

me to represent him in various important ways and duties, whether they seem large or small to us.

As we strive to better understand how Jesus sees us and contemplate our own attempts to live as the Redeemer would have us live, let us remember his instructing observations and their uni-

versal applications in literally all that we do: "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15) and "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matthew 25:40). In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Elder Russell M. Nelson

Children of the covenant

The title of my message is the scriptural phrase "children of the covenant."¹ In introducing this topic I will reflect on recent events as a colleague of President Howard W. Hunter and as a father and on earlier experiences as a doctor of medicine.

These past weeks have been challenging for Sister Nelson and me. Not only have we bid farewell to our beloved President Hunter, but thirty-three days earlier we suffered the demise of our precious daughter Emily. A mother of five young children, Emily had just celebrated her thirty-seventh birthday when called to the other side.

President Hunter influenced Emily's life in a real way. She welcomed his invitation for all adult members of the Church to hold a temple recommend. She and her husband, Bradley Wittwer, regarded their regular time in the temple as a sacred privilege. They viewed "the temple of the Lord as the great symbol of their membership and the supernal setting for their most sacred covenants."² She strived to emulate the example of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Even though illness brought intense suffering to President Hunter and Emily, an angry word never fell from their lips. Instead they chose to endure with loving faith. When well-meaning friends and family expressed concern for Emily, she cheerfully replied, "Don't worry; I'll

be OK!" Even when she concluded a telephone call, she did not close with the customary "good-bye." She would say, "I love you!"

When President Boyd K. Packer and I last visited President Hunter, he beckoned for Sister Hunter, reached for her hand, and said with a smile, "I feel better when you are near me."

My tears of sorrow have flowed along with wishes that I could have done more for our daughter and for our President. If I had the power of resurrection, I would have been tempted to bring them back. Though one of the ordained Apostles, each of whom is entrusted with all the keys of the kingdom of God, I do not hold keys of the Resurrection. Jesus Christ holds those keys and will use them for Emily, for President Hunter, and for all people in the Lord's own time.³

Emily and President Hunter had no fear of death. They had made and honored sacred covenants with the Lord, and they knew that his covenants to them will be kept with equal fidelity.⁴ They lived nobly as "children of the covenant."

Identification and indoctrination

Years ago as a young medical student I saw many patients afflicted with diseases that are now preventable. Today it is possible to immunize individuals against conditions that once were disabling—even deadly. One medical method by which acquired immunity is

conferred is inoculation. The term *inoculate* is fascinating. It comes from two Latin roots: *in*, meaning "within"; and *oculus*, meaning "an eye." The verb *to inoculate*, therefore, literally means "to put an eye within"—to monitor against harm.

An affliction like polio can cripple or destroy the body. An affliction like sin can cripple or destroy the spirit. The ravages of polio can now be prevented by immunization, but the ravages of sin require other means of prevention. Doctors cannot immunize against iniquity. Spiritual protection comes only from the Lord⁵—and in his own way. Jesus chooses not to inoculate, but to indoctrinate. His method employs no vaccine; it utilizes the teaching of divine doctrine—a governing "eye within"—to protect the eternal spirits of his children.

In so teaching, Jesus often established his own identity,⁶ then the identity of his followers. I quote his words to the people of ancient America. He said, "I am Jesus Christ, the Son of God."⁷

"All the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after . . . have testified of me.

"And behold, ye are the children of the prophets; and ye are of the house of Israel; and ye are of the covenant which the Father made with your fathers, saying unto Abraham: And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed.

