

# The Priesthood: Some Definitions and Explanations

by Bruce T. Forbes, 2013

*I have been a bearer of the priesthood for more years than I care to admit – if I had a calculator, I'd figure it out for you. In all these many years, there have been many words and phrases that all priesthood bearers get a feel for, but they are never completely defined.*

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## Part One: Let's Define Three Words

Before any discussion, and especially before any gospel discussion, we should all make sure we're using the same definitions. So let's establish three definitions before we even begin.

### Authority

One definition of the word *authority* is “being granted the power and capacity to perform an action in the stead of and in the name of the person assigning it.”

A definition of the word *authority* from an official Latter-day Saint publication is: “The permission granted to men on earth [who are] called or ordained to act for and in behalf of God the Father or Jesus Christ in doing God’s work.”<sup>1</sup>

Notice in this definition that priesthood bearers are not doing their own will and work – they are doing what God has commissioned them to do. They are doing His will, not their own.

### Power

This same source defines the word *power* as:

The ability to do something. To have power over someone or something is to have the ability to control or command that person or thing. In the scriptures, power is often connected with the power of God or the power of heaven. It is often closely related to priesthood authority, which is the permission or right to act for God.<sup>2</sup>

Again, the bearer of this power is doing the will of the Father, not their own.

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1 Guide to the Scriptures, *Authority*

2 Guide to the Scriptures, *Power*

## Priesthood

The absolutely plainest definition of the word priesthood is: “The authority and power that God gives to man to act in all things for the salvation of man (D&C 50:26–27).”<sup>3</sup>

The *True to the Faith* booklet says that -

The priesthood is the eternal power and authority of God. Through the priesthood God created and governs the heavens and the earth. Through this power He redeems and exalts His children, bringing to pass “the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39).

God gives priesthood authority to worthy male members of the Church so they can act in His name for the salvation of His children. Priesthood holders can be authorized to preach the gospel, administer the ordinances of salvation, and govern the kingdom of God on the earth.<sup>4</sup>

Elder John Widtsoe was commissioned by the Church to write his ground-breaking work *Priesthood and Church Government*, a compilation of teachings by church leaders about the priesthood. His definition of the word priesthood is well worth reading:

. . . The Lord directs the work of all his children on earth, and He naturally gives attention to the Church composed of His obedient children. Nevertheless, although the Lord is the directing intelligence, he is not here in person nor are other superior beings sent to take direct charge of the work . . . Therefore, that the earth-work may be done authoritatively, God has delegated to man the necessary authority to carry out the provisions of the Plan of Salvation. Priesthood is the name given to this authority. . . .

What is Priesthood? It is the government of God, whether on the earth or in the heavens, for it is by that power, agency, or principle that all things are governed on the earth and in the heavens, and by that power that all things are upheld and sustained. It governs all things – it directs all things – and has to do with all things that God and truth are associated with. It is the power of God delegated to intelligences in the heavens and of man on the earth. . . .

It is the channel through which the Almighty commenced revealing His glory at the beginning of the creation of the earth, and through which He has continued to reveal Himself to the children of men to the present time, and through which He will make known His purposes to the end of time.

. . . The Priesthood of the Son of God is the law by which the worlds are, were and will continue forever and ever. . . .

It is nothing more nor less than the power of God delegated to man by which men can act in the earth for the salvation of the human family, in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, and act legitimately; not assuming that authority, not borrowing it from generations that are dead and gone, but authority that has been given

<sup>3</sup> Guide to the Scriptures, *Priesthood*

<sup>4</sup> True to the Faith, page 124

in this day in which we live by ministering angels and spirits from above, direct from the presence of Almighty God, who have come to the earth in our day and restored the Priesthood to the children of men, by which they may baptize for the remission of sins and lay on hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost, and by which they can remit sin, with the sanction and blessing of Almighty God.<sup>5</sup>

It is my personal experience that when a Latter-day Saint man truly understands what he bears as a bearer of the priesthood, his first reaction is to go running and screaming from the room in panic – these are the men who eventually make worthy priesthood bearers. Those who, instead, smile and suddenly realize, in their own way of thinking, the so-called power and authority they can now press to their advantage and to make others do what they say – well, they are the ones the rest of us watch out for. They are the ones who prove that they do not understand.

Elder Bruce R. McConkie gave us a two-part definition worth reading:

As pertaining to eternity, priesthood is the eternal power and authority of Deity by which all things exist; by which they are created, governed, and controlled . . .

As pertaining to man's existence on this earth, priesthood is the power and authority of God delegated to man on earth for the salvation of men. . . .”<sup>6</sup>

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5 John Widtsoe, *Priesthood and Church Government*, pages 32-33; original punctuation preserved

6 Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, page 594

## Part Two: Keys, Authorities, and Powers

Sheri Dew, former member of the General Relief Society Presidency, has given us four quick, accurate bullet statements concerning keys, authorities, and powers of the priesthood:

Worthy priesthood bearers are not able to perform saving ordinances without the authorization of those who hold priesthood keys.

Priesthood keys authorize saving ordinances.

Priesthood authority is required to perform those ordinances.

Priesthood power is available to all who receive those ordinances.<sup>7</sup>

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### Authority and Keys

Some keys lock and unlock and control access. A Head Butler has the keys to the closet where the silver is kept as well as to the wine cellar, and he has authority to control the use of both. The Housekeeper has keys to the rest of the house and can gain access to any part of it she needs to – and she has the authority to grant others access as needed.

In many homes, the parents keep control of the keys to the family car. The teenagers may have been trained and licensed by their local government, but the parents still control their use of that licensing. The youth has to come to the parents, outline the proposed use of the family car, remind the parents of how responsible they have been in the past and how responsible they will be now and in the future. After the proper review of the situation, the parents make their decision and hand over the car keys. Or not.

