

God's Peculiar People Called a Kingdom of Priests—Their Ministry Thus Foreshadowed—The Melchizedek and Aaronic Priesthoods—Their Restoration in the Latter Days—The Preaching of the Gospel—Ephraim and Manasseh—The Lineage of the Prophet Joseph Smith—Predestination and Election—The Dispersion and Gathering of Israel—The Priesthood Endless, Administering in Time and Eternity—The Blindness of the Gentiles to the Things of God—The Results of Persecution—The Future of the Faithful

Discourse by Apostle Erastus Snow, delivered at Logan, Saturday Afternoon, May 6, 1882.

I will call the attention of the congregation to the words of the Lord through Moses, spoken to the children of Israel, contained in the 5th and 6th verses of the 19th chapter of Exodus:

"Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then shall ye be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine:

"And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation."

In connection with this passage I will read the words of the Apostle Peter, as recorded in the 5th verse, 2nd chap. of 1st Peter:

"Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ."

Also the 9th verse of the same chapter:

"But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."

Elder Penrose referred this morning to the fact of so large a portion of the Latter-day Saints being called and ordained to bear some portion of the Priesthood, remarking that at times he had queried in his mind as to why this was so appointed unto us. This reminded me of the Scriptures I have just read in your hearing. The consideration of the subject involves the whole mission of the Latter-day Saints. The promise of God to ancient Israel contained in the first text sets forth the purposes of Jehovah in choosing the seed of Abraham especially and separating them from other peoples and nations, and taking them under His especial care and guidance, and leading them as he did out of Egyptian bondage with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and planting them in Canaan in fulfillment of the promises made to their father Abraham, and to Isaac and Jacob. And when God called Abraham to leave his father's house and go to a land which he should show him and which he afterwards promised to him and his seed for an inheritance, he had this in view, to make of him and his seed a peculiar people; to make of them instruments in his hands of accomplishing good for the benefit of the world.

He promised Abraham on another occasion that in him and his seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed. And although this had reference chiefly to the coming of the Son of God through his lineage, who was to be the Chief Apostle and High Priest of our profession, the Redeemer of the world, it implied the fact also that through his seed the Gospel should be carried to all the world, and the oracles of God delivered to men; that prophets and righteous men should be raised up who should act as the mouthpiece of God to the people among whom they should live, and they should have Abraham for their father. Among his descendants also, his Temple as well as the Tabernacle should be established, and the ordinances were to be revealed through them and the Priesthood

conferred upon them, and the word of God preserved among them and handed down to future generations, thus maintaining the true character and knowledge of God, and perpetuating the same upon the earth. This was a great work that the Lord purposed concerning the seed of Abraham, and it was for this reason and purpose that he promised to establish his covenant with them forever.

Now the Priesthood referred to in Scripture had not reference alone to that lower or lesser order known as the Levitical Priesthood which was confirmed by covenant upon Aaron and his seed and upon the house of his fathers, the tribe of Levi, which Priesthood officiated in offering sacrifices and all the lesser duties pertaining to the law; but it comprehended something more than this, the Priesthood as a whole, including the Melchizedek or that holy order of Priesthood after the order of the Son of God. And when Moses was made the mouthpiece of the Lord to Israel in this precious promise we find them hearkening to him and keeping his covenants, they being a peculiar people unto him, above all the earth, a chosen generation, a royal Priesthood; and he referred to them as a whole people and not to the Levites alone, and to the Priesthood, as I before remarked, as a whole including, of course, the Melchizedek Priesthood, hence the words of Peter: "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal Priesthood, an holy nation."

The same great purpose and object prevail at the present time. The calling and mission of the Latter-day Saints are to fulfill what is here promised in these Scriptures—to bring about the restoration of scattered Israel, the establishment of Zion, the preparing a people for the coming of Christ; a people who are to be Saviors upon Mount Zion, and thus fulfilling one of the prophecies of one of the Jewish prophets concerning the Zion of the latter days, that Saviors should come up upon Mount Zion to save the house of Esau, but the kingdom should be the Lord's. No matter how many might be employed in this work of salvation, as Saviors upon Mount Zion, all should labor as helpers and co-laborers with Christ in the salvation of men.

