



## The Everlasting Priesthood

*“The Melchizedek Priesthood . . . is the channel through which all knowledge, doctrine, the plan of salvation, and every important matter is revealed from heaven.”*

### From the Life of Joseph Smith

**A**fter they received the Aaronic Priesthood and the ordinance of baptism, Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery experienced blessings they had never known before. The Prophet recorded: “Our minds being now enlightened, we began to have the scriptures laid open to our understandings, and the true meaning and intention of their more mysterious passages revealed unto us in a manner which we never could attain to previously, nor ever before had thought of” (Joseph Smith—History 1:74). With this additional insight, they pressed forward in their work of translating the Book of Mormon. But the Prophet had not yet received an important blessing—one that was necessary before he could organize the Church, establish priesthood offices and quorums, and confer the gift of the Holy Ghost. He had to receive the Melchizedek Priesthood.

As promised by John the Baptist, this blessing was given to Joseph and Oliver shortly after they received the Aaronic Priesthood. The ancient Apostles Peter, James, and John appeared to them in a secluded location near the Susquehanna River and conferred the Melchizedek Priesthood upon them. Joseph later declared that he heard “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).



*The ancient Apostles Peter, James, and John conferred the Melchizedek Priesthood on Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery. “The keys [of the priesthood],” the Prophet declared, “have to be brought from heaven whenever the Gospel is sent.”*

In the years that followed, Joseph Smith was visited by many other priesthood holders from ancient times. These messengers from God came to restore the priesthood keys necessary to make the full blessings of the gospel available to God's children. They also came to tutor the prophet who would stand at the head of the dispensation of the fulness of times.

President John Taylor, the third President of the Church, explained: "Moses, Elijah, Elias and many of the leading characters mentioned in the Scriptures, who had operated in the various dispensations, came and conferred upon Joseph the various keys, powers, rights, privileges and [permissions] which they enjoyed in their times. . . . Whatever of knowledge, of intelligence, of Priesthood, of powers, of revelations were conferred upon those men in the different ages, were again restored to the earth by the ministration and through the medium of those who held the holy Priesthood of God in the different dispensations in which they lived."<sup>1</sup>

President Taylor also declared: "If you were to ask Joseph what sort of a looking man Adam was, he would tell you at once; he would tell you his size and appearance and all about him. You might have asked him what sort of men Peter, James and John were, and he could have told you. Why? Because he had seen them."<sup>2</sup>

In September 1842, the Prophet wrote a letter to the Church expressing his joy as he contemplated the knowledge and priesthood keys now restored to the earth: "And again, what do we hear? Glad tidings from Cumorah! Moroni, an angel from heaven, declaring the fulfilment of the prophets—the book to be revealed. . . . And the voice of Michael, the archangel; the voice of Gabriel, and of Raphael, and of divers angels, from Michael or Adam down to the present time, all declaring their dispensation, their rights, their keys, their honors, their majesty and glory, and the power of their priesthood; giving line upon line, precept upon precept; here a little, and there a little; giving us consolation by holding forth that which is to come, confirming our hope!" (D&C 128:20–21).

## Teachings of Joseph Smith

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### **The priesthood is everlasting and has been held by prophets in every dispensation.**

“There has been a chain of authority and power from Adam down to the present time.”<sup>3</sup>

“The Priesthood was first given to Adam; he obtained the First Presidency, and held the keys of it from generation to generation. He obtained it in the Creation, before the world was formed, as in Gen. 1:26, 27, 28. He had dominion given him over every living creature. He is Michael the Archangel, spoken of in the Scriptures. Then to Noah, who is Gabriel; he stands next in authority to Adam in the Priesthood; he was called of God to this office, and was the father of all living in his day, and to him was given the dominion. These men held keys first on earth, and then in heaven.

“The Priesthood is an everlasting principle, and existed with God from eternity, and will to eternity, without beginning of days or end of years [see Joseph Smith Translation, Hebrews 7:3]. The keys have to be brought from heaven whenever the Gospel is sent. When they are revealed from heaven, it is by Adam’s authority.