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### Authority - and Keys of Authorization

Priesthood authority – the authority to act in the name of the Father and Son and Holy Spirit - is conferred upon a man when he is ordained to the priesthood. There are, however, some things he can and cannot do without authorization from those who hold certain keys.

There are some keys the father who is a priesthood bearer holds. As Patriarch of his family, he has the right to receive revelation for his family. He has the right to give blessings of health as well as blessings of comfort and guidance. It is assumed and expected that he will be the person to baptize and ordain his children, as authorized by the proper presiding leaders.

I do not need my bishop's authorization when a neighbor calls to ask me to help administer to a sick child. If I were to be in another's home and was asked by a member of that household for a blessing, however, I would certainly seek out the permission of the priesthood bearer who presided in that home.

But to perform an ordinance of salvation such as baptism, confirmation, and the conferring of the Gift of the Holy Ghost – such ordinances are administered by the bishop or branch president, and his authorization is required as he carries the keys for giving authorization to perform such ordinances.

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<sup>7</sup> Sheri Dew, *Women and the Priesthood*, page 114

These keys are alternately called the Keys of Salvation, the Keys of the Kingdom, or simply Priesthood Keys. These are the “directive powers whereby the Church or kingdom and all its organizations are governed . . . the powers of presidency.”<sup>8</sup>

The *True to the Faith* booklet teaches:

The exercise of priesthood authority in the Church is governed by those who hold priesthood keys (see D&C 65:2; 124:123). Those who hold priesthood keys have the right to preside over and direct the Church within a jurisdiction. For example, a bishop holds priesthood keys that enable him to preside in his ward. Therefore, when a child in that ward is prepared to be baptized, the person baptizing the child must receive authorization from the bishop.

Jesus Christ holds all the keys of the priesthood. He has given His Apostles the keys that are necessary for governing His Church. Only the senior Apostle, the President of the Church, may use (or authorize another person to use) these keys for governing the entire Church (see D&C 43:1–4; 81:2; 132:7).

The President of the Church delegates priesthood keys to other priesthood leaders so they can preside in their areas of responsibility. Priesthood keys are bestowed on presidents of temples, missions, stakes, and districts; bishops; branch presidents; and quorum presidents. A person who serves in one of these positions holds the keys only until he is released. Counselors do not receive keys, but they do receive authority and responsibility by calling and assignment.<sup>9</sup>

Another quote worth reading:

The Priesthood in general is the authority given to man to act for God. Every man ordained to any degree of the Priesthood, has the authority delegated to him.

But it is necessary that every act performed under this authority shall be done at the proper time and place, in the proper way, and after the proper order. The power of directing these labors constitutes the *keys* of the Priesthood. In their fullness, the keys are held by only one person at a time, the Prophet and President of the Church. He may delegate any portion of this power to another, in which case that person holds the keys of that particular labor [or assignment]. Thus the President of a temple, the President of a mission, the President of a quorum, each holds the keys of the labors performed in that particular body or locality. His Priesthood is not increased by this special appointment, for a Seventy who presides over a mission has no more Priesthood than a Seventy who labors under his direction; and the President of an Elders' quorum, for example, has no more Priesthood than any member of that quorum. But he holds the power of directing the official labors performed in the mission or the quorum, or in other words, the keys of that division of that work. So it is throughout all the ramifications of the Priesthood – a distinction must be carefully made between the general authority [that all priesthood

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<sup>8</sup> Mormon Doctrine, page 410

<sup>9</sup> True to the Faith, page 126-127

bearers have], and the directing of the labors performed by that authority.”<sup>10</sup>

As a priesthood holder, I have the authority to perform ordinances. But the bishop holds the keys which will authorize me to use that authority to perform an ordinance for which he is the officiating administrator - he is in control of how and if I perform those ordinances. Seven times I have presented myself to my bishop to be authorized to bless a newborn baby. I have later presented myself to gain his nod in baptizing and confirming those same children. Once I have obtained his nod for dedicating a baby's grave. Twenty times I have made the same trip to the bishop's or stake president's office to gain authorization for performing priesthood ordinations as my sons progressed in their priesthood offices. Each bishop and stake president involved has ensured the willingness and worthiness of the candidate, my worthiness to perform the ordinance, and he has made sure I knew how to perform the ordinance. Handbooks were opened to make sure we were both correct in how the ordinance was to be performed.

I have the authority to perform the ordinances, but the bishop and stake president have the keys to authorize the use of that authority and to ensure it was being done correctly and in proper order.

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## Authority by Assignment and Delegation

Although women do not hold priesthood keys, they have many opportunities to preside over an aspect of the Lord's work. Elder Dallin H. Oaks has taught:

Under the priesthood authority of the bishop, the president of a ward Relief Society presides over and directs the activities of the Relief Society in the ward. A stake Relief Society president presides and exercises authority over the functions to which she has been called. The same is true for the other auxiliaries. Similarly, women called as missionaries are set apart to go forth with authority to teach the everlasting gospel, and women called to work in a temple are given authority for the sacred functions to which they have been called. All function under the direction of the priesthood leader who has been given the priesthood keys to direct those who labor in his area of responsibility.<sup>11</sup>

Sheri Dew adds:

Men and women alike receive authority to serve under the direction of a priesthood leader who holds keys. Those who hold priesthood keys authorize and open the flow of priesthood power in behalf of *all* who serve under their direction.<sup>12</sup>

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It is of note that the Aaronic Priesthood holds the “keys of the ministering of angels, and to administer in outward ordinances, the letter of the gospel, the baptism of repentance for the remission of

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10 Priesthood and Church Government, page 195-196; underlining and notes in brackets by this author; original punctuation retained

11 as quoted in Women and the Priesthood, page 116

12 Women and the Priesthood, page 116

sins, agreeable to the covenants and commandments.<sup>13</sup> The bishop, as the president of the Aaronic Priesthood for his ward, has the keys to call down angels to help with the work of salvation going on within his stewardship!

