

and will better understand many prophetic promises. This is particularly relevant to us since many of these prophecies concern our day and the role of Israel in this crucial time.⁸ Indeed, the Lord is specific that part of the reason for the Restoration is to renew the everlasting covenant (Doctrine and Covenants 1:15, 22).⁹ Because we are a covenant people who are blessed to live in a time when many covenant promises will be fulfilled and who are simultaneously tasked with keeping and spreading the covenant, recognizing covenant references in the scriptures is important. If we keep in mind our own participation in the covenant, we will see how prophetic utterances apply to us as a covenant group and as covenant individuals (see 1 Nephi 19:23).

Thus it is no surprise that President Russell M. Nelson emphasized in an online broadcast to the youth of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints the importance of the covenant with Israel and of striving to fulfill it, both personally and for the whole of Israel.¹⁰ He further extended and emphasized that theme in the general women's session of the next general conference.¹¹ Indeed, President Nelson has been speaking and writing frequently about the covenant for years,¹² including its presence in the Book of Mormon¹³ and influence on the Restoration.¹⁴ It is hoped that by coming to better recognize the role of the Abrahamic covenant in scripture, we can better see and understand what President Nelson has seen and urged us to understand.

A full discussion of what this covenant is and how it is used in scripture will require a book-length manuscript, which is underway. For this article, it is useful to succinctly describe the covenant and present some motifs and phrases to help students of the scriptures recognize when the covenant is being referred to, for we cannot recognize references with which we are not familiar. Thus I first present a brief history and summary of the covenant. Then I will look at examples of how recognizing covenant phrases allows us to find further meaning in the scriptures.

Covenant (Re)Established with Abraham

We begin to see covenantal influence when we become more familiar with the covenant itself. The establishment of the covenant with Adam and its reestablishment with Abraham is discussed in Kerry Muhlestein, Joshua M. Sears, and Avram R. Shannon, "New and Everlasting: The Relationship between Gospel Covenants in History" (in this issue). We need to understand that the new and everlasting covenant established with Adam was reestablished

with Enoch, Noah, Abraham, all of Israel, and even with the Nephites.¹⁵ In each instance, it was modified somewhat to fit the circumstances of the time and the people with whom God was interacting, just as it was again modified when it was reestablished in the days of Joseph Smith. Still, the essential elements remained the same. Moreover, even within any given dispensation, each individual member of the covenant community must personally enter into this covenant. Thus the covenant is continually renewed, though it has always existed. It is both established and simultaneously reestablished again and again as individuals and new groups enter into an agreement with God that also includes a larger, preexisting congregation of past covenant makers.¹⁶

Despite the timelessness of this covenant, we learn the most about it when it was reestablished with Abraham and with Israel at Mount Sinai. This is at least partially because the Bible is a record of Abraham and his descendants. As we look at the covenant made between Abraham, Sarah, and God, I will not provide a comprehensive list of all aspects of the covenant, but rather a quick summary of the most important aspects.¹⁷ God made the following covenant with Abraham:

- Abraham would have innumerable seed (see Genesis 12:2; 13:16; 15:5; 17:2, 4–6, 16; 22:17; and Abraham 2:9).
- God would protect Abraham and his seed (see Genesis 12:3; 22:17; Abraham 1:18; and 2:11).
- Abraham’s seed would have a promised land (see Genesis 12:1; 13:15; 15:18; 17:8; Abraham 2:6, 19; and Doctrine and Covenants 52:2).¹⁸
- This land would prosper and yield abundantly for Abraham and his seed (see Genesis 15:1; 17:6; Leviticus 25:18–19; 26:4–5; Deuteronomy 6:3; 28:3–6, 8, 11–12; 29:9; 30:9, 16; and Abraham 2:9).
- The earth would be blessed by Abraham’s seed (see Genesis 12:2–3; 22:18; and Abraham 2:9–11).
- Rulers would come from Abraham’s seed (see Genesis 17:6, 16).
- Abraham and his seed must carry the gospel and its attendant ordinances to all the earth¹⁹ (see Abraham 1:18–19; and 2:6, 9, 11).²⁰

In many ways, all the obligations and blessings of the covenant are summed up in the promise that Jehovah would be “a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee” (Genesis 17:7). Looking for references to innumerable seed, possessing and inheriting promised lands, divine protection, self-rule,

and a special relationship with God will help us recognize covenantal language as we study each book of scripture, but particularly the Old Testament and Book of Mormon.

Though we continue to see the influence of the covenant in the days of Isaac, Jacob, and Jacob's sons,²¹ we really do not learn more about it again until the story of the Exodus. Under Moses, the covenant was renewed with all Israel at Mount Sinai (see Exodus 24:7).²² The wording of the covenant ceremony is not specified in this text, but there are many hints as to what it may have said.

Before investigating these textual hints, it is worth noting that many scholars debate the timing of when various accounts of the covenant were written. There are those who feel that most of the descriptions of the covenant in the Pentateuch were written towards the end of Israelite history.²³ They see these descriptions of the establishment of the covenant as attempts of later writers to provide Israel with a unique identity. While there are many problems with this theory, the clear delineation of the covenant with Abraham as outlined in the Book of Abraham convinces me that this theory is invalid. This is not to say that the way these accounts have come to us today have not gone through later editorial redactions, for they probably have. Still, it is clear that the establishment of the covenant with both Abraham and Israel was early in their histories, not a later invention. We are fortunate to have latter-day revelation that provides key information many of our colleagues do not have. Thus we can confidently turn to the covenant descriptions in Genesis, Exodus, and Leviticus to learn about Israel's covenant.

By analyzing scriptural references in an attempt to discover the wording of the covenant, we realize that when Jehovah said that he would be Abraham's God and the God of his descendants, he implied that Abraham and his descendants would be God's people. Though not specifically recorded that way in writing, there is evidence in several dialogues from God that the language specifying that Abraham's seed would be God's people was likely used in establishing the covenant. For example, when God told Moses that he would deliver Israel from Egypt, he said, "I have surely seen the affliction of *my people*" (Exodus 3:7; emphasis added). A few verses later, he told Moses that he would bring forth from Egypt "*my people*" (3:10; emphasis added). God's command to Pharaoh was to "let *my people* go" (5:1; emphasis added). In fact, God called Israel *my people* eighteen times in the Exodus narrative (between chapters 1 and 15). In the midst of that narrative, he told Israel he

had remembered the covenant he made with their fathers, and that in order for them to inherit the land he had promised them, he would bring them from Egypt. As part of this he said to Israel, “I will take you *to me* for a people, and I will be *to you* a God” (6:7; emphasis added). This is a promise to establish the covenant at Sinai and is a succinct summary of the covenant. God then says he will fulfill the promise he made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to give their descendants the land of promise (see 6:8), a furthering of the promise to reestablish the covenant.

The Covenant at Sinai and Nebo

The covenant was indeed confirmed at Mount Sinai. The reestablishment of the covenant there is depicted as the central event at Sinai, with a full fifty-eight chapters devoted to it.²⁴ Thus it should not be a surprise that one of the most complete summations of the covenant is provided when describing this event, as found in Leviticus 26.²⁵ The covenant was renewed a generation later,²⁶ just before those who were too young to make the covenant at Sinai were about to go into the promised land (see Deuteronomy 28).²⁷ A comparison of these two explications of the covenant can be seen in the chart below. Looking at the way the covenant was outlined at these two mountains is crucial to recognizing covenant language, for prophetic writers referred to a national understanding of the covenant that is most fully outlined in these instances.

It is important to see another element if we are going to recognize covenant language in the scriptures. As is typical for many covenants, oaths, and treaties in the ancient world at this time, the Lord followed explanations of the covenant and its blessings with a description of the cursings that would happen if the covenant was not kept.²⁸ The potential cursings are usually a direct reversal of the potential blessings.²⁹ The Lord and his prophets referred to the covenant not only by its blessings but also by the cursings that would come upon the Israelites when they broke the covenant. Being familiar with the images employed at Mounts Sinai and Nebo enables us to recognize them again when they are employed elsewhere in the scriptures.

