



Although our perception or understanding is limited, there has always been an inseparable connection (and relevance) between priesthood power and women.

Using Section 84 to Emphasize the Priesthood Power of Women

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In the October 2019 general conference, President Russell M. Nelson expressed his yearning for the women of the Church to “understand that the restoration of the priesthood is just as relevant to you as a woman as it is to any man.” In the same talk, he invited the women to “gain, understand, and use the power with which you have been endowed” and to “study prayerfully *all* the truths you can find about priesthood power.” He encouraged the women to study Doctrine and Covenants sections 25, 84, and 107 as a starting point to increase their understanding. He then blessed the sisters that they might “understand the priesthood power with which [they] have been endowed.”¹ One year later, in the October 2020 general conference, President Nelson “renew[ed]” his “invitation” for the women of the Church to “increase your understanding of priesthood power and of temple covenants and blessings.”²

This prophetic priority on women’s understanding and using priesthood power, especially in regard to the temple, has become a clear focus of Church leaders over the past decade. Consider the following talks, for example, on this topic from members of the First Presidency, senior Apostles, and female General Presidencies:

- Dallin H. Oaks, “Keys and Authority of the Priesthood,” *Ensign or Liabona*, May 2014, 49–52
- M. Russell Ballard, “Men and Women and the Priesthood Power,” *Ensign or Liabona*, September 2014, 28–33
- M. Russell Ballard, “Women of Dedication, Faith, Determination, and Action” (Brigham Young University Women’s Conference address, May 1, 2015)
- Russell M. Nelson, “A Plea to My Sisters,” *Ensign or Liabona*, November 2015, 95–98
- Bonnie L. Oscarson, “Rise Up in Strength, Sisters in Zion,” *Ensign or Liabona*, November 2016, 12–15
- Bonnie L. Oscarson, “Young Women in the Work,” *Ensign or Liabona*, May 2018, 36–38
- Russell M. Nelson, “Sisters’ Participation in the Gathering of Israel,” *Ensign or Liabona*, November 2018, 68–70
- Jean B. Bingham, Sharon Eubank, and Reyna I. Aburto, “Endowed with Priesthood Power” (Brigham Young University Women’s Conference address, May 2, 2019)
- David A. Bednar, “Prepared to Obtain Every Needful Thing,” *Ensign or Liabona*, May 2019, 101–4
- Russell M. Nelson, “Spiritual Treasures,” *Ensign or Liabona*, November 2019, 76–79
- Dallin H. Oaks, “The Melchizedek Priesthood and the Keys,” *Ensign or Liabona*, May 2020, 69–72
- Joy D. Jones, “An Especially Noble Calling,” *Ensign or Liabona*, May 2020, 15–18
- Henry B. Eyring, “Sisters in Zion,” *Ensign or Liabona*, November 2020, 67–69
- Russell M. Nelson, “Embrace the Future with Faith,” *Ensign or Liabona*, November 2020, 73–76

President Nelson’s specific invitations to women and men, young and old, to study all they can about the priesthood places us as religious educators in a primary position of influence, especially as we study the Doctrine and Covenants together with our students. Using Doctrine and Covenants 84:1–42 as the text,³ this paper will weave together doctrines, historical context, prophetic quotes, and personal analysis in each scripture block and give suggestions as to how to better help our students understand “how the

restoration of the priesthood is relevant to [women]” and more about the priesthood power with which women have been or will be endowed.

The Historical Context of Priesthood Structures: Triangulate Authoritative Sources

In studying and teaching section 84, it is important to note that throughout the history of the earth, the Lord has used two organizational structures by which to administer his priesthood. Both of these priesthood organizational structures have been revealed line upon line and used during the times of the Restoration. As the history of the priesthood is unfolded in this article, note not only the teachings but the sources used to formulate them. These sources include the teachings of Joseph Smith, modern prophets, and the standard works.

The first priesthood organizational structure that existed on this earth was patriarchal and was handed down from father to son, as noted in Doctrine and Covenants 84:6. Both Adam and Eve entered into the patriarchal priesthood, or “fullness of the Melchizedek Priesthood,” and both were promised the associated blessings or given the same guarantee from the Lord.⁴ Elder Cree-L Kofford, emeritus member of the Seventy, explained, “The patriarchal order refers to priesthood government by family organization. It originated in the time of Adam and extended down to the days of Moses, when that order was withdrawn.”⁵ This organizational structure, therefore, begins in mortality with Adam and Eve and continues through Abraham and Sarah, and on to Moses. President Ezra Taft Benson explained, however, that it was during the leadership of Moses that this patriarchal priesthood, or the highest order of the Melchizedek Priesthood, was withdrawn.⁶

Moses taught this order of priesthood to his people and “sought diligently to sanctify his people that they might behold the face of God; but they hardened their hearts and could not enter his presence; therefore, the Lord in his wrath, for his anger was kindled against them, swore that they should not enter into his rest while in the wilderness, which rest is the fullness of his glory. Therefore, he took Moses out of their midst, and the Holy Priesthood also” (Doctrine and Covenants 84:23–25). We learn through the Joseph Smith Translation that the Lord further instructed Moses, “I will take away the priesthood out of their midst; therefore my holy order, and the ordinances thereof, shall not go before them” (JST, Exodus 34:1). In the Old World, from the time of Moses to the time of Christ, the patriarchal

priesthood, or higher order of the Melchizedek Priesthood, was not on the earth, but “the lesser priesthood continued” (Doctrine and Covenants 84:26).

