

# ***COVENANTS: OUR BOND WITH THE DIVINE***

## Helping us “out of the pit”

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BYU-Idaho Campus Devotional Talk

March 9, 2004

Imagine yourself lost at the bottom of a deep pit – a pit so big that other people are there with you, a massive pit large enough for homes and villages to be scattered around the bottom like the Havasupai Indians living in their “land of the sparkling blue-green waters” at the bottom of the Grand Canyon. But this deep pit has no trails in or out – just steep walls surrounding it. And, you have no equipment to climb out.

With your independent human spirit you want to get out of this pit so you call out to those you assume live up beyond the rim. You call from different locations at various times day and night and you finally hear a faint whisper of a voice calling back. But, no further communication or help comes. Would you be glad or mad that you heard the voice, that you knew there was life up beyond the rim of the pit? But what if you had not really heard a voice. Those around you at the time did not hear it, although others at different times and occasions did claim to hear voices. You could just stay in that pit and continue life there. But you want to get up out of the pit and return back home.

Then one day as you are walking along where the cliffs and the pit valley floor meet, you come across something unnatural. Hanging from the top of the cliff is a thin synthetic line almost invisible like the fishing line you would use in a mountain stream. You pull on the line and it seems anchored at the top. It is not strong enough to lift you, but you wonder, “Should I attach a message to this line so that it could be carried to the top?” Or, “Is this line the beginning of an attempt by somebody to connect some kind of telephone line or steel cable to the valley floor?” Indeed, “Does this line prove that there is life up beyond the rim?”

Closer observation reveals that the line is a thin fiberoptic cable, capable of transmitting sounds and sights. But do you have the technological equipment to connect with those on the other end of this line? And more significantly, could they lead you back home?

These are the kinds of feelings and questions we have while wandering and wondering in this pit of a terrestrial earth, this lone and dreary world. We can get by and even enjoy life here, but we sense there is a better life up beyond the rim. At times we hear faint whisperings and find thin connections from the heavens above, but we need to connect more firmly with those up there beyond the rim of our natural experience.

We establish and then strengthen our firm connections with God through covenants. Covenants are our bond with the Divine. They connect us with Heavenly Father in various ways:

- Covenants open communication links more clear than any super wideband fiberoptic cable.
- Covenants access spiritual gifts more wonderful than any technological equipment.
- Covenants rescue us from deeper and more varied pits than any steel cable.

In so many ways, covenants connect us to the Divine with all His love and glory. Before illustrating how covenants might actually help us back home, let us review what a covenant is and what the six basic elements of a covenant are.

*What is a covenant?*

Let's first be clear about what a covenant is. The standard definition of a "covenant" is: "a solemn agreement between two or more parties." A covenant is a compact between these parties in which promises are made and conditions are agreed upon, usually in the presence of witnesses. "A solemn agreement between two or more parties" implies that all parties are willing participants in the covenant arrangement. Granted, one of the parties may have drafted the terms of the contract and may have greater power and administrative authority in the covenant agreement – such as a king entering into a vassal treaty with a lesser ruler or as God providing and defining our covenant opportunities with Him.

There are two types of covenant relationships presented in the Scriptures -- horizontal and vertical. Horizontal covenants are where human beings enter into a peer covenant relationship with each other. As a Book of Mormon example, Captain Moroni made covenants with some Nephites that they would keep the peace in the land (Alma 46:31) and later with some Lamanites that they would no more take up their weapons of war against the Nephites (Alma 62:16). Vertical covenants are between God and mortals, either individually or collectively. The Book of Mormon teachings of Nephi, Jacob, King Benjamin, Alma, the resurrected Savior, Mormon and Moroni enrich our understanding of God's covenants (1 Nephi 13-15; 2 Nephi 9-10; Mosiah 5-6, 18; 3 Nephi 15-16, 20-22, 29; Mormon 8; Moroni 10).<sup>1</sup>

Heavenly Father has always seemed anxious to make covenants with us. Early in our pre-mortal existence he made promises which resulted in our present circumstances on this earth. God made special covenant promises with Adam, Enoch, Noah, Abraham and others of our ancestors. The covenants made with Abraham carry on to include us today. Almost four thousand years ago Abraham was given three promises by the Lord which are still in the process of fulfillment: Abraham would have a numberless posterity, lands in the Middle East were to be his family's inheritance, and his descendants would be a blessing to all nations and families of the earth. These promises were renewed through Isaac, Jacob and the house of Israel. We are the heirs of these promises as we individually honor our covenants and prove to be a blessing in the lives of others. The scriptures provide a record of the Abrahamic covenant and its prophesied fulfillment in the latter days. Indeed, the scriptures contain so many of God's covenant promises that another common definition of "covenant" is "a promise of God to His children." To combine the common two definitions of "covenant," we might say that a covenant is "a solemn agreement between God and His children containing His promises to us."