Leviticus blessings	Leviticus cursings	Deuteronomy blessings	Deuteronomy cursings ³⁰
If ye walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments, and do them. (Leviticus 26:3)	But if ye will not hearken unto me, and will not do all these commandments; and if ye shall despise my statutes, or if your soul abhor my judgments, so that ye will not do all my commandments, but that ye break my covenant. (Leviticus 26:14–15)	If thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day. (Deuteronomy 28:1) If that thou hearken unto the commandments of the LORD thy God, which I command thee this day, to observe and to do them. (Deuteronomy 28:13)	If thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee. (Deuteronomy 28:15) If thou wilt not observe to do all the words of this law that are written in this book. (Deuteronomy 28:58)
Ye shall make you no idols nor graven image, neither rear you up a standing image, neither shall ye set up any image of stone in your land, to bow down unto it: for I am the LORD your God. (Leviticus 26:1)	I will destroy your high places, and cut down your images, and cast your carcases upon the carcases of your idols, and my soul shall abhor you. (Leviticus 26:30)	And thou shalt not go aside from any of the words which I command thee this day, to the right hand, or to the left, to go after other gods to serve them. (Deuteronomy 28:14)	There shalt thou serve other gods, wood and stone. (Deuteronomy 28:36)
Then I will give you rain in due season, and the land shall yield her increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. And your threshing shall reach unto the vintage, and the vintage shall reach unto the sowing time:	I will even appoint over you terror, consumption, and the burning ague, that shall consume the eyes, and cause sorrow of heart: and ye shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it. (Leviticus 26:16)	Blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee . . . Blessed shalt thou be in the city, and blessed shalt thou be in the field. . . . Blessed shall be . . . the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy cattle, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep.	Cursed shalt thou be in the city, and cursed shalt thou be in the field. (Deuteronomy 28:16) Cursed shall be thy basket and thy store. (Deuteronomy 28:17)

Leviticus blessings	Leviticus cursings	Deuteronomy blessings	Deuteronomy cursings ³⁰
<p>and ye shall eat your bread to the full. (Leviticus 26:4–5)</p> <p>And ye shall eat old store, and bring forth the old because of the new. (Leviticus 26:10)</p>	<p>I will make your heaven as iron, and your earth as brass:</p> <p>And your strength shall be spent in vain: for your land shall not yield her increase, neither shall the trees of the land yield their fruits. (Leviticus 26:19–20)</p> <p>I will bring a sword upon you, that shall avenge the quarrel of my covenant: and when ye are gathered together within your cities, I will send the pestilence among you; and ye shall be delivered into the hand of the enemy. (Leviticus 26:25)</p> <p>When I have broken the staff of your bread, ten women shall bake your bread in one oven, and they shall deliver you your bread again by weight: and ye shall eat, and not be satisfied. (Leviticus 26:26)</p>	<p>Blessed shall be thy basket and thy store. (Deuteronomy 28:2–5)</p> <p>The LORD shall command the blessing upon thee in thy storehouses, and in all that thou settest thine hand unto. (Deuteronomy 28:8)</p> <p>And the LORD shall make thee plenteous in goods, in the fruit of thy body, and in the fruit of thy cattle, and in the fruit of thy ground. . . . The LORD shall open unto thee his good treasure, the heaven to give the rain unto thy land in his season, and to bless all the work of thine hand: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, and thou shalt not borrow. (Deuteronomy 28:11–12)</p>	<p>Cursed shall be . . . the fruit of thy land, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep. (Deuteronomy 28:18)</p> <p>The LORD shall smite thee with a consumption, and with a fever, and with an inflammation, and with an extreme burning, and with the sword, and with blasting, and with mildew; and they shall pursue thee until thou perish. And thy heaven that is over thy head shall be brass, and the earth that is under thee shall be iron. The LORD shall make the rain of thy land powder and dust: from heaven shall it come down upon thee, until thou be destroyed. (Deuteronomy 28:22–24; see also 28:30–31 and 38–40 and 42)</p>
<p>For I will have respect unto you, and make you fruitful, and multiply you, and establish my covenant with you. (Leviticus 26:9)</p>	<p>I will . . . make you few in number; and your high ways shall be desolate. (Leviticus 26:22)</p>	<p>Blessed shall be the fruit of thy body. (Deuteronomy 28:4)</p>	<p>Cursed shall be the fruit of thy body. (Deuteronomy 28:18)</p>

Leviticus blessings	Leviticus cursings	Deuteronomy blessings	Deuteronomy cursings ³⁰
	<p>And ye shall eat the flesh of your sons, and the flesh of your daughters shall ye eat. (Leviticus 26:29)</p>		<p>Thy sons and thy daughters shall be given unto another people, and thine eyes shall look, and fail with longing for them all the day long; and there shall be no might in thine hand. (Deuteronomy 28:32; see also 28:41, and 62–63)</p>
<p>[You will] dwell in your land safely. And I will give peace in the land. (Leviticus 26:5–6)</p>	<p>And I will scatter you among the heathen, and will draw out a sword after you: and your land shall be desolate, and your cities waste. Then shall the land enjoy her sabbaths, as long as it lieth desolate, and ye be in your enemies' land; even then shall the land rest, and enjoy her sabbaths. As long as it lieth desolate it shall rest; because it did not rest in your sabbaths, when ye dwelt upon it. (Leviticus 26:33–35)</p>	<p>He shall bless thee in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee. (Deut. 28:8)</p> <p>And the LORD shall make thee plenteous . . . in the land which the LORD sware unto thy fathers to give thee. (Deuteronomy 28:11)</p>	<p>The LORD shall make the pestilence cleave unto thee, until he have consumed thee from off the land, whither thou goest to possess it. (Deuteronomy 28:21)</p> <p>Thou . . . shalt be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth. (Deuteronomy 28:25)</p> <p>Ye shall be plucked from off the land whither thou goest to possess it. (Deuteronomy 28:63)</p>
<p>Ye shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid: and I will rid evil beasts out of the land, neither shall the sword go through your land.</p>	<p>Ye shall be slain before your enemies: they that hate you shall reign over you; and ye shall flee when none pursueth you. (Leviticus 26:17)</p>	<p>The LORD shall cause thine enemies that rise up against thee to be smitten before thy face: they shall come out against thee one way, and flee before</p>	<p>The LORD shall cause thee to be smitten before thine enemies: thou shalt go out one way against them, and flee seven ways before them:</p>

Leviticus blessings	Leviticus cursings	Deuteronomy blessings	Deuteronomy cursings ³⁰
And ye shall chase your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword. And five of you shall chase an hundred, and an hundred of you shall put ten thousand to flight: and your enemies shall fall before you by the sword. (Leviticus 26:6–8)	I will also send wild beasts among you, which shall rob you of your children, and destroy your cattle (Leviticus 26:22) I will bring the land into desolation: and your enemies which dwell therein shall be astonished at it. (Leviticus 26:32; see also 26:36–37)	thee seven ways. (Deuteronomy 28:7) And all the people of the earth shall see that thou art called by the name of the LORD; and they shall be afraid of thee. (Deuteronomy 28:10)	and shalt be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth. And thy carcase shall be meat unto all fowls of the air, and unto the beasts of the earth, and no man shall fray them away. (Deuteronomy 28:25–26)
And I will set my tabernacle among you: and my soul shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people. (Leviticus 26:11–12)	And I will make your cities waste, and bring your sanctuaries unto desolation, and I will not smell the savour of your sweet odours. ³¹ (Leviticus 26:31)	The LORD shall establish thee an holy people unto himself. (Deuteronomy 28:9)	Thou shalt serve other gods, which neither thou nor thy fathers have known, even wood and stone. (Deuteronomy 28:64) ³²
I am the LORD your God, which brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, that ye should not be their bondmen; and I have broken the bands of your yoke, and made you go upright. (Leviticus 26:13)	And ye shall perish among the heathen, and the land of your enemies shall eat you up. And they that are left of you shall pine away in their iniquity in your enemies' lands. (Leviticus 26:38–39)	And the LORD shall make thee the head, and not the tail; and thou shalt be above only, and thou shalt not be beneath. (Deuteronomy 28:13)	The LORD shall bring thee, and thy king which thou shalt set over thee, unto a nation which neither thou nor thy fathers have known. (Deuteronomy 28:36; also 28:43–44) ³³

The list of cursings for breaking the covenant is long and intense. Yet they are followed by a promise that the covenant would still be available when Israel was ready to keep their part of the covenant again. Leviticus 26 ends with beautiful assurances that Israel can return when they repent. In Deuteronomy, the cursings are repeated again at the end of chapter 29, but the promise of the ability to return fills chapter 30.

