**Section 20**

H. Dean Garrett, Stephen E. Robinson, *Commentary on the Doctrine and Covenants, Vol. 1* (Salt Lake City 2000)

**Background**

Concerning the period following the restoration of the priesthood in 1829 and the organization of the Church in 1830, the Prophet Joseph Smith wrote: "In this manner did the Lord continue to give us instructions from time to time, concerning the duties which now devolved upon us; and among many other things of the kind, we obtained of Him the following [section 20], by the spirit of prophecy and revelation; which not only gave us much information, but also pointed out to us the precise day upon which, according to His will and commandment, we should proceed to organize His Church once more here upon the earth."1

In the months prior to 6 April 1830, and probably as early as late 1829, Joseph and Oliver had been writing down their various instructions from the Lord concerning the duties of Church members. An early draft of Doctrine and Covenants 20 was written in late 1829 by Oliver Cowdery and ends with the notation, "Written in the year of our Lord & Saviour 1829—A True Copy of the articles of the Church of Christ. O.C."2

Public sale of the Book of Mormon began on 26 March 1830. Eleven days later on Tuesday, 6 April 1830, following express instructions of the Lord received in the section 20 material, Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery, together with Hyrum Smith, David Whitmer, Samuel Smith, and Peter Whitmer Jr., organized the Church of Christ according to the laws of the state of New York. The restored Church was officially called The Church of Christ at its incorporation in 1830. In 1834 the name of the Church was changed to The Church of the Latter Day Saints,3 and finally, on 26 April 1838, the name of the Church was changed by revelation to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (see D&C 115:4). Since the presidency of Harold B. Lee, the initial letter *T* is always capitalized: *The* Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

According to Joseph Smith, the initial organization of the Church took place in Fayette, New York, at the Whitmer home where Joseph and Oliver were then staying.4 "Whilst the Book of Mormon was in the hands of the printer, we still continued to bear testimony and give information, as far as we had opportunity; and also made known to our brethren that we had received a commandment to organize the Church; and accordingly we met together for that purpose, at the house of Mr. Peter Whitmer, Sen., (being six in number,) on Tuesday, the sixth day of April, A.D., one thousand eight hundred and thirty."5

Doctrine and Covenants 20, which is made up largely of revelatory material received before the Church was organized, was known to the early Church as the articles and covenants of the Church of Christ. It was the first summary statement of the history, doctrines, policies, and procedures of the Church. The first printed version of sections 20 and 22, in the Painesville *Telegraph*on 19 April 1831, listed section 20 alone as the articles and covenants. Section 22 had a different heading. The first edition of the Doctrine and Covenants, the 1833 Book of Commandments, also excluded section 22 from the articles and covenants by printing section 22 first with its own, separate heading, followed by section 20, which alone was called the articles and covenants. Section 22 was included with section 20 under the heading of articles and covenants of the Church in the June 1832 *The Evening and the Morning Star,* but this evidence must be judged weaker than the combined witness of the Painesville *Telegraph,* the Book of Commandments, and other early witnesses.6 Robert J. Woodford and Dean C. Jessee also appear to identify section 20 alone as the articles and covenants.7

At the first conference of the Church held in Fayette, New York, on 9 June 1830, Doctrine and Covenants 20 was read to the members and unanimously sustained as the articles and covenants of the Church of Christ, thus making it the first revelation of this dispensation to be formally presented to and sustained by the members. Over the next few years section 20 was revised and expanded several times to reflect additional revelation to Joseph Smith about the unfolding structure of the Church. For example, verses 66–67, concerning high priests, were added after the office of high priest was established by revelation in 1831.

As the articles and covenants of the Church of Christ, section 20 has often been referred to as the Constitution of the Restored Church and, together with section 22 and part of section 27, was sometimes referred to as part of the Mormon Creed.8 Certainly, this section served as the first priesthood manual or handbook for the Church, and it was read verbatim to the members at many early Church conferences. Section 20, the articles and covenants of the Church of Christ, along with sections 21–22, are foundation documents for the organization of the restored Church.

