



By Elder Jeffrey R. Holland

Of the Quorum of
the Twelve Apostles

KEEPING COVENANTS

A MESSAGE FOR
THOSE WHO WILL
SERVE A MISSION



The key to this work is in keeping our covenants. In no other way can we claim and demonstrate the powers of godliness.

I am going to talk to you about the tremendous importance of keeping covenants—me keeping mine and you keeping yours. This is a subject larger than a discussion of obedience, though obedience is certainly a part of it. And it is a very personal subject.

In a way it is the most fundamental thing we can discuss in the gospel plan, because only covenant makers and covenant keepers can claim the ultimate blessings of the celestial kingdom. Yes, when we talk about covenant keeping, we are talking about the heart and soul of our purpose in mortality.

Building the Kingdom One Covenant at a Time

A covenant is a binding spiritual contract, a solemn promise to God our Father that we will live and think and act in a certain way—the way of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. In return, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost promise us the full splendor of eternal life.

It is interesting to me that covenants are made personally, individually. There is a covenant at the time of baptism and confirmation, which starts us on the way to eternal life. Those ordinances are performed for individual persons, one by one, no matter how many must ultimately receive them.

There is a covenant at the time men receive the priesthood. That conferral is always given to one individual at a time.

The highest covenants we can make are in the temple. That is where we make our most solemn promises to our Father in Heaven and where He opens to us more fully the real meaning of His promises to us. Once again, these are individual experiences, even as we go to the temple to be sealed to other individuals.

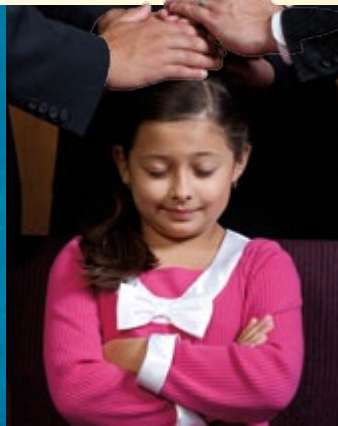
That's how the kingdom of God is built—one person at a time, one covenant at a time, all roads in our mortal journey leading to the ultimate covenants of the holy temple.

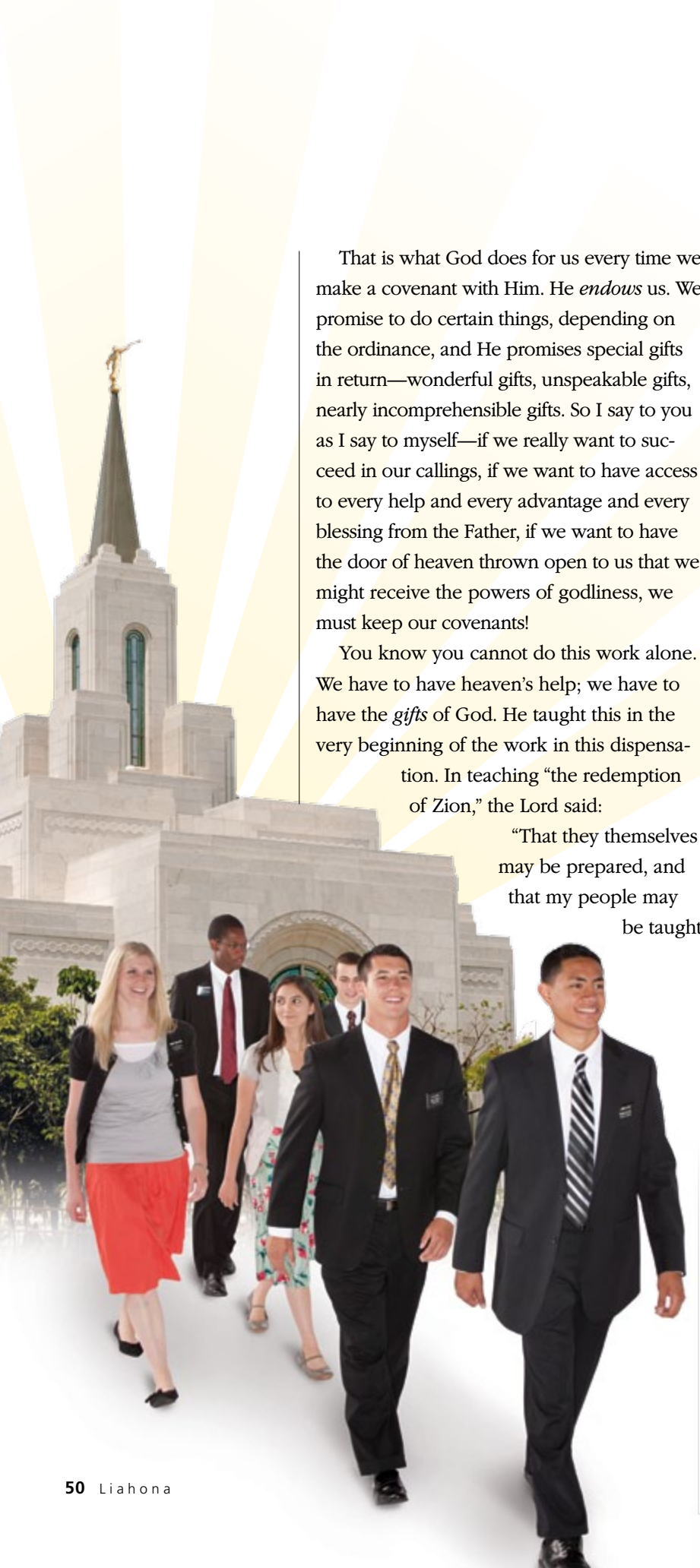
The Role of Temple Covenants

It is so important for you to understand that going to the temple for your own endowment, including the magnificent ordinances that prepare you for that endowment, are an integral part of your mission preparation and your mission commitment.

