Seeking the Fulness of the Priesthood

THE OATH AND COVENANT OF THE MELCHIZEDEK PRIESTHOOD: AN EXEGESIS

By Paul James Toscano

It is my meditation all the day, and more than my meat and drink, to know how I may make the Saints of God to comprehend the visions that flow like an overflowing surge before my mind. —Joseph Smith

This paper was originally written to explore certain aspects of those verses in Doctrine and Covenants section 84 that refer to the oath and covenant of the priesthood. In revising and condensing the original piece for publication, I became aware that some readers might fault me for assuming that the view of priesthood I propose here could have been maintained by the authors of all the scriptural texts from which I quote. That is not my assumption at all. What I assume is that Joseph Smith arrived at a view of priesthood that was, for the most part, internally consistent and that tended to harmonize many of the priesthood passages appearing in scriptural texts. He was not the first to make such an attempt. This type of doctrinal synthesis was used by many of the New Testament writers. The Letter to the Hebrews is a good example of this process. The point of this paper is that the "fulness of the priesthood" concepts announced by Joseph Smith comprise a remarkably consistent and integrated body of teachings that not only tend toward doctrinal harmony and coherence but that, in many instances, contradict popular notions of the priesthood held by modern Mormons.

The starting point for this analysis is the 22 and 23 September 1832 revelation now known as section 84 of the Doctrine and Covenants. I wish to address three questions raised by this revelation:

1. What is the oath and covenant of the priesthood and by whom and to whom is it made?
2. To which priesthood does the oath and covenant belong?
3. What is the relationship between the oath and covenant and the priesthood?

I have heard a number of different answers to the first question. Those most frequently asserted are the following:

1. The terms "oath" and "covenant" are synonyms, referring to a two-party contract between God and an individual.
2. These words are synonyms, used together as a term of art, to refer to a man's promise to God that he will obey all of God's commandments and thereby qualify himself to receive "all that [the] Father hath." If the man fails to keep the commandments, he is guilty of breaking his "oath and covenant."
3. The phrase "oath and covenant" refers to God's promise to a man of "all that [the] Father hath" and it is given to him on condition of, and as an inducement for, his future obedience to God's commandments.
4. The two terms "oath" and "covenant" are not synonyms, but are separate labels for the two sides of a bilateral agreement, or contract, entered into upon ordination to the Melchizedek priesthood, in which a man's promise (the "covenant") to keep the commandments is given in exchange for God's promise (the "oath") to give him priesthood power and blessings.

I believe that none of these explanations is correct. The words "oath" and "covenant" are not synonyms. They describe legal notions that are different both in form and substance. An oath is the ritual of swearing or attestation. A covenant is a promise; it is not a contract. A bare covenant is not enforceable at law. It takes the exchange of two or more covenants to make an
enforceable contract. However, under ancient rules of English law, a single covenant, given without consideration (that is, given unilaterally, without a return promise or performance) could be enforced as if it were a contract if the person making the unilateral promise sealed the covenant with an oath.

These legal concepts have theological relevance, for the term “covenant” also refers to “an engagement entered into by the Divine Being with some other being or person.”1 The nature of this “engagement” is an important subject of Old and New Testament study. The Hebrew word berit, from which the term “covenant” is translated, refers to any of three different types of “engagement”:

1. Mutually assumed obligations (i.e., the exchange of promises and performances) that create the type of bilateral contract which is common in modern business transactions.
2. A one-sided obligation imposed on the weaker party by the stronger, as typified by the Sinai covenant in which God (as the king or suzerain) bound Israel (God's vassal), but did not bind himself (Exodus 19-20).
3. One-sided obligations assumed by one party without expectation of return (e.g., a promise sealed with an oath), as typified by God's covenant with Abraham, in which God bound himself to bless Abraham and his posterity without requiring Abraham to make any promises in return (Abraham 2:8-14, Genesis 15).

