

Priesthood

by Marvin Cowan

The priesthood is the power of God delegated to man, which includes authority to act in the earth for the salvation of the human family.

Topics: "Lds Priesthood", "Christian Apostasy"

Description

Marvin Cowan preaches about the LDS belief in the priesthood, emphasizing the two priesthoods - Melchizedek and Aaronic, the functions and responsibilities of priesthood holders, and the claim of a universal apostasy and restoration of the church. He discusses the origin of LDS priesthood, the lack of Biblical evidence for it, and the contradictions with the Bible regarding priesthood. The sermon also delves into the Biblical priesthood, highlighting the role of Jesus Christ as the eternal High Priest and the inadequacy of LDS priesthood claims in light of Biblical teachings.

Transcript

"We believe that a man must be called of God by prophecy, and by the laying on of hands, by those who are in authority to preach the gospel and administer in the ordinances thereof."

5th Article of Faith by Joseph Smith

DEFINITION AND FUNCTION

President Joseph F. Smith (6th LDS Prophet) said:

What is the Priesthood? It is nothing more or less than the power of God delegated to man by which man can act in the earth for the salvation of the human family... by which they may baptize for the remission of sins and lay on hands for the reception of the Holy Ghost, and by which they can remit sin with the sanction and blessing of Almighty God. It is the same power and priesthood that was committed to the disciples of Christ while He was upon the earth... (G.D., p. 173; also see M.D., p. 594).

"There are in the (LDS) Church, two priesthoods, namely the Melchizedek and Aaronic, including the Levitical Priesthood" (D. & C. 107:1).

Milton R. Hunter also said, "Priesthood is probably the most important single item in the Gospel... The Priesthood was first given to Adam; he obtained the First Presidency, and held the keys of it from generation to generation. He obtained it in the creation, before the world was formed... He is Michael, the

archangel, spoken of in the scripture. Then to Noah, who is Gabriel; He stands next in authority to Adam in the priesthood" (G.T.A., p. 61).

Apostle Bruce McConkie wrote, "Priesthood is conferred upon an individual; he is ordained to office in the priesthood (such as elder); and he is set apart to a position of presidency or administration" (such as Elders Quorum President, M.D., p. 549). Advancement in the lower Aaronic Priesthood is determined by chronological age except in the case of older converts to Mormonism. Aaronic Priesthood is conferred on boys at age 12 when they are ordained as deacons. At age 14 they are ordained as teachers, and at 16 they are ordained priests. At age 18 the higher Melchizedek Priesthood is conferred when they are ordained as elders.

Apostle McConkie also said, "There is no advancement from one office to another within the Melchizedek Priesthood. Every elder holds as much priesthood as an apostle or as the President of the Church, though these latter officers hold greater administrative assignments in the Kingdom" (M.D., p.596).

The offices in the Melchizedek Priesthood include: elder, seventy, high priest, patriarch, and apostle. To hold any office, one must first have the priesthood. There can be no true church without the priesthood, even though priesthood can exist without the church. Each office in the priesthood has its own job description. Those in lower offices cannot function in the capacity of those with greater administrative assignments. Those with greater administrative assignments can do anything that those with less administrative assignments can.

Some things that the Melchizedek Priesthood holders can do include: administering to the sick or injured, consecrating oil for anointing the sick, blessing children, baptizing for the remission of sins, confirming members and bestowing the Holy Ghost on them, conferring priesthood on others and ordaining them to an office, dedicating graves, conducting funerals, and conducting regular meetings.

In support of their priesthood doctrine, LDS often quote part of John 15:16, where Jesus said, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you and ordained you." LDS claim that Jesus was speaking about the priesthood, but priesthood is not mentioned in this context or anywhere in any of the four gospels! This verse says "ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit..." Neither John 15:16 nor any other New Testament verse says that Jesus laid His hands on the disciples and ordained them to the priesthood, but LDS claim that is what the word "ordain" means. However, D. & C. 89:14 says, "all grain is ordained for the use of man and of beast." Did someone lay hands on the grain and give it the Priesthood? Obviously that is not the meaning of "ordain." While it is possible for someone to be ordained by "laying on of hands," that word really means to "appoint" or "point out." D. & C. 89 also mentions that herbs and flesh of beasts and fowls are "ordained for the use of man." Thus, even LDS scripture shows that "ordained" means "appointed," not lay hands on to give some priesthood office.

