

## ELDER ELDRED G. SMITH

### *Patriarch to the Church*

I am very grateful for the many blessings that have been mine. I am thankful for the prayer that was offered at the beginning of this session and pray that I shall receive my part of its fulfillment, that the Lord will guide me in what I say.

I have been very grateful for the heritage that I have, for the blessings and the experiences that have been given to me through my childhood and my youth, in fulfilling the various offices in the priesthood from deacon, teacher, priest, elder, seventy, high priest, and bishop, and the privilege of filling a mission and the other offices that I have held, which have been for my training and preparation. And now, as Patriarch to the Church, I am indeed grateful for the privilege of fulfilling this position and pray the Lord shall ever help me so to do.

We as a people are greatly blessed in many ways, too many to be enumerated, and among these blessings we have the privilege of having patriarchs pronounce blessings upon us. People ask often, what I do in the Church, or, what does a patriarch do. The Lord says that evangelists are patriarchs. The name "patriarch" divided into two syllables, explains itself. "Patri" means "father," and "arch" means "chief," so "patriarch" is a "chief father."

We have two types of fathers in the Church—those who are natural fathers, or the head of their households, and we have those who are fathers as an ordained position in the priesthood. So an ordained father, or an ordained patriarch, is a priesthood office, which gives him the right to perform such things as patriarchal blessings in blessing the members of the Church.

Every holder of the priesthood who is head of a family, has the right to bless members of his own family. However, it is not priesthood order for him to declare the blessings of the lineage of Israel. This is the specific responsibility of an ordained patriarch. For that reason, among others, we go to ordained patriarchs to receive those blessings.

We have in the Church approximately four hundred such patriarchs, ordained

to give patriarchal blessings. We have a representative group of them here with us today. These men are noble and humble, worthy men, especially ordained priesthood officers, whom the Lord has placed in his Church to serve you in giving you patriarchal blessings.

It is most desirable that they do not come to you to give you a blessing and announce that they have a blessing for you. It is more desirable that you go to them. They make themselves available. There is at least one patriarch in each stake of Zion, so that all the membership of the Church has the opportunity of receiving such blessings. Those who live in the mission field, where there are no ordained patriarchs, have the privilege of coming to the stakes and receiving blessings from stake patriarchs, or they may come to my office. And that is the primary work that I do—give blessings to those from the mission field who come to me.

Many people have asked why we do not have patriarchs in the mission field. I guess the only good reason is the same reason we do not have bishops. Bishops and patriarchs are officers of a stake organization and as there are enough members in an area to organize a stake, then they are entitled to a stake organization. As that organization grows sufficiently, there is usually a patriarch ordained in that stake.

Then the question comes, what is a patriarchal blessing? It is different from any other blessing one might receive. The first requirement and that which makes it primarily different from other blessings, is that the ordained patriarch has the right to declare the blessings of Israel, or the line of Israel through which the blessings shall come. The blessings of Israel are leadership blessings, and leadership blessings are the blessings of the priesthood. This is the main difference between patriarchal blessings and blessings given by others.

I have had many faith-promoting experiences in declaring lineage. The majority of the people who come to me for blessings are people whom I do not know. I know nothing about their genealogy or their family background. How-

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ever, a patriarchal blessing, in declaring lineage, does not always need to declare genealogy—it is not a short cut to genealogy. It is the blessings that are declared. Genealogy and genetics may have the effect in assisting their patriarchs, but we are mixtures. Many of us are mixtures of several tribes of Israel, and so it is the right of the patriarch to declare that line through which the blessings shall come.

Elder John A. Widtsoe has stated the following:

"These blessings are possibilities predicated upon faithful devotion to the cause of truth. They must be earned, otherwise they are but empty words. Indeed they rise to their highest value when used as ideals, specific possibilities toward which we may strive throughout life. To look upon a patriarch as a fortuneteller is an offense to the priesthood. The patriarch only indicates the gifts the Lord would give us, if we labor for them. He helps us by pointing out the divine goal which we may enjoy if we pay the price." (The Improvement Era 45:33.)

I am glad Brother Widtsoe mentioned the fact that patriarchs are not fortunetellers because that is the farthest thing from the truth—patriarchal blessings are not fortunetelling.

If you can discover the keynote in your blessing, it will be an index to point the way of life for you, or the path that you should go to serve God. These blessings are an eternal anchor for our soul with the Lord. They are just as eternal and binding upon us, through our faithfulness, as were the blessings given by Adam, Abraham, Jacob, or any other patriarch of past times. Because of their eternal nature the Lord has required that they be recorded so that we have a record of them in the archives of the Church, and each individual is given a copy of his blessing so that he might have it available for himself. We encourage and recommend that members of the Church receive only one patriarchal blessing, which blessing is recorded as an eternal record.