God has promised in the revelations given to the Latter-day Saints to make known unto them the fullness of all former dispensations, and he has confirmed upon his servants in this dispensation of the fullness of times the keys of all former dispensations and revealed all the ordinances made known to the ancients; and, therefore, it is our calling to complete the work that was inaugurated in former dispensations of God to man. At first Joseph Smith received the gift of seeing visions and the gift of translating dead languages by the Urim and Thummim, and when he had exercised himself in these gifts for a season, he received the keys of the Aaronic Priesthood, together with his Brother Oliver, under the hands of John the Baptist, who was a resurrected being, and who was the last of the Jewish High Priests under the dispensation of the law, the only son of Zacharias the High Priest, and a child of promise, who was beheaded by order of Herod, having first performed his mission in preparing the way of the Lord, and having preached the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, testifying of Jesus that was to come, and baptizing those who received him, including the Savior himself. John having finished his mission, seals his testimony with his blood, rose again from the dead and continued to hold those keys of the Priesthood which he inherited from his fathers and which were confirmed upon him by the angel of the Lord when he was eight days old. And he was a fit and proper person to send to confer those keys of Priesthood upon Joseph and Oliver. In due course of time, as we read in the history which he has left, Peter, James and John appeared to him—it was at a period when they were being pursued by their enemies and they had to travel all night, and in the dawn of the coming day when they were weary and worn who should appear to them but Peter, James and John, for the purpose of conferring upon them the Apostleship, the keys of which they themselves had held while upon the earth, which had been bestowed upon them by the Savior. This Priesthood conferred upon them by those three messengers embraces within it all offices of the Priesthood from the highest to the lowest. As has been often taught us that the keys of the presidency of this Apostleship represent the highest authority conferred upon man in the flesh. And by virtue of these keys of Priesthood the Prophet Joseph from time to time proceeded to ordain and set in order the Priesthood in its various quorums as we see it today in the Church. And if the question be asked why, and for what purpose, the answer would be the idea conveyed in the language I have quoted: In accordance with the design of the Lord to raise up a peculiar people to himself, a holy nation, a royal Priesthood—a kingdom of Priests, that shall be saviors upon Mount Zion, not only to preach the Gospel to the scattered remnants of Israel, but to save to the uttermost the nations of the Gentiles, inasmuch as they will listen and can be saved by the plan which God has provided.