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## Keys of Knowledge

The power and authority of the higher, or Melchizedek Priesthood, is to hold the keys of all the spiritual blessings of the church—To have the privilege of receiving the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, to have the heavens opened unto them, to commune with the general assembly and church of the Firstborn, and to enjoy the communion and presence of God the Father, and Jesus the mediator of the new covenant.”<sup>14</sup>

What have been called the Keys of Knowledge or the Keys of the Mysteries are what Elder McConkie called “the means provided whereby something is revealed, discovered, or made manifest.”<sup>15</sup>

Because the priesthood has been restored and is being exercised by those who have the authority, all baptized members of the Church – male or female, of all colors and ages and conditions – have the opportunity, through said priesthood, to receive the Gift of the Holy Ghost. The 'spiritual car keys' are handed to the person, and they have the privilege and right – and are expected to! - call upon the Father in the name of Jesus Christ and receive through the Holy Spirit all the protection, guidance, and knowledge they are fit and prepared to receive.

What is the Gift of the Holy Ghost?

The Holy Ghost is manifested to men on the earth both as the *power* of the Holy Ghost and as the *gift* of the Holy Ghost. The power can come upon one before baptism and is the convincing witness that the gospel is true. By the power of the Holy Ghost a person receives a testimony of Jesus Christ and of His work and the work of His servants upon the earth. The gift can come only after proper and authorized baptism and is conferred by the laying on of hands, as in Acts 8:12–25 and Moro. 2. The gift of the Holy Ghost is the right to have, whenever one is worthy, the companionship of the Holy Ghost. For those who receive this gift, the Holy Ghost acts as a cleansing agent to purify them and sanctify them from all sin. Thus it is often spoken of as “fire” (Matt. 3:11; 2 Ne. 31:17; D&C 19:31). The manifestation on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) was the gift of the Holy Ghost that came upon the Twelve, without which they were not ready for their ministries to the world.<sup>16</sup>

It is the right of every worthy baptized member of the Church to have the constant influence of the Holy Ghost. Following a person’s baptism into the true Church of Jesus Christ, he [or she] receives the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands from one

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13 Doctrine & Covenants 107:20

14 Doctrine and Covenants 107:18–19

15 Mormon Doctrine, page 410

16 Bible Dictionary, *Holy Ghost*

who has the proper authority (Acts 8:12–25; Moro. 2; D&C 39:23). Receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost is often spoken of as a baptism by fire (Matt. 3:11; D&C 19:31).<sup>17</sup>

Following in the wake of this gift of the companionship of the Holy Spirit, there are spiritual gifts – Gifts of the Spirit - that can be manifest in one's life. These are defined as -

Special spiritual blessings given by the Lord to worthy individuals for their own benefit and for them to use in blessing others. For a description of the gifts of the Spirit, study Doctrine and Covenants 46:[7]–33; 1 Corinthians 12:1–12; Moroni 10:8–18.<sup>18</sup>

It is of note that a bishop or other church leader is given the gift to discern the gifts those within their stewardship may have (Doctrine & Covenants 46:27) so they might call them to positions to use said gift, or so they may confront those claiming a gift but don't actually have it.

As a member of the Church continues making covenants and accepting commandments at the hands of authorized bearers of the priesthood, and then lives a life obedient to those covenants and commandments, spiritual strength continues to grow. Part of this strength is the opening of the mind to spiritual truths and realizations they otherwise would not have been in a spiritual condition to receive understand. They “shall find wisdom and great treasures of knowledge, even hidden treasures” (Doctrine and Covenants 89:19). We sometimes refer to this as the right and gift of revelation – of communion with the heavens. As we ponder the scriptures, as we pray and wait patiently for answers, as we leave ourselves open for the Spirit to whisper, things that are but mysteries to the uninitiated will come to our minds and hearts.

Mysteries of God are spiritual truths known only by revelation. God reveals His mysteries to those who are obedient to the gospel. Some of God's mysteries are yet to be revealed.<sup>19</sup>

['Mysteries'] denotes in the New Testament a spiritual truth that was once hidden but now is revealed and that without special revelation would have remained unknown. It is generally used along with words denoting revelation or publication (Rom. 16:25–26; Eph. 1:9; 3:3–10; Col. 1:26; 4:3; 1 Tim. 3:16). The modern meaning of something incomprehensible forms no part of the significance of the word as it occurs in the New Testament. See also Alma 12:9–11; 40:3; D&C 19:10; 42:61–65; 76:5–10. On the other hand, there is no spiritual gain in idle speculation about things the Lord has not revealed.<sup>20</sup>

These gifts and keys are given to all worthy men and women. They are available because the priesthood has been restored and because that person has accepted through an authorized bearer of the priesthood the conditions on which these gifts are given – the accepting of the Gospel, with all its covenants and commandments. Once these keys of knowledge have been given, it is up to each

17 Guide to the Scriptures, *Gift of the Holy Ghost*; comment added for clarification

18 Guide to the Scriptures, *Gifts of the Spirit*

19 Guide to the Scriptures, *Mysteries of God*

20 Bible Dictionary, *Mystery*



individual man and woman to develop their ability and receptiveness to them to allow them to bless their life – and to use to them correctly in order to bless the lives of all those around them.

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## Priesthood Power

What is Priesthood Power?

“I understand that there is a difference between priesthood authority and priesthood power. . . . All of us who hold the priesthood have the authority to act for the Lord, but the effectiveness of our authority—or if you please, the power that comes through that authority—depends on the pattern of our lives; it depends on our righteousness”<sup>21</sup>

How do Priesthood Bearers Develop Proper 'Power in the Priesthood'?

