OATH AND COVENANT OF THE PRIESTHOOD

Among the most important covenants is the oath and covenant of the priesthood, a set of mutual promises between God and those who receive the Melchizedek Priesthood. Doctrine and Covenants 84:33–42 states the obligations involved, affirming the rewards that will be given to those who faithfully discharge their oath, and confirming the consequences of breaking this covenant.

The priesthood holder's first responsibility is to receive in good faith and with honest intent both the Aaronic and the Melchizedek priesthoods. The covenant then obligates that priesthood holder to magnify his callings by fulfilling all the responsibilities associated with the office, teaching the word of God, and laboring with all his might to advance the purposes of the Lord (see Magnifying One's Calling; cf. Jacob 1:19). The priesthood holder is required to “obtain a knowledge of the gospel...[and] to render service—service in carrying the restored gospel, with all the blessings of the priesthood, to the peoples of the earth; and service in comforting, strengthening, and perfecting the lives of one another and all the Saints of God” (Romney, p. 43).

God then promises that those who fulfill their part of the agreement will be “sanctified by the Spirit unto the renewing of their bodies,” will become “the sons of Moses and of Aaron and the seed of Abraham” and members of “the church and kingdom, and the elect of God,” and will receive the Father’s kingdom, and, thus, “all” that the “Father hath shall be given unto” them (D&C 84:33–38). Latter-day Saints see in the first of these promises a change that purifies not only the minds of worthy priesthood holders, but also their bodies, until they are enlivened and strengthened to minister among the nations of the earth. Those who keep this covenant are then counted among those in the celestial kingdom, “into whose hand the Father has given all things—they are they who are priests and kings, who have received of his fulness, and of his glory;...they are gods, even the sons of God” (D&C 76:55–58).

This oath and covenant of the priesthood also carries a severe warning. The Lord has stated that anyone who breaks this covenant and “altogether turneth therefrom, shall not have forgiveness of sins in this world nor in the world to come” (D&C 84:41).

Ancient prophets received the priesthood by oath and covenant. Latter-day Saints understand several Old and New Testament covenantal texts to refer to the oath and covenant by which the priesthood has been received through all generations (e.g., Num. 25:13; 1 Chr. 16:15–17; Ps. 110:4; Heb. 7:20–21, 28). Enoch, Melchizedek, Abraham, and all others who received the fulness of the
gospel of Jesus Christ have obtained the priesthood after the order of the Son of God in a covenant-based relationship with the Lord (e.g., JST Gen. 13:13; 14:27–30). In this way, the priesthood has been transmitted to man since the beginning of time with an eternal obligation and unfullying promise, both of which the Lord communicates through the sacred medium of an oath and a covenant.

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OATHS

Oaths are solemn declarations used to affirm a statement or strengthen a promise. Anciently, oath-swearers formed an important part of social, political, economic, and religious interaction. God himself uses an oath and promise in his covenants with man (cf. Jer. 22:5; Amos 6:8; D&C 97:20). In covenant-making, ritual oaths attest the fidelity of those entering into the COVENANT. Sometimes an oath is sworn that anticipates punishment in case of failure to perform a specified act, and in some cases the covenant process symbolically depicts specific punishments (Jer. 34:18–19).

Oath-swearers were common among the Book of Mormon peoples. NEPHI swore an oath to Zoram assuring him full status in Lehi’s family (1 Ne. 4:32–34), and Zoram swore to accompany Nephi and his brothers into the wilderness, after which their “fears did cease concerning him” (1 Ne. 4:37). Oaths of office were administered to judges (Alma 50:39). In a manner reminiscent of biblical and other Near Eastern peoples, the NEPHITES swore to support MORONI in defensive war, and used their rent garments to represent the punishment they wished upon themselves should they fail (Alma 46:21–22).

Oaths were also used with evil intent. For sinister purposes, the Gadianton robbers and the JAREDITES swore secret oaths that had once been sworn by Cain (Hel. 6:21–26; Ether 8:15; Moses 5:29).

Oaths continue to play a role in Latter-day Saint religion and ritual. The higher priesthood is received through an “oath and covenant” (D&C 84:39–40; cf. Heb. 7:11–22) of faithfulness. Following a pattern similar to ancient covenant-making, Latter-day Saints make holy covenants in temples. In their worship and prayer they use the word AMEN, which in Hebrew means “verily,” “truly,” or “let it be affirmed,” and is considered a form of an oath comparable to expressions used in ancient Israel (Deut. 27:14–26; cf. D&C 88:135). The raising of the right hand of the congregation in periodic CONFERENCES in approval for those called to Church positions is viewed as a silent oath signifying one’s determination to sustain those persons in their CALLINGS.

Frequent and superficial use of oaths can become an abuse and may diminish their sincere and sacred functions and oaths made “in vain” are profane and blasphemous. Christ admonished his followers to avoid oaths sworn without real intent and told them to make their commitments simply by saying “yes” or “no” (Matt. 5:33–37; 23:16–22).

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OBEDIENCE

Obedience in the context of the gospel of Jesus Christ means to comply with God’s will, to live in accordance with his teachings and the promptings of his Spirit, and to keep his COMMANDMENTS. Disobedience means to do anything less, whether it be to follow Satan and his will, to live in accordance with one’s own selfish wants and desires, or to be a “slothful” person who must be “compelled in all things” (D&C 58:26).

Part of God’s purpose in designing mortal life for his children was to “prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord