

# CHRIST, COVENANTS, AND THE CAPH

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For some modern Christian religions, there is a fundamental disconnect between the gospel of Jesus Christ and the need for priesthood covenants and ordinances. Covenants and ordinances are seen as connected to an antiquated system of worship not directly connected to the personal grace found in Jesus Christ. This interpretation comes primarily from an overemphasis on certain statements in the epistles of Paul, and forces an interpretation of Old and New Testament passages given directly by Christ, which separates the grace of Christ offered to members of his Church from sacred ordinances. This viewpoint de-emphasizes the responsibility of Christians to make and keep sacred covenants by participating in priesthood ordinances such as baptism, the sacrament, and the bestowal of the gift of the Holy Ghost.

An example of the impact that this noncovenant, nonordinance interpretation has on these religions' views of Christ's gospel is evidenced by a statement in Spiros Zodhiates' *Complete Word Study Dictionary of the New Testament*. Zodhiates refers to Christ's well-known statement about

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the importance of baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost, found in John 3:5, which states, “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” Zodhiates states, “Water is mentioned in the discourse of the Lord Jesus to Nicodemus in John 3:5, the mention of which has given some the idea that the Lord Jesus was speaking of baptism. Such a presumption, however, is unjustified.”<sup>1</sup> This statement is followed by some lengthy linguistic reasoning about why this verse cannot refer to baptism. Only partway through the passage does the author mention the thought that shapes his reasoning, a heavily tilted view of a statement by the Apostle Paul: “Paul very clearly states in 1 Cor. 15:50 ‘that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.’ This means that there is no physical means whereby man can enter this spiritual kingdom of God. . . . Jesus Christ does not become the King of our hearts and live in us through water baptism. Nowhere in the Scriptures is anything of the kind stated. . . . If the Lord meant to convey the idea of water baptism here, He would have said so. He does not in any shape or form refer to baptism.”<sup>2</sup>

It is not surprising to find that this author’s argument is colored by his own previous conception of the scriptures.<sup>3</sup> However, it is bothersome that the author does not clearly state the viewpoints that guide his thinking before he offers his interpretation. Instead, the thread of his logic is interwoven within his explanation, making it difficult to tell how fundamentally important the assumption is to his argument.

In contrast, the fundamental position of this study should be understood clearly from the outset. The assumptions are these: (1) The fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ has been restored to the earth through the teachings of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; and (2) sacred covenants through true priesthood ordinances exist in the Church, and these covenants and ordinances are an essential part of the gospel. Or, as the third article of faith declares, “We believe that through the Atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved, by *obedience to the laws and ordinances* of the Gospel” (emphasis added). This gospel pattern has existed since the beginning of the world, in each dispensation of the gospel. The Prophet Joseph Smith has clearly stated:

We all admit that the Gospel has ordinances, and if so, had it not always ordinances, and were not its ordinances always the same?

. . . It will be noticed that, according to Paul, (see Gal. iii:8) the Gospel was preached to Abraham. We would like to be informed in what name the Gospel was then preached, whether it was in the name of Christ or some other name. If in any other name, was it the Gospel? And if it was the Gospel, and that preached in the name of Christ, had it any ordinances? If not, was it the Gospel? And if it had ordinances what were they? . . . Now taking it for granted that the scriptures say what they mean, and mean what they say, we have sufficient grounds to go on and prove from the Bible that the gospel has always been the same; the ordinances to fulfil its requirements, the same; and the officers to officiate, the same; and the signs and fruits resulting from the promises, the same: therefore, as Noah was a preacher of righteousness he must have been baptised and ordained to the priesthood by the laying on of the hands, &c.<sup>4</sup>

In light of the foregoing statement, we should not be surprised to find evidence of the connection between Christ, covenants, and priesthood ordinances in either the New or Old Testament, or in any of the scriptures of the restored gospel. The following analysis of the scriptures seeks to answer these questions: (1) Can evidence be found in the Old Testament for the Latter-day Saint view that there is a fundamental connection between covenants, priesthood ordinances, and personal salvation through the grace of Christ? (2) Did the prophets of the Old Testament teach that covenants and priesthood ordinances lead and connect to Christ and his blessings, or are these blessings to be gained without the power of covenants and priesthood ordinances, as some teach today? This study will rely primarily on Old Testament texts to demonstrate the central role of covenants and ordinances from the earliest ages of the earth and that these covenants and ordinances centered in Jesus Christ in antiquity, just as they center in him today.

#### COVENANTS AND CURSE REVERSAL IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

To recognize the importance and spiritual ramifications of covenants in the Old Testament, it is essential to understand the pattern of cause and effect that the Lord sets up early in the scriptural account. God establishes a relationship with his people in which he sets the conditions

or commandments. He grants the blessings when his people choose to obey the commandments and be a part of the covenant relationship, and he designates the consequences when his people transgress against that covenant relationship. Thus, in Genesis 1, the Lord offers to Adam and Eve the blessing of all his creations and the blessing and commandment to exercise dominion over them. He offers the blessing of a companion to Adam with the blessing and commandment to be fruitful and multiply. However, when the Lord's commandments are disobeyed or transgressed, he also designates the consequences of this disobedience. These promises to Adam and Eve, dependent on their faithfulness, bring them into a "partnership" or covenant relationship with the Lord. After they had transgressed the law to not partake of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, Adam and Eve are told, "Because thou hast . . . eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: *curst* is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground" (Genesis 3:17–19; emphasis added).