It appears that Joseph Smith's concept of the oath and covenant of the priesthood falls into the last category. D&C 84:38 states that all the “Father hath shall be given unto” the faithful priesthood bearer, by way of a unilateral promise of God, a promise that is binding because it is made under oath. The oath and covenant of the priesthood mentioned in these verses of the Doctrine and Covenants appear to be connected to those passages in Hebrews 6:13-18, where Abraham is presented as the recipient of the blessings of God. Abraham, who had patiently endured his trials, was accounted a suitable candidate to receive the promise of “all that the Father hath.” The writer of Hebrews states that God wished to show Abraham and his posterity that the divine promise was immutable, so God “confirmed” the covenant with an oath. And since God could swear by no greater person, he swore by himself, thus giving Abraham and his posterity the assurance of eternal life, an endless priesthood, and joint-heirship with Christ.

Scripture states that Abraham was not the first to receive such an oath and covenant. God had previously granted it to others: to Enoch (JST Genesis 14:30) and Melchizedek (JST Genesis 14:26-29, 33) and later to Isaac (Genesis 26:3) and Jacob (Genesis 28:4). Joseph Smith asserted that it was God's intention to make this oath and covenant with each descendant of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at Mount Sinai (JST Genesis 14:25-34, 40). However, as a result of unfaithfulness, the greater promises of God, “the priesthood . . . my holy order, and the ordinances thereof” (JST Exodus 34:1-2) were withheld from the House of Israel, as a people; and the law of carnal commandments was given in place of the higher priesthood blessings. As a result, the House of Israel did not become a “kingdom of priests” (Exodus 19:5-6; cf. 1 Peter 2:9, Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p. 322, hereinafter, Teachings).

Though it appears that Joseph Smith viewed the oath and covenant as a priesthood blessing, it also appears that this blessing was reserved for recipients of the fulness of the priesthood, and not for those men who had only been ordained to offices in the Melchizedek Priesthood held generally by male Church members. In his inspired translation of Genesis, Joseph Smith connected the concept of the oath and covenant with the concept of the fulness of the priesthood. This connection appears in the following verses:

Melchizedek lifted up his voice and blessed Abram. Now Melchizedek was a man of faith, who wrought righteousness; and when a child he feared God, and stopped the mouths of lions, and quenched the violence of fire. And thus, having been approved of God, he was ordained an high priest after the order of the covenant God made with Enoch.

It being after the order of the Son of God; which order came, not by man, nor the will of man; neither by father nor mother; neither by beginning of days nor end of years; but of God; And it was delivered unto men by the calling of his own voice, according to his own will, unto as many as believed in his name.

For God having sworn unto Enoch and unto his seed with an oath by himself; that everyone being ordained after this calling should have power, by faith, to break mountains, to divide seas, to dry up water, to turn them out of their course; To put at defiance the armies of nations, to divide the earth, to break every band, to stand in the presence of God; to do all things according to his will, according to his command, to subdue principalities and powers; and this by the will of the Son of God which was from before the foundations of the world.

. . . And it came to pass that God blessed Abram, and gave unto him riches, and honor, and lands for an everlasting possession; according to the covenant which he had made, and according to the blessing wherewith Melchizedek had blessed him (JST Genesis 14:24-31, 40).

This passage establishes several important facts. It states that Enoch was called to a calling in the priesthood (JST Genesis 6:32-36), and that this calling was delivered not by man, nor by the will of man, but by the calling of God's own voice. It describes how God promised to Enoch by an oath and covenant that, because of his ordination to this calling, he should have power over nature. God also promised to Enoch that any of Enoch's posterity who were ordained unto this calling should likewise have power over nature. We learn that Melchizedek, a descendant of Enoch, was ordained unto this calling and was given power over nature. Finally, Melchizedek blessed Abraham according to the covenant.