“Daniel in his seventh chapter speaks of the Ancient of Days; he means the oldest man, our Father Adam, Michael; he will call his children together and hold a council with them to prepare them for the coming of the Son of Man [see Daniel 7:9–14]. He (Adam) is the father of the human family, and presides over the spirits of all men, and all that have had the keys must stand before him in this grand council. . . . The Son of Man stands before him, and there is given him glory and dominion. Adam delivers up his stewardship to Christ, that which was delivered to him as holding the keys of the universe, but retains his standing as head of the human family.

“. . . The Father called all spirits before Him at the creation of man, and organized them. He (Adam) is the head, and was told to multiply. The keys were first given to him, and by him to

others. He will have to give an account of his stewardship, and they to him.

“The Priesthood is everlasting. The Savior, Moses, and Elias [Elijah], gave the keys to Peter, James, and John, on the mount, when they were transfigured before him. The Priesthood is everlasting—without beginning of days or end of years; without father, mother, etc. If there is no change of ordinances, there is no change of Priesthood. Wherever the ordinances of the Gospel are administered, there is the Priesthood.

“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. Paul speaks of the Church coming to an innumerable company of angels—to God the Judge of all—the spirits of just men made perfect; to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant [see Hebrews 12:22–24].”<sup>4</sup>

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**Prophets who held priesthood keys in ancient times have joined in bringing about the work of the last dispensation.**

“I saw Adam in the valley of Adam-ondi-Ahman. He called together his children and blessed them with a patriarchal blessing. The Lord appeared in their midst, and he (Adam) blessed them all, and foretold what should befall them to the latest generation.

“This is why Adam blessed his posterity; he wanted to bring them into the presence of God. They looked for a city, etc., [‘whose builder and maker is God’—Heb. 11:10]. Moses sought to bring the children of Israel into the presence of God, through the power of the Priesthood, but he could not. In the first ages of the world they tried to establish the same thing; and there were Eliases raised up who tried to restore these very glories, but did not obtain them; but they prophesied of a day when this glory would be revealed. Paul spoke of the dispensation of the fullness of times, when God would gather together all things in one, etc. [see Ephesians 1:10]; and those men to whom these keys have been given, will have to be there; and they without us cannot be made perfect.



*“I saw Adam in the valley of Adam-ondi-Ahman. He called together his children and blessed them with a patriarchal blessing. The Lord appeared in their midst.”*

“These men are in heaven, but their children are on the earth. Their bowels yearn over us. God sends down men for this reason. ‘And the Son of Man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that give offense and them that do iniquity.’ [Matthew 13:41.] All these authoritative characters will come down and join hand in hand in bringing about this work.

“The Kingdom of Heaven is like a grain of mustard seed. The mustard seed is small, but brings forth a large tree, and the fowls lodge in the branches. [See Mark 4:30–32.] The fowls are the angels. Thus angels come down, combine together to gather their children, and gather them. We cannot be made perfect without them, nor they without us; when these things are done, the Son of Man will descend, the Ancient of Days sit; we may come to an innumerable company of angels, have communion with and receive instructions from them.”<sup>5</sup>

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**The priesthood ordinances have been established from the beginning and must be kept in the way God has appointed.**

“Adam . . . was the first man, who is spoken of in Daniel as being the ‘Ancient of Days’ [Daniel 7:9], or in other words, the first and oldest of all, the great, grand progenitor of whom it is said in another place he is Michael, because he was the first and father of all, not only by progeny, but the first to hold the spiritual blessings, to whom was made known the plan of ordinances for the salvation of his posterity unto the end, and to whom Christ was first revealed, and through whom Christ has been revealed from heaven, and will continue to be revealed from henceforth. Adam holds the keys of the dispensation of the fullness of times; i.e., the dispensation of all the times have been and will be revealed through him from the beginning to Christ, and from Christ to the end of all the dispensations that are to be revealed. . . .