As can be seen from reading these scriptural outlines of the covenant, part of the covenant that God established with Israel is that if they would keep the commandments and statutes he was giving them, he would provide them with prosperity, peace, land, and protection from enemies, and he would multiply them and be with them at the tabernacle (or temple) (Leviticus 26:3–11; see also Deuteronomy 28).³⁴ Almost all these phrases are reminiscent of the language used when establishing the covenant with Abraham. But at Mounts Sinai and Nebo, God stressed that the promises were conditional upon Israel's keeping his statutes and commandments.³⁵ These stipulations and promises were and are immensely important in the history of Israel and in the teachings of the prophets and should be remembered as we read the scriptures.

After carefully outlining the elements of the covenant in one of the most beautiful descriptions of what God desires to do for Israel as part of the covenant (see Leviticus 26), God finished his promises by saying, "I will walk among you, and will be *your God*, and ye shall be *my people*" (26:12; emphasis added). In Deuteronomy's covenant renewal, Israel was told that "this day thou art become the people of the LORD thy God" (Deuteronomy 27:9). This phrase, *my people*, became one of the most beloved and intimate names for the house of Israel.³⁶ Many regard this as the climax of the covenant-making process with Israel at Sinai.³⁷ The expression captures a special relationship between God and those who enter into a covenant with him. While this connection applies to the house of Israel as a whole, both in ancient and modern times, it also has profound meaning for covenant individuals. When we enter into and keep a covenant with God we become his people and forge a deep and close bond with him.³⁸ Much of what his prophets describe with covenantal language refers to this personal connection on both a corporate and personal level.

Just as the blessings and cursings outlined in Leviticus were revisited at Mount Nebo, so was this idea of a special relationship. At this time, Moses made it clear that the covenant was a continuation of the covenant that God had made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and that this covenant set them apart from anyone who had not made a covenant with God (see Deuteronomy 7:8–9). In these same verses, Moses also made it clear that a special kind of mercy and love was extended to them through the covenant (discussed later in the article). It was conditional on their keeping the commandments, statutes, and judgments (see 7:11). God said to Israel that because of this covenant, "Thou art an holy *people unto the Lord thy God*: the LORD thy God

hath chosen thee to be a special *people unto himself* (7:6; emphasis added). In effect, God was binding himself to Israel, tying them to him with an unbreakable knot.

The idea of Israel being a special people to God was repeated by Moses as he wrapped up the covenant renewal ceremony with the children of Israel. As part of officially entering into that covenant, Moses told them that they were “enter[ing] into covenant with the LORD thy God, and into his oath, which the LORD thy God maketh with thee this day: that he may establish thee to day for a *people unto himself*, and that he may be *unto thee a God*, as he hath said unto thee, and as he hath sworn unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob” (Deuteronomy 29:12–14; emphasis added).³⁹

This special relationship between God and his people was established by covenant and was founded on love (see Deuteronomy 7:8).⁴⁰ In most ways it was conditional, yet due to the great love God had for his people, even when they broke the covenant he would not abandon them nor abrogate the covenant.⁴¹ Instead, he would always give them another chance, as he told the prophet Samuel: “For the LORD will not forsake his people for his great name’s sake: because it hath pleased the LORD to make you *his people*” (1 Samuel 12:22; emphasis added). This was reemphasized when Solomon dedicated the temple. Solomon continually reiterated God’s willingness to accept Israel back whenever they returned to him, noting that this unending mercy was because God “didst separate them from among all the people of the earth, to be thine inheritance, as thou spakest by the hand of Moses” (1 Kings 8:53). Clearly, Israel and God saw their mutual covenant as denoting a distinctive bond between them that extended great mercy and a willingness to forgive and receive Israel back within the covenant.⁴²

Recognizing the Covenant

This special love and relationship that God has with his covenant people is most often emphasized by invoking phrases stating that God is or will be their God and that they are or will be his people. For the speaker, reader, or listener aware of the covenant and covenantal phrases, such language evokes the entirety of the promises made to Abraham and his posterity and highlights the special love and relationship inherent to the Abrahamic covenant.

While only a real familiarity with what the covenant is and how it has played out through the history of God’s dealings with his covenant people will truly help us recognize all the places in which scriptural authors refer to

the covenant, there are a few phrases and motifs—such as *my people*—that will help us to recognize most of them. The most commonly used textual cues include the following:

1. The phrase “my people” or a variant thereof⁴³
2. The phrase “your god” or a variant thereof⁴⁴
3. References to multiplying or becoming populous⁴⁵
4. References to (re)inheriting land⁴⁶
5. References to conquering enemies or being protected from enemies⁴⁷
6. References to prosperity in the promised land⁴⁸
7. References to self-rulership⁴⁹
8. References to enjoying God’s presence in a house of God⁵⁰
9. References to the fathers, or promises made to the fathers⁵¹
10. References to God helping those who have broken the covenant find a way to return to it.⁵²

It may be useful to provide at least one illustration of how each of these phrases or motifs are used. Further, the last point will give us the opportunity to briefly look at a few prophetic books to see how the covenant theme plays throughout those writings.⁵³

My People

During the days of Ezekiel, as Judah was being punished and scattered, God promised that in a future day he would remove Judah’s false prophets from them so “that the house of Israel may go no more astray from me, neither be polluted any more with all their transgressions; but that they may be *my people*, and I may be *their God*” (Ezekiel 14:11; emphasis added). Recognizing the covenant phrases here allows us to see that God is saying that when Israel rejects their false prophets, they will be able to fully keep the covenant and, thus, truly reap the covenantal rewards and blessings. Recognizing that avoiding false prophets is required adds another layer of meaning to these verses and emphasizes the role of prophets, false or true, in our covenantal relationship with God.

This phrase is used in Restoration scripture as well. An interesting contrast in covenant mentality is provided when we see that Abinadi, speaking for the Lord, spoke of a group of Nephites as “my people,” but they referred to themselves as “thy people” to King Noah, demonstrating their loss of

covenant consciousness.⁵⁴ In the Doctrine and Covenants, for example, when the Lord directed that missionaries be sent westward to “build up my church in every region” (Doctrine and Covenants 42:8), he said they should do it so that “ye may be gathered in one, that ye may be my people and I will be your God” (42:9). Recognizing this as a covenant phrase allows us to see that what God was reestablishing was Israel, this time in the latter days. He was letting Joseph Smith and his contemporaries know that it was time to once again bring Israel together physically and, most especially, spiritually—by means of the covenant. This was a signal that the long foretold gathering of Israel is what they were really setting about! This important element of the revelation is lost when one does not recognize the covenant language being employed by the author of the covenant.

Your God

After Hosea told Israel that they had broken the covenant⁵⁵ and were no longer God’s people, he then held out hope by saying, “It shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not *my people*, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the *sons of the living God*” (Hosea 1:10; emphasis added).⁵⁶ By recognizing the frequent coupling of phrases that evokes God being our God with verbiage about us being his people, we understand that not only will the nullification of the covenant be reversed, but also what it means to be sons and daughters of God. Of course, we are all children of God, but we become so in a different way as we make and keep the Abrahamic covenant. This insight is lost when we don’t recognize the covenant language in Hosea.

Another example is seen in the book of Jeremiah, where the language of God being Israel’s God is coupled with the phrase that Israel would be God’s people, as it usually is. In this case, God says that he will establish a new covenant with Israel. He then says, “I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people” (Jeremiah 31:33).⁵⁷ By tying the law being written in Israel’s hearts to his being their God, God was succinctly explaining that what made someone truly part of the covenant was whether or not the commandments (our obligation under the covenant) were part of his or her heart. Thus the relationship between covenant and the condition of our hearts are even more clearly tied together for those who recognize the covenant phrase.

Multiplying or Being Populous

Innumerable seed is an oft-repeated part of the Abrahamic covenant. Even with this, we often fail to recognize how images of numerous posterity are used to refer to the covenant. For example, it seems very odd to us when Hosea tells covenant-breaking Israel that their wombs will no longer be fruitful and that when they actually do give birth, those children who briefly enjoyed life would die (see Hosea 9:16). Yet, when we consider that these are just images Hosea employs to say that Israel will experience covenantal cursings rather than covenantal blessings, it becomes a powerful—instead of an uncomfortable—image.