"The Father having raised me up unto you first, and sent me to bless you in turning away every one of you from his iniquities; and this because ye are the children of the covenant."⁸

A giant step toward spiritual immunity is taken when we understand the expression "children of the covenant." To what covenant did the Savior refer? "The covenant which he made with Abraham."⁹ The Lord added, "I will remember the covenant which I have made with my people; and I have covenanted with them that I would gather them together *in mine own due time*."¹⁰

The Abrahamic covenant

The covenant that the Lord first made with Abraham¹¹ and reaffirmed with Isaac¹² and Jacob¹³ is of transcendent significance. It contained several promises:

- Abraham's posterity would be numerous, entitled to eternal increase and to bear the priesthood;
- He would become a father of many nations;
- Christ and kings would come through Abraham's lineage;
- Certain lands would be inherited;
- All nations of the earth would be blessed by his seed;
- That covenant would be everlasting—even through "a thousand generations."¹⁴

Some of these promises have been accomplished; others have yet to be. I quote from a prophecy given nearly 600 years B.C.: "Our father hath not spoken of our seed alone, but also of all the house of Israel, pointing to the covenant which should be fulfilled in the latter days; which covenant the Lord made to our father Abraham."¹⁵

Precisely as promised, the Master appeared in these latter days to renew the Abrahamic covenant. To the Prophet Joseph Smith the Lord declared: "Abraham received promises concerning his seed, and of the fruit of his loins—from whose loins ye are, . . . my servant Joseph. . . . This promise is yours also, because ye are of Abraham."¹⁶

We are also children of the covenant. We have received, as did they of old, the holy priesthood and the everlasting gospel. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are our ancestors. We are of Israel. We have the right to receive the gospel, blessings of the priesthood, and eternal life. Nations of the earth will be blessed by our efforts and by the labors of our posterity. The literal seed of Abraham and those who are gathered into his family by adoption receive these

promised blessings—predicated upon acceptance of the Lord and obedience to his commandments.

Elijah the prophet came to plant a knowledge of these promises made to the fathers.¹⁷ Later the Book of Mormon came forth as a sign that the Lord had commenced to gather children of the covenant.¹⁸ This book, written for our day, states:

“Then ye may know that the covenant which the Father hath made with the children of Israel . . . is already beginning to be fulfilled. . . .

“ . . . For behold, the Lord will remember his covenant which he hath made unto his people of the house of Israel.”¹⁹

The new and everlasting covenant

Indeed the Lord has not forgotten us. And to ensure that we do not forget him, children of the covenant receive his doctrine and claim it by covenant. Brigham Young said: “All Latter-day Saints enter the new and everlasting covenant when they enter this Church. . . . They enter the new and everlasting covenant to sustain the Kingdom of God and no other kingdom.”²⁰

At baptism we covenant to serve the Lord and keep his commandments. When we partake of the sacrament, we renew those covenants. We may receive covenants of the priesthood²¹ and the crowning blessings of the endowment, the doctrine, and the covenants unique to the holy temple.

The new and everlasting covenant of the gospel allows us to qualify for marriage in the temple and be blessed to “come forth in the first resurrection” and “inherit thrones, kingdoms, principalities, and powers, dominions, . . . to [our] exaltation and glory in all things.”²²

Children born to parents thus married are natural heirs to the blessings of the priesthood. They are born *in the*

covenant. Hence, “they require no rite of adoption or sealing to insure them place in the posterity of promise.”²³

Rewards for obedience to the commandments are almost beyond mortal comprehension. Here children of the covenant become a strain of sin-resistant souls. And hereafter President Hunter, Emily, other children of the covenant, and “each generation would be linked to the one which went on before [in] the divine family of God.”²⁴ Great comfort comes from the knowledge that our loved ones are secured to us through the covenants.

Unity among children of the covenant

Latter-day Saints understand the word of the Lord, who declared, “I say unto you, be one; and if ye are not one ye are not mine.”²⁵

“This great unity is the hallmark of the true church of Christ,” said President Gordon B. Hinckley. “It is felt among our people throughout the world.” President Hinckley continued, “We pray for one another that we may go on in unity and strength.”²⁶

Throughout the world, however, strident voices are engaged in divisive disputation and name-calling. Often demeaning nicknames are added to—or even substituted for—given names. Unfortunately, terms of derision obscure the true identity of children of the covenant.