The LDS also use Heb. 5:4 to support their doctrine of an ordained priesthood. It says, "No man taketh this honor unto himself but he that is called of God as was Aaron." Then they claim that Aaron was called by Moses in Ex. 28:1. But, neither Heb. 5:4 nor Ex. 28:1 say anything about "laying on of hands" or "ordaining" anything. Heb. 5:4 says, "called of God," not "called by Moses" or "called by laying on of hands" as LDS interpret it. Ex. 4:27 declares, "The Lord said unto Aaron..." which shows that Aaron was called by the Lord, not Moses. In Num. 18:7 the Lord said to Aaron, "I have given your priests office unto you..." Even in D. & C. 132:59, the Lord says, "Verily if a man be called of my Father as was Aaron, by my own voice and

by the voice of Him that sent me and I have endowed him with the keys of the power of this priesthood..." Notice that LDS scripture says Aaron and those with LDS priesthood were called by the "voice" of God, not by laying on of hands! Neither Aaron nor anyone else was ever ordained to the Aaronic priest's office in the Old Testament. The only "priests" who were ordained in the Old Testament were idolatrous priests (II Kings 23:5; II Chron. 11:15)! Aaron was "anointed" (Ex. 40:13), but so was the tabernacle and everything in it (Ex. 40:9-15). Therefore, this "anointing" was not the "laying on of hands" to give the priesthood, unless the tabernacle and everything in it were also ordained to the priesthood! A good concordance will show that many other things in the Old Testament were "ordained," but the priests who served God were not! Later in this chapter under the subtitle, "Biblical Priesthood" how one became a priest in the Old Testament is examined.

ORIGIN OF LDS PRIESTHOOD

Even though LDS have no Biblical basis for their doctrine of "priesthood," LDS scripture says that John the Baptist appeared to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery in 1829 and laid his hands upon them and conferred the Aaronic Priesthood on them just before they were baptized (P. of G.P. J.S. History 1:68-73). Since LDS believe baptism is necessary for salvation, Joseph and Oliver must have been unsaved sinners at the time they received the priesthood! LDS also teach that baptism must precede receiving the priesthood, so why didn't John the Baptist baptize them first? He was of the Levitical priesthood lineage and was filled with the Holy Spirit even before he was born (D. & C. 84:27; Luke 1:5-15). Surely he had the authority since he baptized the Lord (Matt. 3:13-16). Whether John the Baptist was a spirit or a resurrected man, he could have baptized Joseph Smith if the Spirit of the Lord baptized Adam as recorded in the P. of G.P., Moses 6:64-65. But, in Joseph Smith - History, John the Baptist told Joseph to baptize Oliver, and Oliver to baptize Joseph. However, Joseph was not baptized when he baptized Oliver, so Oliver's baptism was invalid by LDS standards! Then Oliver, immediately baptized Joseph. If Oliver's baptism was invalid by LDS standards, that also made Joseph's invalid because he was baptized by Oliver whose baptism was not valid! Next, Joseph, who was not properly baptized by LDS standards, conferred the Aaronic priesthood on Oliver, who was not properly baptized (LDS would reject that ordination today). Then Oliver, who was improperly baptized and ordained, conferred the Aaronic Priesthood on Joseph who had not been properly baptized. But, John the Baptist had already conferred the Priesthood of Aaron on both Joseph and Oliver before they baptized each other. Since they conferred that same priesthood on each other after they baptized each other, they must have lost the priesthood John gave them when they baptized each other or they did not really get it in the first place! Either way, they had no authority to baptize or ordain each other by LDS standards today! If Joseph and Oliver already had the Aaronic Priesthood after they baptized each other, it would have been useless to ordain each other to that which they already possessed! But, if they did not have the Aaronic Priesthood, they had no authority to baptize each other and therefore every Mormon's baptism is invalid today because it is based upon the authority that Joseph and Oliver supposedly received when they baptized each other!

