

17 Authority

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When Moses met face to face on the Mount with the only true and living God, the Children of Israel convinced Aaron to forge (from the fires of idolatry) a golden calf as their deity (Exodus 32). Returning to camp, Moses in anger drew a line in the sand and asked, “Who is on the Lord’s side?” (Exodus 32:26) The Levites were the only ones to stand with him, and because of this, the “Sons of Levi” were chosen to bear the ministry and priesthood. This opportunity to serve God and man in this capacity was henceforth limited to a single family and restricted from all others. The Levites were told to consecrate themselves for the upcoming blessing of *service and administration* (Exodus 32:29). Prior to this time the responsibilities of service and priesthood leadership were borne by the firstborn male of every family and every tribe of Israel (Numbers 3:41, 45). In consequence of the Children of Israel’s faithlessness, the service and ministry was restricted to one blood line, that of Levi. The High Priest of that priesthood was to be a direct descendant of Aaron within that chosen family.

The Levites were brought before the assembly of the Children of Israel and sustained as the priesthood lineage that would be the ministers unto the Lord for the “service of Israel” (see Numbers 8:9-25). Notice, it was not a *power* that the Levites were given but a *privilege and responsibility* to serve others. (See also Numbers 18:1-7).

Long before the time of Moses and Aaron, under the Patriarchal Order, the patriarch of each family was responsible for the temporal and spiritual welfare of his family. The patriarch (or father) acted in his own right and authority as a *prophet, priest and king* to his family. As *prophet*, he would provide the inspired direction and guidance to those for whom he was responsible. As *priest*, he was to stand as a mediator between man and God, officiating in the ordinances of salvation and exaltation for those in his care. Finally, as *king* he was to protect his family from temporal and spiritual intruders and provide for their temporal needs. Father Abraham, described in scripture as the “friend of God,” was endowed with the knowledge and responsibility of being a Grand Patriarch as others before him. He was the exemplar of a righteous parent and priesthood holder of both the Melchizedek and Patriarchal responsibilities. Thus, all are commanded to “go and do the works of Abraham” (John 8:39; D&C 132:32).

The blessings connected to the Covenant of Abraham include three key elements. Abraham explains that these blessings did not originate with him, but were given to Adam, the first man (Abraham 1:2-4). These eternal concepts include the elements of *priesthood, posterity, and inheritance*. By accepting the gospel, the faithful convert *inherits* a responsibility (as the *posterity* and seed of Abraham) to administer the gospel of Jesus Christ to all the nations of the earth. Abraham is every man as every man should be. The covenants the Lord made with the “Father of the Faithful” are directly connected to the priesthood leadership and the administration of the gospel.

The blessing and covenant of Abraham:

9 And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee above measure, and make thy name great among all nations, and thou shalt be a blessing unto *thy seed* after thee, that *in their hands they shall bear this ministry and Priesthood unto all nations.* (Abraham 2:9)

The seed of Abraham, i.e. those who accept the gospel of Christ, have an inherent “ministry”, which is the right and responsibility to *administer* the rites (ordinances) of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This authority of administration is called the priesthood and will reside in Abraham and the hands of his righteous posterity who are accounted as his seed.

10 And I will bless them through thy name; for *as many as receive this Gospel shall be called after thy name, and shall be accounted thy seed,* and shall rise up and bless thee, as their father. (Abraham 2:10)

The seed of Abraham have this responsibility to administer the gospel to the world in perpetuity. For “as many of the Gentiles as will repent are the covenant people of the Lord,” teaches Nephi. He adds: “for the Lord covenanteth with none save it be with them that repent and believe in his Son, who is the Holy One of Israel” (2 Nephi 30:2).

Because of his righteousness, Abraham is told that the authority of administration (the "right" to administer) will be part of the promise and covenant that God will endow upon him and his posterity:

11 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 life eternal.* (Abraham 2:9-11)

The Lord’s covenant to Abraham is that this administrative right is protected and guaranteed by God in such a way that anybody who accepts or rejects the priesthood responsibility of Abraham and his seed (literal or adopted) will be blessed or cursed respectively. The cursing is not directed at Abraham or the posterity but at those who condemn the gospel and who seek to hinder or stop the administration of the gospel by the seed of Abraham. This is best explained in the Doctrine and Covenants:

16 *Cursed are all those that shall lift up the heel against mine anointed,* saith the Lord, and cry they have sinned when they have not sinned before me, saith the Lord, but have done that which was meet in mine eyes, and which I commanded them.