Similarly, when Isaiah speaks of seeing an end to Israel's punishments, he says, "For thy waste and thy desolate places, and the land of thy destruction, shall even now be too narrow by reason of the inhabitants, and they that swallowed thee up shall be far away. The children which thou shalt have, after thou hast lost the other, shall say again in thine ears, The place is too strait for me: give place to me that I may dwell" (Isaiah 49:19–20). Sometimes this passage can seem odd. But when we realize that Isaiah is saying that even the places once inhabited by Judah combined with large stretches of wilderness won't be enough room for all the children of Judah who will someday inhabit them, we can then see that Isaiah is making reference to the fulfillment of the promise of numerous posterity. Thus this passage becomes less about whether there will be enough real estate in the promised land and more of an image employed to show that the covenant will eventually be fulfilled.

(Re)Inheriting the Promised Land

Images of regaining and losing the promised land abound in the scriptures. The Book of Mormon is as profuse in this theme as the Old Testament is.⁵⁸ In both books, these images are particularly prevalent when Israel, Judah, or the Nephites are in danger of being scattered. For example, Jeremiah warns Judah that they are on the brink of being removed from the land into various kingdoms by sword and pestilence and that thus they would be "consumed from off the land that I gave unto them and to their fathers" (Jeremiah 24:9–10). Here the loss of the promised land, combined with the idea that it had once been promised to their fathers, serves to make it abundantly clear that inhabiting the promised land is fully contingent upon Israel keeping the covenant.

An often confusing verse makes more sense when the reference to covenantal cursings is recognized. When Isaiah (or Nephi quoting Isaiah) says,

“Wo unto them that join house to house, till there can be no place, that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth! In mine ears, said the Lord of Hosts, of a truth many houses shall be desolate, and great and fair cities without inhabitant” (2 Nephi 15:8–9; slightly different than Isaiah 5:8–9). To the casual reader, this may seem like an indictment against people who live close to one another and build dense cities. But when considered in light of covenant blessings and cursings, we see something more: filling the land with people is a sign of covenant blessings, while having those homes and cities lie desolate is a sign of covenant cursings. Thus these verses are really about the coming covenant reversal, a cursing that will undo the blessings because of covenant breakings. In this light, these verses are really about the covenant, not about building practices.

Incidentally, with a lack of awareness of covenant language, we often miss a covenant connection in a very well-known verse. In the Ten Commandments, we are told to honor our fathers and mothers, “that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee” (Exodus 20:12). There is no doubt that the promise associated with this verse is that the blessings of a covenant land remain available. If we recognize the catchphrase, we realize we are being told that the reception of covenant blessings is contingent on honoring our parents.

Divine Protection

Jeremiah held out solace for Judah after telling them that punishment was coming. He prophesied that eventually those who devoured them would in turn be devoured, their adversaries would become captives, those who spoiled them would be spoiled, and those who preyed upon them would be preyed upon (see Jeremiah 30:16). This is a clear reference to covenantal promises of protection and of cursing those who curse Abraham and his seed. We see this kind of promise similarly reflected in the Book of Mormon, when Nephi is told that as long as his people were obedient, his brothers and their seed would have no power over Nephi’s seed (see 1 Nephi 2:23). When we recognize this as part of the Abrahamic covenant, we can see that God was establishing this same covenant with the Nephites.⁵⁹ We see it further in the Book of Mormon in the days of Captain Moroni. When he raised the title of liberty and called the people to rally around it, he said that “surely God shall not suffer that we, who are despised because we take upon us the name of Christ, shall be trodden down and destroyed, unless we bring it upon us by our

own transgression” (Alma 46:18). Those who came to covenant with Moroni tore their clothing, saying that if they did not keep the commandments, they knew the Lord would rend them just as they had rent their clothing (see 46:21). They furthered this imagery by throwing their clothing at the feet of Moroni and agreeing that if they transgressed the law, they would be trodden under foot and destroyed by their enemies just as they were putting their garments under Moroni’s feet to be trodden upon (see 46:22). Moroni then explicitly compared their situation to the days of Jacob and Joseph and the promises made to them. When we keep in mind the promises of protection for covenant keepers and the accompanying cursing of destruction for covenant breakers, we realize that this was not just an oath of military service.⁶⁰ Instead, we see that those who were flocking to Moroni were engaging in Abrahamic-covenant renewal.⁶¹ They were claiming their rights of protection as covenant keepers and recognizing the potential for destruction if they became covenant breakers.

Prosperity in the Land

This may be the phrase that is most easily recognized by scripture readers, thanks in large part to the frequent Book of Mormon use of this idea. There is no doubt that when God told Nephi, “Inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments, ye shall prosper, and shall be led to a land of promise” (1 Nephi 2:20), God was specifically reestablishing the covenant with Nephi.⁶² In fact, the Book of Mormon contains at least sixty-five references to God prospering or not prospering the people in the new promised land. We gain more from these references if we understand that they are speaking about the Abrahamic covenant. This is also true of what may seem to be simple phrases elsewhere in scripture. For example, when we read that King Hezekiah “prospered withersoever he went forth” (2 Kings 18:7), we recognize this as a way of saying that Hezekiah was keeping the covenant and that God honored his covenantal promises to the king, a situation that would prove to be crucial for the survival of Judah. In the latter days, God combined the promise of his presence in the temple with the notion of prosperity when he told the Saints that if Zion built the temple and kept unclean things from entering it, God’s presence would be there: “[Zion] shall prosper, and spread herself and become very glorious” (Doctrine and Covenants 97:18). It is only by recognizing that both prosperity and God’s presence are part of the covenant that we recognize that these verses are specific instructions for how to keep the covenant.

Rights to Rulership

Knowing that having a divinely appointed ruler was part of the Abrahamic covenant helps us make sense of what could be some puzzling phrases in Isaiah. For instance, in Isaiah 3, God tells Israel that he will take away their princes and give them children and babes as their rulers (see Isaiah 3:1–4). He prophesied that Israel would be so desperate for the fulfillment of the rulership aspect of the covenant that people would ask for any family member who has clothes to become the ruler (see 3:6). But this would be to no avail, for rather than the kind of ruler they were accustomed to or expecting, women⁶³ and children would become their rulers (see 3:12). All of this can seem quite odd. Yet, when it is seen as a series of covenant-based images about the loss of covenant-promised rulership, it makes sense. In that light, Isaiah is painting a picture of the loss of covenantal blessings as he tries to encourage Israel to avoid the loss of the covenant.

A series of prophets played off each other in speaking of rulership, which, when combined with understanding that this was part of the covenant, adds a new depth of understanding. Isaiah spoke of a branch coming from Jesse (see Isaiah 11:1). Since David was Jesse's son, this is a clear promise of a future Davidic ruler.⁶⁴ Jeremiah expanded on this imagery, speaking of the Lord raising up to David a "righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper" (Jeremiah 23:5).⁶⁵ Jeremiah then prophesied that during the days of this king, Judah would be saved and dwell safely, and people would begin to say that the greatest work of the Lord was in gathering scattered Israel (see 23:6–9). Jeremiah prophesied of these same things again several chapters later (see 33:15–16),⁶⁶ adding that David would never lack a man to sit on the throne (see 33:17). This is a surprising prophecy since Jeremiah had already prophesied that Judah would fall (see 20–21) and lose its king, and he prophesied of it again soon thereafter (see 34).⁶⁷ Understanding that rulership is part of the Abrahamic covenant allows us to see that this prophecy is less about specific kings staying on the throne and more about the fact that God would eventually bring about all the promises of the covenant. Recognizing this allows us to see that Zechariah was promising the same thing when he redeployed Jeremiah's prophecy by saying, "I will bring forth my servant the BRANCH" (Zechariah 3:8).⁶⁸ Thus Zechariah was also teaching that the promises of the covenant were about to be realized again.



If we keep in mind our own participation in the covenant, we will see how prophetic utterances apply to us as a covenant group and as covenant individuals.