In P. of G.P. J.S. History 1:70, John the Baptist said, "this Aaronic Priesthood had not the power of laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost." But, in v. 73, Joseph said, "no sooner had I baptized Oliver Cowdery, than the Holy Ghost fell upon him - and again, so soon as I had been baptized by him, I also had the spirit of prophecy - We were filled with the Holy Ghost, and rejoiced in the God of our salvation." The gift of the Holy Ghost does not "fall" on LDS today, but comes only through the "laying on of hands" by those with priesthood authority (M.D., p. 438). Since John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Ghost from his mother's womb and he had priesthood authority enough to baptize the Lord Himself, why could he not

confer the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands as he did the Aaronic priesthood? John the Baptist was not needed to "restore" the church since the only thing he did was ordain Joseph and Oliver to the Aaronic Priesthood and that was done over again without him! Why didn't Joseph baptize himself while he was baptizing Oliver like Alma did when he baptized Helam (B. of M. Mosiah 18:14)? That context says nothing about Alma having the priesthood, but if he had it, he received it before he was baptized! Since Joseph Smith said "a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its (the B. of M.) precepts than by any other book" (T. of P.J. S. p. 194; D.H.C. Vol. 4, p. 461), he should have followed Alma's example. But, of course, that is contrary to LDS doctrine today! The origin of LDS priesthood is full of problems, but every LDS male received his "priesthood" from someone who ultimately got it from Joseph Smith or Oliver Cowdery!

LDS scripture says the three Nephite disciples and the Apostle John would live on earth and bring souls to Jesus until He comes again (B. of M. III Nephi 28; D. & C. 7). There is no evidence that they did that since LDS claim the church was "extinct" from the time of the apostles of Christ until Joseph Smith restored it in 1830 (D.H.C. Vol. I, intro. pp. 39-40). But, LDS claim the three Nephites and the Apostle John had the "priesthood" so they surely could have "restored" the church to earth again, but they did not. LDS claim that the Melchizedek priesthood was restored to earth by Peter, James and John when they conferred it on Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery in 1829. Peter and James had been dead for centuries, but they did as much as John, who according to D. & C. 7 had remained alive since Christ's earthly ministry (P. of G.P. J.S. History 1:72). LDS have no record of John doing anything else on earth until 1829, so he might as well have been dead too! Since the Apostle John and the three Nephites were to remain on earth and "bring souls to Jesus until He comes again," how could a universal apostasy happen when they were still on earth? The LDS teaching of a universal apostasy is discussed further in the chapter on "The Church."

The LDS claim of a universal apostasy and restoration of the church lacks credibility. If someone today claims that all churches (including the LDS) are apostate and that John the Baptist or an apostle of Christ has returned from the dead and given them the authority to restore the one true church, LDS would reject those claims! Yet, LDS expect others to accept their claims even though they have no more evidence to support them than someone making the same claim today! LDS keep volumes of records, but they have no historical records on the restoration of the Melchizedek priesthood explaining when and where Peter, James, and John visited Joseph Smith. LDS use D. & C. 27:12, dated August, 1830, as historical evidence (Ensign, June, 1973, p. 5), but Peter, James, and John were not mentioned in this revelation in the original 1833 Book of Commandments (predecessor of the D. & C.). They first appeared in the D. & C. in 1835. Compare the Book of Commandments Chapter 28, with D. & C. 27, and notice that 13 verses have been added to this "revelation." That insertion casts suspicion on the LDS claim of a "restored" priesthood as well as on the reliability of LDS scripture!

David Whitmer, one of the "three witnesses" of the B. of M., said the priesthood and high priests were unknown and not a part of the LDS Church until two years after it began (Address to All Believers in Christ, p. 64). Since LDS use Whitmer's book to prove he never denied his testimony of the B. of M., they can accept both statements or reject both, but they cannot be consistent if they accept one and reject the other. If the priesthood was an invention of Sidney Rigdon two years after Mormonism began, as Whitmer claims, then the LDS Church was not founded with proper priesthood authority, as Mormons claim. But, if Whitmer lied about the priesthood, why should we believe his testimony of the B. of M.? Either way, the LDS have a problem.

The Book of Commandments Chapter 24, dated June, 1830, did not mention high priests or high priesthood. That is now D. & C. 20, in which verses 65-67 have been inserted to include high priests and

the high priesthood without any indication of a change from the original revelation. Joseph Smith himself stated that on June 3, 1831, "the authority of the Melchizedek Priesthood was manifested and conferred for the first time upon several of the elders " (D.H.C., Vol. I, pp. 175-176). Apostle George A. Smith also said Ezra Booth, a Methodist minister, was present when the elders first received the high priesthood in June, 1831 (J. of D., Vol. XI, p. 4). That was more than a year after the LDS Church was founded on April 6, 1830! If that is true, the LDS Church was not founded upon the authority of the Melchizedek Priesthood as they claim.

