

Large numbers of Latter-day Saints use personal computers in their homes to facilitate religious activities. Many use disk versions of the scriptures to enhance individual scripture research and study. Personal genealogical research has moved to a personal computer format that will allow exchanges of information with the large genealogical data bases in Salt Lake City.

DARWIN A. JOHN

CONDESCENSION OF GOD

The Book of Mormon prophet Nephi₁ (c. 600 B.C.) was asked by an angel, "Knowest thou the condescension of God?" (1 Ne. 11:16). Nephi was then shown in a vision a virgin who was to become "the mother of the Son of God, after the manner of the flesh" (verse 18). He next beheld the virgin with a child whom the angel identified as "the Lamb of God, yea, even the Son of the Eternal Father" (11:21). Then Nephi understood that the condescension of God is the ultimate manifestation of God's love through Jesus Christ (11:20–22). Such condescension denotes, first, the love of GOD THE FATHER, who deigned to sire a son, born of a mortal woman, and then allow this Son to suffer temptations and pain (Mosiah 3:5–7), "be judged of the world," and be "slain for the sins of the world" (1 Ne. 11:32–33). Second, it signifies the love and willingness of God the Son (Jesus Christ) to die for mankind.

The word "condescension" implies "voluntary descent," "submission," and "performing acts which strict justice does not require." This definition is particularly applicable to Jesus in the portrayal of him by prophets who lived before his birth and who affirmed: "God himself shall come down" to make an atonement (Mosiah 15:1); "the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, yieldeth himself . . . into the hands of wicked men" (1 Ne. 19:10); "the great Creator . . . suffereth himself to become subject unto man in the flesh" (2 Ne. 9:5); and "he offereth himself a sacrifice for sin" (2 Ne. 2:7). "The Lord Omnipotent," said King Benjamin, "shall come down from heaven among the children of men, and shall dwell in a tabernacle of clay" (Mosiah 3:5).

In fulfillment of these prophecies, Jesus descended from the realms of glory for the purposes of experiencing mortal infirmities that he might

have mercy and compassion according to the flesh and of taking upon himself the sins, transgressions, pains, and sicknesses of men in order to satisfy the demands of justice and gain victory over death, thereby redeeming his people (Mosiah 15:8–9; Alma 7:11–13). Christ's selfless sacrifice merits profound gratitude and endearing love from all who are recipients of his supernal offering.

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CONFERENCE REPORTS

Since 1899, the Church has published official reports of its annual (April) and semiannual (October) General Conferences, commonly called *Conference Reports*. These reports are distributed in booklet form only to Church leaders (bishops and higher), Church employees, and libraries, but because other members of the Church wanted to study the conference addresses, the IMPROVEMENT ERA began in 1942 to devote two issues a year to conference reports. The *Ensign* has followed that pattern since replacing the *Era* in 1971. Those issues have made reports of conference addresses available to the world by subscription or single issue bookstore or newsstand purchase. The talks as printed in the Conference Report volumes (see below) and in the Church magazines have mostly been identical. Those publications are significant resources for the study of the theology, progress, and development of the Church.

When the Church first began holding conferences, many attending the meetings recorded in their private journals what was said and done. These personal records now constitute the primary sources available on the various conference addresses in the early years because no official Church publication printed much more than a list of conference events. It appears that the first full report of any Church conference address was published in the *Deseret News* in 1850, even though several partial reports were published in *Times and Seasons* from November 1839 to February 1846, in Nauvoo. The *Deseret News* was able to print word-for-word transcriptions because a young reporter, George D. Watt, had learned

shorthand and transcribed the talks for publication. Watt and others thereafter transcribed a great many conference addresses and other talks for publication in the *Deseret News* and also in the *Journal of Discourses* (Liverpool and London, 1854–1886).

The conference report for the Church's fiftieth jubilee year (1880) was the first to be published as a separate booklet (110 pages) exclusively of general conference addresses. The next volume in that series contained the talks given at the October 1897 Semiannual General Conference (78 pages). Since 1899, the Church has published a Conference Report volume for each general conference.

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CONFERENCES

[This entry is composed of three articles:

- Conferences
- General Conference
- Stake Conference

The first article explains the doctrinal concepts of holding conferences and the various types of conferences held by members of the Church. The second article focuses on the history of holding general conferences. The third article gives the background of holding stake conferences and their usual format.]

CONFERENCES

Latter-day Saints are counseled, as were the New Testament saints, to “meet together oft.” Conferences are among the most frequent types of meeting. Because The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is administered by a constantly changing core of lay leaders, teachers, and officers, there is perpetual need for instruction, inspiration, and renewal. The scriptures state: “And now, behold, I give unto you a commandment, that when ye are assembled together ye shall instruct and edify each other, that ye may know how to act and direct my church, how to act upon the points of my law and commandments, which I have given” (D&C 43:8). The word “edify” means to enlighten, lift, or elevate spiritually. By “union of feeling,” the Prophet Joseph SMITH taught the sisters of the RELIEF SOCIETY, “we obtain power with the heavens.” Conferences contribute to building that union. In

practice, Latter-day Saints often say to each other, “If you cannot come to receive, come to give.” In conferences, as in other types of Church meetings, the “strong in the Spirit” may “take with him him that is weak” (D&C 84:106).

There are only general guidelines for conferences. For “it always has been given to the elders of my church from the beginning, and ever shall be, to conduct all meetings as they are directed and guided by the Holy Spirit” (D&C 46:2).

Specific objectives, scheduling, and activities of conferences vary according to the group being served and may vary from one conference to another of the same group. WARD conferences are held annually to bring the STAKE leaders, ward leaders, and ward members together in local congregations to “review the status of individuals and organizations and to plan for improvement” (*General Handbook of Instructions* 2-4). Stake conferences are held twice annually, and are administered by stake, regional, and GENERAL AUTHORITIES. YOUTH, young adult, and singles conferences are held annually; typically these conferences focus on inspirational experiences and social interchange. Women’s conferences and Church women’s FIRESIDES are also held each year.

The growth of the Church has led to area and regional conferences, which may involve thousands of participants in designated geographic areas. These conferences are planned, organized, conducted, and addressed by General Authorities.

Two general conferences are held each year, one in April (designated the “annual” conference) and the other in October (designated as a “semiannual” conference). These are the most far-reaching conferences of the Church and for many years have been held in the Salt Lake Tabernacle. They provide opportunities to share the common bonds of fellowship in an environment charged with spirituality and in a setting different from the local meeting places of the Church. Prayers, music, addresses by General Authorities and others, shared expressions of faith, meeting new acquaintances, and renewal of self and commitments combine to enrich the lives of all who attend or who experience the conferences on radio or television.

The Savior petitioned: “I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil” (John 17:15). Conferences of the Church serve an import-