“. . . [God] set the ordinances to be the same forever and ever, and set Adam to watch over them, to reveal them from heaven to man, or to send angels to reveal them. ‘Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?’ [Hebrews 1:14.]

“These angels are under the direction of Michael or Adam, who acts under the direction of the Lord. From the above quotation we learn that Paul perfectly understood the purposes of God in relation to His connection with man, and that glorious and perfect order which He established in Himself, whereby He sent forth power, revelations, and glory.

“God will not acknowledge that which He has not called, ordained, and chosen. In the beginning God called Adam by His own voice. ‘And the Lord called unto Adam and said unto him, Where art thou? And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, and hid myself.’ [Genesis 3:9–10.] Adam received commandments and instructions from God: this was the order from the beginning.

“That he received revelations, commandments and ordinances at the beginning is beyond the power of controversy; else

how did they begin to offer sacrifices to God in an acceptable manner? And if they offered sacrifices they must be authorized by ordination. We read in Genesis [4:4] that Abel brought of the firstlings of the flock and the fat thereof, and the Lord had respect to Abel and to his offering. . . .

“This, then, is the nature of the Priesthood; every man holding the Presidency of his dispensation, and one man holding the Presidency of them all, even Adam; and Adam receiving his Presidency and authority from the Lord, but cannot receive a fullness until Christ shall present the Kingdom to the Father, which shall be at the end of the last dispensation.

“The power, glory and blessings of the Priesthood could not continue with those who received ordination only as their righteousness continued; for Cain also being authorized to offer sacrifice, but not offering it in righteousness, was cursed. It signifies, then, that the ordinances must be kept in the very way God has appointed; otherwise their Priesthood will prove a cursing instead of a blessing.”<sup>6</sup>

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**The Melchizedek Priesthood is the channel  
through which God reveals Himself and His purposes.**

“There are two Priesthoods spoken of in the Scriptures, viz., the Melchizedek and the Aaronic or Levitical. Although there are two Priesthoods, yet the Melchizedek Priesthood comprehends the Aaronic or Levitical Priesthood, and is the grand head, and holds the highest authority which pertains to the Priesthood, and the keys of the Kingdom of God in all ages of the world to the latest posterity on the earth, and is the channel through which all knowledge, doctrine, the plan of salvation, and every important matter is revealed from heaven.

“Its institution was prior to ‘the foundation of this earth, or the morning stars sang together, or the Sons of God shouted for joy’ [see Job 38:4–7], and is the highest and holiest Priesthood, and is after the order of the Son of God, and all other Priesthoods are only parts, ramifications, powers and blessings belonging to the same, and are held, controlled, and directed by it. It is the channel through which the Almighty commenced revealing His glory at the beginning of the creation of this earth, and

through which He has continued to reveal Himself to the children of men to the present time, and through which He will make known His purposes to the end of time.”<sup>7</sup>

“The power of the Melchizedek Priesthood is to have the power of ‘endless lives;’ for the everlasting covenant cannot be broken. . . . What was the power of Melchizedek? ’Twas not the Priesthood of Aaron which administers in outward ordinances, and the offering of sacrifices. Those holding the fullness of the Melchizedek Priesthood are kings and priests of the Most High God, holding the keys of power and blessings. In fact, that priesthood is a perfect law of theocracy, and stands as God to give laws to the people, administering endless lives to the sons and daughters of Adam. . . .

“ ‘Without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like unto the Son of God, abideth a priest continually.’ [Hebrews 7:3.] The Melchizedek Priesthood holds the right from the eternal God, and not by descent from father and mother; and that priesthood is as eternal as God Himself, having neither beginning of days nor end of life. . . .

