

# Rejoice in the Gift of Priesthood Keys

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Priesthood keys govern how the priesthood of God may be used to bring about the Lord's purposes and bless all who accept the restored gospel.

My dear brothers and sisters, today is an historic day for President Dallin H. Oaks and me. It was 40 years ago, on April 7, 1984, when we were sustained to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.<sup>1</sup> We have rejoiced in each and every general conference since then, including this one. We have once again been blessed with a sacred outpouring of the Spirit. I hope you will repeatedly study the messages of this conference throughout the coming months.

When I was born,<sup>2</sup> there were six functioning temples in the Church—one each in St. George, Logan, Manti, and Salt Lake City, Utah; as well as in Cardston, Alberta, Canada; and Laie, Hawaii. Two earlier temples had functioned briefly in Kirtland, Ohio, and Nauvoo, Illinois. As the body of the Church moved west, the Saints were forced to leave those two temples behind.

The Nauvoo Temple was destroyed by an arsonist's fire. It was rebuilt and then dedicated by President Gordon B. Hinckley.<sup>3</sup> The Kirtland Temple was desecrated by enemies of the Church. Later the Kirtland Temple was acquired by Community of Christ, which has owned it for many years.

Last month we announced that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has purchased the Kirtland Temple, along with several significant historic sites in Nauvoo. We greatly appreciate the cordial and mutually beneficial discussions we had with leaders from Community of Christ that led to this agreement.

The Kirtland Temple has unusual significance in the Restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Several events that took place there had been prophesied for millennia and were essential for the Lord's restored Church to fulfill its latter-day mission.

The most important of these events occurred on Easter Sunday, April 3, 1836.<sup>4</sup> On that day, Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery experienced a *series* of remarkable visitations. First, the Lord Jesus Christ appeared. The Prophet recorded that the Savior's "eyes were as a flame of fire; the hair of his head was white like the pure snow; his countenance shone above the brightness of the sun; and his voice was as the sound of the rushing of great waters."<sup>5</sup>

During this visitation, the Lord affirmed His identity. He said, "I am the first and the last; I am he who liveth, I am he who was slain; I am your advocate with the Father."<sup>6</sup>

Jesus Christ then declared that He had accepted the temple as *His* house and made this stunning promise: "I will manifest myself to my people in mercy in this house."<sup>7</sup>

This significant promise applies to *every* dedicated temple today. I invite you to ponder what the Lord's promise means for you personally.

Following the Savior's visitation, Moses appeared. Moses conferred upon Joseph Smith the keys for the gathering of Israel and the return of the ten tribes.<sup>8</sup>

When this vision closed, "Elias appeared, and committed the dispensation of the gospel of Abraham" to Joseph.<sup>9</sup>

Then Elijah the prophet appeared. His appearance fulfilled Malachi's promise that before the Second Coming, the Lord would send Elijah to "turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers."<sup>10</sup> Elijah conferred the keys of the sealing power upon Joseph Smith.<sup>11</sup>

The significance of these keys being returned to the earth by three heavenly messengers under the direction of the Lord cannot be overstated. Priesthood keys constitute the authority and power of presidency. Priesthood keys govern how the priesthood of God may be used to bring about the Lord's purposes and bless all who accept the restored gospel of Jesus Christ.

It is important to note that prior to the organization of the Church, heavenly messengers had conferred the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods upon the Prophet Joseph and had given him keys of both priesthoods.<sup>12</sup> These keys gave Joseph Smith authority to organize the Church in 1830.<sup>13</sup>

Then in the Kirtland Temple in 1836, the conferral of these three additional priesthood keys—namely, keys of the gathering of Israel, keys of the gospel of Abraham, and keys of the sealing power—was essential. These keys authorized Joseph Smith—and all succeeding Presidents of the Lord's Church—to gather Israel on both sides of the veil, to bless all covenant children with the blessings of Abraham, to place a ratifying seal on priesthood ordinances and covenants, and to seal families eternally. The power of these priesthood keys is infinite and breathtaking.

Consider how *your* life would be different if priesthood keys had not been restored to the earth.<sup>14</sup> Without priesthood keys, you could not be endowed with the power of God.<sup>15</sup> Without priesthood keys, the Church could serve only as a significant teaching and humanitarian organization but not much more. Without priesthood keys, none of us would have access to essential ordinances and covenants that bind us to our loved ones eternally and allow us eventually to live with God.

Priesthood keys distinguish The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints from any other organization on earth. Many other organizations *can* and *do* make your life better here in mortality. But no other organization *can* and *will* influence your life after death.<sup>16</sup>

Priesthood keys give us the authority to extend all of the blessings promised to Abraham to every covenant-keeping man and woman. Temple work makes these exquisite blessings available to *all* of God's children, regardless of *where* or *when* they lived or now live. Let us rejoice that priesthood keys are once again on the earth!

I invite you to consider carefully the following three statements:

1. The gathering of Israel is evidence that God loves *all* of His children everywhere.

2. The gospel of Abraham is *further* evidence that God loves *all* of His children everywhere. He invites *all* to come unto Him—“black and white, bond and free, male and female; ... *all* are alike unto God.”<sup>17</sup>
3. The sealing power is *supernal* evidence of how much God loves *all* of His children everywhere and wants *each* of them to choose to return home to Him.

