

# *Patriarchal Blessings*

JAMES E. FAUST

**T**hese firesides generate quite a bit of warmth. I can feel it clear down here. We've been delighted by that beautiful musical number. We are honored by the presence of President and Sister Oaks; Dr. Russell M. Nelson, one of the regional representatives; the stake presidencies; and all of you. I am most honored to be with my beloved wife, Ruth, who to me is the most important person in all the world.

This evening I wish to speak about one of the most important blessings available to worthy members of the Church. I speak of patriarchal blessings. My chief reason for speaking upon this subject is that patriarchal blessings verify the divinity of Christ and the truthfulness of the Church. These sacred blessings also strengthen the personal testimonies of those worthy persons who are the recipients of such blessings, provided those recipients live so as to merit the blessings pronounced therein. A patriarchal blessing is a very unique and remarkable privilege that can come to the faithful members of the Church having sufficient maturity to understand the nature and the importance of such blessings. These privileged blessings are a powerful witness of the mission of the Lord Jesus Christ in bringing exaltation to each of us. Like many blessings, they must be requested by the person or by

the family of the one desiring the blessing. The responsibility for a patriarchal blessing rests primarily upon the individual and family.

Our testimonies can be strengthened and fortified and our lives given greater purpose every time we read and reread our patriarchal blessings. By their very nature, all blessings are qualified and conditional, regardless of whether the blessing specifically spells out the qualification or not. Each blessing is absolutely qualified and given upon the condition of the faithfulness of the recipient of the blessing.

We now have stakes of Zion in a great many countries of the world, and most stakes have at least one patriarch. This growth greatly extends the privilege of having patriarchal blessings to many people in many lands.

## **The Patriarchs**

I wish to pay tribute to the faithful men holding this great calling and ordination. They are often among the most humble and faithful

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of our brethren. These chosen men live lives that entitle them to the inspiration of heaven. Patriarchs are privileged to impart blessings directly rather than just solicit blessings to the individual, for the patriarchs are entitled to speak authoritatively for the Lord. The office of patriarch is one of the great separate priesthood offices of the Melchizedek Priesthood. The patriarchal office is one of blessing, not of administration, nor of counseling. It is a sacred, spiritual calling that usually will be the remainder of the patriarch's life. Our patriarchs give total devotion to their callings and do all they can to live in faith and worthiness so that each blessing is inspired

As each patriarch receives the spirit of his calling and devotes himself to it, his calling becomes beautiful, sacred, spiritual, and fulfilling.

### **The Blessing**

When moved upon by the Holy Spirit, the patriarch makes an inspired declaration of the lineage of the recipient together with such blessings, spiritual gifts, promises, advice, admonition, and warnings as the patriarch feels inspired to give. It is in essence a prophetic utterance. Generally, one patriarchal blessing is adequate, and second patriarchal blessings are not encouraged. If a worthy member has an important reason for desiring a second patriarchal blessing, the member may discuss it with his or her bishop.

The giving of additional patriarchal blessings may have been more common in the past. My grandmother, Maude Wetzel Faust, was challenged like most mothers with the raising of her children. She made an offhanded remark that the children were driving her crazy. My grandfather took her to the stake patriarch who blessed her that her "reason would never be dethroned." The blessing was literally fulfilled. She died at eighty-seven years of age, and she was joking with the nurses on the way to the

operating room where she died from a ruptured appendix.

Patriarchal blessings should be read humbly and prayerfully and frequently. A patriarchal blessing is very personal, but may be shared with family members. A patriarchal blessing is a sacred guideline of counsel, promises, and information from the Lord. However, a person should not expect that the blessing will detail all that will happen to him or her, or be an answer to all questions. The omission of the blessing of a great event in life such as a mission or marriage does not mean it will not happen. My own blessing is short and is limited to perhaps three quarters of one page on one side, yet it has been completely adequate and perfect for me.

President Heber J. Grant tells of the length of a patriarchal blessing he received: "That patriarch put his hands upon my head and bestowed upon me a little blessing that would perhaps be about one third of a typewritten page. That blessing foretold my life to the present moment" (James R. Clark, comp., *Messages of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 5 vols. [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965-75], 5:152).

### **When Are Patriarchal Blessings Fulfilled?**

Elder John A. Widtsoe had the following to say:

*It should always be kept in mind that the realization of the promises made may come in this life or the future life. Men have stumbled at times because promised blessings have not occurred in this life. They have failed to remember that, in the gospel, life with all its activities continues forever and that the labors of earth may be continued in heaven. Besides, the giver of the blessings, the Lord, reserves the right to have them become active in our lives as suits his divine purposes. We and our blessings are in the hands of the Lord, but there is a general testimony that when the gospel law has been obeyed, the promised blessings have been realized. [Evidences*

*and Reconciliations* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1960), p. 75].