*What does it mean "to covenant?"*

Let us move from English definitions to the language roots of the Old Testament and briefly discuss some ancient meanings of "covenant" and "covenant making." "Covenant" in the Old Testament derives from the Hebrew word *be'rith*. The noun *be'rith* also joins with a common verb to describe the process of entering into a covenant. The technical Old Testament phrase for "making a covenant" is *karat be'rith*, meaning literally "to cut a covenant," or "to cut a bond." This Hebrew construct is similar to the English legal phrase "to cut a contract," or, as expressed in our vernacular, "to cut a deal." The origin of this expression lies in the ancient covenant ceremony practice of

sacrificing animals by cutting their throats, which symbolized a point of finalization in the contractual process. In other words, when the two parties came to an agreement, they would indicate it through an unusual act -- such as cutting the throat of an animal to be used as a sacrificial offering or as the main dish for their celebration feast. Today, we would probably just "shake hands on it."

According to which language etymology one follows, the term *be'rith*, usually translated as "covenant" has various possible meanings, one of which fits into our analogy of trying to get out of the deep pit. One meaning of *be'rith* is a "bond" or "joining together." Scholars believe this context derives from the Akkadian root *biritu*, which means to "fetter" or "chain." We may feel uncomfortable with such strong language of being fettered or chained because, for us, a covenant is not an obligatory or forceful type of binding together; it is to be a voluntary relationship. However, when there is a true mutual commitment between two parties, once they have made their pact -- they are bound together! As Latter-day Saints, we talk about a "new and everlasting covenant" and being "sealed together," such as in temple ordinances. This joining together represents an absolute, binding compact between God and His children. (D&C 82:10-11.) So to "cut a bond" can mean to bind yourself in a covenant like with chains of steel. It also implies a promised liberation, because if we maintain vows with a powerful, loving God, He rescues us from death and spiritual bondage.

This promise of freedom is highlighted in the Book of Mormon as King Benjamin speaks to his covenant Israelites as recorded in Mosiah, chapter 5. The prophet and king, Benjamin, promises the people: "because of the covenant which ye have made ye shall be called the children of Christ, ... and ... ye are made free." (Mosiah 5:7-8.) It is through God's gifts and covenants, made effective through Christ's atoning sacrifice, that we are delivered from the pits of death and hell to achieve our ultimate, eternal destiny.

#### *What are the basic elements of a covenant?*

In any covenant, certain and constant elements help to define the commitment relationship between the respective parties. Understanding these elements helps us appreciate various dimensions of our covenant relationship with God. The basic elements of a covenant are sixfold:

*First*, there is a preamble or preface in the covenant contract which introduces the involved parties and the basic nature of the covenant. This **introduction** simply brings the parties together so they can now enter into their agreement.

*Second*, the **historical context** of the covenant is presented, sometimes in great detail. This may seem unnecessary, but it is in ancient vassal treaties and in many scriptural contexts, as we will see.

*Third*, the **stipulations** of the covenant are explained. This "fine print of the contract" is what we should seriously study when we evaluate any specific covenant. Before we enter into any contract, we should understand exactly what we are agreeing to.

*Fourth*, for any covenant to be binding, it must be duly witnessed or, as we say today, "notarized by proper officials." To solidify the covenant agreement, a multitude and variety of **witnesses** are involved.

*Fifth*, a listing of **rewards and punishments**, or, as we would say in today's politically correct language, "incentives and penalties" are also part of a covenant. The rewards for proper and prompt adherence and punishments for the neglect or disregard of covenant promises are an essential part

of any contract. Although God's blessings are great, the laws of His covenants usually stipulate that the curses for breaking the covenant are severe. Indeed, it would be far better to never have made the covenant than to make and then break it without ever seeking amends.

*Sixth*, a record of the covenant is made and steps for its **perpetuation** are outlined. A covenant, especially one with God, is rarely for just one time and place. Sometimes the covenant document needs to be brought forth and read aloud in the presence of the covenant parties. It usually needs to be reviewed, maybe even revised, and regularly renewed so that it can continue to bless the relationship between the individuals.