We must first have a desire to develop power in the priesthood. The scriptures teach that men receive from the Lord according to their desires (see Alma 29:4; D&C 4:3; 6:8; 7:1–3). . . .

We should strive to keep all the commandments of our Heavenly Father. By living righteously, we may have the Holy Ghost for our constant companion, and He will direct us to do the things we should do (see 2 Nephi 32:5). Righteous living includes learning to control our thoughts, words, and actions. . . .

“He that truly humbleth himself, and repenteth of his sins, and endureth to the end, the same shall be blessed” (Alma 32:15). We should be willing to accept and follow our leaders’ counsel, complete the assignments given to us by our priesthood leaders, and listen to and follow the promptings of the Spirit. Other ways we can show humility include (1) honestly considering the righteous desires of family members, even though they may not be exactly the same as our desires; (2) listening—even to the smallest child; (3) putting the welfare of the family ahead of our own comfort; and (4) speaking in a voice that always reflects our love and concern for others. . . .

We must search and ponder the scriptures. Only by studying the scriptures personally can we know God’s will and live the gospel. We also need to study our priesthood manuals in order to know our specific duties as priesthood holders. President George Albert Smith taught, “It is your duty first of all to learn what the Lord wants and then by the power and strength of His holy Priesthood to [so] magnify your calling . . . that the people will be glad to follow you” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1942, 14).

We must ask our Heavenly Father what He would have us do. We should always pray for guidance in using the priesthood correctly. Concerning the power of prayer, President Gordon B. Hinckley taught: “Prayer unlocks the powers of heaven in our behalf. Prayer is the great gift which our Eternal Father has given us by which we may approach Him and speak with Him in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Be prayerful. You cannot make it alone. You cannot reach your potential alone. You need the help of the Lord”

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21 Elder H. Burke Peterson, April 1976 General Conference; Ensign, May 1976, page 33; underlining by this author

(Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley [1997], 470). . . .

Jesus Christ has taught us that the power of the priesthood is founded on love and that we should love all people (see D&C 121:41–42, 45–46). Love begins at home. We should love our families and be concerned for their welfare. One way we show our love for our family members is by using the priesthood to direct and bless their lives. . . .

When we use the priesthood, we are examples to other priesthood holders, to the world, and, perhaps most importantly, to our families. As our family members see us use the priesthood, they will know that we are servants of the Lord and will come to us when they need help. All families should experience the blessings which come when fathers and sons use the priesthood for the benefit of their families.<sup>22</sup>

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## Power *because of* the Priesthood – Divine Empowerment

There is in reality an *empowerment* that comes into our lives because of the Priesthood. Sister Dew wrote -

. . . I wince when I hear a priesthood leader say, usually in a Relief Society meeting or a women's conference of some kind, "I want to leave a blessing with each of you, particularly for those who don't have the priesthood in their home." As an unmarried but endowed woman, I do not have a priesthood bearer in my home, but do I have access to priesthood power in my home. While being unmarried is a source of personal sadness and loneliness . . . it does not leave me (or any other endowed woman who lives alone but who understands what she has been endowed with) as defenseless and powerless as some apparently believe.<sup>23</sup>

Any man, woman, or child who has been baptized, and has received the Gift of the Holy Ghost, has been made clean and pure in the sight of God through the power and authority of the Priesthood. They have been given the Holy Spirit as a guide through life. They have been empowered to receive divine help, instruction, knowledge, and protection as they live worthy of that companionship.

Any man or woman who has accepted commandments and covenants as administered by authorized bearers of the Priesthood, and then live in accordance with those commandments and covenants, become empowered to call upon the promised blessings to enrich their life.

Those men and women who qualify and enter the holy temple receive an endowment of knowledge, empowerment, and blessings by making further covenants with their Heavenly Father – which do not require bearing the priesthood to put them into effect in their life – okay, it does require the men to be ordained to the priesthood – a responsibility not required of the women as the Lord has purposes for them that point towards a different mission.

A woman is blessed with every blessing a holder of the priesthood is blessed with while fulfilling a different mission in life. Again, from Sister Dew:

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<sup>22</sup> Duties and Blessings of the Priesthood, Part A, page 4-6

<sup>23</sup> Women and the Priesthood, page 121

Priesthood power heals, blesses, protects, and inoculates all of the father's righteous sons and daughters against the powers of darkness. It has the power to separate and safeguard us from the world, to subdue the adversary and help us surmount obstacles, to enlarge our physical and spiritual capacity and enable us to hear the voice of the Lord, to strengthen marriages and families and bind us to each other and to the Lord, and to allow us to triumph over mortality and come unto Him. These blessings may be received by every righteous son and daughter. . .

. . . we can receive revelation, be blessed and aided by the ministering of angels, learn to part the veil that separates us from our Heavenly Father, be strengthened to resist temptation, be protected, and be enlightened and made smarter than we are – all with out mortal intermediary.<sup>24</sup>

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## Honoring the Priesthood

To honor something or someone is to show courtesy and dignity toward the thing or person being honored – through thought, word, and deed.

The priesthood is the power of God. As such, it is the greatest power on earth. We can honor the priesthood by remembering that we hold the authority of God and that the Lord requires that we honor that authority. We bear the priesthood with dignity when we obey the commandments and do all we can to be righteous.<sup>25</sup>

At the 1971 British Area General Conference, President Harold B. Lee related the following story about Elder Hugh B. Brown as he served as a young officer in the Canadian Army:

“As a young officer, [Elder Hugh B. Brown] was permitted to go to an officer's place of entertainment, and it was not the kind of entertainment that one of a Latter-day Saint background and training would wish to engage in. As he walked around somewhat lonely, he noticed that sitting away on the side, seemingly not enjoying it either, was a young British officer. So he walked around to where this young British officer was, and he said, “You don't seem to enjoying this kind of a party, this drinking and this carrying on, and these woman dancers.” He said, “this young man stood up, and I thought he straightened up inches taller the he usually was, and he said, “No, sir, I can't engage in this kind of activity because I am a member of the royal household of England. I can't stoop to this kind of thing.”

