



Joseph Smith Baptizes Oliver Cowdery, Del Parson, © RI

When we look at the different ways the covenant was administered in the past, we as modern Saints must look to the eternal principles behind situational commands.



### *The (New and) Everlasting Covenant*

In the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord speaks of “mine everlasting covenant” (Doctrine and Covenants 1:15, 22; 45:9; 49:9; and 66:2), “the everlasting covenant” (76:101; and 88:131, 133), and “the new and everlasting covenant” (132:6, 19, 26, 41–42). The revelations define this “everlasting covenant” as “the fulness of my gospel” (66:2; see also 133:57). “The gospel itself,” President Joseph Fielding Smith elaborated, “is the new and everlasting covenant and embraces all of the agreements, promises, and rewards which the Lord offers to his people.”<sup>4</sup>

The “everlasting” part of that name is apt, for this covenant existed even before the world was created. The plan laid out in the Grand Council included the idea that God’s children would be cut off from his presence. It also included the promise that God would provide a way for us to overcome that separation. We further learned that the means by which God would keep his promise would be his Son, Jesus Christ. Joseph Smith taught that the Father and Son agreed to this covenant together: “Everlasting covenant was made between three personages before the organizations of the earth . . . called God the first, the Creator, God the second, the Redeemer, and God the third, the witness or Testator.”<sup>5</sup> President John Taylor taught, “A covenant was entered into between Him [Christ] and His Father, in which He agreed to atone for the sins of the world, and He thus, as stated, became the Lamb slain from before the foundation of the world [see Moses 7:47].”<sup>6</sup>

Although this covenant is “everlasting,” it is also “new” whenever it is revealed afresh to people on earth. President Taylor explained that this eternal covenant is “new” only in the sense that it is “new to the world *at present*, because of their traditions, their follies and weaknesses, and their creeds, opinions and notions,” which led to the necessity of a restoration.<sup>7</sup>

### *Baptism, Eternal Marriage, and Priesthood as New and Everlasting Covenants*

Although the scriptures refer to “the” new and everlasting covenant to describe the totality of gospel ordinances, promises, and responsibilities, they describe certain ordinances, promises, or responsibilities as “a” new and everlasting covenant. Doctrine and Covenants 22:1 describes baptism as “a new and an everlasting covenant, even that which was from the beginning.” Similarly, Doctrine and Covenants 132:4 describes eternal marriage as “a new and an everlasting covenant.” Numbers 25:13 refers to the priesthood as a

“covenant” that is “everlasting.” Elder Marcus B. Nash explains this linguistic distinction: “Neither baptism nor eternal marriage is ‘the’ new and everlasting covenant; rather, they are each parts of the whole.”<sup>8</sup>

### *The Lord’s Covenants with Adam and Eve, Seth, Enoch, and Noah*

The Book of Moses indicates that after Adam and Eve were cast out of the presence of God, they felt an immediate desire to regain that presence in some way, for they “called upon the name of the Lord” (Moses 5:4). God’s answer to that need was to covenant with Adam and Eve.<sup>9</sup> While the specific details of establishing that covenant are not recorded, the Book of Moses preserves just enough of an account to let the reader know it happened. We learn that as Adam and Eve were performing sacrifice after being cast out of the garden, an angel taught them that their sacrifices were “a similitude of the sacrifice of the Only Begotten of the Father” (5:7). The Lord also told them, “I am the Only Begotten of the Father from the beginning, henceforth, and forever, that as thou hast fallen thou mayest be redeemed, and all mankind, even as many as will” (5:9). This appears to be part of the covenant-making process for Adam and Eve.

The Book of Moses continues: “And thus the Gospel began to be preached, from the beginning, being declared by holy angels sent forth from the presence of God, and by his own voice, and by the gift of the Holy Ghost. And thus all things were confirmed unto Adam by an holy ordinance” (Moses 5:58–59). What was the “holy ordinance” spoken of? While it definitely includes the sacrifices Adam and Eve had been making, it seems to encompass something more. Later in the Book of Moses, Enoch recalled that God taught Adam and Eve about repentance, baptism, and the gift of the Holy Ghost (see 6:51–52). When Adam asked why men needed to be baptized, God taught them that because of their Fall, sin and death had entered the world and that the only way to overcome them was to be born again. He spoke of baptism as part of that process of rebirth, justification, and sanctification (see 6:53–60). Adam was then carried by the Spirit into the water and was baptized, after which he received the Holy Ghost (see 6:64–66). God declared, “Thou art after the order of him who was without beginning of days or end of years, from all eternity to all eternity. Behold, thou art one in me, a son of God; and thus may all become my sons” (6:67–68). In this way, Adam partook of the ordinance of baptism and began the process of reunification with God that

the covenant was designed to bring about. As discussed below, baptism was Adam's entrance into the new and everlasting covenant.

The scriptures contain relatively little information about God's covenants with Adam and Eve's descendants before the time of Abraham, although modern revelation provides much more than does the Old Testament alone. Some of Adam and Eve's children rejected the opportunity to covenant with God, while others embraced it (see Moses 5:12–15). Although Cain slew his brother Abel, "God revealed himself unto Seth, and he rebelled not, but offered an acceptable sacrifice. . . . And to him also was born a son, and he called his name Enos. And then began these men to call upon the name of the Lord, and the Lord blessed them" (6:3–4). The Joseph Smith Translation of Genesis 9:15 explicitly identifies the Lord's blessing to Enoch as being "my covenant." Later, God told Noah, "Behold, I establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you" (Genesis 9:9).

