

ENCYCLOPEDIA OF MORMONISM



Edited by
Daniel H. Ludlow

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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 unfailing promise, both of which the Lord communicates through the sacred medium of an oath and a covenant.

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MICHAEL K. YOUNG

OATHS

Oaths are solemn declarations used to affirm a statement or strengthen a promise. Anciently, oath-swearing 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-swearing was common among the Book of Mormon peoples. NEPHI₁ 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 MORONI₁ 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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TERRENCE L. SZINK

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

their God shall command them” (Abr. 3:25; cf. D&C 98:14). Passing such a test is necessary for one to progress to become like God because he, himself, lives in accordance with law and principles of justice (Alma 42:22–26; *see* GODHOOD). Thus, obedience to DIVINE LAW is essential to ETERNAL PROGRESSION, and those who live obediently in this life will “have glory added upon their heads for ever and ever” (Abr. 3:26).

The importance of obedience is further emphasized by the fact that God permits sorrows and suffering on this earth in part to help teach obedience. Thus Jesus Christ, the exemplar, learned “obedience by the things which he suffered” (Heb. 5:8; cf. Alma 7:12), and the Lord’s people “must needs be chastened until they learn obedience, if it must needs be, by the things which they suffer” (D&C 105:6). On the other hand, God has also promised that he will provide a way for his children to obey him (cf. 1 Ne. 3:7).

In the LDS view, although it can sometimes be difficult to be obedient because it requires making difficult choices among alternatives, it does bring BLESSINGS in this life and in eternity. In fact, all blessings depend upon obedience: “When we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated” (D&C 130:21). Disobedience may result in the loss of blessings in this world and may bring curses or punishments in the next life as well. Therefore, when God gives a commandment, he frequently specifies both the blessings that come from obedience and the curses or punishments that come from disobedience. Accordingly, the commandment to “honour thy father and thy mother” specifies the potential blessing “that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee” (Ex. 20:12); and the commandment to Book of Mormon peoples to serve God on the American continent came with the promise of being “free from bondage” or, in the case of noncompliance, the curse of being “swept off” (Ether 2:8–12; *see* AGENCY).

God also recognizes the need to obey the laws of governments. Thus he states: “Let no man break the laws of the land, for he that keepeth the laws of God hath no need to break the laws of the land. Wherefore, be subject to the powers that be, until he reigns whose right it is to reign” (D&C 58:21–22). Joseph SMITH reiterated this principle: “We believe in . . . obeying, honoring, and sustaining the law” (A of F 12).

The purest and best motivation for obedience to godly law is LOVE: “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15). However, because God wants his children to grow spiritually, he neither requires nor desires unwilling or begrudged compliance, nor “blind obedience.” Every person has the right, and even the responsibility, to learn whether a commandment, prompting, or teaching comes from God. However, because God also requires faithful response—“the heart and a willing mind” (D&C 64:34)—from his children, he does sometimes require obedience of the type wherein one complies humbly with his teachings, promptings, or commandments even before totally understanding the reasons for them. ADAM gave such obedience when commanded by the Lord to offer the firstlings of his flocks. “After many days,” when an angel asked him why he was offering such sacrifice, Adam replied: “I know not, save the Lord commanded me.” The angel then taught Adam the reason for the offering: It represented the atoning SACRIFICE that Jesus Christ would eventually make on behalf of all human beings (Moses 5:5–8).

God does not hold people responsible or punish them for disobedience to laws and commandments that they have not had opportunity to learn and understand. King BENJAMIN taught that Christ’s “blood atoneth for the sins of those who have fallen by the transgression of Adam, who have died not knowing the will of God concerning them, or who have ignorantly sinned” (Mosiah 3:11).

As with Adam, men and women who willingly obey the commandments of God because they love him will receive greater KNOWLEDGE and understanding of God and his purposes. Disobedience brings no such growth in knowledge or understanding, and may result in loss of previously gained knowledge and ability or opportunity to make further choices (D&C 1:33). In other words, it can result in both spiritual and temporal captivity for the disobedient. Thus, Jacob taught the Nephites that they were free to choose “liberty and eternal life” or to choose “captivity and death” (2 Ne. 2:27).

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CHERYL BROWN