

bear joyful testimony, in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, amen.

President Hinckley

Thank you, Elder Cuthbert, for those inspiring words. The Choir and congregation will now join in singing "Shall the Youth of Zion Falter?"

The Choir and congregation sang "Shall the Youth of Zion Falter?"

President Hinckley

To those of the television and radio audience who have just joined

us, we are convened in the historic Tabernacle on Temple Square in Salt Lake City, Utah, in this fourth session of the 152nd Semiannual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

The Tabernacle Choir will now sing "God of Our Fathers, Whose Almighty Hand."

The Choir sang "God of Our Fathers, Whose Almighty Hand."

President Hinckley

We shall now be pleased to hear from Elder Howard W. Hunter, a member of the Council of the Twelve Apostles.

Elder Howard W. Hunter

Commitment to God

Reading and studying the scriptures make us conscious of the many conditional promises made by the Lord to encourage obedience and righteous living. Israelite history is filled with examples of covenants, which constitute one of the central themes of the Old Testament—the promises of God made in exchange for the commitments of the prophets and the people.

The Lord made a covenant with Noah, and the rainbow became the token of that eternal covenant with all mankind. (See Genesis 9:13.) The covenant made with Abraham and his seed was sealed by the ceremony of circumcision as a sacrament. (See Genesis 17:10-11.) And the token or sign of the great covenant with all Israel made at Sinai was the Sabbath. (See Exodus 31:12-17.)

Relationship between blessings and obedience

Several experiences in the life of

Joshua are instructive to us today regarding the importance placed by the Lord on keeping commitments and on being committed to following the commandments and direction he has given.

Joshua is remembered as the one who, on the death of Moses, took command and completed the task of giving leadership to the tribes of Israel. Perhaps to comfort Joshua, who now had the responsibility for the children of Israel, who didn't yet have a homeland, and perhaps to comfort that large body of people who had just lost their leader of more than forty years, the Lord spoke to Joshua and said:

"As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.

"Be strong and of a good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I swear unto their fathers to give them." (Joshua 1:5-6.)

The Lord then continues to speak to Joshua by way of commandment:

"Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest" (Joshua 1:7).

Then speaking about the law given to Moses, the Lord adds:

"Observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success" (Joshua 1:8).

Finally, we have this last reiteration by the Lord of what he had previously said, to comfort and to remind Joshua of the relationship between the blessings of heaven and obedience to divine law:

"Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest." (Joshua 1:9.)

Obedience brings success

Joshua would need courage for what he had to do. He would need the Lord's help at every step. Here is a commitment of the Lord to provide that help. With faith in the Lord, Joshua could now go forward, knowing that the Lord would direct him in the way he should go. Joshua knew that his obedience would bring success, and although he did not know exactly how he would succeed, he now had confidence in the result.

The record tells us that the tribes of Israel moved to the Jordan River and encamped for three days, preparing to cross at a point near the city of Jericho. At that time Joshua gave his people this interesting counsel. He said, "Sanctify yourselves: for to morrow the Lord will do wonders among you" (Joshua 3:5).

He knew the victory that would surely come would depend upon their willingness to do the will of the

Lord. Then the Lord said unto Joshua, "This day will I begin to magnify thee in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee" (Joshua 3:7).

Joshua now knew that the miracles of the Lord would continue, just as when Moses had been the leader of Israel. And so it was that when the feet of the priests bearing the ark of the covenant before the people touched the water of the Jordan, it dried up, "and all the Israelites passed over on dry ground" (Joshua 3:17).

Soon after, when Joshua was directed to destroy the city of Jericho that lay before them, the great walls of the city stood as an imposing and physically impossible barrier to Israel's success—or at least so it seemed. Not knowing the means, but assured as to the end, Joshua carried out the instructions he had been given by a messenger of the Lord. His commitment was to complete obedience. His concern was to do precisely as he was instructed, that the promise of the Lord would be fulfilled. The instructions no doubt seemed strange, but his faith in the outcome urged him on. The result, of course, was another in a long series of miracles experienced by the Israelites as they were led over many years by Moses, by Joshua, and by many other prophets who were committed to follow the commandments and the directives of the Lord.

As Joshua and his people approached Jericho, the instructions of the Lord were followed precisely, and according to the scriptural account, "the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city" (Joshua 6:20).