The Presence of God in His House

A great deal of Ezekiel is based on the temple aspect of the covenant.⁶⁹ In one of his earlier visions, Ezekiel saw the presence of God come out of the Holy of Holies, briefly tarry on the threshold (see Ezekiel 9:3), and then depart from the temple altogether (see 10:18–19). The loss of God’s presence in his house, as seen in vision, was soon followed by the destruction of the temple itself (see 33:21). Both were sure signs that the covenant had been broken, and thus, God could no longer keep his part in it. Yet, as always, hope was held out when Ezekiel later saw in vision the rebuilding of an amazing temple. Afterward, Ezekiel saw the Lord’s presence return to that temple and come to rest in the Holy of Holies (see 43:2–11). Knowing that God’s presence in his house is part of the covenant creates a poignant image of the loss and eventual regaining of the covenant and its blessings.⁷⁰ It also helps us to understand further the significance of events recorded in Doctrine and Covenants 109–110, where we learn that the temple was necessary to restore the covenant, and, simultaneously, the restoration of temples helped fulfill the covenant.⁷¹

Promises Made to the Fathers

One of the most beloved verses among Latter-day Saints has an extra layer of meaning when we recognize the covenant language present within it. Malachi tells us that the hearts of the children will be turned to their fathers (see Malachi 4:6). When we ask ourselves how Malachi’s original audience would have perceived this, we have to answer that they would undoubtedly have thought of the “fathers” as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, which is a way of referring to the covenant.⁷² This is given even greater emphasis for us in the latter days when we remember that when Moroni spoke of this prophecy to Joseph Smith at the beginning of the Restoration, Moroni said the Lord would plant in the hearts of the children the *promises* made to the fathers, and then the hearts of the children would turn to their fathers (see Joseph Smith—History 1:38–39). This very clearly refers to the Abrahamic covenant. This is eloquently expounded upon by both President Russell M. Nelson⁷³ and Elder David A. Bednar,⁷⁴ as well as by other scholars and writers.⁷⁵ This adds a powerful aspect to our typical interpretation of this verse. Surely it includes the idea that we will be inspired to do work for our ancestors, but that work is bound up in the idea of sealing us all together through the blessings promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.⁷⁶ The work for the dead is about bringing us

all into that great covenant. We can appreciate that more when we note the covenantal reference in Malachi's promise.

Return to the Covenant

Many of the above examples already highlight how often God refers to bringing covenant makers back into the covenant when they have strayed. God's determination to help covenant breakers return is highlighted when he tells Nephi that when Nephi's seed forsook the covenant, they would no longer be protected from their enemies, but the purpose of their enemies gaining power over them was to remind them to return to God and his covenant (see 1 Nephi 2:24).

I noted that Hosea spoke of Israel being children of God again as a way of indicating that the covenant could be restored. That passage powerfully portrays how the covenant is always made available again, and it also provides several eloquent illustrations of how covenant language can provide greater power and meaning. Thus we will examine the passage again in some detail to summarize all the above points.

Hosea was told to name a child *Lo-ruhamah* (see Hosea 1:6). This name literally means "no mercy" or "no compassion" and teaches Israel that God's continual mercy, always so abundantly available to his covenant people, will now not be extended to them. Another child was named *Lo-ammi*, which literally translates as "not my people." God explains the reason for this name, saying: "For ye are not *my people*, and I will not be *your God*" (Hosea 1:9; emphasis added).⁷⁷ A more explicit and clear reversal of covenant language could not be made. God was announcing that Israel had broken the covenant so severely that he would no longer honor it. The land, right to rule, protection, and other blessings that were Israel's within the covenant were no longer available to them.

Yet in the following verse God also made it clear that this was not a permanent situation. He said, "Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which *cannot be measured nor numbered*" (Hosea 1:10; emphasis added). This is also language taken directly from the Abrahamic covenant. Within almost the same breath that God declared that the covenant was broken, he also showed them that in a future day it would be available again by putting it in future tense, "shall be." He emphasized this by continuing, "It shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not *my people*, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the *sons*

of the living God" (Hosea 1:10; emphasis added).⁷⁸ While it is not as easily seen in the Old Testament scriptures we have, Restoration scripture demonstrates that becoming a son or daughter of God (beyond the way we all are as his spirit children) is integrally tied up with the covenant (see Doctrine and Covenants 45:7–9; compare John 1:12–13; and Mosiah 5:6–7). Hosea and his audience seem to understand the connection between the covenant and being begotten by God. Hosea reverses the broken covenant, marked by saying that Israel is not God's people and then saying that the covenant will one day be renewed, marked by explaining that Israel will become the sons of the living God.

The hope of covenant renewal is held out again just two verses later when God changes the names of Hosea's children to "Ammi" (my people) and "Ruhamah" (mercy/compassion) (Hosea 2:1). Through Hosea, God had to be harshly clear about the loss of covenant, but he was also forceful in his declarations of the ability to regain the covenant. The ability to reverse the loss of relationship and to reestablish the covenant is probably the main theme of the Book of Hosea⁷⁹ and, in some ways, of the entire Old Testament and all of scripture.

Throughout Hosea's writings, the prophet's marriage covenant is used to highlight God's covenant with Israel.⁸⁰ His temporary repudiation of Israel as no longer being his people is like a repudiation of a faithless wife.⁸¹ It was followed by Hosea's temporary divorce of his wife: "For she is not *my wife*, neither am I *her husband*" (Hosea 2:2; emphasis added). Yet these verses are followed by God's description of how he will cause Gomer (Hosea's wife) to see that she is not well taken care of when she plays the harlot, but rather when she is with Hosea.⁸² As a result, she, symbolically representing Israel, will choose to return to Hosea, at which point he will renew the covenant and "will betroth thee unto me forever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies" (Hosea 2:18–19).⁸³ While the betrothal itself bespeaks covenant, this is underscored by the use of the phrase "lovingkindness," translated from the Hebrew word *hesed*, a kind of mercy and love available only within a covenant.⁸⁴ As if this were not explicit enough, the Lord continues by saying, "I will have mercy [*ruhamah*] upon her that had not obtained mercy [*ruhamah*]; and I will say to them which were *not my people*, Thou art *my people*; and they shall say, Thou art *my God*" (Hosea 2:23; emphasis added). I do not think we find a more poignant rendering of covenant renewal in all of scripture. Hosea 1

and 2 powerfully portray the loss of covenant and its attendant loss of blessings that stem from Israel's infidelity to God, but they even more potently show how God works to bring Israel back to him and then fully restores the covenant and all the benedictions that shower from heaven as a part of that covenant. When we do not recognize the nature of covenantal language, we lose much of the meaning of these writings and their ability to transform us, we will not see God's willingness to forgive us after we have broken our own covenants, and we will not sense the power of his covenantal love that should be present in our own lives.

We can see a similar theme in the prophecies of Zechariah, who encouraged Judah after they had experienced the loss of the promised land and captivity due to their breaking of the covenant. When it was time for the Babylonian exile to end and for Judah to return to Jerusalem, the effort to gather home again was aided by many, including Zechariah,⁸⁵ who focused on rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem. It is not surprising, then, that Zechariah should frequently employ language about the restoration of the covenant.⁸⁶ In keeping with many of his predecessors, Zechariah prophesied in such a way that his prophecies both applied to the people of his day and to those in the latter days. In particular, he addressed the idea that the punishment Judah had suffered had been the result of breaking the covenant established at Sinai.⁸⁷ Thus the covenant was not at an end but rather had been executed thus far just as God had outlined and would continue to outline in the future.⁸⁸ The execution of the covenant included both covenantal blessings and cursings. Seen thusly, the judgment Judah had experienced was integrally tied to hope for the future because the surety of covenantal judgment also indicated that covenantal blessings and mercies were also sure. Additionally, the judgments, or cursings, were merely a tool to humble Israel to encourage them to once again keep the covenant. Others have pointed out that Zechariah begins with a quick focus on the covenant by outlining in the first chapter how God initiated a return to the covenant, asking his people to return to him with full hearts.⁸⁹ As demonstrated by both Jeremiah and Ezekiel, Zechariah shows that the reestablishment of the covenant is not dependent on returning to Jerusalem, rebuilding the temple, or keeping the law; those are all by-products of having hearts fully turned to God.⁹⁰ In the next chapter, God promises to dwell with his people, a sure sign of the covenant being reestablished (see Zechariah 2:10). Covenant emphasis continues throughout the rest of the

book, though we will continue to focus primarily on covenant language that is not as visible without a knowledge of covenant phrases.

Consider, for example, the need to recognize covenant language as seen when Zechariah writes that the Lord has returned to Zion and would dwell in Jerusalem (see Zechariah 8:3). As a result, God says, “There shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, and every man with his staff in his hand for very age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof” (8:4–5). This touching image would be fulfilled not long after it was first delivered, since Judah returned and rebuilt Jerusalem, building a temple and creating the city that would last until the Savior’s day. Yet these images also apply to the latter-day gathering of Israel and the rebuilding of Jerusalem. God spoke of both periods when he promised he would bring his people in from every direction (8:7) and that “they *shall dwell in* the midst of Jerusalem: and they shall be *my people*, and I will be *their God*, in truth and in righteousness” (8:8; emphasis added).