17 But those who cry transgression do it because they are the servants of sin, and are the children of disobedience themselves.

18 And those who swear falsely against my servants, that they might bring them into bondage and death—

19 Wo unto them; because they have offended my little ones *they shall be severed from the ordinances of mine house.*

20 Their basket shall not be full, their houses and their barns shall perish, and they themselves shall be despised by those that flattered them.

21 *They shall not have right to the priesthood, nor their posterity after them from generation to generation.*

22 It had been better for them that a millstone had been hanged about their necks, and they drowned in the depth of the sea.

23 Wo unto all those that discomfort my people, and drive, and murder, and testify against them, saith the Lord of Hosts; a generation of vipers shall not escape the damnation of hell. (D&C 121:16-23)

The promise of innumerable seed was not based on Abraham's desire for large family and numerous progeny. In seeking for a son, his desire (because of his *love of God and his fellow man*) was to have a posterity that would be worthy to *administer* the ordinances and "blessings of salvation and life eternal" to all mankind. This is why the parenthetical phrases are inserted in verse 11:

*"bless them that bless thee, and curse them that curse thee; and in thee (that is, [meaning] in thy priesthood [responsibility of administration]) and in thy seed (that is, [meaning] thy priesthood [responsibility]), for I give unto thee a promise that this **right** shall continue in thee, and in thy seed after thee."* (Abraham 2:11)

The priesthood organization today is an organization of those who have accepted the gospel of Christ and are considered the righteous seed of Abraham. As Saviors on Mt. Zion, the seed of Abraham will bless all the "families of the earth" through the administration of the gospel. By virtue of the covenant made with Abraham, these are those recognized and sustained by God to receive the authority to serve, administer, and bless mankind.

Joseph Smith taught this about the priesthood authority to administer the ordinances of the gospel:

*"Whenever men can find out the will of God and find an **administrator** legally authorized from God, there is the kingdom of God; but where these are not, the kingdom of God is not. All the ordinances, systems, and administrations on the earth are of no use to the children of men, unless they are ordained and authorized of God; for nothing will save a man but a **legal administrator**; for none others will be acknowledged either by God or angels."* (TPJS, p 274)

This statement indicates that there are certain "authorities" (or keys) that leaders must possess for the kingdom of God and the gospel to exist. Again from the Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith:

*Christ was the head of the Church, the chief corner stone, the spiritual rock upon which the church was built, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. He built up the kingdom, chose apostles, and *ordained them to the Melchizedek Priesthood, giving them **power to administer** in the ordinances of the gospel.* (TPJS, p 318)*

The apostolic responsibility is to make the gospel available to the entire world, while the keys and the authority they receive give them an *authoritative power* to administer the gospel. Those who have "keys" are those who have the authority to make decisions that will affect the administration of the gospel for those under their responsibility. Thus, the prophet and president of the church holds all keys necessary for the administration of the gospel for the whole church, while the Deacons quorum president has the keys to make decisions for the priesthood activity and service for those under his leadership and quorum.

The Prophet Joseph explains:

There is no salvation between the two lids of the Bible *without a legal administrator*. Jesus was then the legal administrator, and *ordained His apostles*. (TPJS, 319).

Every priesthood holder will have a *line of authority*. This line of authority traces a priesthood holder's authority of administration from the person ordaining him back to the Lord. This ensures that the priesthood holder has been duly authorized to administer in the responsibility of the priesthood order to which they have been conferred and set apart. Therefore "no man taketh this honor unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron" (Hebrews 5:4). This verse is teaching that any priesthood calling or authoritative position **cannot be self-proclaimed**, but must come from a legal administrator who has been given the authority within the priesthood organization to ordain others (see D&C 18:32). Hence the *line of authority* is the order of heaven. It is this line of authority that connects them to the "rights" and blessings of Abraham and his descendants.

Part of this order of heaven is the *law of witnesses*, that "in the mouth of *two or three witnesses* shall *every word be established*." (see: D&C 6:28, D&C 128:3; Deut. 17:6, Deut. 19:15; Matt. 18:16; 2 Cor. 13:1) At the beginning of this dispensation when the priesthood was conferred and keys given, there was always at least two present to bear witness of the event. Why is this important? The charlatan will claim manifestations and authority without the required second witness, for who then can argue or disagree? However, this is not the order of heaven, as "no man taketh this honor to himself", nor by himself. All ordinances of record and the transmission of divine priesthood "authority and keys" requires and invokes the law of witnesses, as outlined by the Savior in D&C 128:3, for the sake of order and faith.