In these verses, the cursing, or consequence of eating the fruit, reverses some of the earlier blessings promised to Adam by the Lord. He had been promised dominion over an earth that would provide for him plentifully, but now he will live in an earth with which he has to struggle for dominion. Adam and Eve are also told, "I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children" (Genesis 3:16). They had been promised the ability to multiply and replenish the earth, but now those blessings would come with significant hardship.

The Book of Mormon clarifies the purpose of the cursing or consequences of the Fall when Lehi teaches his son that "Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy" (2 Nephi 2:25). While the Fall obviously made the world a more difficult place in which to live, with pain, sickness, hardship, and death, it also provided immense opportunities designed by a loving Father for our benefit. These difficulties are connected to the many joys that also spring from the Fall, including the ability to have and raise children, the joy of overcoming difficult challenges, the opportunity to become more like our Heavenly Father, and the joy of a saving reliance upon the Lord developed in consequence

of our need for him in a fallen world. The consequences of the Fall draw the hearts and minds of God's children constantly back to the Lord, help them overcome their weaknesses, and fill them with a desire to enter into covenant relationships with him. Thus the word *curse* should be understood in the light of Nephi's teachings that "[God] doeth not anything save it be for the benefit of the world; for he loveth the world, even that he layeth down his own life that he may draw all men unto him. Wherefore, he commandeth none that they shall not partake of his salvation" (2 Nephi 26:24).

While the descendants of Adam and Eve are not accountable for our first parents' transgression (see Articles of Faith 1:2), we do live in a world affected by their choices. In addition, we also transgress and sin in our own lives. When any child of God willfully moves away from him, this behavior also leads to consequences. The Old Testament offers a reminder of this pattern in the chapter of Genesis right after the Fall. After Cain's transgression of the law in the murder of his brother Abel, he is told, "And now art thou *cursed* from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand; when thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth" (Genesis 4:11–12; emphasis added). It should again be noted that while these consequences were difficult for Cain, they were designed by a loving Father, who desired to draw Cain's heart toward goodness to help him overcome the weaknesses that motivated him to "murder and get gain" (see Moses 5:31), and to create the need for him to rely upon the Lord in his difficulties.

The consequences that followed the transgression in the Garden of Eden affected future covenants that the Lord would offer his people. In effect, through the making and keeping of sacred covenants, the Lord would offer to *reverse* the effects of the consequences of the Fall under which his people operate. He would also offer to redeem them from the consequences of their own sins. Therefore, when the Lord later covenanted with Abraham, he stated: "I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect. And I will make my *covenant* between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly. . . . And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee. . . . And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land

wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God” (Genesis 17:1–2, 6, 8; emphasis added).

God offered Abraham again the same thing he had offered to Adam and Eve, namely, dominion over a land and greatness in posterity. The reversal through the Abrahamic covenant of the curse on the land, dependent on Abraham’s obedience, becomes even clearer in God’s description of the promised land to Abraham’s descendant, Moses. “I am come down to deliver [the Israelites] out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey” (Exodus 3:8). This description is a vivid reminder of the paradise that existed in the garden of Eden.

Nowhere is the triumphant power of covenants to reverse the consequences of sin more evident than in the writings of the Old Testament prophets, and most particularly the writings of Isaiah. Again and again, Isaiah uses language which is biblically connected to covenant breaking and to covenant making in order to teach that the consequences of sin are real, but that these consequences can be reversed for God’s people if they will return to a correct covenantal relationship with him. Most frequently the blessings of the covenant are promised in the form of a cursed land returning to its precurse, Edenic state, as man returns to a right relationship with God: “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. . . . *Instead of the thorn* shall come up the fir tree, and *instead of the brier* shall come up the myrtle tree: and it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an *everlasting sign* that shall not be cut off” (Isaiah 55:7, 13; emphasis added). Blessings that follow after the covenant, such as those mentioned in this verse from Isaiah, act as physical *signs* of the reality of the Lord’s covenant promises.

The reversal of the consequences of sin is often described in terms of water coming to a land that has been cursed with drought:

For I the Lord thy God will hold thy *right hand*, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee. . . .

When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them.

I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys:

I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water.

I will plant in the wilderness the cedar, the shittah tree, and the myrtle, and the oil tree; I will set in the desert the fir tree, and the pine, and the box tree together: That they may see, and know, and consider, and understand together, that the hand of the Lord hath done this, and the Holy One of Israel hath created it. (Isaiah 41:13, 17–20; emphasis added)

The effects of the Fall are also overcome in Isaiah 55, where the ability to obtain food and water without having to purchase them (by the sweat of one's brow), again hearkens to the Edenic state: "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and *I will make an everlasting covenant with you*, even the sure mercies of David" (Isaiah 55:1–3; emphasis added).