In contrast, God employs names that unify and sanctify. When we embrace the gospel and are baptized, we are born again and take upon ourselves the sacred name of Jesus Christ.²⁷ We are adopted as his sons and daughters and are known as brothers and sisters. He is the Father of our new life. We become joint heirs to promises given by the Lord to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and their posterity.²⁸

A peculiar people

Peter used uplifting terms in a prophecy regarding our day. He identified members of the Church as “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people.”²⁹ The adjectives *chosen*, *royal*, and *holy* we recognize as elevating. But what about *peculiar*? A modern dictionary defines *peculiar* as “unusual,” “eccentric,” or “strange.”³⁰ What kind of compliment is that?

But the term *peculiar* as used in the scriptures is quite different. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew term from which *peculiar* was translated is *segullah*, which means “valued property” or “treasure.”³¹ In the New Testament, the Greek term from which *peculiar* was translated is *peripoiēsis*, which means “possession” or “an obtaining.”³²

Thus we see that the scriptural term *peculiar* signifies “valued treasure,” “made” or “selected by God.”³³ For us to be identified by servants of the Lord as his *peculiar* people is a compliment of the highest order.

Becoming spiritually protected

When we know who we are and what God expects of us—when his “law [is] written in [our] hearts”³⁴—we are spiritually protected. We become better people. When the Nephites were truly righteous, they avoided divisive nicknames and “there was no contention in the land, because of the love of God which did dwell in the hearts of the people. . . . There were no . . . Lamanites, nor any manner of -ites; but they were in one, the children of Christ, and heirs to the kingdom of God.”³⁵

That lesson from history suggests that we also delete from our personal vocabularies names that segregate and hyphens that separate. Paul taught that “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither

male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.”³⁶

He invites us “to come unto him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; . . . all are alike unto God.”³⁷

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has been restored in these latter days to fulfill ancient promises of the Lord. It is part of the “restitution of all things.”³⁸ Committed children of the covenant remain steadfast, even in the midst of adversity. We shall “be chastened and tried, even as Abraham, who was commanded to offer up his only son.”³⁹ Yet we are strengthened by this promise of the Lord:

“Ye are lawful heirs, according to the flesh, and have been hid from the world with Christ in God—

“Therefore your life and the priesthood have remained, and must needs remain through you and your lineage until the restoration of all things. . . .

“Therefore, blessed are ye if ye continue in my goodness, a light unto the Gentiles, and through this priesthood, a savior unto my people Israel.”⁴⁰

With that doctrine implanted deeply within our souls, the sting of death is soothed and spiritual protection is provided. Children of the covenant will be blessed—here and hereafter—I testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. 3 Nephi 20:26.
2. Howard W. Hunter, quoted in *Ensign*, July 1994, p. 5.
3. See *Discourses of Brigham Young*, sel. John A. Widtsoe (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1941), pp. 397–98; Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954–56), 1:128.
4. See Doctrine and Covenants 82:10.
5. Rules of agency and accountability still apply, however. Choice and accountability are divine gifts nearly as precious

as life itself. "Even the children of the covenant will be rejected except they make good their title by godly works" (James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 3rd ed. [Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1916], p. 540). Children of the covenant are to honor the Sabbath day and keep it holy (see Exodus 31:12–13, 16–17; Ezekiel 20:20) and obey all of God's commandments.

6. For examples, see 3 Nephi 9:15; 11:10; 20:31; Ether 3:14; Doctrine and Covenants 6:21; 10:57; 11:28; 14:9; 19:24; 35:2; 36:8; 43:34; 49:28; 51:20; 52:44.
7. 3 Nephi 20:31; italics added.
8. 3 Nephi 20:24–26; italics added.
9. 3 Nephi 20:27.
10. 3 Nephi 20:29; italics added. See also 1 Peter 5:6; 3 Nephi 5:25; Mormon 5:12; Doctrine and Covenants 93:19.
11. See Genesis 17:1–10; 22:15–18; Galatians 3:28–29; Abraham 2:9–11.
12. 3 Nephi 26:1–5, 24.
13. See Genesis 28:1–4, 10–14; 35:9–13; 48:3–4.
14. 1 Chronicles 16:15. See also Genesis 17:1–10, 19; Leviticus 26:42; Acts 3:25; LDS Bible Dictionary, "Abraham, Covenant of," p. 602.
15. 1 Nephi 15:18; italics added. Other prophecies convey similar meaning. Among them are the following:

