

Living Up to Our Patriarchies

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In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

And God said, let us make man in our image, after our likeness;

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. (Genesis 1:1, 26–27)

THESE WORDS FROM THE BOOK OF Genesis contain revealed information about the physical creation of the earth, man, and woman. In the third chapter of Moses, we have the added truth that all things were created spiritually before they were created physically: “For I, the Lord God, created all things, of which I have spoken, spiritually, before they were naturally upon the face of the earth. . . . And I, the Lord God, had created all the children of men; and not yet a man to till the ground; for in heaven created I them; and there was not

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yet flesh upon the earth. . . . Nevertheless, all things were before created; but spiritually were they created and made according to my word” (Moses 3:5, 7).

There is no revealed account of the spirit creation, only these references that all things and persons had been created in heaven at a previous time. However, we have been taught authoritatively about the spirit creation. We know that the temporal creation was after the likeness of the spirit creation. The brother of Jared recorded seeing the spirit of Jesus Christ some two thousand years before our Lord was born on the earth. Jesus said, “Behold, this body, which ye now behold, is the body of my spirit; and man have I created after the body of my spirit; and even as I appear unto thee to be in the spirit will I appear unto my people in the flesh” (Ether 3:16). We thus know the form of a pre-earth spirit.

Earthly government was patterned after heavenly government. In our premortal existence, God, our Eternal Father, was the father of all spirits. Even in those past times, we were not equal. Among the spirits, “one shall be more intelligent than the other” (Abraham 3:18). Some would be called to be rulers. “These I will make my rulers” (v. 23). Indeed, one who was “more intelligent than they all” was called to be our Savior, who said, “Here am I, send me” (vv. 19, 27). Jeremiah was called to be a prophet before he was born on the earth (see Jeremiah 1:5). The Apostle Paul refers to this early system of things, or government, as the “family in heaven” (Ephesians 3:15).

The Lord’s government was, and is, patriarchal in nature. In heaven there existed a perfect theocratic, patriarchal system. With the placing of men and women on earth, the Lord began by patterning earthly government after that which was heavenly. Adam, our first mortal parent, was at the head. The family is the basic unit of the

Church and of civil society. The needs and preservation of the family take precedence over all things. As it was in the heavens, the family consists of a husband and wife. As it was in the heavens, and as it was with Adam and Eve, the husband and wife are joined together in the new and everlasting covenant of marriage. Adam and Eve set a proper and righteous pattern for all of their descendants. They were married by God Himself in the Garden of Eden.¹ It was an eternal marriage, since death had not been introduced into the scheme of things. Moses records, “I, the Lord God, . . . made . . . a woman, and brought her unto the man” (Moses 3:22). If a couple brought together in this way is blessed with children, they too become members of the family.

In those early days, the Church government itself was patriarchal in nature. From Adam to Noah, the presiding Church officer was always both a high priest and a patriarch, and the office descended from father to son. In the great revelation of priesthood given to the Prophet Joseph Smith, these words are recorded: “The order of this priesthood was confirmed to be handed down from father to son, and rightly belongs to the literal descendants of the chosen seed, to whom the promises were made. This order was instituted in the days of Adam” (D&C 107:40–41).

The First Commandment

The first and fundamental precept and commandment given by God to man and woman had to do with parenthood and the duties of husbands and wives: “And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it” (Genesis 1:28). Thus, from the first precept uttered from the lips of God to our first parents, instruction regarding how to have eternal families commenced. Eternal families have their

beginnings in celestial marriage here on earth. Faithful members of such families then continue in the family unit in eternity. They are in the highest heaven of the celestial world. They have eternal increase (see D&C 131:1–4; 132:16–32). A full endowment of all good graces attends such eternal families. We shall hereafter discuss how Latter-day Saint families begin here and now, by obedience to the laws of the gospel, and progress to enjoy peace, joy, and love, which will be enjoyed in eternal fullness in the exalted family unit.