Moses had the authority to call and set apart Aaron because of his line of authority through Jethro, which, when it comes to Melchizedek administrative authority, is even more important than bloodline genealogy.

6 And the sons of Moses, according to the Holy Priesthood which he received under the hand of his father-in-law, Jethro;

7 And Jethro received it under the hand of Caleb;

8 And Caleb received it under the hand of Elihu;

9 And Elihu under the hand of Jeremy;

10 And Jeremy under the hand of Gad;

11 And Gad under the hand of Esaias;

12 And Esaias received it under the hand of God.

13 Esaias also lived in the days of Abraham, and was blessed of him—

14 Which Abraham received the priesthood from Melchizedek, who received it through the lineage of his fathers, even till Noah;

15 And from Noah till Enoch, through the lineage of their fathers;

16 And from Enoch to Abel, who was slain by the conspiracy of his brother, who received the priesthood by the commandments of God, by the hand of his father Adam, who was the first man—

17 Which *priesthood continueth in the church of God in all generations*, and is without beginning of days or end of years. (D&C 84:6-17)

Verse 17 above reveals that this administrative authority will be in the “church of God in all generations.” This is not to imply that the church is on the earth in all generations, but that this organized administrative authority, called ‘priesthood’, will be present when the church of God is on the earth. Today, this authority from God is not given personally by God, but conferred by authorization and under the hand of righteous men who previously received it. The authority to administer the gospel must come through an earthly and physical line because the administration of the gospel for the temporal and spiritual salvation of man is linked to this earth. None can “minister to this earth but those who do belong or have belonged to it” (D&C 130:5). There are specific righteous men who were foreordained with authorities, keys and responsibilities before the foundation of the earth. As the holders of these responsibilities and keys, these select righteous men have the authority to restore them in orderly succession. This is why John the Baptist, Moses, and Elias [Elijah] appeared to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery, just as they appeared to Peter, James, and John on the Mount of Transfiguration to transfer keys and authority.

God declares that His “house is a house of order...and not a house of confusion” (D&C 132:8). Therefore, the ordaining of priesthood authority (i.e. the authority to administer the gospel) must be done in an orderly fashion (via the line of authority) in order to know who has, and who doesn't have, the authorization to administer the gospel. The Doctrine and Covenants outlines this order as given by Christ. Notice: it is not power that is given authorizing him to perform the duties of his calling, but “license.”

64 Each priest, teacher, or deacon, who is ordained by a priest, may take a certificate from him at the time, which certificate, when presented to an elder, shall entitle him to a *license*, which shall *authorize* him to perform the duties of his calling, *or he may receive it from a conference*.

84 All members removing from the church where they reside, if going to a church where they are not known, may take a letter certifying that they are regular members and in good standing, which certificate may be signed by any elder or priest if the member receiving the letter is personally acquainted with the elder or priest, or it may be signed by the teachers or deacons of the church. (D&C 20:64, 84)

These certificates and licenses establish membership, activity, and priesthood office of responsibility in an orderly way so that there can be no claim of authority without due process. Records are also kept of ordinances and ordinations to prevent confusion and redundancy. To claim baptism and authority without witnesses of record and license would be a sure sign that the authority did not come from God.

Those who claim authority unto themselves without witnesses do so because they have no authority other than their own personal proclamation. Often they believe that the priesthood is a *power* rather than an *organization of administration*, leading to claims that they have Godly power, authorization, special knowledge, and manifestations that are given to them alone, thus creating a supposed *authority ex nihilo* (out of nothing). In contrast, the Lord mandates within a restoration that “**every word**” shall be established in the mouth of two or three witnesses, and the witnesses must physically see and participate for themselves, according to the scriptural patterns established anciently and by the modern revelations given to Joseph Smith from the Lord.

Outside the opening of a dispensation, the authority to administer the gospel, and the keys to do so, must be restored with witnesses. This, that no man taketh this honor unto himself, nor by himself. Thus, in this dispensation, following this mandate:

- There were Three Witnesses and then Eight Witnesses of the Nephite National Treasures
- The Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods were restored to Joseph and Oliver Cowdery
- The Keys of Melchizedek were restored in Kirtland to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery