



Theses and Dissertations

2006-07-18

A Study of the History of the Office of High Priest

John D. Lawson
Brigham Young University - Provo

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd>



Part of the [History of Christianity Commons](#)

BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Lawson, John D., "A Study of the History of the Office of High Priest" (2006). *Theses and Dissertations*. 749.

<https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd/749>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@byu.edu, ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.

A STUDY OF THE HISTORY OF THE OFFICE OF HIGH PRIEST

by

John Lawson

A thesis submitted to the faculty of

Brigham Young University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Masters of Arts

Religious Education

Brigham Young University

July 2006

Copyright © 2006 John D. Lawson

All Rights Reserved

BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE COMMITTEE APPROVAL

Of a thesis submitted by

John D. Lawson

This thesis has been read by each member of the following graduate committee and has been found to be satisfactory.

Date

Craig J. Ostler, Chair

Date

Joseph F. McConkie

Date

Guy L. Dorius

BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

As chair of the candidate's graduate committee, I have read the thesis of John D. Lawson in its final form and have found that (1) its format, citations, and bibliographical style are consistent and acceptable and fulfill university and department style requirements; (2) its illustrative materials including figures, tables, and charts are in place; and (3) the final manuscript is satisfactory to the graduate committee and is ready for submission to the university library.

Date

Craig J. Ostler
Chair, Graduate Committee

Accepted for the Department

Clyde J. Williams
Graduate Coordinator

Accepted for the College

Terry B. Ball
Dean of Religious Education

ABSTRACT

A STUDY OF THE HISTORY OF THE OFFICE OF HIGH PRIEST

John D. Lawson

Religious Education

Masters of Arts

This study is an examination of the office of high priest from its beginning with Adam as the first and down through the restoration of the Church in the last days.

This study revealed that the office of high priest was the only priesthood office that was held from the time of Adam until the Melchizedek Priesthood was taken, generally, away from the congregation of Israel in Moses' day. The office did however remain but was exclusive only to a few.

Another important aspect of the history of the office of high priest that will be shown is how the doctrine of foreordination applies to the office. The Book of Mormon prophet Alma discourse on the subject will be analyzed and used to show many of the requirements men who have desired the office of high priest have and continue to meet.

This study also details the restoration of the office of high priest in the dispensation of the fullness of times. The Doctrine and Covenants is scriptural backdrop

of this section. Historical examples from journals and other writings of those who were there will show how the office has been understood in the Church since the days of Joseph Smith. Further, a detailed account of how the Church came to understand the office of high priest in regard to the Melchizedek Priesthood office of Seventy is set forth.

Lastly, a brief examination of vicarious bestowal of the office of high priest and the future of the office of high priest is also given.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the dedicated help of Craig J. Ostler, the chair of my graduate committee. He was always willing to take time out of his busy schedule to help in any way he could. His assistance and service to me amidst many trials of his own, is an example of the type of service the Savior desires of all of us. I appreciated his patience, his insights, corrections, and suggestions, as well as those of the other two committee members, Joseph F. McConkie and Guy L. Dorius.

I express appreciation to the Church Educational System and to the faculty of Religious Education of Brigham Young University. The time I have spent with the men and women in this department has inspired me to be a more thorough student of the gospel.

Finally, I express my love to my beautiful family. In the time that I have been working on this project my wife, Elisabeth, has given birth to two of my four princess daughters. Her love and the love of my children inspire me to work a little harder and be a little better.

John D. Lawson

July 10, 2006

CONTENTS

Chapter

1. <u>INTRODUCTION.....</u>	<u>1</u>
2. <u>THE HISTORY OF THE OFFICE OF HIGH PRIEST FROM ADAM TO MOSES.....</u>	<u>15</u>
3. <u>THE HISTORY OF THE OFFICE OF HIGH PRIEST FROM MOSES TO JESUS CHRIST.....</u>	<u>29</u>
4. <u>THE PRIESTHOOD AND THE HIGH PRIESTS IN ANCIENT AMERICA.....</u>	<u>37</u>
5. <u>THE RESTORATION OF THE OFFICE OF HIGH PRIEST IN THE LAST DISPENSATION</u>	<u>49</u>
6. <u>THE TERM <i>HIGH PRIESTHOOD</i> USED IN EARLY CHURCH HISTORY.....</u>	<u>61</u>
7. <u>THE OFFICE OF HIGH PRIEST SINCE THE RESTORATION.....</u>	<u>74</u>
8. <u>CONCLUSION.....</u>	<u>99</u>
<u>WORKS CITED.....</u>	<u>102</u>

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The first recorded office of the priesthood held by man on earth was that of high priest, this office was held by father Adam. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that next to Christ, Adam was the greatest high priest ever to live on earth.¹

It can be reasoned that it was God himself who gave Adam the priesthood and ordained him to the office of high priest.² When Adam received the priesthood he was authorized to administer in the saving ordinances of the Gospel. The Book of Moses in the Pearl of Great Price explains, “Now this same Priesthood, which was in the beginning, shall be in the end of the world also” (Moses 6:7). Nearly six thousand years after Adam, Joseph Smith was given the same priesthood by angelic messengers and later, like Adam, was ordained to the office of high priest. Joseph Smith too, was authorized to introduce and perform those ordinances Adam had performed.

These two men, who stood in the first and last gospel dispensations, could not have been more different in situation or circumstance. Their priesthood and office in mortality however, were the same. They were high priests. As is the case with many high priests today, their mission was one of administering in all the ordinances of the gospel and blessing the children of God.

¹ Smith, Joseph, *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 7 vols., introduction and notes by B. H. Roberts, Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1932-1951, 3: 387 - 388

² This supposition can be made because there was no one else with a corporeal body that could perform the ordination. God has always followed the pattern, in regards to bestowal of the priesthood, that a man must receive the priesthood by the laying on of physical hands. Never has a man received the priesthood from a personage of spirit. At the time of Adam, God was the only resurrected being who held the priesthood. A resurrected angel from another world could not have given Adam the priesthood because no angel can administer to a world he or she has not or will not live on (D&C 130:5).

This thesis will trace the history of the office of high priest from Adam through the restoration of the Church in the latter days. The study of this history will provide insight and understanding to the office of high priest which will increase the appreciation for the office in our day

Review of Literature

The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature available concerning the history of the office of high priest within the greater or Melchizedek Priesthood. As searched by the author, the literature available focuses mainly on the duties and responsibilities associated with the office and not its history.

The scope of the literature reviewed is limited to the words of scripture that are accepted by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, namely the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, Pearl of Great Price, and the King James Version of the Bible. Further, the teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith and all other prophets and Apostles of the Church have been examined, along with the writings of scholars who are of the Latter-day Saint faith.

No scholarly work of those who are not of the Latter-day Saint faith will be examined in this thesis. This is because no scholar has written on the history of the office of high priest who has a correct understanding of revealed priesthood and its offices. In order to understand the history of the office correctly, it must be studied with the revelations of the Restoration.

Further, crucial to understanding the office of high priest is the need to separate the office of high priest in the Aaronic Priesthood and the office of high priest in the Melchizedek Priesthood. Scholars outside of the Church rarely separate these two offices other than the rare few who identify Christ as the only high priest to ever receive the higher priesthood (Hebrews 6:20).

As the subject of priesthood is approached, a river of general information is available, as the topic is narrowed to a study of the offices within the priesthood, this river slows into a stream and as the topic of priesthood offices is tapered even further to an examination of the history of the particular office of high priest, the information available becomes a trickle.

The Scriptures

The most helpful sources in a study of the history of the office of high priest are the canonized scriptures of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Scripture however, was not written to be used as a priesthood history manual. As a result, the difficulty in the study of this office is that the scriptures are not organized in a way that produces one clear section on the office of high priest and its history. This information has to be mined from many pages and brought together and studied as a whole. Until this paper, no publication exists that pieces together references in scripture concerning the office of high priest to produce a picture of its history.

For instance, the Bible contains many references to the office of high priest. However the majority of these references deal with the office of high priest of the Aaronic Priesthood, which is a different office than is the focus of this paper. The only specific references to the office of high priest in the Melchizedek Priesthood come in Paul's letter to the Hebrews (Hebrews 5:10, 6:20, 8:1) and a brief reference by John the Revelator (Revelation 14:3).

Concerning the history of the office, one main contribution of the Bible is to identify the names of several, but not all, high priests of the Melchizedek Priesthood. The vast majority of the information used to study the history of the office of high priest

comes from the revelations of the Restoration, meaning the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants and the Pearl of Great Price.

Writers of the Book of Mormon refer to “high priest” or “high priests” 26 times. All of these refer to the office of high priest in the Melchizedek Priesthood. One particular valuable contribution the Book of Mormon makes to the study of the history of the office of high priest comes from the writings of the prophet Alma concerning Melchizedek as a high priest (Alma 13).

Using Melchizedek as a pattern for all high priests, Alma identifies the requirements Melchizedek and all high priests before and after him should fulfill in order to receive the office (Alma 13:1-14). This test constitutes the only discussion in scripture dedicated to the nature of this office.

The Book of Mormon makes another contribution to the study of the history of the office, though it appears it might not have been the intent of the writers to do so. The language used by the writers of the Book of Mormon provides insight to a question that arises from the early history of the Church concerning the meaning of the phrase “high priesthood”. As used by the prophets of the Book of Mormon, the phrase “high priesthood” actually means office of high priest, as will be shown in a later chapter.

The phrase “high priesthood” as used today, is normally associated with the Melchizedek Priesthood, this work will illustrate that Joseph Smith, and many other of the early Saints used the term “high priesthood,” as did the prophets of the Book of Mormon, to describe the office of high priest.

Part of the history of the office is how it began to be misunderstood when it was first introduced in 1831. Much of what has been preserved concerning the office of high

priest during the first few years of the restoration may be glossed over and misunderstood if the term “high priesthood” is not understood to refer directly to the office.

The Joseph Smith Translation identifies Melchizedek and Abraham respectively as high priests but do not recount any specific history of the office. Likewise the Doctrine and Covenants, though referencing the office of high priest more than any other book of scripture, does not identify where, when or how the office of high priest came about.

Other Sources

There are credible publications centered in a discussion of the priesthood and its offices in the literature concerning The Church of the Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

A significant publication concerning the subject of priesthood and its offices comes from Elder John A. Widstoe. Widstoe's volume, *Priesthood and Church Government*,³ explains the roles and functions of all the priesthood offices of the Church. This work provides insight, meaning and definition to all priesthood offices in the Church in this dispensation.

Elder Widstoe discusses briefly the office of high priest in ancient days while dealing with duties of those who hold the office in the latter-days. There is no discussion of the history of the office.

Some significant publications on priesthood and its offices produced by the Church were published in the *Ensign* magazine during the year 2005. An article dedicated to each office of the priesthood was produced each month. An article devoted to the office of high priest was published in June of 2005. This article focused on the

³ Widstoe, John A. *Priesthood and Church Government*, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1939.

duties and responsibilities of a high priest but did not add anything to the discussion of the history of the office.⁴

Pertinent especially to this paper is the work of Joseph Fielding McConkie and Craig J. Ostler's in a comprehensive volume entitled, *Revelations of the Restoration*⁵. The scope of this book is wide as it is a commentary on the Doctrine and Covenants, however their work on a small section concerning the office of high priest must be noted for its influence in this paper.

McConkie and Ostler identify language that is used in early Church history as important in understanding the history of the office. The authors show how the term "high priesthood" as used in the Doctrine and Covenants and other early Church documents repeatedly and exclusively refers to the office of high priest. This discussion begins to show how the use of this term has evolved since the early day and in the process meaning has been lost.

The authors have discussed thoroughly the meaning of the phrase *high priesthood*, however no dialogue is put forth examining why the phrase, understood in the early days changes later on.

Richard L. Bushman's 2005 publication, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*⁶ briefly approaches the history of the office of high priest in the days of Joseph Smith. His views about the events surrounding and the date of the restoration of the Melchizedek

⁴ Sorenson, David E., The High Priest Quorum, *Ensign*, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, June 2005, 50.

⁵ McConkie, Joseph Fielding and Ostler, Craig J., *Revelations of the Restoration*, Salt Lake City, Desert Book Co., 2000.

⁶Bushman, Richard L., *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*, New York, Knopf Publishing, 2005.

Priesthood and office of high priest differ from those of the author of this work. The reasons for these differences will be considered in this work.

A survey of the subject of priesthood specifically the history of the office of high priest reveals how barren the field of literature is on the matter. Therefore, in view of the fact that no measurable work has been done in compiling the history of the office of high priest, this work will seek to reconstruct a meaningful understanding of the history of the office of high priest in ancient times and in this age of the restoration of the gospel.

Definition of Terms

In order to understand the history of the office of high priest as it functions in the Melchizedek Priesthood, it is necessary to be familiar with the definition of the terms and phrases used to describe it. The following are the terms with their definitions and explanations.

The Priesthood

“The Priesthood is the power and authority of God delegated to man on earth to act in all things for the salvation of men”⁷ The priesthood was given to Adam and continued throughout all gospel dispensations since then (Moses 6:7). There are two priesthoods in the Church, the Aaronic or lesser priesthood and the Melchizedek or greater priesthood (D&C 107:1).

Melchizedek Priesthood

The Melchizedek Priesthood, named for the great high priest Melchizedek (D&C 107:2), is the highest priesthood on earth. It encompasses and directs the Aaronic Priesthood. This priesthood “is the channel through which all knowledge, doctrine, the plan of salvation and every important matter is revealed from heaven.”⁸

Aaronic Priesthood

The Aaronic Priesthood takes its name from Aaron who was a spokesman for his younger brother Moses as they wandered in the wilderness en route to the Promised Land. In our day, the Aaronic Priesthood is a training ground for those who wish to hold the Melchizedek Priesthood. Subsequently then, this priesthood is often referred to as the preparatory priesthood.

⁷Bruce R. McConkie, *Conference Report, April 1949*, Afternoon Meeting, 89.

⁸ Smith, *History of The Church*, 4:xxxix.

The Aaronic Priesthood is an appendage to the greater priesthood (D&C 107:14). As an appendage, the Aaronic Priesthood is authorized to administer in the outward ordinances of the gospel such as baptism and the sacrament (D&C 107:18-20).

Keys of the Priesthood

Where the priesthood of God is, there will also be order. Order within the priesthood is maintained by the use of priesthood keys. “Keys are the directing power, the right to preside and govern in the priesthood and in the Church.”⁹ Just as an actual key is used to open something that has been locked, a priesthood key is used to unlock or authorize the use of the priesthood to function. To possess priesthood is to possess authority; however, no priesthood bearer may use the priesthood authority unless he is given permission to do so by those holding the keys.

Offices of the Priesthood

There are divisions within the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods by which callings or assignments are divided, these divisions are called offices. Within the Aaronic or Lesser priesthood there are four ordained offices. They are, bishop, priest, teacher and deacon. Within the Melchizedek Priesthood there are six ordained offices. They are: president of the high priesthood, apostle, seventy, patriarch, high priest and elder.

Whenever the Church has been organized, men who have the priesthood are ordained to an office within the priesthood.

Ordained and Set Apart

⁹ McConkie, *Conference Report, April 1949*, 89.

In the study of the history of the office of high priest, some terms can have dual meaning. For the purposes of this paper it is necessary to distinguish between the terms *ordain* and *set apart*. Today the term, *ordain*, is used to describe receiving a priesthood office. The phrase *set apart*, in relation to priesthood, means to authorize a man to act in a position of presidency. Further, others are *set apart* to special callings that require the use of the priesthood such as a sealer in the temple. As we study the history of the Church it is important to understand that the definitions of terms sometimes change as in the case of the term “ordained” and “set apart.” President Joseph Fielding Smith explained:

The term "ordain" was used generally in the early days of the Church in reference to both ordination and setting apart. Men holding the priesthood were said to have been "ordained" to preside over branches and to perform special work. Women also were said to have been "ordained" when they were called to some special duty or responsibility. In later years we developed a distinction between ordain and setting apart. Men are ordained to offices in the priesthood and set apart to preside over stakes, wards, branches, missions, and auxiliary organizations.¹⁰

When a man is *ordained*, he is given an office and is then responsible to fulfill the assignments inherent in that particular office.

Within most offices of the priesthood there are men chosen to form a presidency. A presidency consists of three men who all have been ordained to the same office. The president within a presidency is given the keys and *set apart* to preside over a specific group or quorum.

¹⁰ Smith, Joseph Fielding, *Church History and Modern Revelation*, 4 vols. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1946-1949, 1: 117 - 118.

Priesthood Ordinance

A priesthood ordinance is a rite or ceremony performed by one holding proper priesthood authority. There are two types of priesthood ordinances in the Church. The first is an ordinance of blessing, such as healing the sick and blessings of comfort.

The second type of ordinances are those that deal with covenants. These ordinances include all ordinances found in the temples of God, receiving the priesthood, baptism and the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost and sacrament as a renewal of covenant.

It is important to distinguish between these ordinances as those that are not required for salvation and those that are. Particularly in this work it is important to realize that the ordination to the priesthood is required in order to receive salvation.

Quorums of the Priesthood

A quorum is a particular body of priesthood holders holding the same office who have been organized into groups. Each quorum has its own duties and assignments.

The Office of High Priest of the Melchizedek Priesthood

The office of high priest is an office within the Melchizedek Priesthood with the assignment to minister in spiritual things (D&C 107:18) and preach the gospel (D&C 84:111). The office of high priest is given to those chosen to preside or serve as bishops, patriarchs, on high councils, stake presidencies, or as General Authorities.

The Office of High Priest of the Aaronic Priesthood

Under the Law of Moses the presiding officer of the Aaronic Priesthood was called a high priest. These high priests were called to perform many of the outward ordinances involved in the Law of Moses.

The Office of Patriarch

The term “Patriarch” has a dual meaning. There are ordained patriarchs that hold an office in the Melchizedek Priesthood and also natural patriarchs, who are the head of a family group within the priesthood. An ordained patriarch must be a high priest. He may function in the offices of the Aaronic Priesthood and the offices of high priest, elder in the Melchizedek Priesthood.

The right and responsibility of one who holds the ordained office of patriarch in the Melchizedek Priesthood is to give patriarchal blessings to the members of the Church.

A natural patriarch is anyone who holds the priesthood and has entered into the patriarchal order of celestial marriage. The Church in the days of Adam to Moses functioned under the direction of patriarchs. Each patriarch had responsibility to lead his family by revelation.

Dispensation

A gospel dispensation is a period of time during which the Lord reveals the doctrines of the gospel to mankind. This is done in order that one generation does not rely on another in order to have knowledge unto salvation.

If the priesthood and its keys and offices have not come down by proper descent from a previous dispensation, these also must necessarily be conferred upon men again by the opening of the heavens.¹¹ This means that those who held the priesthood and keys previously, have to return to give these priesthood keys again to start a new dispensation.

¹¹ McConkie, Bruce R., *Mormon Doctrine*, 2d ed. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966, 200.

The day in which we live is referred to as the *Dispensation of the Fulness of Times*. This means that all the dispensations of the past flow into this final dispensation. The priesthood in its fulness has been restored and all knowledge that ever will be revealed will come forward in this dispensation.