The Abrahamic Covenant

Jesus said: “I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. . . . My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me” (John 10:14, 27). We thus come to understand that some people hear and understand and believe Jesus and His saving truths more readily than others do. It is easier for some people to believe the gospel than it is for others to believe. Some people have a talent for recognizing and believing saving truths. The Apostle Paul had a good deal to say about such chosen people. They are described by him as becoming “joint-heirs with Christ” and conforming to “the image” of God’s Son (Romans 8:17, 29). Paul used the birth of Jacob and Esau as his example of the law of election being based on pre-earth life and actions. He wrote that although “the children [Jacob and Esau] being not yet born” (that is, the two sons were still in their mother’s womb), one was “according to election” and that “the elder shall serve the younger” (Romans 9:11, 12).

As with Jacob and Esau pursuant to their pre-earth preparations, so it is with us all. Paul wrote, “To the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus: . . . Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places: . . . According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love” (Ephesians 1:1, 3–4).

Why is it that Jacob came into this world with greater spiritual capacity than did his brother Esau? Why were the Saints at Ephesus and all the faithful in Christ foreordained and other persons were not? Why, in Paul’s language, are some “God’s elect” (Romans 8:33)?

In our discussion of a spirit creation prior to a temporal creation, there is found an approach to the answer to this question. We are not born into this world with equal spiritual aptitudes. We came into this world with varying capacities. These capacities were developed in our pre-earth life. I have referred to Father Abraham’s incomparable vision of the world of spirits prior to physical creation. In it, Abraham saw the hosts of men and women in the spirit world before they were born, “and among all these there were many of the noble and great ones” (Abraham 3:22). Of these select spirits, their Father said, “These I will make my rulers” (v. 23). And then to Abraham, the Father of the Faithful, it was said: “Thou art one of them; thou wast chosen before thou wast born” (v. 23).

A more complete answer to the question why this difference among people exists is given by Alma in the Book of Mormon. Alma said that high priests in the holy order of the priesthood in this life were, in fact, “called and prepared from the foundation of the world according to the foreknowledge of God, on account of their exceeding faith and good works” (Alma 13:3). We developed our spiritual talents and our aptitude to believe saving truths by our faith and good works in the pre-earth existence. God’s elect earned their election, having been “in the first place

... on the same standing with their brethren” (v. 5). There they had the ability “to choose good or evil” (v. 3).

We have no concept of time incident to pre-earth life. By obedience to law we were endowed with varying degrees of aptitude to believe spiritual truths. We lived as spirit beings. We were all spirit children of the Eternal Father.

God gave a series of sacred promises to Abraham. Abraham, through the gift of God, was chosen to receive from Melchizedek the power to perpetuate the patriarchal system, a system that would make Abraham the father of the faithful forever. Those sacred promises, taken together, are called the Abrahamic covenant.

The best restatement of the Abrahamic covenant is found in the scriptures of the Restoration. God had Abraham record, “And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse them that curse thee; and in thee (that is, in thy Priesthood) and in thy seed (that is, thy Priesthood), for I give unto thee a promise that this right shall continue in thee, and in thy seed after thee (that is to say, the literal seed, or the seed of the body) shall all the families of the earth be blessed, even with the blessings of the Gospel, which are the blessings of salvation, even of eternal life” (Abraham 2:11). Elder Bruce R. McConkie restated those sacred promises in these words: “Abraham first received the gospel by baptism (which is the covenant of salvation); then he had conferred upon him the higher priesthood, and he entered into celestial marriage (which is the covenant of exaltation), gaining assurance thereby that he would have eternal increase; finally he received a promise that all of these blessings would be offered to all of his mortal posterity.”²

Genesis contains a partial restatement of these promises. Therein the Lord said to Abraham that he was called

to “be a father of many nations” (Genesis 17:14). He continued, “I will establish my covenant [my gospel covenant] between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee” (v. 7). On another occasion he added, “And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed” (Genesis 22:18). Included in those sacred promises to Abraham were the promises that Christ would come through his lineage and that Abraham’s posterity would receive certain lands as an eternal inheritance (see Abraham 2; Genesis 17; 22:15–18; Galatians 3). The Abrahamic covenant was renewed with Isaac (see Genesis 24:60; 26:1–4, 24) and again with Jacob (see Genesis 28; 35:9–13; 48:3–4).