In review, the six elements of a covenant are: introduction, historical context, stipulations, witnesses, rewards & punishments, and perpetuation.

*What covenant models do we have in the Church?*

Lest we think these six covenant elements only belong to ancient Israelite communities, let's review how they are found in the Church today. In fact, these elements are so much a part of our being a covenant people that we may not appreciate how much they permeate our Latter-day Saint society but we find all six elements in the ordinances of baptism, sacrament, and the temple.

Baptism is the gateway covenant ordinance which establishes our membership in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Simply stated, we were first introduced to the Church through parents, members or missionaries. Then we were instructed about the life and mission of the Savior and about the restoration, which provided the historical framework of our membership. We also learned the stipulations or commandments of Christ's gospel which were expected of us as Church members. Our formal entrance into the Church at baptism was duly witnessed by two priesthood holders. Blessings and higher levels of accountability came upon us as Church members. Finally, as members of record, we have had weekly opportunities to perpetuate our covenant relationship through the sacrament.

Our most consistent covenant model is found in the sacrament. Following the same six elements, we first come together in a sacrament meeting to renew our covenants. The sacrament hymn then provides the historical framework as we come out of a worldly environment (and our wondering why the bishop called **that** person to the calling which we just sustained) and our thoughts are turned to places like Gethsemane, Golgotha, and the Garden Tomb. In precise wording, we agree to take Christ's name upon us, to always remember him, and to keep his commandments. The sacrament covenant is not only witnessed by the priesthood leaders, but we witness it to each other as we individually partake of the bread and water. Those around us can see and witness that we have done an external act as a symbol of an internal commitment. A wonderful blessing, the companionship of the Holy Spirit, is promised in the prayers. Once we have experienced that blessing, to lose the Spirit is indeed a curse. And finally, partaking of the sacrament is the latest perpetuation or renewal of our covenant relationship with God.

The temple provides the most sacred covenant opportunities for Latter-day Saints. First, we introduce or present ourselves at the temple with a valid temple recommend. Second, as the actual endowment session begins, we go way back into an historical context and review the premortal councils, the periods of creation, and the actions of Adam and Eve in the Garden. Third, although

one would expect to learn a lot of detail about temple covenants and their stipulations during the endowment session, the covenants themselves are just introduced, briefly defined and explained in the temple. However, we are told where we can learn more about them – “in the scriptures!” Thus a conscientious study of the scriptures and their covenant teachings is an excellent preparation for going to and returning to the temple. Fourth, there are special witnesses for every endowment session. We not only have a designated couple represent the company, but we also enter into our sacred covenants in the Lord’s house in the presence of God and angels. Fifth, detailed rewards and punishments are not explained in the endowment, but they are found in the scriptures as we learn about the solemn nature of sacred covenants. Finally, the specific date and temple where we received our endowment is recorded in our individual membership record, and we renew our temple covenants as we partake of the sacrament. Like the ancient Israelites, Latter-day Saints are indeed a temple worshipping, covenant people.

*How covenants can deliver us from the pit*

Let us now return to our analogy of the deep pit and see how five different covenants can take us up beyond the rim. Let’s assume that somehow we are able to connect with that thin fiberoptic line that we found dangling from the cliff. Through this communication link we are able to gain instructions that will help us out of the pit. But knowing what to do is not enough, we must act upon that knowledge to get ourselves over the rim. Our covenants with the powers above will empower our actions. Let’s discuss how five critical covenants help us out of this pit.

*Baptism: the gateway covenant*

First, we receive communication through the fiberoptic line and we are instructed about how to braid a special rope which will serve many roles in helping us out of the pit. The rope will help the first workers to build a trail along the cliff wall as it anchors them to the rock and connects them safely to each other. The rope can also be made into bridges and ladders to assist them and later travelers over difficult obstacles. It can be woven into nets and barriers to provide protection along dangerous passages. With its many functions, this good strong rope will help us out of the pit.

Heavenly Father has provided a multi-functional aide like the rope to help us back into His presence. But it is only given to us after we have made an initial covenant with Him – the gateway covenant of baptism. As Jesus promised Nicodemus, except a person “be born of water and of the Spirit” he or she cannot enter into the kingdom of God. (John 3:5.) The promised reward of the baptismal covenant is receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost. The companionship of this third member of the Godhead helps us in various ways. As expressed in a “Belief Statement” from the book *Principles and Practices of the Restored Gospel*, “The Holy Ghost is a spirit personage who serves as a revelator of truth, a witness of God's work, and a comforter for the human soul.” (Pages 65, 641.) Revealed insights, strong confirmations, and comforting strengths are significant roles of the Holy Spirit which could help us out of the pit.