We can also clearly see a reversal of the effects of the Fall as it relates to a greater abundance of descendants, which appear to spring up almost without any effort, in these verses by the prophet Isaiah: "Thus saith the Lord. . . . Fear not, O Jacob, my servant. . . . For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring: And they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water courses. One shall say, *I am the Lord's*; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and *surname himself by the name of Israel*" (Isaiah 44:2–5; emphasis added).

The offspring are given the same name—Israel—that the Lord gave to Jacob when making a covenant with him (see Genesis 32:28), and they become the Lord's. It is interesting to note that this process is followed precisely in the covenant-making process of new members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Through baptism they become the

Lord's. As they receive their patriarchal blessing, they learn that they are descendants of Israel and can be called by his name.<sup>5</sup>

Of course, the curses and the blessings mentioned in Isaiah are to a great degree symbolic of more important spiritual changes that will come upon the individual. Where the individual spirit has been dry and unproductive, providing only weeds and thistles, the Lord will send water to bring forth an abundance of knowledge, peace, and joy.<sup>6</sup> Where the spiritual womb has been barren, not bringing any blessings to others or joy to the individual, it will spring forth with life to bless all those around and bring joy to the bearer. These spiritual blessings, more important than the physical, reverse the consequences that separate people from the Lord because of their wickedness. A reminder of these spiritual consequences of sin, followed by a promise of their reversal, when the covenant is renewed and obeyed, is beautifully described by the prophet Isaiah:

Hear the word of the Lord, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah. . . .

When ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood.

Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil. . . .

Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.

If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land:

But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it. (Isaiah 1:10, 15–16, 18–20)

The theme of the glorious power of covenants in the reversal of the consequences of sin develops throughout the scriptures and in an overview of the entire plan of salvation from the Garden of Eden through the Millennium. The foregoing examples serve as ample witness that God does make covenants with his people and that his people are required to obey the stipulations of that covenant. When they do not obey, they receive the consequences that flow from their actions. These consequences

come from a loving Father who desires to strengthen his people and to call them back to him. When the Lord's people do obey, God reverses the consequences of sin and blesses them. However, while the power of the Lord is always most important in the covenant relationship, the Old Testament clearly supports the teachings of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ that disciples of Christ have an important role to play and are required to be obedient to these covenants to the best of their ability. There is abundant evidence that "through the Atonement [grace, mercy] of Christ, all mankind may be saved, *by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel*" (Articles of Faith 1:3; emphasis added).

#### PRIESTHOOD ORDINANCES IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Thus far, this study has analyzed the vital role covenants have played in God's interaction with his children from the beginning. However, what of the importance of priesthood ordinances as emphasized by the Prophet Joseph Smith? Covenants are an essential part of God's dealings with his people, but is there evidence in the Old Testament that these covenants are solemnized, entered into, and made valid through priesthood ordinances? Is it sufficient to feel that God has spiritually called one into a covenant relationship, or is a priesthood ordinance an important part of the pattern?

In order to determine whether ordinances are important in covenant making, first it is important to understand what is meant by the word *ordinance*. The *Encyclopædia of Mormonism* states:

The word "ordinance" is derived from the Latin *ordinare*, which means to put in order or sequence; or to act by authorization or command. Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints regard religious ordinances not as arbitrarily established but as purposefully instituted by God and eternal in scope.

The power to perform ordinances whose validity is recognized by God is inseparably connected with the divine authority conferred on mortal man, that is, the priesthood of God. . . .

Ordinances in the Church contain instructions and rich symbolism. Anointing with consecrated oil (e.g., as in the temple) is reminiscent of the use of sacred oil in the coronation of kings and the calling of prophets in ancient days. *Laying hands* on the head of

the sick symbolically suggests the invocation and transmission of power from on high.<sup>7</sup>

So, according to Latter-day Saint usage, priesthood ordinances are sacred rituals, designed to teach eternal truths, with the important purpose (along with other purposes) of solemnizing and validating covenants between God and man.

The Hebrew word for “ordinance” is *huqqah*. This word comes directly from the Hebrew verb *haqah* or *haqq* (“to engrave”).<sup>8</sup> Ordinances engrave, cement, or seal upon the individual the reality of the covenant.<sup>9</sup> One who is marked by the physical reality of an ordinance cannot with impunity pretend that the covenant never took place or that the commandment was never taught. The individual is completely accountable for the covenant and for the consequences of obeying or disobeying the laws of that covenant.

The connection between covenant and ordinance becomes clearer when we notice the Lord regularly requiring a physical demonstration (or, according to Latter-day Saint usage, an ordinance) of his covenants with man. Thus in Genesis 17, the proclaiming of the covenant from God is followed by a physical demonstration of the reality of that covenant, in the nature of circumcision: “And God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations. This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised. And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a *token of the covenant* betwixt me and you” (Genesis 17:9–11).

Of course, this ordinance would be much more than the symbolic “engraving” of the covenant through a physical act. It would literally engrave the reality of the covenant upon the flesh of the Israelite males.

Again, when God renewed his covenant with the children of Israel before their departure from Egypt, he solemnized that renewal with the ordinance of the Passover sacrifice and feast: “And this day shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast to the Lord” (Exodus 12:14). This ordinance was perpetuated by Christ in his New Testament Church when he instituted the sacrament as a continuation of the ancient ordinance of the Passover lamb, remembered by the Passover feast (see Luke 22:15, 19–20).