Little is known of the history of the covenant between the days of Noah and the time of Abraham. The Book of Mormon contains the only information on this, for the Jaredites presumably had some version of the covenant. Still, for anything in this time span, we mainly extrapolate based on how the gospel was administered in other eras. It is only with Abraham that the Old Testament becomes more specific regarding God's covenants.<sup>10</sup>

### *The Abrahamic Covenant*

"The Abrahamic covenant" is a collective term for responsibilities and blessings the Lord gave to Abraham and Sarah and their posterity.<sup>11</sup> This particular family was given a singular mission: "In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 12:3; repeated in 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; and 28:14). This important mission statement is one of the few quoted across all the standard works (see also Acts 3:25; Galatians 3:8; 1 Nephi 15:18; 22:9; 3 Nephi 20:25, 27; Doctrine and Covenants 110:12; 124:58; and Abraham 2:11). Latter-day revelation clarifies that the "blessings" that Abraham and Sarah's family are to bring to all the rest of the families of the earth are none other than "the blessings of the Gospel, which are the blessings of salvation, even of life eternal" (Abraham 2:11). Beginning with Abraham and Sarah, the crucial work of saving both the living and the dead has been linked with this family line.

Abraham and Sarah's family covenanted to walk blamelessly before the Lord, to follow his ways and do what is right and just, and to obey his voice and keep his commandments (see Genesis 17:1; 18:19; and 26:5). To help

them fulfill their mission, the Lord promised that if they fulfilled their obligations under the covenant that he would bless them with an innumerable posterity (see 13:16; 15:5; 17:2, 4–6; 22:17; and 28:14), land for an inheritance (see 13:14–15, 17; 17:8; 26:3–4; and 28:13), prosperity and protection from their enemies (see 12:3; 17:6; 18:18; and 22:17), and the privilege of having the Lord, Jehovah, to be their God (see 15:1; and 17:7–8). Latter-day revelation adds that this family would be blessed with the priesthood as they ministered to all nations (see Abraham 2:9, 11).

The covenant made with Abraham and Sarah continued through their son Isaac, about whom the Lord said, “I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him” (Genesis 17:19). The Lord also covenanted with Isaac and Rebekah’s son Jacob, saying, “I am the LORD God of Abraham [and] Isaac. . . . In thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed” (28:13–14).<sup>12</sup> Later, Jacob was renamed Israel (see 32:28), and he, his wives, and their twelve sons and their wives became the ancestors of the Israelite tribes.<sup>13</sup>

### *The Sinai Covenant*

Centuries later, once the children of Israel were delivered from slavery in Egypt, they traveled to Mount Sinai for the express purpose of entering into a covenant with God. Biblical scholars often refer to Exodus 20:22–23:33 as the Covenant Code because the details of what Israel is expected to do as part of the covenant are outlined there, but additional descriptions are found throughout Exodus 19–40, as well as the books of Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.<sup>14</sup> The people initially agreed to keep this covenant sight unseen because of all the Lord had done for them in bringing them out of Egypt (see Exodus 19:8). After receiving a detailed outline of covenantal obligations, the Israelites again agreed to the covenant as it had been explained to them (see 24:3). They officially entered the covenant via sacrifice and a formal reading of the terms of the covenant to the congregation (see 24:4–8). After these events, the Israelites were defined by the covenant they made with God at Sinai.<sup>15</sup>

### **The Relationship between These Various Gospel Covenants**

We have now defined the everlasting covenant; described the way that baptism, eternal marriage, and other ordinances relate to the everlasting covenant; and reviewed various historical covenants such as the covenants made with Adam and Eve, Abraham and Sarah, and the children of Israel through Moses. But

how are all these covenants related? Are these the same covenant by different names, or are they distinct from each other?

It regularly happens that a covenant remains in force even though the manner of administration or the specific requirements undergo changes. As one example, in both the New Testament and the Book of Mormon, Christ directed his people to drink wine as a part of the sacrament. This practice continued in the early history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, but eventually the wine was substituted with water. Elder Orson F. Whitney recalled that a priest from another church once came to Utah and criticized this change; it “made him shudder.” Elder Whitney, however, explained that “divine revelation adapts itself to the circumstances and conditions of men, and change upon change ensues as God’s progressive work goes on to its destiny.”<sup>16</sup> The covenant associated with partaking of the sacrament remains the same, even if the specifics of the ordinance change.

In the same way, although the everlasting covenant has been administered in different ways and the specific commands associated with it have varied throughout history, the covenant itself remains the same in its essentials. The Prophet Joseph Smith stressed this essential unity of the gospel plan across dispensations:

We cannot believe that the ancients in all ages were so ignorant of the system of heaven as many suppose, since all that were ever saved, were saved through the power of this great plan of redemption, as much before the coming of Christ as since; if not, God has had different plans in operation (if we may so express it), to bring men back to dwell with Himself. And this we cannot believe, since there has been no change in the constitution of man since he fell. . . .