Now, if we are going to receive only one blessing, then it is important that we get that blessing at a proper time in our life. The question often comes to

me, at what age should my children receive their patriarchal blessings? I discourage anyone under twelve years of age. If I were a stake patriarch and giving blessings to people in my community, I think I would raise that age. I think the best age is between fifteen and twenty-five. However, every baptized member of the Church is entitled to receive a patriarchal blessing. He should be old enough to understand the meaning and purpose and value of a patriarchal blessing to the extent that he has a personal desire to receive such a blessing, and not because a group is getting blessings, or because friends or neighbors are getting blessings, or because an adult or parent has the desire that the child should receive a blessing.

Do not wait until you are troubled and then go to the Lord through his holy servants. The Lord does not intend to solve our problems for us. He gives us special problems for our good, to teach us to make decisions, because through making those decisions and through those trials we have the privilege of growing, and the Lord does not intend to take that privilege from us.

I am grateful for the many blessings of the Lord that have been given to me and pray that the membership of this Church will avail themselves of the opportunities which are theirs to receive patriarchal blessings. I am thankful for the testimony of the divinity of the gospel which has been given to me, that I know that God lives, that he is truly our Father in heaven. I am grateful for the knowledge I have that Jesus is the Christ, the son of the Living God, and that Joseph Smith is truly a prophet of God, and through him, this gospel of Jesus Christ has been restored on the earth in these the last days, in the fullness of times, never to be taken from the earth again.

I pray the Lord's blessings upon the leadership of the Church, for I know that our present leader, President David O. McKay, is just as much a prophet of God as any previous leader we have ever had. I pray the Lord's blessings upon all the leaders that they may have strength and health to continue to serve the Lord with us as long as he will permit them to be here.

I pray for these blessings on the lead-

ers of the Church and the membership of this Church, thanking him for the blessings which have been given to me, and the testimony which I have, and I do it in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

President David O. McKay:

Elder Eldred G. Smith, Patriarch to the Church, has just spoken to us. Elder Sterling W. Sill, Assistant to the Twelve, will now address us.

### ELDER STERLING W. SILL

*Assistant to the Council of the Twelve Apostles*

In the year 428 B.C. a play was being presented in the ancient city of Athens entitled *Hippolytus*. This was a Greek tragedy written by Euripides. It was centered around Theseus, the old king of Athens and his son Hippolytus. Theseus had received from his father, Poseidon, the Greek god of the sea, three gifts in the form of three curses. These curses not only had the power of temporal destruction, but they would also continue throughout eternity to punish anyone against whom they were invoked.

The first of these curses was directed by Theseus against his own son, Hippolytus. Hippolytus had done no wrong but Theseus had been deceived and did not discover his error until Hippolytus was on his deathbed. And while Theseus had the power to invoke the curse he did not have the power to set it aside once it was in operation. And so as the father sat by the bedside of his dying son he said through his tears, "I weep for your good heart, your true and upright mind. The gods have cheated me of my good sense." And as Hippolytus lay their contemplating eternity, he said to his father, "Twas a bitter gift your sire gave." And then just before he died he pointed out that he could already see the gates of hell beyond which he would suffer his own father's curse throughout eternity.

If we had been witnessing this tragic play in ancient Athens, we would probably have joined our tears with the others not only in feeling sorry for Hippolytus, the victim of this dread curse, but also more especially for his father who had set it in motion. But Theseus was not the first to possess this power to curse, nor is he the only one who has turned it against his own son.

Ten centuries before Theseus was born, God gave ancient Israel their law

from the top of Mt. Sinai, and out of the lightnings and thunders of that holy mountain came the divine warning that "... the sins of the fathers shall be visited upon the children." (See Exodus 20:5.) The most effective way to set a curse in operation against one's own son is to develop the cause of the curse in his own life. And then as our children play with us this interesting game of "Follow the Leader," it will not be long before the curse will begin to appear in their lives—that is, the power to lead, possessed by every parent, is also the power to mislead. The power to mislead is the power to destroy; it is the power to cause eternal suffering.

It is a little bit startling to realize that this father and son tragedy is being enacted in real life in many of our own homes. Let me give you a more up-to-date Theseus and Hippolytus story.

A friend of mine recently called me on the telephone and told me that his young son had the habit of coming home from Sunday School each week and discussing his Sunday School lesson with his father. Sometimes the father was unable to handle the situation adequately, and it became necessary for him to get outside help. And on this particular occasion he asked me if I would help him with the right information. We discussed the idea at some length and noted the scriptural references that were applicable.

But I suggested to my friend that he could not solve this problem with just one answer. It would be impossible to keep his son content for very long with the answers that the father got from someone else. The son would want the father to know the answers for himself. Before the son was very much older he would also discover that his father did not go to Sunday School, and he would want to know why. At Sunday School