During Christ’s mortal ministry, the organizational structure of his Church changed dramatically. Elder McConkie explained, “The church operates in the easiest and harmonious way because of the social setting that exists from the world. The social circumstances of the nations and the governments reflect that we can’t operate through families like they did in Abraham’s day. You can’t have civil and ecclesiastical authority combined, because the great masses of men don’t belong to the Church.”⁷ Thus his Church was organized following a more hierarchical or administrative structure with Twelve Apostles, Seventy, and so forth rather than the patriarchal or family structure used with Adam and Eve. Following Christ’s crucifixion and the ensuing death of the Apostles—both in the ancient world and in the Americas, as described in the Book of Mormon—Christ’s Church and all priesthood keys and authority were taken from the earth.

This Great Apostasy continued on the earth until May 1829, when Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery were visited by John the Baptist, who ordained them to the Aaronic Priesthood, and later by Peter, James, and John, who conferred upon them the keys and authority associated with the Melchizedek Priesthood, specifically the priesthood keys of presiding. With these priesthood keys, Joseph was able to establish The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, call members of the Quorum of the Twelve and First Presidency, and perform other ecclesiastical duties within the Church. He also delegated priesthood authority for a variety of purposes including performing priesthood ordinances such as baptism and conferring the Holy Ghost, similar to the ecclesiastical structure Christ established during his mortal ministry.

The priesthood keys received by Peter, James, and John, however, did not allow for the administration of the patriarchal, or highest level of the Melchizedek Priesthood. Thus, in section 84, the Lord is speaking in future tense in regard to the temple (verses 3–4), his “house” (verse 5), and the “Holy Priesthood” (verse 6), or patriarchal priesthood yet to be revealed. In fact, it wasn’t until after the dedication of the Kirtland Temple that the keys promised by Elijah, mentioned in what is now Doctrine and Covenants section 2, were finally restored. The Prophet Joseph Smith explains why Elijah was necessary. He said, “Because he holds the keys of the authority to administer in all the ordinances of the Priesthood,”⁸ or the sealing power. Joseph

also explained that these keys were “the revelation, ordinances, oracles, powers and endowments of the fulness of the Melchizedek Priesthood and of the kingdom of God on the earth.”⁹

Although these keys associated with the patriarchal priesthood had eventually been revealed in 1836, the endowment was not yet given, and the fullness of the priesthood had not yet been restored to the earth. Nearly two years after the dedication of the Kirtland Temple, the Saints left the city and abandoned their temple. Thus, although the temple had been built according to God’s command and the keys had now been received, the power and authority given to the Saints through the ordinances and covenants of the highest order of the Melchizedek Priesthood had not been entered into or received, and thus, in a real sense, “the power of godliness” promised in verse 21 had not yet been “manifest.”

What would be the significance of these ordinances and covenants? What were these keys to do? They would create families and save souls. Who would become a vital part of this divine mandate? Both women and men! President Benson explained, “Even though the Aaronic Priesthood and Melchizedek Priesthood had been restored to the earth, the Lord urged the Saints to build a temple to receive the keys by which this order of priesthood could be administered on the earth again, “for there [was] not a place found on earth that he may come to and restore again that which was lost, . . . *even the fulness of the priesthood.*”¹⁰

After the movement of the Saints from Ohio and Missouri to Illinois, Joseph would turn his attention primarily to the building of the new temple. Having now obtained the keys of apostleship given to him by Moses, Elias, and Elijah, Joseph was determined that these keys would be used and the ordinances performed, “for without this, no man can see the face of God, even the Father, and live” (Doctrine and Covenants 84:22). This time the temple that the Saints would build would allow for priesthood ordinances not yet available that, unlike the Kirtland Temple and the administrative priesthood functions, would require women. In the Nauvoo Temple, both women and men would enter into a specific order of the priesthood, even the patriarchal order, or fullness of the priesthood, and would receive the promised privileges (Doctrine and Covenants 84:18–22).

Thus the building of the temple in Nauvoo began line upon line. With the building of the temple came new ordinances, new opportunities, and new privileges for women that were unheard of since the days of

earlier dispensations. Regarding the Nauvoo Temple, the Lord revealed to his Prophet in January of 1841, “And verily I say unto you, let this house be built unto my name, that I may reveal mine ordinances therein unto my people; for I deign to reveal unto my church things which have been kept hid from before the foundation of the world, things that pertain to the dispensation of the fulness of times. And I will show unto my servant Joseph all things pertaining to this house, and the priesthood thereof, and the place whereon it shall be built” (Doctrine and Covenants 124:40–42).

In this same revelation, the Lord calls his temple “the house of the daughters of Zion” (Doctrine and Covenants 124:11), perhaps foreshadowing the necessary involvement of women in these sacred priesthood ordinances and its associated power and authority given to women. It wouldn’t be long before women would become full participants in both receiving and performing priesthood ordinances and making covenants in the temple. This background is foundational to correctly teaching the relevance of priesthood to women as revealed in section 84.

Section Heading: *Stay Current*

As the section heading to section 84 notes, “The Prophet designated it as a revelation on priesthood.” Traditionally, section 84 has been taught and used as training in regard to men and their priesthood ordination. Recently however, great strides have been made by Church leaders to help members understand that “priesthood” applies to women as well as men. Although our perception or understanding is limited, there has always been an inseparable connection (and relevance) between priesthood power and women. Gratefully, prophets continue to give clarification to help us understand the eternal nature of the priesthood and women’s relationship with it.