Fulfilling the Covenant of Abraham

We shall now discuss those portions of the Abrahamic covenant that pertain to personal exaltation and eternal increase. These most important covenants are renewed with every member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints who enters into the new and everlasting order of celestial marriage. Thus, modern Israel participates in the Abrahamic covenant.

“Thou shalt be a blessing unto thy seed after thee,” the Lord promised Abraham, “that in their hands they shall bear this ministry and Priesthood unto all nations” (Abraham 2:9). To fulfill this promise to “bear this ministry” to “all nations,” a number of specific things must take place in the last days. The gospel must be restored. This has been done. The priesthood must be conferred upon men. That has been done. The keys of the sealing power for celestial marriage must again be given to man. This has been done. Scattered Israel must be gathered, and the Holy Ghost must be poured out upon the Gentiles. These are

in process. We live in days when the identity of those who are “heirs according to the covenant” (D&C 52:2) and who are “lawful heirs, according to the flesh” (D&C 86:8–11) are being made known by their joining The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Scattered Israel is coming back into the fold.

“I give unto you a sign,” said God, “that ye may know the time when these things shall be about to take place” (3 Nephi 21:1). He then detailed four occurrences that take place: (1) A free people will be set up in the Americas; (2) the gospel will be restored; (3) the Book of Mormon will come forth; and (4) “I will establish my Church” (vv. 1–22).

Let us examine, in more detail, those promises in the Abrahamic covenant that have to do with the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob becoming inheritors of all of the blessings promised them. These sacred promises—having particular reference to the fact that the literal seed of these patriarchs would be entitled to the blessings of the gospel, the priesthood, celestial marriage, and eternal life (see Abraham 2:10–11)—are referred to as “the promises made to the fathers” (D&C 2:2). In a vision given to President Joseph F. Smith, it is recorded, “The Prophet Elijah was to plant in the hearts of the children the promises made to their fathers” (D&C 138:47).

The angel Moroni, who appeared to the Prophet Joseph on the evening of September 21, 1823, said: “Behold, I will reveal unto you the Priesthood, by the hand of Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he shall plant in the hearts of the children the promises made to the fathers, and the hearts of the children shall turn to their fathers. If it were not so, the whole earth would be utterly wasted at his coming” (D&C 2:1–3). This angelic promise was fulfilled on April 3,

1836, in the temple at Kirtland, Ohio. “The veil was taken from our minds, and the eyes of our understanding were opened,” wrote the Prophet Joseph of himself and Oliver Cowdery (D&C 110:1).

Elias appeared, and committed the dispensation of the gospel of Abraham, saying that in us and our seed all generations after us should be blessed.

After this vision had closed, another great and glorious vision burst upon us; for Elijah the prophet, who was taken to heaven without tasting death, stood before us and said:

Behold, the time has fully come, which was spoken of by the mouth of Malachi—testifying that he [Elijah] should be sent, before the great and dreadful day of the Lord come—

To turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the children to the fathers, lest the whole earth be smitten with a curse—

Therefore, the keys of this dispensation are committed into your hands. (vv. 12–16)

This passage does not say who the “Elias” from the dispensation of Abraham was. If the Elias was not Abraham himself, then Abraham would probably be the only head of a biblical dispensation who did not appear to the Prophet Joseph. Clearly his dispensation had to do with the proper order of marriage and the resulting seed. Elijah restored the keys of the sealing powers. The promises made to the fathers were given to the children. God specifically said to the Prophet Joseph, “And as I said unto Abraham concerning the kindreds of the earth, even so I say unto my servant Joseph: In thee and in thy seed shall the kindred of the earth be blessed” (D&C 124:58).

The promised Elijah has come. The keys of the sealing powers have been restored as promised. As it was with Joseph Smith, so will it be with all who follow the same law. “All who enter into celestial marriage receive the promise that in them and in their seed after them shall all generations be blessed.”³ The Abrahamic covenant is thus fulfilled in us. Those foreordained persons who believe in Christ, accept His gospel, gain temple blessings, and endure in righteousness are “the elect of God,” and as their election is made sure, they are “hid with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:12, 3). The promises made to the fathers have been given to the children. “For ye are lawful heirs, according to the flesh, and have been hid from the world with Christ in God” (D&C 86:9).

