

### Other authorities present

Other Church authorities in attendance included Regional Representatives, presidents of stakes and their counselors, presidents of temples, bishops of wards,

and presidencies and members of the Aaronic and Melchizedek priesthood quorums.

Many general, stake, and ward auxiliary officers also attended.

## FIRST DAY MORNING SESSION

The first general session of the 158th Annual General Conference convened in the Tabernacle on Temple Square in Salt Lake City, Utah, on Saturday, April 2, 1988, at 10:00 A.M. President Ezra Taft Benson presided, and President Thomas S. Monson, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, conducted this session.

The music for the opening session was provided by the Mormon Youth Chorus with Robert C. Bowden conducting and Clay Christiansen at the organ.

Before the meeting, the Mormon Youth Chorus sang "Hark, All Ye Nations!" without announcement.

President Monson made the following remarks:

### President Thomas S. Monson

We welcome you this morning from the Tabernacle on Temple Square in Salt Lake City in this, the first general session of the 158th annual conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Our beloved prophet, President Ezra Taft Benson, who presides at this conference, has asked me, Brother Monson, to conduct this session.

We welcome all who are participating in the large audience assembled in the Tabernacle and the overflow gathering in the nearby Assembly Hall, where Elders Carlos E. Asay and Helio da Rocha Camargo are seated on the stand. We welcome also the many others who are

receiving these conference proceedings by satellite transmission, radio, cable, and television.

We acknowledge the General Authorities of the Church, all of whom are in attendance except President Marion G. Romney and Elder John H. Vandenberg, who are excused. We also acknowledge the Relief Society, Young Women, and Primary general presidencies, who are seated on the stand. We extend a special welcome to government, education, and civic leaders who are present.

The Mormon Youth Chorus, under the direction of Brother Robert C. Bowden, with Brother Clay Christiansen at the organ, opened this session by singing "Hark, All Ye Nations!" The chorus will now sing the beautiful number, "O My Father." Following the singing, the invocation will be offered by Bishop Robert D. Hales, Presiding Bishop of the Church.

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The chorus sang "O My Father."  
Bishop Robert D. Hales offered the invocation.

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### President Monson

We will now be privileged to listen to President Ezra Taft Benson, President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

## President Ezra Taft Benson

My dear brethren and sisters, I thank the Lord that He in His kindness has per-

mitted me to join with you in another glorious general conference of the Church.

How I have been blessed as a result of your faith and prayers during the past few months.

My heart has been touched as I have learned of the many children, youth, and adults of the Church whose lives are being changed by the study of the Book of Mormon. You are helping to cleanse the inner vessel. God bless you for it.

### Love and obey the Lord

*The great test of life* is obedience to God. "We will prove them herewith," said the Lord, "to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them" (Abraham 3:25).

*The great task of life* is to learn the will of the Lord and then do it.

*The great commandment of life* is to love the Lord.

"Come unto Christ," exhorts Moroni in his closing testimony, "... and love God with all your might, mind and strength" (Moroni 10:32).

This, then, is the first and great commandment: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength" (Mark 12:30; see also Matthew 22:37, Deuteronomy 6:5, Luke 10:27, Moroni 10:32, D&C 59:5).

It is the pure love of Christ, called charity, that the Book of Mormon testifies is the greatest of all—that never faileth, that endureth forever, that all men should have, and that without which they are nothing (see Moroni 7:44–47, 2 Nephi 26:30).

"Wherefore, my beloved brethren," pleads Moroni, "pray unto the Father with all the energy of [your] heart, that ye may be filled with this love, which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ; that ye may become the sons of God; that when he shall appear we shall be like him" (Moroni 7:48).

In the closing accounts of both the Jaredites and the Nephites, Moroni records that except men shall have this pure love of Christ, called charity, they

cannot inherit that place which Christ has prepared in the mansions of His Father nor can they be saved in the kingdom of God (see Ether 12:34, Moroni 10:21).

The fruit that Lehi partook of in his vision and that filled his soul with exceeding great joy and that was most desirable above all things was the love of God.

### Loving God requires total commitment

To love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength is all-consuming and all-encompassing. It is no lukewarm endeavor. It is total commitment of our very being—physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually—to a love of the Lord.

The breadth, depth, and height of this love of God extend into every facet of one's life. Our desires, be they spiritual or temporal, should be rooted in a love of the Lord. Our thoughts and affections should be centered on the Lord. "Let all thy thoughts be directed unto the Lord," said Alma, "yea, let the affections of thy heart be placed upon the Lord forever" (Alma 37:36).