The prophecy continues⁹¹ by using some familiar and some lesser-used covenantal phrases. Zechariah promised that seeds would prosper, vines would be fruitful, the ground would be fruitful, and the dew would come as it should—all so that Israel could possess the land (see Zechariah 8:12). This is followed by the idea that during their time in Babylon, Israel had been a curse to them, but now “ye shall be a blessing,” a clear reference to covenantal promises of God blessing those that blessed Israel (Persia was now helping Israel) and that the nations of the earth would be blessed by Israel (see Zechariah 8:13).

Zechariah continually referred to the covenant as he moved towards prophecies about the final fulfillment of covenantal blessings. For example, in Zechariah 11:10–11, he dramatically illustrates the breaking of the covenant by breaking his staff.⁹² Yet in the next chapter, he speaks of God defending Jerusalem and establishing David—clear references to the fulfillment of the protection and rulership aspects of the covenant.

Finally, in one of his greatest prophecies, Zechariah speaks of a time when God will once again refine his people so that they may be part of the covenant. As he does so, they will ask, “What are these wounds in thine hands? Then he shall answer, Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends” (Zechariah 13:6). Zechariah then speaks of two-thirds of Israel being cut off, but he also holds out a promise for those who remain, for God “will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try

them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is *my people*: and they shall say, The LORD is *my God*” (13:9; emphasis added). It is after this that the Lord fights for and saves his people and then dwells among them (Zechariah 14). Such a message gave hope of covenantal fulfillment in Zechariah’s day and continues to do so for us today.

Conclusion

Latter-day Saints have long understood the importance of God’s covenant with Israel. Yet a general unfamiliarity with the Old Testament and language of the covenant—and how that language is reflected throughout scriptures—has often hampered our ability to see the power of the covenant. By recognizing the language of the covenant, we can see how pervasive it is. We also gain a greater appreciation for its power as we realize that God has a special relationship with his covenant people and that he intends to keep this covenant with all his soul and all his might. Such a realization has been, and can continue to be, a bright beacon of hope to all who make, and work to keep, the new and everlasting covenant with God.

Notes

1. Some have been confused as to whether these are different covenants. They are the same covenant in different forms, as discussed in Kerry Muhlestein, Joshua M. Sears, and Avram R. Shannon, “New and Everlasting: The Relationship between Gospel Covenants in History,” in this issue.
2. Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 2 vols., trans. J. A. Baker (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961), argues that the covenant is the central theme of the entire Old Testament. See also Michael A. Goodman, “The Abrahamic Covenant: A Foundational Theme for the Old Testament,” *Religious Educator* 4, no. 3 (2003): 43–53, who both outlines the basic elements of the covenant and demonstrates its centrality to both the Old and New Testaments.
3. Steven L. McKenzie, *Covenant* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000), 8–9.
4. See, for example, Jared W. Ludlow, “‘They Are Not Cast Off Forever’: Fulfillment of the Covenant Purposes,” in *The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon: A Marvelous Work and a Wonder*, ed. Dennis L. Largey, Andrew H. Hedges, John Hilton III, and Kerry Hull (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2015), 265–79. On the applicability of this theme to the entire book, see Daniel H. Ludlow, “The Title Page,” in *First Nephi, The Doctrinal Foundation*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1988), 19; Stephen D. Ricks, “Abrahamic covenant,” in *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*, ed. Dennis L. Largey (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 25–26; Blake T. Ostler, “The Covenant Tradition in the Book of Mormon,” in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, ed. John

L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 230–40; and Stephen D. Ricks, “Deuteronomy: A Covenant of Love,” *Ensign*, April 1990, 55–59.

5. See, for a few examples, Galatians 3; Romans 9; Doctrine and Covenants 1, 22, and 39. See also S. Lewis Johnson Jr., “The Last Passover, the First Lord’s Supper, and the New Covenant,” *Reformation and Revival* 6 (1997): 128; Charles H. Talbert, “Paul on the Covenant,” *Review and Expositor* 84 (1987): 299–300; and Olufemi I. Adeyemi, “What Is the New Covenant ‘Law’ in Jeremiah 31:33?,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 163, no. 651 (2006): 312–13.

6. For an exploration of discussing the covenant or promises to Israel in the Doctrine and Covenants, see R. Wayne Shute, Monte S. Nyman, and Randy L. Bott, *Ephraim, Chosen of the Lord: What It Means to Be of the Tribe of Ephraim* (Riverton, UT: Millennial Press, 1999), 59–68, 119–20.

7. Victor L. Ludlow, “Covenant Teachings in the Book of Mormon,” in *The Disciple as Scholar: Essays on Scripture and the Ancient World in Honor of Richard Lloyd Anderson*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks, Donald W. Parry, and Andrew H. Hedges (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2000), 67.

8. See Russell M. Nelson, “The Gathering of Scattered Israel,” *Ensign*, November 2006, 79–82; and Truman G. Madsen, “Chosenness: Implications and Extensions in Mormonism and Judaism,” in *Covenant and Chosenness in Judaism and Mormonism*, ed. Raphael Jospe and Truman G. Madsen (London: Associated University Press, 2001), 131, 133–35.

9. David Rolph Seely, “The Restoration as Covenant Renewal,” in *Sperry Symposium Classics: The Old Testament*, ed. Paul Y. Hoskisson (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2005), 311. Also note that the Old Testament ends with a promise that the messenger of the covenant will come to restore the covenant (see Malachi 3:1 and 4:5–6).

10. See Russell M. Nelson and Wendy W. Nelson, “Hope of Israel” (broadcast, Conference Center, 3 June 2018, Salt Lake City).

11. Russell M. Nelson, “Sisters’ Participation in the Gathering of Israel,” *Ensign*, November 2018, 68–70.

12. See Russell M. Nelson, “Covenants,” *Ensign*, November 2011, 86–89; Russell M. Nelson, “The Gathering of Scattered Israel,” *Ensign*, November 2006, 79–81; Russell M. Nelson, “Children of the Covenant,” *Ensign*, April 1995, 32–24; Russell M. Nelson, “Remnants Gathered, Covenants Fulfilled,” in *The Voice of My Servants: Apostolic Messages on Teaching, Learning, and Scripture*, ed. Scott C. Esplin and Richard Neitzel Holzapfel (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2010), 181–98.

13. Russell M. Nelson, “The Book of Mormon, the Gathering of Israel, and the Second Coming,” *Ensign*, July 2014, 26.

14. Russell M. Nelson, “Thanks for the Covenant” (BYU devotional address, Marriott Center, 22 November 1988, Provo, UT), speeches.byu.edu.

15. See, for example, Kerry Muhlestein, “Prospering in the Land: A Comparison of Covenant Promises in Leviticus and First Nephi 2,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 32 (2019): 287–96.

16. Seely, “The Restoration as Covenant Renewal,” 12–14, also discusses this.

17. The aspects included here come from descriptions of the covenant in Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, and Abraham. Some scholars believe these come from different time periods. While there is no doubt that the Genesis/Abraham iterations are from a different period than the Exodus writings and that the Deuteronomy writings are even later than that—and while there may be later additions (for example, many feel Genesis 17

is from P (the so-called “priestly source”), which they feel would be much later)—I believe that though the descriptions of the covenant may have changed over time, and that different aspects of it were emphasized at different times based on changing needs, the basic elements of the covenant were consistent throughout. Additionally, the presence of the Leviticus covenant in the Book of Mormon dictates that that covenant was part of Israel’s knowledge before 600 BC, which predates when many scholars would posit the creation of Leviticus 26.

18. In Leviticus 18:5 and 18:24–30, it is made clear to all Israel that if they keep the commandments, statutes, and ordinances, they will be able to stay in the promised land. The land and the people are designated as holy, and if the people become unholy the land will not tolerate them.

19. This part of the covenant is unique to latter-day scripture, though discerning Christian writers have understood it to be implied in the idea that Abraham’s covenant would bless the earth. See Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Mission in the Old Testament: Israel as a Light to the Nations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 7.

20. For more on a Latter-day Saint point of view on the covenant, see Dean L. Larsen, *People of Destiny: The Special Role of God’s Covenant Children* (Salt Lake City: Millennial Press, 2001), 10; Kent P. Jackson, “The Abrahamic Covenant: A Blessing for All People,” *Ensign*, February 1990, 50–53; and S. Michael Wilcox, “The Abrahamic Covenant,” *Ensign*, January 1998, 40–48. While there are dozens of treatises on general views of the Abrahamic covenant, for some representative pieces from a Christian and Jewish standpoint, see Keith H. Essex, “The Abrahamic Covenant,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 10, no. 2 (1999): 191–212; and Moshe Weinfeld, “The Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East,” in *The Journal of the American Oriental Society* 90, no. 2 (1970): 184–203.