*Sacrament: the renewal covenant*

Next, we need to recognize that this precious rope can be cut, frayed or lost. We not only must protect it in its dangerous environment, we must strengthen and replace it as needed. This renewing and strengthening of our spiritual companionship comes through the sacrament. We all

sin and thus in one way or another we all damage our connection with the Holy Spirit. It is not enough to have felt powerful spiritual witnesses earlier in our life – we need to have the Spirit with us now and always (meaning “all the way”) as we try to get out of the pit.

The promise of the sacrament is that we can always have His Spirit with us, because if it is not with us “all the way,” we will never make it back to God’s presence. We can’t just have the Spirit here and there along the way, we need His guidance, gifts and power all the way to the end. Just as abundant, strong rope could help us in multiple ways to get us out of a physical pit, the companionship and abundant gifts of the Holy Spirit assist us out of spiritual darkness.

*Priesthood: the service covenant*

So, with this rope we are ready to build a trail out of the pit, but we need a lot of workers, strong, powerful workers, to do the work. People living in the pit might not want to do all this work because it takes them away from their other activities. They might not want to serve others who are weak or in need. But there are some of God’s sons here in this telestial pit who are willing to enter into an oath and covenant of the priesthood to help and serve others. They survey the cliff walls, map out possible routes, and work together to place anchors, clips, pulleys and other aids so that a trail can be built that will benefit anyone who wants to travel on it. If you have ever tried to hike or travel through a wilderness area without a trail, you know what a blessing it is to have trailblazers prepare the way and to have guides assist along the way. Likewise, priesthood holders should make life better for others.

As the Lord teaches us about the “oath and covenant of the priesthood,” we learn that faithful priesthood holders are “sanctified by the Spirit unto the renewing of their bodies.” (D&C 84:33.) This promise refers ultimately to a celestial resurrection, but I believe it is a promise for this life as well, while we are still in the pit. As servants in the Kingdom, we need to be refined and motivated by the Spirit and to be uplifted and energized in our bodies so we can do the necessary work in raising our families, helping others, and furthering the mission of Christ’s church. Hard working priesthood bearers, honoring their priesthood oath and covenant will help us out of the pit.

*Endowment: the gift covenant*

However, these workers need special tools and equipment to get the trail work done – bare hands, sticks and rope will not make a trail through rocky walls. Rugged hand tools and powerful machines are needed for this difficult project. And if the workers do not have this essential equipment with them in the pit, it will have to be delivered from above. When something is given or bestowed upon a person, it is called a gift or endowment. One attends the temple to receive an endowment.

As the name implies, the “endowment” is a special gift from God which helps His children qualify for His special celestial blessings. Presented by means of a symbolic drama, the endowment is a gift of special spiritual knowledge. The New Testament phrase “to endow” comes from the Greek *enduein*, meaning “to put on”: both to clothe, put on garments, etc. or to put on attributes, receive virtue, etc. (EM 454). As noted in this root meaning, “to be endowed” involves both external acts (such as putting on sacred clothing) and internal edification (such as committing to righteous behavior). As highlighted in the Encyclopedia of Mormonism, the essential, cardinal teachings of

the endowment place the entire gospel structure into a divinely inspired eternal framework (EM 455, 1460). This elevated perspective reveals about life beyond the rim and gives us spiritual directions about the path we must follow to return to our heavenly home.

Beyond providing instruction, the endowment gives opportunity for personal commitment. The divine knowledge in the temple endowment is given only in conjunction with certain specific covenants, which commit us to principles of devotion, charity, righteousness, purity, and diligence. We follow Adam's example as we promise to obey God and to sacrifice our time and talents in building His kingdom. We also covenant to keep the laws of the gospel in a spirit of unity. We then declare our sincere intentions to follow the laws of chastity and consecration, signifying the degree of purity and commitment which God desires of His dedicated disciples (EM 455, 1444).