Natural Patriarchs

We have thus observed how, in the restoration of all things, the promise made to Abraham that all of his blessings would be offered to his mortal posterity has been extended to each member of the house of Israel who enters into the order of celestial marriage. Abraham was promised that God’s gospel covenant with him and his descendants would be an everlasting covenant: “And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed” (Genesis 22:18). Each person who enters into the order of celestial marriage is promised “that in us and our seed all generations after us shall be blessed” (D&C 110:12). As it was with Abraham, so it will be with us.

In a literal sense, every holder of the higher priesthood who enters into the patriarchal order of celestial marriage—and thereby has pronounced upon his head and receives for himself the blessings of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—is a natural patriarch to his family. All such fathers are not ordained to the priesthood office of patriarch. In

our day, each stake of Zion is entitled to have at least one who is ordained to the priesthood office of a patriarch (see D&C 107:39). Their special priestly duty is to give patriarchal blessings to members of the Church. However, as we are about to observe, all fathers have special priestly duties in regard to their families.

If we claim the title of being Abraham's seed, if we claim the title of being natural patriarchs, then we are under the obligation to act as Abraham acted. Israelites of New Testament times sought refuge against Jesus's teachings by saying what was legally true: "We be Abraham's seed" (John 8:33). Our Lord's reply was devastating: "If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham. . . . Ye do the deeds of your father. . . . Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do" (John 8:39–44). We, indeed, should be Abraham's children. In the gospel sense, Abraham's children are those of us who do the works of Abraham. And what are the works of Abraham? Let us consider the priestly duties incident to being a natural patriarch, having been blessed as Abraham was blessed.

The Family Is Ordained of God

We have already concluded that the family unit on earth was patterned after the family unit in heaven and that God Himself brought the family into being. In September 1995, the leaders of the Church made a solemn proclamation to the world. "We the First Presidency and the Council of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, solemnly proclaim that marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God and that the family is central to the Creator's plan for the eternal destiny of His children. . . . The family is ordained of God."⁴

Priestly Duties of Natural Patriarchs

The “Proclamation to the World” sets forth in particularity the priestly duties incumbent upon natural patriarchs. It cites Psalm 127: “Children are an heritage of the Lord” (v. 3). To set a spiritual tone to parental responsibilities, let us itemize the requirements of the proclamation.

1. “Husband and wife have a solemn responsibility to love and care for each other.” First and foremost in the priestly duties of a husband is to love his wife. This theme is repeated in the scriptures: “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave himself for it; . . . So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies” (Ephesians 5:25, 28). President Spencer W. Kimball taught that the most important thing a father can do for his children is to love their mother.

Let us go back to the heavenly pattern set at the time of Adam and Eve: “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). A natural patriarch’s wife comes first—before himself, before his parents, before their children. The husband’s natural duty is to cherish and love his wife.

The proclamation adds two more words: “care for.” It is not enough to love and cherish. A husband has the affirmative duty to care for his wife. A scripture of the Restoration could not be plainer: “Women have claim on their husbands for their maintenance” (D&C 83:2). To Paul, one who “provide[s] not . . . for those of his own house . . . is worse than an infidel” (1 Timothy 5:8).

The wife was kneeling at the same alter with her husband when it was said to them “that in us and our seed all generations after us should be blessed” (D&C 110:12). She shares the same responsibility to love her husband. The great word craftsman Paul uses these words: “Wives, sub-

mit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord.” He also wrote that the wife should “reverence her husband” (Ephesians 5:22, 33).

2. “We declare that God’s commandment for His children to multiply and replenish the Earth remains in force.” God’s first and fundamental precept and commandment is still in force and in effect. Marriage is a divine institution in which we live our true and complete lives. Celibacy is contrary to nature and nature’s God. Conjugal relations in marriage have specific apostolic approval: “The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife. . . . Come together . . . that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency” (1 Corinthians 7:4–5). Having children is a divine mandate. It is a priestly duty of a natural patriarch.