### Put God first

Why did God put the first commandment first? Because He knew that if we truly loved Him we would want to keep all of His other commandments. "For this is the love of God," says John, "that we keep his commandments" (1 John 5:3; see also 2 John 1:6).

We must put God in the forefront of everything else in our lives. He must come first, just as He declares in the first of His Ten Commandments: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3).

When we put God first, all other things fall into their proper place or drop out of our lives. Our love of the Lord will govern the claims for our affection, the demands on our time, the interests we pursue, and the order of our priorities.

We should put God ahead of *every-one else* in our lives.

## Joseph, Nephi, and Job put God first

When Joseph was in Egypt, what came first in his life—God, his job, or Potiphar's wife? When she tried to seduce him, he responded by saying, "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:9).

Joseph was put in prison because he put God first. If we were faced with a similar choice, where would we place our first loyalty? Can we put God ahead of security, peace, passions, wealth, and the honors of men?

When Joseph was forced to choose, he was more anxious to please God than to please his employer's wife. When we are required to choose, are we more anxious to please God than our boss, our teacher, our neighbor, or our date?

The Lord said, "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" (Matthew 10:37). One of the most difficult tests of all is when you have to choose between pleasing God or pleasing someone you love or respect—particularly a family member.

Nephi faced that test and handled it well when his good father temporarily murmured against the Lord (see 1 Nephi 16:18–25). Job maintained his integrity with the Lord even though his wife told him to curse God and die (see Job 2:9–10).

The scripture says, "Honour thy father and thy mother" (Exodus 20:12; see also Mosiah 13:20). Sometimes one must choose to honor Heavenly Father over a mortal father.

## God's concern for our eternal welfare

We should give God, the Father of our spirits, an exclusive preeminence in our lives. He has a prior parental claim on our eternal welfare, ahead of all other ties that may bind us here or hereafter.

God, our Father, Jesus, our Elder Brother and our Redeemer, and the Holy Ghost, the Testator, are perfect. They know us best and love us most and will

not leave one thing undone for our eternal welfare. Should we not love them for it and honor them first?

There are faithful members who joined the Church in spite of the objections of their mortal relatives. By putting God first, many later became the instruments to lead those loved ones into the kingdom of God.

Jesus said, "I do always those things that please [God]" (John 8:29).

## Putting God first in our homes

What is the condition in our homes? Are we striving to put the Lord first and to please Him?

Fathers, would it please the Lord if there were daily family prayer and scripture reading in your home? And what about the holding of weekly home evenings and periodically having individual time with your wife and each child? And if your child went temporarily astray, do you think it would please the Lord and He would honor your efforts if you continued to live an exemplary life, consistently prayed and frequently fasted for that child, and kept the name of that son or daughter on the temple prayer roll?

You mothers, who are especially charged with the righteous rearing of the youth of Zion, are you not putting God first when you honor your divine calling by not leaving the homefront to follow the ways of the world? Our mothers put God first when they fill their highest mission within the walls of their own homes.

Children, do you pray for your parents? Do you try to support them in their noble endeavors? They will make mistakes like you, but they have a divine mission to accomplish in your life. Will you help them do so? Will you add honor to their name and bring comfort and support to them in their older years?

## Temple marriage pleases God

If someone wants to marry you outside the temple, whom will you strive to please—God or a mortal? If you insist on a temple marriage, you will be pleasing

the Lord and blessing the other party. Why? Because that person will either become worthy to go to the temple—which would be a blessing—or will leave—which could also be a blessing—because neither of you should want to be unequally yoked (see 2 Corinthians 6:14).

You should qualify for the temple. Then you will know that there is no one good enough for you to marry outside the temple. If such individuals are that good, they will get themselves in a condition so that they too can be married in the temple.

### Bless others by putting God first

We bless our fellowmen the most when we put the first commandment first.

“Whatever God requires is right,” said the Prophet Joseph Smith (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1938], p. 256)—and so Nephi slew Laban. And God asked Abraham to sacrifice Isaac.

Had Abraham loved Isaac more than God, would he have consented? As the Lord indicates in the Doctrine and Covenants, both Abraham and Isaac now sit as gods (see D&C 132:37). They were willing to offer or to be offered up as God required. They have a deeper love and respect for each other because both were willing to put God first.

### Choosing to obey brings happiness

The Book of Mormon teaches that “it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things” (2 Nephi 2:11)—and so there is. Opposition provides choices, and choices bring consequences—good or bad.