However, this account leaves unanswered two important questions: (1) What was the nature of the calling Enoch received and passed down to Melchizedek? and (2) Did Melchizedek
Jesus was known (Isaiah 9:6), and a "rightful heir," holding the of Melchizedek's high priesthood: "right belonging to the fathers" (Abraham 1:2). Abraham a "prince of peace" (Abraham 1:2), the title by which whereunto he might administer the same." This office constituted hood gave him "the blessings of the fathers and the right authority and keys at some future time, Abraham's high priest-

dy an office qualifying him to preside or to receive greater that he too was ordained a "High Priest," but far from being 93:17). Abraham, who was ordained by Melchizedek, explains of Christ (Hebrews 4:14; 5:4-11). As a "high priest" of this order, 

was a member of the high priests quorum, which John Taylor explained was instituted for the purpose of qualifying those who shall be appointed standing presidents over the different Stakes scattered abroad. A sort of normal school, if you please, to prepare men to preside, to be fathers of the people." However, the term "high priest" also refers to one holding the fulness of the priesthood held by Jesus, who was called a "High Priest" (Hebrews 3:1), and by Melchizedek, who was a prototype of Christ (Hebrews 4:14; 5:4-11). As a "high priest" of this order, Melchizedek, like Christ, was given power over nature (D&C 93:17). Abraham, who was ordained by Melchizedek, explains that he too was ordained a "High Priest," but far from being merely an office qualifying him to preside or to receive greater authority and keys at some future time, Abraham's high priesthood gave him "the blessings of the fathers and the right whereunto he might administer the same." This office constituted Abraham a "prince of peace" (Abraham 1:2), the title by which Jesus was known (Isaiah 9:6), and a "rightful heir," holding the "right belonging to the fathers" (Abraham 1:2).

On 15 October 1843 Joseph Smith elaborated on the nature of Melchizedek's high priesthood:

There are three grand principle or orders of priesthood portrayed in this chapter [Hebrews 7]:

1st Levitical, which was never able to administer a blessing, but only to bind heavy burdens which neither they nor their fathers were able to bear.

2. Abraham's patriarchal power which is the greatest yet experienced in this church.

3d. That of Melchizedek who had still greater power, even power of an endless life, of which was our Lord Jesus Christ, which also Abraham obtained by the offering of his son Isaac, which was not the power of a prophet nor apostle nor patriarch only, but of King and Priest to God, to open the windows of heaven and pour out the peace and law of endless life to man and no man can attain to the joint heirship with Jesus Christ without being administered to by one having the same power and authority of Melchizedek."

"What was the power of the priesthood?" asked Joseph Smith, rhetorically:

"Twas not the Priesthood of Aaron which administers in outward ordinances and the offering of sacrifices. Those holding the fulness of the Melchizedek Priesthood are kings and priests of the Most High God, holding the keys of power and blessings. In fact, that Priesthood is a perfect law of theocracy, and stands as God to give laws to the people, administering endless lives unto the sons and daughters of Adam. (Teachings, pp. 322-23).

"King and priest" was the office Melchizedek held. It was by the keys and powers of that office that Melchizedek ruled the people of Salem and ruled as king. It was by this power that he blessed them with endless lives (Teachings, p. 322). By this power they were translated into heaven to join the City of Enoch (JST Genesis 14:33-34). Abraham, who was blessed and ordained by Melchizedek, was likewise raised to this calling, which held the right, belonging to the fathers, to sanctify his people and administer endless lives unto them (Teachings, p. 322). Joseph Smith also said, "the Levitical Priesthood . . . [is] made without an oath; but the [fulness of the] Priesthood of Melchizedek is [made] by an oath and covenant" (Teachings, p. 323).

Though the scriptural accounts of God's bestowal of such an oath and covenant are few, in those that exist the individuals receiving the oath and covenant (e.g., Melchizedek, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Elijah) can usually be identified as kings and priests, either because they are so denominated or because they are said to be priests "of the holy order of God," after the order of Enoch," or "blessed with the blessings of Abraham." Therefore, when the Joseph Smith Translation speaks of Enoch's posteriority being ordained "after this order and calling" by which they "should have power, by faith, to break mountains," the "order and calling" referred to is the fulness of the priesthood.

