For ten years Acting Patriarchs were called who were not in the direct hereditary line. They included Nicholas G. Smith (October 1932 to October 1934), Frank B. Woodbury (June 1935 to October 1937), and George F. Richards (October 1937 to October 1942).

The call returned to the hereditary line on October 3, 1942, with the call of Elder Joseph Fielding Smith (1899–1964), a great-grandson of Hyrum Smith. He was released at his own request on October 7, 1946, because of poor health. Eldred G. Smith, eldest son of Hyrum Gibbs Smith, was called in April 1947.

In 1979 the office of Patriarch to the Church was retired "because of the large increase in the number of stake patriarchs and the availability of patriarchal service throughout the world." Eldred G. Smith was designated "a Patriarch Emeritus, which means that he is honorably relieved of all duties and responsibilities pertaining to the office of Patriarch to the Church" (CR [Oct. 1979]:25).

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CALVIN R. STEPHENS

Patriarchal Blessings

The practice of a father blessing his sons and daughters can be traced from earliest times. Adam, as the first patriarch and father of the human race, blessed his son Seth, promising that "his posterity should be the chosen of the Lord, and that they should be preserved unto the end of the earth" (D&C 107:42). Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob blessed their children, opening up a vision of their inheritance and their destinies (e.g., Gen. 28:4; 49:3–27).

Each family in the Church, and the larger family that is the Church, perpetuates this heritage. Members have the right to go to the stake patriarch for a Church blessing. Stake patriarchs are ordained wherever the Church is organized that all may have this privilege.

Patriarchal blessings are given by the authority of the Melchizedek Priesthood which "is to hold the keys of all the spiritual blessings of the Church" (D&C 107:18).

When God covenanted with Abraham that through his posterity all the families of the earth would be blessed, he promised "the blessings of the Gospel, which are the blessings of salvation, even of life eternal" (Abr. 2:11). The scope of these promises, both here and hereafter, is outlined in modern day scripture:

Abraham received promises concerning his seed, and of the fruit of his loins . . . which were to continue so long as they were in the world; and as touching Abraham and his seed, out of the world they should continue . . . . This promise is yours also, because ye are of Abraham, and the promise was made unto Abraham [D&C 132:30–31].

An essential part of a patriarchal blessing is a declaration of lineage. The patriarch seeks inspiration to specify the dominant family line that leads back to Abraham. The majority of modern blessings have designated Ephraim or Manasseh as the main link in this tracing, but others of every tribe of Israel have also been named. Whether this is a pronouncement of blood inheritance or of adoption does not matter (see Abr. 2:10). It is seen as the line and legacy through which one's blessings are transmitted. Thus the blessings "of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" are conferred.

In addition, as the patriarch seeks the spirit he may be moved to give admonitions, promises, and assurances. Individual traits of personality and strengths and weaknesses may be mentioned. Against the backdrop of the prophetic anticipation of world events, individual roles and callings may be named. One's spiritual gifts, talents, skills, and potentials may be specified with their associated obligations of gratitude and dedication. Karl G. Maeser described these blessings as "paragraphs from the book of one's possibilities" (Alma P. Burton, Karl G. Maeser: Mormon Educator, p. 82 [Salt Lake City, 1953]).

It is continually taught in the Church that the fulfillment of patriarchal blessings, as of all divine promises, is conditioned on the faith and works of the individual. Typically, blessings close with such a statement as, "I pronounce these blessings upon your head according to your faith and your diligence in keeping the commandments of the Lord."

The practice of giving patriarchal blessings is a constant reminder of the honor and glory of family; that one is not alone and that every person stands on the shoulders of those who have gone before. They prompt those who receive blessings to "look unto Abraham, your father," (2 Ne. 8:2) to "do the
works of Abraham” (D&C 132:32; cf. John 8:39), to be willing to be “chastened and tried even as Abraham” (D&C 101:4), and to recognize that Abraham’s willingness in offering up his son was “a similitude of God and his Only Begotten Son” (Jacob 4:5). In short, the command to honor one’s father and mother does not end with death, nor with the unfolding growth of the human family.

All patriarchal blessings are recorded and transcribed; copies are preserved in official Church archives and by the recipient. They are held sacred by those receiving them.

In the history of Israel, as of the Latter-day Saints, the moving appeal of these blessings is inestimable. They open many doors to self-awareness. They have inspired men and women of renown, as well as those in the most obscure and remote places, to lose themselves in a realization of mission; to serve and give in the spirit of consecration. They have been a strength amidst the tests and temptations of life, a comfort in the darkness of bereavement and loss, and an anchor in stormy days, a “daily help in all the affairs of life” (Widtsoe, p. 74).

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WILLIAM JAMES MORTIMER

Patriarchal Order of the Priesthood

To Latter-day Saints, the patriarchal order of the priesthood is the organizing power and principle of celestial family life. It is the ultimate and ideal form of government. It answers the query of Elder Parley P. Pratt: “Who can endure to be forever banished and separated from father, mother, wife, children and every kindred affection and from every family tie?” (Pratt, Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine 23 [Apr. 1932]:59).

In the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints there are two priesthood divisions: the Aaronic and the Melchizedek. The highest order of the Melchizedek Priesthood is patriarchal authority. The order was divinely established with father Adam and mother Eve. They are the fount and progenitors of all living, and they will appear at the culmination of earth’s history at the head of the whole sealed family of the redeemed. The promises given to Abraham and Sarah pertain to this same order.

Three principles underlie the patriarchal order. First, the primal parents of the race were in their paradisiacal state in Eden united in eternal bonds before death entered their lives. Second, the fall of man and the continual source of degeneration in this world have resulted in the estrangement of parents from God, from each other, and from their children. Third, the healing of this broken harmony is the essence of eternal life, as is the perpetuation of powers of creation and procreation—eternal increase.

The patriarchal order is, in the words of Elder James E. Talmage, a condition where “woman shares with man the blessings of the Priesthood,” where husband and wife minister, “seeing and understanding alike, and cooperating to the full in the government of their family kingdom” (Young Woman’s Journal 25 [Oct. 1914]:602–603). A man cannot hold this priesthood without a wife, and a woman cannot share the blessings of this priesthood without a husband, sealed in the temple.

Concerning patriarchal authority, the Prophet Joseph Smith admonished the Saints: “Go to and finish the [Nauvoo] temple, and God will fill it with power, and you will receive more knowledge concerning this priesthood” (TPJS, p. 323, cf. D&C 107:18, 20). This priesthood and its associated powers were introduced in Nauvoo, Illinois, in 1843. It was first conferred upon the first presidency, the apostles, and their wives (WJS, pp. 244–45).

Today dedicated husbands and wives enter this order in the temple in a covenant with God. The blessings of this priesthood are given only to husbands and wives together. Their covenants extend beyond this life (D&C 76:59, 60), beyond death (D&C 132:20–24), and into the resurrection, to eternal lives, the eternal giving and receiving of life.

Thus united, they work in love, faith, and harmony for the glorification of their family. If they are not united in obedient love, if they are not one, they are not of the Lord. Eventually, through this order, families will be linked in indissoluble bonds all the way back to the first parents, and all the way forward to the last child born into this world. This priesthood order will be both the means and the end of reconciliation, redemption, peace, joy, and eternal life.

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