CHAPTER 2
THE HISTORY OF THE OFFICE OF HIGH PRIEST FROM ADAM UNTIL
MOSES

The Melchizedek Priesthood has always been present on the earth though Christ's Church has not.¹² More specifically, whenever the Church has existed on earth it has done so under the direction of the Melchizedek Priesthood. In order for Christ's Church to be present and the saving ordinances of the gospel to be administered, men must hold the Melchizedek Priesthood.

The Lord has said concerning the relationship of the Melchizedek Priesthood and the Church, the "priesthood continueth in the church of God in all generations, and is without beginning of days or end of years" (D&C 84:17). When the Church has been organized the priesthood will always function within the Church. President J. Reuben Clark said in regard to the Church and priesthood, "Christ's Church was and is a Church of Melchizedek Priesthood."¹³

Elder Bruce R. McConkie has said, "If there is no Melchizedek Priesthood on earth, the true Church is not here and the gospel of Christ is not available to men. But where the Melchizedek Priesthood is, there is the kingdom, the Church, and the fulness of the gospel."¹⁴

Christ's Church and the Melchizedek Priesthood were present in Adam's day. The only office in the ancient church of which we have record is that of high priest.

¹² For further discussion of why and how the Priesthood continued on earth even during periods of apostasy see Harold B. Lee, *Stand Ye in Holy Places*, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1974, 161 - 162.

¹³ Clark, J. Reuben, *On the Way to Immortality and Eternal Life*, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1949, 43.

¹⁴ McConkie, Bruce R., *Mormon Doctrine*, 2d ed. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966, 479.

Further, the only priesthood held by man during the time period from Adam until Moses was the Melchizedek Priesthood, also known as the greater priesthood (D&C 107:4). The Aaronic Priesthood or lesser priesthood was introduced during Moses' day (D&C 107:13).

The Office of High Priest from Adam until Moses

Whenever the Church and priesthood have been established together on earth there has also been at least one priesthood office present as well.¹⁵ Adam was the first Church member, Melchizedek Priesthood holder, and high priest on earth.¹⁶ Joseph Smith taught, "How have we come at the Priesthood in the last days? It came down, down, in regular succession. Peter, James, and John had it given to them and they gave it to others. Christ is the Great High Priest; Adam next."¹⁷

Further evidence which shows Adam held the office of high priest can be seen through a scriptural account that identifies Adam as the presiding figure at a meeting with his posterity who were identified as high priests (D&C 107: 53-57). Here we learn the high priests Enos, Mahalaleel, Jared, Enoch, and Methuselah were all ordained to the office of high priest by Adam (D&C 107 42-48). Clearly Adam held the priesthood and was able to give the office of high priest to his descendants. Though having the office of high priest is not what empowered Adam to give the office to another, he certainly could not give his sons that which he did not possess.

¹⁵ When Joseph Smith received the priesthood from John the Baptist then Peter, James and John, he did not receive any priesthood office. This is because without a church organization there can be no offices. It was not until the Church was established in 1830 that he received the priesthood office of elder.

¹⁶ Phelps, William W. "The Church of Christ", *Evening and Morning Star*, vol. 1 March, 1833. No. 9. 73.

¹⁷ Smith, *History of The Church*, 3: 387-88.

Adam had the fulness of the gospel¹⁸, meaning priesthood, keys and ordinances. Adam received the priesthood from God in the creation¹⁹, and we may assume that it was God who ordained him to the office of high priest.²⁰

As far as can be definitely determined from scripture and the words of modern revelation, the office of high priest was the only office that administered the priesthood from Adam until Moses. There is no scriptural record in those early days naming any other office.

The Melchizedek Priesthood office of high priest has been present in every gospel dispensation. The same cannot be said of any other office of the priesthood.

The Patriarchal Order

The Patriarchal Order, as referenced earlier by President Joseph Fielding Smith, is the system or order by which the Melchizedek Priesthood was administered or used from the days of Adam to Moses.

The patriarchal order is a theocracy by which the will of God is made known to mankind through righteous high priests. “All of the ancient patriarchs were high priests, but the direction of the Church in those days was by patriarchs.”²¹ These patriarchs, who were high priests, had charge of their families in civil and religious matters and led them individually according to the revelation they received.

¹⁸ Moses 6:64-68 Explains that Adam was baptized by water and then by fire or the Holy Ghost and then was given the priesthood which is without “beginning of days or end of years.”

¹⁹ *History of the Church*, 3:385.

²⁰ As mentioned in the previous chapter, priesthood and its offices can only be given by one holding priesthood authority. There was no one present on earth who could give Adam the priesthood or any of its offices. God was the only one who had the ability to do this.

²¹ Smith, Joseph Fielding, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 3 vols., edited by Bruce R. McConkie. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954-1956, 3: 104.

These men were patriarchs in the sense that they had entered into the covenant of eternal marriage and by so doing became natural patriarchs to those who would become their descendants in that covenant.²²

Joseph Fielding Smith explained what it means for the priesthood to be administered in the patriarchal order;

The authority descended from father to son, and those who held it were high priests. This order of descent from Adam to Noah is given in the Doctrine and Covenants. Noah, who stands next to Adam in authority, brought this priesthood through the flood, and it continued from generation to generation....

The patriarchal authority has come down from Abraham through Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and Ephraim.... All through the centuries from the beginning to the days of Moses, the patriarchal priesthood prevailed. Those who held this authority were high priests.²³

²² John Taylor explained that the ordained office of patriarch is not the same as being a natural patriarch and the office was not needed while the priesthood was administered under the patriarchal order:

Does not the Patriarch stand in the same relationship to the church, as Adam did to his family, and as Abraham and Jacob did to theirs? No. Adam was the (natural) father of his posterity, who were his family and over whom he presided as patriarch, prophet, priest, and king. Both Abraham and Jacob stood in the same relationship to their families. But not so with Father Joseph Smith, Hyrum Smith, or William Smith.

They were not the natural fathers of the church, and could not stand in the same capacity as Adam, Abraham, or Jacob; but inasmuch as there had been none to bless for generations past, according to the ancient order, they were ordained and set apart for the purpose of conferring patriarchal blessings, to hold the keys of this priesthood, and unlock the door, that had long been closed upon the human family: that blessings might again be conferred according to the ancient order, and those who were orphans, or had no father to bless them, might receive it through a patriarch who should act as proxy for their father, and that fathers might again be enabled to act as patriarchs to their families, and bless their children. For like all other ordinances in the church, this had been neglected; and must needs be restored. (Taylor, John, *Times and Seasons*, vol. 6. January 15, 1845-February, No. 10. Nauvoo, Illinois, June 1, 1845 Whole No. 118. 921 - 922.)

²³ Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 3:160.

Other High Priests in Days of Adam

There were other high priests in the days of Adam and after Adam. Anyone who was a patriarch had to also be a high priest. The Melchizedek Priesthood “was confirmed to be handed down from father to son, and rightly belongs to the literal descendants of the chosen seed, to whom the promises were made” (D&C 107:40).

The office of high priest was conferred upon all those who were given the Melchizedek Priesthood. Joseph Smith identified the following individuals and then age they were when they received the Melchizedek Priesthood and their ordination to the office of high priest (names of those ordained are italicized):

From Adam to *Seth*, who was ordained by Adam at the age of sixty–nine years, and was blessed by him three years previous to his (Adam's) death, and received the promise of God by his father, that his posterity should be the chosen of the Lord, and that they should be preserved unto the end of the earth;

Enos was ordained at the age of one hundred and thirty–four years and four months, by the hand of Adam.

God called upon *Cainan* in the wilderness in the fortieth year of his age; and he met Adam in journeying to the place Shedolamak. He was eighty–seven years old when he received his ordination.

Mahalaleel was four hundred and ninety–six years and seven days old when he was ordained by the hand of Adam, who also blessed him.

Jared was two hundred years old when he was ordained under the hand of Adam, who also blessed him.

Enoch was twenty–five years old when he was ordained under the hand of Adam; and he was sixty–five and Adam blessed him.

Methuselah was one hundred years old when he was ordained under the hand of Adam.

Lamech was thirty–two years old when he was ordained under the hand of Seth.

Noah was ten years old when he was ordained under the hand of Methuselah (D&C 107:42-52).

All of these high priests were present near the end of Adam's very long life.

“Three years previous to the death of Adam, he called Seth, Enos, Cainan, Mahalaleel, Jared, Enoch, and Methuselah, who were all high priests, with the residue of his posterity who were righteous, into the valley of Adam-ondi-Ahman, and there bestowed upon them his last blessing” (D&C 107:53).

How the Office of High Priest Was Given

There is no set list of requirements put forth in scripture which shows what was necessary to be ordained a high priest in the days of Adam until Moses. However, righteous high priests who lived in this time period are used as examples in scripture to teach what kind of person was called to be a high priest and how the calling to this office was planned for even before these individuals came to earth.

Melchizedek

Melchizedek was a high priest whose character, priesthood and office were described in scripture. Melchizedek “was a man of faith, who wrought righteousness; and when a child he feared God, and stopped the mouths of lions, and quenched the violence of fire. And thus, having been approved of God, he was ordained an high priest after the order of the covenant which God made with Enoch” (JST Genesis 14:26-27).

Alma uses Melchizedek as an example of a pattern one follows to become a high priest. “Now this Melchizedek was a king over the land of Salem; and his people had waxed strong in iniquity and abomination; yea, they had all gone astray; they were full of

all manner of wickedness; But Melchizedek having exercised mighty faith, and received the office of the high priesthood according to the holy order of God..." (Alma 13:17-18).

The characteristics of righteousness and faith may not seem significant as all callings which come from God require these qualities; the only significance may be in the use of the adjective "mighty" in describing his faith. Perhaps a greater portion of faith was required, to be chosen as a high priest.

Abraham

From the scriptural passages available, it is difficult to determine for certain when Abraham received the Melchizedek Priesthood and office of high priest. The Doctrine and Covenants identifies Melchizedek as the man Abraham received the priesthood from (D&C 84:14). In the Book of Abraham we learn that Abraham desired for the "blessings of his fathers" and to become a high priest which ordination he received from the hands of Melchizedek (Abraham 1:2).

These two references discuss two separate ordinances, receiving the Melchizedek Priesthood and receiving the office of high priest. To determine if Abraham received the priesthood and office of high priest at separate times or if both were given to him at once is not clear. What is known however, is that he did receive both from Melchizedek on account of his lineage and righteousness.

Though the priesthood and office of high priest descended from father to son, we must not say the priesthood and office of high priest was given unconditionally because of ancestry or heredity. We must remember that righteousness and faith in the pre-mortal world and on earth are requisite to hold the office of high priest. Elder Bruce R. McConkie stated, "Those in Israel are called to receive certain blessings because they

earned the right in their first estate so to inherit in this life.... Implicit in all this is the fact that they are foreordained to be baptized, to join the Church, to receive the priesthood...”²⁴

When Abraham says he sought for the “blessings of his fathers” he is simply stating that he wanted the blessings Adam, Seth, Noah and the other believers in Christ had. He was a literal descendant of these men; however, it was righteousness that was also a requirement for him to receive the office of high priest.

All those who were ordained high priests from Adam until Moses first obtained the priesthood "not by man, nor the will of man; neither by father nor mother; neither by beginning of days nor end of years; but of God; And it was delivered unto men by the calling of his own voice, according to his own will, unto as many as believed on his name" (JST Gen. 14:28-29; see also Heb. 7:1-3).

To obtain the priesthood “not by man, nor the will of man; neither by father nor mother; neither by beginning of days nor end of years; but of God” is a phrase used in scriptures to describe the eternal nature of the Melchizedek Priesthood. However this scripture may be misunderstood to mean that lineage plays no role in who has the opportunity to receive the Melchizedek Priesthood along with the offices such as high priest. This type of language is simply intended to cement the divine, endless and eternal nature of the priesthood and its offices into the minds and hearts of the Saints.

It was by Abraham’s lineage, righteousness in mortality and pre-mortality, that he "became a rightful heir, a high priest, holding the right belonging to the fathers."

Abraham continues by saying that the priesthood, "was conferred upon me from the

²⁴ McConkie, Bruce R., *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1985, 513.

fathers; it came down from the fathers, from the beginning of time, yea, even from the beginning, or before the foundations of the earth down to the present time, even the right of the firstborn, or the first man, who is Adam, or first father, through the fathers, unto me. I sought for mine appointment unto the priesthood according to the appointment of God unto the fathers concerning the seed.”(Abr. 1:1-4).

High Priests Foreordained

A discussion of the foreordination of high priests seems appropriate at this point based on the fact that the clearest teaching on the matter uses examples of individuals who lived during the time period of Adam until Moses. This is not to say that high priests who lived from Adam to Moses were the only ones foreordained to this office. Rather, all who are called high priests have been foreordained in the pre-mortal world to this office.

The Prophet Joseph Smith said, “Every man who has a calling to minister to the inhabitants of the world was ordained to that very purpose in the Grand Council of heaven before the world was.”²⁵

Wilford Woodruff also made a statement similar to that of the Prophet’s concerning the priesthood in the pre-mortal world:

Joseph Smith was ordained before he came here, the same as Jeremiah was. Said the Lord unto him, 'Before you were begotten I knew you,' etc. So do I believe with regard to this people, so do I believe with regard to the apostles, the high priests, seventies and the elders of Israel bearing the holy priesthood, I believe they were ordained before they came here; and I believe the God of Israel has raised them up, and has watched over them from their youth, and has carried them through all the scenes of life both seen and unseen, and has prepared them as instruments in his hands to take this kingdom and bear it off. If this be so, what manner of men ought we to be? If anything under the heavens should humble men before the Lord

²⁵ Smith, *History of The Church*, 6: 364-365.

and before one another, it should be the fact that we have been called of God.²⁶

Likewise, President Joseph Fielding Smith taught, “In regard to the holding of the priesthood in pre-existence, I will say that there was an organization there just as well as an organization here, and men there held authority. Men chosen to positions of trust in the spirit world held priesthood.”²⁷

In his statement, President Woodruff paints with a broad stroke when he says that all Melchizedek Priesthood holders were foreordained pre-mortally to offices they were ordained to on earth.

The Prophet Alma identifies only one office as being foreordained to priesthood. This may be because the Church functioned with only one office in his day. He said, “Thus they [those foreordained] become high priests forever, after the order of the Son, the Only Begotten of the Father, who is without beginning of days or end of years, who is full of grace, equity, and truth. And thus it is. Amen” (Alma 13:9).

Elder Bruce R. McConkie said, “Each righteous spirit called to minister in priestly offices has been ordained to come through a particular lineage. Consequently it has become the right of those holding special inheritance in the Lord's chosen lineage to receive the priesthood, provided they are obedient and faithful.”²⁸

²⁶ *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1854-1886, 21: 317.

²⁷ Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 3: 81.

²⁸ McConkie Bruce R., *Mormon Doctrine*, 2d ed. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966, 478.

The hereditary right to the priesthood and the blessing associated with it does not mean the individual has an unconditional claim to that priesthood and office of high priest. It does mean however, if those who come through a lineage chosen to bear the priesthood are faithful, they will have the opportunity to be ordained.

Alma described why individuals were foreordained to the office of high priest. He first asked the people of Ammonihah to, “cite your minds forward to the time when the Lord God gave these commandments unto his children; and I would that ye should remember that the Lord God ordained priests, after his holy order, which was after the order of his Son, to teach these things unto the people” (Alma 13:1). To “cite your mind forward” actually means to “think back”, in this case, to the prophets and high priests of the days of Adam, Enoch and Noah. He continued, “And those priests were ordained after the order of his Son, in a manner that thereby the people might know in what manner to look forward to his Son for redemption” (Alma 13:2). These high priests were given the commandment and calling to be representatives and symbols of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Next, Alma drew attention to the fact that those who are ordained to the office of high priest obtained it on the basis of their righteousness. It is important to note however that this blessing is extended partially based on the righteousness of the individual before they entered into mortality. Alma taught, “And this is the manner after which they were ordained—being called and prepared from the foundation of the world according to the foreknowledge of God, on account of their exceeding faith and good works;”(Alma 13:3).

These high priests exercised faith while in the presence of God. They chose to follow God and be valiant in the truth of the Gospel. Their ordination to the priesthood

did not fall upon them because of random lot, but because of their righteousness in “the first place” or in other words, the pre-mortal life.

We know by revelation that Jesus Christ is the creator of the world and used the priesthood to do it. He has said concerning his role in the creation, “HEARKEN, O ye people of my church, to whom the kingdom has been given; hearken ye and give ear to him who laid the foundation of the earth, who made the heavens and all the hosts thereof, and by whom all things were made which live, and move, and have a being” (D&C 45:1).

Elder Bruce R. McConkie said, “God swore an oath that Christ should be a priest forever; that is, though our Lord had possessed the priesthood in pre-existence, he would receive it anew in mortality and would have it forever-in time and in eternity. And this sets the pattern for all who become sons of God and joint-heirs with Christ.”²⁹

The Eternal Nature of the Priesthood Held by the High Priests

The prophet Alma pointed out the existence of the ordination of high priests in the pre-mortal world then demonstrated how this ordination might never leave the individual.

He taught:

This high priesthood being after the order of his Son, which order was from the foundation of the world; or in other words, being without beginning of days or end of years, being prepared from eternity to all eternity, according to his foreknowledge of all things—

Now they were ordained after this manner—being called with a holy calling, and ordained with a holy ordinance, and taking upon them the high priesthood of the holy order, which calling, and ordinance, and high priesthood, is without beginning or end—

²⁹ McConkie, Bruce R., *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, Bookcraft, Salt Lake City, 1973, 3: 173.

Thus they become high priests forever, after the order of the Son, the Only Begotten of the Father, who is without beginning of days or end of years, who is full of grace, equity, and truth. And thus it is. Amen.

Alma 13:7-9

These faithful high priests were given the promise that if they proved true to the calling and ordination given to them, their priesthood would remain with them forever. Elder Bruce R. McConkie stated, “Those who are faithful in their priesthood callings in this life shall continue on in their holy authorizations in eternity; they shall remain forever ‘priests and kings’; their destiny is to stand as ‘priests of the Most High, after the order of Melchizedek, which was after the order of Enoch, which was after the order of the Only Begotten Son’ (D&C 76:56-57).”³⁰

Along similar lines Elder Russell M. Nelson taught that in addition to priesthood in general, offices of the priesthood are also eternal. “Scriptures certify that the priesthood has continued and will continue ‘through the lineage of [the] fathers.’ Ordination to its offices has timeless implication as well. Tenure in priesthood office may extend into post-mortal realms. For example, scriptures declare that one ordained as a high priest may be a high priest forever.”³¹

Clearly, unshaken, sure faith was and is required to obtain the office of high priest. Those righteous high priests who were patriarchs to their families relied on the Lord to give them revelation so that they might guide their posterity in righteousness.

³⁰ McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 478.

³¹ Nelson, Russell M., *Perfection Pending, and Other Favorite Discourses*, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1998, 229.