The sacrifice of the Passover feast, along with previous Old Testament sacrifices, points forward to ordinances that the Lord would later initiate in the Tabernacle/Temple setting with the children of Israel. These ordinances, including animal sacrifices, would serve as constant, physical reminders to them of the covenants they had made with the Lord. The Temple was the place where the majority of covenant-ratifying ordinances were completed. Isaiah frequently reminds the reader of the importance of a Temple setting and covenants: “And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord’s house [i.e., the Temple] shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem” (Isaiah 2:2–3). It is important to note that Isaiah is referring to the Temple, with which the Old Testament Israelites would have been familiar, but prophecies of its importance “in the last days,” indicating that the importance of the Temple and Temple ordinances was not just for Old Testament times.

Isaiah offers a powerful example of how the ordinances of the Temple would reverse the consequences of sin. When the tribes of Israel were at Mount Sinai, they had lost the full blessings of the higher law of the gospel through transgression and were given a lesser law in which the lower priesthood was only held by the Levites. However, Isaiah prophesied that in the last days, members of the covenant would bring true Israel from among the Gentile nations to the Temple, and there, connected to priesthood offerings and ordinances, God will make all of these true Israelites a part of his holy priesthood:

And I will set a *sign* among them, and I will send . . . them unto the nations . . . that have not heard my fame, neither have seen my glory; and they shall declare my glory among the Gentiles.

And they shall bring all your brethren for an offering unto the Lord out of all nations upon horses, and in chariots, and in litters, and upon mules, and upon swift beasts, to my holy mountain [i.e., the Temple] Jerusalem, saith the Lord, as the children of Israel bring an *offering* in a clean vessel into the house of the Lord.

*And I will also take of them for priests and for Levites, saith the Lord.*  
(Isaiah 66:19–21; emphasis added)

Thus the consequences of Israel’s transgression at Mount Sinai would be reversed, and they would again become a “kingdom of priests, and an holy nation” (Exodus 19:6).

Christ in the New Testament demonstrates that covenants, with their spiritual blessings and manifestations, must be connected with the outward manifestations of priesthood ordinances. In his well-known discussion with Nicodemus in John 3, mentioned above, Christ is most intent on teaching about the importance and spiritual benefits of being born of the Spirit and focuses on the Spirit throughout his discussion. However, he does not leave out the importance of a physical manifestation of the ordinance. “Except a man be born *of water* and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:5). Both are necessary. Being born of the Spirit engraves the disciples’ spirit with the image and power of Christ. However, since we are both physical and spiritual beings, it is necessary for the physical “engraving” to take place as well. The necessity of this outward ordinance is restated by Christ in the Gospel of Mark: “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved” (Mark 16:16).

Not surprisingly, it is the Book of Mormon that makes an important connection with the Old Testament. The prophet Alma teaches that through being born again, the disciple can receive Christ’s image in his countenance. “And now behold, I ask of you, my brethren of the church, have ye spiritually been born of God? Have ye received his image in your countenances? Have ye experienced this mighty change in your hearts?” (Alma 5:14). Shortly thereafter, Alma connects receiving Christ’s image with the engraving process: “I say unto you, can ye look up to God at that day with a pure heart and clean hands? I say unto you, can you look up, having the image of God *engraven* upon your countenances?” (Alma 5:19; emphasis added). As we would expect, Alma finishes his powerful discourse with priesthood ordinations and with the ordinance (or engraving) of baptism (see Alma 6:1–2). In such a way, through priesthood ordinances, the image of Christ can begin to be engraven, stamped, or sealed upon the countenances of the disciples of Christ. The Old Testament, the New Testament, and the Book of Mormon have provided clear illustration of the teaching of the Prophet Joseph Smith, that “being born

again, comes by the Spirit of God *through ordinances*.<sup>10</sup> Or, as the Doctrine and Covenants states it, “In the ordinances [of the priesthood], the power of godliness is manifest. And without the ordinances thereof, and the authority of the priesthood, the power of godliness is not manifest unto men in the flesh” (D&C 84:20–21).

#### PRIESTHOOD ORDINANCES AND THE CAPH

The passage quoted above from the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* mentions the laying on of hands as an example of a priesthood ordinance. There are many instances in the restored gospel in which the laying on of hands is essential as an important part of priesthood ordinances, such as ordaining to the priesthood, setting apart for a calling, conferring the gift of the Holy Ghost, giving priesthood blessings of health, and even naming and blessing babies. Other ordinances, such as baptism, with the raised right arm of the priesthood holder as the baptismal prayer is offered, also demonstrate the importance of the hand in the making of sacred covenants.