21. For a brief recounting of the transmission of this covenant, see Spencer J. Condie, “I Will Write My Law in Their Hearts,” in *Prophets and Prophecies of the Old Testament*, ed. Aaron P. Schade, Brian M. Hauglid, and Kerry Muhlestein (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2017), 10–12.

22. Some consider this to be the covenant referred to most often in the Old Testament and see it as somewhat different from the Abrahamic covenant. See McKenzie, *Covenant*, 4. See also William D. Barrick, “Intercovenantal Truth and Relevance: Leviticus 26 and Biblical Covenants,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 21, no. 1 (2010): 81–102. I see this covenant as the same as that established with Abraham and find the promises and wording to echo each other. The New Testament writers also saw the Sinai covenant as a continuation of the Abrahamic covenant. See Acts 3:25; Galatians 3:15; and McKenzie, *Covenant*, 6.

23. McKenzie, *Covenant*, 17.

24. McKenzie, *Covenant*, 49.

25. Leviticus 26 is the ending of what is often referred to as the “Holiness Code” (comprising Leviticus 17–26). See Henry T. C. Sun, “Holiness Code,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 3, ed. David Noel Freedman et al. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 254–57. The Holiness Code contains a series of commandments regarding rituals, sexual conduct, family relations, priestly conduct, regulations of religious festivals and the tabernacle, blasphemy, and redemption. The statutes and commandments Israel is told they must keep as part of the covenant most directly refer to the laws found in this section of scripture.

26. As discussed below, the covenant is also summarized in Deuteronomy 28. According to the biblical text, the Deuteronomic summary of the covenant would postdate that of Leviticus. There is scholarly debate about this, largely focused on the manner in which the Leviticus Holiness Code, which Leviticus 26 is a part of, seems to rely on the existence of

some laws present in Deuteronomy. See Sun, “Holiness Code,” 256. Of course, if the laws in Deuteronomy were a review of laws and covenants given a generation earlier, as the text portrays, then these laws would have been known by the time the Holiness Code was created, whenever that was. The dating of both texts is complicated and difficult, as Sun outlines.

27. Some have argued that when first given on Sinai, the covenant only included the ten commandments and that the inclusion of the law code in Deuteronomy 12–26 was a later addition. See McKenzie, *Covenant*, 37–38.

28. See Jacob Milgrom, *The Anchor Bible: Leviticus 23–27, a New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 2286–87. Milgrom notes that the cursings section is longer than the blessings section, which is typical of covenants and treaties in the ancient Near East.

29. Charles Fensham, “Malediction and Benediction in Ancient Near Eastern Vassal-Treaties and the Old Testament,” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 74, no. 1 (1962): 1–9.

30. The curses in Deuteronomy 28 are repeated more than in Leviticus. They are too lengthy to record all of them in this chart, but a representative sample is included. It is worth reading each of these instances; thus, I present a few of the references in the chart.

31. “Sweet odors” is a way of referring to sacrifices made in holy places.

32. This is perhaps the least direct parallel. Serving other gods implies that God is no longer Israel’s God and that Israel is not his people. It also suggests that they will worship in a place other than the tabernacle of God. It is curious that Deuteronomy does not mention the tabernacle directly in its cursings, because having a house where his name is put is an important theme in Deuteronomy. See Sandra L. Richter, “The Place of the Name in Deuteronomy,” *Vetus Testamentum* 57, no. 3 (2007): 342–66; and R. E. Clements, “Deuteronomy and the Jerusalem Cult Tradition,” *Vetus Testamentum* 15, no. 3 (1965): 300–12.

33. Some feel that verses 48–68 are a later addition. See McKenzie, *Covenant*, 35; and Ernest W. Nicholson, *God and His People: Covenant and Theology in the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 75–77. While I do not fully agree with this assessment, it is possible. They are a repeat of the ideas already present in the chapter and are not included here because of redundancy.

34. Emphasis on keeping the law as part of the covenant was also made in Israel’s first encounter with God at Sinai (see Exodus 19:3–6). A special emphasis on being punished for breaking the parts of the law that had to do with taking care of the poor was made in Exodus 22:21–24.

35. These laws are often referred to as the “covenant code.” Frank H. Seilhamer, “The Role of Covenant in the Mission and Message of Amos,” in *A Light unto My Path: Old Testament Studies in Honor of Jacob M. Myers*, ed. H. N. Bream et al. (Philadelphia: Temple University, 1974), 437–38, points out that the statutes and commandments are the laws of the covenant, or the stipulations of how to act within the covenant.

36. Francis I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman, *Hosea: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible Series, vol. 24, ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday Publishing, 1980), 197.

37. Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, 197–98.

38. Robert L. Millet, *Men of Covenant: Oaths, Covenants, and Transcendent Promises* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2015), 3, notes that God binds himself through covenant to both individuals and groups.

39. An important part of having Jehovah as their God was that they would not worship other gods (see Deuteronomy 29:18–29).

40. Tikva Frymer-Kensky, “Biblical Voices on Chosenness,” in *Covenant and Chosenness in Judaism and Mormonism*, ed. Raphael Jospe, Truman G. Madsen, and Seth Ward (Madison: Farleigh Dickinson University Press; London: Associated University Press, 2001), 23. For more on the special love available within this covenant, see Daniel L. Belnap, “How Excellent Is Thy Lovingkindness’: The Gospel Principle of *Hesed*,” in *The Gospel of Jesus Christ in the Old Testament* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2009).

41. Frymer-Kensky, “Biblical Voices on Chosenness,” 27.

42. See also Gordon R. Clark, *The Word “Hesed” in the Hebrew Bible*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 157 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 267; Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *The Meaning of Hesed in the Hebrew Bible: A New Inquiry*, Harvard Semitic Monographs Number 17 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1978), 233, 236; and Aaron T. Lockhart, “Toward a Unitive Understanding of *Hesed*: Mercy Defined and Displayed,” 5, published online at academia.edu.

43. For each of these motifs, a few scriptural references for when those promises are made as part of the covenant will be included. For this one, see Exodus 6:7; Leviticus 26:12; Deuteronomy 7:6; 28:9–10; and 29:13.

44. Genesis 17:7, 8; Exodus 6:7; Leviticus 26:12; Deuteronomy 29:13; Abraham 1:19; and Abraham 2:7.

45. Genesis 13:16; 15:5; 17:2, 4–6; 22:17; 24:60; Leviticus 26:9; Deuteronomy 6:3; 30:16; Abraham 2:9; and 3:14.

46. Genesis 12:1, 7; 13:15; 13:17; 15:7, 16, 18; 17:8; Exodus 6:8; Leviticus 18:24–30; 25:18; Deuteronomy 5:33; 6:1, 18; 30:16, 20; Abraham 2:6, 19; and Doctrine and Covenants 52:2.

47. Genesis 22:17; 24:60; 15:1; Leviticus 25:18; and 26:5–7.

48. Genesis 15:1; 17:6; Leviticus 25:18–19; 26:4–5; Deuteronomy 6:3; 28:3–6, 8, 11–12; 29:9; 30:9, 16; and Abraham 2:9.

49. Genesis 17:6, 16; and Abraham 1:2.

50. Leviticus 26:11–12.

51. Genesis 17:4–5; 26:25; and Abraham 1:2–4.

52. Leviticus 26:41–46; 1 Kings 8:46–51; and 1 Nephi 2:24.

53. Many scholars have argued that the idea of covenant did not preexist the prophets or even the days of Josiah, while many others have agreed that the concept was as old as Israel. See Seilhamer, “Role of Covenant,” 435–36; and John Eaton, *Mysterious Messengers: A Course on Hebrew Prophecy from Amos Onwards* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1997), 23. As noted above, Restoration scripture makes it clear that covenant was a central concept from the days of Adam.

54. Jared W. Ludlow, “A Message of Good and Evil Tidings’: A Narrative Study of Abinadi,” in *Abinadi: He Came Among Them in Disguise*, ed. Shon D. Hopkin (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2018), 7–11.

