

# ZARHEMLA BRANCH

## PROCLAIMING THE RESTORED GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST

December 16, 2018

Dear Saints,

When we both returned from viewing the plates in the possession of Mauricio Berger, we had no other testimony or explanation than that they were the same plates from which Joseph Smith Jr. translated the Book of Mormon. What bolstered our hope was the promise that part of the sealed book, which soon would be translated, would unite the saints. We have sorrowed for many years over the divisions, disagreements, and denunciations that have kept Restoration believers apart.

Since March 31, when the eight witnesses gave their united testimony, we have been dismayed at the growing focus to organize a church. The goal to restructure the church within the near future competed with our original testimony and more recently disclosed contradictions to which we must speak.

Since its inception, the Zarahemla Branch has maintained that the promises concerning the gathering of Israel, the building of Zion in the Center Place (including the temple), and the coming of our Savior will be realized through the vehicle of his church as it has continued in the Reorganization and eventually through the seed of Joseph Smith Jr.

As a branch, we have rightfully resisted the unlawful organization of higher quorums (apostles, etc.) in other groups until such time that the Lord properly calls forth that seed. We have prayed often for Wallace B. Smith who we believe according to Section 43, still holds a right to name a lawful successor and we have prayed for Joseph F. Smith.

Our present un-tethered condition allows us to continue to build bridges, maintain friendships and perhaps even be a catalyst for unity among the various portions of the restoration. We lament and are saddened by the many "organizational" walls that have been built among the saints and wish that no more would be constructed.

Because of what we verily believe, we want to make transparent some of the actions and teachings that contradict not only our belief, but what God has already revealed concerning his coming earthly kingdom. They include:

### The ordination of Joseph F. Smith as High Priest and president of the High Priesthood.

While we again affirm that by lineage, the seed of Joseph Smith Jr. holds the right to the prophetic office and that in him and his seed the kindreds of the earth would be blessed, we also affirm that there are safeguards given by the Lord to ensure a proper passing of the oracles and keys to and through his lineage.

Firstly, latter day revelation states "Every president of the high priesthood ... is to be ordained by the direction of a high council, or general conference." (Sec. 17:17) Because the church exists, albeit in many various portions, it must come together in conference to accept God's appointment of any future president of the High Priesthood prior to an ordination. A solemn assembly was called but in comparison to the number of saints in the area, few attended, and no effort has been made to organize or hold a general conference of the church.

Secondly, authority in any priesthood office or appendage is conferred, not assumed. This is done through ordination by the laying on of hands by someone having the authority to do so. Mauricio Berger ordained Joseph F. Smith to the High Priesthood but does not hold the proper authority. He was correctly ordained to the office of Elder by Joseph F. but has more recently claimed that Moroni conferred on him the authority of a High Priest. Section 26 indicates that the keys (or authority) that Moroni holds are the keys to the "record of the stick of Ephraim" which is the Book of Mormon. It would not be Moroni's place to restore the High Priesthood.

Lastly, there are men in the Restoration that hold the authority of High Priest. It did not need to be restored.

The removal of the Melchisedec priesthood except for the "royal" or "pure" priesthood resident in Joseph F. Smith and Mauricio Berger. It is also asserted that the Aaronic priesthood has continued in all the factions of the Restoration.

This teaching has led to the conclusion that re-ordinations and re-baptisms are necessary for membership and participation in the emerging church. While we all wish for a greater demonstration and manifestation of the "power of Godliness" in the assembly of the saints, we cannot deny the many testimonies and experiences had in us and among us. While perhaps less frequent, marvelous manifestations continue today.

For those who have already entered in at the strait gate, an additional baptism "availeth him nothing" (Sec. 20:1b)

The notion of the Aaronic priesthood continuing in the absence of the Melchisedec priesthood is problematic because it is highly unlikely that any Aaronic priest today could trace their authority in an unbroken chain of ordinations from priest-to-priest all the way back to its restoration under the hands of John the Baptist.

To say that one man's priesthood is more "pure" than another's is inaccurate. You either have authority or you do not. There are no grades of authority.

The teaching that in the future all men will first have to be ordained as an Aaronic Priest and "prove themselves" before any ordination to the Melchisedec priesthood.

It is God's prerogative to call men to priesthood. Progressive priesthood is a practice in the LDS church and one that does not find support in scripture. We are all wonderfully and differently made. Only God knows how men can best serve. Paul rightly asked the questions, "Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? ... I say unto you nay." (1 Cor 12:29-31) God will call men according to their gifts and talents. (Sec. 17:12a) No progression is necessary.

The return to a Saturday Sabbath and the celebration of a "day of adoration" beginning with a communion service at sundown of every new moon.

The establishment of a Saturday Sabbath is part of the Mosaic Law given to former-day Israel. It continues today as the Lord's Day (Sunday) which commemorates the resurrection of our Savior who rose on the 8th day or Sunday, without which there is no hope. The Lord's Day is the day when we should "rest from our labors, and pay devotions unto the Most High" in order to keep ourselves "unspotted from the world." (Sec. 59:2f)

Rosh Chodesh is a Hebrew minor holiday marking the beginning of each new month. It is also part of the Mosaic Law. (Num 10:10)

To return to a Saturday Sabbath or to return to any portion of the Mosaic Law is to return to an imperfect law and one that was fulfilled in Christ. Paul made this very clear emphasizing the importance of our baptism (new covenant) and the fact that Christ nailed the former ordinances to His cross specifically identifying the sabbath and new moons. (Col 2:12-16)

The righteous must leave the land of Zion for eight years while it is destroyed and cleansed.