There are various words for hand in Hebrew: *yad* refers to the hand as a whole, *ha-yamin* refers to the right hand, and *caph* refers to the palm of the hand. Scholars of other faiths have discussed the significance of the hand in the Hebrew language, as summarized below. For the ancient Israelites, the hand symbolized divine might, power, and authority. Human hands could be used in ways that indicated their possession of some of God’s power and authority. Thus hands could be stretched out to offer a priesthood blessing. When laid upon the head, they could confer blessings from God, as when Jacob blessed Ephraim and Mannaseh (see Genesis 48:13–19). This example, when Joseph verbally shows preference for the father’s right hand of blessing, offers evidence of the symbolic importance of the right hand. The right hand was used to make important marks or place seals of authority on communications. The grasping of right hands signified the entering into of a relationship, whether through treaty, obligation, or formal friendship. The right hand could be raised into the air as a formal gesture that the statement or oath being made was of special importance and weight, or it could be raised in the offering of a blessing.<sup>11</sup> The importance of the right hand in the context of covenants in the Latter-day Saint Church is obvious to those who have watched a baby blessing or who have witnessed a baptism.

As discussed by James Hastings in his *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, the biblical phrase that is used to signify formal consecration or appointment to priesthood office through priesthood ordinance literally means “to fill the hand (*yad*),” most likely symbolizing the priestly hand being filled with that which it needed to fulfill its work (such as incense in the hand of a priest) or with a symbol of authority (such as a scepter in the hand of a king).<sup>12</sup> The *caph* is the name of the Hebrew letter כ. For ancient Jewish/Israelite readers, the shape of the letter *caph* represented the curved shape of the palm of the hand and would have described the part of the hand that could be “filled” with priesthood authority and blessings. *Caph* was also one of the names given to spoons, cups, incense holders, and bowls in the Hebrew Bible, which, of course, are designed to be filled.<sup>13</sup> According to Hastings, the “filling of the hand” would have occurred at the time when the ancient Levitical priest was consecrated in his office to serve at the Temple or sanctuary, with the implicit receipt of blessings, power, and authority from heaven. This “filling of the hand” could also symbolize the receipt of those items or blessings that would have allowed the priest to serve the Lord (and to serve the house of Israel). This action might then imply a subsequent passing of the received blessings on to others through the laying on of hands, through priesthood service, or through a worthy offering made to the Lord after the priest’s hand had been filled with the appropriate item of sacrifice.

For the Latter-day Saint, our hands become filled when we receive direction, authority, and blessings from the Lord to fulfill the duty to which we have been called or ordained. With regard to the Atonement, Christ accepted his divinely appointed mission when he drank from the “bitter cup” (D&C 19:18), which had been filled with the sins and suffering of all people. His plea to the Father to “let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt” (Matthew 26:39) was an acknowledgment of the Father’s directive power in the mission that had been placed in Christ’s hands. Significantly, Christ’s mention of the “cup” comes only twelve verses after Christ’s institution of the sacrament, fulfilled in part by filling a cup with wine, a symbol of his atoning blood, and passing it to his apostles’ waiting hands. In the modern-day symbolism of the sacrament ordinance, Latter-day Saints also accept the emblems of Christ’s sacrifice into their hands with the divinely appointed responsibility to

“always remember” Christ with the attendant blessing that they may be filled with the Spirit (D&C 20:77, 79).

These priesthood and gospel connections with the palm of the hand (*caph*), the hand (*yad*), and the right hand (*yamin*) become important in scriptural examples.<sup>14</sup> The importance of the hand in Isaiah 41:13 was already mentioned: “I the Lord thy God will hold thy right hand” (i.e., according to scholars of Jewish symbolism, this action brings the Lord and Israel into a formal, close relationship).<sup>15</sup> Three verses earlier is a mention of the protective power of God’s right hand: “I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness” (Isaiah 41:10). In the context of the covenant nature of these verses, this phrase might appropriately be interpreted, “I will uphold you through the power of my covenants.” Later, the Lord utilizes the importance of the right hand in making oaths or promises when he states, “The Lord hath sworn by his right hand, and by the arm of his strength” (Isaiah 62:8). Each instance witnesses of the importance of an outwardly visible ordinance or sign in the making of covenants.<sup>16</sup>

#### THE *CAPH* AND THE CHRIST

Having established the importance of hands as associated with priesthood power, we are prepared to answer a final question: Does the Old Testament provide evidence that these covenants and ordinances are connected to Christ? And are these covenants and ordinances necessary in order to receive a full measure of Christ’s saving grace? In part, of course, the question has already been answered. It has been clear that God uses covenants, ratified through ordinances, to offer blessings to his people and reverse the effects of sin. But does the Old Testament specifically connect this important process with Christ?

While there are many prophecies of the Messiah throughout the Old Testament, three specific examples are useful as they describe Christ’s priesthood power and authority and point specifically to his role in reversing the effects of sin, employing “hand” symbolism to make his priesthood authority clear. One of these is found in Isaiah 22:20–25. These messianic verses need to be analyzed closely: “And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will call my servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah: and I will clothe him with thy robe, and strengthen him with thy girdle, and I will commit thy government into his hand [*yad*]: and he shall be a father to the

inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to the house of Judah. And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open” (Isaiah 22:20–22).

Eliakim, meaning “God shall cause to arise,” was to serve at the king’s right hand, just as Joseph did with Pharaoh and just as Christ does with the Father. As part of this symbolically Christ-centered position, Eliakim carried out all of the king’s wishes, held the authority of the king to act in his stead, and held the power to grant a petitioner audience with the king or to deny that access, i.e., to open or to shut.

