

Bishop Keith B. McMullin

Responsibilities of priesthood holders

This vast assembly of brethren reminds us that the purposes and destiny of the Church rest in large measure on the shoulders of those who bear the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods. Though the Aaronic is the lesser and an appendage to the greater, or Melchizedek, each is everlasting and essential to the Lord's work. Said President John Taylor: "When both of these Priesthoods are carried out and united in their purity, the glory of the Lord will be manifested upon Mount Zion, in the Lord's house, both operating according to their callings, position and authority."¹

With this aim in view, there lies before us the duty to hold fast all those who are newly converted and baptized, rekindle the faith of those who have drifted away, and protect the budding devotion of our youth.

Newly baptized converts make an abrupt departure from past habits and ways. They are frequently alone in the Church, without the support of family and familiar faces. They stand on a path that is strait, narrow, and true. It is also new and can be a bit baffling.

There are those who were once on this same path who have wandered away. Their faith has grown dim. To them, the prospect of full fellowship seems remote and perhaps unwanted. They "hide" from the Church and feel hidden from God.

Overcome perils through the gospel

We love and admire you young men of the Aaronic Priesthood. Your vitality is infectious, your abilities astounding, your association invigorating. But we know of other forces interested in you. They are dark and ominous. Wicked men and women parade before you ferocious temptations and deceptions. Their

intent is to destroy you. They can exact a terrible toll.

To make it possible for us to escape these perils, Heavenly Father provided a Savior.² The atoning sacrifice of our Lord is the most important single event in the history of all created things. This, then, is the gospel—that God lives and is our Father, Christ is the beloved Son of God, His Atonement is real, His earthly kingdom is established, and a celestial inheritance awaits those who embrace and abide by the everlasting principles upon which it rests.³

Blessings of the Aaronic Priesthood

The gospel is imparted and received in two ways—one comes before the other. The first contains a lesser portion which prepares; thereafter comes the greater portion which fulfills. The substance of each is found in the ordinances and workings of the Holy Priesthood—beginning in the Aaronic, culminating in the Melchizedek. Those who are "faithful unto the obtaining these two priesthoods . . . and the magnifying their calling . . . become . . . the church and kingdom, and the elect of God."⁴

The lesser portion of the gospel encompasses vital, saving truths and rests on the cornerstones of obedience and sacrifice. These truths school men and women, boys and girls in the fundamentals of righteousness. They consist of repentance, baptism, and observance of the law of carnal commandments unto the remission of sins. Carnal commandments are those that enable us to overcome the lusts, passions, and desires of our natural, or mortal, bodies and minds. Principal among these are the Ten Commandments.⁵ This lesser portion of the gospel will nourish those who are new in the Church, lead back those who have strayed, help young people recognize and overcome the temptations

and deceptions of the world. Without this preparation, the fulness of gospel blessings cannot be realized or enjoyed.

The responsibility for administering this preparatory portion of the gospel is entrusted to the Aaronic Priesthood:

"And the lesser [or Aaronic] priesthood . . . holdeth the key of the . . . preparatory gospel;

"Which gospel is the gospel of repentance and of baptism, and the remission of sins, and the law of carnal commandments."⁶

Blessed is the man so called and ordained, for his devoted service in the Aaronic Priesthood will not only save others but himself as well.⁷ It is the same whether the man is new in the Church, returning after a long absence, or of younger years. As he administers these principles, ordinances, and commandments, he himself is schooled. Aaronic Priesthood service readies men for the fulness of the everlasting gospel, for the oath and covenant and spiritual blessings "which belongeth to the [Melchizedek] priesthood."⁸ In every sense, the Aaronic Priesthood is truly preparatory. And for you younger men, there are additional opportunities.

Worthiness, not age, qualify for the work

The world uses age as a means of defining one's readiness for manhood. For example, age is used to determine when a young person is sufficiently mature and responsible to drive an automobile. To youth, the long-awaited time arrives. To their parents, it is a time of sheer terror.

The world also uses age to establish when a man is sufficiently wise and responsible to vote, to make contracts, to be held fully and legally accountable. We call this the age of majority, the time when one ceases to be a minor.

Because youth and age are so visible in the Aaronic Priesthood, we could mistakenly assume they somehow deter-

mine the powers and effectiveness of this priesthood. *Remember, please remember: In the Church, it is worthiness and the power of God that qualify men for the work. Expectation, opportunity, and service contribute more to one's growth than do birthdays. In the kingdom of God, the age of majority begins with ordination.*

Mighty works of the Aaronic Priesthood

Think about the mighty works of Samuel, John the Baptist, Mormon, and Joseph Smith. Each was called while in his youth; each was qualified by God for the great tasks at hand; each performed his duties to the everlasting blessing of us all.

Such works can be the hallmark of the Aaronic Priesthood today. It is, in some measure, a matter of perspective. As we look upon a young Aaronic Priesthood bearer, do we see a boy, or a man "called of God, by prophecy, and by the laying on of hands"?⁹ How we view him has a bearing on how he views himself. Let me illustrate.

Pretend for a moment that my hand represents Aaronic Priesthood authority. These four fingers represent its four offices: deacon, teacher, priest, and bishop. Select one of these offices, say that of a deacon. Next to the others, he stands a little shorter, a little less robust. But as the hand is seriously impaired by the loss of its little finger, so the priesthood is impaired if we view a deacon as merely a boy.