55. Some have argued that Hosea isn’t really referring to the covenant with God because he does not use the Hebrew word for covenant, *brit*, except for times when it could be taken as a reference as a covenant between nations. See McKenzie, *Covenant*, 6, 22–23. I would argue that the use of phrases such as “my people” and “your God” are such clear references

to the covenant with God that there is no doubt Hosea is speaking of a covenant with God frequently in his book as he compares it to the marriage covenant. Furthermore, Hosea 8:1 is clearly about a covenant with God. It has been dismissed as being a later addition because Hosea doesn't really talk about covenants with God. But that is circular reasoning and doesn't make sense when one allows the evidence of phrases such as "my people" and other covenant phrases. When looking at Hosea comprehensively, it is clear that he is speaking of God's covenant with Israel.

56. Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, 200, recognize this as a promise to fulfill the ancient promises.

57. There is not full agreement as to how new or how much of a continuity of covenant is being spoken of here. For a summary of many of these arguments, see Adeyemi, "What Is the New Covenant 'Law,'" 312–21; Wilber B. Wallis, "Irony in Jeremiah's Prophecy of a New Covenant," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 12 (1969): 107–10; Walter Kaiser Jr., *The Uses of the Old Testament in the New* (Chicago: Moody, 1985), 136–37; and Johnson Jr., "The Last Passover, the First Lord's Supper," 128. See also Talbert, "Paul on the Covenant," 299–300. See especially Adeyemi, "What Is the New Covenant," 312–13. Eaton, *Mysterious Messengers*, 58–59, notes that the new covenant is the great hope held out to Israel during this dark time.

58. See Douglas E. Brinley, "The Promised Land and Its Covenant Peoples," in *The Book of Mormon: Helaman through 3 Nephi 8, According to Thy Word*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1992), 39–46; Muhlestein, "Prospering in the Land," 287–96; and Philip M. Flammer, "A Land of Promise Choice above All Other Lands," in *First Nephi, The Doctrinal Foundation*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1988), 217–29.

59. Muhlestein, "Prospering in the Land," 287–96.

60. Terrence L. Szink, "An Oath of Allegiance in the Book of Mormon," in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, ed. William J. Hamblin and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS and Deseret Book, 1990), 35–36. See also Mark J. Morisse, "Simile Curses in the Ancient Near East, Old Testament, and Book of Mormon," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2, no. 1 (1993): 125, 127–28, 134–35.

61. For more on this, see Thomas R. Valletta, "The Captain of the Covenant," in *The Book of Mormon: Alma, the Testimony of the Word*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1992), 223–48.

62. See Muhlestein, "Prospering in the Land," 287–96.

63. Today this would be seen as sexist language. It was not viewed that way in Isaiah's day.

64. While Doctrine and Covenants 113:1–6 provides an interpretation that probably refers to Joseph Smith, it does not specifically address the "branch." We should remember that most of Isaiah's prophecies have multiple fulfillments, which means that this specific latter-day interpretation does not rule out other interpretations. Old Testament writers clearly interpreted this prophecy to refer to Davidic kingship, as will be shown in the following passages.

65. The promise of restoration of a Davidic king becomes very important throughout both biblical books. For example, Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, vol. 1, trans. D. R. Ap-Thomas (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1967), 129–92, argues that covenant renewal was part of enthronement in ancient Israel and that this was celebrated at the Feast

of Tabernacles. This idea would be tied up with the waving of palm fronds as Christ rode into Jerusalem and was accepted by crowds as the son of David.

66. The chapters of Jeremiah are not arranged in chronological order, but chapter 33 does seem to be chronologically later than chapter 23. See John Bright, *Jeremiah: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible Series, vol. 21, ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday Publishing, 1986), lxxxvi–cxi.

67. See also Matthew L. Bowen, “Ominous Onomastics: Symbolic Naming and Paranomasia in Old Testament Prophecy,” in *Prophets and Prophecies of the Old Testament*, ed. Aaron P. Schade, Brian M. Hauglid, and Kerry Muhlestein (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2017), 29–30.

68. Bowen, “Ominous Onomastics,” 30, independently saw this same connection, as have others.

69. Christopher T. Begg, “Berit in Ezekiel,” in *Proceedings of the Ninth World Congress of Jewish Studies, Division A: The Period of the Bible* (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Magnes Press, 1985), 77, notes that the word for covenant is used more by Jeremiah and then Ezekiel, than by any other prophets. This does not include allusions to covenant such as we are studying here, which would enhance the theme of covenant in these prophetic books.

70. For other ways Ezekiel tied the temple to covenants, see Condie, “I Will Write My Law in Their Hearts,” 17–18.

71. See also Nelson, “The Gathering of Scattered Israel.”

72. On the relation between various Malachi verses and the covenant and a Book of Mormon tie-in, see Matthew L. Bowen, “Messengers of the Covenant: Mormon’s Doctrinal Use of Malachi 3:1 in Moroni 7:29–30,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 31 (2019): 122–25.

73. Nelson, “Covenants;” and Nelson, “Thanks for the Covenant.”

74. David A. Bednar, “The Hearts of the Children Shall Turn,” *Ensign*, November 2011, 24–27.

75. Mark A. Shields, *Your Covenant* (Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 2016), 11–13; Robert L. Millet, *LDS Beliefs: A Doctrinal Reference* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2011), 18; Julie B. Beck, *Joy in the Covenant* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book: 2018), 91; Kerry Muhlestein, *Scripture Study Made Simple: The Old Testament, Text and Commentary in a Single Volume* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2017), 530.

76. Nelson, “The Gathering of Scattered Israel,” 80, says, “In the temple we receive our ultimate blessings, as the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” Nelson, “Covenants,” 88, says, “Ultimately, in the holy temple, we may become joint heirs to the blessings of an eternal family, as once promised to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and their posterity. Thus, celestial marriage is the covenant of exaltation.” Russell M. Nelson, “The Book of Mormon, the Gathering of Israel, and the Second Coming,” *Ensign*, July 2014, 30, says, “In the temple we receive our ultimate and highest blessings, as promised to the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.”

77. There are a few ways to translate this verse, such as “I am not your God,” or “I am not yours,” or “I am not your ‘I Am.’” See Carl S. Elrich, “The Text of Hosea 1:9,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 104, no. 1 (1985): 13–19. In the end, they all mean the same thing and carry the same covenant allusion. Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, 198, suggest that the phrase really means “you are my non-people.” This does not work well with the parallel phrase, for it seems unlikely that God would say he was their non-god.

78. Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, 200, recognize this as a promise to fulfill the ancient promises.

79. Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, 199–200.

80. Larsen, *People of Destiny*, 50–51.

81. Anderson and David Noel Freedman, *Hosea: a New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 199–200.

82. Kerry Muhlestein, *Return unto Me: Old Testament Messages of God's Love for You* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2013), 21–26.

83. Anderson and David Noel Freedman, *Hosea: a New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 199, also believes this is about an everlasting covenant being reestablished with God.

84. See Belnap, “How Excellent Is Thy Lovingkindness,” 170; and H. J. Stoebe, “hesed kindness,” in *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, ed. Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, trans. Mark E. Biddle (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 460–61. Seilhamer, “Role of Covenant,” 436, who also points out the covenant connotations of this word. See also Sakenfeld, *Meaning of Hesed in the Hebrew Bible*, 233, 236; and Clark, *Word “Hesed” in the Hebrew Bible*, 267.

85. See Carol L. Meyers and Eric M. Meyers, *Haggai, Zechariah 1–8: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible Series, vol. 25B, ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday Publishing, 1987), xl–xlii, on the return of the Jews to Jerusalem as the historical backdrop of the book of Zechariah. Especially see xlii on the focus of the temple for every necessary part of the return.

86. James A. Hartle, “The Literary Unity of Zechariah,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 35, no. 2 (1992): 147, argues that restoration of the covenant relationship is the primary theme of Zechariah.

87. Reed Lessing, “Reading Zechariah with Zechariah 1 as the Introduction to the Entire Book,” *Concordia Journal* 40, no. 2 (2014): 189.

88. Lessing, “Reading Zechariah,” 189.

89. Hartle, “Literary Unity of Zechariah,” 147–48.

90. Hartle, “Literary Unity of Zechariah,” 147–48.

91. Elie Assis, “The Structure of Zechariah 8 and Its Meaning,” *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 12 (2012): 10–17, repeatedly notes the essential role of covenant in this chapter’s theme.

92. Robert L. Foster, “Shepherds, Sticks, and Social Destabilization: A Fresh Look at Zechariah 11:4–17,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 126, no. 4 (2007): 747. Foster notes that there is not complete agreement as to whether the covenant mentioned here is a covenant with all people or just Israel. The fulfillment of the covenant in the following chapter indicates, to me at least, that it is about a covenant with Israel.