The first important labor of this ministry is to go abroad and preach the Gospel to the nations. The Gospel of the kingdom must be preached to all people and nations and tongues before the end can come; and by the preaching of the word and the administering of the ordinances of the Gospel, is Israel sought out from among the nations among which they are scattered, especially the seed of Ephraim unto whom the first promises appertain, the promise of the keys of the Priesthood. For it must be remembered that of all the seed of Abraham whom the Lord chose to bear the keys pertaining to this holy order of Priesthood, the seed of Ephraim, the son of Joseph, were the first and chief. While the tribe of Levi, unto which Moses and Aaron belonged, was especially charged with the administration of affairs of the lesser Priesthood under the law, yet Ephraim, the peculiar and chosen son of Joseph, was the one whom the Lord had named by his own mouth and through the Prophets, to inherit the keys of presidency of this High Priesthood after the order of the Son of God. In this also we see the fulfillment of the covenants and promises of God; not that Joseph by birthright inherited this blessing, for Reuben was the firstborn among the twelve sons of Jacob; but we are told in Chronicles, the 5th chapter, that Reuben forfeited this birthright by his adultery, and that God took it from him and conferred it upon the sons of Joseph; and of the sons of Joseph he chose Ephraim as the chief; and while the Patriarch Jacob, as we read in the 49th chapter of Genesis, adopted into his own family two of the sons of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh, yet he placed Ephraim the younger foremost, and blessed him with the chief blessing, saying, that Manasseh shall be great, but Ephraim shall be greater than he; he shall become a multitude in the midst of the earth. Another Scripture also says concerning scattered Israel, that Ephraim has mixed himself among the people; and speaking of the gathering of Israel in the latter-day dispensation, the Prophet Jeremiah has said that God would gather Israel and lead them as a shepherd does his flock, and says he, I am Father to Israel, but Ephraim is my firstborn. Now, if Ephraim has been scattered and has mixed himself with the people until their identity is lost among the nations, how are they going to be recognized and receive the promised blessings—how is it that Ephraim shall be the firstborn of the Lord in the great gathering of the latter days? If we turn back to the blessing which Moses gave to the twelve tribes of Israel as found in Deuteronomy, we shall there see that in blessing the tribe of Joseph, he especially charged them with the duty of gathering the people from the ends of the earth. Said he, Joseph's horns are like the horns of unicorns, which shall push the people together from the ends of the earth, and they are the thousands of Manasseh and ten thousands of Ephraim; showing that it shall be the ten thousands of Ephraim and thousands of Manasseh who shall be in the foremost ranks of bearing the Gospel message to the ends of the earth, and gathering Israel from the four quarters of the world in the last days. Whoever has read the Book of Mormon carefully will have learned that the remnants of the house of Joseph dwelt upon the American continent; and that Lehi learned by searching the records of his fathers that were written upon the plates of brass, that he was of the lineage of Manasseh. The Prophet Joseph informed us that the record of Lehi, was contained on the 116 pages that were first translated and subsequently stolen, and of which an abridgement is given us in the first Book of Nephi, which is the record of Nephi individually, he himself being of the lineage of Manasseh; but that Ishmael was of the lineage of Ephraim, and that his sons married into Lehi's family, and Lehi's sons married Ishmael's daughters, thus fulfilling the words of Jacob upon Ephraim and Manasseh in the 48th chapter of Genesis, which says: "And let my name be named on them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the land." Thus these descendants of Manasseh and Ephraim grew together upon this American continent, with a sprinkling from the house of Judah, from Mulek descended, who left Jerusalem eleven years after Lehi, and founded the colony afterwards known as Zarahemla and found by Mosiah—thus making a combination, an intermixture of Ephraim and Manasseh with the remnants of Judah; and for aught we know, the remnants of some other tribes that might have accompanied Mulek. And such have grown up on the American continent. But we are not informed that the Prophet Joseph and the first Elders of this Church who were called and chosen of God to bear the Priesthood and lay the foundation of this work, were descended from any portion of those remnants that peopled America anciently, and whose history is given us in the Book of Mormon. Yet we find in the Doctrine and Covenants the declaration concerning the first Elders of this Church, that they were of the house of Ephraim; and another passage referring to the wicked and rebellious says, they shall be cut off from among the people, for the rebellious are not of the seed of Ephraim. And there is a passage in the Book of Mormon which is a part of the prophecy of Joseph written on the plates of brass and quoted by Lehi, concerning the Prophet Joseph Smith, who, it says, was to be raised up in the latter days to translate the records of the Nephites, and whose name should be Joseph, and who should be a descendant of that Joseph that was sold into Egypt, and also that that should be the name of his father.

Now if the Prophet Joseph Smith was that chosen vessel out of the loins of Joseph, it may be asked by some, what evidence have we of this lineage? I answer, the testimony of God, the best of all testimony, for no record kept by mortal man can be equal to it; and that, too, by reason of that quaint but sensible old maxim, "it takes a wise man to know who his father was, but a fool may find out who his mother was." And even if we had the lineage of the fathers, it would not be as sure and certain to us as the word of the Lord. For he has had his eye upon the chosen spirits that have come upon the earth in the various ages from the beginning of the world up to this time; and as he said to Abraham, speaking of the multitudes of spirits that were shown unto him in heavenly vision, you see that some are more noble than others? Yes. Then you may know there were some others still more noble than they; and he speaks in the same manner of the multitude of the heavenly bodies; and said he to Abraham, thou art one of those noble ones whom I have chosen to be my rulers. The Lord has sent those noble spirits into the world to perform a special work, and appointed their times; and they have always fulfilled the mission given them, and their future glory and exaltation is secured unto them; and that is what I understand by the doctrine of election spoken of by the Apostle Paul and other sacred writers: "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren." Such were called and chosen and elected of God to perform a certain work at a certain time of the world's history and in due time he fitted them for that work. It will be remembered when Jeremiah was called of God in his youth that he, in order to excuse himself, complained of his youth and of his being slow of speech, that the Lord said unto him that he would be mouth for him and matter to his heart, for, he said, he knew him and called him from his mother's womb to be a prophet unto the nations. And so he called John the Baptist by sending his angel Gabriel to his father Zacharias, and giving him a promise that his wife Elizabeth, though old and barren, should yet conceive and bear a son, and that his name should be John, who should be a forerunner to the Savior to prepare the way before his face. And so he elected the seed of Ephraim to be that peculiar people I have referred to, that holy nation, a kingdom of Priests, a people to receive the covenants and oracles, and to be witnesses to certain nations of the God of Israel. And how strict were his commands that they should have no other Gods but him, that they might be a standing rebuke to the idol worshippers, and to all who believe not in the true and living God.