Alma explained that there were some who missed the opportunity to become high priests because of their lack of faith and desire to follow God. “And thus they have been called to this holy calling on account of their faith, while others would reject the Spirit of God on account of the hardness of their hearts and blindness of their minds, while, if it had not been for this they might have had as great privilege as their brethren” (Alma 13:4).

CHAPTER 3

THE OFFICE OF HIGH PRIEST FROM MOSES TO JESUS CHRIST IN PALASTINE

When the Children of Israel proved unworthy to receive the highest ordinances of the gospel, Jehovah took from their presence, generally, the Melchizedek Priesthood, along with the office of high priest held previously by the patriarchs, and introduced the lesser or Aaronic Priesthood.

And the Lord said unto Moses, Hew thee two other tables of stone, like unto the first, and I will write upon them also, the words of the law, according as they were written at the first on the tables which thou brakest; but it shall not be according to the first, *for I will take away the priesthood out of their midst; therefore my holy order, and the ordinances thereof, shall not go before them;* for my presence shall not go up in their midst, lest I destroy them.

But I will give unto them the law as at the first, but it shall be after the law of a carnal commandment; for I have sworn in my wrath, that they shall not enter into my presence, into my rest, in the days of their pilgrimage. Therefore do as I have commanded thee, and be ready in the morning, and come up in the morning unto mount Sinai. (JST Exodus 34:1-2; emphasis added).

The Doctrine and Covenants explains that Moses, "...sought diligently to sanctify his people that they might behold the face of God;

But they hardened their hearts and could not endure his presence; therefore, the Lord in his wrath, for his anger was kindled against them, swore that they should not enter into his rest while in the wilderness, which rest is the fulness of his glory.

Therefore, he took Moses out of their midst, and the Holy Priesthood also;" (D&C 84:23 - 25).

From the departure of Moses until the time of Christ the blessings and privileges of the Melchizedek Priesthood and the office of high priest were still available but only to a select few among those living in Palastine.³² President Joseph Fielding Smith explained, “After the time of Moses, when the Melchizedek Priesthood was withdrawn from Israel, this order as it is called, of patriarchal priesthood, did not continue, there came then, the Aaronic Priesthood, with the prophets holding the Melchizedek Priesthood as high priests. The bestowal of this higher authority, however, had to come by special designation; it was not generally given to the male members of the tribes.”³³

The Aaronic Priesthood was a lesser priesthood than what was held previously by the high priests. As a result this meant the ordinances of the gospel which require the Melchizedek Priesthood were not available to the general population of the Children of Israel.

Aaron presided over this lesser priesthood as the presiding high priest of the Aaronic Priesthood. Aaron was a descendant of Levi (Exodus 4:14). The charge of the lesser priesthood was given to those chosen among these descendants.

In addition to being a high priest of the Aaronic Priesthood, Aaron had been previously ordained to the Melchizedek Priesthood office of high priest.³⁴ He was not

³² The Melchizedek Priesthood and the office of high priest were not generally had among the Children of Israel who lived in Palastine. However, for those living in the Americas, the Melchizedek Priesthood and office of high priest was the only priesthood and office available until the visitation of Jesus Christ among them.

³³ Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 3: 160.

³⁴ Aaron was invited into the presence of God with Moses his brother, and seventy others (Exodus 24:1, 9-10). In order for a man to be brought into the presence of God, he must possess the Melchizedek Priesthood (D&C 84:18-19). The Melchizedek Priesthood office of high priest is the only office identified within this priesthood during this time period.

demoted in any way nor had the Melchizedek Priesthood taken away from him in receiving the office of high priest within the Aaronic order.

Who Were the High Priests

There were some in Moses' day who were chosen to be ordained high priests of the Melchizedek Priesthood. No man, however, could pass the Melchizedek Priesthood and the office of high priest to any other. If a man was to obtain this priesthood he had to receive it from God himself by what is called a special dispensation.

The meaning of a special dispensation during the time period of Moses to Christ is understood as revelations, priesthood and keys that are given to man in a manner other than the order of father to son as followed by the patriarchs. Joseph Smith taught that after Moses died, all who held the Melchizedek priesthood were ordained unto that priesthood by God.³⁵

The Doctrine and Covenants also states that the Melchizedek Priesthood "continueth in the church of God in all generations and is without beginning of days or end of years" (D&C 84:17).

The Prophet Joseph Smith explained that though the Melchizedek Priesthood was taken away from the general congregation of Israel, it did not completely vanish. "All Priesthood is Melchizedek, but there are different portions or degrees of it. That portion which brought Moses to speak with God face to face was taken away; but that which brought the ministry of angels remained."³⁶

³⁵ Smith, *Teachings*, 181.

³⁶ Ibid 180-81

President Joseph Fielding Smith identified a few of those who were chosen to hold the Melchizedek Priesthood in the days following Moses when he said, “We should understand, however, that while Israel was restricted in the power of the priesthood from the days of Moses to the days of the ministry of our Savior, yet the prophets in Israel, such as Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel, were blessed with the Melchizedek Priesthood, but this priesthood was not given to others.”³⁷

By closely examining the actions of the prophets who lived after the days of Moses we can see that indeed they had the Melchizedek Priesthood and as cited by President Joseph Fielding Smith earlier, functioned as high priests in that priesthood.

Samuel

The prophet Samuel was a descendant of Levi but not of Aaron. Samuel was also a descendant of Kohath, (1 Chronicles 6:33-38, 1 Samuel 1:1), to whom the right of the office of priest was not generally given.³⁸ “Samuel, though not a descendant of Aaron, was closely related to him, and held the office of high priest by divine appointment, the first known instance of its deviation from the direct family line of the original.”³⁹

He could not have been a priest of the Aaronic order because his lineage would not permit it. Even though he was not a priest of Aaron he still was able to perform animal sacrifice.

And Samuel took a sucking lamb, and offered *it for* a burnt offering wholly unto the LORD: and Samuel cried unto the LORD for Israel; and the LORD heard him. And as Samuel was offering up the burnt offering,

³⁷ Smith, *Answers to Gospel Questions*, 1: 117.

³⁸ Tvedtnes, John A., *Church of the Old Testament*, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1980, 46.

³⁹ Orson F. Whitney, *Contributor*, vol. 6 (October 1884-September 1885), Vol. Vi. March, 1885. No. 6. 201.

the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel: but the LORD thundered with a great thunder on that day upon the Philistines, and discomfited them; and they were smitten before Israel”(1 Samuel 7:9-10).

In order to perform this sacrifice and have the Lord “hear” or acknowledge it as acceptable he had to have priesthood. The only priesthood he could then have is the Melchizedek Priesthood; therefore, it is likely that he was a high priest of the Melchizedek order.

Elijah

Elijah held the Melchizedek Priesthood and the office of high priest. We may determine this by noting in scripture that he had the keys of the sealing power in ancient Israel. From the account of a Sabbath day meeting at the Kirtland Temple, The Prophet Joseph Smith records:

After this vision had closed, another great and glorious vision burst upon us; for Elijah the prophet, who was taken to heaven without tasting death, stood before us, and said:

Behold, the time has fully come, which was spoken of by the mouth of Malachi—testifying that he [Elijah] should be sent, before the great and dreadful day of the Lord come—

To turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the children to the fathers, lest the whole earth be smitten with a curse—

Therefore, the keys of this dispensation are committed into your hands; and by this ye may know that the great and dreadful day of the Lord is near, even at the doors. (D&C 110:13-16).

In order for Elijah to give these keys of the Melchizedek Priesthood he had to first have them himself. The Joseph Smith also taught:

Elijah was the last Prophet that held the keys of the Priesthood, and who will, before the last dispensation, restore the authority and deliver the keys of the Priesthood, in order that all the ordinances may be attended to in

righteousness. It is true that the Savior had authority and power to bestow this blessing; but the sons of Levi were too prejudiced. "And I will send Elijah the Prophet before the great and terrible day of the Lord," etc., etc. Why send Elijah? Because he holds the keys of the authority to administer in all the ordinances of the Priesthood; and without the authority is given, the ordinances could not be administered in righteousness.⁴⁰

Evidence of Elijah's use of the Melchizedek Priesthood can be seen throughout this great high priest's life. He called down fire from heaven (2 Kings 1:12), sealed the heavens from pouring down rain for three and a half years (2 Kings 17:1-7), multiplied the widow's meal and oil (2 Kings 2:10-15), and raised a boy from the dead (2 Kings 17:23).

Others who Held the Melchizedek Priesthood

There were other men throughout the Old Testament that we may assume held the office of high priest by virtue of the fact that they had the Melchizedek Priesthood. These men are identified as Melchizedek Priesthood holders because of their performances of offering sacrifices acceptable to God even though they were not of priestly descent. These were Gideon (Judges 6:24-28) of the tribe of Manasseh (Judges 6:15) and Solomon of the tribe of Judah, who dedicated the temple of Jerusalem (1 Kings 8; 1 Chronicles 6, 7).

King David, also held the Melchizedek Priesthood, as shown by the fact that modern revelation has made it clear that David was sealed to his wives, whom he subsequently lost through sin. (D&C 132:39.) He, along with Abraham, Issac, Jacob and Moses could not have been so sealed, nor promised "exaltation," if he did not have the higher Melchizedek Priesthood (D&C 132:37-39).

⁴⁰ Smith, *History of The Church*, 4:211.

Solomon dedicated the temple, which is an act reserved for one holding the priesthood (1 Kings 8). After this dedication the Lord appeared to Solomon to accept the dedication of the temple and bless Solomon.

On the other hand one of the descendants of David and Solomon, Uzziah, assumed that he, as king, had the priesthood rights automatically. He tried to perform ordinances in the temple requiring the priesthood and the Lord severely punished him because he lacked the necessary authority possessed by his father and his grandfather (2 Chronicles 26:16-21). The reality that Solomon was blessed and Uzziah was punished for doing the same act shows that one was done with proper authority and the other was not.

The Office of High Priest in the Time of Christ

There is very little recorded in scripture or anyplace else for that matter, concerning the office of high priest in the days of Christ's ministry upon the earth.

The only known office of priesthood held by the Savior was the office of high priest. This knowledge comes to us from the writings of the apostle Paul to the Hebrews. For example, the first reference in Hebrews pertaining to Christ as a high priest says, "Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people" (Hebrew 2:17).

Paul's use of the term high priest can be associated with the office of high priest in the Aaronic Priesthood who offered sacrifice for the sins of the Children of Israel. However, Paul also identified the Savior as a high priest after the order of Melchizedek in two places in the book of Hebrews (Heb. 5:10, 6:20).

There has been little said concerning Christ and the priesthood he held, however,

Elder Bruce R. McConkie taught:

Christ our Lord received the Melchizedek Priesthood here on earth, and was ordained to the office of a high priest therein, thus setting an example for others and being in all things the Prototype of salvation. With reference to the mortal receipt of that holy order which is his, and which he had afore used to create this and an infinite number of other worlds, and which he had in fact given to Melchizedek in the first instance, the Prophet says: 'If a man gets a fulness of the priesthood of God he has to get it in the same way that Jesus Christ obtained it, and that was by keeping all the commandments and obeying all the ordinances of the house of the Lord.'⁴¹

The Melchizedek Priesthood office of high priest is not clearly visible in the Old Testament record from the time of Moses to Jesus Christ. In like manner, the New Testament is relatively silent concerning the office. There is evidence present however in the text and when mined out, it shows the office did exist. Fortunately, the Old and New Testaments are not the only scriptures we have concerning the office of high priest during this time period.

⁴¹ McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 3: 157.

CHAPTER 4

THE PRIESTHOOD AND THE HIGH PRIESTS IN ANCIENT AMERICA

There is some, but very little, effort made by the writers of the Book of Mormon to explain the nature of priesthood and Church government. There is no step-by-step guide as to how priesthood offices, quorums, or even the organization of the Church itself should be established. This is not the purpose of the book.

Elder Jeffery R. Holland taught that the Book of Mormon “focuses on the first principles of the gospel exclusively, including an expression of encouragement to endure, to persist, to press on. Indeed, it is in the clarity and simplicity of “the doctrine of Christ” that its impact is found. Nephi knew it would be so. He wrote, “I shall speak unto you plainly, according to the plainness of my prophesying.”⁴²

Although little is said directly in the Book of Mormon of the structure of priesthood and its offices, we clearly see that indeed there was priesthood and there were offices. President Joseph Fielding Smith explained:

The Nephites did not officiate under the authority of the Aaronic Priesthood. They were not descendants of Aaron, and there were no Levites among them. There is no evidence in the Book of Mormon that they held the Aaronic Priesthood until after the ministry of the resurrected Lord among them, but the Book of Mormon tells us definitely, in many places, that the priesthood which they held and under which they officiated was the priesthood after the holy order, the order of the Son of God. This higher priesthood can officiate in every ordinance of the gospel, and Jacob and Joseph, for instance, were consecrated priests and teachers after this order.⁴³

⁴² Holland, Jeffery R., *Christ and the New Covenant: The Messianic Message of the Book of Mormon*, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1997, 49 - 50.

⁴³ Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 3: 86.

The Jews, in Palestine, administered the Law of Moses with the lesser or Aaronic Priesthood. The Nephites administered the same Law of Moses, the sacrifices, and other ordinances by the authority of the Melchizedek Priesthood. If a man holds the Melchizedek Priesthood he is able to officiate in all the offices and responsibilities of the Aaronic Priesthood (D&C 107:8).

Undoubtedly, the prophets and many righteous Saints spoken of in the Book of Mormon received the Melchizedek Priesthood. Until the coming of Christ, the only recorded office of the priesthood held among the Nephites was the office of high priest. Before this time it does not appear that any other offices of the Melchizedek Priesthood were needed.

For example, today, the duties of the office of seventy, an office within the Melchizedek Priesthood, are mainly concerned with the spreading of the Gospel to the entire world. It does not appear that this commission was ever given to the Nephites making this office unnecessary in their day. For certain, the offices of the Aaronic Priesthood were not present among the Nephites until after the coming of Christ among them in 34 A.D.

Alma, a prophet in the Book of Mormon gives us insight into the nature of the priesthood that they held before the coming of Christ. From examining these statements we will determine that he and others held the Melchizedek Priesthood and it will also be shown that many held the office of high priest in that priesthood.

Priesthood in the Book of Mormon

There are eight direct references to the word priesthood in the Book of Mormon, all by the prophet Alma. Of particular note, every time the word “priesthood” is used, it is part of the phrase “high priesthood” (emphasis has been added).

Alma delivered up the judgment-seat to Nephihah, and confined himself wholly to the *high priesthood of the holy order of God*, to the testimony of the word, according to the spirit of revelation and prophecy.

Alma 4:20

And thus being called by this holy calling, and ordained unto *the high priesthood of the holy order of God*, to teach his commandments unto the children of men, that they also might enter into his rest—

Alma 13:6

This *high priesthood being after the order of his Son*, which order was from the foundation of the world; or in other words, being without beginning of days or end of years, being prepared from eternity to all eternity, according to his foreknowledge of all things—

Alma 13:7

Now they were ordained after this manner—being called with a holy calling, and ordained with a holy ordinance, and taking upon them the *high priesthood of the holy order*, which calling, and ordinance, and high priesthood, is without beginning or end—

Alma 13:8

Now, as I said concerning *the holy order, or this high priesthood*, there were many who were ordained and became high priests of God; and it was on account of their exceeding faith and repentance, and their righteousness before God, they choosing to repent and work righteousness rather than to perish;

Alma 13:10

Yea, humble yourselves even as the people in the days of Melchizedek, who was also *a high priest after this same order* which I have spoken, who also took upon him the *high priesthood* forever.

Alma 13:14

But Melchizedek having exercised mighty faith, and received the *office of the high priesthood according to the holy order of God*, did preach repentance unto his people. And behold, they did repent; and

Melchizedek did establish peace in the land in his days; therefore he was called the prince of peace, for he was the king of Salem; and he did reign under his father.

Alma 13:18

The last reference in Alma shows clearly that the term *high priesthood* is used to refer to an office in the priesthood and not the priesthood in general. Translating the Book of Alma may have been where Joseph Smith learned for the first time about the office of high priesthood.

We can easily see in the revelations of the Doctrine and Covenants and other early Church literature that the Prophet Joseph Smith, like Alma, used the term *high priesthood* to describe a priesthood office, the office of high priest.⁴⁴ This will be shown in more detail in a subsequent chapter.

The ordinances practiced by the people of the Book of Mormon, evidence that Melchizedek Priesthood was available among them. By the authority of the Melchizedek Priesthood, the Nephites performed baptisms. Records of these ordinances are cited as occurring among the people from the days of Nephi the son of Lehi and Sariah. (2 Nephi 31:13, Mosiah 18:13-16; Alma 5:3; 15:13; 48:19).

Baptism is by itself, however, an incomplete ordinance that only requires the Aaronic Priesthood. The complete blessing of baptism comes with the reception of the gift of the Holy Ghost. Numerous passages in the Book of Mormon show that those who had been baptized also received the gift of the Holy Ghost. For example: "The gate by which ye should enter is repentance and baptism by water; and then cometh a remission of your sins by fire and by the Holy Ghost"(2 Ne. 31:17). "He that is baptized him will the Father give the Holy Ghost baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost" (2 Ne. 31:12, 14).

⁴⁴ McConkie, Joseph F. and Ostler, Craig J., Revelations of the Restoration. Deseret Book Company, Salt Lake City, 2000, 597-602.

Alma says that he had labored "without ceasing" to bring souls unto repentance "that they might also be born of God, and be filled with the Holy Ghost." (Alma 36:24)

The Melchizedek Priesthood is the only priesthood that can confer upon an individual the gift of the Holy Ghost (D&C 107:18-19).

It is difficult to determine who and how many held the Melchizedek Priesthood before Christ came in 34 A.D. It appears that not every man held this priesthood, yet it must have been rather widely distributed. Mosiah records there was "one priest to every fifty of their number"(Mosiah 18:18). Every Church unit was presided over by the Melchizedek Priesthood (Mosiah 25:21).

In any case, it is clear that many people were able to receive the blessings of the Melchizedek Priesthood under the hands of faithful high priests.

The Office of High Priest

The office of high priest in the Melchizedek Priesthood is the only priesthood office mentioned in the Book of Mormon until the coming of Christ. Though it appears the Aaronic Priesthood offices of priest and teacher are mentioned before Christ visit (2 Nephi 5:26, Jacob 1:17-18: Alma 45:22), any reference to "teachers" in the Book of Mormon should not be confused with the office of teacher as known to us in the Aaronic Priesthood today. The Aaronic Priesthood was not present among the Nephites until it was brought during Christ's visit among them

Because there were no descendants of Aaron among the Nephites or Lamanites, high priests in the Book of Mormon held the Melchizedek Priesthood and performed the sacrificial responsibilities that were reserved for the priests of the Aaronic Priesthood who lived in Israel. In addition to these responsibilities, high priests held presiding

positions among the people and were also considered teachers. This description was made of Alma who served as a high priest;

And now, Alma was their high priest, he being the founder of their church. And it came to pass that none received authority to preach or to teach except it were by him from God. Therefore he consecrated all their priests and all their teachers; and none were consecrated except they were just men. Therefore they did watch over their people, and did nourish them with things pertaining to righteousness (Mosiah 23:16-18).