This was well illustrated in my father's patriarchal blessing. He was told in his blessing that he would be blessed with "many beautiful daughters." He and my mother became the parents of five sons. There were no daughters born to them, but of course they treated the wives of their sons as daughters. This last summer when we had a family reunion, I saw my father's granddaughters moving about tending to the food and ministering to the young children and the elderly, and the realization came to me that Father's blessing had been literally fulfilled; he has, indeed, many beautiful daughters. The patriarch who gave my father his blessing had spiritual vision to see beyond this life. There was a disappearance of the dividing line between time and eternity. The patriarch has no blessing of his own to give; the blessing is the Lord's to give. God knows our spirits; he knows our strengths and weaknesses. He knows our capabilities and our potential. Our patriarchal blessings indicate what the Lord expects of us and what our potential can be. Our blessings can encourage us when we are discouraged, strengthen us when we are fearful, comfort us when we sorrow, give us courage when we are filled with anxiety, lift us up when we are weak in spirit.

### **Father's Blessings**

Elder John A. Widtsoe stated: "Every father, having children born to him under the covenant, is to them a patriarch, and he has the right to bless his posterity in the authority of the priesthood which he holds" (*Evidences and Reconciliations*, p. 72).

There are those who feel that the order of governing in families by the parents, under the influence of the priesthood held by the father and fully shared by the mother, should be changed. The patriarchy and the patriarchs of the Church are being attacked. We know that

the gospel always has been and always will be operated through families.

Since early biblical times order has been brought into the house of Israel through the family units. The family unit was the organization that had inherently and internally the natural love, the concern, and the blood ties to bring a governing peace and stability to the prophets of God.

The same is true today for substantially the same reasons. No other unit of society can provide an effective substitute for the natural ties of love and affection inherent in families.

The natural leaders of the family unit are the parents, standing side by side as equals in their loving guidance of their children. Each parent brings a separate enriching influence. The patriarchal order is a righteous priesthood order in which that influence is dominant in family affairs. Whatever diminishes the family order is destructive to the family unity, the family life, and the family progress.

The patriarchal order does not just involve men. It involves equally and fully the women of the family in their joint and separate activities. It also blesses the wives and children and their descendants as they come together in family functions and activities.

Our great work in genealogy research and temple work centers around the ancient promise of the hearts of the children being turned to their fathers in order that all of the blessings of the Lord may be offered to Abraham's seed.

Genealogical ancestry or blood lines are of importance because our lineage is a chain or linkage through which many of our blessings flow. This began with father Abraham: "I give unto thee a promise that this right [meaning the right to receive the gospel and the priesthood] shall continue in thee, and in thy seed after thee" (Abr. 2:11). This teaching has been reconfirmed in our day and time through this statement found in the Doctrine and Covenants: "Thus saith the Lord unto you,

with whom the priesthood hath continued through the lineage of your fathers—For ye are lawful heirs, according to the flesh, . . . Your life and the priesthood have remained, and must needs remain through you and your lineage” (D&C 86:8–10).

President John Taylor made the following statement concerning a father’s privilege to give a patriarchal blessing: “Every father, after he has received his patriarchal blessing, is a patriarch to his own family, which blessings will be just as legal as those conferred by any patriarch to the Church: in fact it is his right; and a patriarch in blessing of children can only bless as his mouthpiece” (*The Gospel Kingdom*, ed. G. Homer Durham [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1943], p. 146).

President Joseph Fielding Smith affirmed the statement of President Taylor with just one qualification, namely, that the father must hold the Melchizedek Priesthood. President Smith also added that “a father will be better qualified to give such blessings if he has been to the temple and had his wife and children sealed to him” (*Answers to Gospel Questions*, ed. Joseph Fielding Smith, Jr., 5 vols. [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1957–66], 3:199–200).

The First Presidency has issued the following policy statement:

*Certainly we should give new and additional emphasis to the role of the father in giving blessings to children in the family. We think we should generally leave to the ordained patriarchs in the stakes the responsibility of declaring lineage in connection with an official patriarchal blessing, but still we could leave unlocked the door so that any father who felt inspired to pronounce the lineage in connection with a father’s blessing he was giving to his children should not be prevented from doing so. We should urge and encourage fathers to give a father’s blessing to their children on such occasions as their going into the military, or away from home, to school, or on missions, and on other appropriate occasions. The father’s blessing may be recorded and*

*preserved in family records, but in contrast to a blessing given by one of the ordained patriarchs, it is not to be preserved in the archives of the Church.* [General Handbook of Instructions, p. 50]

### Adoption into the House of Israel

There are many coming into the Church in this day and time who are not of the blood lineage of a specific tribe of Jacob. Indeed, I am fully aware that there could be some within the sound of my voice who fall into this category. No one need assume that he or she will be denied any blessing by reason of not being of the blood lineage of Israel.