**Commentary**

**1. Being one thousand eight hundred and thirty years.** Many have taken this reference to be a literal count of the years from the birth of Jesus to the organization of the Church. On 6 April 1833, the third anniversary of that organization, Joseph Smith himself wrote, "The day was spent in a very agreeable manner, in giving and receiving knowledge which appertained to this last kingdom—it being just 1800 years since the Savior laid down his life that men might have everlasting life, and only three years since the Church had come out of the wilderness, preparatory for the last dispensation."9

On the other hand, several writers, including some modern apostles and prophets, have urged caution in interpreting Doctrine and Covenants 20:1 as an exact count of years. Among these are Hyrum M. Smith, J. Reuben Clark Jr., and Bruce R. McConkie.10

It is possible that the "one thousand eight hundred and thirty years" is just an elaborate way of referring to the year 1830 without being intended as an actual count of years.11 Elder McConkie's summation is helpful, "We do not believe it is possible with the present state of our knowledge—including that which is known both in and out of the Church—to state with finality when [i.e., in which year] the natal day of the Lord Jesus actually occurred."12

**1. Agreeable to the laws.** This likely refers in particular to an 1813 New York statute entitled "an act to provide for the incorporation of Religious Societies," which stated that between three and nine individuals must be listed as members and responsible parties in the foundation documents of any religious organization.13 In this verse, and again in Doctrine and Covenants 44:4–5 and 58:22, the Lord explicitly instructs the Church to observe the laws of the land.

**1. Sixth day of . . . April.** At least two Presidents of the Church, Harold B. Lee and Spencer W. Kimball, have affirmed that 6 April is the actual birthday of the Savior as well as the anniversary of the organization of the Church.14 Apparently, the actual day of Christ's birth is more certain than the actual year.

**2. Ordained an apostle.** The wording here, particularly the use of the past tense, clearly implies that Joseph and Oliver had received both the Melchizedek Priesthood and the apostolic keys*before* the organization of the Church. Even in 1829, Oliver Cowdery had by commandment written down a revelation foreshadowing Doctrine and Covenants 20, in which he declared himself "an Apostle of Jesus Christ."15 Moreover, the language of John the Baptist as recorded in Joseph Smith–History, and which is clearly reflected in Doctrine and Covenants 20:2–3, seems to imply that Joseph and Oliver would be ordained to the Melchizedek Priesthood, and that only then would Joseph "be called the first Elder of the Church, and he (Oliver Cowdery) the second" (JS–H 1:72). We know positively that Joseph and Oliver already had the Melchizedek Priesthood by September 1830 from Doctrine and Covenants 27:12: "And also with Peter, and James, and John, whom I have sent unto you, by whom I have ordained you and confirmed you to be apostles."16

**2. First Elder.** This is a Church administrative designation and does not refer to a special office in the priesthood. Joseph and Oliver were already Apostles and thereby also elders (see v. 38). In exercising their authority as Apostles and elders, Joseph was to have administrative precedence over Oliver. Their designation as first and second elders had nothing to do with the sequence of their ordination, but rather with their authority. In the infancy of the Church there was no First Presidency, only a first and second elder who held the keys of the apostleship.

**5. Truly manifested.** This happened during Joseph's first vision (see JS–H 1:28–30 for expanded explanation).

**5. Entangled again in the vanities.** In other words, Joseph was a normal teenager. After his vision, he made the same kinds of "foolish errors" teenagers often make, though he said, "no one need suppose me guilty of any great or malignant sins" (JS–H 1:28).