The point of all this is that Joseph Smith connected the oath and covenant of section 84 to the fulness of the priesthood, i.e., to the calling of king and priest or queen and priestess. Support for this view is found in section 84, particularly in verses 33 to 42, with connections to other sources of the Restored Gospel. Briefly, the evidence for this is as follows:

1. D&C 84:33 mentions the "two priesthoods spoken of." The first of these is clearly the lesser or Aaronic Priesthood with which, according to Joseph Smith, no oath and covenant is connected. The greater priesthood is very likely the fulness of the priesthood, for, as D&C 84:6-18 makes clear, it was passed down from the king and priest Abraham.

2. D&C 84:33 also connects the greater priesthood with the doctrine of sanctification. This connection echoes the teachings of the Book of Mormon prophet Alma, who states that those holding the fulness of the priesthood, who took "upon them the high priesthood of the holy order" (Alma 13:8), were like Melchizedek, the "high priest after this same order" (Alma 13:14). They were "sanctified, and their garments were washed white
through the blood of the Lamb” (Alma 13:11).

3. D&C 84:34 designates the recipients of the greater priesthood as the “seed of Abraham.” The Book of Abraham equates the “seed of Abraham” with the priesthood of Abraham, which, as Joseph Smith explained, was the fulness of the priesthood:

And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse them that curse thee; and in thee (that is, in thy Priesthood) and in thy seed (that is, thy Priesthood) . . . shall all the families of the earth be blessed, even with the blessings of the Gospel, which are the blessings of salvation, even of life eternal (Abraham 2:11, italics added).

4. D&C 84:34 connects the greater priesthood with the concept of election, which Joseph Smith described at length (Teachings, pp. 150-51). The “elect of God” are described in section 76 as “they who are the church of the Firstborn,” “they into whose hands the father hath given all things.” They are:

priests and kings, who have received of his fulness, and of his glory; And are priests of the Most High, after the order of Melchizedek, which was after the order of Enoch, which was after the order of the Only Begotten Son . . . These shall dwell in the presence of God and his Christ forever (D&C 76:54-57, 62).

5. D&C 84:1-5 makes reference to the city of the New Jerusalem and to the temple. This is important because it is in the temple that the fulness of the priesthood is conferred. Joseph Smith explained:

If a man gets a fullness of the priesthood of God he has to get it in the same way that Jesus Christ obtained it, and that was by keeping all the commandments and obeying all the ordinances of the house of the Lord (Teachings, p. 308).

6. D&C 84:36-39 makes reference to heirship which is often linked in the scriptures with the fulness of the priesthood. For example, when Abraham receives that priesthood, he accounts himself a “rightful heir” (Abraham 1:2). Paul declares that Abraham became the “heir of the world” (Romans 4:13), and that those who suffer with Christ and are glorified with him are “heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:17). Joseph Smith revealed that “they who are of the Church of the Firstborn” are priests and kings “into whose hands the Father has given all things,” i.e., they are heirs (D&C 76:54-57).

7. D&C 84:41 contains a penalty clause. Applied generally to the priesthood bearers of the Church, the penalty of no forgiveness of sins for breaking the covenant seems curiously harsh. But if applied to a queen and priestess or king and priest, the punishment becomes more understandable.

The point of this evidence, again, is that since D&C 84 is about the fulness of the priesthood, it follows that Joseph Smith associated the oath and covenant with that priesthood and not the priesthood held by elders, high priests, patriarchs, seventies, or apostles.

At this point, I digress briefly to make an observation regarding the historical context of section 84. The original version of this revelation reads as follows:

And wo unto all those who come not unto this priesthood which ye have received, which I now confirm upon you who are present this day by mine own voice out of the heavens; and even I have given the heavenly host and mine angels charge concerning you.