For example, note the difference in definition of priesthood and therefore the possible relevance to women between the 2010 “Priesthood Principles” introduction found in the official *Handbook 2: Administering in the Church* and that found in the 2020 *General Handbook*. The 2010 *Handbook 2* states, “The priesthood is the power and authority of God. It has always existed and will continue to exist without end. . . . In mortality, the priesthood is the power and authority that God gives to man to act in all things necessary for the salvation of God’s children.”¹¹ Contrast that definition with the latest 2020 *General Handbook*, which similarly defines priesthood as “the authority and power of God.” It then clarifies, “God grants authority and power to His

sons *and daughters* on earth to help carry out this work.”¹² When priesthood is defined and applied overtly in the context of both the sisters and brothers, women’s use of the priesthood is better understood. the concept of priesthood power for our women is better understood.

Knowing and following current prophetic teachings will make the priesthood more relevant to women and will help women better understand their ability to call upon God’s priesthood power, as President Nelson invited them to do. Therefore, in teaching our students any topic regarding or related to the priesthood, it is imperative that the most up-to-date and official definitions and teachings are being used.

Verses 1–6, 17: Focus on Temple and Family Priesthood

In January 1832, Joseph Smith received a revelation in which the Lord called twenty-four missionaries to serve throughout the United States. Now, nearly nine months later, in September 1832, these missionaries returned home to Kirtland. It was at the meeting that these revelations, now composing section 84, were received by Joseph Smith from the Lord. In fact, section 84 is a compilation of three revelations received from September 22 to September 23, a “season of joy” (section heading).

When put into historical context as described above, it is clear that this revelation was more than an administrative treatise on how the priesthood was to be used and governed in the Church—it was instruction on how the patriarchal priesthood was to be used and entered into in terms of the temple. Therefore, while teaching section 84, it is important to note that the “Holy Priesthood” referred to in verse 6 is being used in terms of “the temple” (verses 3–4), the “house of the Lord” (verse 5), the “temple [to] be reared in this generation” (verse 4) and the patriarchal nature of the priesthood, just as in the days of Moses (verse 6). Like Moses of old, Joseph Smith “sought diligently to sanctify his people that they might behold the face of God.”¹³ In both ancient and modern times, sanctification was to be accomplished through the authority and ordinances of the patriarchal, or familial, order of the priesthood, the highest order of the Melchizedek Priesthood, and it was to be done only in the temple. Joseph Smith explained, “The Church is not fully organized, in its proper order, and cannot be, until the Temple is completed.”¹⁴ In other words, the Church could not be fully restored, with all of the rites and privileges granted in the days of Adam through Moses, without a temple on the earth to make that possible.

Referring to the patriarchal order of the priesthood, the Prophet Joseph Smith admonished the Saints, “Go to and Finish the [Nauvoo] temple, and God will fill it with power, and you will then receive more knowledge concerning this Priesthood.”¹⁵ Interestingly, in section 84:19, the Lord promises the “key of the knowledge of God,” which is critical to understanding the priesthood in its fullness. Before the completion of the Nauvoo Temple, Joseph declared that God “has begun to restore the ancient order of His kingdom unto His servants and His people.” In testifying of the fulfillment of the promise given of the Lord, he continued “all things are concurring to bring about the completion of the fullness of the Gospel, a fullness of the dispensation of dispensations, even the fullness of times . . . to prepare the earth for the return of His glory, even a celestial glory, and a kingdom of Priests and kings to God and the Lamb, forever, on Mount Zion.”¹⁶

It seems that both the Lord and Joseph Smith were anxious to bestow the ordinances and authority of the patriarchal, or familial, order, as described above. On May 4, 1842, the sacred ritual of the temple endowment was initiated as nine men met with the Prophet in the upper room of his store. “In this council,” wrote the prophet, “was instituted the ancient order of things for the first time in these last days,” including “washings, anointings, endowments and the communication of keys pertaining to the Aaronic Priesthood, and so on to the highest order of the Melchizedek Priesthood . . . and all those plans and principles by which anyone is enabled to secure the fullness of those blessings which have been prepared for the Church of the Firstborn, and come up and abide in the presence of the Elohim in the eternal worlds”¹⁷—thus reversing the consequence of the wickedness during the days of Moses as described in Doctrine and Covenants 84:24.

It wasn’t just to the men, however, that “washings, anointings, endowments and the communication of keys” were to be revealed in the patriarchal order. As part of the preparation for the temple ordinances, Joseph Smith in 1842 organized the Relief Society to serve as a “counterpart and companion to the men’s priesthood quorums,”¹⁸ both essential to the organization of the Church, and both necessary for the salvation of souls. On March 30, 1842, Joseph “instructed members of the newly organized Relief Society regarding their important role in the ‘kingdom of Priests and kings,’ the ‘holy nation’ which would be established as the Saints were endowed through temple ordinances.”¹⁹ More than half a century later, in 1905, Bathsheba W. Smith, the Relief Society General President who was earlier at the meetings

conducted by Joseph Smith, commented on the Prophet's instructions to the women: "He said . . . he wanted to make us, as the women were in Paul's day, 'A kingdom of priestesses.' We have the ceremony in our endowments as Joseph taught."²⁰ Reynolds Cahoon, an early church leader, connected the purpose of the establishment of the Relief Society with the temple when he declared, "the Order of the Priesthood is not complete without it."²¹

In September 1843 the first women, all members of the Relief Society, received their endowments. Within the temple, women performed sacred priesthood ordinances as they washed, anointed, and blessed each other, and ministered in the holy endowment.²² In addition, they entered, with their husbands, into the new and everlasting covenant of marriage, which, explained Elder Kofford, "is simply another way of saying 'patriarchal order.'"²³

How is the fullness of the priesthood received in the temple, and what are these associated ordinances that qualify us for eternal life? Elder Bruce R. McConkie taught that "this fulness is received through washings, anointings, solemn assemblies, oracles in holy places, conversations, ordinances, endowments, and sealings. (D&C 124:40.) It is in the temple that we enter into the patriarchal order, the order of priesthood that bears the name 'the new and everlasting covenant of marriage.'"²⁴ Therefore, each covenant a woman or man individually makes in the temple is part of the process of entering into the patriarchal, or familial, order, otherwise known as the new and everlasting covenant. Whether married or single, each woman or man therefore individually receives promised priesthood privileges and blessings associated with the patriarchal order of the priesthood, or new and everlasting covenant, and thus "enter[s] into his rest, . . . which rest is the fulness of his glory" (Doctrine and Covenants 84:24).