**6. By an holy angel.** The angel Moroni.

**7. Gave unto him commandments.** Read the longer account in Joseph Smith–History 1:33–42.

**8. The means which were before prepared.** The Urim and Thummim.

**9. Fulness of the gospel.** "The fulness of the gospel" was a much narrower and more limited phrase in the early Church and in its scriptures than it has become in contemporary LDS usage. The correct meaning of the phrase varies according to the knowledge of those who use it. In scripture the Lord defines his gospel, strictly speaking, as faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, repentance, baptism by immersion for the remission of sins, and the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost (see Articles of Faith 1:4; D&C 33:10–13; 39:6; 3 Nephi 27:19–21). The Book of Mormon is a mighty witness of these principles, containing more information on them—including how the ordinances are to be performed—than even the Bible has. Thus, the Book of Mormon contains the fulness of the gospel. "That does not mean it contains every teaching, every doctrine ever revealed. Rather, it means that in the Book of Mormon we will find the fulness of those doctrines required for our salvation."17

Though it is common for contemporary Saints to use the phrase "fulness of the gospel" to mean *all* that the Lord has revealed to us in the latter days up to the present time, the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants use the term to refer only to the first principles, to the basic "good news" of Christ—consisting of faith, repentance, baptism by immersion, and receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost. For example, while the Doctrine and Covenants solidly affirms here and again at Doctrine and Covenants 27:5 that the Book of Mormon already contains the fulness of the gospel, it is self-evident that the Book of Mormon does *not* contain the many wonderful things revealed to the Saints after 1830, including a knowledge of the degrees of glory, celestial marriage, and vicarious work for the dead. In October of 1831, William E. McLellin was blessed "for receiving mine everlasting covenant, even the fulness of my gospel" (D&C 66:2). Yet section 66 was received in 1831, long before many of the higher principles and ordinances, such as the ordinances of the temple, for example, had been revealed to the Saints.

As *gospel* means "good news," so the *fulness* of the gospel refers to the full message of redemption in Jesus Christ—redemption from the fall of Adam and its effects through the atonement of Christ. Those doctrines, principles, and ordinances necessary to remedy the effects of the Fall and restore us to the celestial kingdom of God constitute the fulness of the gospel in the technical, scriptural sense. After the publication of the Book of Mormon, however, there continued to be great and important revelations to the Saints about the nature of God's kingdom. They learned about degrees of glory (see D&C 76), salvation for the dead (see D&C 128), exaltation in the celestial kingdom, and celestial marriage (see D&C 131–32). They also received those higher ordinances that would take them beyond mere redemption from the Fall and would lead them to become as their heavenly parents are.

Because it has, understandably, become common practice in the modern Church to use the phrase "fulness of the gospel" to mean all that God has revealed,18 students and teachers of the Doctrine and Covenants should be aware of the distinctions between the scriptural and the contemporary usage and the possible ambiguities involved.19

**9. To the Gentiles.** In this dispensation, which includes the times of the Gentiles, the Book of Mormon and the gospel are to go to the Gentiles first and then to the Jews. This order of things fulfills the ancient declaration that "the last [the Gentiles] shall be first, and the first [the Jews] shall be last" (1 Nephi 13:42; Luke 13:30).

**10. Confirmed to others.** To the Three Witnesses and the Eight Witnesses of the Book of Mormon.

**11. Proving . . . the holy scriptures are true.** Often members of the Church will use portions of the Bible, Isaiah for example, in an attempt to interpret the Book of Mormon, or to prove its truth. This is backwards, however; the Lord's intent is just the opposite. It is the Book of Mormon that proves the Bible is true and that provides the keys by which the Bible should be interpreted. For example, though some biblical scholars deny that Jesus himself could have composed or taught the Sermon on the Mount,20 the Book of Mormon shows that Jesus did (see 3 Nephi 12–14). Though scholars theorize that much of the book of Isaiah was not written by Isaiah but by other writers after the Babylonian conquest in 588–87 B.C.,21 the Book of Mormon shows this theory to be false. Because Lehi left with the brass plates before the fall of Jerusalem, and because the brass plates at that time already contained a nearly complete copy of Isaiah, if the Book of Mormon is true, then Isaiah cannot have been written after 600 B.C.