We may conclude, that though there were different dispensations, yet all things which God commanded to His people were calculated to draw their minds to the great object, and to teach them to rely upon God alone as the author of their salvation, as contained in His law.<sup>17</sup>

Similarly, President Joseph F. Smith taught that the everlasting covenant is universal:

We have entered into the bond of that new and everlasting covenant agreeing that we would obey the commandments of God in all things whatsoever he shall command us. This is an everlasting covenant even unto the end of our days. . . . We shall never see the day in time nor in eternity, when it will not be obligatory. . . . It is upon this principle that we keep in touch with God, and remain in harmony with his purposes. It is only in this way that we can consummate our mission, and obtain our crown and the gift of eternal lives, which is the greatest gift of God. Can you imagine any other way?<sup>18</sup>

President Harold B. Lee taught that there has been continuity in the way that God has administered the gospel of Jesus Christ in every age: “It was perpetuated in a regular succession from Adam to Noah and from Noah to Melchizedek, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Samuel the prophet, John, Jesus, and His apostles.”<sup>19</sup>

Recognizing the essential continuity of the covenant across dispensations, as well as the historical differences in the way the covenant was administered, is essential. Below, both the similarities and differences between the various forms of the covenant will be explored in greater detail.

### *Continuity and Change from Adam and Eve to Abraham and Sarah*

Although the Bible says little about the relationship between the covenants God made with Adam, Noah, or Abraham, it is clear in Restoration scripture that Abraham wanted to make the same covenant that Adam himself had made and that he and Sarah were able to do so.<sup>20</sup> (See Kerry Muhlestein, “Recognizing the Everlasting Covenant in the Scriptures,” in this issue.) Abraham tells us he “sought for the blessings of the fathers” (Abraham 1:2). He clarifies that this means he sought “to be a greater follower of righteousness, and to possess a greater knowledge, and to be a father of many nations, a prince of peace, and desiring to receive instructions, and to keep the commandments of God” (1:2), all of which are covenantal elements. Abraham also wanted to have the right “to administer” those blessings (1:2), which indicates that the blessings were something that could only be administered by authority. Only a covenant fits that description. Abraham then tells us that “it [the blessings] was conferred upon me from the fathers; it came down from the fathers, from the beginning of time, yea, even from the beginning, or before the foundation of the earth, down to the present time, even the right of the firstborn, or the first man, who is Adam, or first Father, through the fathers unto me” (1:3).

Modern prophets have also taught that the Abrahamic covenant is the same covenant that Adam and Eve had made—what we call the new and everlasting covenant.<sup>21</sup> President Wilford Woodruff said, “Men, in the days of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and of Jesus and the Apostles, had blessings sealed upon them, kingdoms, thrones, principalities and powers, with all the blessings of the New and Everlasting Covenant.”<sup>22</sup> President Gordon B. Hinckley taught, “The Lord . . . said that one reason for the restoration was that His everlasting covenant might be reestablished [see Doctrine and Covenants

1:22]. That covenant . . . was made between Abraham and Jehovah when the mighty Jehovah made a great and solemn promise to Abraham.”<sup>23</sup>

Although Abraham and Sarah received all the blessings of the new and everlasting covenant, there were some differences between the Abrahamic iteration of the covenant and the version given to Adam and Eve. For example, after Abraham’s day, anyone who was not part of Abraham and Sarah’s family but who wanted to be part of the covenant would have to be adopted as part of their “seed” (see Abraham 2:10). Because their family line was now integral to the salvation of the whole world, their descendants must always be spared from complete destruction and must always be gathered back to God so that they can perform God’s work (see, for example, Leviticus 26:40–45).<sup>24</sup> Further, a specific land was promised to Abraham and Sarah’s descendants (see Genesis 15:18–21). Despite the innovation that began with Abraham and Sarah’s having a land and using their family to take the Lord’s blessings to the rest of the world, it was in its essence still the same eternal covenant established with Adam and Eve.

### *Continuity and Change from Abraham and Sarah to Moses and Israel*

As the story of the Israelites’ exodus from Egypt opens, it pays careful attention to the covenant the Lord had established with their ancestors: “And their cry came up unto God by reason of the bondage. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob” (Exodus 2:23–24). To Moses, God declared, “I am the LORD: and I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob. . . . And I have also established my covenant with them. . . . And I have heard the groaning of the children of Israel, whom the Egyptians keep in bondage; and I have remembered my covenant” (6:2–5). From the beginning of the Exodus story, it is clear that the new covenant God will make with the Israelites grows out of the covenant already in force.<sup>25</sup>

The Sinai covenant lists several of the specific responsibilities and blessings of the Abrahamic covenant:

- God promises prosperity (see Genesis 15:1; 17:16; and Abraham 2:9; compare Leviticus 25:18–19; 26:4–5, 10; Deuteronomy 6:3; 28:3–6, 8, 11–12; 29:9; and 30:0, 16).

- God blesses them with a promised land (see Genesis 12:1, 7; 13:14, 17; 15:17–18; 17:8; and Abraham 2:6, 9; compare Exodus 6:8; Leviticus 18:24–30; 25:18; Deuteronomy 5:33; 6:1; and 30:16, 20).
- God grants protection (see Genesis 15:1, 17; 22:17; and 24:60; compare Leviticus 25:18; 26:5–8; Deuteronomy 6:19; 26:8; and 28:10–12).
- They will rule rather than be ruled (see Genesis 17:6, 16; compare Leviticus 26:13; and Deuteronomy 28:36, 43–44).
- They will have a special relationship with God (see Genesis 17:7–8; Abraham 1:19; and 2:7; compare Exodus 6:7; 19:5–6; Leviticus 26:12; Deuteronomy 7:6; and 29:9–13).
- They must keep God’s commandments (see Genesis 17:9; Abraham 1:2; and 2:6; compare Exodus 19:5; Leviticus 18:5, 24–30; 25:18; 26:3; Deuteronomy 5:1, 33; 6:1–2, 17; 7:11; 26:3; 28:1, 9, 14–15; and 30:8, 10, 16, 20).