The clothing of Eliakim/Christ with a robe and girdle points the Old Testament reader immediately to the first act of clothing which occurred in the beginning of the world, as God began through covenant to reverse the effects of Adam and Eve’s Fall by providing them with a “coat of skins” (Genesis 3:21).<sup>17</sup> Just as the garment of Adam and Eve surrounded and protected them from the elements of a fallen world, even so the children of God, which have been stripped of premortal glory by sin and by the effects of the Fall, can again become surrounded and protected by the power of God through the restoring effects of covenants. In addition, the vestments of robe and girdle in these verses, and the “filling of the hand” with the authority of government committed “into his [Eliakim’s/Christ’s] hand” (Isaiah 22:21), also clearly point to the priestly consecrations that occurred in Old Testament ordinations to the Levitical priesthood, in which the priest was clothed with a robe and girdle and consecrated (see Leviticus 8:7 for the robe and girdle; also see Leviticus 8:33 for “consecration” or the “filling of the hand”). Eliakim/Christ is clothed in an outward sign or evidence of the inward reality of his priesthood authority. Blessings connected to offspring are restored as Eliakim/Christ is made the “father” of all of the house of Judah (see Isaiah 22:21). Eliakim’s/Christ’s authority to act in the king’s name is made complete by the key which is laid upon his shoulder (see Isaiah 22:22). This Davidic key of authority (see Revelation 3:7), connected with power to “open and none shall shut” and to “shut and none shall open” (Isaiah 22:22) points forward to Christ’s offering of keys of authority to Peter. Peter is promised that what he binds on earth will be bound in heaven and what he looses on earth will be loosed in heaven (see Matthew 16:15–19).

This symbolic bestowal of authority points most specifically to Christ as evidenced by the permanent nature of the reversal of the effects of the Fall: “And I will fasten him as a nail in a sure place; and he shall be for a glorious throne to his father’s house. And they shall hang upon him [Christ] all the glory of his father’s house, the offspring and the issue” (Isaiah 22:23–24).

Eliakim/Christ is to be fastened as a “nail in a sure place” in “his father’s house” (v. 23). Thus Christ (unlike other humans, for whom the blessings of the covenant are dependent upon continued obedience) is never to be removed from his position in his Father’s house, which is located at God’s throne in heaven or in the Tabernacle/Temple at his symbolic throne on earth. He is fastened there for all eternity, having overcome for himself forever the spiritual curse which separates man from God.

In addition, these verses state that not only is Eliakim/Christ to be “fasten[ed] as a nail” in his Father’s house, he is also to serve as a “glorious throne” in that house, upon which all the blessings, glory, and “*offspring*” (since he is now the father of Judah) “hang” (Isaiah 22:24). All of the future blessings of Judah, the possibilities of overcoming the effects of the Fall and the possibility of their position on a throne (signifying authority) in the house of God “hang” on, or hinge on Christ. Paul brings the symbolism of nailing full circle, centered in Christ’s Atonement: “And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us [i.e., the record of the transgression of laws/ordinances, which transgression causes a loss of blessings], which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, *nailing* it to his cross” (Colossians 2:13–14).

The supreme act of sacrificial Atonement for mankind’s trespasses that caused Christ to be nailed to the cross ensured that he would be secured or “nail[ed] in a sure place” in his Father’s house forever. However, as Paul states, this same glorious act also caused Christ to become “sin for us” (2 Corinthians 5:21). The Atonement of Christ laid upon his shoulders the trespasses of all mankind, “nailing [them] to his cross” (Colossians 2:14), and with those trespasses hung all of mankind’s potential glory and blessings. Isaiah finished his Christ-centered message

in this way: “In that day, saith the Lord of hosts, shall the nail that is fastened in the sure place be removed, and be cut down, and fall; and the burden that was upon it shall be cut off: for the Lord hath spoken it” (Isaiah 22:25). When the nail that held Christ to the cross was removed, his great act of atoning sacrifice was completed. The burden was finished, removed, and cut off from God’s sight, so that Christ could be fastened permanently into his Father’s house as the throne or foundation of all our hopes in heaven, judging when to open and when to shut or when to reverse the effects of sin and when to leave them intact.

A second example of the Old Testament connection between Christ and restoration of lost blessings through covenants is found in the famous messianic prophecy of Isaiah 53 and makes reference to the burden laid upon Christ’s shoulders, as in the previous example. This passage is full of the evidence of the Fall and of the loss of blessings occasioned by apostasy. The effects of a rejected covenant are exemplified in Christ, who will suffer those effects vicariously for all of mankind and restore the covenant relationship between God and all those who are willing to accept his atoning sacrifice. Christ is to grow up out of “dry ground” (v. 2), wherein all the blessings of life and growth have been removed. Notwithstanding the effects of the apostasy and sin around him, he will have life and vitality as a “tender plant” in the midst of a benighted land (v. 2). However, by all external appearances, Christ appears to carry the effects of transgression himself. He has no beauty of form nor comeliness (see v. 2), in contrast to his glorious appearance in the premortal and postmortal life. He appears to be stricken and smitten of God (see v. 4). He is bruised by God, oppressed, full of grief, and cut off from the land of the living (see vv. 3, 7, 10). God has laid transgressions upon his shoulders (see v. 6). He suffers with the same type of “travail” (v. 11) that came to Adam and Eve as a result of their transgression. The very act that causes him to appear smitten and stricken of God is the same act that will ensure the salvation of others. This act causes him to become a father to all the house of Israel as he provides the possibility of the reversal of the effects of the Fall for all mankind. “With his stripes we are healed. . . . When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand” (vv. 5, 10). As in the symbolism of Eliakim, Christ’s offering will allow him to serve at the

throne (or mercy seat) in his Father's house: "[He] made intercession for the transgressors" (v. 12).