And as this young British officer walked away, Brother Brown said, “Neither can I because I am a member of the Royal House of God”<sup>26</sup>

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24 Women and the Priesthood, page 125

25 Duties and Blessings of the Priesthood, Part B, page 25

26 A Royal Priesthood: A Personal Study Guide (Salt Lake City, Utah, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1975) pag vi

Several prophets have taught us how to honor and to bring dignity to the priesthood we bear:

President Harold B. Lee counseled: “We must say, ‘Because I am a holder of the priesthood of the living God, I am a representative of our Heavenly Father and hold the priesthood by which He can work through me; I can’t stoop to do some of the things that I might have done otherwise because of my fellowship with the priesthood of God. . . .’

“And that is what the holders of the priesthood must say to themselves: ‘We can’t be holders of the priesthood and be like other men. We must be different’” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1973, 115; or Ensign, Jan. 1974, 97). . . .

Church leaders have given much instruction on how members should honor the priesthood. President Brigham Young said that “men who [hold] the holy Priesthood, who are charged with words of eternal life to the world, should strive continually in their words and actions . . . to do honor to the great dignity of their calling and office as ministers and representatives of the Most High” (Discourses of Brigham Young, sel. John A. Widtsoe [1954], 130).

President David O. McKay said: “God bless you men of the priesthood. May you hold it with dignity and righteousness that comes from within, not from without. To hold the priesthood of God by divine authority is one of the greatest gifts that can come to a man. He is greatly blessed who feels the responsibility of representing Deity. He should feel it to such an extent that he is conscious of his actions and words under all conditions” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1967, 152–53; or Improvement Era, Dec. 1967, 109).

Elder Robert L. Simpson explained:

“To bear the priesthood of God with dignity means . . . that we move about with a quiet dignity, not only at the sacrament table but also at work, at school, and even as Dad walks along the roadway on his way to work; we are priesthood holders; we are different, not particularly better than anyone else, but we’re different.”<sup>27</sup>

The following instructions have been given to the beloved women of the Church:

Just as everyone in the Church benefits from the priesthood, so everyone is responsible for honoring and sustaining the priesthood. . . . Women are likewise counseled to honor the priesthood, to be grateful for its power, and to show respect to those who hold it. We are also responsible to support the priesthood. To support means “to promote the interests or cause of; . . . to uphold or defend as valid or right”.<sup>28</sup>

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## Magnifying the Priesthood

*Magnifying the Priesthood* and *Magnifying your Callings* are two phrases that each and every priesthood bearer I've met has their own theory as to what they mean. I'm grateful to have found a couple of explanations.

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<sup>27</sup> Duties and Blessings of the Priesthood, Part B, page 24-25

<sup>28</sup> The Latter-day Saint Woman, Page 92

When I was a teenager, my favorite use for a magnifying glass was to start campfires. Well-meaning scout leaders felt we should know how to start a fire without the use of matches or butane lighters, and it only took one attempt to rub sticks together long enough to make fire to convert me to the magic of concentrated solar energy. A generation later, my sons discovered that clothes dryer lint was the most dry, flammable material available and, coupled with their own dime-store magnifying glasses, they could nearly start forest fires.

Today, as a grandfather, I have a plastic strip I use as a bookmark in my scriptures which magnifies the footnotes – bringing them into focus so I can read and learn. For other reading purposes, I have a large blue-framed magnifying glass with LED lights on one side to shed light on whatever it is I'm trying to bring into focus. It also helps me read the fine print on medicine bottles. On dark nights and during power outages, I've used this magnifying glass with LED lights as a flashlight to find my way around my dark house.

But the question still lingers -

What does it mean to magnify a calling? It means to build it up in dignity and importance, to make it honorable and commendable in the eyes of all men, to enlarge and strengthen it, to let the light of heaven shine through it to the view of other men.

And how does one magnify a calling? Simply by performing the service that pertains to it. An elder magnifies the ordained calling of an elder by learning what his duties as an elder are and then by doing them. As with an elder, so with a deacon, a teacher, a priest, a bishop, and each who holds office in the priesthood.<sup>29</sup>

We magnify our priesthood and enlarge our calling when we serve with diligence and enthusiasm in those responsibilities to which we are called by proper authority. . . . We magnify our calling, we enlarge the potential of our priesthood when we reach out to those in distress and give strength to those who falter. . . . We magnify our calling when we walk with honesty and integrity<sup>30</sup>

When a man is set apart to administer in any of the offices of the Priesthood, if he magnifies his calling and lives in the spirit of it, his authority in that sphere is unquestionable, his councils are the dictates of inspiration, and they will impart life and salvation to all who will follow them.<sup>31</sup>

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## Exercising the Priesthood

Let's read some dictionary definitions for the word *exercise*. First, as a noun, it can mean:

- 1) An act of employing or putting into play or use;
- 2) The discharge of a duty, function, or office;
- 3) Activity that requires physical or mental exertion;
- 4) A task, problem, or other

<sup>29</sup> Pres. Thomas S. Monson, April 2005 Priesthood Session

<sup>30</sup> Pres. Gordon B. Hinkley, April 1989 General Conference, Ensign, May 1989, 48–49

<sup>31</sup> Priesthood and Church Government, page 236

effort performed to develop or maintain fitness or increase skill; 5) An activity having a specified aspect: an undertaking that was an exercise in futility.