Some aspects of the Abrahamic covenant are not clearly identifiable in the Sinai covenant as recorded in our Old Testament; however, they are described elsewhere by people who lived the Sinai covenant:

- They are to bring the gospel to all nations of the earth (see Genesis 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; Abraham 1:18–19; and 2:6–11; compare this with the Nephites’ understanding of the covenant in 1 Nephi 15:17–18; 22:9; and 3 Nephi 20:25, 27).<sup>26</sup>
- God will bless those that bless Abraham and curse those that curse Abraham (see Genesis 12:3; and Abraham 2:11; compare this with the teachings of Israel’s prophets regarding how nations react to Israel in Isaiah 41:10–16; 59:18; 60:14; Jeremiah 30:16; and Zechariah 8:13).

In addition to these parallel descriptions of the Abrahamic and Sinai covenants, there are also several Old Testament passages that explicitly draw a connection between the two. For example, Deuteronomy enjoins the Israelites to keep the covenant, “that thou mayest love the LORD thy God, and that thou mayest obey his voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto him: for he is thy life, and the length of thy days: that thou mayest dwell in the land which the LORD sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them” (Deuteronomy 30:20). Moses had explained to Israel that the Lord was making the covenant with them because he loved them and also because

he wanted to honor the promise he had made to their fathers, a clear reference to the covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (see Deuteronomy 7:8). One of the clearest Israelite connections between the Sinai and Abrahamic covenants is Psalm 105 (paralleled in 1 Chronicles 16).<sup>27</sup> In Psalm 105:7–10, the Psalmist praises Jehovah, reminding Israel of their history:

He is the LORD our God:  
     his judgments are in all the earth.  
 He hath remembered his covenant for ever,  
     the word which he commanded to a thousand generations.  
 Which covenant he made with Abraham,  
     and his oath unto Isaac;  
 and confirmed the same unto Jacob for a law,  
     and to Israel for an everlasting covenant.

Through poetic parallelism, the Psalmist explicitly connects the covenant made with Abraham to the everlasting law and covenant made with Israel.<sup>28</sup>

In addition to these Old Testament examples, this equation between the Abrahamic and Sinai covenants was made by New Testament–era Jews (see, for example, Acts 3:25; Galatians 3:15),<sup>29</sup> Nephite prophets (see, for example, 1 Nephi 15:18; 22:9), and the Savior himself when he visited the Nephites (see 3 Nephi 20:25–27). Mormon made an explicit connection when he said, “Then will the Lord remember the covenant which he made to Abraham *and* unto all the house of Israel” (Mormon 5:20; emphasis added).<sup>30</sup> Latter-day revelations also make connections between the covenants made with Israel and with Abraham. For example, the Lord told the early Saints that they were “the children of Israel, and of the seed of Abraham” (Doctrine and Covenants 103:17). He also spoke of those who receive the priesthood ordinances of the temple as becoming both “sons of Moses and Aaron and the seed of Abraham” (Doctrine and Covenants 84:34). After quoting this passage, President Joseph Fielding Smith taught that “the covenant made with Abraham . . . was renewed with Jacob and the tribes of Israel.”<sup>31</sup>

Some have suggested that the covenant made between Israel and God at Sinai is related to but different from the Abrahamic covenant.<sup>32</sup> It would be more accurate to say that it is the same covenant, though it was once again tailored to the specific time and people who were participating in it.<sup>33</sup> When the Lord gives Israel the covenant, he tells them it is to make them into “a kingdom of priests, an holy nation” (Exodus 19:6). The goal of this covenant, as with the covenant with our first parents and with Sarah and Abraham, was to make Israel into the kinds of people God wanted them to be. The Sinai covenant did

introduce several commandments and ordinances for the Israelites, known collectively as the law of Moses, that were not required before Sinai and that would eventually be fulfilled and replaced.<sup>34</sup> But *every* form of the covenant in any dispensation has included situation-specific commands. And while it is true that the law of Moses was a “schoolmaster” (Galatians 3:24), a “very strict law” designed for people “to observe strictly day to day, to keep them in remembrance of God and their duty towards him” (Mosiah 13:29–30), and was primarily administered through “the lesser priesthood” (Doctrine and Covenants 84:26), none of that changes the fact that the Savior himself gave this law to point his people to him. “Behold,” the resurrected Lord told the Nephites—who had exercised faith in Christ, repented, and received the ordinances of baptism and confirmation throughout their history through the administration of the Sinai covenant—“I am he that gave the law, and I am he who covenanted with my people Israel” (3 Nephi 15:5). Although with Christ’s coming many of the specific laws and ordinances of the Mosaic covenant were “fulfilled” and had “an end” (15:4–5), the *covenant itself*, being everlasting, continued: “Behold, *the covenant* which I have made with my people is not all fulfilled; but [only] *the law* which was given unto Moses hath an end in me” (15:8; emphasis added).