"Many generations after the Messiah shall be manifested in body unto the children of men, then shall the fulness of the gospel of the Messiah come unto the Gentiles, and from the Gentiles unto the remnant of our seed—

"And at that day shall the remnant of our seed know that they are of the house of Israel, and that they are the covenant people of the Lord; and then shall they know and come to the knowledge of their forefathers, and also to the knowledge of the gospel of their Redeemer, which was ministered unto their fathers by him; wherefore, they shall come to the knowledge of their

Redeemer and the very points of his doctrine, that they may know how to come unto him and be saved" (1 Nephi 15:13–14).

"Then will I gather them in from the four quarters of the earth; and then will I fulfil the covenant which the Father hath made unto all the people of the house of Israel" (3 Nephi 16:5).

"And then will I remember my covenant which I have made unto my people, O house of Israel, and I will bring my gospel unto them.

"And I will show unto thee, O house of Israel, that the Gentiles shall not have power over you; but I will remember my covenant unto you, O house of Israel, and ye shall come unto the knowledge of the fulness of my gospel" (3 Nephi 16:11–12).

"Thou shalt preach the fulness of my gospel, which I have sent forth in these last days, the covenant which I have sent forth to recover my people, which are of the house of Israel" (D&C 39:11).

16. Doctrine and Covenants 132:30–31. The Lord also told the Prophet Joseph Smith: "As I said unto Abraham concerning the kindreds of the earth, even so I say unto my servant Joseph: In thee and in thy seed shall the kindred of the earth be blessed" (D&C 124:58).

17. See Doctrine and Covenants 2:1–3.

18. See 3 Nephi 29:1–9.

19. 3 Nephi 29:1, 3. As part of that promise, certain lands were to be inherited. While most descendants of Israel received their inheritance in the Near East, the choice land of the Americas was reserved for Joseph (see Ether 13:8). It was to be the repository of the plates from which the Book of Mormon would be translated. It was also destined to become world headquarters of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. From there the restored gospel would go forth to bless all nations of the earth—according to the promise. Devout men, women, and chil-

dren are being gathered in our day, turning to the truths of salvation that they have not heard before.

The Book of Mormon has many prophecies pertaining to the old and new cities of Jerusalem. For example, "Then shall this covenant which the Father hath covenanted with his people be fulfilled; and then shall Jerusalem be inhabited again with my people, and it shall be the land of their inheritance" (3 Nephi 20:46).

"And that it was the place of the New Jerusalem, which should come down out of heaven, and the holy sanctuary of the Lord.

"Behold, Ether saw the days of Christ, and he spake concerning a New Jerusalem upon this land.

"And he spake also concerning the house of Israel, and the Jerusalem from whence Lehi should come—after it should be destroyed it should be built up again, a holy city unto the Lord; wherefore, it could not be a new Jerusalem for it had been in a time of old; but it should be built up again, and become a holy city of the Lord; and it should be built unto the house of Israel—

"And that a New Jerusalem should be built up upon this land, unto the remnant of the seed of Joseph, for which things there has been a type" (Ether 13:3-6).