Priests

The terms “priest” or “priests” appears over 70 times in the Book of Mormon. The term *priest* is used differently in the Book of Mormon depending on the time period in which it is used. If the term *priest* appears after Jesus Christ’s visit among the Nephites it refers to the Aaronic Priesthood office of priest. Before the Savior’s arrival however, the term is used to describe someone who holds the Melchizedek Priesthood.

Elder Bruce R. McConkie explained what is meant by the term *priest* as found in the Book of Mormon. He said,

In general terms a *priest* is a minister. One so designated (if he is a true priest) must in fact hold the priesthood; yet the designation *priest*, when so used, has no reference to any particular office in the priesthood. Thus among the Nephites it was the practice to consecrate priests and teachers, give them administrative responsibility, and send them out to preach, teach, and baptize. (Mosiah 23:17; 25:19; 26:7; Alma 4:7; 15:13; 23:4.) These priests and teachers held the Melchizedek Priesthood.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* 598.

High Priests of the Book of Mormon

It is difficult to identify all who held the office of high priest in the Book of Mormon. The office is identified many times; however most of those who held the office remain unnamed in the Book of Mormon.

The title “high priest” is used in many different contexts. For example, the term “high priest” was used to describe the leader of the Church among the Nephites. This term is not used however until the book of Mosiah, over 400 years after the arrival of Lehi and his family.

The title “high priest” is also used to describe those who led the Church in smaller areas where there seemed to be a system of hierarchy. This is seen in situations where one high priest will report to another high priest who has a higher presiding responsibility.

A few men have been identified specifically in the Book of Mormon as high priests. There is a distinction made between priest and high priest in the Book of Mormon. Most references in the Book of Mormon to a high priest describe an individual who presides over a certain people. The following individuals are described as being high priests over the entire church. They are:

Alma, a former priest of Noah, was a high priest over the people in the land of Helam that had escaped from King Noah’s tyranny. He later was appointed the high priest over all of the Church in Zarahemla by King Mosiah (Mosiah 23:16, 26:7).

Alma (son of Alma) was ordained by his father to be the high priest over the Church of God (Alma 5:3).

Helaman, son of Alma (the younger), probably was ordained as the high priest over the entire Church by his father. He built up the Church and ordained others (Alma 45:22-23). He maintained order in the Church with aid of other unnamed high priests (Alma 46:38).

Although these are the only individuals who were named specifically as high priests who presided over the entire church, we may determine that there were others who were high priest who presided over smaller geographic regions of the Church. For instance, Ammon, one of the sons of Mosiah, was a high priest over the members of the church in the land of Jershon, whom he had worked among as a missionary (Alma 30:20).

Further evidence shows that there were other high priests than those who presided over the entire Church. Giddonah was a high priest and chief judge in the land of Gideon who questioned Korihor concerning his teachings against Christ. When Korihor responded with lies and contempt Giddonah refused to acknowledge them and sent him to Alma, the presiding high priest over the entire Church in the land and to the chief judge, who was the chief judge over all the land (Alma 30:21-29).

Lehi was a Melchizedek Priesthood holder and had received this priesthood while still living in Jerusalem. B.H. Roberts explained:

In order to offer sacrifices and administer in the other ordinances of the law of Moses (which the Nephites were commanded to observe), it was necessary, of course, that they have a priesthood, and this they had; but not the priesthood after the order of Aaron; for that was a priesthood that could only properly be held by Aaron's family and the tribe of Levi; while Lehi was of the tribe of Manasseh. Lehi held the priesthood, however, the higher priesthood, which was after the order of Melchizedek, and was a prophet and minister of righteousness.⁴⁶

Although no record exists, presumably, Lehi, gave this same priesthood to his son Nephi, who in turn gave the priesthood to others including his brother Jacob who he consecrated a priest meaning a high priest.⁴⁷

Another reference, most likely citing the office of high priest among the Nephites occurs in Mormon's explanation of the conditions during the days of King Benjamin: "For behold, King Benjamin was a holy man, and he did reign over his people in righteousness; and there were many holy men in the land, and they did speak the word of God with power and with authority" (Words of Mormon 1:17).

There are a few clues that indicate that King Benjamin was a high priest. First, he was called a "holy man" who taught with "power and authority". These phrases do not clearly identify him as a high priest; however he did consecrate his son to be king over all the land and appointed priests over all the land.

⁴⁶ Roberts, B.H., *New Witnesses for God*, 3 vols. Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1909, 2: 253.

⁴⁷ 2 Nephi 6:2, Jacob 1:8.

Consecrating someone to be a king over others does not necessarily evidence that he held the Melchizedek Priesthood, but his action of appointing priests over the people does.

King Mosiah, the son of King Benjamin, gave Alma the elder “power to ordain priests and teachers over every church” (Mosiah 25:19). It is apparent that King Benjamin and King Mosiah acted in either dual roles of king and high priest, or that the king acted as the presiding high priest over his people.

Earlier in the Book of Mormon, Nephi, son of Lehi, was chosen by the request of the people to be a king over them (2 Nephi 6:2). This set a pattern among the Nephites to have priesthood holders consecrated and set apart as kings among them.

In general, the position of a king, among the Nephites, does not appear separate from those who hold the Melchizedek Priesthood office of high priest in the Book of Mormon. The priesthood authority has power over all things (Genesis 14:30-31). The kingly authority is limited to a particular kingdom placed under its rule. Elder Orson Pratt taught, “Where the two are combined and the individual perfected, he has almighty power both as a King and as a Priest; both offices are then merged in one. The distinctions then, will be merely in the name and not in the authority; either as a King or a Priest he will then have power and dominion over all things, and reign over all.”⁴⁸

King Mosiah, son of King Benjamin, strongly counseled the Nephites to not be led by kings because of the iniquity that one wicked king can inflict upon a nation (Mosiah 29:17). This principle was clear in the minds of the people for many could remember the actions of King Noah who was a high priest and a king over the land of

⁴⁸ Pratt, Orson, *The Seer*, I (October, 1853), p. 145.

Lehi-Nephi.⁴⁹ King Noah was able to encourage and facilitate wickedness on account of his position in the priesthood as a high priest and governmental position as King.

However, King Mosiah was not against kings in all cases, he taught, “Therefore, if it were possible that you could have just men to be your kings, who would establish the laws of God, and judge this people according to his commandments, yea, if ye could have men for your kings who would do even as my father Benjamin did for this people—I say unto you, if this could always be the case then it would be expedient that ye should always have kings to rule over you (Mosiah 29:13).

The Prophet Joseph Smith taught, the Melchizedek “Priesthood is a perfect law of theocracy.”⁵⁰ This means that God desires us to be presided over ecclesiastically and governmentally by righteous priesthood holders, Jesus Christ being foremost among all rulers as King of all the earth (Alma 5:50).

The last time the title of high priest is recorded in the Book of Mormon is near the time of the Savior’s arrival among the Nephites. A few men at this time were identified as high priests were not living in a manner appropriate to one called to this office. The description is as follows:

And there began to be men inspired from heaven and sent forth, standing among the people in all the land, preaching and testifying boldly of the sins and iniquities of the people, and testifying unto them concerning the redemption which the Lord would make for his people, or in other words, the resurrection of Christ; and they did testify boldly of his death and sufferings.

⁴⁹ We may suppose King Noah was a high priest because he consecrated others to be high priests (Mosiah 11:5). He could not give something that he did not have. It may be argued that King Noah did not have the priesthood at all and merely usurped authority, however; we know for sure that Alma, the elder, one of the priests of Noah, held the priesthood. The Book of Mormon is silent on any other way Alma may have received the priesthood other than at the hands of King Noah.

⁵⁰ Smith, *History of the Church*, 5:555.

Now there were many of the people who were exceedingly angry because of those who testified of these things; and those who were angry were chiefly the chief judges, and they who had been high priests and lawyers; yea, all those who were lawyers were angry with those who testified of these things.

Now there was no lawyer nor judge nor high priest that could have power to condemn any one to death save their condemnation was signed by the governor of the land (3 Nephi 6:20-22).

Some who held the office of high priest had this office removed from them shortly before the coming of the Savior. These high priest had either been excommunicated from the church or their right to the priesthood restricted because of iniquity (3 Nephi 6:21).

Other Melchizedek Priesthood Offices among the Nephites

The first mention of other offices of the Melchizedek Priesthood is in the Book of Moroni that was written after Christ appeared to the Nephites. The prophet Moroni instructs the elders (Melchizedek Priesthood) and priests (Aaronic Priesthood) how to administer the sacrament to the Church (Moroni 4:1). Also, the selection of the twelve men to whom Christ gave power to bestow the gift of the Holy Ghost appears to have been ordained apostles (Moroni 2).

The Book of Mormon and the History of the Office of High Priest

The office of high priest is more visible in the Book of Mormon than either the Old or New Testaments. It is difficult to distinguish in the Bible references to the office of high priest of the Melchizedek Priesthood and reference the office of high priest in the Aaronic Priesthood.

The office of high priest in the Aaronic Priesthood is absent among the people of the Book of Mormon and so there is less confusion in the matter. Though it is not the

writers intent, the Book of Mormon shows a brief structure and outlines what a high priest was called to do and be like.

Clearly, the people of the Book of Mormon recognized the office and title of high priest as a position of presiding. Many people put trust in the men that held this office. This trust led some to experience the saving ordinances of the gospel as with many of those who trusted righteous high priests such as Alma the younger (Alma 6:1-2).

Alma's father however, had experience in leading people as an unrighteous high priest. He had to repent of sins he had committed while serving as high priest (Mosiah 18:1). The influence of a high priest was great in the lives of many within the pages of the Book of Mormon.

These facts and examples from the Book of Mormon are significant because with this understanding of the office in ancient days, will come modern day application, dedication and appreciation for the duties, responsibilities and the importance of the office of high priest as will be shown in the chapters that follow.

CHAPTER 5

THE RESTORATION OF THE OFFICE OF HIGH PRIEST IN THE LAST DISPENSATION

Just more than one year after the Church was restored; the office of high priest was introduced. Beginning with Adam, whenever the Church has been in existence in its fullness, the office of high priest has been present. All those who held the Melchizedek Priesthood from Adam to Moses were ordained to this office. When the Children of Israel rejected the opportunity to have the same blessings as their fathers, the blessings of this office were given only to a select few.

When the light of the restoration dawned in the fullness of times, priesthood, along with its offices was restored. The office of high priest today is the same office held by prophets and patriarchs of old.

The Restoration of the Office of High Priest in 1831

In late spring of 1831 Joseph Smith called a conference in Kirtland, Ohio. Without any known previous recorded revelation directing the Prophet Joseph Smith to ordain individuals to the office of high priest, the office was restored and bestowed upon more than 20 elders. Joseph Smith said, "...the authority of the Melchizedek Priesthood was manifested and conferred for the first time upon several of the Elders. It was clearly evident that the Lord gave us power in proportion to the work to be done, and strength according to the race set before us, and grace and help as our needs required."⁵¹

⁵¹ Smith, *History of The Church*, 1:175-177.

The Prophet's explanation of the events in Kirtland does not refer to the restoration of the Melchizedek Priesthood. This restoration had taken place in 1829;⁵² rather, it was a bestowal of the office of high priest among those men who had previously been ordained elders in the Melchizedek Priesthood. This fact has been disputed.⁵³ Elder B.H. Roberts explained the Prophet's reference to the authority that was restored during this conference:

It has been supposed that this passage meant that the higher or Melchizedek Priesthood was now for the first time conferred upon men in this dispensation. This of course is an error, since even before the Church was organized, the Apostleship, the highest authority in the Melchizedek Priesthood, was conferred upon Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery, and very probably upon David Whitmer also. The Prophet does not mean that the Melchizedek Priesthood was given for the first time in the Church. It was at this conference, however, that the special office of High Priest was for the first time conferred upon men in this dispensation, except in so far as Apostles are also High Priests (Doctrine and Covenants, sec. 84:63); and of course as there were men who had been ordained to the apostleship before this conference of June, 1831, in that manner there had been High Priests in the Church, but not otherwise.⁵⁴

Clearly, Joseph Smith and others had received the Melchizedek Priesthood before the 1831 conference. This is seen in the ordinations of Joseph and Oliver who bestowed

⁵² Circumstantial evidence places the restoration of the Melchizedek Priesthood in late May, 1829. See Larry C. Porter, "The Restoration of the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods," *Ensign* (December 1996).

⁵³ The writer concurs with Elder B.H. Roberts conclusion that the statement made by the prophet concerning the bestowal of the "Melchizedek Priesthood for the first time" deals with the restoration of the office of high priest and not the bestowal of the Melchizedek Priesthood in general (*History of The Church*, 1:176). Historian Richard L. Bushman entertains the idea that Joseph was possibly bestowing the office of high priest upon these elders, but if he was, he did not realize it (Bushman, Richard L., *Joseph Smith, Rough Stone Rolling*, New York, Knopf Publishing, 2005, 157-160).

Bushman further speculates that the Melchizedek Priesthood in general was being given to these elders in 1831 (Bushman 204). If this was the case, this would mean that Joseph Smith did not receive the Melchizedek Priesthood until June 1831 because he was among those ordained at this conference (Cannon, Donald Q. and Cook, Lyndon W. eds., *Far West Record: Minutes of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1830-1844*, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1983, 7.)

⁵⁴ Smith, *History of the Church* vol. 1:176.

upon each other the office of elder in the Melchizedek Priesthood and then bestowed gift of the Holy Ghost upon those who were baptized members of the Church.⁵⁵ These ordinances took place in April of 1830 and are ordinances that require the Melchizedek Priesthood.⁵⁶

The historical record shows that God's prophet knew exactly what he was going on at the 1831 conference. In fact, there is evidence that the Prophet did not originally use the term "Melchizedek Priesthood" when describing the ordinations at the conference. In the manuscript history of the Church, Willard Richard's crossed out the term "Melchizedek Priesthood" and replaced it with "high priesthood" making the statement read: "I conferred the high priesthood for the first time, upon several of the Elders".⁵⁷ Though this fact may be disputed as Richard's idea and not the Prophet's, the minutes of the conference also use the term "high priesthood." Further, those who were there and described the event also used the term "high priesthood".⁵⁸

In the early days of the Church there was a difference in the terms "high priesthood" and "Melchizedek Priesthood". For instance, the Book of Mormon and other early church documents that Joseph Smith brought forth use the term "high priesthood" to describe the office of high priest, not the priesthood now known as Melchizedek (Alma 13:18). The use of the term "high priesthood," meaning office of high priest, will be discussed further in the next chapter.

⁵⁵ Smith, *History of the Church* 1:77-78

⁵⁶ *Ibid* 1:60-62

⁵⁷ Jesse, Dean, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 2 vols. Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book, 1989-1992, 1:353.

⁵⁸ Cannon, Donald Q. and Cook, Lyndon W. eds., *Far West Record: Minutes of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1830-1844*, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1983.7.

Even if Joseph did use the term “Melchizedek Priesthood” in referencing the June 1831 ordinations he may have simply been using Melchizedek, the greatest of all high priests (D&C 107:2), as a reference of what kind of authority and blessing these first high priests now possessed. Joseph may have been making the terms Melchizedek Priesthood and high priesthood (office of high priest) interchangeable in this instance to describe the office to those being ordained.

Elder Parley P. Pratt described his understanding of this newly restored office and what it meant to him. “Several were then selected by revelation, through President Smith, and ordained to the high priesthood after the order of the Son of God; which is after the order of Melchizedek. This was the first occasion in which this priesthood had been revealed and conferred upon the Elders in this dispensation, although the office of an Elder is the same in a certain degree, but not in the fulness.”⁵⁹

Elder Pratt’s statement confirms that indeed he recognized he was receiving an office of the priesthood that previously had not been available to men in this last dispensation. His use of the term *high priesthood* is consistent with the Book of Mormon prophet Alma, Joseph Smith and others who used the term to describe the office of high priest.

Dating the Revelation

Determining when the Prophet Joseph Smith became aware that the office of high priest should be restored to earth is difficult to show. He may have pondered the meaning of the priesthood office of high priest as early as 1829 when he reached the Book of Alma in the translation of the Book of Mormon. Passages in the thirteenth

⁵⁹ Pratt, Parley P. *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*, edited by his son, Parley P. Pratt, Salt Lake City: Desert Book Co., 1985, 53.

chapter of Alma discuss the calling and ordination of high priests including Melchizedek to the “office of the high priesthood of the holy order of God” (Alma 13:6,14,18). These few passages may have sparked questions in the Prophet’s mind to be brought before God.⁶⁰

The announcement concerning the introduction of the office of high priest was made soon after the Kirtland conference opened June 3, 1831.⁶¹ John Whitmer records, “After the business of the Church was attended to according to the covenants, The Lord made manifest to Joseph that it was necessary that such of the elders as were considered worthy, should be ordained to the High Priesthood.”⁶²

These ordinations took place continuously over, approximately, the next three days. Among the 18 men ordained were many of the leaders of the Church. Whitmer recorded the names of those ordained, “Lyman Wight, Sidney Rigdon, John Murdock, Reynolds Cahoon, Harvey Whitlock and Hyrum Smith were ordained by Joseph Smith, Jr., except Sidney Rigdon.”

Whitmer continued, “The following by Lyman Wight by commandment. Parley P. Pratt, Thomas B. Marsh, Isaac Morley, Edward Partridge, Joseph Wakefield, Ezra

⁶⁰ Priesthood Restoration Documents, *BYU Studies*, vol. 35 (1995), Number 4-1996, 2.

⁶¹ “This date in the Prophet’s narrative is given the 6th of June, but the minutes of the conference in the *Far West Record* are dated “June 3rd.” In John Whitmer’s *History of the Church* it is written: “June 3rd 1831, a general conference was called, and a blessing promised if the Elders were faithful and humble before Him [i. e. the Lord]. Therefore the Elders assembled from the east and from the west, from the north and the south, and also many members.” (p. 21.) Whitmer, however, speaks of the conference as continuing several days (p. 22); and then under date of “the 6th of June states that the revelation was given which Joseph, the Prophet, in the text of his *History* above, speaks of as having been given the day following the close of the conference. The 3rd of June, 1831, fell upon Friday, so that the great probability is that this important conference commenced on Friday and continued through Saturday and Sunday; and then before the Elders dispersed on Monday, the 6th, the revelation alluded to by the Prophet, was given. Previous conferences of a general character usually occupied three days, See p. 118, and hence it is likely that this one did.” *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 1: 175.”

⁶² Whitmer, John, *The Book of John Whitmer*, typescript, Provo: BYU Archives and Manuscripts.