Although the Sinai covenant included the obligation to keep many laws and ordinances that are no longer in force, and although those laws and ordinances were initially adapted to help people who struggled to obtain the gospel’s highest blessings, we would be wrong to disparage this form of the covenant. Edward J. Brandt taught, “When many people hear the words ‘the law of Moses,’ they tend to associate that law with something very undesirable—a program or a system that is all outward and temporal and so far removed from what they would hope or expect to be associated with the gospel of Christ that some might wonder if there were any worth in it at all. Such a view of the law of Moses is false.”<sup>35</sup> For Samuel, Elijah, Isaiah, Sariah, Nephi, Mosiah, Mary, Anna, and many other faithful disciples, “the law of Moses did serve to strengthen their faith in Christ” (Alma 25:16), and through it they participated in the everlasting covenant. President Joseph F. Smith told the Latter-day Saints, “You [are] the covenant people of the Lord, *just as truly as ancient Israel were the covenant people of God*, for you have entered into the solemn covenant of the Gospel of Jesus Christ . . . you have entered into the bond of the new and everlasting covenant.”<sup>36</sup>

### *Continuity and Change from the Israelites to the Nephites*

As noted, Lehi and his family in the New World understood that they participated in both the covenant that Abraham and Sarah made with God and the covenant that Israel made with God at Sinai.<sup>37</sup> The Nephites continued to live the essentials of each of these covenants. At the same time, their unique situation required adaptation. For example, some of the Nephites apparently felt “cast off” because they were separated from the land of Canaan, so Jacob had to implore the people to “not hang down our heads,” because although “we have been driven out of the land of our inheritance . . . we have been led to a better land” (2 Nephi 10:20). Although Canaan was the original “land of promise” given to Abraham and Sarah’s descendants, the Book of Mormon shows that the principle of having a “land of promise” can be applied to new territories. Many of the Isaiah chapters quoted in the Book of Mormon appear to have been used by either Nephi or Jacob to address how the covenant applied to the Nephites in their new situation.

Another important adaptation of the covenant among the Nephites was in their use of priesthood authority. Although contemporary Jews back in Jerusalem received priesthood ordinances through the authority of the Aaronic Priesthood as administered by Levites, no representatives of the tribe of Levi are recorded among the Nephites, who apparently were provided with another way to administer priesthood ordinances.<sup>38</sup> Even the ordinances themselves could not be performed exactly as they had in the Old World. For example, anointing was traditionally performed with olive oil, but that was unknown in the Nephites’ new environment, so they would have had to substitute a different liquid.<sup>39</sup>

Whatever adaptations the Nephites had to make to live the covenant in their particular circumstances, they still participated in the everlasting covenant and the essentials of the Abrahamic and Sinai covenants. When the resurrected Christ came to minister to Lehi’s descendants, he explained that he had come to them precisely because they were “the children of the covenant” (3 Nephi 20:26).

### *Continuity and Change from Ancient Saints to Latter-day Saints*

Modern revelation and the teachings of modern prophets have stressed the essential unity of the restored gospel covenant with the covenant as it was revealed in past dispensations. President Brigham Young taught, “If we obtain the glory that Abraham obtained, we must do so by the same means that he

did. If we are ever prepared to enjoy the society of Enoch, Noah, Melchizedek, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, or of their faithful children, and of the faithful Prophets and Apostles, we must pass through the same experience.”<sup>40</sup> Similarly, President Lorenzo Snow indicated that “Mormonism . . . proclaims itself as the original plan of salvation, instituted in the heavens before the world was, and revealed from God to man in different ages. . . . Adam, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and other ancient worthies had this religion successively, in a series of dispensations.”<sup>41</sup>

The Lord revealed to Joseph Smith that, as part of the apostasy, the people of the earth “have strayed from mine ordinances, and have broken mine everlasting covenant” (Doctrine and Covenants 1:15). The Lord called Joseph precisely so “that mine everlasting covenant might be established” once again (1:22).<sup>42</sup> President Russell M. Nelson taught that “God the Father and his Son Jesus Christ . . . established once again the Abrahamic covenant, this time through the Prophet Joseph Smith.”<sup>43</sup> On another occasion he said that “the Lord appeared in these latter days to renew that Abrahamic covenant. . . . With this renewal, we have received, as did they of old, the holy priesthood and the everlasting gospel.”<sup>44</sup> Because Joseph Smith is said to have restored both the new and everlasting covenant *and* the Abrahamic covenant, and because both are associated with the everlasting gospel, this again strongly suggests that these are the same covenant.<sup>45</sup>

Prophets have also taught that baptism is the means whereby modern Saints are initiated both into the everlasting covenant and into the specific requirements and blessings of the Abrahamic covenant. President Young said, “All Latter-day Saints enter the new and everlasting covenant when they enter this Church. . . . They enter into the new and everlasting covenant to sustain the Kingdom of God and no other kingdom.”<sup>46</sup> This idea is buttressed by the Lord’s declaration that old covenants were done away and people had to be baptized to receive a new and everlasting covenant (see Doctrine and Covenants 22:2). Yet at the same time, President Nelson—who on multiple occasions has quoted what President Young taught about baptism and the new and everlasting covenant<sup>47</sup>—taught that “when we embrace the gospel and are baptized, we . . . become joint heirs to promises given by the Lord to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and their posterity.”<sup>48</sup> This indicates that President Nelson equates these covenants.