When you go to the temple, you will begin to understand the significance of those temple covenants, the inextricable link between your endowment there and your missionary success.

Indeed, the very word *endowment* conveys the essence of that vital link. An endowment is a gift. It contains the same root word as *dowry*, which is a special gift to start a new couple on their married life. While I was president of Brigham Young University, I spent a certain amount of my time trying to build up the university's endowment, its treasury of gifts from generous donors.





That is what God does for us every time we make a covenant with Him. He *endows* us. We promise to do certain things, depending on the ordinance, and He promises special gifts in return—wonderful gifts, unspeakable gifts, nearly incomprehensible gifts. So I say to you as I say to myself—if we really want to succeed in our callings, if we want to have access to every help and every advantage and every blessing from the Father, if we want to have the door of heaven thrown open to us that we might receive the powers of godliness, we must keep our covenants!

You know you cannot do this work alone. We have to have heaven's help; we have to have the *gifts* of God. He taught this in the very beginning of the work in this dispensation. In teaching “the redemption of Zion,” the Lord said:

“That they themselves may be prepared, and that my people may be taught

more perfectly, and have experience, and know more perfectly concerning their duty, and the things which I require at their hands.

“And this cannot be brought to pass until mine elders are endowed with power from on high.

“For behold, I have prepared a great endowment and blessing to be poured out upon them, inasmuch as they are faithful and continue in humility before me” (D&C 105:10–12).

This work is so serious and the adversary's opposition to it is so great that we need every divine power to enhance our effort and move the Church steadily forward. The key to that for us as individuals is the covenant we make in the temple—our promise to obey and sacrifice, to consecrate unto the Father, and His promise to empower us with “a great endowment.”

Covenants and the Lord's Work

Does this help you see how fundamental our personal, individual promises are to the overall sweep and grandeur of the work? Like everything else in the plan of salvation, the success of all of the elders and sisters around the world is determined one missionary at a time.

We don't make covenants as entire wards or stakes. No, we make covenants as Brother Brown or Brother Burns, Sister Jones or Sister Jensen. The key to this work is the keeping of covenants by individuals.

I don't know what mission you will serve in, but I don't believe our Father in Heaven has made any particular promises to your mission as a mission. I do know He has made great promises to you personally.

It is when an entire mission is united by the strength of every missionary's integrity, every

missionary's personal covenant keeping, that we move mountains. When there is such unity and power, an endowment from heaven, coming to every individual in the mission, nothing can "stop the work from progressing." It is in this way that the "truth of God will go forth boldly, nobly, and independent."¹

We have that confidence when there is no weak link in the chain, when there is no vulnerable chink in the armor. The war against evil and error is the way every gospel victory is achieved—one covenant at a time, one individual at a time, one missionary at a time.

That is why the Lord said to the early leaders of the Church, "Bind yourselves to act in all holiness before me—that inasmuch as ye do this, glory shall be added to the kingdom which ye have received" (D&C 43:9–10).

That is covenant language. That is precisely what we go to the temple to do—to bind ourselves to the Lord and to each other and with that strength to then "act in all holiness." In return, power and glory come to us and our work. It is in precisely that context of covenant keeping the Lord said, "I, the Lord, am bound when ye do what I say; but when ye do not what I say, ye have no promise" (D&C 82:10).

Trust me. The key to this work is in keeping our covenants. In no other way can we claim and demonstrate the powers of godliness. You have the word of the Lord on that subject.

You will go to the temple to prepare you for your mission. Keep your covenants made there, every one of them. They are very personal, very sacred pledges each of us makes with our Father in Heaven.

A Covenant to Bear Witness

As I ask this of you, I want you to know I will be doing the same. I will keep my

covenants too. One of those covenants is to be, as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, a special witness "of the name of Christ in all the world" (D&C 107:23). In keeping my covenants, I not only bear witness to you today of the Lord Jesus Christ and Him crucified, but I am such a witness—called, ordained, commissioned to take that testimony to the world. I am happy to join you in that ministry, my beloved young friends.

I know that God lives, that He is our literal Father in Heaven, and that He will keep His promises to us forever. I know Jesus is the Christ, the Only Begotten Son of the Father in the flesh, and the Savior of the world. I know He suffered, bled, and died that we might have eternal life.

I know the Father and the Son appeared to the boy prophet Joseph Smith, the great founding prophet of this dispensation, who also shed his blood as a testament of his calling, the ultimate symbol of one's loyalty to his covenants. I know those prophetic keys have descended in an unbroken chain down through 15 other men until at this time they reside in the possession and prophetic ministry of President Thomas S. Monson, God's presiding high priest on the earth today.

This work is true. These declarations are true. I know them independent of any other mortal man or woman who has ever lived. I know them by the manifestations of the Holy Spirit, which give direction to my life and meaning to my testimony and which send me forth—with you—to be a special witness of the Redeemer of the world. ■

From a missionary satellite broadcast address given on April 25, 1997.

NOTE

1. Joseph Smith, in *History of the Church*, 4:540.

