Ghost, or recorded in heaven (D&C 132:7). The sealing power, the power to bind on earth and in heaven (Matt. 16:19; 18:18; D&C 132:46), belongs solely to the priesthood of God; and proper baptism, the gift of the Holy Ghost, the holy endowment, eternal marriage, and family sealings come only through the authorized servants of the Lord. Through these powers and authorities of the holy priesthood, the work of salvation proceeds as it was planned in the grand councils of heaven before the world was.

Under the direction and authority of the priesthood in this last dispensation, the Dispensation of the Fulness of Times, the work of the priesthood includes proclaiming the gospel, perfecting the Saints, and performing ordinances for the redemption of the dead. Priesthood bearers are charged to teach the gospel to all nations and peoples, to proclaim the knowledge of salvation. Doing this missionary work is a responsibility of all members of the Church, and a particular obligation for bearers of the priesthood. They are also charged to watch over the Saints everywhere, to labor to increase faith, understanding, and testimony, and to improve the spiritual welfare and physical comfort of all who will receive them. Priesthood bearers are further charged to “redeem the dead” through the sealing power of the priesthood (D&C 128:14–18). Latter-day Saints are taught and encouraged to seek out the names and records of their dead progenitors, to actively engage in genealogical research, to turn their hearts to their ancestors, that every individual may be sealed by sacred temple ordinances in eternal families and ultimately in the family of Adam, which becomes the family of Jesus Christ (D&C 39:4–6; 42:52).

Essentially and eternally, the work of the priesthood is the work of Christ delegated to righteous servants. “This is my work and my glory,” the Lord said to Moses, “to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39). The work of priesthood is to assist in bringing souls to Christ and thereby to exaltation in the kingdom of the Father.

Achieving the fulness of the priesthood of the Son of God is the great goal of all faithful Latter-day Saints, because it is the power of God unto salvation and eternal lives. It is the power by which mortal bodies will be resurrected immortal, to be possessed forever by the spirits who dwelt in them, glorified by God according to their works while in mortality. It is the power by which eternal joy may be attained, but always and only through obedience to the laws and principles of righteousness as exemplified and taught by the Savior.

BIBLIOGRAPHY
Smith, Joseph F. GD. Salt Lake City, 1919.

RICHARD G. ELLSWORTH
MELVIN J. LUTHY

PRIESTHOOD IN BIBLICAL TIMES

Throughout the biblical period, God called prophets and other servants to direct his work and to be his authorized representatives by sharing his power or priesthood with them. Through that priesthood, God administered his spiritual and temporal kingdom on earth, taught redeeming gospel truths, and provided saving ordinances in all generations (D&C 84:17–21). An understanding of the priesthood in biblical times facilitates an appreciation of the contemporary LDS priesthood, since it represents a restoration of priesthood authority in the latter days.

The priesthood or authority to act for God is governed by keys, which open God’s greatest blessings, including the “privilege of receiving the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, . . . [and] the communion and presence of God the Father, and Jesus” (D&C 107:19). These divinely bestowed powers came down in an unbroken line from Adam to Moses (D&C 84:6–17; 107:14–52), but the titles of priesthood officers changed periodically along with the type of social and religious structures that they administered.

Patriarchal Priesthood and Melchizedek. From Adam to Jacob, the main office of God’s priesthood was that of patriarch. Adam, Enoch,
Noah, and Abraham administered the Lord’s work, established covenants between God and the faithful, recorded their teachings and prophecies, and gave special PRIESTHOOD BLESSINGS. A patriarch could bless his offspring by calling upon the powers of heaven. As he gave the birthright blessing to one of his sons, for instance, the keys and powers of the priesthood were extended to the next generation. In the patriarchal order, under the law of primogeniture, these priesthood rights normally were to be given to the eldest son; from Abraham to Ephraim the birthright blessing went to younger sons because of their righteousness (Gen. 21, 27–28, 48–49).

Melchizedek, one of the most important biblical priesthood bearers, remains something of a mystery in the Bible because the precise lineage of his priesthood is not noted. He is simply identified as “priest of the most high God” (Gen. 14:18); a revelation to Joseph Smith adds that Melchizedek received the priesthood “through the lineage of his fathers, even till Noah” (D&C 84:14). Melchizedek not only blessed Abraham and gave him the priesthood after the order of the Son of God, but he was such a righteous high priest that the “greater” priesthood was named the Melchizedek PRIESTHOOD after him (D&C 84:19; 107:1–4; Alma 13:1–19). Jesus also was identified as a priest “after the order of Melchizedek” (Heb. 5:6). The Prophet Joseph Smith observed, “All priesthood is Melchizedek, but there are different portions or degrees of it. That portion which brought Moses to speak with God face to face was taken away; but that which brought the ministry of angels remained. All the prophets had the Melchizedek Priesthood and were ordained by God himself” (TPJS, pp. 180–81).

Although little is known from the Bible about these patriarchs, their righteousness set a pattern referred to in later generations (e.g., Ps. 110:4; 1 Kgs. 18:36). The books of Abraham and Moses in the PEARL OF GREAT PRICE reveal more of the visions, revelations, ordinances, and divine experiences of many of these ancient priesthood holders than the Bible does.

Aaron and the Levitical Priesthood. With Moses, a new social and religious order with special priesthood offices was established among the Israelites. The priesthood emphasis shifted from patriarchs presiding over extended families to a designated tribe of Levitical priesthood holders, who served Israel for centuries. Under the Lord’s direction, Moses ordained his older brother, Aaron, to preside over the tribe of Levi, which served all the people (Lev. 8:1–13; Num. 8:13–22; Heb. 5:4). Over time, Aaron became exemplary in his priesthood service and the “lesser” priesthood was named the Aaronic Priesthood after him (Heb. 7:11; D&C 84:18, 26; 107:13–16). The major priesthood offices were the priests, including a “high” (Hebrew “great”) priest, and the Levites.