The way in which the Book of Mormon "proves" the Bible true is not scientifically or empirically but with the logic of the Spirit, for if a person learns by the Spirit's witness that the Book of Mormon is true, then he or she also knows that the Bible, of which the Book of Mormon testifies, is true.

Also, the very existence of the Book of Mormon testifies to the world that the heavens are still open and that the Lord of Heaven who spoke to prophets and apostles anciently continues to do so today. He is still the same—yesterday, today, and forever. If humanity is not receiving revelation from God, it isn't because God has changed his mode of operation. Alone among contemporary denominations, the LDS Church, with its belief in modern revelation to apostles and prophets, is consistent with the Old and New Testaments in this respect.

**13. So great witnesses.** These witnesses are Joseph Smith, the Three and the Eight Witnesses, the Bible, and the testimony of the Book of Mormon itself.

**14. Receive it in faith, and work righteousness.** Note the importance of both faith and works to those who accept the gospel—faith to enter and begin, and work to remain and grow in the covenant.

**14. Crown of eternal life.** This implies exaltation in the celestial kingdom. Servants do not wear crowns; only rulers do.

**16. The elders of the church.** Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery, the first and second elders.

**17–36.** These verses contain a brief statement of the plan of salvation to the extent that it had been revealed to Joseph and Oliver by 1830, along with a short discussion of the basics of the gospel: faith, repentance, baptism, and receiving the Holy Ghost. They also affirm the essential doctrines of justification, sanctification, and grace. The statement proceeds very much like a sort of creed dealing with the same issues and sometimes even in the same language as non-LDS creeds of the day.22

**17. By these things.** By the Book of Mormon and the many witnesses to its truthfulness enumerated in verses 8–16.

**17. Infinite . . . unchangeable.** Because Latter-day Saints believe in a God with a physical body (see D&C 130:22), we are often accused of believing in a "finite" God, but this statement in the Articles and Covenants of the Church is unequivocal—God is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable. In fact, it is the God of traditional Christianity, who no longer reveals his will to apostles or prophets, who seems rather to have changed from the biblical pattern.

**18.** Note that Eve as much as Adam is created in the image of God; therefore the use of *God* has a slightly different significance in connection with the Creation than it does in most other contexts. The First Presidency, in 1925, declared, "All men and women are in the similitude of the universal Father and Mother, and are literally sons and daughters of Deity."23 This may be one of several reasons for the plural noun form *Elohim* in the Hebrew word for God.

**19. And gave unto them.** The fulness of the gospel was given to Adam and Eve, who taught it to their children (see Moses 5).

**19. The only living and true God.** If death is the separation of spirit and body, then a truly *living* God is a God, like the Father or like Jesus Christ, who has been resurrected. In this vein, some early Christian literature reserves the phrase "the living Jesus" for the resurrected Christ.24

**20.** It should be noted that man became devilish by transgression, and that we possessed a different nature prior to that transgression that was *not* carnal, sensual, and devilish. Our fallen self with its carnal nature is a temporary, sin-caused aberration. The atonement of Christ restores us to our true and original nature.

**22. He suffered temptations.** Jesus suffered all the temptations associated with mortality; every temptation we encounter, he encountered. The great difference between us is that when he suffered temptations, Jesus "gave no heed," that is, paid no attention to them (see Hebrews 2:17–18; 4:15; Alma 7:11–12). He was perfectly righteous because of his moral strength in overcoming temptation—not because he never experienced genuine temptation.

**25. Be baptized . . . and endure.** All who enter the gospel covenant through faith, repentance, baptism, and receiving the Holy Ghost, and who then remain committed and faithful, are assured of salvation in the celestial kingdom of God.

**26. The meridian of time.** Not necessarily the chronological middle of the earth's temporal existence, but rather the spiritual middle. It is the point that everything before looks ahead to, and that everything after looks back at—the high point in the earth's temporal existence. Just as everything before noon is ante meridian, or A.M., and everything after noon is post meridian, or P.M., so the atonement of Christ is the reference point in time, like noon, that determines the before and after of all things.