Having thus pledged our all to the Lord and His kingdom on earth, we are then privileged to receive certain blessings or "keys" in the form of specialized instruction necessary to return back to God's celestial realm. These keys help us learn how to petition Heavenly Father in the true order of prayer and they give us instruction about regaining His pure, celestial kingdom. The endowment session symbolically takes us into the realm of God, into the celestial room. If we keep our temple covenants, these keys will someday admit us to God's celestial kingdom (EM 455, 1444, 1460). These keys are the essential tools we need to get out of the pit and to enter those heavenly realms beyond the rim.<sup>2</sup>

#### *Sealing: the bonding covenant*

As we complete this difficult trail out of the pit and we are almost to the rim, we find one last unexpected obstacle. Beyond getting out of the pit, we need to be brought into the community above. We assumed that we would be welcomed by those living up beyond the rim, but we find out we must first be accepted and comfortable as compatible members of their special society. We need to bond with these people in a certain social order – as eternal families.

To receive exaltation in the highest degree of God's celestial kingdom, yet another temple ordinance and covenant is required – celestial marriage and the sealing of families into an eternal union. A "sealing" means the securing of a lasting bond. A bond is defined as a special agreement or a covenant. Temple sealings refer to the marriage of a husband and wife and the joining together of children and parents into the family order of God's celestial society. Sealings bind us together with a chain that is not easily broken. As the culminating temple ordinance, a sealing ceremony is an inspiring and solemn rite performed in specially dedicated sealing rooms of the temple. The family unit begins with the sealing of a man and a woman in holy matrimony. They make sacred commitments to God and each other as they enter into the new and everlasting covenant of eternal marriage. An officiator performs the sealing in the presence of two witnesses. Close friends and family members usually witness the ceremony as well. Sealings become a spiritual foundation for a marriage and family -- they sustain the family in life and unite its members after death (EM 1289). These sealings eternally bind in heaven that which is performed and sanctified on earth.

To summarize these five essential covenants, "Latter-day Saints, like the ancient Israelites, are a covenant people who worship in temples where they learn about their relationship with God, make sacred commitments, receive key directions about returning to God's presence, and do

ordinance work for their deceased relatives.” (PPRG, pages 371-72, 643.) These temple ordinances are sacred rites and covenants which bind us to our Heavenly Father. And as we are bound together with God, He can rescue us from the deep pits of ignorance, worldliness, selfishness and sinfulness. As members of a covenant community, we become integrated with other celestial people.

*What are the purposes of covenants?*

Knowing what covenants are and how they can help us upwards towards celestial life, it is also helpful to appreciate why God uses covenants to bind our relationship with him. Heavenly Father’s work and glory is to "bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man" (Moses 1:39). And, Christ’s ultimate commandment to us is to become “perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.” (Matt. 5:48.) For us to achieve these divine purposes, we need help. I believe there are at least four sets of reasons why covenants are so valuable for us to achieve our eternal destiny:

*Teachings and Guidelines:* First, covenants provide valuable teachings and guidelines, informing us of God’s expectations. As we prepare to enter into covenants, we receive instruction about their doctrinal framework. We are taught the commandments which God expects of us. The laws and commandments attached to the covenants teach us how to draw nearer to God and how to become more like Him. This instruction provides gospel teachings and guidelines which give us direction as we commit ourselves to keep His commandments.

*Incentives and Rewards:* Second, covenants give us incentives and rewards. Sometimes the blessings of a particular commandment or covenant are so important to us that we receive extra motivation to be obedient. Such incentives can be a positive influence in our lives to counter the many frustrations and negative enticements which surround us. The Lord promises to bless us as we obey His laws, and this gives us encouragement to remain faithful. Granted, eventually we will want to do good for good’s sake and to keep our covenants because that’s really what we want to do, not just because we want to receive rewards. But in the meantime, and as a motivator in moments of weakness, covenant incentives and rewards encourage us to stay on the path towards God.

*Gateways and Ordinances:* Third, covenants are required gospel gateways and ordinances we must pass through if we want to return to God’s presence. Covenants define essential commitments and ordinances which God requires of us as we seek to return to his celestial realm. Certain covenant gateways, such as baptism, are absolutely essential for all of us, even Jesus, the Son of God. After passing through the gates of water and spirit baptism, we then prepare to enter into higher temple covenants, drawing us closer to God’s highest glory. When we are willing and worthy to enter into these higher covenants, we sense we are getting closer to our highest potential -- the gateway of eternal life. We must participate in these ordinances if we want to fulfill our divine destiny.