20. *Discourses of Brigham Young*, p. 160.
21. See Doctrine and Covenants 84:39-40.
22. Doctrine and Covenants 132:19.
23. James E. Talmage, *The Articles of Faith*, 12th ed. (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1924), p. 446.
24. Joseph Fielding Smith, in Conference Report, Apr. 1965, p. 10.
25. Doctrine and Covenants 38:27. "Christ and his people will ever be one" ("Now Let Us Rejoice," *Hymns*, no. 3).
26. In Conference Report, Oct. 1983, p. 4; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1983, p. 5.
27. See Doctrine and Covenants 20:37.
28. See Galatians 3:29; Doctrine and Covenants 86:8-11.
29. 1 Peter 2:9. Moses also employed the term when he said, "Thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God, and the Lord hath chosen thee to be a *peculiar* people unto himself, above all the nations that are upon the earth" (Deuteronomy 14:2; italics added).
30. *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1980), p. 965.
31. See LDS Bible Dictionary, "Peculiar," p. 748; "Hebrew and Chaldee Dictionary," *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1983), p. 82, word 5,459.
32. Forms of the Greek suffix *poiesis* are seen in words currently in use in the English language. For example, doctors and druggists use a book known as a "pharmacopoeia," which refers to possession or obtaining of pharmaceutical agents. The English word *onomatopoeia* refers to a sound like its referent, such as "buzz," "crack," or "twang." The term used for the making of blood in the body is known as *hematopoiesis*.
33. *Peculiar* is used in only seven verses of the Bible. In the Old Testament it is used five times (see Exodus 19:5; Deuteronomy 14:2; 26:18; Psalm 135:4; Ecclesiastes 2:8). In each instance it has been translated from the Hebrew term that means "valued treasure." In the New Testament, *peculiar* is used two times (see Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 2:9). In each instance it has been translated from a Greek term that signifies "possession," or "those selected by God as His own people."
34. Romans 2:15; see also Jeremiah 31:33; Mosiah 13:11.
35. 4 Nephi 1:15, 17.
36. Galatians 3:28; see also Colossians 3:11. Speaking of correct names, we are reminded of a proclamation given by the Lord: "Thus shall my church be called in the last days, even The Church of Je-

sus Christ of Latter-day Saints" (D&C 115:4). He did *not* say, "Thus shall my church be *named*." He said, "Thus shall my church be *called*." Members have been cautioned by the Brethren, who wrote: "We feel that some may be misled by the too frequent use of the term 'Mormon Church'" (*Member-Missionary Class, Instructor's Guide* [Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1982], p. 2).

37. 2 Nephi 26:33. Additional scripture declares that God "made the world and all things therein, . . . and hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth" (Acts 17:24, 26).

The commandment to love our neighbors without discrimination is certain. But it must not be misunderstood. It applies generally. Selection of a *marriage partner*, on the other hand, involves *specific* and not *general* criteria. After all, one person can be married to only *one* individual.

The probabilities of a successful marriage are known to be much greater if both the husband and wife are united in their religion, language, culture, and ethnic background. Thus, in choosing an eternal companion, wisdom is needed. It's better not to fly in the face of constant head winds. Occasional squalls provide challenge enough. Once marriage vows are taken, absolute fidelity is essential—to the Lord and to one's companion.

38. Acts 3:21.

39. Doctrine and Covenants 101:4.

40. Doctrine and Covenants 86:9–11.

President Faust

We have just heard from Elder Cecil O. Samuelson Jr. of the Seventy, followed by Elder Russell M. Nelson, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

Elder David B. Haight of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles will be our concluding speaker for this session.

Elder David B. Haight

Foreordination of President Hinckley

My brothers and sisters, this has been a historic and blessed day. As I have witnessed the inspired manner in which President Gordon B. Hinckley fulfilled his calling as a counselor to Presidents Spencer W. Kimball, Ezra Taft Benson, and Howard W. Hunter—during their periods of declining health—I rejoice with you in sustaining him as God's anointed prophet.

With all the inspiration and love that I possess, I testify that Gordon B. Hinckley was foreordained to become the President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, to be the mouthpiece of God on the earth at this time, and to

lead God's people as prophet, seer, and revelator.

President Hinckley's calling Thomas S. Monson to continue in his effective administration in the First Presidency, now as First Counselor, and James E. Faust as Second Counselor is inspired.

President Monson has demonstrated an unusual ability to lead and inspire others—whether members of this church or other non-Church organizations—in their desire to serve the Master. As a newly called Assistant to the Council of the Twelve Apostles twenty-five years ago, my assignments were chaired by then Elder Thomas S. Monson. He was my kind but effective teacher, schooling me in a more clear understanding of the