**26–27.** The atonement of Christ was infinite in its scope and nature and blessed not just those who lived after his ascension, but all who have accepted or who will accept the gospel from Adam's time on down to the end of the earth's millennial existence.

**28. One God.** The term *God* is used here and in many other scriptures in the sense of Godhead, meaning the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost together. In this sense, how many Gods are there? Only one. It is true we believe there is more than one divine being, but they are united. If the Son and the Holy Ghost were not obedient to the Father, or if they deviated from being one with him in mind, thought, and purpose, they would cease to be divine (see Alma 42:13, 22, 25). Even those mortals who are to be exalted and become "as gods" will do so only in a subordinate sense to the degree that they become obedient to and one with the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Thus, Latter-day Saints believe in one God(head) consisting of three divine beings, two of whom depend on their perfect oneness with the Father for their divine status (see D&C 93:3).25

**29. Worship the Father in His name.** See the commentary on Doctrine and Covenants 93:19 for a discussion of true and correct worship.

**30. Justification.** *Justification* is a judicial or legal term, and it means being acquitted or being declared innocent of all charges. Though all of us make mistakes in this life, we may, with repentance and baptism, and thereafter as long as we stay in the gospel covenant, still be declared innocent of all sin, not because of our own perfect performance—which no one has!—but because of Christ's perfect performance and his willingness to share it with us. We are justified or declared innocent before God by the sacrifice of Christ (see Romans 5:9), and our acquittal or victory at the bar of justice is received only through reliance upon the merits of Christ (see D&C 3:20; 76:53, 60–61; 2 Nephi 31:19; Alma 22:14).26

It would be an error to define the specific agents of justification or sanctification too narrowly. The scriptures describe us variously as being justified by Christ,27 by faith,28 by grace,29 by works,30 by Christ's blood,31 and by the Spirit.32

Likewise, scripture describes us variously as being *sanctified* by Christ,33 by the grace of God,34 by the truth,35 by the word of God,36 by God the Father,37 by law,38 by water,39 by the Holy Spirit,40 and by blood.41 Thus, while it is clear that justification and sanctification are true and essential principles, we should not try to define too narrowly the means by which they are gained.

Here in Doctrine and Covenants 20:30, the Lord himself affirms that the worthiness we seek in order to enter the kingdom comes to us only through Christ and because of his merits, mercy, and grace (compare 2 Nephi 2:5–8). This is both a just and a true principle. It is *just* because Christ satisfied the demands of justice that someone pay for our sins, and it is also true (see Ephesians 2:5, 8; 2 Nephi 10:24; Ether 12:27; Moses 7:59).

**31. Sanctification.** To be made holy, to become Saints. When we have been rendered innocent by being justified through the grace of Christ by baptism, we are then worthy to receive the actual companionship of God in the person of the Holy Ghost. Receiving the Holy Ghost does not just make us clean; it also makes us *holy*—that is sanctified (see 3 Nephi 27:20). For this reason all who have received the gift of the Holy Ghost are referred to collectively as "the Saints," meaning "the holy ones." Through faith in Christ, repentance, baptism, and receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost we are first rendered innocent (justified) and then we are made holy (sanctified), and may be called Saints, "the holy ones." Because we have received this blessing in the latter days, we are called *Latter-day* Saints, a collective term for those in our dispensation who have been justified and sanctified by the grace of Christ and who now work to endure faithfully to the end.

**31. To all those who love and serve.** Sanctification does not, however, come to everyone who is confirmed simply as an automatic result of the ordinance being performed. Only those who truly love and serve the Lord, who have received the ordinance with sincere intent, will actually be sanctified by the Spirit and truly become Saints (see v. 34).