3. “Husband and wife have a solemn responsibility to love and care for . . . their children.” Love is always associated with and manifest through service. “If thou lovest me thou shalt serve me” (D&C 42:29). It is a priestly duty of a natural patriarch to love and serve his children. Love is particularly important in the family unit. Parents should be kind and tender to their children.

The great King Benjamin instructed us in how “to live peaceably” in a family setting, saying, “Ye will not suffer your children that they go hungry, or naked; neither will ye suffer that they transgress the laws of God, and fight and quarrel one with another” (Mosiah 4:13–14). In an essay on the Abrahamic covenant and its attendant patriarchies, it should be noted that our children are the children of the covenant. According to the terms of the covenant which God made with Abraham, all of the literal seed of this great prophet are entitled to receive the gospel, the priesthood, and all the ordinances of salvation and exaltation. It is the

priestly duty of the natural patriarchs—who have received these same promises—to see to it that their children do receive all these things. When our children receive all of these promised blessings, “they become the sons of Moses and of Aaron and the seed of Abraham, and the church and kingdom, and the elect of God” (D&C 84:34). It is the duty of the father to see that his children become “the children of light” (John 12:36).

4. “Parents have a sacred duty to rear their children in love and righteousness.” Love and righteousness are the foundation for peace and happiness in this life and exaltation in the life hereafter. Righteousness is the quality and type of living that results from obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel. Teaching righteousness begins at a child’s birth. Righteous natural patriarchs are to give a name and blessing to their children: “Every member of the church of Christ having children is to bring them unto the elders before the church, who are to lay their hands upon them in the name of Jesus Christ, and bless them in his name” (D&C 20:70). This begins the teaching process. Moses told us how to rear our children and teach them to “love the Lord” with all their hearts and souls and might: “And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up” (Deuteronomy 6:5, 7). This is a priestly duty of a natural patriarch.

5. “By divine design, fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness.” Natural patriarchs are to act as patriarchs. They are to lead in righteous living, “for the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church” (Ephesians 5:23). Husbands should emulate our Lord in tenderness and compassion. In talking

about “the covenant that I made with their fathers,” the Lord said, “I was an husband unto them” (Jeremiah 31:32).

Do not confuse the concept of presiding with the concept of equality or inequality. Husbands and wives may be equal in the attributes of godliness, such as knowledge, faith or power, justice, judgment, mercy, and truth.⁵ They may be equal or unequal in intelligence or good works. Be their separate talents as they may, “mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children. In these sacred responsibilities, fathers and mothers are obligated to help one another as equal partners.”⁶

6. “Parents have a sacred duty to rear their children . . . to provide for their physical and spiritual needs.” Righteous natural patriarchs are under obligation to rear their children. Children are not to be left to rear themselves. Families are not democracies. Some facts are more important than other facts. Some actions are more important than other actions. Some truths are eternally more important than other truths. And, opinions of righteous fathers and mothers are more important than opinions of their children in family rearing.

Under normal circumstances, fathers should care for the physical needs of their children so that they can be nurtured in the home by their mothers. It is the spiritual rearing that deserves comment. We were taught in our home that parents should set the example of living all gospel precepts. If children are taught by example that it is permissible to disobey one law with impunity, they may choose to disobey a much more important law but be unprepared for the consequences.

Nephi wrote of Lehi counseling and blessing his posterity. Then he recorded: “I write the things of my soul, . . . for my soul delighteth in the scriptures, and my heart pondereth them, and writeth them for the learning and

the profit of my children” (2 Nephi 4:15). We are under the direct commandment “that inasmuch as parents have children . . . they shall also teach their children to pray, and to walk uprightly before the Lord” (D&C 68:25, 28).