This patriarchal priesthood is what Joseph was preparing the women and men to receive and enter into in the Nauvoo Temple and seems to be what President Nelson and Church leaders are primarily discussing today. In fact, when President Nelson and other Church leaders refer to women and priesthood, it is almost always in the context of the temple. Note, for example, this quote by President Nelson: "Every woman and every man who makes covenants with God and keeps those covenants, and who participates worthily in priesthood ordinances, has direct access to the power of God. Those who are endowed in the house of the Lord receive a gift of God's priesthood power by virtue of their covenant, along with a gift of knowledge to know how to draw upon that power."²⁵

This foundational understanding of the endowment of priesthood power and authority to women in the temple is critical to our teaching section 84 in a way that will answer our prophet's request. It is this patriarchal priesthood, or the fullness of the priesthood, entered into by women and men that allows both to call on priesthood power, as President Nelson has asked. How critical it is for us, as religious educators to explain this, as President Ballard did:

Although the Church plays a pivotal role in proclaiming, announcing, and administering the necessary ordinances of salvation and exaltation, all of that, as important as it is, is really just the scaffolding being used in an infinite and eternal construction project to build, support, and strengthen the family. And just as scaffolding is eventually taken down and put away to reveal the final completed building, so too will the mortal, administrative functions of the Church eventually fade as the eternal family comes fully into view. In that context, it's important to remember that our Church assignments are only temporary, and that at some point we will all be released either by our leaders or by death. But we will never be released from our eternal callings within the family.²⁶

Imagine how helpful it could be if we as teachers helped our students understand the importance of this revelation in terms of the patriarchal priesthood. How helpful it could be for both women and men to know that they enter into this order of the priesthood in the temple and receive the associated power and authority of the priesthood based upon their obedience to temple covenants. How critical for our sisters and brothers to understand that the priesthood power received through covenants is critical in their lives now, and will remain in the eternities. By focusing on the priesthood in terms of temple and family, we not only help our students understand the relevance of the priesthood to women but also help them better understand how to use its associated power.

Verses 6–18 Include Women Even When Not Specifically Named

Some may wonder how this revelation, and specifically these verses, relate to women, as the verses seem clearly directed to men. In these verses, the Lord is speaking directly to Joseph in the presence of only men, specifically returned missionaries and in the context of missionary work. In regard to the lack of women found in scriptures, President Ballard instructed members to “develop the skill to find [women’s] influence” even when they aren’t specifically mentioned. He continued, “As we look for and find women in our scriptures and in our history, we will see far better the power and influence women have in our family, community, the Church, and the world.”²⁷

Thus, rather than making this revelation, and specifically verses 6–16 a chain of scriptures referring only to men, how could we accurately include women? Note how seamlessly President Benson included women in the context of these verses:

The order of priesthood spoken of in the scriptures is sometimes referred to as the patriarchal order because it came down from father to son.

But this order is otherwise described in modern revelation as an order of family government where a man and woman enter into a covenant with God—just as did Adam and Eve—to be sealed for eternity, to have posterity, and to do the will and work of God throughout their mortality.”²⁸

President Benson naturally included Eve with Adam because Adam and Eve needed each other to enter the patriarchal priesthood in order to have a family. The patriarchal priesthood is all about family.

Robert L. Millet, former dean of Religious Education at Brigham Young University, surmised that the “patriarchal order is a family order, a partnership, a joint stewardship.”²⁹ Imagine then, the strength given to women and the enhancement of their likelihood to understand, use, and call on God’s priesthood power when they correctly see that the priesthood described in this revelation was entered into by both Eve and Adam. Recognizing that Adam and Eve entered into the covenant together and that the patriarchal priesthood is a family order helps women understand their divine role as they make temple covenants. How important is it, then, to help the young women and men understand that women do not need to be ordained to a priesthood office in the administrative function of the Church to enter this order of the priesthood but rather this priesthood power and authority depends on making and keeping temple covenants. Through their covenants with God in the temple, both women and men receive priesthood power and authority, regardless of marital status.

As religious educators, we could help all of our students understand that this patriarchal order of the priesthood was also entered into by Enoch and his wife, who brought their family into the presence of God as the result of making and keeping covenants with the Lord and becoming a Christlike people.³⁰ Noah and Shem followed the same pattern after the Flood, and it continued with Abraham and Sarah, the great patriarch and matriarch. It may be helpful to pause in verses 13 and 14 of section 84 and discuss that it was because of Abraham and Sarah’s righteousness that they, and all covenant-making members of the Church, will receive all of the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant.