What had apparently begun on September 22 as a revelation to six elders became by September 23 a revelation to ten high priests. This revelation was apparently given over a two-day period at the time these men were ordained to the Church office of “high priest.” It is clear that these men were not at this time...
Joseph Smith taught that all priesthood was Melchizedek, but that Elijah must come to reveal the priesthood and plant in the hearts of the children the promises made to the fathers, so that the hearts of the children would turn to the fathers. Other such allusions followed. One of the most important of these was made by Oliver Cowdery at the time of the ordination of the first modern Quorum of Twelve, when he told Parley P. Pratt that his ordination to the apostleship was not full and complete and that other, greater keys and blessings were yet to be restored. According to Joseph Smith, it was Elijah who restored the “key of the revelations, ordinances, oracles, powers, and endowments of the fulness of the Melchizedek Priesthood and of the kingdom of God on the earth” (Teachings p. 337), without which “the ordinances could not be administered in righteousness” (Teachings p. 172).

The relationship between the fulness of the priesthood and the oath and covenant of God may be seen in the historical context of the restoration of priesthood keys in this dispensation. Joseph Smith taught that all priesthood was Melchizedek, but that there were varying degrees of it (Teachings, p. 180). That portion of the Melchizedek priesthood taken from the children of Israel was the fulness of the priesthood, which was restored in Jesus’ time and then lost again.

Beginning in 1829, the fulness of the priesthood of God was restored to Joseph Smith by degrees. First the Aaronic Priesthood was conferred upon Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery by John the Baptist (D&C 13). Later, the Melchizedek Priesthood was restored when Peter, James, and John ordained Joseph and Oliver to the apostleship (D&C 18:9; 20:2-3; and 27:12). The restoration of these two priesthoods was followed by a period of development in which priesthood quorums, offices, and keys were defined in the growing Church organization.

On 3 April 1836, Jesus, Moses, Elias, and Elijah appeared to Oliver Cowdery and Joseph Smith as they knelted in prayer behind the veils of the presidency’s pulpits in the priesthood assembly room of the Kirtland Temple (D&C 110). In this visitation, Joseph and Oliver received priesthood keys vital to the further development of the Church (Teachings, p. 224). From 1836 until his death, Joseph Smith increasingly stressed the need to build temples where the fulness of the priesthood could be bestowed upon the Latter-day Saints as a crowning blessing from God.

The first foreshadowing of such a restoration came in 1829, in the revelation now appearing as section 2, which states that Elijah must come to reveal the priesthood and plant in the hearts of the children the promises made to the fathers, so that the hearts of the children would turn to the fathers. Other such allusions followed. One of the most important of these was made by Oliver Cowdery at the time of the ordination of the first modern Quorum of Twelve, when he told Parley P. Pratt that his ordination to the apostleship was not full and complete and that other, greater keys and blessings were yet to be restored. According to Joseph Smith, it was Elijah who restored the “key of the revelations, ordinances, oracles, powers, and endowments of the fulness of the Melchizedek Priesthood and of the kingdom of God on the earth” (Teachings p. 337), without which “the ordinances could not be administered in righteousness” (Teachings p. 172).

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The preparation for the conferral of the fulness of the priesthood began on 4 May 1842 when Joseph Smith first administered the endowment. These ordinances were an extension and elaboration of the ordinances that had been administered several years before in the Kirtland Temple. The endowment was administered according to the pattern of priesthood ordination established at the visitation of John the Baptist: first Joseph Smith would administer an ordinance, and then the recipient(s) of that ordinance would, in turn, administer the ordinance to Joseph Smith. This pattern was followed when the endowments were first performed. Joseph Smith said that he endowed certain men on 4 May 1842, and then 5 May he and his brother Hyrum received the endowment from them (HC 5:1-2).