LDS claim that Peter, James, and John conferred the high priesthood on Joseph Smith, in 1829, but they quote a message given by Oliver Cowdery in 1848 as their historical source. It says, "I was also present with Joseph when the higher or Melchizedek Priesthood was conferred by the holy angel on high" (A New Witness for Christ in America, Kirkham, Vol. I, p. 72). The first time Cowdery's message was published was in the Deseret News on April 13, 1859 which was ten and a half years after he gave it! That was also nine years after his death and 30 years after the LDS claim that the Melchizedek Priesthood was restored! The Deseret News claimed that Reuben Miller's Journal was their source for Cowdery's words, but that journal quoted Cowdery as saying, "I was also present with Joseph when the high or Melchizedek Priesthood was conferred by 'holy angels' from on high" (BYU Study Series, Vol. 8, No. 3, p. 278; see also D. of S., Vol. III, p. 99). Did Cowdery say "angel" or "angels"? Since he apostatized, is Cowdery's word even reliable? Apostle George A. Smith said that Oliver Cowdery did not know a true revelation from a false one (J. of D., Vol. XI, pp. 2-3). D. & C. 28 was received by Joseph Smith to help Oliver discern true revelations. Times and Seasons, a Mormon paper printed in 1840, says that Cowdery was a liar (Vol. I, pp. 22-23 and 81)! Yet, LDS use his message as evidence for their high priesthood!

LDS often ask others, "Where did you get your authority?" But, in the light of the foregoing information, Christians should ask LDS where they got their authority! All Mormon males over 12 years of age have priesthood certificates showing who ordained them. Thus, they can trace their line of authority back to Joseph Smith, whom they claim got his authority from Peter, James, and John, who got it from Christ. But, Christ's priesthood does not pass from person to person because He lives eternally (Heb. 7:24). Furthermore, Christ claims He has all power or authority in heaven and in earth (Matt. 28:18) which does not leave much "authority" for any man to claim! Therefore, anyone who claims that he has the priesthood of Christ has been misled. It is easy to boast, "I am a millionaire." But, to prove that you are a millionaire you must have the money! The same is true when LDS claim they have the priesthood or authority to act for God. The lack of Biblical evidence for such priesthood, the confusion in their own records about it and their inability to demonstrate that their priesthood authority even exists and that they have it, all indicate serious problems with their claims.

BIBLICAL PRIESTHOOD

In the Old Testament, Aaronic or Levitical Priesthood was not received by ordination, but it was inherited. Every priest was born an Israelite of the tribe of Levi and as a descendant of Aaron (Num. 3:6-12; D. & C. 107:16). LDS usually claim to be the tribe of Ephraim or Manasseh, which disqualifies them from having the "Aaronic Priesthood." LDS priests have never fulfilled the Old Testament duties of the "priests" or the "high priest" in offering sacrifices (Ex. 29:38-44; Heb. 5:1; 8:3). The Aaronic priesthood cannot be separated from those sacrifices.

But, even if LDS offered those sacrifices today, they would be of no value, because the Levitical or Aaronic Priesthood was replaced or superceded by Jesus Christ, the Great Eternal High Priest (Heb.

7:11-17; 10:8-21). While Old Testament Priests functioned as mediators, Christ is now the only Mediator (Priest) between men and God (I Tim. 2:5; Heb. 7:24-25; John 14:6). The Aaronic priesthood actually ended at Christ's crucifixion when "the veil of the temple was rent in twain from top to bottom" (Matt. 27:50-51). That veil was 60 feet high and separated the "Holiest of all" from the "sanctuary" (Heb. 9:2-3). By tearing that veil, God symbolically declared that Christ's death gave believers direct access to God. They "enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus - through the veil, that is to say, His flesh" (Heb. 10:19-20). But, some of the priests patched the heavy temple curtain and went on offering sacrifices until 70 AD when the Roman army destroyed both the temple and the city of Jerusalem. They did not know that those sacrifices were only figures (symbols) of Christ's offering of Himself (Heb. 9:1-10:21).

In Old Testament days, there was only one high priest on earth at a time. Once each year He went into the "Holiest of all" to offer blood sacrifice for himself and for the people (Ex. 30:10; Heb. 9:7, 19-22). In the New Testament church, Jesus Christ is both the High Priest and the sacrifice (Heb. 3:1; 9:11-12, 25-26). His body was offered once so there is no more sacrifice for sin (Heb. 7:26-27; 9:11-12, 26; 10:10-14). Because that work is finished (John 19:30), there is no need for a High Priest on earth! Christ, the only mediator and High Priest, is in heaven (I Tim. 2:5; Heb. 8:1-6).