Regarding the Abrahamic covenant and the promises of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Elder Bruce R. McConkie also wisely and carefully included women when he taught, “What we say for Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob we say also for Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel, the wives who stood at their side and who with them were true and faithful in all things.” He continued, “Men are not saved alone, and women do not gain an eternal fullness except in and through the continuation of the family unit in eternity. Salvation is a family affair.”³¹

As explained in verse 17, this “priesthood continueth in the church of God in all generations, and is without beginning of days or end of years.” This makes complete sense if we understand this priesthood in its true form, in the context of family. Robert Millet instructed, “The patriarchal order was established by God and predates mortal institutions. . . . In the premortal existence—our first estate—we lived under the patriarchal order, the family order. It was an order consisting of Father, Mother, and children, an order presided over by our Parents and directed by love, kindness, gentleness, and godly persuasion. We are thus children of God, members of the royal family. Our souls are eternally attuned and acclimated to family things.”³²

Perhaps the following quote by Elder James E. Talmage could be used to help our students understand the divine priesthood roles of both women and men in the eternal context of the family: “In the glorified state of the blessed hereafter, husband and wife will administer in their respective stations, seeing and understanding alike, and co-operating to the full in the government of their family kingdom.” He continued with this empowering truth, “Then shall woman reign by Divine right, a queen in the resplendent realm of her glorified state, even as exalted man shall stand, priest and king unto the Most High God. Mortal eye cannot see nor mind comprehend the beauty, glory, and majesty of a righteous woman made perfect in the celestial kingdom of God.”³³

A statement by President Nelson makes all the more sense by understanding it in an eternal context and tying it to the temple: “When a man understands the majesty and power of a righteous, seeking, endowed Latter-day Saint woman, is it any wonder that he feels like standing when she enters the room?”³⁴

What is the promise for those who enter into the patriarchal priesthood and keep the associated covenants? “They shall pass by the angels, and the gods, which are set there, to their exaltation, and glory in all things, as hath been sealed upon their heads, which glory shall be a fulness and a continuation

of the seeds forever and ever. Then shall they be gods, because they have no end; therefore shall they be from everlasting to everlasting, because they continue; then shall they be above all, because all things are subject unto them. Then shall they be gods, because they have all power, and the angels are subject unto them” (Doctrine and Covenants 132:19–20). Who are the “they” referred to in this verse? Men and women who “enter into this order of the priesthood [meaning the new and everlasting covenant of marriage] (Doctrine and Covenants 131:2; see also 132:15).

How relevant is the priesthood to women when they understand that a woman and a man must enter the patriarchal order together to become gods? How relevant is the priesthood to women when they understand that both here in mortality and throughout the eternities, both women and men receive and use priesthood power based on their righteousness to covenants, especially temple covenants? Women do not need to be included by name in order for the priesthood to apply to them. If we teach the doctrine correctly as teachers, we cannot help but make the priesthood relevant to women and help them understand they have priesthood power through temple covenants.

Verses 19–25: We All (Women and Men) Live Below Our Privileges and Have Much to Learn

I have come to learn that for many, unless the adult leaders in their lives understand, support, and teach the truths regarding the priesthood and women, the women, as well as the men, will likely live below their priesthood privileges. How critical it is for all parents, teachers, and leaders to correctly teach truths regarding the role of the priesthood in the lives of women. And if the women are living below their privileges, so likely are the men. In the April 2018 general conference, President Nelson “voice[d] a concern,” that “too many of our brothers and sisters do not fully understand the concept of priesthood power and authority.” He continued, “I fear that too many of our brothers and sisters do not grasp the privileges that could be theirs.”³⁵ In the note to this statement, he specifically cited Doctrine and Covenants 84:18–22 and 107:18–19.

What are the privileges found in in these verses of section 84 that are not understood and therefore not likely being used by both women and men? The Lord explains in verse 19, “This greater priesthood administereth the gospel and holdeth the key of the mysteries of the kingdom, even the key of the knowledge of God.” This “greater priesthood” seems to refer to the

patriarchal priesthood, which, as stated previously, operates in the temples of the Lord. Where then do we receive the key of the mysteries of the kingdom, even the key of the knowledge of God? Again, this seems to refer to the temple. What ordinances are being spoken of in verse 20? The ordinances of the temple, where “the power of godliness” are manifest. “For without this,” the Lord continues, “no man can see the face of God, even the Father and live” (verse 22).

Note President Benson’s careful explanation of the patriarchal priesthood and the associated blessings of those who participate in temple ordinances: “This order of priesthood has been on the earth since the beginning, and it is the only means by which we can one day see the face of God and live. (See D&C 84:22.)”³⁶ He later added, “When you attend the temple and perform the ordinances that pertain to the House of the Lord, certain blessings will come to you.” Among the blessings promised by President Benson are that “you will be endowed with power from on high as the Lord has promised,” and “you will receive the key of the knowledge of God. (See D&C 84:19.) You will learn how you can be like Him. Even the power of godliness will be manifest to you. (See D&C 84:20.)” He continued, “Such are the blessings of the temple and the blessings of frequently attending the temple.”³⁷

How important is it for women and men alike to know that through their temple covenants they receive the “key of the knowledge of God”? This key is not to be confused with keys of presidency so often referred to, but rather it is a key made available to all who have made and kept the covenants of the temple. Perhaps this is why President Nelson expressed, “Those who are endowed in the house of the Lord receive a gift of God’s priesthood power by virtue of their covenant, along with a gift of knowledge to know how to draw upon that power.”³⁸ *Key* is another name for gift in this context.

President Nelson’s invitation pertained to *both* men and women needing to deepen their understanding about priesthood power. As religious educators, are we carefully distinguishing between the keys of presidency and the keys made available to all righteous members through their covenants? Do we, as teachers, understand that typically when women and men hear the word *key* in gospel conversation, they automatically believe it pertains only to men and therefore dismiss the divine privilege of women in this context? Imagine the impact this one clarification alone would make on women’s ability to understand their priesthood power!

