

# ORIGIN OF LATTER DAY SAINTS' PRIESTHOOD

By Marvin W. Cowan

Priesthood is the authority God recognizes to act in His name in such matters as baptism, ordination, preaching, etc., according to Mormonism. The origin of Mormon Priesthood is recorded in LDS scripture in *The Pearl of Great Price*, "Joseph Smith-History" 1:66-75. It says Joseph Smith translated The Book of Mormon into English from the writing on the gold plates and read it to Oliver Cowdery who wrote it down. While translating on May 15, 1829 they came to a text that mentioned "baptism for the remission of sins" and wanted to know more about it so they went into the woods to pray. While they were praying, a messenger from heaven descended in a cloud of light and laid his hands on them and said, "Upon you my fellow servants, in the name of Messiah, I confer the Priesthood of Aaron, which holds the keys of the ministering of angels, and of the gospel of repentance, and of baptism by immersion for the remission of sins..." He told them the Aaronic Priesthood didn't have the power of laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost, but that they would receive that later.

The messenger, who later identified himself as John the Baptist, gave directions for Joseph to baptize Oliver and afterwards for Oliver to baptize Joseph, which they did. Then Joseph laid his hands on Oliver and ordained him to the Aaronic Priesthood after which Oliver ordained Joseph according to John's instructions. Joseph said after he and Oliver were baptized the Holy Ghost immediately fell on them and they were filled with the Holy Ghost and prophesied about many things which would shortly come to pass. John the Baptist told Joseph and Oliver that he was acting under the direction of Peter, James and John who had the Priesthood of Melchizedek, which they would soon receive from those apostles.

This story raises some questions: If Joseph and Oliver received the Aaronic Priesthood from John before their baptism, why did they ordain each other to that same Priesthood after they were baptized? Did they lose it in the waters of baptism? If they already had it, their action was either redundant or a sham. Mormonism teaches that a person can receive the Priesthood only after being properly baptized, so why did John give Joseph and Oliver the Priesthood before baptism? They needed to be examples for others to follow since Smith claimed they were going to restore the one true church!

Why didn't John baptize them first? The Holy Spirit baptized Adam according to *The Pearl of Great Price*—Moses 6:64, so surely John, in his resurrected body, could have baptized them! According to Mormon teaching today, Joseph's and Oliver's ordination by John the Baptist would be invalid because they hadn't been properly baptized. Likewise, their baptisms would be invalid because they ordained each other to the Priesthood after they were baptized, indicating they didn't have the Priesthood when they baptized each other!

Every LDS Priesthood holder today was ordained by someone who can trace his line of ordination authority back to Joseph and Oliver, where it originated. But that doesn't prove they have authority from God! LDS don't recognize ordinations done in over 200 Mormon splinter groups even though they also claim their Priesthood authority came from Joseph and Oliver.

But if Joseph and Oliver were really ordained to the Aaronic Priesthood by John the Baptist and later ordained to the Melchizedek Priesthood by Peter, James and John, why

would Cowdery later join an “apostate church,” as Mormonism calls all other churches? He resigned his LDS membership in 1838 and joined the Methodist Church and held an office in it. When he died in 1850 he was buried by a Methodist minister in Richmond, MO. If he truly believed he had received God’s Priesthood from heavenly messengers, what he did afterwards doesn’t make sense!

There is no Biblical basis for the LDS claim that those who baptize, ordain, etc. need “priesthood authority” in order for God to accept it. Neither Jesus nor His apostles taught that Aaronic Priesthood was to function in the church. And the Aaronic Priests never baptized or ordained anyone! Aaronic Priests were usually antagonistic toward Christ and the church as they were in Matthew 21:12-27. The primary work of Aaronic Priests was to offer Old Testament sacrifices and offerings in the tabernacle and temple as recorded in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. But, their job description in the Old Testament does not include the things in *The Pearl of Great Price*, Joseph Smith-History 1:69 (first paragraph of this article).

The LDS account of John the Baptist giving the Aaronic Priesthood to Joseph and Oliver contradicts Hebrews 7:11-12 which says the Aaronic Priesthood has been changed. There is now one Melchizedek Priest (Jesus) who is not an Aaronic Priest. Hebrews 7:23-24 explains that Old Testament Aaronic Priests died, so they had to be replaced. But Jesus, the Christians’ only High Priest, lives forever, so He will never be replaced nor will His Priesthood be given to anyone else! That eliminates both of the Priesthoods that Mormons claim to have! Hebrews 7:25 goes on to say that Jesus, our High Priest, “saves them to the uttermost that come to God by Him.” Have you come to God by Him?

For more information on this subject we suggest the booklet, *Latter-day Saints—Where Did You Get Your Authority?* By Hal Hougey; published by Pacific Publishing Co., Concord, CA. Our next article will discuss apostles in the church.