

Priesthood, Women, and Early Temple Worship

Stake Education Class, 21 March 2019

By Dave LeFevre

Description: The title is too short to reflect the actual content, which is Priesthood Restoration; Priesthood and Temple Restrictions; Women and the Priesthood in the Early Church; and Temple Worship in the Early Church. These topics are related, though each could take several classes each to discuss. These minimal notes will summarize some key information on each of these topics and most importantly, point the learner to additional resources for more information.

Priesthood Restoration

For many reasons, we typically simplify our discussion of priesthood restoration to two events: The 15 May 1829 visit of John the Baptist to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery and the subsequent visit of Peter, James, and John to the same two men. But a fuller understanding of priesthood restoration requires an examination of several other events that complete the picture. The picture that emerges is an expanding understanding on the part of Joseph Smith and other Church leaders what the priesthood was, what authority they received with it, and what rights (keys) they received at each stage along the way.

John the Baptist Visit

This event is well-known, especially because it is canonized in Joseph Smith—History in the Pearl of Great Price. But the accounts were written several years later when Joseph Smith’s and others’ understanding of the priesthood had evolved significantly. It’s not clear exactly what Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery understood they had authority to do immediately after John’s visit, except to baptize and ordain each other to the same priesthood, as John had done to them. There certainly was no known structure of Aaronic priesthood offices such as we have now, no association with the sacrament, or similar authority or abilities.

Peter, James, and John

The visit of Peter, James, and John is alluded to in the Joseph Smith—History account (JS-H 1:72) but the date of this event was not recorded. However, we can get very close by considering relevant historical information.

Referring to the Melchizedek Priesthood, John told Joseph and Oliver that they would receive it shortly. Joseph Smith did not record any details about this experience, though there are references to it in the Doctrine and Covenants (18:9; 20:23; 27:12; 128:20). This event happened as Joseph and Oliver were returning from a visit to Joseph Knight in Colesville (D&C 128:20). As they walked along the river, Peter, James, and John appeared, “declaring themselves as possessing the keys of the kingdom, and of the dispensation of the fullness of times!” (D&C 128:20).

Oliver wrote some details about it: “I was also present with Joseph when the Melchizedek priesthood was conferred by the holy angles of god.—which we then confirmed on each other by the will and commandment of god. This priesthood is also to remain upon the earth untill the Last remnant of time. This holy priesthood we conferred upon many. And is just as good and valid as if god had conferred it in person.”¹

In terms of the date, it has to be after 15 May 1829, but how long? Larry C. Porter did some excellent work several decades ago that is still helpful in narrowing it down.² According to his research, the first mention of the priesthood is in D&C 18:9,

¹ Cook, Revelations, 23.

² See <https://www.lds.org/ensign/1979/06/dating-the-restoration-of-the-melchizedek-priesthood>.

which was in early June 1829.³ Joseph and Oliver moved to Fayette, NY, leaving sometime around June 1, and they had received the priesthood before they left, based on D&C 128:20. Because that scripture also declares that the event took place between Colesville and Harmony, it has to be when Joseph and Oliver were traveling twenty-eight miles between Joseph's house in Harmony and the Knight's home in Colesville, sometime between 15 May and the end of the month. One account from Addison Everett, who said he heard it from Joseph Smith in 1844, explained how Joseph and Oliver were arrested in Colesville but managed to escape into the woods. As they traveled at night in the mud and water, Oliver prayed, "O Lord, How long Brother Joseph have we got to endure this thing." Everett stated that next Peter, James, and John appeared and gave them the priesthood. However, there are some problems with the account, including the attorney mentioned by Everett not being involved with Joseph Smith until the summer of 1830. Nevertheless, a second source, Erastus Snow, said a similar thing in 1882 (without mentioning the attorney), so it could be that Everett simply conflated a couple of events but got the priesthood ordination narrative correct.⁴

In an upcoming publication, historian Michael McKay documents the details of Hyrum Smith and Samuel Smith's visits to their brother, Joseph, in Harmony, and ties that into accounts of the visit of Peter, James, and John. As a result of this research, McKay believes that he can narrow this encounter to within one or two days at the end of May.⁵

While we describe this appearance as the restoration of the Melchizedek priesthood today, it is clear that was the application of later understanding. At the time, it appears that Joseph Smith didn't perceive this visit in those terms and still sought for the full restoration of priesthood authority needed to direct the Church.