Julie B. Beck, former Relief Society General President, wrote, “Through the blessings of the temple, [women] will be armed with power and blessed to receive ‘the key of the knowledge of God.’” She continued, “I am grateful that one of the Lord’s primary purposes in organizing Relief Society was to give the women the responsibility to help each other prepare ‘for the greater blessings of the priesthood found in the ordinances and covenants of the temple.’”³⁹ How beneficial it could be for women to fully understand that they have a key to the knowledge of God through their temple covenants. In the context of the role of women in moving the work forward and using wisdom in so doing, President Eyring taught, “It was Eve who received the knowledge that Adam needed to partake of the fruit of the tree of knowledge for them to keep all of God’s commandments and to form a family,”⁴⁰ and Adam was wise enough to join her.

How important it is to teach that as men and women, husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, we are equally capable of receiving knowledge and revelation from the Lord, both for ourselves, our families, and anyone under our stewardship. In fact, the Lord declared in section 76, “I, the Lord, am merciful and gracious unto those who fear me, and delight to honor those who serve me in righteousness and in truth unto the end” (verse 5). What are the privileges and blessings of those who do so? The Lord promises, “To them will I reveal all mysteries, yea, all the hidden mysteries of my kingdom from days of old, and for ages to come, will I make known unto them the good pleasure of my will concerning all things pertaining to my kingdom” (verse 7).

It is through these covenants, made by both women and men, that we are allowed to “see the face of God, even the Father, and live” (Doctrine and Covenants 84:22) or, in other words, return to his presence. President Benson taught, “When our Heavenly Father placed Adam and Eve on this earth, He did so with the purpose in mind of teaching them how to regain His presence.”⁴¹ These covenants, made in the temple through sacred ordinances give both women and men the “key of the knowledge of God,” and the “power of godliness,” which are necessary to return to his presence, to live with and become like our heavenly parents, and to receive their eternal reward.

In addition to these specific privileges of possessing the “key of knowledge,” and receiving the “power of godliness,” which are so often misunderstood by both women and men, it may also be helpful to clarify, as Elder McConkie instructed, “this doctrine of the priesthood—unknown in the world and but little known even in the Church—cannot be learned out of the scriptures

alone. It is not set forth in the sermons and teachings of the prophets and apostles, except in small measure. The doctrine of the priesthood is known only by personal revelation. It comes, line upon line and precept upon precept, by the power of the Holy Ghost to those who love and serve God with all their heart, might, mind and strength.”⁴² Although many talks have been given on subject of priesthood, most are given in the context of the administrative function, and are, as Elder McConkie stated, “in small measure.”

Specifically on the topic of the priesthood, President Russell M. Nelson instructed, “The Lord loves to do His own teaching in His holy house.” He continues, “Imagine how pleased He would be if you asked Him to teach you about priesthood keys, authority, and power as you experience the ordinances of the Melchizedek Priesthood in the holy temple.”⁴³ It is helpful for women to know that revelation regarding women and the priesthood is continually being revealed both on an individual and general level, from the newest convert to the prophet, and that we as teachers are in the process of learning ourselves.

I admit that there have been times in my life when I too have found myself wondering what more there is to learn. However, through study, experience, and divine mentoring, I have come to understand that I have barely scraped the surface of what the Lord has to teach in his temples, especially in regard to the priesthood privileges of both women and men. President Packer taught that in the temples, “We are continually instructed and enlightened on matters of spiritual importance. It comes line upon line, precept upon precept, until we gain a fullness of light and knowledge.”⁴⁴

The Lord clearly teaches in section 84 that Moses knew this pattern and that he “plainly taught [this] to the children of Israel in the wilderness, and sought diligently to sanctify his people that they might behold the face of God; but they hardened their hearts and could not endure his presence; therefore, the Lord . . . swore that they should not enter into his rest while in the wilderness” (verses 23–24). “Therefore, he took Moses out of their midst and the Holy Priesthood also” (verse 25). How frustrating and painful this must have been to Moses. Moses knew about this order of the priesthood, as did his wife, because they entered into it themselves. Jethro had entered into it as well, as did Abraham, Noah, Enoch, Adam, and their wives. The people in Moses’s day lost their priesthood privilege. In our day, this privilege is available to all covenant-making Saints but must be clearly understood to fully take advantage of it.

Verses 27–32: Women Receive Priesthood Blessings, Power, and Authority

Although the greater priesthood was taken away, the “lesser priesthood” remained. With this priesthood came the “key of the ministering of angels and the preparatory gospel . . . of repentance and of baptism, and the remission of sins, and the law of carnal commandments” (verses 26–27). This lesser priesthood was that which was bestowed upon John the Baptist, “whom God raised up, being filled with the Holy Ghost from his mother’s womb” (verse 27). How wonderful it is that we have priesthood holders that are authorized to perform the ordinances associated with the Aaronic Priesthood, and how important it is to remind all who participate in these ordinances that they receive the associated blessings.

How can we teach our students the relevance of the Aaronic Priesthood to women? In his October 1998 general conference address, President Dallin H. Oaks explained the connection between the Aaronic Priesthood holder performing the sacrament ordinance and all members receiving the blessings.

Through the Aaronic Priesthood ordinances of baptism and the sacrament, we are cleansed of our sins and promised that if we keep our covenants we will always have His Spirit to be with us. I believe that promise not only refers to the Holy Ghost but also to the ministering of angels, for “angels speak by the power of the Holy Ghost; wherefore, they speak the words of Christ” (2 Ne. 32:3). So it is that those who hold the Aaronic Priesthood open the door for all Church members who worthily partake of the sacrament to enjoy the companionship of the Spirit of the Lord and the ministering of angels.⁴⁵

I have read and listened to many talks where young men have been told how significant it is that they have the right to the ministering of angels. Although this is correct, so do the young women! All receive the right to the ministering of angels based upon their ability to make and keep sacred covenants associated with baptism and every other covenant. What an incredible privilege our female students could and should understand. Imagine the blessings a young woman could have as she grows into young adulthood to know that she has the privilege of having angels, seen or unseen, accompany her, know her, and speak to her.