By virtue of the endowment the fulness of the keys of the greater priesthood were transmitted to others. This was done in preparation for the administration of those final rituals by which men and women could be given the fulness of the priesthood; that is, be made kings and priests and queens and priestesses. The endowment itself does not confer this fulness, any more than the conferral of the keys of the Melchizedek Priesthood by Peter, James, and John upon Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery conferred upon them the gift of the Holy Ghost. The keys come before the salific ordinances. In this case, the endowment was administered to confer the keys of the fulness of the priesthood, so that the final ordinances could be communicated. Both Wilford Woodruff and Orson Hyde, as well as other apostles, emphasized that in the winter of 1843-44 the apostles received the fulness of the keys and powers of the priesthood by attending to every ordinance of the temple.

On 6 August 1843 Wilford Woodruff reported that [Brigham Young] remarked that if any in the Church had the fulness of the Melchizedek Priesthood, he did not know it. For any person to have the fulness of the priesthood, he must be a king and priest. A person may have a portion of that priesthood, the same as governors or judges of England have power from the king to transact business; but that does not make them kings of England. A person may be anointed king and priest long before he receives his kingdom (HC 5:5-27).

The fulness of the priesthood was first conferred in the fall of 1843. Apparently, Joseph had hoped to administer these ordinances in the Nauvoo Temple, but that structure was not completed at the time. So, because of a premonition of his death, Joseph Smith went forward with the administration of these rituals in his private office. These ordinances were first performed on 28 September 1843. The record states that Joseph Smith led the group in the true order of prayer, after which Hyrum Smith and William Marks, at Joseph Smith’s dictation, “anointed and ordained [Joseph] to the highest and holiest order of the priesthood, viz., a king and priest unto God.” After this, Emma was anointed and ordained a queen and priestess unto her husband. It appears to have been Joseph Smith’s intention to extend these blessings to many of the Church faithful:

We calculate to give the Elders of Israel theirwashings and anointing, and attend to those last and more impressive ordinances, without which we cannot obtain
thhoods available in the Church, and both men and women must be endowed and sealed in marriage in the new and everlasting covenant (D&C 84:33; 131:1-3; Teachings, p. 308).

3. The married individuals must be anointed kings and priests and queens and priestesses; and they must magnify that calling by manifesting to God a willingness to sacrifice all earthly things to become one in Christ (D&C 84:33; 101:4-5).

4. These individuals must be sanctified by the Spirit unto the renewing of their bodies, thereby becoming the "sons" of Moses, of Aaron, the seed of Abraham, the church, the kingdom, and the elect of God (D&C 84:34).

5. These individuals may then receive the visitation of the angels, but eventually must obtain the visitation of the Son (the "second comforter" spoken of in John 14) (D&C 84:36).

6. These individuals must, through the Son, be presented to the Father (D&C 84:37).

7. The candidates must receive from the Father the promise or covenant of "all that [the] Father hath," and this promise the Father must seal by his own oath "out of the heavens" (D&C 84:38-40).

8. The candidates must receive the fulfillment of the promise of the Father by actually obtaining God's glory, by which they acquire power over nature, and must, finally, receive their appointed kingdom in the world to come (D&C 84:63-67; cf. Luke 22:29-30).

These requirements, if not realized in mortality, may be realized in the afterlife, for the necessary ordinances by which men and women are ordained kings and priests and queens and priestesses may be done by proxy for the dead in certain of the temples.

Obviously, these steps cannot be taken suddenly (1 Tim 5:22). Faith in Christ, patience in affliction, and submission to all his ordinances, including the covenant of marriage, are fundamental preconditions to receiving the fulness of the priesthood. This idea is reflected throughout the scriptures (D&C 50:26-29; 76:53; Ether 12:6-9). Two examples are illustrative:

Therefore, they must needs be chastened and tried, even as Abraham, who was commanded to offer up his only son. For all those who will not endure chastening, but deny me cannot be sanctified (D&C 101:4-5).