Part of fulfilling the spiritual needs of children is helping them receive blessings for being righteous. Children need blessings from God. A priestly duty of a natural patriarch is to give what are usually called father’s blessings. In the Church, children have a right to be blessed (see D&C 20:70). This is not an ordinance that is necessary for salvation, but it is a way for a natural patriarch to bond with his children and to care for their spiritual needs. It is appropriate to record such blessings in family records. The same can be said for husbands acting as voice in blessing their wives.

7. “Parents have a sacred duty to rear their children, . . . to teach them to love and serve one another.” The priestly duties of natural patriarchs are detailed. They include teaching children to love and serve one another. Our latter-day scriptures talk about the sin of selfishness (see D&C 56:8). To be selfish is to be overly concerned with oneself, regardless of others. It is the opposite of the golden rule as taught by the Savior in the Sermon on the Mount: “Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them” (Matthew 7:12). As all parents have experienced, this takes patient teaching among young siblings.

Service is a child of love. All of this comes from keeping the commandments—“If thou lovest me thou shalt serve me and keep all my commandments” (D&C 42:29). Teaching children to love and serve one another comes naturally in a God-ordained family. As the proclamation suggests, “Happiness in family life is most likely to be achieved when founded upon the teachings of the Lord

Jesus Christ. Successful marriages and families are established and maintained on principles of faith, prayer, repentance, forgiveness, respect, love, compassion, work, and wholesome recreational activities.”

8. “Parents have a sacred duty to rear their children, . . . to obey the commandments of God.” Take baptism for example. The scriptures of the Restoration place the responsibility for this saving ordinance squarely on the natural patriarch in the home: “And again, inasmuch as parents have children in Zion, or in any of her stakes which are organized, that teach them not to understand the doctrine of repentance, faith in Christ the Son of the living God, and of baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands, when eight years old, the sin be upon the heads of the parents” (D&C 68:25).

I remember my eighth birthday. The memory of it was by design—my father’s design. It was over seventy years ago, on May 26, 1934. With the exception of my wedding day, which was to occur sixteen years later, it was the most significant day of my life. And so it stands almost alone in my memory.

The constitution of the Church makes it clear that baptism is the initiatory ordinance into the Church on earth and the celestial kingdom in the world to come (see D&C 20:68–74). No one can be received into the Church “unless he has arrived unto the years of accountability before God” (v. 71). Parents are to teach their children “to understand the doctrine . . . of baptism . . . when eight years old” (D&C 68:25). Baptism is the ordinance which the Lord has provided so that a person can signify his or her personal acceptance of all the terms and conditions of the gospel covenant. Alma summarized our baptismal covenants in this way: “As ye are desirous to come into the fold of God and to be called his people, and are willing to

bear one another's burdens, that they may be light; yea, and are willing to mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort, and to stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places that ye may be in" (Mosiah 18:8–9). When we agree to serve God and keep His commandments that we may "be redeemed of God, and be numbered with those of the first resurrection," God, for His part of the covenant, will "pour out his spirit more abundantly upon us" (vv. 9–10).

Even Jesus had to be baptized, and He taught that "except a man be [baptized], he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:3–5). Some different reasons exist why our Lord needed to be baptized. His expression to John was, "Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15).

In our family we were taught that if baptism was this important, and if we could be baptized when we were eight years old, we should not wait one extra day. We looked forward to our eighth birthday, and all six children were baptized on their eighth birthdays. The *Church Handbook of Instructions* gave encouragement to righteous fathers, who were empowered by the priesthood to bind on earth and seal in heaven, to baptize their children themselves. Our father baptized each of us.

This was my father exercising his patriarchy to its fullest. We were taught the doctrine. As an everlasting covenant, baptism began on this earth with our first patriarch, Adam (see Moses 6:64–67), baptizing his wife and children. Baptism is the symbolic representation that bears record of the death, burial, and Resurrection of Christ (see Romans 6:1–12). It is symbolic of a new birth, with the same elements—water, blood, and spirit—being present that are found in the first birth (see Moses 6:59–60). These

elements were also present in the circumstances surrounding the atoning sacrifice of our Lord (see John 19:28–37; 1 John 5:5–12). Thus, through this ordinance, attention is focused on the Atonement.