One final example from the prophet Isaiah will further illustrate the connection between Christ, covenants, and priesthood ordinances, as symbolized by the hand, which in this example is the Hebrew word *caph*: "Sing, O heavens; and be joyful, O earth; and break forth into singing, O mountains: for the Lord hath comforted his people, and will have mercy upon his afflicted. But Zion said, The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me" (Isaiah 49:13–14). The curse of affliction is being reversed, but Zion/Israel is still not confident that the Lord will remember her. The memory of her affliction is too fresh and vivid. So, the Lord seeks to convince her of the reality of his love: "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have *graven* thee upon the palms of my hands" (Isaiah 49:15–16; emphasis added). How does the Lord prove to his people that he remembers them and will bless them with joy? He points to a physical reminder or ordinance of the covenant he has made with them. He points to the palms of his hands (*caphim*), upon which he has engraven (*haqqah*) them. The physical engraving of the wounds that remain upon Christ's hands is a physical ordinance (*huqqah*) reminding his people of the reality of his covenant with them. As his physical, resurrected body is a reminder of his spiritual power, so are the wounds in his hands a physical reminder of his love. This engraving/ordinance has been carried out in the palm of his hand (*caph*), symbolizing the power and authority of Christ's consecrated sacrifice, acceptable before Heavenly Father. Heavenly Father "filled Christ's hand" or consecrated and authorized his performance of the Atonement, as symbolized by the wounds in his hands, for the good of all mankind.

This is one of the primary reasons why when Christ appears to the Apostles in Jerusalem and later to the Nephites in the Americas, he first reminds them of the bitter cup from which he has drunk (see 3 Nephi 11:11) and then invites them to touch the wounds in his hands (see 3 Nephi 11:14–15). Those wounds in his resurrected body serve as a palpable, physical reminder to his disciples that Christ remembers his spiritual covenant with them and that God the Father has accepted Christ's sacrifice in their behalf.

## CONCLUSION

That Christ has physically engraven us upon his hands reminds us that we must have Christ's image engraven upon our countenances through physical ordinances (see Alma 5:19), which ratify our covenants with the Lord. Therefore, Christ invites us to engage in physical ordinances such as baptism and the sacrament, which remind us of the reality of Christ's atoning sacrifice. These ordinances mark us and who we are as Christ's sacrifice marked him and who he is. They provide outward evidence to all who would come and see of the inner covenant that has been made with Christ. They are also outward symbols ratifying the reversal of the spiritual loss and separation that has come into our lives through sin. We can become connected to Christ through covenants, cemented and made real through ratifying ordinances. And through the Atonement of Christ, we can be forgiven of our sins, be healed of our destitute and barren spiritual condition, be born again, have the Spirit of God with us always, be reunited with Christ, and overcome the distance separating us from God. Again, as the Prophet Joseph Smith said, "Being born again, comes by the Spirit of God *through ordinances*."<sup>18</sup>

The Old Testament testifies eloquently of the necessity of covenants to restore us from our separated state and bring us back into God's presence. Mankind cannot receive the full blessings of God's mercy without making and keeping sacred covenants. Those covenants must be ratified and made efficacious through priesthood ordinances. And those covenants and priesthood ordinances point to and are centered in the example, power, and Atonement of Jesus Christ. It is the power of the Atonement of Christ that allows a full return of blessings lost, that allows ordinances to have real effect in the lives of his disciples, and that will give his disciples power to eventually enter back into the presence of their Heavenly Father.

## NOTES

1. Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 1992), 907.
2. Zodhiates, *Complete Word Study New Testament*, 908.
3. Indeed, all writers and scholars have biases and preconceived notions which shape their view of the scriptures. An important key for students of the scriptures is to be aware of their preformed assumptions and to ensure to the best of their

abilities that these viewpoints conform with God's viewpoints. An important step in scripture scholarship is for scholars to be open and forthcoming about their assumptions so that the reader knows what lens is guiding the scholarship.

4. Larry Dahl, ed., *Encyclopedia of Joseph Smith's Teachings* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1997), "Gospel."

5. For this use of the name Israel when referring to Latter-day Saints, see D&C 103:17. For popular usage and understanding of this concept, see the Latter-day Saint hymn "Israel, Israel, God Is Calling," no. 7; "Hope of Israel," no. 259, and others (*Hymns* [Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985]).