Melchizedek was not ordained a king and priest until he was first proved faithful to God:

Now Melchizedek was a man of faith, who wrought righteousness; and when a child he leaned God, and stopped the mouths of lions, and quenched the violence of fire. And thus, having been approved of God, he was ordained a high priest after the order of the covenant which God made with Enoch (JST Genesis 14:26-27).

It is the vitality of Christian faith behind the ordinances that conditions an individual for the reception both of the fulness of the keys of the priesthood transmitted by the endowment, and the fulness of the blessings of the priesthood, to which individuals are given access through the medium of the anointing to the highest of callings, king and priest and queen and priestess.

Joseph Smith's writings reveal that kings and priests and
queens and priestesses can be constituted by an anointing ritual performed by the president of the High Priesthood, who is now the president of the Church, or by one delegated by him (D&C 132:6-7). It may also be conferred by angels (D&C 77:11). The ritual is called the second anointing. This ritual, whenever feasible, is administered in the Holy of Holies of a temple dedicated to that purpose. 

It is conferred jointly upon husbands and wives sealed in the new and everlasting covenant by the administration of the anointing proper, which is followed by the washing of feet and other rites. These ordinances have the effect of sealing those receiving them to exaltation in the celestial kingdom of God (Teachings, pp. 306, 321, 323) and giving them all the blessings of the priesthood which can be conferred by one mortal on another. This authority, however, is held subordinate to that of the president of the High Priesthood, for he is not only a king and priest unto God in Israel, but a king and priest in and over Israel, and in and over Zion.

Those anointed to the fulness of the priesthood have all authority to administer in all the ordinances of the gospel and of the priesthood (Teachings, p. 337), to officiate in any of the offices of the Church and kingdom of God, including the apostolic office (D&C 107:1-10), to bear witness of the Father and the Son (D&C 84:63-64), to pray in the true order to detect the source of revelations (D&C 124:95, 97), and to assist the president of the Holy Order of the High Priesthood in anointing other kings and priests or queens and priestesses.

Although many believe that the second anointing is the highest ordinance in the Church, this is not technically correct. The highest ordinance in the Church is the conferred by God upon an individual of the oath and covenant that is associated with the fulness of the priesthood. This idea was the gist of Oliver Cowdery's statement to Parley P. Pratt in 1835: "Your ordinations are not full and complete till God has laid His hand upon you" (HC 2:195 96). And Brigham Young said, "A person may be anointed king and priest long before he receives his kingdom" (HC 5:527). Joseph Smith made this same point in his discourse on Elias, Elijah, and Messiah:

The Spirit of Elias is first, Elijah is second, and Messiah last. Elias is a forerunner to prepare the way, and the spirit and power of Elijah is to come after, holding the keys of power, building the temple to the capstone, placing the seals of the Melchizedek Priesthood upon the House of Israel, and making all things ready. Then Messiah comes to His Temple, which is last of all (Teachings, p. 340).

The spirit and power of Elias refers to the work associated now with the Aaronic Priesthood and the Melchizedek Priesthood in the Church—proclaiming faith and repentance, and baptizing for the remission of sins, and the laying on of hands for the imparting of the gift of the Holy Ghost—in short, the work of adoption into the House of Israel, the family of Jesus Christ (of whom Abraham, as father of the faithful, was but a type and shadow) (Teachings, pp. 335-36; Ether 3:14). After proving faithful to these necessary preliminaries, men and women will receive, under the keys of Elijah, all the blessings of the temple, including the endowment and the second anointing, thereby obtaining the fulness of the keys to turn (i.e., seal or bind) (Teachings, p. 330) the hearts of the fathers to the children as well as the fulness of the blessings of the priesthood, i.e., immortality and eternal life. It is at this point that the seals are put upon the House of Israel. Individuals so sealed and so empowered to seal others have all that can be conferred upon mortals by mortals. Such individuals, according to Joseph Smith, must then receive the visitation of the Messiah (i.e., "Messiah comes to his temple") and be ushered by him into the presence of the Father (2 Nephi 9:41). It is at this point that the final component ordinance of the priesthood is administered by the members of the Godhead. This is the oath and covenant that, according to section 84, belongs to the priesthood. This is the final confirmation from the Godhead to the individual of the promise of immortality, eternal life, and everlasting possession of all that the Father has. This, according to Joseph Smith, is the capstone on the temple, "which temple," says Paul, "ye are," the members of Christ's Church (1 Corinthians 3:17).