Just as women receive the ministering of angels without being ordained to a priesthood office, women also receive priesthood authority through their callings and priesthood power through their righteousness. President Ballard opened the window to a wider understanding of who has priesthood



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authority in the Church. He stated, “Those who have priesthood keys . . . literally make it possible for all who serve faithfully under their direction to exercise priesthood authority and have access to priesthood power.”⁴⁶

In his landmark talk given in the April 2014 general conference, President Oaks illuminated the role of women in regard to priesthood authority in the Church. He declared, “We are not accustomed to speaking of women having

the authority of the priesthood in their Church callings, but what other authority can it be? When a woman—young or old—is set apart to preach the gospel as a full-time missionary, she is given priesthood authority to perform a priesthood function.” He continued, “The same is true when a woman is set apart to function as an officer or teacher in a Church organization under the direction of one who holds the keys of the priesthood. Whoever functions in an office or calling received from one who holds priesthood keys exercises priesthood authority in performing her or his assigned duties.”⁴⁷ Priesthood authority is therefore given to both women and men, based on their calling.

Verses 33–42: Teach Truth, Not Tradition

Returning to section 84, the Lord seems to be speaking of the temple when he reminds us that “the sons of Moses and also the sons of Aaron shall offer an acceptable offering and sacrifice in the house of the Lord” (verse 31). In fact, this verse takes us back to the main purpose of this section, which is the house of the Lord. Verses 6–30 seem to be a parenthetical insertion regarding patriarchal priesthood. This then leads us to the oath and covenant of the priesthood found in verses 33–44. Although traditionally taught in terms of those men who have been ordained to a priesthood office in the administrative structure of the Church, the oath and covenant of the priesthood is also relevant to all who have received their endowments. It seems from the context of this revelation and its clear tie to the temple, that the oath and covenant primarily applies to those who have made and kept their temple covenants, including those made in the initiatory and sealing ordinances. How do we become “the seed of Abraham . . . and the elect of God” (verse 34)? Through temple covenants, entered into by both women and men. Who receives “all that my Father hath,” as taught by the Lord in verse 38? Only those who obtain exaltation. Elder Paul B. Pieper of the Quorum of the Seventy clarified, “The full blessings of the priesthood are received together as husband and wife or not at all.” He continued, “It is interesting that in the oath and covenant of the priesthood, the Lord uses the verbs *obtain* and *receive*. He does not use the verb *ordain*. It is in the temple that men and women—together—obtain and receive the blessings and power of both the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods.”⁴⁸

In a 2020 interview between Relief Society General President Jean B. Bingham and President Nelson held in Harmony, Pennsylvania, President

Nelson clarified what the oath and covenant of the priesthood means, and to whom it applies:

President Nelson: “The oath and covenant of the priesthood means that God’s made a promise and He sets the conditions, and if you agree to keep them you make a covenant, and then He also indicates, when you do what I say you will receive the blessings but if you do not what I say you have no promise. So it is clearly a two way conversation, a covenant, two way. He makes the provision and you accept them and keep those covenants and keep the blessings.”

Sister Bingham: “So that is just as relevant to women as it is to men?”

President Nelson: “Totally.”

Sister Bingham: “All those priesthood blessings from the oath and covenant of the priesthood are enjoyed by both men and women.”

President Nelson: “Exactly, exactly.”⁴⁹

Imagine the strength given to covenant-keeping women, young and old, to know that “all that [the] Father hath shall be given unto [them]” (verse 38). Imagine the peace, hope, and joy this statement in and of itself gave to the early pioneer women, who, as they left Nauvoo, looked back at their burning temple with the fire of this covenant burning in their hearts. Clearly, the Lord’s timing is manifest when we realize he had the women receive their temple endowments before crossing the plains. Imagine what a difference it makes for covenant-keeping women in all situations to know that in the future they are promised to receive “all that my Father hath” (verse 38), that God has promised he will “go before your face,” that he “will be on your right hand and on your left,” and that his “Spirit shall be in your hearts” and his “angels round about you, to bear you up” (verse 88).

Can we imagine the strength this truth gives to our single sisters, living away from home, working, in school, on missions, or living in their own homes or apartments with roommates but with no male in the home who has been ordained to a priesthood office? Can we recognize the assurance this may give to a divorced young adult woman or single young adult mother who made and continues to keep sacred temple covenants, or to the children of single mothers or part-member families, likely in our own classrooms? Clearly this priesthood is relevant to them. As President Nelson clarified, “If you are endowed but not currently married to a man who bears the priesthood and someone says to you, ‘I’m sorry you don’t have the priesthood in your home,’ please understand that that statement is incorrect. You may not have a priesthood *bearer* in your home, but you have received and made sacred covenants

with God in His temple. From those covenants flows an endowment of His priesthood power upon you.”⁵⁰

President Nelson declared, “One day Sister Nelson and I will dwell together in the presence of our family and the Lord forevermore. We will have been faithful to covenants made in the temple and to the oath and covenant of the priesthood, which have assured us, in the words of the Lord, that ‘all that my Father hath shall be given unto [you]’ (D&C 84:38).”⁵¹ That is the promise for the prophet and Sister Nelson, and that is the promise for every faithful woman and man who makes and keeps sacred temple covenants as described in this first revelation of section 84.