Latter-day revelation clearly indicates that an "overflowing scourge, for a desolating sickness shall come over the land," earthquakes will be manifest in diverse places, and many desolations will occur. And, before the Lord comes, blood and fire, and vapors of smoke. (Sec. 45:4-5) But latter-day revelation also indicates that those that have taken the Holy Spirit for their guide shall not be hewn down. (Sec 45:10b-c) The appointed place, which is the land of Zion, will be "a land of peace, a city of refuge and a place of safety for the saints." (Sec. 45:12c-d)

Just like the day when the Savior was crucified and there was great upheaval in the land before He visited them, the more righteous will be preserved.

### The re-writing of a "revelation" from God.

On August 3, 2018 the witnesses received a communication from Mauricio Berger wherein he described an all-night experience with the Holy Spirit the outcome of which was an attached "revelation" that he had received from God.

This revelation was read to the Zarahemla priesthood at our August meeting. The heart of the message dwelled on a confirmation of the validity of the office of High Priest, an office that Joseph had openly taught and spoke against among the witnesses and others.

Joseph F. Smith took umbrage to a number of the items that the revelation contained. He stated that he prayed about it and received no witness that it was from God. This created a difficult situation between Mauricio and Joseph which was not resolved by the time Joseph returned to Brazil in late October 2018.

While in Brazil, Joseph and Mauricio discussed the office of High Priest. Joseph testified that he heard a voice that said if he left the discussion, all would be lost. We understood that the difficulty between Joseph and Mauricio was resolved. On November 3, the witnesses received a corrected copy of the August 3 revelation. Joseph said that when he confronted Mauricio with the issues he had with the August 3 revelation, in many cases, Mauricio commented that they were translation errors produced by the individual whom Mauricio had asked to translate it to English.

A side-by-side comparison of the August 3 revelation and its November 3 revision showed however that major portions of the revelation had been removed and replaced. These changes could not be attributed to translation errors. In many cases, the portions that Joseph had disagreed with had been re-written to make them more agreeable for him, although Joseph still thinks that they are corrections of a bad translation. He was only told the original revelation was not translated correctly. This re-writing and its attempted cover-up are disconcerting to us. Mauricio has been invited to comment further but has not.

We are further concerned that in order to move these actions and teachings forward, their advocates are framing them in terms that can make people fearful of not following them. If you confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwells in you and His love is made perfect in you. That perfect love casts out fear. There is no fear in love. The fear that God's love casts out is the fear of judgment. If God dwells in us, we can have boldness when we stand before Him to be judged. (John 4:15-18) Telling the saints that they must accept Joseph F. as prophet or suffer judgment is wrong.

They argue that we should not consider these contradictory actions and teachings because doing so demonstrates a lack of faith. It is suggested that we must believe contradictions to scripture if we want a fuller understanding. We believe the counsel given to Oliver Cowdery in Section 9 is wise in this matter. Oliver was chastised for taking no thought, only asking God. He was admonished to study it out in his mind, then ask. We have done that and invite all the saints to compare the actions and teachings of any group or organization with the revealed word of God. Then take the results of your study to the Lord. As He told Oliver Cowdery, He will either confirm with a burning in the bosom or provide a stupor of thought.

We believe that Joseph F. Smith and all those supporting his effort to restructure the church, including the witnesses involved, are honest and sincere and people of character and integrity. We have a strong bond and love for all the witnesses and find in them a rich love for God and His Son. They believe that they are doing what God wants them to do.

While we pointed out most of these points to the witnesses and wished to continue to associate with them, the study group for the reading of the Sealed Book of Mormon was enlarged, making it impossible to confine our discussion of some of the difficulties that we saw to only the fellowship and confidentiality that the

witnesses had previously agreed to keep. We did not read the Sealed Book and cannot endorse or criticize it at this time. We have concerns.

We also affirm the presence of the Holy Spirit when all the witnesses were together in Brazil. During the time that we were all there, there was no mention about restructuring the church or ordaining Joseph as prophet. We believe that the testimony of the Holy Spirit given to all of us is confirmation of the testimony that we were asked to bear. That testimony contains the following points:

- The Lord is displeased with the division among the branches that claim to be His church. He is particularly upset with the judgmental and accusatory attitude that some saints have toward other saints, who in many cases are equally devoted. This condition makes it impossible for anyone to bring God's word to the entire church while these conditions persist, unless He acts in a surprising and extraordinary way, such as speaking through a complete outsider.
- The Lord longs to see His people united and worshipping together in peace, love, and joy so that His Spirit can lift all of them together into heavenly places. Unless the saints willingly facilitate this event first, Zion cannot be redeemed in the way that saves all His people.
- The Lord has good news for His people. The promises that He made are true and will shortly be fulfilled as He wills. He will gather His saints, unify them as He pours His righteousness on them, and bring forth the sealed portion of the Book of Mormon. He will gather His people to the land of Zion and redeem it, providing a place of safety during the day of judgment on the world. (See Sec. 36:12e-g, 1N 3:229-231)

Finally, we bear witness that Jesus Christ came in the flesh to take upon Himself the sins of all mankind. His resurrection from the dead on the third day provides stunning evidence of His redeeming victory. He has promised that he will come again and reign as King and Lord. When the sealed portion comes forth, it will bear testimony of Him. Upon this promise our hope rests. We commend Him and this hope to all.

Sincerely,

Brad Gault

Bob Moore

Because of these scriptural contradictions contained in the teachings coming from the effort to restructure the original church, we cannot recommend that the saints join it. After discussion and prayer, we, the pastorate of the Zarahemla Branch, recommend that our branch remain un-tethered from this emerging church. We also welcome all members who choose to participate in any of its activities and wish them to understand that such participation in no way diminishes our love and respect for them. We continue to regard them as significant members of the branch and invite them to continue to worship with us.

Sincerely,

Brad Gault

Dean Falconer

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