Thayer, Martin Harris, Ezra Booth, who denied the faith, Harvey Whitlock denied the faith, also Joseph Wakefield, Joseph Smith, Sen., Joseph Smith, Jr., John Whitmer.”⁶³

If the order in which the names appear is an indication of who was ordained to the office of high priest first, we must assume it was Lyman Wight who earned this distinction as he was ordained by Joseph Smith. Lyman Wight, later in the same meeting, ordained Joseph Smith to the office of high priest. This practice is consistent with the bestowal of the Aaronic Priesthood⁶⁴ and later, the office of elder in the Melchizedek Priesthood to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery. Joseph ordained Cowdery first then Cowdery laid his hands upon the prophet and ordained him.⁶⁵

Obviously the ordinations of the 1831 conference were ordinations to priesthood office and not the priesthood in general. The Prophet himself, who had already been given the Melchizedek Priesthood by the ancient apostles Peter, James and John, was ordained a high priest at the hands of Lyman Wight.⁶⁶ Wight, who was identified by Whitmer as holding the office of elder, was able to ordain others to the office of high priest because he had been given the Melchizedek Priesthood 1830 and then had been ordained a high priest previous to ordaining others to the office.

As shown by John Whitmer, those who were ordained high priests had previously been ordained elders in the Melchizedek Priesthood. Whitmer’s reference to these elders being “ordained to the high priesthood” is another example of the consistency with which

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Joseph Smith History 1:71

⁶⁵ Smith, *History of the Church* 1:77-78

⁶⁶ Cannon, *Far West Record*, 7.

the term *high priesthood* was used in scripture and by others in his day to mean the office of high priest.

Another in attendance at the 1831 conference in Ohio was Jared Carter. Elder Carter did not hold any priesthood at this time but had previously witnessed the power of the Melchizedek Priesthood when Joseph Smith laid his hands on Carter's dying infant. The child recovered and Carter's testimony of the Prophet and the priesthood grew. Carter cited his remembrance of what transpired when the office of high priest was restored:

Before this [i.e., June 6, 1831] was that memorable day when God first gave the fullness of the high priesthood to the elders of the Church of Christ. At the interview, Brother Joseph, notwithstanding he is not naturally talented for a speaker yet he was filled with the power of the Holy Ghost so that he spoke as I never heard man speak for God, by the power of the Holy Ghost spoke in him and marvelous was the display of the power of the spirit among the elders present.⁶⁷

Levi Hancock's journal describes the second day of the June 1831 conference where additional elders were ordained to the office of high priest:

The Fourth of June came and we all met in a little string of buildings under the hill near Isaac Morleys in Kirtland, [Geauga] County, Ohio. Then we all went to a school house on the hill about one fourth of a mile ascending nearly all the way. The building was built of logs. It was filled with slab benches. Here the Elders were seated and the meeting was

⁶⁷ Journal of Jared Carter, typescript copy, LDS Church Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah.

opened as usual. . . . Joseph put his hands on Harvey Whitlock and ordained him to the high priesthood.⁶⁸

These ordinations did not take place in the peaceful manner that usually is present when ordinances of the gospel are performed. Hancock explained what took place immediately after the prophet ordained Harvey Whitlock a high priest.

He turned as black as Lyman was white. His fingers were set like claws. He went around the room and showed his hands and tried to speak; his eyes were in the shape of oval O's. Hyrum Smith said, "Joseph, that is not of God." Joseph said, "Do not speak against this." "I will not believe," said Hyrum, "unless you inquire of God and he owns it." Joseph bowed his head, and in a short time got up and commanded Satan to leave Harvey, laying his hands upon his head at the same time. At that very instant an old man said to weigh two hundred and fourteen pounds sitting in the window turned a complete summersault in the house and came his back across a bench and lay helpless. Joseph told Lyman to cast Satan out. He did. The man's name was Leanon [Leman] Copley [Copley], formally a Quaker [Shaker]. The evil spirit left him and as quick lightning Harvey Green fell bound and screamed like a panther. Satan was cast out of him. But immediately entered someone else. This continued all day and the greater part of the night. But to return to the meeting, Joseph said, "Now if you elders have sinned it will do you no good to preach if you have not repented. Heamon [Heman] Bassett you sit still the Devil wants to sift you. . ." Then he ordained Jacob Scott and some others to the High Priesthood. He came to Zebidee [Zebedee] Coltrin and myself and told us that we had another calling as high as any man in the house. I was glad for that for I was so scared I would not stir without his liberty for all the world. I knew the things I had seen was not made.⁶⁹

The attack of the adversary on many of the brethren at this conference is consistent with an earlier advances made by Satan upon the Prophet Joseph Smith. Once when he went to the grove of trees to ask for guidance to know which of all churches was

⁶⁸ *Hancock, Levi, Autobiography*, BYU Special Collections, Writings of Early Latter-day Saints 33.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

right. Another, minutes before he receive the Melchizedek Priesthood from Peter, James and John. Concerning the attack in the grove he recorded,

After I had retired to the place where I had previously designed to go, having looked around me, and finding myself alone, I kneeled down and began to offer up the desires of my heart to God. I had scarcely done so, when immediately I was seized upon by some power which entirely overcame me, and had such an astonishing influence over me as to bind my tongue so that I could not speak. Thick darkness gathered around me, and it seemed to me for a time as if I were doomed to sudden destruction.

But, exerting all my powers to call upon God to deliver me out of the power of this enemy which had seized upon me, and at the very moment when I was ready to sink into despair and abandon myself to destruction—not to an imaginary ruin, but to the power of some actual being from the unseen world, who had such marvelous power as I had never before felt in any being—just at this moment of great alarm, I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head, above the brightness of the sun, which descended gradually until it fell upon me.

It no sooner appeared than I found myself delivered from the enemy which held me bound (JS-History 1:15-17).

About ten years after this occurrence, Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery in Susquehanna County, were fleeing a mob who desired to harm them. Addison Everett in a letter to Oliver B. Huntington wrote that he heard Joseph Smith give the following description of what happened next, “They traveled all night” Everett stated, “and just at the break of day Oliver gave out entirely and exclaimed ‘O! Lord! How long Brother Joseph have we got to endure this thing,’ “Brother Joseph said that at that very time Peter, James & John came to them and ordained them to the Apostleship. “They had 16 or 17 miles to travel to get back to Mr. Hales his father in law and Oliver did not complain anymore of fatigue.”⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Porter, Larry C. "Dating the Restoration of the Melchizedek Priesthood," Ensign, December 1996, 43.

The Doctrine and Covenants applies further light of what happen to Joseph and Oliver as they were fleeing in the forest,

The voice of Michael on the banks of the Susquehanna, detecting the devil when he appeared as an angel of light! The voice of Peter, James, and John in the wilderness between Harmony, Susquehanna county, and Colesville, Broome county, on the Susquehanna river, declaring themselves as possessing the keys of the kingdom, and of the dispensation of the fulness of times! (D&C 128:20).

There is no other recorded account from the Prophet concerning this event. It is possible that Satan appeared to thwart the authorized bestowal of the Melchizedek Priesthood. It seems in regard to the First Vision, the receiving of the Melchizedek Priesthood and office of high priest, Satan was doing his best to thwart what was taking place. It appears that the greater the event is that will transpire, the greater opposition will be offered up by Satan and those who have chosen to serve him.

Timing of the Restoration

The organization of the Lord's Church is not haphazard or unnecessary. Priesthood and its offices are set forth by revelation for the Lord's purposes. Looking back it is clear to see why the Lord chose this time in 1831 to restore the office of high priest to the earth.

As the size of the Church grew, so also did the priesthood government of the Church. Additional offices of the priesthood were restored, patriarch, apostle and seventies all became part the priesthood organization of the Church.

The years that followed the restoration began unfolding an understanding as to why the office of high priest was restored when it was. For instance, March 8, 1832, the organization of the Presidency of the High Priesthood, known later as the First Presidency of the Church, was restored (D&C 81:1-2).

To hold the “Presidency of the High Priesthood” is to preside over the high priests and all other priesthood holders and the general membership of the Church. In order to preside over all in the Church, three high priests are called and form a quorum, the Presidency of the High Priesthood (D&C 107:22). Further, the “Presidency of the High Priesthood, after the order of Melchizedek, have the right to officiate in all the offices of the Church” (D&C 107:9). The Lord has set forth offices of the priesthood to distribute responsibilities among all who hold the priesthood. Just as a deacon is not authorized to perform the duties of a priest in the Aaronic Priesthood, an elder cannot function in the role of a high priest.

Peter, James and John, who constituted the First Presidency of the Church in their day, held the keys of the kingdom and only they could restore these keys to Joseph. This they did in the account mentioned earlier (D&C 128:20). In order for these keys to function in their fullness the Prophet needed the office of high priest. Keys are the right of presidency and the duty of the office of high priest is to preside (D&C 107:10). Joseph Smith could not form the Presidency of the High Priesthood and preside over the Church and all of the offices of the priesthood that are part of it without the office of high priest.

Line upon Line

The restoration of the office of high priest was part of the picture of progression of the renewal of the Church of Jesus Christ on earth. The Saints had to be prepared for further ordinances and responsibilities that would require the office of high priest to be present on earth. Priesthood, keys and offices became the framework through which the Lord would bring forth the fullness of the gospel and the restoration of the Kingdom of God on earth.

To these early Saints, the office of high priest, though new to them, was not unknown. They read the words of the Alma as he spoke of the great high priest Melchizedek and how he obtained the “office of the high priesthood (Alma 13:18). They used the words of scripture to describe what was being given and they understood it was something different than they already had. Through time however, the term “high priesthood” lost its original meaning. The term “high priesthood” has changed since the days of Joseph Smith. As we recognize the term for what it meant in an earlier time, we will find it easier to understand the office of high priest today.

CHAPTER 6

THE TERM *HIGH PRIESTHOOD* USED IN THE EARLY CHURCH

There was a remarkable outpouring of the spirit at the Kirtland conference in June 1831 at the time when the office of high priest was restored. Many of the brethren in attendance who were ordained recorded how humbled they were by their ordinations.

The meaning and significance of these ordinations to the high priesthood can only be comprehended if it is understood that among the early Saints, the phrase “high priesthood” was used in writing, sermonizing and revealed scripture, to mean the office of high priest, rather than the Melchizedek Priesthood in general.⁷¹

In January 1832 Joseph Smith was sustained as President of the High Priesthood (i.e., president of all the high priests), and two months later he appointed two counselors to assist him, Fredrick G. Williams⁷² and Sidney Rigdon who were both high priests.

Early in the history of the Church there was a distinction between the terms *Melchizedek Priesthood* and *high priesthood*. The term *Melchizedek Priesthood*, meaning higher priesthood, appeared for the first time scripturally or in any known historical record in November of 1831 (D&C 68:15). The term was not used again until March of 1835 (D&C 107:2). Calling the office of high priest the *high priesthood* followed the pattern set in the Book of Mormon (Alma 13:18), mentioned in previous chapters.

⁷¹ Smith, *History of the Church*, 4:190.

⁷² D&C 81:1 This revelation was originally given to Jesse Gause who did not live worthy of his call to the First Presidency and so the lot fell upon Fredrick Williams.

References to *High Priesthood* in the Early Church

It is clear in much of the writing and records of the members of the early Church, the term *high priesthood* meant the office of high priest. The following statements are given as evidence that the term *high priesthood* was used to describe the office of high priest. Note the context within each statement that the term *high priesthood* is used as it is evident the office of high priest is what is being spoken of.⁷³

1- John Whitmer, a historian for the Church stated that at the time the office of high priest was restored, missionary efforts, specifically among the Shakers were somewhat unsuccessful and many brethren were beginning to apostatize from the Church. He recorded that on:

June 3, 1831, a general conference was called, and a blessing promised, if the elders were faithful, and humble before him. Therefore, the elders assembled from the East and the West, from the North and the South. And also many members. Conference was opened by prayer and exhortation by Joseph Smith, Jr., the Revelator. After the business of the Church was attended to according to the covenants. The Lord made manifest to Joseph that it was necessary that such of the elders as were considered worthy, should be ordained to the High Priesthood.⁷⁴

From all accounts from eyewitnesses of the restoration of the office of high priest, no one actually used the term high priest choosing instead, high priesthood.

2- William E. McLellin in speaking of his own ordination to the office of high priest said, “A number of elders were ordained to the High -Priesthood of the Holy order of

⁷³ Many of these statements can also be located in McConkie, Joseph F. and Ostler, Craig J., *Revelations of the Restoration*. Deseret Book Company, Salt Lake City, 598-600.

⁷⁴ The Book of John Whitmer, microfilm copy at Church Archives. Pages 27-29 of this document report the June 1831 conference and the reception of section 52:

God among whom though I felt unworthy I was ordained and took upon me the high responsibility of that office.”⁷⁵

3- The minutes of the June 1831 conference contain the following note made concerning a statement made by Sidney Rigdon. “Br. Sidney Rigdon then made certain remarks on the privileges of the Saints in these last days. Remarks to those who were ordained to the High priesthood last evening saying that the Lord was not well pleased with some of them because of their indifference to be ordained to that office, exhortation to faith and obedience setting forth the power of that office.”⁷⁶

4- Parley P. Pratt was in attendance when the office of high priest was restored and offered this account of what happened, “Several were then selected by revelation, through President Smith, and ordained to the High Priesthood after the order of the Son of God; which is after the order of Melchizedek. This was the first occasion in which this priesthood had been revealed and conferred upon the Elders in this dispensation, although the office of an Elder is the same in a certain degree, but not in the fulness. On this occasion I was ordained to this holy ordinance and calling by President Smith.”⁷⁷

5- A conference held in October of 1831 brought about more men being ordained to the office of high priest. From the minutes of this conference it is recorded that, “Br. Sidney Rigdon said it was the privilege of those Elders present to be ordained to the High Priesthood.”⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Shipps, Jan and John W. Welch, *The Journals of William E. McLellin 1831-1836*. Provo, Utah: BYU Studies, 994, 45.

⁷⁶ Far West Record 25-26.

⁷⁷ Pratt, *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*, 53.

⁷⁸ Cannon and Cook, *Far West Record*: 25.

This conference was the first conference that followed the conference in June of the same year when the office of high priest was restored.

6- Speaking of his own father Joseph Smith wrote: He removed with his family to Kirtland in 1831; was ordained Patriarch and President of the High Priesthood.⁷⁹ The purpose of the above statement is to say that Joseph Smith Sr. was ordained Patriarch and the President of the High Priests in Kirtland.

There was, at this time, two bodies of high priests, one in Kirtland and one in Missouri. In 1832 the Lord directed Joseph Smith to organize a stake in Kirtland (D&C 82:12). Before this stake was organized, there had been several councils consisting of twelve high priests assembled to serve informally, in order to resolve various problems that arose within the membership of the Church.⁸⁰ Joseph Smith Sr. was made president of a group of high priests that made up one of these councils.

These high priest councils governed some of the affairs of the Church until February 17, 1834 when formal high councils were organized to officiate within the Kirtland stake.⁸¹ Later, quorums of high priests were formed when new stakes were organized, from which high council members and other officers were chosen. Each quorum had a president, Don Carlos Smith being called in Kirtland and continuing in this position when the Saints moved to Nauvoo (D&C 124:133). Those so chosen, like Don

⁷⁹ *History of the Church* 4: 190.

⁸⁰ *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1854-1886, 11: 7 - 8.

⁸¹ *History of the Church* 2:28

Carlos Smith, may be called *Presidents of the High Priesthood* for the particular stake in which they serve.⁸²

Joseph Smith Sr. was not made President of the High Priesthood over the entire Church but over a particular group of high priest assigned to whatever responsibilities given to them. The Prophet Joseph Smith Jr., was previously ordained to that office of President of the High Priesthood over the entire Church at a conference of high priests in Amherst, Ohio, in 1832.⁸³

7- A statement from the *History of the Church* records that, “Elias and Isaac Higbee, and Jesse Hitchcock, were ordained to the High Priesthood.”⁸⁴ It is clear that Elias and Isaac Higbee were elders at the time they received this ordination to the high priesthood or office of high priest. The ordination of these two men to the office of high priest took place in 1835. Elias was ordained to the office of elder by Isaac in 1833 two years before he was ordained a high priest. In order for Isaac to ordain Elias to this office he two must have held the office of Elder because he was not yet ordained a high priest.⁸⁵

8- In January of 1837 a priesthood meeting was held in Kirtland, Ohio to discuss a number of matters, one of which concerned the office of high priest. The history of the Church states:

Another subject of vital importance to the Church, was the establishing of the grades of the different quorums. It was ascertained that all but one or two of the presidents of the Seventies were High Priests, and when they had ordained and set apart any from the quorums of Elders, into the

⁸² Further discussion of high priest quorums and how they function within stakes will be shown in the following chapter.

⁸³ *History of the Church* 1:267

⁸⁴ *Ibid* 2: 141.

⁸⁵ Jenson, Andrew, *Church Chronology: A Record of Important Events Pertaining to the History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1914.*

quorum of Seventies, they had conferred upon them the High Priesthood, also. This was declared to be wrong, and not according to the order of heaven. New Presidents of the Seventies were accordingly ordained to fill the places of such of them as were High Priests, and the *ex-officio* presidents, and such of the Seventies as had been legally ordained to be High Priests, were directed to unite with the High Priests' quorum.⁸⁶

9- The general conference of the Church in April 1840 began with the brethren of the priesthood bringing various charges against fellow Saints for alleged improprieties. One of these charges asked for an explanation concerning ordinations to the office of high priest.

A letter was read from presidents of the Seventies, wishing for an explanation of the steps, which the High Council had taken, in removing Elder F. G. Bishop from the quorum of the Seventies to that of the High Priests, without any other ordination than he had when in the Seventies, and wished to know whether those ordained into the Seventies at the same time F. G. Bishop was, had a right to the High Priesthood, or not. After observations on the case by different individuals, the president gave a statement of the authority of the Seventies, and stated that they were Elders and not High Priests, and consequently Brother F. G. Bishop had no claim to that office. It was then unanimously resolved that Elder F. G. Bishop be placed back again into the quorum of the Seventies.⁸⁷

Additionally, Lyman Sherman, who also served in the presidency of Seventy was released when discovered that he had previously been ordained a high priest (D&C 108 historical background).⁸⁸

The restoration of the office of seventy in 1835 brought about some misunderstanding concerning the office of high priest. As in these cases, the question arose whether or not

⁸⁶ Smith, *History of The Church*, 2: 476.

⁸⁷ Ibid 4: 105.

⁸⁸ There has been confusion in the Church concerning office of Seventy and its relation to the office of high priest. It has not always been understood that a Seventy can also be a high priest. The following chapter will discuss this confusion and will show that Seventies are in fact, high priests who have been given special responsibilities. This is the case with other high priest such as Bishops and Patriarchs.

a seventy might labor as a high priest without being ordained to the office. It is easy to see that the term high priesthood used in this record is referring to the office of high priest.