As a verb – an action word – it can mean -

1) To put into play or operation; employ: Proceed, but exercise caution; 2) To bring to bear; 3) a. To subject to practice or exertion in order to train, strengthen, or develop; b. To put through exercises: exercise a platoon.

When I was a young boy in school, our textbooks didn't have *questions* at the end of each chapter – they had *exercises*. They made our brain work hard to recall what we'd just learned. These exercises also made us practice what we'd just learned.

Muscles need to be exercised or they go flabby and useless. The family dog needs to be exercised to stay in top form and to do their job of guarding the family and the property.

In the Old Testament we read: “I *am* the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness. . .” (Jeremiah 9:24) The Apostle Paul declared: “And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and *toward* men.” (Acts 24:16) He went on to instruct us: “But refuse profane and old wives’ fables, and exercise thyself *rather* unto godliness.” (1 Timothy 4:7) Also: “For every one that useth milk *is* unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, *even* those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.” (Hebrews 5:13–14)

Lehi in the Book of Mormon admonished his sons: “Yea, and how is it that ye have forgotten that the Lord is able to do all things according to his will, for the children of men, if it so be that they exercise faith in him? Wherefore, let us be faithful to him.” (1 Nephi 7:12) The Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants tell of both wicked and righteous men who exercised authority, exercised faith, exercised the prayer of faith . . . and, unfortunately, exercised unrighteous dominion.

Practice makes perfect. Exercise builds up strength, stamina, endurance, confidence, ability, and Faith in the task for which your are exercising.

The scariest moment in the life of any priesthood bearer is the first time they are called upon to administer a blessing. The weight of Eternity is upon them as they step into such unknown waters. Fortunately, the experienced father or other priesthood bearer is standing next to them, whispering instructions and giving encouragement. The second blessing is easier; the third one even more so. Why? Because they have exercised their ability to perform the ordinance correctly. They have exercised their faith and ability in listening for the promptings of the Holy Spirit. They have gained confidence that they can properly represent their Father in Heaven. They come to realize that their Father in Heaven does not send down lightning bolts for pronouncing a word strangely.

A priesthood bearer who exercises the priesthood he bears is not afraid when called upon to bless other's lives. His faith that the Holy Spirit will give him guidance turns into knowledge. He is literally able to receive revelation and pass it on to the person he is serving.

It is said that a bearer of the priesthood does nothing to bless their own life – they give all in the blessing of other people's lives. But as a bearer of the priesthood I must say that I feel blessed each and every time I exercise the priesthood. I become a better man. I become more grateful for the faith my Father has in me. I gain the desire to not disappoint my Father in Heaven and to strive to be what He

wants me to be. My heart is opened and I gain a desire to love and assist all those around me. I become a better Christian.

The scariest moment in the life of any priesthood bearer is the first time they are called upon to administer a blessing. The most glorious moment in a priesthood bearer's life is when they are assisting their sons through their first administering of a blessing. A sacred torch is handed from one generation to the next, and the father realizes that the torch is going to be in good hands, even if the son isn't quite convinced.

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## Part Three: Patriarchs and Matriarchs

NOTE: In this section we will be using the words *husband* and *wife*. To clarify, *husband* refers to a righteous, priesthood-bearing husband who is striving to keep his covenants and obey the commandments. The word *wife* refers to a righteous wife who is doing the same.

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“The Family: A Proclamation to the World” has important statements concerning the organization of the Man, the Woman, and the Family:

All human beings - male and female - are created in the image of God. Each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and, as such, each has a divine nature and destiny. Gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose. . . .

Husband and wife have a solemn responsibility to love and care for each other and for their children. . . .

The family is ordained of God. Marriage between man and woman is essential to His eternal plan. Children are entitled to birth within the bonds of matrimony, and to be reared by a father and a mother who honor marital vows with complete fidelity. Happiness in family life is most likely to be achieved when founded upon the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ. Successful marriages and families are established and maintained on principles of faith, prayer, repentance, forgiveness, respect, love, compassion, work, and wholesome recreational activities. . . .

By divine design, fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness and are responsible to provide the necessities of life and protection for their families. Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children. In these sacred responsibilities, fathers and mothers are obligated to help one another as equal partners. Disability, death, or other circumstances may necessitate individual adaptation. Extended families should lend support when needed.

That a man and a woman must join together and learn to become One is expressed in the scriptures:

Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord. For as the woman *is* of the man, even so *is* the man also by the woman; but all things of God.<sup>32</sup>

Although the two following passages from the Doctrine and Covenants are filled with masculine nouns and pronouns, as was proper when speaking of both genders, this law applies to both men and women:

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32 1 Corinthians 11:11–12



In the celestial glory there are three heavens or degrees; And in order to obtain the highest, a man must enter into this order of the priesthood [meaning the new and everlasting covenant of marriage]; And if he does not, he cannot obtain it. He may enter into the other, but that is the end of his kingdom; he cannot have an increase.<sup>33</sup>

Therefore, if a man marry him a wife in the world, and he marry her not by me nor by my word, and he covenant with her so long as he is in the world and she with him, their covenant and marriage are not of force when they are dead, and when they are out of the world; therefore, they are not bound by any law when they are out of the world. Therefore, when they are out of the world they neither marry nor are given in marriage; but are appointed angels in heaven, which angels are ministering servants, to minister for those who are worthy of a far more, and an exceeding, and an eternal weight of glory. For these angels did not abide my law; therefore, they cannot be enlarged, but remain separately and singly, without exaltation, in their saved condition, to all eternity; and from henceforth are not gods, but are angels of God forever and ever.