Conclusion

Sister Joy D. Jones, former Primary General President, faithfully acknowledged, “I didn’t realize, earlier in my life, that *I* had access, through my covenants, to the power of the priesthood.”⁵¹ If, as an adult woman, having been active in the Church, and faithfully striving to fulfill her callings in the Church and as a righteous endowed member and mother, the Primary General President didn’t understand that she had access to the power of the priesthood in her life, how much more knowledge and understanding do our students need in regard to women and the priesthood?

What a paradigm shift it would be for all our students to understand that the priesthood really is relevant to women and that women have priesthood power and authority. How important it is for all of us to understand and correctly teach, as did President Nelson, that “all the purposes of the world and all that was in the world would be brought to naught without woman—a keystone in the priesthood arch of creation.”⁵²

Notes

1. Russell M. Nelson, “Spiritual Treasures,” *Ensign* or *Liabona*, November 2019, 77–79.
2. Russell M. Nelson, “Embrace the Future with Faith,” *Ensign* or *Liabona*, November 2020, 75.
3. It is significant to note that section 84 was given by the Lord in three separate revelations. The first revelation, composing what is now verses 1–41 or 42 was received on September 22. The second, verses 41–42 to 102 was received the next day, as well as was the final revelation, composing verses 103 to the end.
4. Ezra Taft Benson, “What I Hope You Would Teach Your Children about the Temple,” *Ensign*, August 1985, 8.

5. Cree-L Kofford, "Marriage in the Lord's Way, Part One," *Ensign*, June 1998, 12.
6. Benson, "What I Hope You Would Teach," 9.
7. Bruce R. McConkie, "Patriarchal Order—Eternal Family Concept" (Brigham Young University religion lecture, 1967), 9, 11–14.
8. "Instruction on Priesthood, circa 5 October 1840," p. 9, The Joseph Smith Papers.
9. "History, 1838–1856, volume E-1 [1 July 1843–30 April 1844]," p. 1920, The Joseph Smith Papers.
10. Benson, "What I Hope You Would Teach," 10, quoting Doctrine and Covenants 124:28.
11. *Handbook 2: Administering the Church* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2010), "Priesthood Principles," 8.
12. *General Handbook: Serving in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2021), "Priesthood Principles," 3.0, emphasis added.
13. George Q. Cannon, in *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1884), 25:289.
14. *Teachings: Joseph Smith*, 416.
15. "History, 1838–1856, volume E-1 [1 July 1843–30 April 1844]," p. 1708, The Joseph Smith Papers.
16. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2007), 510.
17. *Teachings: Joseph Smith*, 414.
18. Jill Mulvay Derr, Janath Russell Cannon, and Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, *Women of Covenant: The Story of Relief Society* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 1.
19. Derr, Cannon, and Beecher, *Women of Covenant*, 1.
20. Derr, Cannon, and Beecher, *Women of Covenant*, 1.
21. Derr, Cannon, and Beecher, *Women of Covenant*, 50.
22. Derr, Cannon, and Beecher, *Women of Covenant*, 45.
23. Kofford, "Marriage in the Lord's Way, Part One," 12.
24. Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 315.
25. Nelson, "Spiritual Treasures," 77.
26. M. Russell Ballard, "Women of Dedication, Faith, Determination, and Action" (Brigham Young University Women's Conference address, May 1, 2015), 7.
27. Ballard, "Women of Dedication," 7.
28. Benson, "What I Hope You Would Teach," 9.
29. Robert L. Millet, personal correspondence.
30. Benson, "What I Hope You Would Teach," 9.
31. Bruce R. McConkie, "Mothers in Israel and Daughters of Zion," *New Era*, May 1978, 37.
32. Millet, "Restoring the Patriarchal Order," 1–2.
33. James E. Talmage, "The Eternity of Sex," *Young Woman's Journal* 25, no. 10 (October 1914): 602–3.
34. Russell M. Nelson, "Spiritual Treasures," 78.
35. Russell M. Nelson, "Ministering with the Power and Authority of God," *Ensign or Liahona*, May 2018, 69.
36. Benson, "What I Hope You Would Teach," 9.

37. Benson, "What I Hope You Would Teach," 10.
38. Russell M. Nelson, "Spiritual Treasures," 77.
39. Julie B. Beck, "What I Hope My Grandaughters (and Grandsons) Will Understand about Relief Society," *Ensign or Liabona*, November 2011, 111.
40. Henry B. Eyring, "Women and Gospel Learning in the Home," *Ensign or Liabona*, November 2018, 58.
41. Benson, "What I Hope You Would Teach," 8.
42. Bruce R. McConkie, "The Doctrine of the Priesthood," *Ensign*, May 1982, 32.
43. Russell M. Nelson, "The Price of Priesthood Power," *Ensign or Liabona*, May 2016, 68.
44. Boyd K. Packer, *The Holy Temple*, 264–65.
45. Dallin H. Oaks, "The Aaronic Priesthood and the Sacrament," *Ensign*, November 1998, 39.
46. M. Russell Ballard, "Men and Women in the Work of the Lord," *New Era*, April 2014, 4. See also *Daughters in My Kingdom: The History and Work of Relief Society* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2011), 138.
47. Dallin H. Oaks, "The Keys and Authority," 51.
48. Paul B. Pieper, "Revealed Realities of Mortality," *Ensign or Liabona*, January 2016, 21.
49. "The Oath and Covenant of the Priesthood Is Relevant to Women" (interview of Russell M. Nelson by Jean B. Bingham), ChurchofJesusChrist.org.
50. Nelson, "Spiritual Treasures," 79.
51. Russell M. Nelson, "Identity, Priority, and Blessings," *Ensign*, August 2001, 10.
52. Russell M. Nelson, "Lessons from Eve," *Ensign*, November 1987, 87.