Priesthood keys restored through the Prophet Joseph Smith make it possible for *every* covenant-keeping man and woman to enjoy incredible *personal* spiritual privileges. Here again, there is much we can learn from the sacred history of the Kirtland Temple.

Joseph Smith’s dedicatory prayer of the Kirtland Temple is a tutorial about how the temple spiritually empowers you and me to meet the challenges of life in these last days. I encourage you to study that prayer, recorded in Doctrine and Covenants section 109. That dedicatory prayer, which was *received by revelation*, teaches that the temple is “a house of prayer, a house of fasting, a house of faith, a house of learning, a house of glory, a house of order, a house of God.”<sup>18</sup>

This list of attributes is much more than a description of a temple. It is a promise about what will happen to those who serve and worship in the house of the Lord. They can *expect* to receive answers to prayer, personal revelation, greater faith, strength, comfort, increased knowledge, and increased power.

Time in the temple will help you to *think celestial* and to catch a vision of who you really are, who you can become, and the kind of life you can have forever. Regular temple worship will enhance the way you see yourself and how you fit into God’s magnificent plan. I promise you that.

We are also promised that in the temple we may “receive a fulness of the Holy Ghost.”<sup>19</sup> Imagine what *that* promise means in terms of having the heavens open for each earnest seeker of eternal truth.

We are instructed that all who worship in the temple will have the power of God and angels having “charge over them.”<sup>20</sup> How much does it increase your confidence to know that, as an endowed woman or man armed with the power of God, you do not have to face life alone? What courage does it give you to know that angels really will help you?

Finally, we are promised that “no combination of wickedness” will prevail over those who worship in the house of the Lord.<sup>21</sup>

Understanding the spiritual privileges made possible in the temple is vital to each of us today.

My dear brothers and sisters, here is my promise. Nothing will help you *more* to hold fast to the iron rod<sup>22</sup> than worshipping in the temple as regularly as your circumstances permit. Nothing will protect you *more* as you encounter the world’s mists of darkness. Nothing will bolster your testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Atonement or help you understand God’s magnificent plan *more*. Nothing will soothe your spirit *more* during times of pain. Nothing will open the heavens *more*. Nothing!

The temple *is* the gateway to the greatest blessings God has in store for each of us, for the temple is the only place on earth where we may receive *all* of the blessings promised to Abraham.<sup>23</sup> That is why we are doing all within our power, under the direction of the Lord, to make the temple

blessings more accessible to members of the Church. Thus, we are pleased to announce that we plan to build a new temple in each of the following 15 locations:

- Uturoa, French Polynesia
- Chihuahua, Mexico
- Florianópolis, Brazil
- Rosario, Argentina
- Edinburgh, Scotland
- Brisbane, Australia south area
- Victoria, British Columbia
- Yuma, Arizona
- Houston, Texas south area
- Des Moines, Iowa
- Cincinnati, Ohio
- Honolulu, Hawaii
- West Jordan, Utah
- Lehi, Utah
- Maracaibo, Venezuela

My dear brothers and sisters, I testify that this *is* The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He stands at its head. We are His disciples.

Let us *rejoice* in the restoration of priesthood keys, which make it possible for you and me to enjoy *every* spiritual blessing we are *willing* and worthy to receive. I so testify in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

#### Notes

1. I filled the vacancy in the Quorum of the Twelve left by the January 11, 1983, death of Elder LeGrand Richards. Elder Oaks filled that which was left by the January 11, 1984, death of Mark E. Petersen.
2. September 9, 1924.
3. The dedication of the rebuilt Nauvoo Illinois Temple by President Gordon B. Hinckley occurred on June 27, 2002, the 158th anniversary of the martyrdom of Joseph and Hyrum Smith.
4. Just one week after the Prophet Joseph Smith dedicated the Kirtland Temple.
5. Doctrine and Covenants 110:3.
6. Doctrine and Covenants 110:4.

7. Doctrine and Covenants 110:7.
8. See Doctrine and Covenants 110:11.
9. Doctrine and Covenants 110:12. This was a perpetuation of the promise the Lord had made to Abraham thousands of years earlier (see Genesis 18:18; 1 Nephi 15:18).
10. See Malachi 4:5–6.
11. See Doctrine and Covenants 110:13–16.
12. See Doctrine and Covenants 13; 27:7–8, 12.
13. See Doctrine and Covenants 20:1–4.
14. When the Lord told Joseph Smith that this dispensation is the time when “nothing shall be withheld” (Doctrine and Covenants 121:28), it was because these priesthood keys had been returned to the earth.
15. See Doctrine and Covenants 95:8; 109:22.
16. See Doctrine and Covenants 132:45–46.
17. 2 Nephi 26:33; emphasis added.
18. Doctrine and Covenants 109:8.
19. Doctrine and Covenants 109:15.
20. Doctrine and Covenants 109:22.
21. See Doctrine and Covenants 109:24–26.
22. Meaning the word of God.
23. See Doctrine and Covenants 110:12; 132:29–30.