**32. Fall from grace.** As wonderful as the gifts of being justified and sanctified are, we may fall from grace after receiving them if we "depart from the living God." For once justified and sanctified by the gift of God, we are then obligated to serve him "with all [our] mights, minds, and strength" (v. 31). Getting into the covenant by grace is easy, but staying in it takes commitment, willingness, and effort. We enter the covenant by faith in Christ and by his grace, but we endure to the end by continuing to serve and obey him. If we refuse to serve God, withhold our loyalty, or renege on our covenants, we can "fall" from the grace by which we were justified and sanctified when we first came to Christ.

Christians who follow the teachings of John Calvin deny the possibility of "falling from grace," insisting instead on the "perseverance of the Saints" (once saved always saved). This is a major difference between Latter-day Saints and Calvinist Christians. We as members of the Church sometimes get confused and insist that coming into the covenant requires works, which, if we perform well, God will then reward with grace. But this is backwards. Entering the covenant requires faith and grace; *staying* in it, enduring to the end and not falling from grace already received, requires work as well.

**34. Even . . . those who are sanctified.** Exactly who among the total membership of the Church have actually been sanctified is clarified in verse 31. Not every member loves and serves the Lord, but even those who do—the truly sanctified—must pray always, lest they fall into temptation.

Some people believe that in this verse "sanctification" refers to those who have been sealed up to eternal life,42 or who have received the Second Comforter, but this revelation was received too early in the history of the Church—April 1830—for that phenomenon to be found among the Saints, or to be widely known (see D&C 105:35–36; Alma 13:10–14).43

**35. Neither adding to, nor diminishing from.** The revelations received through the Prophet Joseph Smith and other latter-day prophets reflect all the truths that have been revealed by God since the time of Adam, neither adding to it nor diminishing from it. In nothing does the restored gospel contradict, add to, or diminish from the fulness of the gospel (in the narrow and scriptural sense explained above in v. 9) as revealed to other prophets, including John, the last prophet of the former dispensation (see Revelation 22:18–19).

**37. The manner of baptism.** The Lord commands the Church to administer baptism: (1) when candidates are humble before God—no bargaining and nothing held back, but willing to do whatever God requires; (2) when candidates really want to be baptized; (3) when they have a broken heart and a contrite spirit; (4) when they can testify to the Church that they have repented—that is, that they have begun the repentance process; (5) when they are willing to take upon themselves the name of Christ; and (6) when they have a determination to serve Christ for the rest of their lives and bear the fruits of membership in his Church.

**37. Broken hearts and contrite spirits.** A broken heart suggests an overwhelming sense of grief and loss; in this case not for a lost sweetheart, but for lost worthiness and a lost relationship with God. In our fallen state we have lost these things, but when we enter the gospel covenant we can receive them again, and our broken hearts will be healed. Contrition is the desire to repent and make things right. A contrite heart yearns to do whatever it may take to get right with God and to make amends for sin.

**37. Take upon them the name of Jesus Christ.** The name of Christ is symbolic for Christ himself and for his power. It is the name of Jesus Christ that makes everything we do work: repentance, prayers, ordinances, justification, sanctification, the Church, and so on. We have faith in the power of his name, repent in his name, are baptized in his name, receive the Holy Ghost in his name, and have access to the Father only in his name. We can use Jesus' name properly, however, only if we are *his;* so to take his name upon us is to accept the power of his name in our own behalf and also to accept the obligation to represent his name to others and to the world. We accept his ownership—his name is "written" upon us—and we accept that we represent his name as we serve him. Finally, bearing his name means assuming his identity and therefore gradually becoming what he is.44

**37. The Spirit of Christ.** Usually, the phrase "Spirit of Christ" refers to the Holy Ghost, just as in the sacrament prayers the priest petitions "that they may always have *his* Spirit to be with them," referring specifically to the Holy Ghost (vv. 77, 79; emphasis added). Here in verse 37, however, it appears that the Spirit of Christ refers to the light or influence of Christ (see D&C 84:45–46; Moroni 7:18) that works on individuals before they enter the covenant and which, when followed, increases in intensity until it brings them to the gospel.