Priests were worthy male descendants of Aaron. The high priest was designated from among the first-born descendants of Aaron. His office was responsible for the annual Day of Atonement rituals (Lev. 16) and for all the tithes and offerings of the Israelites (see TITHING). The priests supervised the system of worship and sacrifices at the holy sanctuary and helped regulate the religious affairs and holy days of Israel.

The Levites included all male descendants of Levi. They assisted the priests in collecting and distributing the tithes and offerings, in the elaborate system of animal and food sacrifices, in teaching the law, in singing, and in building and maintaining places of worship, especially the tabernacle and the temple.

Prophets in Old Testament times held the Melchizedek Priesthood, as noted above (TPJS, p. 181); and some of them held special priesthood keys for the gathering of Israel (see ISRAEL: GATHERING OF ISRAEL) and the sealing powers of eternal ordinances (D&C 132:38–39). In an extension of their mortal ministries, Moses and Elijah delivered these keys to Jesus’ apostles on the MOUNT OF TRANSFIGURATION (Matt. 17:1–8) and, along with Elias, delivered them also to Joseph Smith in the Kirtland Temple in 1836 (D&C 110). In general, however, the various PRIESTHOOD OFFICES of the Aaronic and Melchizedek priesthoods were not held by Israelite men from the time of Moses to the New Testament period.

Although the Melchizedek Priesthood was limited to those prophets specially called and commissioned, the Aaronic Priesthood continued “with the house of Aaron among the children of Israel” from Aaron to John the Baptist (D&C 84:26–27; TPJS, p. 319). However, after Malachi (c. 400 B.C.), political corruption occurred involving the office of high priest. Persian, Greek, and Roman rulers sought to control the Jewish priest-
hood office by making the high priest a political appointee of the state rather than a true and righteous descendant of Aaron. This political manipulation led to rival claimants to priesthood offices and authority, with particular opposition between the Sadducees of Jerusalem and the Essenes of Qumran.

CHRIST’S MINISTERS. John the Baptist was a priesthood bridge between the Old and New Testament periods. Being of priestly descent through both parents, he was a legal administrator of the LAW OF MOSES, yet he received additional blessings and keys to usher in Christ’s ministry, being set apart to this power by an angel of God when he was eight days old (D&C 84:28).

As Jesus organized his Church, he established a religious order with new priesthood leaders. While he retained features of the earlier structures such as the Twelve (cf. Num. 1:4; 44; Ezra 8:24–30) and the SEVENTY (cf. Ex. 24:1–11), he gave new titles and ordained new offices, especially the apostles, who served as special witnesses of his ministry and resurrection. Upon the foundation of apostles and prophets, Christ’s Church was administered by EVANGELISTS, seventies, ELKERS, BISHOPS, priests, TEACHERS, and DEACONS (Eph. 4:11–16; 1 Cor. 12:12–28; see also ORGANIZATION OF THE CHURCH IN NEW TESTAMENT TIMES).

As part of the RESTORATION OF ALL THINGS (Acts 3:21; cf. Moses 6:7), The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints received elements from all the biblical priesthood periods, with the greater part coming from the pattern and offices of Christ’s New Testament Church. Under the direction of modern prophets, priesthood holders of both the Melchizedek and Aaronic orders officiate today in a variety of offices and callings, continuing God’s pattern of administering to his children’s needs.

BIBLIOGRAPHY
Smith, Joseph Fielding. DS 3:80–90.

VICTOR L. LUDLOW

PRIESTHOOD BLESSINGS

Priesthood blessings are pronounced in connection with most of the essential ORDINANCES of the gospel: blessing and naming children; CONFIRMATION; ORDINATION TO THE PRIESTHOOD; SETTING APART; and other occasions. In addition, any person may request a blessing at the hands of a worthy Melchizedek Priesthood bearer at any time. The person who does so is usually seeking inspired counsel and asking for official prayer and blessing under the hands of one who is authorized and discerning.

In the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the PRIESTHOOD is not a centralized elite. Ideally, the priesthood is held by every husband and father. The home is viewed as his constant and most important ministry, regardless of the offices he may hold in the Church. One who seeks a priesthood blessing is encouraged to approach father or brother, BISHOP OR HOME TEACHERS rather than prominent Church authorities. In principle and in practice, this recognizes the diversity of spiritual gifts, the individual heritage of faith, and the shared sanctity of priesthood service.

Priesthood blessings are usually conferred by LAYING ON OF HANDS, which is seen as the New Testament pattern. Exceptions are found in administering the SACRAMENT and in apostolic blessings given to a congregation (see HC 2:120; 5:473).

All priesthood blessings are given in the name of Jesus Christ and by authority of the MELCHIZEDEK PRIESTHOOD (so named to avoid the too frequent repetition of its sacred title [D&C 107:4]). The blessing process may vary according to circumstance and individual need: e.g., the extent of preparation, the use of consecrated OIL, involvement of other persons as participants or witnesses, recording or writing the blessing (often the counsel is to “write it in your heart”), and whether and when further blessings may be appropriate. Blessings given by a father to his wife are known as husband’s blessings, to his children as father’s blessings; those given by a PATRIARCH, as PATRIARCHAL BLESSINGS; when related to a personal crisis or need, as comfort blessings; those given in response to illness or injury, as administration to the sick.

Priesthood blessings are to be “spoken with care, and by constraint of the Spirit” (D&C 63:64). To refuse to give a blessing when one is called or to