Full commitment by Joshua

The record states that after Israel had rested from the wars with their enemies, Joshua, who was now very

old, called all Israel together. In his farewell address he reminded them they had been victorious because God had fought for them, but if they now ceased to serve the Lord and keep his law they would be destroyed. He recalled how the Lord God of Israel had led Abraham throughout Canaan and had "multiplied his seed" (Joshua 24:3). He reminded them of how Jacob and his children had gone down into Egypt. He told of how the Lord had been with Moses and Aaron and had brought their fathers out of Egypt; how, in all of the battles and conquests, they had prevailed, adding this significant statement: "But not with thy sword, nor with thy bow" (Joshua 24:12). They had been led by the Lord to victory. The battles had not been won by swords and bows. He then admonished them: "Fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the Lord" (Joshua 24:14).

This great military and spiritual leader then urged a commitment, and made one himself and for his family: "Choose you this day whom ye will serve . . . but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15).

Here was a great statement of full commitment of a man to God; of a prophet to the desires of the Lord; of Joshua the man to his God, who had many times previously blessed his obedience. He was telling the Israelites that regardless of how they decided, he would do what he knew was right. He was saying that his decision to serve the Lord was independent of whatever they decided; that their actions would not affect his; that his commitment to do the Lord's will would not be altered by anything they or anyone else would do. Joshua was firmly in control of his actions and had his eyes fixed on

the commandments of the Lord. He was committed to obedience.

Unwavering determination

Surely the Lord loves, more than anything else, an unwavering determination to obey his counsel. Surely the experiences of the great prophets of the Old Testament have been recorded to help us understand the importance of choosing the path of strict obedience. How pleased the Lord must have been with Abraham, after receiving direction to sacrifice his only son, Isaac, did as he was instructed, without question and without wavering. The record states that God said unto Abraham:

"Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of" (Genesis 22:2).

The next verse simply states:

"And Abraham rose up early in the morning . . . and took . . . Isaac his son . . . and went unto the place of which God had told him" (Genesis 22:3).

Years later, when Rebekah was asked if she would go with the servant of Abraham to become Isaac's wife, and no doubt knowing that the servant's mission had the blessing of the Lord, she simply said, "I will go" (Genesis 24:58).

A generation after that, when Jacob was instructed to return to the land of Canaan, which meant leaving all for which he had worked for many years, he called Rachel and Leah into the field where his flock was and explained what the Lord had said. The reply of Rachel was simple and straightforward and indicative of her commitment: "Whatsoever God hath said unto thee, do" (Genesis 31:16).

Evaluate with eternal perspective

We have, then, examples from

the scriptures of how we should consider and evaluate the commandments of the Lord. If we choose to react like Joshua, and Abraham, and Rebekah and Rachel, our response will be, simply, to go and do the thing that the Lord has commanded.

There is good reason to make our decision *now* to serve the Lord. On this Sunday morning, when the complications and temptations of life are somewhat removed, and when we have the time and more of an inclination to take an eternal perspective, we can more clearly evaluate what will bring us the greatest happiness in life. We should decide now, in the light of the morning, how we will act when the darkness of night and when the storms of temptation arrive.

I pray that we will have the

strength to decide now to do what we ought to do. I pray that we will decide now to serve the Lord. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

The Choir sang "On Great Lone Hills" without announcement.

President Hinckley

We extend our appreciation to the owners and operators of the many radio and television stations and cable systems who have offered their facilities as a public service to make the proceedings of this conference available to a large audience throughout many areas of the world. Our next speaker will be President Ezra Taft Benson, President of the Council of the Twelve Apostles.

President Ezra Taft Benson

Family life ordained of God

Marriage is the rock foundation, the cornerstone, of civilization. No nation will ever rise above its homes.

Marriage and family life are ordained of God.

In an eternal sense, salvation is a family affair. God holds parents responsible for their stewardship in rearing their family. It is a most sacred responsibility.

Today we are aware of great problems in our society. The most obvious are sexual promiscuity, homosexuality, drug abuse, alcoholism, vandalism, pornography, and violence.

These grave problems are symptoms of failure in the home—the disregarding of principles and practices established by God in the very beginning.

Because parents have departed

from the principles the Lord gave for happiness and success, families throughout the world are undergoing great stress and trauma. Many parents have been enticed to abandon their responsibilities in the home to seek after an elusive "self-fulfillment." Some have abdicated parental responsibilities for pursuit of material things, unwilling to postpone personal gratification in the interest of their children's welfare.

It is time to awaken to the fact that there are deliberate efforts to restructure the family along the lines of humanistic values. Images of the family and of love as depicted in television and film often portray a philosophy contrary to the commandments of God.

If one doubts that the family as an institution is being restructured, consider these facts:

Nearly one out of every three marriages ends in divorce.