Now the same spirit of revelation that sought out the Prophet Joseph from the loins of Joseph who was sold into Egypt, and that raised him up in this dispensation to receive the keys of the Priesthood and to lay the foundation of this great work in the earth, has also called the children of Abraham from among the kingdoms and countries of the earth to first hear and then embrace the everlasting Gospel; and the remnants of the seed of Ephraim who were scattered from Palestine and who colonized the shores of the Caspian Sea and thence made their way into the north of Europe, western Scandinavia and northern Germany, penetrating Scotland and England, and conquering those nations and reigning as monarchs of Great Britain, and mingling their seed with the Anglo-Saxon race, and spreading over the waters a fruitful vine, as predicted by Jacob, whose branches should run over the wall. Their blood has permeated European society, and it coursed in the veins of the early colonists of America. And when the books shall be opened and the lineage of all men is known, it will be found that they have been first and foremost in everything noble among men in the various nations in breaking off the shackles of kingcraft and priestcraft and oppression of every kind, and the foremost among men in upholding and maintaining the principles of liberty and freedom upon this continent and establishing a representative government, and thus preparing the way for the coming forth of the fullness of the everlasting Gospel. And it is the foremost of those spirits whom the Lord has prepared to receive the Gospel when it was presented to them, and who did not wait for the Elders to hunt them from the hills and corners of the earth, but they were hunting for the Elders, impelled by a spirit which then they could not understand; and for this reason were they among the first Elders of the Church; they and the fathers having been watched over from the days that God promised those blessings upon Isaac and Jacob and Joseph and Ephraim. And these are they that will be found in the front ranks of all that is noble and good in their day and time, and who will be found among those whose efforts are directed in establishing upon the earth those heaven-born principles which tend directly to blessing and salvation, to ameliorating the condition of their fellow men, and elevating them in the scale of their being; and among those also who receive the fullness of the Everlasting Gospel, and the keys of Priesthood in the last days, through whom God determined to gather up again unto himself a peculiar people, a holy nation, a pure seed that shall stand upon Mount Zion as saviors, not only to the house of Israel but also to the house of Esau.

Now the work of carrying the Gospel to the nations and gathering the people, mighty as it is, is not the chief, it is but laying the foundation for the still greater work of the redemption of the myriads of the dead of the seed of Israel that have perished without the fullness of the Gospel, who too are heirs to the promised blessings; but the time had not come when they passed away for the fulfillment of all that God had promised Abraham, Isaac and Jacob concerning their seed: Ezekiel in the 37th chapter of his book beautifully illustrates this doctrine in his vision of the valley of dry bones. I respectfully refer you to it. The substance of the vision is this: The Lord showed Ezekiel a valley full of dry human bones; and he asks him if those bones can live. Ezekiel answered, "O Lord God, thou knowest." The Lord then tells him to prophesy to the bones: Oh ye dry bones. Hear the word of the Lord; and as he did so there was a shaking, and behold the bones came together, bone to its bone; and according to the word of the Lord through him, flesh and skin and sinews came upon them, and the breath of life came into them, and lo, and behold, they stood upon their feet an exceedingly great army. The Lord then tells the Prophet that these are the whole house of Israel; and that they complain of the non-fulfillment of the promises upon their head, saying, "Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: all are cut off for our parts." But he further tells him to prophesy unto them, saying, "Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel," etc. And by whom shall this great and marvelous work be accomplished? I answer, by the thousands of Manasseh and the ten thousands of Ephraim; by this same people who shall search out and gather together the house of Israel, and who will come up as saviors upon Mount Zion.