Father and I participated together in this mighty and necessary religious experience. It was more than doctrine. It was experiential religion. It was part of our bonding. As to the occasion, this is what I remember. In midafternoon, my mother was hosting a birthday party for me. A few friends were there. We played games and had light refreshments. Then my father came home from work early. He came home and the party was over. My father had inquired of the city officials to determine where would be a clean and appropriate place in the Jordan River for a baptism. My family got into the car and drove to the predetermined spot. My family stood on the side of the river. My father led me by the hand and we walked into the water of the Jordan River until the water was waist high. I do not remember the clothing either of us wore. I do not remember if there was any formal meeting with an opening prayer. I do not think there was one. I held on to my father's left hand. He raised his right arm to the square and said: "Oscar W. McConkie Jr., having been commissioned of Jesus Christ, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen." He immersed me. I put one hand over my face and held on to my father's hand with the other. I came out of the water. He gently led me to the edge of the river, and Mother helped me out. I was confirmed at the water's edge. My father acted as voice for God, or so it seemed to me, and I received the gift of the Holy Ghost.

All of this had a profound effect upon me—so much so, that as each of our eight children turned eight, I baptized them.

9. “Husband and wife have a solemn responsibility . . . to teach [their children] . . . to be law-abiding citizens.” Civil power affects us all. As early as 1835, the Church issued a formal declaration of belief regarding governments and civil law. It begins, “We believe that governments were instituted of God for the benefit of man” (D&C 134:1). This has reference to the existence of governments. The concept of governments has God’s approbation. Governments are positive goods. They are not necessary evils. This does not mean that all governments have divine approval. Indeed, the declaration continues that for a government to be legitimate it must “secure to each individual the free exercise of conscience, the right and control of property, and the protection of life” (v. 2).

The declaration further states, “We believe that . . . God . . . holds men accountable for their acts in relation to them [governments], both in making laws and administering them. . . . We believe that all men are bound to sustain and uphold the respective governments in which they reside” (D&C 134:1, 5).

When I and my three brothers, Bruce, Brit, and James, were serving in the United States armed services during World War II, and when our father was living up to his patriarchy in sustaining us all with weekly letters, and when Saints were called upon by their various governments to serve on both sides of the conflict, the First Presidency instructed and comforted us, saying:

The church stands for the separation of church and state. The church has no civil political functions. . . . The state is responsible for the civil control of its citizens or subjects, for their political welfare, and for the carrying forward of political policies, domestic and foreign, of the body politic. For these policies, their success or failure, the state is alone responsible, and must carry its burdens. . . .

Nevertheless, as a correlative of the principle of separation of the church and state, themselves, there is an obligation running from every citizen or subject to the state. . . . The church is and must be against war. . . . But the church members are citizens or subject of sovereignties over which the church has no control. . . . This church is a worldwide church. Its devoted members are in both camps. They are the innocent war instrumentalities of their warring sovereignties. . . . God will work out in his own due time and in his own sovereign way the justice and right of the conflict, but he will not hold the innocent instrumentalities of war, our brethren in arms, responsible for the conflict.⁷

Few things are of such deep concern to the Saints as their relationship with the powers that be. The ancient scriptures contain accounts of how the Church and state used their respective powers. There is no need to recount these. To us, all of this is covered by the twelfth article of faith: “We believe in being subject to kings, presidents, rulers, and magistrates, in obeying, honoring, and sustaining the law.” This is a core concept of the gospel and is to be taught by fathers to their children.

10. “Husband and wife have a solemn responsibility to . . . provide for their [children’s] physical . . . needs. . . . By divine design, fathers . . . are responsible to provide the necessities of life . . . for their families.” In all practicality, this is how most fathers live up to their patriarchies. Our first mortal father was told: “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread,” and “In sorrow shalt thou eat of [the ground]” (Genesis 3:19, 17). We labor and toil and sweat and wear ourselves out. We are given the ground, but we must “dress it” and “keep it” (Genesis 2:15). We leave father and mother and work to provide for the physical necessities of life for our children. We are given dominion over the earth, the sea, the air, the fowls, the animals, and every

herb. But we must work to subdue those things for our sake. Work is an integral part of the first and fundamental precept and commandment to “be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth” (Genesis 1:28).