President Nelson has also consistently framed the ordinances and covenants of the temple in terms of the Abrahamic covenant. “In the temple,” he

said, “with the authority of the sealing power, blessings of the Abrahamic covenant will be conferred. There, we may truly become heirs to all the blessings of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.”<sup>49</sup> He has also taught that “the fulfillment, the consummation,” of the blessings received at baptism “comes as [people] perfect their lives to the point that they may enter the holy temple. Receiving the endowment there seals members of the Church to the Abrahamic covenant.”<sup>50</sup> Because temple—and especially sealing—covenants are associated with the new and everlasting covenant in scripture (see Doctrine and Covenants 131:2; and 132:4–21), this again indicates that President Nelson equates these covenants.<sup>51</sup>

Recognizing the links between gospel covenants administered at various points in history can help us appreciate the richness and importance of the covenant offered to us in the latter days—in many ways the culmination of all gospel covenants offered since Adam and Eve. In their seminal vision on the blessings that await us in the eternities, Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon saw exalted people described in this language:

They are they who received the testimony of Jesus, and believed on his name and were baptized after the manner of his burial, being buried in the water in his name, and this according to the commandment which he has given—that by keeping the commandments they might be washed and cleansed from all their sins, and receive the Holy Spirit by the laying on of the hands of him who is ordained and sealed unto this power;

And who overcome by faith, and are sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise, which the Father sheds forth upon all those who are just and true.

They are they who are the church of the Firstborn.

They are they into whose hands the Father has given all things—

They are they who are priests and kings, who have received of his fulness, and of his glory; and are priests of the Most High, after the order of Melchizedek, which was after the order of Enoch, which was after the order of the Only Begotten Son.

Wherefore, as it is written, they are gods, even the sons of God—

Wherefore, all things are theirs, whether life or death, or things present, or things to come, all are theirs and they are Christ's, and Christ is God's.

And they shall overcome all things. (Doctrine and Covenants 76:51–60)

This revelatory description brings together many of the covenant themes we have seen. It begins with a discussion of baptism in the name of Jesus, which Enoch said the Lord gave to our first parents at the very beginning (see Moses 6:51–68). It talks about how the redeemed are priests and kings, echoing the promise given to Israel at Sinai (see Exodus 19:6). It shows that the redeemed are priests after the order of Melchizedek, Enoch, and the Only Begotten, which connects us to the promises of priesthood power and

blessings bound up in the Abrahamic covenant (see Abraham 2:9–11). Truly the covenant restored through Joseph Smith was both *new* and *everlasting*.

Still, undoubtedly there *are* differences between the way the covenant was administered to Adam and Eve, to Abraham and Sarah, to the ancient Israelites at Mount Sinai, to the Nephites, and to members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. For example, the core obligation of the covenant has always been obedience and sacrifice; as Joseph Smith taught, “Enoch, Abraham, Moses, and the children of Israel, and all God’s people were saved by keeping the commandments of God, [and] we, if saved at all, shall be saved upon the same principle.”<sup>52</sup> However, the *specific* commandments and the *substance* and *manner* of sacrifice has changed over time. When we look at the different ways the covenant was administered in the past, we as modern Saints must look to the eternal principles behind situational commands. Abraham was asked to sacrifice his son, and though we are not asked to make that particular offering, we will surely be asked to perform some kind of sacrifice of that which is dear to us. Moses forbade Israel certain foods that we eat today, but we can appreciate the importance of dietary laws. It is important to realize that we are part of the same covenant that God made with Adam and Eve, and yet it has been tailored for our specific time.

## Conclusion

The covenant offered to us in the latter days is a new, yet everlasting covenant. It is new each time it is reestablished but everlasting because it existed before the creation of this world and because its promises of eternal life and exaltation will have no end. Significantly, each individual and each generation of Saints has had to enter into the covenant personally, a practice still in force today. 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.<sup>53</sup>

If our students do not realize that the new and everlasting covenant made with Adam and Eve is the same covenant made with Abraham and Sarah, renewed with Israel at Mount Sinai, and adapted by the Nephites in the Book of Mormon, they could become frustrated in their desire to understand their place in these covenants. Recognizing that all these covenants we have spoken of are all really the same covenant, adapted to different circumstances, allows our students to gain a much greater understanding of our covenant with God

as they intensely study the scriptural records of the past. They can come to see that at baptism, in endowment rooms, in sealing rooms, and during each instance they partake of the sacrament, they are entering into, moving further into, or making a renewal of the new and everlasting—or Abrahamic—covenant and that this is one of the main purposes of the temple or sacrament.<sup>54</sup> As much as some laws and ordinances have changed, the foundational constant through every iteration of the covenant is God’s promise to bring us back to him through the saving power of the Atonement of Jesus Christ. When the Nephites “wondered” what they should do now that “the law of Moses . . . had passed away” (3 Nephi 15:2), the Savior dramatically refocused their understanding of covenant law: “Behold, *I* am the law, and the light. Look unto *me*, and endure to the end, and ye shall live; for unto him that endureth to the end will I give eternal life” (3 Nephi 15:9; emphasis added).

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## Notes

1. This includes typical classroom experiences, firesides, devotionals, lectures, and conversations with other religious educators and seminary and institute administrators who have seen the same thing in many other classes.
2. In general terms, a *covenant* is “a sacred agreement between God and a person or group of people. God sets specific conditions, and He promises to bless us as we obey those conditions.” See *True to the Faith: A Gospel Reference* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2004), 44.
3. There are other, less relevant covenants that we will not discuss in this article, such as the Davidic covenant (2 Samuel 7:8–16), which contains God’s promises to David and the kings of Judah who descended from him.
4. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Fielding Smith* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2013), 165.
5. “Discourse, circa May 1841, as Reported by Unknown Scribe–A,” 1, The Joseph Smith Papers.
6. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: John Taylor* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2001), 41.
7. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: John Taylor*, 84; emphasis added.
8. Marcus B. Nash, “The New and Everlasting Covenant,” *Ensign*, December 2015, 43.
9. Members of other faiths have also posited that there was a covenant with Adam. See Steven L. McKenzie, *Covenant* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000), 4; and Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1957), 8, n. 2.
10. For example, see Isaac M. Kidawada and Arthur Quinn, *Before Abraham Was: The Unity of Genesis 1–11* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1999), 14, where they refer to Genesis 1–11 as Primeval History, as compared to the story of Abraham that begins in chapter 12. The renowned medieval Jewish biblical scholar Rashi asked why even start with creation, because as far as he was concerned, the importance of the scripture is in the law and covenant, which does not properly start until the Exodus. See Rashi on Genesis 1:1.