Paul tells us concerning the Melchizedek Priesthood, that it is after the order of an endless life, without beginning of days or end of years; or, in other words, that it is eternal; that it ministers in time and also in eternity. Peter, James and John and their fellow laborers still minister in their Priesthood on the other side of the veil; and Joseph Smith and his fellow brethren still minister in their office and calling under the counsel and direction of the same Peter, James and John who ministered on earth, and who conferred upon Joseph the keys of their Priesthood; and all the Elders of this dispensation who prove faithful and magnify their calling in the flesh will, when they pass hence, continue their labors in the spirit world, retaining the same holy character and high responsibility that they assume here. And these men will be engaged there hunting up the remnants of their fathers of the house of Joseph through Ephraim and Manasseh; and then all the other tribes of Israel; while their children and children's children remaining in the flesh, holding the same Priesthood, are building and will continue to build Temples and enter into them, and there officiate for the whole house of Israel, whose bones are dry and hope lost; but with whom it will be, as the Apostle Peter has expressed it, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." When Peter buried his Lord he buried his hope also, and when in this state of mind he said, "I go a fishing." He returned to the old mode of living, and his fellow Apostles accompanied him. After toiling all night and catching no fish, the Savior appeared to them, but the disciples did not know him; and after learning that they had caught nothing, he told them to cast the net on the other side of the ship, and instantly the net was full of fishes. And straightway the inspiration of the Almighty was upon Peter, who said, that's the Lord; that's one of his tricks. And the impetuosity of his nature was such that he could not wait, but threw himself into the water to go and meet the Savior, knowing that it was He just as well as if the Father himself had told him so. And when they got ashore they found that their Lord had prepared food for them, of which they all partook. And then the Savior takes Peter to task by giving him to understand that He had called him and fellow apostles to be fishers of men, and says to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these," (fish)? Peter answered, "Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee." The Savior said unto him, then "feed my lambs;" repeating his question and admonition three times. This rebuke was sufficient for Peter all the rest of his days; we never hear of his going fishing again.

The morning of the resurrection dawns upon us. Ere long we will find Joseph and his brethren overseeing and directing the labors of the Elders of Israel in the Temples of our God, laboring for the redemption of the dead, which work will continue during the thousand years rest when the Savior will bear rule over the whole earth.

The Gentile nations comprehend not these things. Congress and the hireling priests are blind and ignorant to them. And why? Because they have not been "born again," being in the same condition that Nicodemus was when the Savior told him that except a man were born again—that is born of the water and the Spirit—he could not enter into (or see) the kingdom of God. They talk about religion, and they profess to be teachers of Christianity; so far as

they honestly believe, and show by their works, that Christ was the Son of God, so far God will have them in remembrance; so far as they honestly receive those principles of morality that should govern men in their walks of life and their intercourse with their fellows, and do respect and strive to live them, so far will he hold them in honorable remembrance, and they will be numbered among the honorable of the earth, and the mercy of the Lord will reach them in his due time; but the hypocrite who conceals his wicked heart under the cloak of religion, who has a form of godliness, but denies the power thereof, all such will he waste away.

Understanding this as we understand them, we do not wonder at this class of persons combining with the powers of earth to throw stumbling blocks in the way of this community. But will the Lord suffer them to bring persecution upon us? Peradventure he may; and he will if it is necessary to prune the vineyard, to cleanse his people from sin, to purge out evil and frighten away the hypocrites in Zion; for it has been decreed that fearfulness shall surprise the hypocrites in Zion; and if he suffers the wicked to combine against us, he will overrule it for the salvation of the righteous. The righteous can endure trials, realizing as they do that

Behind a frowning providence, He hides a smiling face.

And that after much tribulation comes the blessing. And such are of Ephraim. Amen.