

- 10- President Brigham Young added that the priesthood is “the law by which the worlds are, were, and will continue for ever and ever” (*Discourses of Brigham Young*, sel. John A. Widtsoe, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1941, p. 130).
- 11- Priesthood is the authority of God delegated to man to minister for the salvation of men. “The power of directing these labors constitutes the *keys* of the Priesthood” (Joseph F. Smith, *Improvement Era*, Jan. 1901, p. 230).

Scene Two—The Mortal Ministry of the Lord

- 12- Many in scene one held those keys, such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Elias, and Elijah.
- 13- Scene two pertains to keys of the priesthood during the mortal ministry of the Lord. Jesus revealed the extent of priesthood authority. To his Apostles, the Savior said, “I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Matt. 16:19; see also D&C 128:10).
- 14- Within a week of that promise, Jesus took Peter, James, and John to a high mountain. Keys of the priesthood were bestowed upon them by Moses and Elijah (Elias) under divine direction (see Matt. 17:1–5).
- 15- The Master then reminded his disciples of their sacred calls to the holy apostleship, “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you” (John 15:16; see also D&C 7:7).
- 16- Jesus not only called and ordained men, but he taught them their duties.
- 17- After Christ was crucified, and even before the early Apostles completed their labors, the Apostasy began. This occurred as prophesied when priesthood authority was abused and sacred ordinances were defiled.
- Scene Three—Modern Times
- 18- With scenes one and two as background, let us consider scene three—the modern times in which we live. After centuries of apostasy, keys of the priesthood have again been restored. Under that authority, we have had hands laid upon our heads.
- 19- Obligations pertain to those who *give* and to those who *receive* ordinations or calls.
- 20- Perhaps that can be explained by example. I hold a set of keys to an automobile. In your mind, let them represent keys to something of value in your life—a tractor, an implement, or a powerful instrument. If I give keys to you, *I* have certain obligations, and *you* have certain obligations.
- 21- For me as the giver, I have a duty toward your success. Should you fail, in a measure I have failed. So I must teach and train adequately to ensure your personal safety and, at the same time, safeguard precious property you are to use.
- 22- For you as the receiver, obligations accompany the keys. You must know applicable laws and obey them. Loyalty is expected. And you should understand the power of your instrument. Obedience, loyalty, and understanding are implicit with your acceptance of those keys.
- 23- Now apply the same principles to keys of the priesthood. Your stake president, quorum president, and bishop hold keys of presidency. Their keys control the power of their unit of the Church. Those leaders not only may call and release, but they must train and bear sacred responsibility that the mission of the Church be accomplished.
- 24- They who *receive* ordinations or callings have obligations of obedience, loyalty, and understanding.

- 25- *Obedience* to law first and foremost means keeping the commandments of God. By so doing, one becomes worthy to receive personal revelation! Those who receive the Melchizedek Priesthood are under solemn oath and covenant to “live by every word that proceedeth forth from the mouth of God” (D&C 84:44).
- 26- *Loyalty* is vital. Loyalty to him who has keys to call and to release you, even though he is an imperfect human being, will develop unity essential to success (see D&C 124:45–46). The Lord defined this reality when he said, “Israel shall be saved in mine own due time; and by the keys which I have given shall they be led” (D&C 35:25).
- 27- To *understand* the power of the priesthood, we must know its limitations. If an automobile is used recklessly, future permission from parents is likely to be denied. So, if priesthood power be abused, “the Spirit of the Lord is grieved; and when it is withdrawn, Amen to the priesthood or the authority of that man” (D&C 121:37).
- 28- To *understand* the power of the priesthood, we must know the divinity of its restoration in these latter days. In 1820, our Heavenly Father and his Son Jesus Christ appeared to the Prophet Joseph Smith. In 1829, John the Baptist conferred the Aaronic Priesthood upon Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery (see D&C 13, D&C 27:8; JS—H 1:69, 72). Shortly thereafter they received the Melchizedek Priesthood under the hands of Peter, James, and John (see D&C 27:11–12).
- 29- Later, the Lord spoke to Joseph and Oliver of others to whom specific keys of the priesthood had been committed. Each, in turn, did confer these keys:
- 30- *Moroni*: Keys of the Book of Mormon (see D&C 27:5).
- 31- *Moses*: Keys of the gathering of Israel and the leading of the ten tribes (see D&C 110:11).
- 32- *Elias*: Keys of the restoration of all things (see D&C 27:6), including the Abrahamic covenant (see D&C 110:12; Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols., Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954–56, 3:126–27).
- 33- *Elijah*: Keys of the sealing power (see D&C 27:9, D&C 110:13–16; see also D&C 128:21).
- 34- Joseph Smith conferred all keys on all of the Twelve (see Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 3:154–56). In turn, keys have been transferred to present leaders.
- 35- Today, President Ezra Taft Benson actively holds every restored key held by “all those who have received a dispensation at any time *from the beginning of the creation*” (D&C 112:31; italics added; see also D&C 128:18).
- 36- Surely a sacred moment of my life occurred April 12, 1984, when the First Presidency and members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles laid their hands upon my head. As had been done for others before me, all the keys of the priesthood were conferred. As it is with each member of the Quorum of the Twelve, some keys are not used until called upon by the Lord, or as directed by his senior Apostle.
- 37- I feel the weight of responsibility and the burden of timeless trust. I know those keys have been restored “for the last days and for the last time” (D&C 112:30).
- 38- I am deeply grateful that we bear the priesthood—each of us foreordained from the foundation of the world for that responsibility (see Alma 13:1–5).
- 39- As a symbol of gratitude, I have penned a few lines to be sung as the concluding portion of my message. A verse for each of three scenes of history may summarize my remarks. This song will be new to you. The words have been written to music from Wales.¹ For the gracious support of Brother Jerold D. Ottley and our male chorus I express my appreciation. To this song I have assigned an ancient title, “Hosanna,” the prayerful shout of fervent praise:
- 40- *Hosanna*