“ . . . The Levitical [Aaronic] Priesthood, consisting of priests to administer in outward ordinance, [is] made without an oath; but the Priesthood of Melchizedek is by an oath and covenant.”<sup>8</sup>

“The Melchizedek High Priesthood [is] no other than the Priesthood of the Son of God; . . . there are certain ordinances which belong to the Priesthood, from which flow certain results. . . . One great privilege of the Priesthood is to obtain revelations of the mind and will of God. It is also the privilege of the Melchizedek Priesthood to reprove, rebuke, and admonish, as well as to receive revelation.”<sup>9</sup>

“All priesthood is Melchizedek; but there are different portions or degrees of it. . . . All the prophets had the Melchizedek Priesthood.”<sup>10</sup>

“I advise all to go on to perfection, and search deeper and deeper into the mysteries of Godliness. A man can do nothing for himself unless God direct him in the right way; and the priesthood is for that purpose.”<sup>11</sup>

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**A man must be authorized of God and ordained to the priesthood to administer in the ordinances of salvation.**

*Articles of Faith 1:5*: “We believe that a man must be called of God, by prophecy, and by the laying on of hands by those who are in authority, to preach the Gospel and administer in the ordinances thereof.”<sup>12</sup>

“We believe that no man can administer salvation through the gospel, to the souls of men, in the name of Jesus Christ, except he is authorized from God, by revelation, or by being ordained by some one whom God hath sent by revelation, as it is written by Paul, Romans 10:14, ‘And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach, except they be sent?’ And I will ask, how can they be sent without a revelation, or some other visible display of the manifestation of God? And again, Hebrews 5:4, ‘And no man taketh this honor unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron.’—And I would ask, how was Aaron called, but by revelation?”<sup>13</sup>

“The angel told good old Cornelius that he must send for Peter to learn how to be saved [see Acts 10:21–22]: Peter could baptise, and angels could not, so long as there were legal officers in the flesh holding the keys of the kingdom, or the authority of the priesthood. There is one evidence still further on this point, and that is that Jesus himself when he appeared to Paul on his way to Damascus, did not inform him how he could be saved. He had set in the church firstly Apostles, and secondly prophets, for the work of the ministry, perfecting of the saints, etc. [see Ephesians 4:11–12]; and as the grand rule of heaven was that nothing should ever be done on earth without revealing the secret to his servants the prophets, agreeable to Amos 3:7, so Paul could not learn so much from the Lord relative to his duty in the common salvation of man, as he could from one of Christ’s ambassadors called with the same heavenly calling of the Lord, and endowed with the same power from on high—so that what they loosed on earth, should be loosed in heaven; and what they bound on earth should be bound in heaven [see Matthew 16:19].”<sup>14</sup>



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

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**It is a great privilege to magnify any office of the priesthood.**

“[The] Priesthood . . . may be illustrated by the figure of the human body, which has different members, which have different offices to perform; all are necessary in their place, and the body is not complete without all the members. . . . If a Priest understands his duty, his calling, and ministry, and preaches by the Holy Ghost, his enjoyment is as great as if he were one of the Presidency; and his services are necessary in the body, as are also those of Teachers and Deacons.”<sup>15</sup>

*Eliza R. Snow reported:* “[Joseph Smith gave] instructions respecting the different offices, and the necessity of every individual acting in the sphere allotted him or her, and filling the several offices to which they are appointed. He spoke of the

disposition of many men to consider the lower offices in the Church dishonorable, and to look with jealous eyes upon the standing of others who are called to preside over them; that it was the folly and nonsense of the human heart for a person to be aspiring to other stations than those to which they are appointed of God for them to occupy; that it was better for individuals to magnify their respective callings. . . . Everyone should aspire only to magnify his own office and calling.”<sup>16</sup>

## Suggestions for Study and Teaching

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Consider these ideas as you study the chapter or as you prepare to teach. For additional help, see pages vii–xii.