And again, verily I say unto you, if a man marry a wife, and make a covenant with her for time and for all eternity, if that covenant is not by me or by my word, which is my law, and is not sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise, through him whom I have anointed and appointed unto this power, then it is not valid neither of force when they are out of the world, because they are not joined by me, saith the Lord, neither by my word; when they are out of the world it cannot be received there, because the angels and the gods are appointed there, by whom they cannot pass; they cannot, therefore, inherit my glory; for my house is a house of order, saith the Lord God.

And again, verily I say unto you, if a man marry a wife by my word, which is my law, and by the new and everlasting covenant, and it is sealed unto them by the Holy Spirit of promise, by him who is anointed, unto whom I have appointed this power and the keys of this priesthood; and it shall be said unto them—Ye shall come forth in the first resurrection; and if it be after the first resurrection, in the next resurrection; and shall inherit thrones, kingdoms, principalities, and powers, dominions, all heights and depths—then shall it be written in the Lamb's Book of Life, that he shall commit no murder whereby to shed innocent blood, and if ye abide in my covenant, and commit no murder whereby to shed innocent blood, it shall be done unto them in all things whatsoever my servant hath put upon them, in time, and through all eternity; and shall be of full force when they are out of the world; and they shall pass by the angels, and the gods, which are set there, to their exaltation and glory in all things, as hath been sealed upon their heads, which glory shall be a fulness and a continuation of the seeds forever and ever.

Then shall they be gods, because they have no end; therefore shall they be from everlasting to everlasting, because they continue; then shall they be above all, because all things are subject unto them. Then shall they be gods, because they have all power, and the angels are subject unto them.

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33 Doctrine and Covenants 131:1–4

Verily, verily, I say unto you, except ye abide my law ye cannot attain to this glory.<sup>34</sup>

Elder David A. Bednar explained:

After the earth was created, Adam was placed in the Garden of Eden. Importantly, however, God said “it was not good that the man should be alone” (Moses 3:18; see also Genesis 2:18), and Eve became Adam’s wife and helpmeet. The unique combination of spiritual, physical, mental, and emotional capacities of both males and females was needed to enact the plan of happiness. “Neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 11:11). The man and the woman are intended to learn from, strengthen, bless, and complete each other.<sup>35</sup>

Of the roles of men and women, one Apostle has said:

Men and women have different but equally valued roles. Just as a woman cannot conceive a child without a man, so a man cannot fully exercise the power of the priesthood to establish an eternal family without a woman . . . In the eternal perspective, both the procreative power and the priesthood power are shared by a husband and wife.<sup>36</sup>

Elder Bruce R. McConkie has taught that -

In the true Patriarchal Order man holds the priesthood and is the head of the household of faith, but he cannot attain a fulness of joy here or of eternal reward hereafter alone. Woman stands at his side a joint-inheritor with him in the fulness of all things. Exaltation and eternal increase is her lot as well as his. (D. & C. 131:1–4.) Godhood is not for men only; it is for men and women together. (D. & C. 132:19–20)<sup>37</sup>

Sister Dew has noted that -

It may well be that some of the *most* defining tests of mortality involve issues that swirl around gender, including how men feel about and treat women; how women feel about and treat men; how men feel about manhood and women feel about womanhood; and how all regard and honor priesthood keys, priesthood authority and priesthood power. Having a witness that Heavenly Father's plan and the Lord's church are perfectly constructed to give us the maximum potential for achieving our eternal destiny is foundational to passing these tests.<sup>38</sup>

Elder John Widtsoe wrote that -

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34 Doctrine and Covenants 132:15–21

35 April 2013 General Conference; ENSIGN Magazine, May 2013, page 41-42

36 As quoted in Women and the Priesthood, page 107

37 Mormon Doctrine, page 844

38 Women and the Priesthood, page 113

The Priesthood is for the benefit of all members of the Church. Men have no greater claim than women upon the blessings that issue from the Priesthood and accompany its possession.

Woman does not hold the priesthood, but she is a partaker of the blessings of the Priesthood. That is, the man holds the Priesthood, performs the priestly duties of the Church, but his wife enjoys with him every other privilege derived from the possession of the Priesthood. This is made clear, as an example, in the Temple service of the Church. The ordinances of the Temple are distinctly of Priesthood character, yet women have access to all of them, and the highest blessings of the Temple are conferred only upon a man and his wife jointly”<sup>39</sup>

“How?” I have asked myself all my life; how does a woman share in the blessings of the priesthood her husband bears? Because that's how I have been taught all my life – “the wife shares in the blessings of her husband's priesthood.” (Although we do clearly understand it's not her husband's priesthood; it's the priesthood of God, who shares it with His children.) At the greying-white age of Grandparenthood, I am finally finding the words to express the answers – hopefully others won't have to wait as long to understand.

When a man and woman kneel across from each other at a temple altar to receive the ordinance of Marriage, that man become a Patriarch in a very real, Old Testament sense. It is as if those gathered around the bride and groom has heard the calling extended and have raised their hands in support and sustaining of the calling. His prime priesthood duty from that day forward is to preside over his family in righteousness and to provide for their needs and to protect them from the world.

The bride, whose hand the groom is hesitant to let go of, has the calling of Matriarch extended. Under the priesthood authority of her husband, she is called to preside over and direct the nurturing, maternal activities of the family. She receives this “authority and responsibility by calling and assignment”<sup>40</sup> without it being verbally said, but she receives it nonetheless.

As she exercises this authority in righteousness, she receives the same blessings of all those who work under the direction and authority of the priesthood.

Both the husband and the wife sustain, support, comfort, and strength each other in their respective priesthood callings as equal partners before God. The husband does not rule the wife in any way but in love, kindness, tenderness, and compassion. The wife does not rule the husband in any way but in love, kindness, tenderness, and compassion.