10- On the same day that Thomas Marsh was chosen as the president of the Twelve, Oliver Cowdery recorded, “Elder Don Carlos Smith was ordained and anointed president of the high priesthood of the Melchisedek priesthood.”⁸⁹ It is clear that the term high priesthood is used here to describe the office of high priest and not the Melchizedek Priesthood otherwise the statement would be redundant.⁹⁰

11- Wilford Woodruff spoke in 1836 concerning a change that affected the quorums of seventy and high priests. Some brethren were selected to be high priest, while another brother, a high priest, was selected to preside in a quorum of seventy. “Six of the Presidents of the Seventies were to leave the Seventies & take a station in the quorum of the traveling high priesthood and six other Presidents chosen in their stead I shall not here give the particulars of this change of Councillors suffice it to say that all of the councillors first chosen excepting Joseph Young were high priest before the organization of the seventies & they had a right to officiate in the lower offices of the Church & there was some difference in the authority and office of the quorums of high priesthood & seventies.”⁹¹

⁸⁹ Smith, Joseph, *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, compiled and edited by Dean C. Jessee, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1984, 148-149.

⁹⁰ The anointing that is referred to in the statement by Oliver Cowdery was part of an ordinance performed in the Kirtland temple for many of the brethren. It appears as part of the ordinance, Don Carlos was given a blessing in the which he was ordained to be President of the High Priesthood or high priest quorum president.

12- From the minutes of the April 1841 conference the following is recorded:

At an early hour this morning the different quorums, who had previously been organized, came to the ground and took their seats as follows: the First Presidency, with the presidents of the quorums on the stand; the High Council, on the front of the stand; the High Priesthood on the front to the right of the stand; the Seventies immediately behind the High Priesthood; the Elders in the front, to the left; the Lesser Priesthood on the extreme right.⁹²

The seating arrangements described at this meeting in the Nauvoo temple identify those who have the *high priesthood* separate from the Seventy and the elders. Obviously, the Seventy and elders hold the higher or Melchizedek Priesthood and so the term *high priesthood* as used here refers to the office of high priest.

13- On April 6th, 1841, nine of the twelve apostles along with over 5,000 members of the Church in Manchester, England gathered together in a conference. At this meeting men were selected to be ordained high priests. As far as can be determined this is the first time the office of high priest was given outside of the United States in the last dispensation. Elder Parley P. Pratt said, “Eleven persons were chosen and ordained to the High Priesthood during this Conference, and twelve persons were ordained Elders.”⁹³

14- Elder George A. Smith in an address given in Ogden Utah in 1864 recounted conferral of the office of high priest among the some of the members of the Church. He said:

Among the early baptisms in Northern Ohio, was a Methodist minister by the name of Ezra Booth. He was present when the Elders first received the

⁹¹ The Kirtland Diary of Wilford Woodruff by Dean C. Jessee , *BYU Studies*, vol. 12 (1971-1972), Number 4 –Summer 1972 389.

⁹² Joseph Smith, *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph*, compiled and edited by Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook ,Provo: BYU RSC, 1980, 69.

⁹³ Pratt, *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*, 275.

ordination of the High Priesthood. They met together in June, 1831, in a log school house in Kirtland, a room about eighteen feet by twenty. While they were there, the manifestation of the power of God being on Joseph, he set apart some of the Elders to the High Priesthood.⁹⁴

Later in his discourse he referenced elders receiving their ordinations to the priesthood, “The Priesthood was conferred on a number of Elders, and thirty were selected to take a mission to the western boundaries of Missouri.”⁹⁵ Elder Smith’s statement concerning priesthood being conferred upon the elders who already had the priesthood is similar to a statement made by Joseph Smith concerning the restoration of the office of high priest. Joseph Smith at that time said that the Melchizedek Priesthood was being conferred for the first time upon those who were already elders.⁹⁶

Receiving the priesthood, in this case, meant receiving the office of high priest. It is also interesting to note that the office of high priest was still being referred to as the high priesthood over thirty years after its restoration. It is difficult to find references to the term *High Priesthood* referring to the office of high priest after the Saints leave Nauvoo. It is not clear why the term was not used much to describe the office of high priest after this time.

Another rare example of the use of the term *high priesthood* after the Saints left Nauvoo is seen in an address given October 21, 1877. President John Taylor, the newly called President of the Church, spoke concerning the subject of priesthood offices and how they relate with each other. When discussing a question that had arisen among some of the Saints as to whether or not the office of high priest was greater than the office of

⁹⁴ Journal of Discourses, 11: 4.

⁹⁵ Ibid 11:6

⁹⁶ Smith, *History of The Church*, 1: 176

seventy, President Taylor identifies the office of high priest as the high priesthood. He said, “There is a matter that has of late become a subject of a good deal of conversation, and it occurs to my mind to refer to it, namely that of the High Priesthood, or the place and calling of a High Priest.”⁹⁷

Another later reference to the office of high priest as the *high priesthood*, came from George Q. Cannon speaking on October 15, 1891. He taught how the office of high priest is given. “An Elder is not a High Priest until he is ordained to the High Priesthood. He cannot legally act in that office by being merely set apart; he must be ordained, and the High Priesthood must be bestowed upon him.”⁹⁸ Obviously an elder already holds the Melchizedek Priesthood, so to be ordained to the high priesthood means he must be ordained a high priest as pointed out by Elder Cannon.

We must assume that at this time there was still some understanding within the Church the term *high priesthood* meant the office of high priest.

Confusion of Terms

These preceding statements clearly show the term *high priesthood* used to refer to the office of high priest and not the Melchizedek Priesthood in general. Obviously there are many more references recorded where the office of high priest is referred to in this way. The statements put forth in this work are used because their clarity and it is difficult to debate or confuse the fact that the use of the term *high priesthood* within them is referring to an office of the Melchizedek Priesthood and not the Melchizedek Priesthood in general.

⁹⁷ *Journal of Discourses*, 19: 242 - 243.

⁹⁸ Cannon, George Q. *Gospel Truth: Discourses and Writings of President George Q. Cannon*, selected, arranged, and edited by Jerreld L. Newquist, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1987, 190.

It is not apparent when or why the term *high priesthood* became synonymous with *Melchizedek Priesthood*. Some speculation concerning why the terms *Melchizedek Priesthood* and *high priesthood* became interchangeable proclaims there was a feeling of jealousy and disdain among some of the Saints. Referring to some leaders who officiated in the Church as high priests who held the *high priesthood* brought about a sense of inequality and elitism.⁹⁹

Other possibilities as to why multiple uses of the term began to appear may be that an association was made the terms *high priesthood* and the term *greater priesthood* which was introduced in 1832 (D&C 84:19). Also, the term *higher priesthood* was introduced in 1835 and it was used to describe the Melchizedek Priesthood (D&C 107:18).

Another contributing factor to the change in the use of the term *high priesthood* came from a statement by the First Presidency of the Church in 1902 when they declared, "It is well to remember that the term "High Priesthood," as frequently used, has reference to the Melchizedek Priesthood, in contradistinction to the "Lesser," or Aaronic Priesthood."¹⁰⁰

President Joseph F. Smith was the president of the Church when the statement was made. Earlier, while serving as a member of the quorum of the Twelve Apostles, he offered his thoughts concerning what was taking place at the June 1831 conference which this work declares was beginning of the office of high priest. His conclusions differ from the conclusion of this thesis as to what the Prophet Joseph Smith meant when he

⁹⁹ Cook, *The Revelations of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sec. 52.

¹⁰⁰ Editor's Table, *Improvement Era*, Vol. V. May, 1902. No. 7.

described the events of the Kirtland conference as follows; “The authority of the Melchizedek Priesthood was manifested and conferred for the first time upon several of the Elders.”¹⁰¹

The difference in the conclusions can be found in the way President Smith described the history of the term *high priesthood*. This thesis maintains that Joseph Smith was referring to the office of high priest. Concerning Joseph Smith’s statement, President Smith agrees that indeed the elders were not given the Melchizedek Priesthood for the first time, but mentions nothing of the bestowal of the office of high priest. He presented this different view when he said:

Now, if this does not mean that on this occasion several elders received their first ordination, then it must mean that these several elders who had previously been ordained, then, for the first time, received the power or authority of their ordinations. The words "conferred for the first time upon several of the elders," would seem at first glance to mean that several were then ordained elders, but taking the complete sentence together, namely, "The man of sin was revealed, and the authority of the Melchizedek Priesthood was manifested, and conferred for the first time upon several of the elders," we naturally conclude that several who had previously been ordained elders, had not yet received the spirit, or power, or authority of their ordinations, but that now for the first time, the authority of the Priesthood having been manifested, it fell upon them.... One thing is perfectly clear, and that is, no reference whatever is here made to the restoration of the Melchizedek Priesthood by Peter, James and John, which great event occurred, without doubt, between May and July, 1829. However until about the time this conference was held, the term Melchizedek Priesthood was seldom or never used. *The High Priesthood, or the Holy Priesthood, were the terms generally applied until then.*¹⁰²

Obviously these statements must have had impact on the way members of the Church viewed the term high priesthood and probably solidified the term becoming synonymous with the term *Melchizedek Priesthood*.

¹⁰¹ Smith, *History of the Church* 1:176.

¹⁰² Contributor, Vol. 10, 1889, pp. 307-311. (emphasis added)

The interpretation and meaning of the term *high priesthood* has evolved since its introduction into the vocabulary of the restored gospel. It is used to describe the office of high priest and the Melchizedek Priesthood. A careful survey of the history of the office of high priest shows evidence of this fact.

Understanding there can be more than one use for the term *high priesthood* should alert students of the gospel to carefully view the context in which the term is used. The context will provide the clue to which definition the author intends, save the possibility that the author does not recognize the dual meaning of the term.

CHAPTER 7

THE OFFICE OF HIGH PRIEST SINCE THE RESTORATION

The history of the office of high priest from Adam to the days of Joseph Smith is intriguing, but does not end with its restoration in the latter days. There have been many events, sermons and policies set forth since the ministry of the Prophet Joseph Smith which have effected the manner in which high priests function in their office. This chapter will examine the history of the office of high priest since its restoration.

The restoration of the office of high priest that took place in June 1831 did not reveal the length and breadth of the office. Over time, we see how the office of high priest grew and developed within a Church that also was growing. We now see how the office of high priest functions in the order of the priesthood today and how it functioned in the early history of the Church.

Councils

All eighteen high priests who were ordained at the June 1831 conference were called to serve missions within a week of their ordination (D&C 52).¹⁰³ These high priest missionaries were given the charge of organizing and presiding over the Church in the areas to which they were to labor (D&C 52:10).

As branches of the Church began to grow, high priests were called to organize and govern the affairs of the Church in that particular area. High priests began to be organized into councils and finally quorums.

¹⁰³ John Whitmer and Joseph Smith Sr. were the two high priests that were not called at this time to travel as proselyte missionaries. John Whitmer however was given the calling of church historian which can be considered a missionary service for the Lord. Joseph Smith Sr., on the other hand, was ordained as patriarch to the Church.

Before any quorums of high priests were formed, high priests were called to be part of councils. These councils were formed for the purpose of receiving instruction and to discuss solutions to various problems encountered by the young Church. These councils did not include all high priests of the Church, but seemed to be geographic in nature and usually the agenda of the council was to meet only on specific situations. Many councils of high priests were called in 1833 and 1834 as the Church was growing in Ohio and Missouri.¹⁰⁴

References to these types of councils are made in the Doctrine and Covenants. For example, the revelation known as the Word of Wisdom was given to a council of high priests who were part of the School of the Prophets (D&C 89).¹⁰⁵

High Councils

Shortly after the restoration of the office of high priest, selected men ordained to the office were often organized into councils of high priests. The practice of organizing high priest councils has existed since the days of the first high priest, Adam. Doctrine and Covenants 107 identifies a council of high priest being held at Adam-ondi-Ahman and presided over by Adam.

On February 17, 1834, twenty-four high priests along with other members of the Church, assembled at the home of the Prophet Joseph Smith for the purpose of organizing a high council of high priests for the stake in Kirtland.

¹⁰⁴ The *History of the Church* records many councils of high priest called to decide on Church matters that ranged from the purchasing of land to disciplinary actions. For further study of the purposes of these early councils of high priests, see *History of the Church* 1: 327, 332, 335-36, 354, 407; 2: 28, 47, 112, 151, 317.

¹⁰⁵ The school of the prophets was formed by the command of the Lord on 23 January 1833 (D&C 88:127-41). The school originally consisted of 12 high priests and 2 elders.(see *History of the Church* 1:322.

Twelve men were called to serve on the high council in Kirtland (D&C 102:3). This council of high priests was designated to be different than the previous councils that had been called. Previous councils of high priests were called to serve specific purposes, usually pertaining to one specific situation concerning the Church. The high council called in 1834 was attached to the first stake of the Church. The duty of the council was to settle difficult matters that would arise within the stake.

The Lord revealed that all stakes throughout the Church should be organized with a council of high priests organized in the same manner as the council in Kirtland.¹⁰⁶ As more stakes were organized, councils of 12 high priests were called to labor within that particular stake. Today the same practice continues as new stakes continue to be formed.

The High Priest Quorum

After the restoration of the office of high priest along with the organization of stake high councils, a larger council consisting of the Kirtland and Zion stake high council members and other leaders of the Church met in the Kirtland Temple, January 15, 1836. One purpose for the meeting was to discuss the unfolding of a new organizational structure within the priesthood.¹⁰⁷

For the first time in this dispensation, a quorum of high priests was organized. The quorum organization was completed by the appointment of a president of the quorum: “After one hour's adjournment of the Council, Elder Don Carlos Smith was nominated to be ordained to the High Priesthood, also to officiate as President, to preside over that body in Kirtland. The vote of the quorums was called for in their order, and

¹⁰⁶ “Kirtland Council Minute Book,” Typescript. Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, 25.

¹⁰⁷ Smith, *History of the Church* 2:370-371.

their nomination passed through the whole house by unanimous voice.”¹⁰⁸ The use of the term “quorums” in this reference refers to the councils of high priests from Kirtland and Missouri. Also the First Presidency, Quorum of the Twelve and Seventies were present.

The names of those called as counselors to assist the 19 year old, Don Carlos Smith, are not identified in the official history of the Church. However, it is clear Don Carlos Smith had counselors because it is recorded that he and his counselors anointed many members of the high priests quorum in the temple.¹⁰⁹

Another quorum of high priests was organized on August 15, 1837 about 18 months after the Kirtland quorum began. This new quorum was part of the second stake in the Church which was organized in Far West, Missouri. Charles C. Rich was called to preside over those assigned to the Far West high priest quorum.¹¹⁰

The late 1830’s brought an exodus of the Saints from Kirtland Ohio to Missouri. It is not clear what happened to the Kirtland Quorum of high priests. Don Carlos Smith was called away on various assignments and a mission to the southern states but no record exists of his release as president of the quorum. It may have been that members of the Kirtland quorum joined with the quorum already established in Missouri, or the Kirtland quorum was temporarily disbanded only to reunite and organize again at Nauvoo in 1841.¹¹¹

The Saints were forced to leave their homes in Missouri in 1838-1839 and the quorum of high priests associated with the Far West stake dissolved. For a period of

¹⁰⁸ Smith, *History of the Church*, 2: 370.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 2:386

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 2:507

¹¹¹ Melchizedek Priesthood, Improvement Era, 1947, Vol. L. July, 1947. No. 7.

nearly two years there were not quorums of high priests in the Church. The Saints relocated in Commerce, Illinois which later was named Nauvoo, Illinois. Don Carlos Smith was called to serve as the president of the high priest quorum in the newly organized Nauvoo stake (D&C 124:33). Amasa Lyman and Noah Packard were called to be counselors to President Don Carlos Smith.¹¹²

In 1841, a new quorum of high priests was formed consisting of some who had been members of the Kirtland quorum and others the Far West quorum. All high priests who subsequently moved to Nauvoo were encouraged to “sign up” to be included on the rolls of the quorum.¹¹³

Still there were high priests residing outside of Nauvoo who were not apart of the quorum in Nauvoo. Though there was precedence for establishing high priest quorums in the Kirtland and Far West stakes, there is no record of any of the surrounding stakes maintaining quorums of high priests. Though there was no quorum of high priests, the Zarahemla Stake, which consisted of branches in Iowa, had high priests forming a high council to assist the stake president, John Smith, in governing the affairs of the Church in that area.¹¹⁴

High Priests Leaving Nauvoo

The exodus of the Saints from Nauvoo in the 1840's brought about an interesting problem for the now transient quorum of high priests. As the Saints began to settle in the Salt Lake Valley and the surrounding area, it became necessary to organize stakes which in turn would include new quorums of high priests.

¹¹² D&C 124:136

¹¹³ *Times and Seasons* 3: 894. (August 15, 1842)

¹¹⁴ Smith, *History of the Church* 4:352.

The first quorum of high priests organized in the west was the quorum within the Salt Lake Stake. Elder Parley P. Pratt recorded on February 12, 1848:

I met in council with the First Presidency and members of the Twelve, in which certain vacancies in our quorum were filled. We were then instructed to assist in reorganizing the different quorums here, and in establishing righteousness. We accordingly met with the Presidency almost daily, and proceeded to organize and ordain the Presidency of the High Priests quorum, the Presidency of the Stake at Salt Lake City, with its High Council, and to divide the city and county into wards and ordain a bishop over each.¹¹⁵

The same practice which began in Kirtland of organizing quorums of high priests when stakes were organized, continued when the Saints moved into the Salt Lake valley and surrounding areas. However, with the building up of new communities, farming to be done and the construction of temples, implementing a complete organization of the priesthood took some time. It was not until the last year of Brigham Young's life that direct instruction pertaining to how the offices of the priesthood should be structured in their new mountain home was given.¹¹⁶

After the Saints arrival in the Salt Lake Valley, some organizational practices not in harmony with the revealed plan of organization crept into the Church. The biggest problem concerning the organization of the office of high priests appears to be that, although this was to be a stake organization, some wards organized quorums of high priests complete with quorum presidents.¹¹⁷ High priests were eventually instructed to form stake quorums and not to meet as ward quorums any longer. These high priests

¹¹⁵ Pratt, *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*, 336.

¹¹⁶ Hartley, William G. *The Priesthood Reorganization of 1877: Brigham Young's Last Achievement*, BYU Studies, vol. 20 (1979-1980), 31.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid* 31.

were able to continue to meet and fellowship one another in their wards but they were presided over by president on the stake level.

The high priest quorum president and the president of stakes were different officers for most of the history of the office of high priest since its restoration. At the time the first stake was organized in Kirtland, Joseph Smith presided over the stake while Don Carlos functioned as president of the high priest quorum in Kirtland. The practice of maintaining separate offices of stake president and high priest quorum president remained until 1956.¹¹⁸ No formal declaration of why stake presidencies were placed as the high priest quorum presidency has been given.

Today, high priests living within the boundaries of a stake belong to a quorum consisting of all the high priests in the stake. Under the direction of the stake president, who is the presiding high priest in the stake and the bishop, who is the presiding high priest of a ward, one high priest is called to lead, not preside, over a group of high priests in a ward. High priests meet regularly as a stake quorum but they also meet weekly with other high priests in their ward. These are not quorum meetings but are called group meetings.¹¹⁹

Who is Called to the Office of High Priest

From the ranks of the councils and quorums of high priests, various leadership positions are filled. These positions require men of righteousness and example. Ever since the first high priest, Adam, men who hold or have desires to hold the office of high priest had standards they were required to meet.

¹¹⁸ *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, “High Priests” 587.

