

was for this reason that God spake through the mouth of Jeremiah concerning the gathering of Israel: "I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my first-born." That is according to his purposes. He acknowledged and reconfirmed this birthright upon Ephraim the younger of the two sons of Joseph, when he referred to the dispensation of the fullness of times and the ushering in of its great work—when the Lord should set his hand to gather His people, and be a father to Israel, even to Ephraim His firstborn.

Now, the Levitical Priesthood referred to was not a new Priesthood. We do not understand it to be an order of the Priesthood instituted at the time Israel was in the wilderness of Sinai, but that it had been from the beginning a part of the Holy Priesthood, an appendage, or a subdivision, or branch of the same Priesthood. The rights of this descended from father to son, among the firstborn, unless the firstborn failed to appreciate it and exercise it in righteousness. In that event it passed to one of the others.

We see the same principle set forth when the Lord commanded Moses to take the tribe of Levi and set them apart to be Priests. He told them the reason. Now, said He, I have claimed the firstborn of all the families of Israel as my own. When I sent forth my angel to smite the firstborn of the sons of Egypt, I caused mine angel to pass by the families of Israel, that he smite not their firstborn. In remembrance of this He instituted the ordinance called the Passover, to preserve in the minds of the Israelites, the occasion when the Lord passed over their firstborn, while the firstborn of the sons of Egypt He caused to be slain. For this rea-

son, He said, I have consecrated the first-born as mine own; and now, said He to Moses, I will take from the tribes of Israel the house of Levi, and you shall consecrate them to officiate, etc. This principle has continued from the beginning. We see it exemplified in the calling of the Lamb of God, who was the first-born among many brethren, and was in all things obedient to his Father; who loved righteousness and hated iniquity, and was therefore chosen and anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows. So in after years, those who in like manner exercised their birthright in connection with the powers of heaven, and on the principles of virtue, integrity and righteousness had these rights confirmed upon him. But in no case, when acting unrighteously, were they chosen to receive the confirmation of the ordinances of the Priesthood. In the days of Eli, who permitted his sons, who were heirs of the Priesthood, to set bad examples and work iniquities in Israel, God held the father responsible for their course, and He destroyed both Eli and his sons, and raised up another in his place.

The article read in your hearing from the Doctrine and Covenants, shows most clearly that the rights and blessings and keys of this Priesthood can only be held and exercised in connection with the powers of heaven and on the principles of righteousness. It is most beautiful to contemplate. It is like apples of gold in pictures of silver.

And that God may enable us to preserve these things in our hearts, and that we may attain to all that He has prepared for us, is my earnest prayer, in the name of Jesus. Amen.