Hard as it is, most of us do a fair job in providing for our kin. We ought to. It is not optional. Civil law, as well as ecclesiastical law, demands it of us. When we have a few hours to rest from our labors, we have the virtuous feeling that we are doing just that which is required of us. Fathers are to provide for the necessities of life for their children. There are civil and ecclesiastical sanctions for those who shirk this duty, ranging from spending time in jail to not being worthy of a temple recommend.

Scriptural instruction in this regard varies from a positive requirement that parents are to take care of the physical needs of their children to derisive, negative name-calling for those who do not do this basic duty. The Lord said to the Saints of the dispensation of the fullness of times through Joseph Smith: “All children have claim upon their parents for their maintenance until they are of age” (D&C 83:4). The Lord said to the Saints anciently through Paul: “But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel” (1 Timothy 5:8).

11. Finally, “by divine design, fathers . . . are responsible to provide . . . protection of their families.” We conclude this essay on natural patriarchs living up to their patriarchies as we commenced. We go back to the Lord God who made the heavens and the earth: “It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him” (Genesis 2:18). God brought to man a woman and decreed

that they should be “one flesh” (v. 24). And He said, “Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth” (Genesis 1:28). Families were born. It is the natural duty of a wife to be at her husband’s side and to help him. It is the natural duty of the husband to cherish and defend his wife and family as he would himself.

How does a natural patriarch provide protection for his family in the world in which we live? Remember, the world in which we live consists of the social conditions created by fallen man. We are in a world of carnal, sensual, and lustful people. As the angel said to King Benjamin, “The natural man is an enemy to God” (Mosiah 3:19). It is the great goal of a natural patriarch to help his family to overcome the world. This is how he defends his family.

Near the end of his ministry, John wrote: “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever” (1 John 2:15–17).

Once again, and finally, I turn for an example to the one who both taught me the meaning of the Abrahamic covenant in our day and who acted it out in the name of God—my father. I was in high school and had not reached my eighteenth birthday. The United States Navy sent a representative to our school. He was suggesting the possibility of an officers training program after we graduated. World War II was a time of universal military service commitment. I passed a series of tests that he administered. The Navy sent me to San Francisco for more testing, physical and mental. I agreed to go into the Naval V-12 program. After graduation from high school, I would be

sent to a university with a naval unit to become an officer in the U.S. Navy.

For the first time in my life, I was troubled. My life at home in Salt Lake City had been a sheltered one. Family and church had protected me from the world. Was I ready for Navy life? I had specific questions. Was I mature enough to be firm in the faith? Would I keep my father's name in honorable remembrance? Just how much power does Satan have? Did I have the physical and mental strength and the ability to do the responsibilities that would be thrust upon me? Did I have the intellect? Fear was upon me.

I went to my father. He customarily gave formal written father's blessings to his children when they went on missions or got married. Could I have mine a little early, before I was to be shipped out to the V-12 program at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque? The fact that I asked was all the evidence of maturity that was necessary for my father. He took me into the privacy of a back bedroom. Mother came with a yellow legal pad and a pencil. Mother and I sat on the edge of the bed. Dad stood by me and put his hands on my head. Mother wrote in longhand as he spoke: "Oscar, my son, . . . unto you it is given to bear my name." And then particularly, slowly enough for mother to write, he intoned the answers to each of my worried but unspoken questions.

My fears left me. I was comforted. All my questions were answered and dismissed. A just-turned-eighteen-year-old boy became a man that day under his father's hands. I felt an awareness—as I had so often seen in my father—that I, too, was a subject of divine notice. By acting as voice, in a father's blessing from God, my natural patriarch protected me.

Notes

1. See Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2nd ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1957), 2:320.
2. Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 13.
3. Bruce R. McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1979), 1:57.
4. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign*, November 1995, 102.
5. See “Lecture Fourth,” in Joseph Smith, comp., *Lectures on Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 49–58.
6. “The Family: A Proclamation,” 102.
7. In Conference Report, April 1942, 92–95.