Paul makes repeated references to adoption into the house of Israel through faith: “But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his” (Rom. 8:9). And again: “Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises” (Rom. 9:4).

King Benjamin refers to the faithful as “the children of Christ, his sons, and his daughters” thus being able to be “spiritually begotten . . . through faith,” and thus coming into the family of Christ through a spiritual birth (Mosiah 5:7).

It really makes no difference if the blessings of the house of Israel come through the lineage or through the spirit of adoption. Elder John A. Widtsoe stated, “Whether this lineage is of blood or of adoption does not matter” (*Evidences and Reconciliations*, pp. 72–77).

In Abraham we are told, “And I will bless them through thy name; for as many as receive this Gospel shall be called after thy name, and shall be accounted thy seed, and shall rise up and bless thee, as their father” (Abr. 2:10).

### Lineage

Since families are of mixed lineage, it occasionally happens that members of the same family have blessings declaring them to be of

different lineage. There has been an intermixture of the tribes one with another. One child may be of Ephraim, another in the same family of Manasseh, Judah, or one of the other tribes. The blood of one tribe, therefore, may be dominant in one child and the blood of another tribe dominant in another child, so children from the same parents could belong to different tribes.

The house of Israel, in the original sense, meant the literal blood descendants of the house of Jacob. The Lord said to Abraham, "I give unto thee a promise that this right [meaning the right to receive the gospel and the priesthood] shall continue in thee, and in thy seed after thee" (Abr. 2:11). By seed we mean the heirs of the body. In our time the Lord has said, "Thus sayeth the Lord unto you, with whom the priesthood hath continued through the lineage of your fathers—for ye are lawful heirs, according to the flesh, . . . Your life and priesthood have remained, and must needs remain through you and your lineage" (D&C 86:8–10).

Believing Gentiles, even though not of the blood lines or genealogical ancestry of Israel, become adopted into the house of Israel. King Benjamin refers to the faithful becoming "the children of Christ, his sons and his daughters; spiritually begotten . . . through faith." Thus they are born again into the family of Christ. (See Mosiah 5:7.)

Joseph Smith taught that when "the Holy Ghost falls upon one of the literal seed of Abraham, it is calm and serene; . . . while the effect of the Holy Ghost upon a Gentile, is to purge out the old blood, and make him actually of the seed of Abraham. That man that has none of the blood of Abraham (naturally) must have a new creation by the Holy Ghost." (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, ed. Joseph Fielding Smith [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1972], pp. 149–150.)

I witness that there is here in this great hall an assemblage of thousands of future leaders of the Church who were called out of the

world, having been chosen by the Lord before the foundations of the world under the same promise as that which came to Jeremiah and Abraham:

*Now the Lord had shown unto me, Abraham, the intelligences that were organized before the world was; and among all these there were many of the noble and great ones;*

*And God saw these souls that they were good, and he stood in the midst of them, and he said: These I will make my rulers; for he stood among those that were spirits, and he saw that they were good, and he said unto me: Abraham, thou art one of them; thou wast chosen before thou wast born. [Abr. 3:22, 23]*

You who are here at this great university have come under this great promise, and you have come here to receive secular and spiritual learning. Having become more learned in the wisdom of the heavens and of the earth, thus enabling us to become a light unto the world, what if we hide that light under a bushel basket? What if we do not stay in the course the Lord wants us to be in, and to which the Lord may have called us before the foundations of the world? As the Lord told Saul, you are chosen vessels unto him, to bear his name "before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel" (Acts 9:15). Seek to live worthy of the blessings pronounced upon you by the patriarchs and by your own fathers.

I received my own patriarchal blessing when I was but a boy of twelve. From that short blessing I learned something about my responsibilities and my labors in establishing the kingdom.

I pray that we will live worthily and seek the blessings that are promised us by the Lord through our family patriarchs and through our ordained patriarchs, and that we will strive to help conditions and circumstances so that these great promises can be realized.

I love the Lord. I love his holy work. I have come to love this work more than life itself. I know that it is true. I shall never know with more certainty than I do now. I have also come to know something of the Savior, and as one of his witnesses, I invoke the blessings of Almighty

God upon each of you and pray that you will be sustained and built up and strengthened, and that he will watch over you and wrap his arms around you. I say this in the sacred name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.