The Book of Mormon explains that men “are free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil” (2 Nephi 2:27).

God loves us; the devil hates us. God wants us to have a fulness of joy as He has. The devil wants us to be miserable as he is. God gives us commandments to

bless us. The devil would have us break these commandments to curse us.

Daily, constantly, we choose by our desires, our thoughts, and our actions whether we want to be blessed or cursed, happy or miserable. One of the trials of life is that we do not usually receive immediately the full blessing for righteousness or the full cursing for wickedness. That it will come is certain, but oftentimes there is a waiting period that occurs, as was the case with Job and Joseph.

In the meantime the wicked think they are getting away with something. The Book of Mormon teaches that the wicked “have joy in their works for a season, [but] by and by the end cometh, and they are hewn down and cast into the fire, from whence there is no return” (3 Nephi 27:11).

### Be patient and trust God’s promises

During this testing time the righteous must continue to love God, trust in His promises, be patient, and be assured, as the poet said, that—

Who does God’s work will get God’s pay,  
 However long may seem the day,  
 However weary be the way.  
 No mortal hand, God’s hand can stay,  
 He may not pay as others pay,  
 In gold, or lands, or raiments gay,  
 In goods that perish and decay;  
 But God’s high wisdom knows a way,  
 And this is sure, let come what may—  
 Who does God’s work will get God’s pay.  
 (Anonymous)

I testify to you that God’s pay is the best pay that this world or any other world knows anything about. And it comes in full abundance only to those who love the Lord and put Him first.

*The great test of life* is obedience to God.

*The great task of life* is to learn the will of the Lord and then do it.

*The great commandment of life is, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength" (Mark 12:30).*

May God bless us to put the first commandment first and, as a result, reap peace in this life and eternal life with a fulness of joy in the life to come, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

The chorus sang "The Morning Breaks" without announcement.

## Elder Neal A. Maxwell

Thank you, President Benson, for that sermon on the first commandment, and even more, for the way in which you implement it by your expressions of your love for all of us.

### Keep prophecies in perspective

Brothers and sisters, over the sweep of Christian history, some believers have, by focusing on a few prophecies while neglecting others, prematurely expected the Second Coming. Today, while we are obviously closer to that great moment, we are in the same danger.

On the other hand, smugness is also a real danger. Of Jesus' first advent, the smug said, "It is not reasonable that such a being as a Christ shall come" (Helaman 16:18). Declared Jesus of His second coming, "Take heed . . . lest . . . that day come upon you unawares" (Luke 21:34; see also Matthew 24:37-38, Luke 21:35, Revelation 3:3, D&C 45:26).

Peter wrote of the smug skeptics who would say, "Where is the promise of his coming," for do not "all things continue as they were from the beginning" (2 Peter 3:4)?

Some prophecies, such as the return of Jewish people to Israel, were decades in their fulfillment (see Ezekiel 39:27). Other prophecies can be fulfilled in a compressed period of time. Taking the

### President Monson

It has been our privilege to listen to the opening address of our beloved prophet, President Ezra Taft Benson.

Following his remarks, the Mormon Youth Chorus sang for us the beautiful hymn of the Restoration, "The Morning Breaks."

Elder Neal A. Maxwell of the Council of the Twelve Apostles will now speak to us.

restored gospel "for a witness" to all the nations of the world involves generations (Matthew 24:14), but a "desolating scourge" can cover the land quickly (D&C 5:19). Sadly, more than one qualifying possibility already exists for such scourges (see Mark 13:10, D&C 5:19). The blossoming of the desert "as the rose" involved substantial time, yet significant moral decay can happen within a single generation—whether in a nation or in a family (see Isaiah 35:1; Helaman 6:32, 11:36, 12:4).

The Middle East has been at the intersection of human history so many times! Yet in our time the words of Zechariah are especially descriptive, saying that Jerusalem is to be "a cup of trembling" for "all the people round about" and "a burdensome stone for all people" (Zechariah 12:2-3).

Hence the need to keep our eyes on more than a few leaves of the fig tree in order to know when "summer is nigh" (Matthew 24:32). By analogy, it is one thing to notice strong ocean breakers crashing against the shore, heralding another oncoming storm, and quite another to discern the powerful movements on the ocean's quake-jarred floor foretelling a terrible tidal wave.

In the context of such cautions, I have no hesitancy in saying that there are some signs—but certainly not all—suggesting that "summer is nigh"