In the eyes of God, there is more power and authority in the hand of an Aaronic Priesthood bearer than there is among all of the world's rich, famous, and influential people. Their works will end; his will not. They can do nothing in the name of the Lord; he can do whatever the Lord requires of him, for he is on the Lord's errand. He can strengthen the new convert, bring a change of heart to those who seem lost, and bolster other young people in their faith.

Acting in his Aaronic Priesthood office, he:

- Extends the hand of fellowship and friendliness.
- Teaches, declares, and bears witness of the truth.
- Sees that members meet together often and that none are overlooked.
- Collects fast offerings to care for the poor.
- Administers the holy sacrament.
- Visits members in their homes and enfolds them in the safety of the Church.
- Searches out his ancestors, submits their names to the Family File, and presents himself at the temple to be baptized and confirmed for those who did not receive these ordinances while on earth.
- As a priest, performs baptisms and ordains, by the laying on of hands, other priests, teachers, and deacons.
- Is an example of virtue, moral courage, and wholesome manhood in his family, among his friends, and in the community and nation where he dwells.¹⁰

Commitment of Aaronic Priesthood holders

In my mind I can hear you of the Aaronic Priesthood saying, with a fervor and conviction characteristic of men like Mormon and Joseph Smith:

"We are sons of our Heavenly Father and disciples of Jesus Christ. We act in 'faith, hope, charity and love, with an eye single to the glory of God.'¹¹

"As a bearer of the Aaronic Priesthood:

- I will live the gospel of Jesus Christ.¹²
- I will magnify priesthood callings.¹³
- I will give meaningful service.¹⁴
- I will prepare to receive the Melchizedek Priesthood.¹⁵
- I will commit to, prepare for, and serve an honorable full-time mission.¹⁶

• I will live worthy to receive temple covenants and prepare to become a worthy husband and father."¹⁷

"Behold the man!"

Our vision of you and your work looks beyond the outward appearance of a boy and sees instead a bearer of the holy priesthood outfitted with its attendant powers, duties, and blessings.

To men of old there came in time
The priesthood named for Aaron.
Through Levites, priests, and prophets too,
It served to bless God's children.

Then came the Savior of the world
And sought out one named John,
To be baptized by this same power
And mark salvation's dawn.

In latter days this selfsame power
Was again restored to earth,
That gospel truths from first to last
Might in one's soul find birth.

Aaronic Priesthood, truth sublime,
In preparation come—
That redemption might be had
Through God's Beloved Son!

And he who ministers these powers—
'Tis not a boy that can.
With priesthood mantle on him fixed
We say, "Behold the man!"¹⁸

God bless you, noble men of the Aaronic Priesthood, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. *Items on Priesthood, Presented to the Latter-day Saints* (1881), 30.
2. See Moses 6:57–68.
3. See D&C 76:40–44; 3 Nephi 27:13–21; D&C 39:5–6; see also *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith (1976), 121.
4. D&C 84:33–34; see also verses 32–41.
5. See Joseph Smith Translation, Exodus 34:1–2; D&C 84:27; Exodus 20.

6. D&C 84:26–27.
7. See James 5:19–20.
8. D&C 84:39; see also D&C 107:18–19.
9. Articles of Faith 1:5; see also Hebrews 5:4.
10. See D&C 20:46–60; 84:106–110.
11. D&C 4:5.
12. See 1 Corinthians 9:14.
13. See D&C 107:99.
14. See D&C 4:2–3.
15. See D&C 84:33–39.
16. See 3 Nephi 5:13.
17. See D&C 110:7–9; text is adapted from the Aaronic Priesthood mission state-

ment in *Aaronic Priesthood Leadership Handbook* (1991), 6.

18. Poem by Keith B. McMullin.

President Hinckley

We've heard from Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve and Bishop Keith B. McMullin, Counselor in the Presiding Bishopric.

President James E. Faust, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, will now speak to us.

President James E. Faust

My dear brethren, I greet you in love and gratitude for your faith and devotion. We have had a great day of conference. Great has been the music; inspirational have been the messages.

Marvelous time in the Church's history

We are concluding a marvelous year celebrating the struggles and heroism of the pioneers who arrived in the Salt Lake Valley 150 years ago. We appreciate so much the hundreds of thousands of faithful Church members across the whole world who have contributed to this great commemoration.

Significantly, all of these activities have been under the prophetic leadership of our inspired President, Gordon B. Hinckley. Now he is directing us to become pioneers of the future with all its exciting opportunities. Faith in every future footstep will fulfill prophetic vision concerning the glorious destiny of this Church.

There has never been a more marvelous time in the history of this Church. More temples are under construction and being planned than ever before. As an important first step in this

future pioneering, President Hinckley has broken ground for a great new hall to be built close to the temple in Salt Lake City. From there the word of the Lord in general conference will be spoken to more of God's children, both in the hall and by satellite or other electronic means.

"Be not afraid, only believe"

Tonight I speak with special emphasis to you young priesthood bearers who will take this Church into the future. You do not follow the ways of the world by engaging in unwholesome activities or wearing strange clothes and ornaments. We are proud of you. We have great confidence in you.

I take as my text the profound but simple message of the Savior to the ruler of the synagogue. You will recall that the ruler was told that his daughter was dead and that he should not trouble the Master about it. When the Savior came into the house of this grieving father, He said: "Why make ye this ado, and weep? the damsel is not dead, but sleepeth. . . . And he took the [girl] by the hand, and said . . . , I say unto thee, arise. And