*Patterns and Measurements:* Fourth, covenants develop patterns and measurements of righteous behavior. As we not only enter into but also keep our basic covenant commitments, patterns of obedience make it easier for us to make and keep higher and higher levels of covenants. Knowing God’s expectations for us and then committing to them through a covenant act provides us with a somewhat objective means of measuring our religious performance. Our progress on the

path of life is verified and we feel trustworthy for greater opportunities of service. As we establish patterns of obedience, this behavior becomes a part of our eternal nature. We gradually become the type of person who is dedicated to goodness, love, and righteousness. By keeping covenants and being faithful in what may seem to be little things, we are proven worthy to receive greater things, even eternal life.

### *Keeping covenants*

After we understand how and why covenants help us, we need to decide what we personally should do about our covenant relationship with God. Three key words describe the steps of keeping covenants. First, we need to know God's covenants so we can properly connect with our Heavenly Father. Studying the Scriptures, learning the counsel of God's prophets, and following the inspiration of the Holy Spirit will help us know God's covenants and how we should live them. Second, we need to do God's covenants so we can experience His bonding power. Divine gifts and blessings are made manifest through the Holy Spirit after we make baptismal covenants and then renew them through the sacrament. Further powers and rewards come to us through the priesthood and temple as we make and keep higher, sacred covenants. Third, we need to become God's covenant children so we can be sanctified through the Holy Spirit and then effectively use His spiritual gifts to serve others. We are then ready to help the next generations along the covenant path towards celestial life.

Having prepared six children for the temple; having taught the temple preparation course and conducted numerous temple preparation firesides; and having conducted many temple recommend interviews in various ecclesiastical callings – may I now please share two valuable pieces of advice with you?

First, prepare yourself for the temple with integrity. By “integrity” I exhort you to be absolutely honest in your temple recommend interviews with your ecclesiastical leaders. Realize that this interview is a means for both a common judge in Israel and you to evaluate if you are already doing that which you soon will solemnly covenant to continue doing. In the temple you will not be asked to do anything new or more challenging beyond what you need to do to enter the temple in the first place. For example, you should be keeping the law of chastity before you receive your temple recommend and then in the temple you make a sacred covenant to thereafter keep that commandment. Be a trustworthy person of integrity.

My second piece of advice is to involve others as you prepare for your covenants and as you strive to keep them. By ourselves, we are weak and fallible. Companions, friends and family are invaluable sources of counsel and strength. As we have learned with exercise programs, exam preparations, business ventures and other endeavors in life, we are far more likely to succeed if we know others have an interest and involvement in our success. Most importantly, keep the Holy Ghost as your constant companion. This divine friend will not lead you astray. He will give you insight as you study your covenants, He will strengthen you as you strive to keep your covenants, and He will purify you as covenants help you become a true child of God.

*Conclusion*

In conclusion, let us assume God's covenants have helped us out of the pit. We are now over the rim and in those celestial realms with God, His Son, the Holy Spirit, the prophets and our family and friends. What do you assume we are doing now? Are we just recycling the communication lines, helpful ropes, tools, equipment and other aids which help people out of their own pits? No, we are actually "angelfactoring" more of them. (For those of you unacquainted with this process, **angelfactoring** is a much more environmentally friendly process than "**manufacturing**.") We angelfacture covenant opportunities for future endless generations of spirit children who, in turn, will be sent out to countless worlds yet unorganized

where they can call out to the heavens and listen for a gentle voice,  
where they can connect with a communication line to the realms above,  
where they can follow the path back home through sacred covenants, and,  
where they can establish their personal eternal bond with the Divine.

Covenants help us in so many ways as we sojourn on earth and try to get out of this telestial pit. Covenant teachings give us direction so we know what to do. Covenant rewards encourage us to stay on the correct path and covenant ordinances define what is expected of us as we do God's will. And covenant patterns develop consistent righteous behavior as we become His true children. Without covenants, we would be lost and frustrated, eternally stranded in the pit. With covenants, we not only draw nearer to our Heavenly Father and Elder Brother and bond with them, but we also become more like them, eternally.

Thus we see that God's covenants, along with their attached laws, commandments and promises, give us hope and help in reaching towards eternal life – celestial life up beyond the rim of this telestial pit.

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1. The scriptures not only provide details about the specific covenants but they also give the eternal context of our covenant relationship with God. As stated on the title page of the Book of Mormon, scriptures provide both the past historical context for these covenants and also the future prophetic promises for their blessings and fulfillment.

2. Adapted from *Principles and Practices of the Restored Gospel*, (SLC, Deseret Book Co., 1992) pages 365-68.