*Through time's immortal endless stay
 In love he guides our way.
 Beyond the realms of heaven's beam,
 Our great God, Elohim.
 Hosanna to his holy name—
 Our fathers' God is still the same.
 That holy night in Bethlehem
 His Son was born among men.
 To ransom from a timeless grave,
 Each child of God to save.
 Hosanna to his holy name—
 Our fathers' God is still the same.
 His priesthood power restored to earth
 To bless each soul given birth.
 Our song of prayer to him we raise
 Proclaiming joy and praise.
 Hosanna to his holy name—
 Our fathers' God is still the same.
 Amen, amen, amen, amen.*

41- May we be true to the trust he has given to us who bear the holy priesthood and hold its sacred keys, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

1. Lyrics by Russell M. Nelson, copyright 1987; “Tydi A Roddaist,” by Arwell Hughes, copyright 1938. Gratitude is expressed to Mr. Hughes for permission to use his music with these words and to Barry D. R. Whittaker, president of the Cardiff Wales Stake, for his assistance.

Keys of the Priesthood

RUSSELL M. NELSON
*Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles
 October 1987 General Conference*

1- You all know how valuable keys can be. Many, if not most, of us carry keys in our pockets at this very moment.

2- But the keys about which I shall speak are far more important. They are precious, powerful, and invisible! Some can lock and unlock in heaven as well as on earth. I speak of keys of the priesthood.

3- You boys hold what is sometimes referred to as the preparatory priesthood. Preparation, priesthood service, and keys are all related, but different. Service of any type requires preparation. But proper authorization to give that service requires keys. May I illustrate?

4- Prior to my call to the Twelve, I served as a medical doctor and surgeon. I had earned two doctor's degrees. I had been certified by two specialty boards. That long preparation had consumed many years, yet it carried no legal permission. Keys were required. They were held by authorities of the state government and the hospitals in which I desired to work. Once those holding proper authority exercised those keys by granting me a license and permission, then I could perform operations. In return, I was obligated to obey the law, to be loyal, and to understand and not abuse the power of a surgeon's knife. The important steps of preparation, permission, and obligation likewise pertain to other occupations.

5- Why is the power to act in the name of God more important? Because it is of eternal significance. We should understand the source of our authority and something of the keys that control its power. They may benefit every man, woman, and child who now lives, who has lived, and who yet will live upon the earth.

6- Let us consider keys of the priesthood through three scenes of history: in ancient days, during the Lord's mortal ministry, and in modern times.

Scene One—Ancient Days

7- Scene one pertains to keys of the priesthood in ancient days, even before creation of the earth. We then existed as spirit children of God. Abraham was one of us. He was told that he was among rulers chosen—even before he was born (see Abr. 3:23). Scriptures also relate that the Lord God foreordained priests prepared from the foundation of the world according to his foreknowledge. Thus, our calling to the holy priesthood was foreseen before we were born (see Alma 13:1–5).

8- We know that Adam received priesthood authority before the world was formed (see Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1938, pp. 157, 167–68; see also D&C 78:16).

9- The potential of the priesthood is so vast that our comprehension of it is a challenge. The Prophet Joseph Smith declared, “The Priesthood is an everlasting principle, and existed with God from eternity, and will to eternity” (*Teachings*, p. 157).