11. Although most scriptural references only describe Abraham making this covenant, Genesis 17:16 uses similar covenant language to describe Sarah: “I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her.” Joseph Fielding Smith emphasized, “We are all aware” of what the Lord promised Abraham, “but what we must not overlook is that the same promises were made to Sarah.” *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Fielding Smith*, 306. Barbara Morgan Gardner explains, “Throughout the Old Testament . . . husbands and wives ma[de] covenants together with the Lord, and both men and women receiv[ed] sacred priesthood ordinances. In fact, it is perhaps ironic that the priesthood government structure named *patriarchal* was absolutely dependent equally on both men as patriarchs and women as matriarchs. . . . It is because of [both] Abraham and Sarah’s righteousness that they . . . will be blessed with all of the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant.” *The Priesthood Power of Women: In the Temple, Church, and Family* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2019), 15–16.

12. Because all three patriarchs were foundational in establishing the Abrahamic covenant, the scriptures frequently refer to the triad “Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” See Genesis 50:24; Exodus 2:24; 3:6, 15–16; 4:5; 6:3, 8; 33:1; Leviticus 26:42; Numbers 32:11; Deuteronomy 1:8; 6:10; 9:5, 27; 29:13; 30:20; 34:4; 2 Kings 13:23; Jeremiah 33:26; Matthew 8:11; 22:32; Mark 12:26; Luke 13:28; 20:37; Acts 3:13; 7:32; 1 Nephi 6:4; 17:40; 19:10; Mosiah 7:19; 23:23; Alma 5:24; 7:25; 29:11; 36:2; Helaman 3:30; 3 Nephi 4:30; Mormon 9:11; Doctrine and Covenants 133:55; and 136:21. The quartet “Joseph, and Isaac, and Abraham” appears in Doctrine and Covenants 27:10 and 98:32.

13. In Genesis 35:1–15 we learn that Jacob had his family prepare themselves to interact with God and brought them to Bethel, where he had entered into the covenant with God. The text then only specifically speaks of Jacob covenanting with God, but we can assume that since he had prepared his family to go there with him, that they also entered into the covenant there.

14. The laws and ordinances described in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy are not internally consistent and include various redundancies and contradictions. Most biblical scholars understand this textual material to represent a development of teachings and practices that changed over time as Israel experienced new circumstances, perhaps over hundreds of years. While many people are accustomed to thinking of the “law of Moses” as a single revelation that remained in force until its fulfillment in Christ, biblical and Book of Mormon evidence suggests that the law was continually adapted to new religious, political, social, and economic circumstances. See Daniel L. Belnap, “The Law of Moses: An Introduction,” in *New Testament History, Culture, and Society*, ed. Lincoln H. Blumell (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2019), 19–34.

15. W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 2 vols., trans. J. A. Baker (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), argues that the covenant is the central theme of the entire Old Testament. For more on a Latter-day Saint point of view, see Dean L. Larsen, *People of Destiny: The Special Role of God’s Covenant Children* (Salt Lake City: Millennial Press, 2001), 10.

16. Orson F. Whitney, “Built upon the Rock,” *Ensign*, March 2015, 80.

17. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2007), 48–49.

18. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph F. Smith* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1998), 152–53.

19. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Harold B. Lee* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2000), 83.

20. Many scholars have argued that the idea of covenant did not exist before the eighth-century BC prophets, while many others have agreed that the concept was as old as Israel. See 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. Howard N. Bream, Ralph D. Heim, and Carey A. Moore (Philadelphia: Temple University, 1974), 435–36. Some have posited that the idea of covenant arose in the days of Josiah. John Eaton, *Mysterious Messengers: A Course on Hebrew Prophecy from Amos Onwards* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 23. We disagree with Eaton and others who claim that the idea of covenant arises only then and was not very present in Israel before that. As noted above, Restoration scripture makes it clear that covenant was a central concept from the days of Adam and Eve.

21. Accounts of Abraham either learning about or entering into the covenant are found in Genesis 12:1–3; 15:1–6; 17:1–17; and 22:15–18. Some scholars see each account as being from different sources or representing different traditions. See Paul R. Williamson, *Abraham, Israel and the Nations: The Patriarchal Promise and its Covenantal Development in Genesis*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 315 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000).

22. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Wilford Woodruff* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2004), 228–29.

23. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Gordon B. Hinckley* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2016), 179.

24. The Jaredites provide an example of the real difference this makes: while they probably received the everlasting covenant as it had been given to Adam, Enoch, and Noah, when the Jaredites became wicked, they were completely destroyed. In contrast, because they were of the house of Israel, a remnant of Lehi’s descendants were preserved so that they could repent and be gathered and redeemed at a future time (see Book of Mormon title page; 1 Nephi 13:30–31, 38–39; Alma 46:24; and 3 Nephi 20:13–14).

25. Kent P. Jackson noted, “The [Abrahamic] covenant was renewed at Sinai with the descendants of these three men, the house of Israel. (Ex. 19:1–8). By inheritance, those who descend from that lineage receive the same blessings and enter into the same obligations as their great forefathers.” Kent P. Jackson, “The Abrahamic Covenant: A Blessing for All People,” *Ensign*, February 1990, 51.