¹¹⁹ *Church Handbook of Instruction Book 2*, 1998, 162.

An article written by Victor C. Anderson expressed the following views in the *Improvement Era*, gives some insight to what type of individual some members of the Church thought or hoped that those who were called as high priests should be in 1932:

What does it mean to you to be ordained a high priest in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints? Is it merely an ordination commonly conferred upon the elderly man of the Church or is it an ordinance having a deeper significance?

When ordained a High Priest the individual receives recognition by the Church that certain fundamental standards have been attained which are requisite for "life eternal." In order to enjoy celestial living it is necessary that one has ability to live the standards that yield "abundant life." This plan of living was given to the world by Jesus nearly 2,000 years ago and again reiterated to the world by Joseph Smith in our dispensation. As a man is advanced in the priesthood he should feel that he has greater strength in his ability to live the gospel plan. Ultimately when he is honored by the church with the degree of high priesthood, or High Priest, it is an announcement to the world that he has mastered certain standards of attainment required for leadership in Christ's Church.

When a medical school confers an M. D. degree upon a student the university announces to the world that it may expect the man or woman receiving the degree to possess certain skills and information necessary to care for the health of the people. Anyone who desires may acquaint himself with the standards for such a degree. It is because of our confidence that these attainments have been met, that we trust the life of our dear ones when sickness and accident comes to them. Likewise when conferring the degree of High Priest, the Church of Jesus Christ announces to the world that this man who becomes a High Priest in the Kingdom of God has acquired certain fundamental skills that make for "life abundant."¹²⁰

Brother Anderson's article emphasizes that some in the Church recognized one called to the office of high priest as having made an important and significant step towards exaltation. Further, those ordained to the office of high priest were said to have reached a standard of righteousness that qualified them to lead others within the Church.

¹²⁰ Melchizedek Priesthood, *Improvement Era*, 1932, Vol. Xxxv. August, 1932. No. 10

In 1939, Elder John A. Widstoe explained what requirements a man had to meet in order to be a high priest; “From the body of High Priests are chosen those who are to fill presiding positions of the Church. High Priests are, as a rule, men of varied experience, who have filled missions abroad, who have preached the Gospel to the nations of the earth, and who have had experience fitting them to fill positions of presidency”¹²¹

Today, there is no requirement of a man to have fulfilled a mission in order to become a high priest. The 1998 edition of the handbook of instructions contain the qualifications for a potential high priest. “Brethren are ordained high priests when they are called to a stake presidency, high council, or bishopric or when otherwise determined by the stake president.”¹²²

The Additional Offices of a High Priest

Another important aspect of the history of the office of high priest is its relation to other Melchizedek Priesthood offices. For instance the office of bishop in the Aaronic Priesthood, and the offices of patriarch, seventy (as a general officer of the Church), apostle, and president of the high priesthood all require the holder to also be a high priest. Each of these offices will be briefly considered as follows.

Office of President and Presidency of the High Priesthood and the Office of High Priest

The high quorum of the Church is the Quorum of the First Presidency or Presidency of the High Priesthood. The presidency consists of three high priests who are ordained to the office (D&C 107:22). Within this quorum is one who is called as

¹²¹ Widstoe, *Priesthood and Church Government*, 121.

¹²² *Handbook of Instruction Book 2*, 162.

President of the High Priesthood (D&C 107:65). His duty is to preside over the whole Church and he holds and exercises all the keys of the kingdom in their fulness (D&C 132:7).

In order for these three in the Presidency of the High Priesthood to preside over all offices of the priesthood, they must hold the office of high priest.

Office of Apostle and the Office of High Priest

The office of Apostle was restored nearly 4 years after the office of high priest.¹²³ The authority of the office of Apostle encompasses the office of high priest and all other offices of the priesthood. This means that a man may labor as an ordained Apostle with ever having been specifically ordained a high priest as was the case with Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball.¹²⁴

Office of Patriarch and the Office of High Priest

Within the government of the Church there is the priesthood office of patriarch (D&C 107:39). This office was the next office of the priesthood restored after the office of high priest. On December 18, 1833, Joseph Smith Sr. was called to be patriarch to the Church.¹²⁵

The office of patriarch to the Church can be conferred upon a high priest as a result of lineage and worthiness. President Joseph Fielding Smith said the following in regard to the patriarch to the Church meeting the lineage requirement: “This office by divine appointment comes down by lineage and rightfully belongs to the family of

¹²³ Smith, *History of the Church*, 2:187.

¹²⁴ Young, Brigham, *Discourses of Brigham Young*, selected and arranged by John A. Widtsoe, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1954, 141.

¹²⁵ *Teachings*, 38.

Hyrum, son of Joseph Smith, Sen., and descends by the law of primogeniture. Joseph, son of Israel, because of the transgression of his older brethren, received this birthright and it was conferred upon his son Ephraim, and has continued down through that lineage.”¹²⁶

The office of patriarch to the Church was discontinued in 1979. President N. Eldon Tanner explained the reason, he said: “Because of the large increase in the number of stake patriarchs and the availability of patriarchal services throughout the world, we now designate Elder Eldred G. Smith as a Patriarch Emeritus, which means that he is relieved of all duties and responsibilities pertaining to the office of Patriarch to the Church.”¹²⁷

Office of Bishop and the Office of High Priest

We learn from the Doctrine and Covenants that the office of bishop¹²⁸ and elder are appendages to the office of the high priesthood meaning office of high priest (D&C 84:29). The office of bishop is a calling within the Aaronic Priesthood. Those ordained and set apart may serve in the Presiding Bishopric of the Church or as a ward bishop. A ward bishop is called to preside over all other priesthood holders in his ward. He does not preside over the ward because he holds the office of bishop or elder. A bishop presides because he holds the office of high priest and has been given specific keys as the presiding high priest of the ward. These keys cannot be given to an elder or to a bishop who has not yet been ordained a high priest.

¹²⁶ Smith, Joseph Fielding, *Church History and Modern Revelation*, 4 vols. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1946-1949, 3: 54.)

¹²⁷ *Conference Report*, October 1979, 25.

¹²⁸ At the time this revelation was received the only Bishops in the Church were traveling bishops whose main duties surrounded administering the Law of Consecration.

Office of Seventy and the Office of High Priest

The restoration of the office of Seventy in 1835, brought with it a new challenge for some members of the Church. Misunderstanding of this new office and its role in the Melchizedek Priesthood bred some confusion regarding the office of high priest. However, eventually the confusion concerning the office of Seventy actually helped bring about a greater understanding of the office of high priest.

The Problem

The subject of priesthood and the order thereof can be difficult to understand. Men who received this authority without extensive Church experience were particularly vulnerable to confusion. Some of this confusion revolved around an incorrect belief that priesthood office entitled a man to more priesthood power than a man who held a different office. Evidence of this confusion manifested itself from early in the history of the Church. The hotly debated question was which office held more priesthood, the Seventy or the high priest. Consideration of the principles that resolved this issue in the past brings meaning and insight to the office of high priest today.

Brigham Young explained the basis of the unsettled feelings and debate of superiority between the brethren belonging to these two offices when he said:

This dissension has come between the Seventies and the high priests in the consequence of some poor, miserable, beggarly whiners who craved after power and who did not know what to do with the authority they already possessed. Some of these high priests would go to Joseph saying: 'Brother Joseph the Seventies, are they ordained to as high authority and power as the High Priests? Are the Seventies equal to the High Priests? Brother Joseph, it cannot be so, it must not be; the High Priests must be the greater, and they are first.' Now, even to this day there is contention, and I do not know but even among the first Elders of Israel, there may be argument as to which should come next if anything were to happen to the First Presidency and the Twelve, the High Priests or the Seventies.¹²⁹

Confusion of Priesthood Authority and Priesthood Office

When the office of Seventy was established, many of those ordained were also given the high priesthood, or in other words, the office of high priest.¹³⁰ Joseph Smith may have changed this practice on April 6, 1837 during a meeting in the Kirtland Temple held specifically for members of the Seventy. An unspecified clerk taking minutes at this meeting wrote;

It was ascertained that all but one or two of the presidents of the Seventies were high priests, and when they had ordained and set apart any from the quorums of Elders, into the quorum of Seventies, they had conferred upon them the High Priesthood, also. This was declared to be wrong, and not according to the order of heaven. New Presidents of the Seventies were accordingly ordained to fill the places of such of them as were high priests, and the *ex-officio* presidents, and such of the Seventies as had been legally ordained to be High Priests, were directed to unite with the High Priests' quorum.¹³¹

Some brethren of the priesthood interpreted the actions of the Prophet as a signal that indeed a high priest was not to officiate in what was considered the “lower authority” office of Seventy. What actually was happening was simply a reassignment to calm the anxiety caused over this misunderstanding.

In a correspondence to his son, Elder Bruce R. McConkie, stated that “after reading the full account of what happened that day it appears that the statement about a Seventy not being a high priest was an erroneous conclusion drawn by an unnamed clerk in taking the minutes of the meeting. Likely what the Prophet actually said was that it

¹²⁹ Young, Brigham, “Discourse by Pres. Brigham Young at Logan, Cache County, on Monday morning, May 25, 1877, at the Priesthood Meeting, held for the purpose of organizing a Stake of Zion”, *Deseret News*. Vol. 22. June 6, 1877, 274-275.

¹³⁰ Smith, *History of the Church*, 2: 476.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

was against the order of heaven for the brethren to bicker and contend as to their priesthood prerogatives. This conclusion is in harmony with the actions of the Prophet.”¹³² It appears that the purpose for the release of these men had more to do with their inability to understand the principle that priesthood power comes by righteousness and not by ordination to an office.

The Seventy at this point were no longer given the high priesthood, meaning the office of high priest. They served and met in quorum meetings with other Seventies. When these brethren were spread far and wide after the exodus from Nauvoo they were instructed to meet with the elders or high priest quorum.¹³³ Apparently, this is because they had previously been ordained as elders or high priests and there was not a quorum of Seventy with which to meet in their area of service.

Those who were ordained Seventies in 1835, were to be immediately under the direction of The Twelve and were given the responsibility of serving as traveling missionaries, building up the Church and regulating the affairs of the Church in the nations they were called to serve in (D&C 107:34). Those ordained to the office of high priest were the group from which presiding leaders were called to serve within organized Church stakes of Zion.¹³⁴

¹³² McConkie, Joseph F. *The Bruce R. McConkie Story: Reflections of a Son*. Deseret Book Company, Salt Lake City, 2003, 180.

¹³³ Hartley, *The Priesthood Reorganization of 1877*, 31.

¹³⁴ Smith, *Gospel Doctrine*, 182-83.

The Resolution

President Joseph F. Smith noted, in 1903, that the brethren of the priesthood were failing to understand the relationship and difference between the offices and authority of the priesthood. President Smith tried to resolve the error when he said:

Today the question is, which is the greater—the High Priest or the Seventy, the Seventy or the High Priest? I tell you that neither of them is the greater, and neither of them is the lesser. Their callings lie in different directions, but they are from the same priesthood. If it were necessary, the Seventy, holding the Melchisedek Priesthood, as he does, I say IF IT WERE NECESSARY—he could ordain a High Priest; and if it were necessary for a High Priest to ordain a Seventy, he could do that. Why? Because both of them hold the Melchisedek Priesthood. Then again, if it were necessary—though I do not expect the necessity will ever arise—and there was no man left on earth holding the Melchisedek Priesthood, except an Elder, that Elder, by the inspiration of the Spirit of God, and by the direction of the Almighty, could proceed, and should proceed, to organize the Church of Jesus Christ in all its perfection, because he holds the Melchisedek Priesthood. But the house of God is a house of order, and while the other offices remain in the Church, we must observe the order of the Priesthood, and we must perform ordinances and ordinations strictly in accordance with that order, as it has been established in the Church through the instrumentality of the Prophet Joseph Smith and his successors.¹³⁵

In this statement President Smith showed that it is incorrect to assume one office of the Melchizedek Priesthood has greater power than another. Therefore it was useless for men to argue who held greater authority or power. An ordination to another office does not give a man a greater degree of the Melchizedek Priesthood. The priesthood and not the office is what give a man power to act in the name of God.

When a man is ordained to an office it is done by the authority of the priesthood not the authority of an office. If for some reason the Lord saw fit for an elder to ordain a man a high priest he could do it. Elders ordaining men to be high priests was exactly

¹³⁵ Smith, Joseph F. *Conference Report, October 1903, Afternoon Session 97.*

what took place at the June 1831 conference when Joseph Smith and Lyman White, who were elders, ordained others to the office of high priest.

In 1847, John Taylor, then a member of the Quorum of the Twelve, spoke concerning any confusion in understanding the relationship to priesthood and its offices.

Elder Taylor explained:

There has been, sometimes, a little feeling manifested between the seventies and high priests, as to who has the greatest authority, and some of the seventies have manifested a desire to be united with the high priests' quorum, thinking thereby to obtain a greater degree of priesthood. This is folly, for, as I stated before, it is not the office but the magnifying of an office that makes a man honorable. But in relation to their offices, they are called to move in other spheres, and fulfil other callings, rather than possessing different power and authority. Brother Carter thought that some of the seventies were out of their place, because they were appointed to preside over conferences, whereas they have as much right to preside, when legally appointed, as an high priest or an apostle. The seventies have the high priesthood, and many of them have received ordinances in the temple, qualifying them to build up the kingdom of God, if every other officer were dead or killed, and so have the high priests. So far, then, as authority is concerned, they both have authority, but it is the especial business of the seventies to preach to all the world, introduce and spread the gospel; while it is the duty of the high priests more especially to preside. Yet a high priest is not precluded from traveling and preaching, and introducing the gospel (nor a seventy from presiding.)¹³⁶

¹³⁶ Taylor, John. *The Gospel Kingdom: Selections from the Writings and Discourses of John Taylor*, selected, arranged, and edited, with an introduction by G. Homer Durham, Salt Lake City: Improvement Era, 1941, 151.

Again, the principle that priesthood is greater than its offices was explained to clear any confusion as to superiority in the priesthood. Elder Taylor understood that a man who holds the Melchizedek Priesthood can perform any ordinance of that priesthood and even preside if called upon to.

The Proper Order

In an address to the Church concerning the order of the priesthood in 1961, President David O. McKay explained, in order to perform the needed work under the direction of the Twelve, members of the Seventy now needed the high priesthood, or the rights to the office of high priest, as part of their ordination. He explained:

I am glad that Elder Lee referred to the ordaining of members of the First Council of the Seventy as high priests. There seem to be a number of men of the priesthood in the Church who are wondering about it, because they know that the Prophet said that what was going on in the early days of making high priests of Seventies, was not in accordance with the will of God.

Do you know what they were doing? Before a man was ordained a member of the First Council of the Seventy he was ordained a high priest. This practice, the Prophet said, was not in accordance with the will of the Lord. It should be sufficient for you who have the Spirit of the Lord to know that the work today is required of those members of the First Council of the Seventy which needs the High Priesthood.¹³⁷ They do not join the high priests' quorum, but they are sent out by the Council of the Twelve Apostles to set in order the Church in the stakes and missions, and they should be given authority to set apart a president of a stake, a high councilman, a bishop of a ward, which requires the High Priesthood.

The Lord has never said, nor has the Prophet Joseph, that that is against the will of the Lord. These men are sent out now to take care of 300 and some odd stakes, and they are given the authority as members of the First Council of the Seventy to attend to anything necessary in order to set in order the affairs of the stake and the ward, and that is in accordance with the will of the Lord.

¹³⁷ Here is another example of the term “high priesthood” being used to describe the office of high priest as discussed in the previous chapter.

The members of the First Council of the Seventy are now given the authority of high priests to set in order all things pertaining to the stake and the wards under the direction of the Twelve Apostles.¹³⁸

President McKay's reference to the size and growth of the Church in 1961 in relation to the size and growth of the Church in the 1830's provides another explanation as to why the Seventy were not always ordained high priests. In the early history of the Church there were not that many stakes to organize or bishops to call, hence the demand for those holding the office of high priest would be less. Further, President McKay's direction to ordain Seventies high priests, was only in reference to seven men who held the office of Seventy and functioned as General Authorities of the Church.

There were then, in 1961, seven men holding the office of Seventy who were ordained to the office of high priest. These men composed the First Council of Seventy and served as General Authorities or leaders over the general membership of the Church. They could not do the work of a General Authority without being a high priest. After 1961, all who have been called to labor as General Authority Seventies have been high priests; before that time they were Seventies and not high priests.

Amidst the struggle for place and praise within the priesthood among some of the early brethren of the Church, it appears that Joseph Smith originally wanted to give the office of high priest to the Seventy who were to serve as General Authorities to the Church. In addition to the fact that the first Seventies were given the high priesthood, President Brigham Young added further evidence of the Prophets desire. He said that the Prophet Joseph came to him many times and said, "Brethren, you are going to ordain

¹³⁸ McKay, David O. *Conference Report, October 1961*, General Priesthood Meeting, 90.

Seventies. Do not forget to confer the high priesthood upon them. Ordain each of them to the high priesthood, and to be one of the Seventy-apostles.”¹³⁹

Joseph Smith understood the principle that priesthood is greater than office. This principle governed the decision to give Seventies the office of high priest in their ordination. He simply was expanding their responsibilities, not their priesthood power. This did not break the proper order of the priesthood.

In 1975 President Spencer W. Kimball began organizing the First Quorum of Seventy as a body of General Authorities. He ordained three men to serve as Seventies in addition to the seven men who comprised the First Council of Seventy. At the same time, President Kimball released those high priests who had served previously as Assistants to the Twelve and absorbed them into this new quorum of Seventy.

While studying the many concerns surrounding the order of the Seventy, Elder Boyd K. Packer of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles had insight into a scripture, which brought more understanding to the office of Seventy and likewise the office of high priest. Taken from Lucille Tate’s biography of Elder Packer, the development came as follows:

Laboring in faith and diligence, Brother Packer continued the quest, to know the Lord's will. He studied and pondered the passages in D&C 107 that pertain specifically to the Seventy. As he read and reread, verse 10 suddenly stood out as if it had been newly placed there: "High priests after the order of the Melchizedek Priesthood have a right to officiate in their own standing, under the direction of the presidency, in administering spiritual things, and also in the office of an elder, priest, ... teacher, deacon, and member" (D&C 107:10).

Elder Packer tells of the impact upon him:

¹³⁹ Deseret News, Vol. 22. June 6, 1877, 274-275.

It suddenly occurred to me that that was a verse on the Seventy that should be added to the others. The reason it had never been considered was that it did not mention the Seventy. And the significance of it was that it did not mention the Seventy.

I took it to Bruce McConkie first and read it to him in that context. It was the first time that he had ever seen it in that light. Because it very declaratively said that a high priest could not officiate in the office of a Seventy.¹⁴⁰

A high priest may be ordained to serve as a Patriarch, Seventy or an Apostle, but they do not have a right to officiate in that office by virtue of their ordination as a high priest. In order to serve as a Seventy or an apostle, a man must be ordained to those specific offices.