- Review the account of Peter, James, and John conferring the Melchizedek Priesthood on Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery (page 101). What blessings have you and your family received because the Melchizedek Priesthood has been restored?
- Throughout this chapter, Joseph Smith testifies of a chain of priesthood authority through a succession of prophets. Why do you think this doctrine was important for him to teach in his day? Why do we need to understand this doctrine today? How does the chain of authority that Joseph Smith describes relate to a man’s priesthood line of authority?
- As you read this chapter, note the Prophet Joseph Smith’s use of the words *everlasting*, *eternal*, and *eternity*. What do these terms tell you about the nature and importance of the priesthood?
- Joseph Smith taught that God “set the ordinances to be the same forever and ever” and that “the ordinances must be kept in the very way God has appointed” (pages 107–8). How do these teachings increase your understanding of the ordinances of the gospel?
- Review the Prophet Joseph Smith’s teachings about the Melchizedek Priesthood (pages 108–9). Think about how the Melchizedek Priesthood is necessary in all aspects of the gospel. What are your thoughts and feelings as you contemplate the Melchizedek Priesthood in this way?

- Review the final two paragraphs in the chapter (pages 111–12). How have you seen that each member of the Church plays an important part in the Lord’s work? What can result if we “look with jealous eyes” at those who are called to serve as leaders in the Church? Think about what you can do to magnify your own calling.

*Related Scriptures:* Alma 13:1–12; D&C 27:5–14; 84:33–44, 109–10; 107:6–20; 121:34–46

### Notes

1. John Taylor, *Deseret News: Semi-Weekly*, Apr. 18, 1882, p. 1; paragraph divisions altered.
2. John Taylor, *Deseret News: Semi-Weekly*, Mar. 20, 1877, p. 1.
3. *History of the Church*, 4:425; from the minutes of a Church conference held on Oct. 3, 1841, in Nauvoo, Illinois, published in *Times and Seasons*, Oct. 15, 1841, p. 577.
4. *History of the Church*, 3:385–88; punctuation modernized; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith about July 1839 in Commerce, Illinois; reported by Willard Richards.
5. *History of the Church*, 3:388–89; first set of bracketed words in second paragraph in original; punctuation modernized; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith about July 1839 in Commerce, Illinois; reported by Willard Richards.
6. *History of the Church*, 4:207–9; punctuation modernized; from a discourse prepared by Joseph Smith and read at a Church conference held on Oct. 5, 1840, in Nauvoo, Illinois.
7. *History of the Church*, 4:207; spelling and punctuation modernized; from a discourse prepared by Joseph Smith and read at a Church conference held on Oct. 5, 1840, in Nauvoo, Illinois.
8. *History of the Church*, 5:554–55; capitalization modernized; paragraph divisions altered; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Aug. 27, 1843, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Willard Richards and William Clayton; see also appendix, page 562, item 3.
9. *History of the Church*, 2:477; punctuation modernized; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Apr. 6, 1837, in Kirtland, Ohio; reported by *Messenger and Advocate*, Apr. 1837, p. 487.
10. Quoted by William Clayton, reporting a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Jan. 5, 1841, in Nauvoo, Illinois; in L. John Nuttall, “Extracts from William Clayton’s Private Book,” p. 5, Journals of L. John Nuttall, 1857–1904, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah; copy in Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.
11. *History of the Church*, 6:363; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on May 12, 1844, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Thomas Bullock.
12. Articles of Faith 1:5.
13. Letter from Joseph Smith to Isaac Galland, Mar. 22, 1839, Liberty Jail, Liberty, Missouri, published in *Times and Seasons*, Feb. 1840, p. 54; punctuation and capitalization modernized.
14. “Baptism,” an editorial published in *Times and Seasons*, Sept. 1, 1842, p. 905; grammar modernized; Joseph Smith was the editor of the periodical.
15. *History of the Church*, 2:478; paragraph divisions altered; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Apr. 6, 1837, in Kirtland, Ohio; reported by *Messenger and Advocate*, Apr. 1837, p. 487.
16. *History of the Church*, 4:603, 606; paragraph divisions altered; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Apr. 28, 1842, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Eliza R. Snow; see also appendix, page 562, item 3.