What Do We Covenant to Do at Baptism?

“Now I say unto you, if this be the desire of your hearts, what have you against being baptized in the name of the Lord, as a witness before him that ye have entered into a covenant with him, that ye will serve him and keep his commandments, that he may pour out his Spirit more abundantly upon you?”

Mosiah 18:10

The Know

As discussed previously in KnoWhy 59, 2 Nephi 31:7 explains that the reason why a sinless Jesus would need baptism, is not for the remission of sins but to publicly witness His making of a covenant to be obedient to the Father. In that KnoWhy, we cited emeritus BYU Professor Noel B. Reynolds as asserting that for Nephi and subsequent Book of Mormon figures, baptism principally serves as an outward sign witnessing our repentant commitment to follow Jesus Christ. In contrast to baptism being a symbol of spiritual cleansing, Reynolds notes, “the Book of Mormon consistently points to a different symbolism: the making of a covenant.” We are then cleansed by the purifying fire of the Holy Ghost (3 Nephi 12:2).

From ancient times, covenants have been understood as mutual or bilateral promises. If baptism, in the Book of Mormon, is understood as a sign that one has made a covenant with God to do certain things, what are those things? What is God, for His part, promising to do? The narrative of Alma (the elder) baptizing believers at the waters of Mormon in Mosiah 18 is one of the most informative accounts of what was expected of newly baptized saints.

And it came to pass that he said unto them: Behold, here are the waters of Mormon (for thus were they called) and now, as ye are desirous to come into the fold of God, and to be called his people, and are willing to bear one another’s burdens, that they may be light; Yea, and are willing to mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort, and to stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places that ye may be in, even until death, that ye may be redeemed of God, and be numbered with those of the first resurrection, that ye may have eternal life—Now I say unto you,
if this be the desire of your hearts, what have you against being baptized in the name of the Lord, as a witness before him that ye have entered into a covenant with him, that ye will serve him and keep his commandments, that he may pour out his Spirit more abundantly upon you? (Mosiah 18:8–10, emphasis added).

This passage concisely indicates that baptized believers make a covenant to do the following:

- Come into the fold of God
- Be called His people
- Bear one another’s burdens
- Mourn with those who mourn
- Comfort those who need comfort
- Stand as a witness of God at all times and places
- Serve God
- Keep His commandments

At the same time, God promises to:

- Redeem them
- Number them with those of the first resurrection
- Give eternal life
- Pour out His Spirit more abundantly upon them

As we are baptized and commit to take upon ourselves the name of Christ, we also covenant with Him to do what He would do and love as He would love.

Further Reading


Notes