26. Noel B. Reynolds, “Understanding the Abrahamic Covenant through the Book of Mormon” (working paper posted in 2017 at BYU Scholars Archive); Joseph Fielding McConkie, “The Doctrine of a Covenant People,” in 3 *Nephi 9–30: This Is My Gospel*, vol. 8 in the Book of Mormon Symposium Series, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1993), 357–77; 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.

27. In the 1 Chronicles passage, this psalm is ascribed Davidic authorship. There is no equivalent attribution in the parallel in Psalms.

28. This connection is reiterated again at Psalm 105:42–45.

29. See also McKenzie, *Covenant*, 6.

30. 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), 267, observes, “In most of the passages referring to the covenants made with Abraham, the [Nephite] writers link those covenants with the covenants passed on through the house of Israel.”

31. Joseph Fielding Smith, *The Way to Perfection* (Independence, MO: Genealogical Society of Utah, 1946), 90.

32. See McKenzie, *Covenant*, 4; and William D. Barrick, “Intercovenantal Truth and Relevance: Leviticus 26 and Biblical Covenants,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 21, no. 1 (2010): 81–102.

33. Others have made a connection not only between these two covenants, but between a covenant with Adam and that made with Israel. See Michael McGiffert, “From Moses to Adam: The Making of the Covenant of Works,” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 19, no. 2 (1988): 131–55.

34. Of course, some of the laws and ordinances of the law of Moses, including animal sacrifice, already existed in previous iterations of the covenant. For example, “Moses came down from the quaking, smoking Mount Sinai and brought to the wandering children of Israel the Ten Commandments, fundamental rules for the conduct of life. These commandments were, however, not new. They had been known to Adam and his posterity, who had been commanded to live them from the beginning, and were merely reiterated by the Lord to Moses.” *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Spencer W. Kimball* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2006), 167.

35. Edward J. Brant, “The Law of Moses and the Law of Christ,” 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), 133.

36. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph F. Smith*, 310; emphasis added.

37. See 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.

38. See Joseph Fielding McConkie, “Priesthood among the Nephites,” in *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*, ed. Dennis L. Largey (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 656–58.

39. Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon—Volume 2, Second Nephi–Jacob* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 472.

40. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1997), 261–62.

41. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Lorenzo Snow* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2012), 240.

42. Joseph was also told both in the Sacred Grove (“Levi Richards, Journal, 11 June 1843, extract,” 15, The Joseph Smith Papers) and by Moroni (“The Wentworth Letter,” in *The Joseph Smith Papers, Histories Volume 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832–1844*, ed. Karen Lynn Davidson, David J. Whittaker, Mark Ashurst-McGee, and Richard L. Jensen [Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press], 494), that the new and everlasting covenant was being restored through him.

43. Russell M. Nelson, “Thanks for the Covenant,” in *Brigham Young University Speeches of the Year, 1988–89* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 1989), 4.

44. Russell M. Nelson, “Covenants,” *Ensign*, November 2011, 87.

45. David Rolph Seely writes, “From modern revelation we learn that the Lord has administered His covenant to His children from the very beginning and that Adam was the first to accept the gospel of Jesus Christ and enter into the covenant through the ordinance of baptism (see Moses 6:62–67). The scriptures record the restoration, or renewal, of this same covenant at pivotal times in history, through Noah, Abraham, Moses, and in the meridian of time through Jesus Christ.” “The Restoration as Covenant Renewal,” in Hoskisson, *Sperry Symposium Classics: The Old Testament*, 312. Indeed, Seely spends a great deal of time pointing out how the restoration of the new and everlasting covenant from the First Vision throughout the revelations given to Joseph Smith mimics the elements of covenant establishment and renewal that we see in the days of Moses, which he sees as an extension of the Abrahamic covenant. See 325–36; see also S. Michael Wilcox, “The Abrahamic Covenant,” *Ensign*, January 1998, 40–48.

46. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young*, 62.

47. See Russell M. Nelson, “Children of the Covenant,” *Ensign*, May 1995, 33; and Nelson, “Covenants,” 88. In the addresses, he taught that we claim the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant by making our own covenants, and then he quoted Brigham Young’s teaching about all of us entering into the new and everlasting covenant at baptism, making it clear that he saw these as the same covenant.

48. Nelson, “Children of the Covenant,” 34.

49. Nelson, “Thanks for the Covenant,” 5.

50. Russell M. Nelson, “The Future of the Church: Preparing the World for the Savior’s Second Coming,” *Ensign*, April 2020, 15.

51. It is also significant that Doctrine and Covenants 132, when describing the new and everlasting covenant, and specifically the new and everlasting covenant of marriage, discusses Abraham specifically and promises posterity “as innumerable as the stars . . . or . . . the sand upon the seashore” (132:30). These promises are key components of the Abrahamic covenant (see Genesis 13:16; 15:5; 17:2, 4–6; 22:17; and 28:14). See also Doctrine and Covenants 110:12, which speaks of “the gospel of Abraham.” Since there is no gospel that is uniquely associated with Abraham, and these verses are associated with receiving keys that help restore the fulness of the gospel, presumably the gospel of Abraham is another name for the fulness of the gospel.

52. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith*, 161.

53. See Seely, “Restoration as Covenant Renewal,” 12–14.

54. Mark A. Shields, *Your Covenant* (Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 2016), 11.