6. Famine is clearly used by the prophet Amos to symbolize separation from God. Amos 8:11 declares, "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord." Water is often used as a symbol for spiritual knowledge or revelation in the Old Testament. Habakkuk 2:14 provides an excellent example: "For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."

7. Immo Luschin, "Ordinances," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 3:1032.

8. *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1906), 349. It is important to clarify that there are many shades of meaning of the word *ordinance* in English. It can refer to (1) a command or order, (2) a custom or practice established by long usage, (3) a Christian rite, or (4) a statute or regulation. These variations are connected to the Latin meaning of the word, "to set in order." In the King James Version of the Bible, ordinance was translated from the Hebrew word *huqqah*, which indicates something that is engraved. Another Hebrew word, *mishpat*, which is sometimes translated "ordinance" in the King James Version, refers more to the shade of meaning of a statute or regulation. Latter-day Saint usage of the word *ordinance* focuses specifically on the physical act which declares or demonstrates (or physically engraves and sets in order) a priesthood covenant.

9. An excellent example of a spiritual covenant being cemented and made real by a physical act of engraving occurred when the Lord's finger engraved the Ten Commandments upon the stone tablets (see Exodus 31:18).

10. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 162.

11. Ellen Frankel, *The Encyclopedia of Jewish Symbols* (New Jersey: Jason Aronson, 1992), 70; see also Maurice Farbridge, in *Studies in Biblical and Semitic Symbolism* (E. P. Dutton & Co., 1923), 274–75.

12. James Hastings, *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1914), 12:494; see Exodus 28:41, 29:9, 29:33, 32:29; Leviticus 8:33, 16:32, 21:10; Numbers 3:3; Judges 17:5, 17:12; 1 Kings 13:33; 1 Chronicles 29:5, 29:31; Jeremiah 44:25; Ezekiel 43:26. This concept is also supported by E.W. Bullinger, in *Number in Scripture*: "[This] means to *fill the hand*, especially with that which is the sign and symbol of office, *i.e. to fill the hand with a scepter* was to consecrate to the office of king. To fill the hand with certain parts of sacrifices was to set apart for the office of priest, and to

confirm their right to offer both gifts and sacrifices to God. (Ex. 29:22–25, 28:41; 29:9; 32:29; see also Heb. 5:1, 8:3–4.) A ram of ‘consecration’ (or of filling) was a ram with parts of which the hands of the priests were filled when they were set apart to their office. Whenever the word refers to official appointment, or separation to a work or dignity, it is the sovereign act of God, and the accompanying symbolic act was the filling of the hand of the person so appointed with the sign which marked his office” (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2003), 145.

13. See Exodus 25:29; Exodus 37:16; Numbers 5:7; Numbers 7:14; 1 Kings 7:50; 2 Chronicles 4:22; 2 Kings 25:14; Jeremiah 52:18–19; 2 Chronicles 24:14.

14. As stated above, there are various words for “hand” in the Hebrew language. The *caph* (palm of the hand) is a part of the *yad* (hand), which in turn may be distinguished as the *yamin* (right hand), each of these having connection with covenants and ordinances. In the scriptures which will be quoted regarding the hand, ordinances, and Christ, only the last, Isaiah 49:15–16, which is the most important reference, utilizes the Hebrew word *caph*. However, all refer to the hand, which, of course, contains the *caph*.

15. Frankel, *Encyclopedia of Jewish Symbols*, 70.

16. While the examples cited here are metaphorical actions, they would only be significant to the Israelites as they represented physically understood realities. Thus the image of God swearing by his right hand would be significant only if the Israelites understood the physical use of the right hand to confirm statements. Examples are found in Genesis 14:22 and Exodus 6:8. Similarly, God holding Israel by the right hand would only be significant if the right hand held special meaning for the Israelites. Examples are found in 2 Kings 10:15, Jeremiah 1:15, and Ezekiel 17:18.

17. In Genesis 3, the symbolism of the coat of skins shows God’s willingness to protect Adam and Eve (as the coat would do in the newly fallen world) and provide for them (as he did when he gave them the coat). An understanding of the importance of covenants and ordinances reveals the Lord’s tender offering of the coat of skins as a renewal of the covenant and a partial reversal of the curse upon them. The act of clothing Adam and Eve would partially reverse the effects of the Fall, when they “knew that they were naked.” Also, the providing of a coat of skins by the Lord after the Fall would certainly have entailed a memorable physical act (or ordinance), cementing and teaching the relationship of God as the protector of Adam and Eve. The physical act would have been even more memorable in a setting where death with all its difficulties and dangers had newly been introduced into the world, along with the need for a protective covering and the ability for the first time to obtain that covering from a slain (possibly sacrificed) animal. Of course, the physical reversal of the curse with a physical covering more importantly represents a symbolic reversal of Adam’s and Eve’s loss of Edenic glory, reversed symbolically with God’s “covering.” The spiritual symbolism of the “covering” becomes even more clear when we understand that the word for “atonement” in Hebrew is *kippur*, or “covering.” Christ provided for Adam and Eve’s Fall, and for our sins, with the “covering” of the Atonement, represented by the coat or “covering” of skins, which clothed and protected Adam and Eve with God’s redemptive glory.

18. Smith, *Teachings*, 162.