**38–59.** "The Lord could not reveal to the Church in the beginning all the knowledge and organization which would be essential to the full and complete organization of the Church. Had this been done, it would have been like an overwhelming flood that would have brought destruction. The truth had to come piecemeal—line upon line, precept upon precept, just like knowledge comes to all of us. However, all that was revealed in this section was expedient for the government of the Church at the time of its organization. What the Lord revealed at this time is just as expedient and necessary today. We have had nothing, for instance, given since that day to add to or improve on the instruction concerning the duties of teachers."45

Overall, the duties of the priesthood center on looking after the Church and assisting the members in living the principles of the gospel. The key functions of the priesthood are service and blessing. Priesthood should not necessarily be thought of as bestowing special rights, but rather as bestowing special responsibilities.

**38. An apostle is an elder.** The difference between an elder and an Apostle is not a difference of priesthood. Both hold the Melchizedek Priesthood, but an Apostle holds, with his quorum, the keys of the kingdom and has an additional, special calling to be a personal witness for Christ. High priests and seventies are also elders; that is, they hold the Melchizedek Priesthood, but they also are elders who at times hold specific keys and callings. "*Elder* is the title given all holders of the Melchizedek Priesthood."46

**44. Take the lead.** This means to preside. If an Apostle is present, it is his meeting. He may ask an elder to conduct for him (see v. 45). He may not wish to speak or otherwise participate, but he still presides, and all things in that meeting are done with the permission and authority of the one who presides.

**60.** Office in the priesthood cannot come by self-appointment. A man must be ordained in proper order by one who already holds the priesthood. The effective power in ordination is the power of the Holy Ghost.

**61–62, 81. Conferences.** In the early history of the Church, the conferences held were mainly priesthood conferences, but as the Church expanded, the need developed for stake and ward conferences as well as general conferences. In time, conferences have been expanded to include regional and area conferences. The commandment for elders to "meet in conference once in three months" is met today by a combination of general and stake conference priesthood meetings. Note that attendance at these meetings, in person or by telecast, is a commandment of the Lord and an obligation of holding the priesthood (see v. 61).

**63–64, 82–84.** In the early days of the Church, the method employed to certify the membership, priesthood, and good standing of individuals was to give them certificates of ordination and membership. A person carried this certificate with him from his old branch and presented it to the presiding elder of the new one. Then, by sustaining vote of the new branch, the priesthood holder would be given a license to function in the new branch. Also, membership lists were presented at the various conferences for entrance in the general records of the Church. These usually also included a list of those who had been removed from the Church since the last conference. Today we still issue certificates of membership and ordination, but the function of issuing licenses and maintaining membership records has been assumed by ward, stake, and general clerks using an automated record system. The importance of members keeping their Church records complete and up-to-date is thus underscored by these verses.

**65–67.** At the time Doctrine and Covenants 20 was received in 1829–30, there were no such offices in the Church as high priest, bishop, or high councilor. As the structure of the Church continued to unfold, section 20 was revised to include the newly revealed offices. Verses 65–67 were added to section 20 at the Prophet's direction in 1835, in order to include and instruct those holding offices that were unknown in 1830. Verse 65 also reflects the need for common consent in the Church (see D&C 26).

**68. Expound all things . . . to their understanding.** In the early days of the Church, the Lord required that bap-tized members be taught the basics of the gospel and have an understanding*before* being confirmed and partaking of the sacrament. This obligation now rests with the elders—a major purpose for teaching the missionary discussions—and home teachers and parents, and is generally met before baptism. Baptized members then have a binding obligation to behave according to what they have been taught (see v. 69).