The office of Seventy became a general authority calling. Men ordained to this office have the charge to minister in the Church anywhere they are assigned under the direction of the Twelve. Further they have no affiliation with any local quorum of high priests where they may reside. Rather, they are part of a general Church quorum of Seventies.

Many may wonder why the Lord allowed the Church to stumble around in the dark, as it were, concerning the administration of the office of Seventy. The Lord revealed to President John Taylor the need of being patient until the fullness of what was meant for the Seventy was in place. He said,

Thus saith the Lord unto the First Presidency, unto the Twelve, unto the Seventies and unto all my holy Priesthood, let not your hearts be troubled, neither be ye concerned about the management and organization of my Church and Priesthood and the accomplishment of my work. Fear me and observe my laws and I will reveal unto you, from time to time, through the channels that I have appointed, everything that shall be necessary for the

¹⁴⁰ Tate, Lucille C., *Boyd K. Packer: A Watchman on the Tower*, Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1995, 238.

future development and perfection of my Church, for the adjustment and rolling forth of my kingdom, and for the building up and the establishment of my Zion. For ye are my Priesthood and I am your God. Even so. Amen.¹⁴¹

Within this revelation was a prophecy. A prophecy relating directly to the priesthood that was realized as understanding grew between the office of high priest and of Seventy. No office in the priesthood diminishes any other office. A high priest need not feel his priesthood power is less than one who holds position as a Seventy or vice versa. Rather, as those so ordained fulfill their calling they add glory to God. It is then fruitless for a priesthood holder to worry about what authority another has; when within him is the power and authority of the Melchizedek Priesthood that can be used to accomplish God's purposes.

President John Taylor reminded the men who hold priesthood, "Let us seek to know who of us is living nearer to God and acting in such a manner as to call down upon us the power of God, and angels will administer to us. We cannot tell which member of the body is most useful to us, which we can best afford to spare—the leg or the arm, the eye or the nose. All are necessary to render the body perfect."¹⁴²

The discussion of the authority of the office of Seventy aids our understanding of the history of the office of high priest. Part of the history of the office of high priest is how members of the Church understood the office as it began to be surrounded by other offices of the priesthood. There was for some time a feeling, as evidence earlier, that priesthood was a matter of supremacy and not of service to mankind. The roles and

¹⁴¹ Roberts, B.H., *Seventy's Course in Theology*, Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1907-1912, 1: 10.

¹⁴² Taylor, John, *The Gospel Kingdom*: 145-146.

functions of the office of high priest were clouded by the desire of men to not be estimated as lesser Saints because they did not hold a particular office.

Through a study of the scriptures, history and the words of inspired leaders, we now may focus our thoughts on understanding the divine role of priesthood offices in plan of our Heavenly Father. This focus will help those seeking to understand priesthood to magnify the office to which they have been called.

The Eternal Influence of the Office of High Priest

Through a study of the scriptures, history, and the words of inspired leaders, we now may focus our thoughts on understanding the divine role of priesthood offices in the plan of our Heavenly Father. This focus will help those seeking to understand priesthood to magnify the office to which they have been called.

Part of the history of the office of high priest entails what the scriptures and Joseph Smith taught concerning the future of the office of high priest in the eternities. The book of Revelation in the New Testament records, “And I heard the number of them which were sealed: *and there were* sealed an hundred *and* forty *and* four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel (Revelation 7:4). Concerning the passage, the Prophet Joseph Smith asked, “What are we to understand by sealing the one hundred and forty-four thousand, out of all the tribes of Israel—twelve thousand out of every tribe” (D&C 77:11)? By the spirit of revelation, he explained

We are to understand that those who are sealed are *high priests*, ordained unto the holy order of God, to administer the everlasting gospel; for they are they who are ordained out of every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, by the angels to whom is given power over the nations of the earth, to bring as many as will come to the church of the Firstborn” (Doctrine and Covenants 77:11: emphasis added).

Shortly before the Savior comes there will be called out of the ranks of the priesthood of the Church high priests who will be given a special assignment. President Joseph

Fielding Smith said of this group:

This certainly is a great honor to be one of the 144 thousand who are especially called by the power of 'the angels to whom is given power over the nations of the earth,' to bring souls unto Christ. John the Apostle had the great desire to bring souls to Christ. The three Nephite Disciples likewise sought this great honor and it was granted to them. It is one of the noblest desires that a man can have. It will be a wonderful blessing to those who are called in this great group.¹⁴³

Elder Bruce R. McConkie also identified these high priests as ones who will also have a special privilege as part of the Second Coming of the Savior. He stated:

It seems clear that the Lord and his exalted associates shall stand in glory upon the American Mount Zion, although it may well be that in his numerous other appearances, including that on the Mount of Olivet, which is itself but a few stones' throw from old Mount Zion, he shall also be accompanied by the 144,000 high priests, "for they follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth."¹⁴⁴

The 144,000 high priests will be a part of that organization sent to bring the ordinances to those worthy to obtain entrance into the Church of the Firstborn. The Church of the Firstborn includes those who have been "sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise" and are those "into whose hands the Father has given all things" (D&C 76:51-55). They will be priests and priestesses, kings and queens, receiving the Father's glory, having the fulness of knowledge, wisdom, power, and dominion (D&C 76:56-62).

¹⁴³ Smith, Joseph Fielding, *Church History and Modern Revelation*, 4 vols. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1946-1949, 2: 71 - 72.

¹⁴⁴ *McConkie, Bruce R., Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 3 vols. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965-1973, 3: 527.

Joseph Smith identified that an “innumerable host” will have been blessed by those 144,000 high priests and will accompany them in this last labor before the coming of the Lord.¹⁴⁵

The Office of High Priest and Exaltation

The scriptures are clear concerning requirements a man must meet in order to obtain exaltation in the Celestial Kingdom. Speaking of those who are allowed to enter into Celestial Glory, we learn from revelation:

They are they into whose hands the Father has given all things—They are they who are priests and kings, who have received of his fulness, and of his glory; And are priests of the Most High, after the order of Melchizedek, which was after the order of Enoch, which was after the order of the Only Begotten Son (D&C 76:55-57).

Those who are kings and priests, as referred to in this scripture, are “Holders of the Melchizedek Priesthood” wrote Elder Bruce R. McConkie, “have power to press forward in righteousness, living by every word that proceedeth forth from the mouth of God, magnifying their callings, going from grace to grace, until through the fulness of the ordinances of the temple they receive the fulness of the priesthood and are ordained kings and priests. Those so attaining shall have exaltation and be kings, priests, rulers, and lords in their respective spheres in the eternal kingdoms of the great King who is God our Father.”¹⁴⁶

Those who inherit the Celestial Kingdom are high priests who will become kings and priests or “priests of the most high” in the eternities (D&C 76:75).

¹⁴⁵ Smith, *History of the Church*, 6:365

¹⁴⁶ *Mormon Doctrine*, 425.

Ordination to the Office of High Priest for the Dead

The requirement for exaltation that a man be a high priest also must be extended to the dead. While President Wilford Woodruff was president of the St. George temple some individuals of notoriety in the western world visited him. Elder Woodruff recorded;

I will here say, before closing, that two weeks before I left St. George, the spirits of the dead gathered around me, wanting to know why we did not redeem them. Said they, "You have had the use of the Endowment House for a number of years, and yet nothing has ever been done for us. We laid the foundation of the government you now enjoy, and we never apostatized from it, but we remained true to it and were faithful to God." These were the signers of the Declaration of Independence, and they waited on me for two days and two nights.¹⁴⁷

These prominent men, along with others who passed on to the spirit world, had the further ordinances of the temple performed for them. Among all of who had ordinances performed in their behalf, four are recorded as having been ordained to the office of high priest. President Ezra Taft Benson spoke concerning these ordinations, "The temple work for the fifty-six signers of the Declaration of Independence and other Founding Fathers has been done. All these appeared to President Woodruff when he was president of the St. George Temple. President George Washington was ordained a high priest at that time. You will also be interested to know that, according to Wilford Woodruff's journal, John Wesley, Benjamin Franklin, and Christopher Columbus were also ordained high priests at that time."¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁷ *Journal of Discourses*, 19: 229 - 230.

¹⁴⁸ Benson, Ezra Taft *This Nation Shall Endure*, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1977, 22. see also Wilford Woodruff Journals, 25 July 1887, LDS Historical Department, Salt Lake City, March 1894;

The sacred nature of the temple prevents any further elaboration on the ordinances and ordinations performed therein. This is the only known recorded account, of which the author is aware of anyone receiving the office of high priest vicariously after they died.

New Circumstances Require New Revelation

Part of what makes The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints a “living” Church is its claim to direct revelation from God. The rights and responsibilities of the office of high priest are understood better today because of continuous revelation.

Until the restoration, no recorded scripture existed to explain how the office of high priest functions in regard to the office of Seventy and other offices. It would be impossible to know of the general governance of the priesthood with its various quorums and offices by relying solely on the word of the Bible. The divine purpose of the office of high priest in administering the saving ordinances of the gospel would be lost without revelation from God. Finally, there may yet still be explanations, duties and responsibilities added to those who hold the office of high priest that are not yet known or revealed to man by God that will bring even more meaning to this office.

further references will also be found at: Matthias Cowley, Wilford Woodruff: History of His Life and Labors (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1964) 586-587.

CONCLUSION

A study of the history of the office of high priest of Adam through the restoration with a desire to increase faith does not just yield a multitude of dates and recollections; Rather, a deep and abiding sense of the marvelous power that God has given to man will become evident in pages of scripture and the words of divinely led prophets, seers and revelators.

When a history of any heavenly principle or ordinance is studied, the end result should always place the student in his or her own day. This is because all principles and ordinances of the gospel of Jesus Christ are eternal. Such is the case with the office of high priest.

This office, first given in mortality to Adam, was the office by which Adam presided in the patriarchal order of the priesthood. The priesthood and the office of high priest were passed down generally, from father to son until Moses' day. Though the order of the patriarchal priesthood was substituted when the Law of Moses was instituted, the office of high priest of the Melchizedek Priesthood continued, but only for a select few. Righteous, chosen men were called to this office while the general congregation of the Lord's people was denied this office.

However, among the righteous people of the Book of Mormon, the office of high priest was always available. In fact, up until the time of the Savior, it appears the office of high priest was the only priesthood office among them. These righteous high priests spent their lives serving as kings, military leaders and ministers to the people. These people also had a greater eternal understanding of the office of high priest than the people of Moses' day. The high priest Alma taught of the foreordination of high priest in the

pre-mortal world (Alma 13). Alma used the example of Melchizedek, a righteous high priest, to show that the office was only to be held by those who had been righteous in the first estate and then continued in righteousness in the second.

When the Savior came to earth, the office of high priest of the Melchizedek Priesthood was once again available to man. Apostasy from the true Church took away the priesthood, along with its offices, from among those in New Testament times. Eventually apostasy led to the same result among the people in the lands of the Book of Mormon.

Late in the spring of 1831, the office of high priest, which had been absent for more than one thousand years of the earth's history was restored through the Prophet Joseph Smith. The return of the office of high priest to earth is yet another testimony of the restoration of the Lord's true Church on earth.

The office of high priest was understood by those, like the Prophet Joseph Smith, who studied the past history of the office and sought out revelation to determine how it was to be administered in the last dispensation.

From the ranks of those first ordained to office of high priests came some of the first missionaries in this dispensation. Every man part of that first ordination was called to preach the gospel to the people of the earth (D&C 52).

Councils of high priests were formed to settle the affairs of the Church as it expanded. These councils consisted of wise men that showed wisdom in their counsel.

A high priest in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints today has duties that differ in some ways to that of Adam, the first high priest on earth. However, the root of the office has never changed since the days of Eden. The priesthood is the root. The

duties, responsibilities and requirements of the office of high priest have changed but the office is not what determines the power. That is the priesthood. A high priest today holds the same priesthood and office as Adam and all the great prophets who have or ever will live.

A study of the history of this office however, suggests that perhaps some of the importance of the office has faded away since its restoration. Terms such as *high priesthood* and *office of the high priesthood* are often read in scripture or found in the early history of the Church and immediately associated with meaning simply Melchizedek Priesthood. These terms however refer to the office of high priest.

Understanding the history of this office will bring new light to scripture references and the words of Saints in the early days of the Church that have been darkened by careless definitions. These passages when interpreted correctly bring meaning and insight into the heart of all who desire eternal life.

The priesthood power, given to man to enable him to act in God's name is what blesses the lives of the entire family of Adam. The office of high priest is described as being the "greatest of all" offices of the priesthood (D&C 107:64). Part of the reason behind this description is because this office will have direct bearing on all who desire and finally receive the gift of eternal life. Since such weight is placed on this one office, it only seems natural to do all we can to understand its place in the Heavenly Father's Plan of Salvation.

WORKS CITED

- Anderson, Karl Ricks, *Joseph Smith's Kirtland*, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1989.
- Bushman, Richard L., *Joseph Smith, Rough Stone Rolling*, New York: Knopf, 2005.
- Cannon, Donald Q. and Cook, Lyndon W. eds., *Far West Record: Minutes of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1830-1844*, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1983.
- Cannon, George Q. *Gospel Truth: Discourses and Writings of President George Q. Cannon*, selected, arranged, and edited by Jerreld L. Newquist, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1987.
- Clark, J. Reuben, *On the Way to Immortality and Eternal Life*, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1949, 43.
- Contributor, vol. 6 (October 1884-September 1885), Vol. VI. March, 1885. No. 6.
- Cook, Lyndon W., *The Revelations of the Prophet Joseph Smith: A Historical and Biographical Commentary of the Doctrine and Covenants*, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1985.
- Editors Table. *Improvement Era*, vol. V. May, 1902. No.7.
- Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1-4 vols., Edited by Daniel H. Ludlow, New York: Macmillan, 1992.
- Benson, Ezra Taft *This Nation Shall Endure*, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1977.
- Handbook of Instructions Book 2*, The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City. 1998.
- Hancock, Levi, *Autobiography*, BYU Special Collections, Writings of Early Latter-day Saints.
- Hartley, William G. *The Priesthood Reorganization of 1877: Brigham Young's Last Achievement*, BYU Studies, vol. 20 (1979-1980), 31.

Holland, Jeffery R., *Christ and the New Covenant: The Messianic Message of the Book of*

Mormon, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1997.

Jenson, Andrew. *Church Chronology: A Record of Important Events Pertaining to the History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1914.*

Jesse, Dean, *Papers of Joseph Smith, 2 vols. Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book, 1989-1992.*

Journal of Discourses, 26 vols. London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1854-1886.

Journal of Jared Carter, typescript copy, LDS Church Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah.

“Kirtland Council Minute Book,” Typescript. Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, 25.

McConkie, Bruce R., *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1985.*

McConkie, Bruce R. *Conference Report, April 1949, Afternoon Meeting, 89.*

McConkie, Bruce R., *Mormon Doctrine, 2d ed. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966.*

McConkie, Bruce R., *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary, 3 vols. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965-1973.*

McConkie, Joseph F. *The Bruce R. McConkie Story: Reflections of a Son. Deseret Book Company, Salt Lake City, 2003.*

McConkie, Joseph F. and Ostler, Craig J., *Revelations of the Restoration. Deseret Book Company, Salt Lake City, 2000.*

McKay, David O. *Conference Report, October 1991, General Priesthood Meeting.*

Melchizedek Priesthood, *Improvement Era, 1947, Vol. L. July, 1932, Vol. Xxxv. August, 1932. No. 10.*

Melchizedek Priesthood, *Improvement Era, 1947, Vol. L. July, 1947. No. 7.*

Nelson, Russell M., *The Power within Us. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1988.*

Oliver Cowdery's Kirtland, Ohio.

Orson Pratt, *The Seer*, October 1853:147

Packer, Boyd K. "What Every Elder Should Know and Every Sister as Well: A Primer on Principles of Priesthood Government" *Ensign*, February 1993.

Phelps, William W. "The Church of Christ", *Evening and Morning Star*, vol 1. no. 9, March 1833.

Porter, Larry C. "Dating the Restoration of the Melchizedek Priesthood," *Ensign*, December 1996, 43.

Pratt, Parley P. *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*, edited by his son, Parley P. Pratt, Salt Lake City: Desert Book Co., 1985.

Priesthood Restoration Documents, *BYU Studies*, vol. 35 (1995), Number 4-1996

Roberts, B.H., *New Witnesses for God*, 3 vols. Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1909.

Roberts, B.H., *Seventy's Course in Theology*, Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1907-1912.

Shippo, Jan and John W. Welch, *The Journals of William E. McLellin 1831-1836*. Provo, Utah: BYU Studies, 1994.

Smith, Joseph. *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, compiled and edited by Dean C. Jessee, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1984.

Smith, Joseph, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, selected and arranged by Joseph Fielding Smith, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1976.

Smith, Joseph Jr., *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 7 vols., introduction and notes by B. H. Roberts. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1932-1951.

Smith, Joseph, *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph*, compiled and edited by Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook Provo: BYU RSC, 1980.

Smith, Joseph Fielding, *Answers to Gospel Questions*, 5 vols. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co.,
1957-1966.

Smith, Joseph Fielding, *Church History and Modern Revelation*, 4 vols. Salt Lake City:
The
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1946-1949.

Smith, Joseph Fielding, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 3 vols., edited by Bruce R. McConkie,
Salt Lake
City: Bookcraft, 1954-1956.

Smith, Joseph F. *Conference Report, October 1903*, Afternoon Session.

Smith, Joseph F. *Gospel Doctrine: Selections from the Sermons and Writings of Joseph
F. Smith*,
compiled by John A. Widtsoe, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1939.

Sorenson, David E., *The High Priest Quorum, Ensign*, The Church of Jesus Christ of
Latter-day
Saints, June 2005.

Tate, Lucille C., *Boyd K. Packer: A Watchman on the Tower*, Salt Lake City: Bookcraft,
1995.

Taylor, John. *The Gospel Kingdom: Selections from the Writings and Discourses of John
Taylor*,
selected, arranged, and edited, with an introduction by G. Homer Durham, Salt
Lake
City: Improvement Era, 1941.

The Kirtland Diary of Wilford Woodruff by Dean C. Jessee , *BYU Studies*, vol. 12
(1971-1972),
Number 4 –summer 1972.

Whitmer, John, *The Book of John Whitmer*, typescript, Provo: BYU Archives and
Manuscripts.

Widtsoe, John A. *Priesthood and Church Government*, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co.,
1939.

Young, Brigham, *Discourses of Brigham Young*, selected and arranged by John A.
Widtsoe, Salt
Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1954.

Young, Brigham, "Discourse by Pres. Brigham Young at Logan, Cache County, on Monday morning, May 25, 1877, at the Priesthood Meeting, held for the purpose of organizing a Stake of Zion", *Deseret News*. Vol. 22. June 6, 1877.

BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE COMMITTEE APPROVAL

Of a thesis submitted by

John D. Lawson

This thesis has been read by each member of the following graduate committee and has been found to be satisfactory.

14 July 2006
Date

Craig Lane Oetler
Craig I. Oetler, Chair

14 July 2006
Date

Joseph F. McConkie
Joseph F. McConkie

14 July 2006
Date

Guy L. Dorius
Guy L. Dorius