The book of Hebrews repeatedly declares that Jesus Christ is the only High Priest after the order (manner) of Melchizedek (Heb. 3:1; 5:6, 10; 6:20; 7:11, 15, 17, 21, 24, 26; 8:1; 9:11). His "Melchizedek Priesthood" is "unchangeable" (literally "untransferable" or it "passeth not from one to another," Heb. 7:24). He did not get it from anyone nor give it to anyone. Because He lives forever (Heb. 7:25), He is consecrated for evermore (Heb. 7:28) as the Christian's only High Priest after the manner of Melchizedek (Heb. 7:15-17). Since Jesus Christ lives forever as our High Priest, there is no need for other high priests!

Thus, LDS Priesthood claims contradict the Bible at several points: 1) there were "high priests" under the Old Testament Law, but nowhere does the Bible say that they held the Melchizedek Priesthood; 2) Priests cannot be separated from "sacrifice for sins" Heb. 5:1 declares. But, LDS high priests offer no sacrifice for sins. At least twice, two contemporary men were called high priests (I Chron. 15:11; Luke 3:2), but only one was the legal high priest; 3) Priests had to be descendants of Aaron (Num. 20:28; 25:10-13). LDS "high priests" are not descendants of Aaron, so they cannot legally claim to have the same office as the Old Testament high priest; 4) There was only one legal high priest at a time; 5) Today Jesus Christ is the only High Priest Christians will ever need because He lives forever (Heb. 7:24), but multitudes of LDS men claim they are high priests, too. When Heb. 7:27-28 mentions "high priests" it refers to the fact that as one high priest died, he was replaced by another one (Num. 20:28; Heb. 7:23). The "high priest" in the New Testament was a part of Judaism, and he sought to kill Jesus (Matt. 26:57-66) and he persecuted Christians (Acts 9:1-2). But, there never was an office called "high priest" in the New Testament church. If LDS claim to have high priests like those mentioned in the New Testament, they identify themselves with the persecutors of Christ and Christians!

LDS teach that Joseph Smith had to have the priesthood before he could establish the Church. But the Bible says nothing about apostles, bishops, deacons, or any other New Testament office holding either the Aaronic or Melchizedek Priesthood. Why did Joseph Smith need it if Mormonism is a restoration of the New Testament church? The Bible does not teach that the church or priesthood will be lost or restored. The B. of M. is also silent about the Aaronic Priesthood, and the Melchizedek Priesthood is mentioned only once, when it refers directly to Melchizedek. If the B. of M. is the "the fulness" of the everlasting gospel (D. & C. 20:9; 27:5; 42:12; and P. of G.P. J.S. History 1:34), and it does not even mention priesthood in the church, why does the LDS Church teach that it so important? The B. of M. does mention

high priests, but it does not say that they held the Melchizedek Priesthood. Nor does it say that those who baptized had the Aaronic or Melchizedek Priesthood. LDS assume B. of M. people had the priesthood since they teach that it is so important today, but "Priestcraft" is forbidden in the B. of M. (II Nephi 26:29).

Acts 6:7 does say that "a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith." But, these were converts from Judaism to Christianity, and they never functioned as "priests" in the church! LDS claim that when Jesus was no longer on earth in person to guide His church, He left His apostles in charge of it. But, Col. 1:18 declares that "He (Christ) is (now) the head of the body the church," even though He is in heaven! Jesus said, "All power (authority) is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Matt. 28:18). If Jesus has it all, men do not have any!

All Christians are a "Kingdom of priests (Rev. 1:6) and possess a "holy" or "royal" priesthood mentioned in I Peter 2:5 and 9, which is neither Aaronic nor Melchizedek. Nor did it ever exclude the Negroid race like the LDS did until 1978. Nor does it exclude, women or children, like the LDS still do (Gal. 3:28; Acts 10:34; Rom. 2:11; 10:12; Eph. 6:9). Even the B. of M., in II Nephi 26:33 and Jacob 2:21, declares that God sees all men alike whether they are black or white, male or female, bond or free. If God sees all alike, why have LDS treated them differently? LDS scripture contradicts their history of excluding blacks, women, and children from their priesthood!

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