Lesson 8

Joseph Smith—History 1:66–73;
Doctrine and Covenants 13; 20:38–67; 27:12–13;
84:6–30; 107:1–20; and 110:11–16

Aaronic Priesthood

Joseph Smith—History 1

Verse 68: The Father and the Son visited Joseph Smith in response to his soul-searching and his desire to know what church to join. John the Baptist visited him and Oliver Cowdery in response to their question about baptism by immersion. What does this suggest about revelation?

Verse 72: Why was it important that John the Baptist tell them who he was and what authority he operated under?

Doctrine and Covenants 13 (see also 84:26–27)

How does the use of the word *keys* here differ from its use in Matthew 16:19? How is it the same?

Numbers chapter 18 spells out the responsibilities of the Aaronic Priesthood anciently:

- They are to bear the sin of Israel and prevent others from getting too close to the tabernacle and its holy vessels (verses 1–5).
As priesthood bearers, they are a gift to Israel, and they should understand their priesthood service as a gift they give to Israel (verses 6–7).

Speaking to Aaron, the Lords says that he is in charge of the holy sacrifices and should depend on the Lord for his inheritance (verses 8–20; the same things are repeated in verses 21–32, speaking to the Levites as a whole).

Compare these responsibilities of the ancient Aaronic Priesthood with the responsibilities of the latter-day Aaronic Priesthood (D&C 20:46–59; 107:13–14, and 20). How is priesthood service a gift to give? What does authority mean when we think of it in those terms? How might priesthood bearers today understand the instruction to depend on the Lord for their inheritance?

What is the ministering of angels? Is it related to Jesus’s experience after his forty-day fast (Matthew 4:11 and Mark 1:13)? Does the fact that it is a telestial privilege (D&C 76:88) help us understand what it means to us? Sherem confesses that angels minister as part of his repentance (Jacob 7:17); Amaleki lists it among the things in which he believes (Omni 1:25); when, after Christ’s appearance, the disciplines receive the Holy Ghost, angels minister to them (3 Nephi 19:15); Moroni mentions the ministering of angels as something by which people have faith (Moroni 7:25), and he tells us that it is one of the gifts of the Spirit (Moroni 10:14). The fact that the ministering of angels is one of only two things mentioned by John the Baptist, the other being the gospel, suggests that it is something very
important. Can you explain specifically what it is in a way that gives it its importance? Where do we find the ministering of angels today?

John the Baptist describes the gospel in two ways: it is the gospel of repentance, and it is the gospel of baptism by immersion for the remission of sins. Why do you think he chooses those particular ways of describing the gospel, rather than others? John speaks of keys in the plural, but then he says, “this shall never be taken from the earth,” using a singular pronoun. To what does the word this refer? So what?

Doctrine and Covenants 107

Verse 14: What does the description of the Aaronic Priesthood as an appendage tell us? D&C 84:29–30 describes the offices of elder and bishop as appendages to the high priesthood and the offices of teacher and deacon as appendages to the lesser priesthood. Does that help us understand what it means to say that the Aaronic Priesthood is an appendage to the Melchizedek Priesthood?

To what does the phrase “outward ordinances” refer? Are there inward ordinances? What might be the difference between outward and inward ordinances? Why is the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost not an outward ordinance while baptism is?

Verse 20: What does this verse add that was not in the description of the Aaronic Priesthood that John the Baptist gave in his ordination of Joseph and Oliver?

What does “the letter of the gospel” mean?
Why does this verse end with “agreeable to the covenants and commandments”? “Covenants and Commandments” was the title of the second half of the first edition of the Doctrine and Covenants. Does that answer the question, or does the phrase mean more?

Melchizedek Priesthood

Doctrine and Covenants 84

Verse 17: What does it mean to say that the Melchizedek Priesthood continues “in the church of God in all generations”? Is that the same as being “without beginning of days or end of years,” or are the two different?

Verse 19: What does it mean to say that the Melchizedek Priesthood administers the gospel? How does that differ from the responsibility of the Aaronic Priesthood? What does it mean to say that the greater priesthood holds the key to the mysteries of the kingdom? In what sense does it hold that key? What do you make of the fact that this verse makes “mysteries of the kingdom” and “knowledge of God” equivalent? Are we to understand “knowledge of God” to mean “God’s knowledge” or “our knowledge of him”?

Verse 20: The verse begins with the word therefore. How does the previous verse lead us to the conclusion stated in this verse?

How do the ordinances of the gospel manifest the power of godliness? Is “the power of godliness” different from “the power of God”? If so, how? Can you explain specifically how, say, baptism manifests the power of godliness?
Verse 21: What does it mean to say that without the ordinances, which are only possible through the authority of the priesthood, “the power of godliness is not manifest unto men in the flesh”? That is a very strong claim about the function of ordinances for human beings. Can you explain it? What is godliness that it cannot be manifest without authoritative ordinances?

Verse 22: To what does the word this refer, to “the power of godliness” or to something else?

Doctrine and Covenants 107

Verse 8: What does it mean to hold the right of presidency? Which presidency is intended here? Or is this referring to a general right, the right to preside? Does verse 9 answer that question, or does it speak of something else?

What are “spiritual things”?

Verses 18–19: Why is the power and authority of the priesthood a matter of holding keys? Does that differ from our ordinary ways of understanding power and authority? If so, how? What does it mean to hold the key to blessings rather than to hold the key to doing something? Why does verse 18 speak of spiritual blessings rather than merely blessings?

What does it mean to have the heavens opened to one? What does it mean to “commune with the general assembly and church of the Firstborn” (italics added)? The phrase “general assembly and church of the firstborn” comes from Hebrews 12:23. Does its use in Hebrews help us understand better what it means here?
D&C 76:67 equates the church of the Firstborn with the church of Enoch. What might that teach us? Verse 71 of the same section says that the church of the Firstborn consists of those who have received the fulness of the Father, and verse 94 says that it is composed of those who dwell in his presence. Does that mean that there is no such church on the earth today? If so, how do you explain D&C 78:21, where the Lord tells the members of the Church, “Ye are the church of the Firstborn”? D&C 76:51–60 describes the church of the Firstborn quite fully.

Notice that all of the pronouns in D&C 76:51–60 are either plural or masculine. Does this mean that the promises in verses 57–60 are offered only to men? What evidence is there to the contrary (such as the temple ordinances)? Where do women fit in the understanding of things explained here?

What does it mean to “enjoy the communion and presence of God the Father, and Jesus”? How is that related to the statement that the power and authority of the Melchizedek Priesthood is “to commune with the general assembly and church of the Firstborn”?

Why is it important in this context that Jesus be remembered as “the mediator of the new covenant”? Writing about the verses in section 76, Bruce R. McConkie said, “Baptism is the gate to the Church itself, but celestial marriage is the gate to membership in the Church of the First-born, the inner circle of faithful Saints who are heirs of exaltation and the fulness of the Father’s kingdom” (Mormon Doctrine
How does Elder McConkie understand the communion of the church of the Firstborn?

**Doctrine and Covenants 20**

Are each of the things listed here *spiritual* things? Can you explain your answer?

*Verses 41, 43:* What reasons might there be for why the gift of the Holy Ghost is conferred by the laying on of hands?

What is “the baptism of fire and the Holy Ghost”? Is it the same as the gift of the Holy Ghost? Answering President Martin Van Buren’s question about how Mormonism differs from other religions, Joseph Smith said that we differ “in the mode of baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost. We consider that all other considerations are contained in the gift of the Holy Ghost” (*History of the Church*, 4:42). How can this be? What does it mean to *conduct* meetings—rather than to preach—as one is led by the Holy Ghost?