**70.** While fathers holding the Melchizedek Priesthood can bless their children whenever need arises, they are also commanded in this verse to bless them publicly in church. This commandment is kept, under the direction of a bishop or branch president, by blessing infants and small children in ward or branch fast and testimony meetings. Besides obtaining the obvious blessing of the priesthood for their child, parents who keep this commandment "manifest their faith in the sight of their brethren and sisters, in God's word and in his promises, as well as their thankfulness to him for increasing their posterity and for the safe delivery of his handmaiden. The child is also benefitted by the united faith and responsive prayers of the assembled Saints."47

**71. Years of accountability.** In Doctrine and Covenants 68:25–27 the Lord defined the age of accountability as eight years of age. This age was prefigured in the law of Moses by circumcision of male children at eight days of age (see JST Genesis 17:11) and is perhaps also alluded to in 1 Peter 3:20–21. Children younger than eight do not normally understand the covenant of baptism (see v. 68) nor can they repent, because without knowledge and accountability they cannot sin (see Moroni 8:8–15). "Baptism is for remission of sins. Children have no sins. Jesus blessed them and said, 'Do what you have seen me do.' Children are all made alive in Christ, and those of riper years through faith and repentance."48

**74. Immerse him or her.** The Lord has revealed to the Church that baptism is to be by complete immersion, following the ancient pattern. The consensus of biblical scholars is that Jewish and Christian baptism in the first century was also by immersion. In fact, the verb *baptize* in Greek is normally translated as "to immerse" or "to dip."49

**75. Bread and wine.** Jesus' body is the "bread of life," or the "manna from heaven" (John 6:35; 48–51). His blood is the "living water" (John 4:10–14; 7:37–38) and the "wine" of the Atonement pressed out of him in the press of Gethsemane (see D&C 19:18).50 As bread is made from crushed wheat and gives life to humans, and as wine is made from the crushed grapes when they are pressed, so bread and wine are ideal symbols for the body and blood of Christ bruised and shed for us that we might live. By partaking of the emblems of the sacrament we symbolically partake of his body and blood. We symbolically take Christ into ourselves and become one with him as he nourishes us and gives us life through his atoning sacrifice (see John 6:53–58).

As Israel under Moses partook of the sacrificial animals that brought cleansing and safety through their deaths, so we partake symbolically of the Lamb of God, sacrificed to bring us cleansing and salvation. Also, when we partake of the bread and wine, or water, in faith and repentance, we receive the same blessings and restore the same covenants as at our baptism. And just as those who are baptized are then given the gift of the Holy Ghost, so those who partake of the sacrament in good faith will then "always have his Spirit to be with them" (D&C 20:77, 79).

Because the bread and wine are symbolic only and are partaken of in remembrance only, and not as a literal transubstantiation, it does not matter what we eat or drink in order to remember his body and blood. Consequently, it is common throughout the Church today to use bread and water for the emblems of the sacrament. This is in accordance with revelation received two months after section 20 was canonized.51 After Doctrine and Covenants 27 was received, wine and water were used interchangeably for the sacrament until about the turn of the century. Since that time pure water has uniformly been the content of the cup.

**76. Shall kneel with the Church.** It appears that in the early days the entire Church knelt when the sacrament was blessed, just as in the Book of Mormon (see Moroni 4:1–2). This is largely impractical in modern congregations, though we must still have an attitude of humility and bend the "knees" of our hearts as the priest offers the prayers. It should be noted that all such changes in practice have been inspired, with prophetic authorization.

**79. They may witness.** *Witness* here means to affirm or to testify. Thus, this portion of the prayer states what those partaking of the sacrament intend to affirm: that they are willing to take his name upon them, that they are willing to remember Christ, and that they are willing to keep his commandments (see v. 37). To the extent that they do these things that they have publicly witnessed before God, they will have his Spirit to be with them.

**81–84.** See Commentary above on verses 61–62, 63–64.

**83. Expelled from the church.** The Lord from the very beginning of the Church has allowed for the excommunication of those who violate their covenants and refuse to repent. When an excommunication takes place, the name of the excommunicated person is removed from the records of the Church. By this action they are mercifully released from covenants they will not keep, and they are returned to "the world." Unfortunately, they are also denied certain benefits of the Atonement and can reenter the kingdom only through subsequent repentance and eventual rebaptism.