Let's read a passage by the Apostle Paul:

“Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing.

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such

39 Priesthood and Church Government, page 83

40 True to the Faith, page 127

thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh.”<sup>41</sup>

The husband is the head of the wife in the respect that he is the presiding priesthood authority in the home. She reports her priesthood stewardship to him, and as one they discuss, counsel, and then act as one. This doesn't stop her from seeking guidance through prayer, but when they act, they act as one. As the Lord has instructed, “be one; and if ye are not one ye are not mine.” (Doctrine and Covenants 38:27)

He may be the chairman, but she is an equal member of the committee. He treats her as Christ treated the Church – for goodness sakes, he treats her as Christ treated women during his mortal ministry! He treats her with love, kindness, tenderness, and compassion.

Just as the Church is subject to the presiding authority of Christ as its Head, so the wife is subject to her righteous husband's priesthood leadership. She hearkens (listens and follows) to his counsel and guidance. As Matriarch, it is her priesthood calling to in turn guide and counsel her husband, remembering that he is also her equal. (After all, doesn't the Relief Society president counsel and guide the bishop in matters concerning the women of the congregation?) All she does towards her husband is done with love, kindness, tenderness, and compassion.

A wise husband knows his most important priesthood authority hinges on how he treats his wife. Mistreat, bully, or abuse her, and his authority comes to an end.

A wise wife understands her priesthood authority is delegated to her by her husband. She knows that if she mistreats, abuses, or bullies him, she mistreats, abuses, or bullies the source of her authority in the home, and her *righteous* authority comes to an end.

So, how do we have “power” in our home and over those in it?

The mother of the Apostles James and John came to Jesus, asking that her two sons might always stand beside Him; one on the left and one on the right. Jesus' reply was that she did not know what she was asking – those who sat there would have trials she could not comprehend. The other Apostles heard about this, and they were a tad bit put out. Jesus turned this into a teaching moment:

. . . Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief<sup>42</sup> among you, let him be your servant<sup>43</sup>: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.<sup>44</sup>

Sometime later, as Jesus and his disciples were readying for the Passover meal which would be Jesus' last meal with his disciples, this dispute over who was the greatest came up again. I would hope

41 Ephesians 5:22-31

42 Greek: *protos*: *foremost* (in time, place, order or importance)

43 Greek: *doúlos* : a *slave* (literally or figuratively, involuntary or voluntary; frequently therefore in a qualified sense of *subjection* or *subserviency*)

44 Matthew 20:25–28; see also Mark 10:42-45

they were merely trying to establish who was the eldest and who was the youngest for the roles they would enact in the Passover meal. Christ again taught:

. . . The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye *shall* not *be* so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve. For whether *is* greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? *is* not he that sitteth at meat? but I am among you as he that serveth.<sup>45</sup>

As a demonstration of this teaching, the Scriptures say that -

Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God; He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. After that he poureth water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe *them* with the towel wherewith he was girded.<sup>46</sup>

The washing of a guest's feet was performed by the lowliest and least-favored of a household's servants; certainly not by the Son of God! But as their presiding priesthood authority, He set the example we all must follow in serving one another.

Whether you are a mother and wife who expects absolute obedience, a husband and father who demands the same, a person wounded by Life who thinks being 'in charge' and 'in control' is the only way to protect yourself, or any other person who feels you are the one who is to be in charge, be obeyed, and be the center of Life as we know it, the Lord has spoken in these modern times especially to you. And now that we understand that both the husband and the wife's righteous authority in the home is in fact priesthood authority, let us ignore the gender-specific language of one of the most important priesthood-related revelations in all of scripture and read it, applying it to our role in the governing of our homes:

Behold, there are many called, but few are chosen. And why are they not chosen? Because their hearts are set so much upon the things of this world, and aspire to the honors of men, that they do not learn this one lesson—That the rights of the priesthood are inseparably connected with the powers of heaven, and that the powers of heaven cannot be controlled nor handled only upon the principles of righteousness. That they may be conferred upon us, it is true; but when we undertake to cover our sins, or to gratify our pride, our vain ambition, or to exercise control or dominion or compulsion upon the souls of the children of men, in any degree of unrighteousness, behold, the heavens withdraw themselves; the Spirit of the Lord is grieved; and when it is withdrawn, Amen to the priesthood or the authority of that man. Behold, ere he is aware, he is left unto himself, to kick against the pricks, to persecute the saints, and to fight against God.

We have learned by sad experience that it is the nature and disposition of almost all men, as soon as they get a little authority, as they suppose, they will immediately begin to

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45 Luke 22:24–27

46 John 13:3–5

exercise unrighteous dominion. Hence many are called, but few are chosen.

No power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood, only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned; By kindness, and pure knowledge, which shall greatly enlarge the soul without hypocrisy, and without guile— Repeating betimes with sharpness, when moved upon by the Holy Ghost; and then showing forth afterwards an increase of love toward him whom thou hast reprov'd, lest he esteem thee to be his enemy; That he may know that thy faithfulness is stronger than the cords of death.

Let thy bowels also be full of charity towards all men, and to the household of faith, and let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly; then shall thy confidence wax strong in the presence of God; and the doctrine of the priesthood shall distil upon thy soul as the dews from heaven. The Holy Ghost shall be thy constant companion, and thy scepter an unchanging scepter of righteousness and truth; and thy dominion shall be an everlasting dominion, and without compulsory means it shall flow unto thee forever and ever.<sup>47</sup>

Any husband or wife who seeks to rule and command their home by any other means than what is outlined in this passage puts an end to their priesthood authority and is exercising unrighteous dominion. They have become instead bullies and abusers of their spouse and their children.

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47 Doctrine and Covenants 121:34–46

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