For Joseph Smith, then, the oath and covenant of the priesthood did not refer to the two parts of a bilateral contract, nor to any kind of mutual contract with God. Instead, the oath and covenant is a unilateral promise made by God, and sealed by his own oath. This promise is not extended to all priesthood bearers, but only to those men and women who have received the fulness of the priesthood. This highest of priesthood blessings is not conditional upon future obedience. It is granted unconditionally as a reward for past loyalty and devotion.

In the theology of Joseph Smith, then, it was not earthly status, or even status in the priesthood hierarchy, that ensured one's salvation or exaltation, but direct contact with the Father and the Son. This is the final and indispensable component of the ordinance by which the fulness of the priesthood is conferred, by which the anointed ones are constituted joint heirs with Jesus Christ and Saviors on Mount Zion (HC 6:184, 364-365). Within the worldview of Joseph Smith, it was by this supernatural event that the recipients of the full manifold of gospel, Church, and temple ordinances became, in fact, fully called, elected, anointed, and crowned kings and priests and queens and priestesses—possessors of the fulness of the priesthood, whose lives are "hid . . . with Christ in God" (D&C 86:8 9). cf 101:39-42; 103:9-10; Matthew 5:13)—individuals who have passed beyond their personal judgment and have entered into their exaltation, awaiting only the time of the resurrection to enjoy the fulfillment of the promises of the Most High.

NOTES

1. The American Heritage Dictionary, s.v. "oath."
3. The Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. "promise."
CROSSING THE SWEETWATER

Chorus: O Brigham, are you crying?
Do your tears come just for me?
Our journey's done - I'm the pioneer
You meant for me to be.
You think I'm much too little
For this heavy load you see.
Well, crossing the Sweetwater
Took the little outa me.

1. Don't cry for me, a prophet's tears
Are more than I can bear.
You dreamed us to the promised land.
We laid down our fair share.
I lost fingers to the bite of frost
Baby sisters to the flu.
I fought my tears along the trail,
Now I see the tears in you.

2. Winter caught us early,
Taught us Zion's price.
By crossing the Sweetwater
We lost our mother's life.
I heard her voice just days ago;
We'd almost made it through.
I turned around and she was gone
Just two days short of you.

Chorus: O Brigham -
Do you weep our welcome?
I reckon sorrow makes us strong.
Mother's dead inside our wagon
She's alive here in my song.
You think I'm much too little
For this heavy loss you see.
But crossing the Sweetwater
Took the little outa me.

3. You said -
"Suffer little children to come westward
with me."
Did you mean for us to suffer so
In our sojourn to be free?
You're a prophet, you're a leader.
You called us to this place.
Your welcome feels so bittersweet-
Oh, where's my mother's face?

4. I'm crying for my mama;
Ya need not weep along,
She's dead inside our wagon.
She's alive here in my song.
A heavy load for a little girl,
But you see I pulled it through.
I'm all grewed up, which came about
When we chose to follow you.

Chorus: O Brigham, are you crying?
Do your tears come just for me?
Our journey's done - I'm the pioneer
You meant for me to be.
I'm really not too little
For this heavy load you see
'Cause crossing the Sweetwater
Took the little outa me.

MIGNONETTE HARGAN