

The Closer Look Series

Patriarchs and Joseph Smith

The English word *patriarch* is a combination of the Greek *pater* (father) and *arches* (beginning or origin). Since the word is from Greek, in the Bible it appears only in the New Testament (Acts 7:8-9, Heb. 7:4). There it is used to refer to the first fathers—the origin—of the nation of Israel: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob (later renamed Israel) and Jacob's twelve sons who became the heads of the twelve tribes of Israel. The term is also used once to refer to David (Acts 2:29)—who conquered Jerusalem and founded Israel's capitol there.

■ **Old Testament Blessings.** In that ancient world it was customary for the father to impart a blessing upon his son(s) shortly before his own death. This was not a sentimental tradition but one filled with the spiritual power to govern the rest of one's life, for better or worse. Often the destiny of entire nations hinged on the event (Gen 25:19-50:26).

■ **Latter Day Patriarchs.** Since Joseph Smith believed that his movement was "Latter Day Israel" he felt it necessary to restore the concept of Israel's patriarchs with their blessings. His own father—Joseph Smith, Sr.—was ordained the church's first Patriarch on Jan. 21, 1836 (*RLDS History of the Church* 2:16). After his death, Joseph Jr. appointed his brother Hyrum as Patriarch (D&C 107:29a-f, 38). Joseph implied that the office of Evangelist also served a patriarchal function (D&C 104:17-29). This unlikely combination led to the dual RLDS office of Patriarch/Evangelist in 1901 (D&C 125:3-6).

The office of Patriarch—along with its special blessings—has continued to this day. Patriarchs are Melchisedec High Priests (read The Closer Look Series tract, *The Melchisedec Priesthood*) who receive a secondary ordination. They tend to be older fatherly figures whose ordination as Patriarch is seen as a semi-retirement. Leaders at the very highest positions of the church are often "called" to be Patriarchs as a way to retire them with honor.

■ **Latter Day Blessings.** Today, most active RLDS seek a Patriarchal Blessing at some point in their lives, often in their late teenage or early adult years. It is a very special event and a real high point in their church life. Most Patriarchal Blessings are prepared for ahead of time with opportunity for the Patriarch and the subject to get to know each other. Occasionally Blessings will be given spontaneously with no prior notice, though these are increasingly rare. Historically, it was a normal expectation for the subject's "lineage" in a tribe of Israel to be revealed during the Blessing. This practice has become controversial and is now discouraged. Patriarchal Blessings usually contain fatherly counsel, comfort and assurance. They have often included prophecies of what a person's life might hold in store for them. Sometimes these predictions materialize, sometimes they don't. In any event they are usually highly prized by the recipient.

Historical Contradictions.

■ **January 7, 1836** is the first record of a Patriarchal Blessing (by that name) in *RLDS History of the Church* (2:5). Patriarchal Blessings were given in Kirtland, Ohio on that day to Newell K. Whitney's parents and a number of others by "Father Smith"—Joseph Jr's father.

■ **January 21, 1836**, he was *ordained to that office* (14 days later) and then gave blessings to the First Presidency (Joseph Smith, Jr., Sydney Rigdon and Frederick G. Williams) the same evening (*ibid.* 2:16). **Would the January 7, 1836 blessings be valid in today's RLDS church?**

To add even more confusion, Joseph Smith Sr's. **1842 obituary** (*ibid.* 1:631) quotes from *Times and Seasons* v. 1:170-173 with very different dates:

■ **December 18, 1833** is the date given for Joseph Smith Sr's ordination

to Patriarch and President of the High Priesthood.

■ **February 17, 1834** is the day claimed for Patriarchal blessings having been given to Joseph Smith, Jr. and Samuel H. Smith. ***If church history and this obituary are both correct, then Joseph Smith, Sr. was ordained Patriarch twice, and Joseph Smith, Jr. received two Patriarchal Blessings!***

Scriptural Contradictions.

■ Joseph Smith Jr's only "revelation" on Patriarchs *wasn't given until 1842* (D&C 107:29, 38)! It is now an RLDS D&C "appendix," and no longer scripture because of references to esoteric practices (baptism for the dead, etc.).

■ The word *patriarch* never appears in the Book of Mormon, though *other* Greek-based words are frequently used.

■ There clearly is no Biblical support for this fatherly "priesthood office" or blessing ordinance within a Christian church. True believers in Christ have a Heavenly Father whose Word gives a never-ending blessing to His children.

Joseph Smith, Jr made up the Patriarchal office and ordinance for his own purposes. It has no valid foundation.

**God does NOT change.
Read Galatians 1:6-9.**

This tract was condensed from
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