Upper Chamber of Father Whitmer's Home

D&C 128:21 mentions "the voice of God in the chamber of old Father Whitmer, In Fayette, Seneca county." In a history written by clerks but overseen by Joseph in Nauvoo, it records that they brethren were anxious to fulfill the promise made:

that provided we continued faithful; we should also have the Melchizedek Priesthood, which holds the authority of the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost. We had for some time made this matter a subject of humble prayer, and at length we got together in the Chamber of M^r Whitmer's house in order more particularly to seek of the Lord what we now so earnestly desired: and here to our unspeakable satisfaction did we realize the truth of the Saviour's promise; "Ask, and you shall receive, seek, and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you;" for we had not long been engaged in solemn and fervent prayer, when the word of the Lord, came unto us in the Chamber, commanding us; that I should ordain Oliver Cowdery to be an Elder in the Church of Jesus Christ, and that he also should ordain me to the same office, ~~according~~ and then <to> ordain others as it should be made known unto us, from time to time: we were however commanded to defer this our ordination untill, such times, as it should be practicable to have our brethren, who had been and who should be baptized, assembled together, when we must have their sanction to our thus proceeding to ordain each other, and have them decide by vote whether they were willing to accept us as spiritual teachers, or not, when also we were commanded to bless bread and break it with them, and to take wine, bless it, and drink it with them, afterward proceed to ordain each other according to commandment, then call out such men as the Spirit should dictate, and ordain them, and then attend to the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost, upon all those whom we had previously baptized; doing all things in the name of the Lord.⁶

Thus in the minds of Joseph and others, the experience in the upper room at the Whitmer home (where the Church was later organized) was where they received the authority or permission to organize the Church, confer the Holy Ghost, and administer the sacrament, though they needed to wait until the Church was organized on 6 April 1830 to do all that. They may have had the priesthood prior, but it was this commandment that made that priesthood operable.

³ JSP, D1:69.

⁴ See an excerpt from BYU Studies 35:4 that documents known comments about the priesthood restoration and provides some analysis, for more details: <https://byustudies.byu.edu/content/priesthood-restoration-documents>.

⁵ Details forthcoming later in 2019 with the published volume; information based on personal conversations with McKay.

⁶ JS History, vol. A-1, 26–27 (<https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-a-1-23-december-1805-30-august-1834/33>).

Unfolding of Priesthood Offices

Between 1830 and 1835, additional revelations directed additional organizations and priesthood offices. Bishops, high priests, high council, presidencies, Quorum of the Twelve, and the First Presidency all came about during this time, though offices, roles, and the hierarchy continued to evolve during Joseph's lifetime and continues today. For example, the Twelve were first called as a traveling high council with the responsibility to take the gospel to the world. Their responsibilities continued to increase until by Nauvoo, the Twelve were the second highest governing council in the Church, and upon Joseph Smith's death, took over the running of the Church.

Kirtland House of the Lord, 3 April 1836

Shortly after the dedication of the House of the Lord in Kirtland, Joseph and Oliver pulled the curtains around them at the Melchizedek priesthood pulpit end of the room and silently prayed. Soon a series of four visions opened—Jesus Christ, Moses, Elias, and Elijah. The latter three restored keys to the men that immediately triggered a series of activities—the expansion of missionary work outside of the United States and Canada and an expansion of the notion of temple ordinances that led to eternal families, the endowment, and more. This seems to have been the final step in the multi-year activities of priesthood restoration.

Priesthood and Temple Restrictions

Blacks as members and ordained missionaries in Joseph Smith's lifetime: Elijah Able and Jane Manning (James).

William I. Appleby, Q. Walker and Enoch Lewis, and amalgamation. "Now dear Br I wish to know if this is the order of God or tolerated in this Church ie to ordain Negroes to the Priesthood, and allow amalgamation. If it is I desire to know it, as I have yet got to learn it." ". . . in look for a Br. In the Church, I called at a House,--a coloured man resided there; I set myself down for a few moments. presently in came quite a good looking White Woman, about 22 years old I should think, with blushing cheeks, and was introduced to me as the negro's wife. 'Oh! Woman, thought I, where is thy shame . . . Respect for thy family, thyself—for thy offspring and above all the law of God?' (from *Religion of a Different Color*).

Paul Reeve: "It is impossible to understand Mormonism's evolving racial views about priesthood without understanding Mormonism's closely linked views on interracial marriage. It is equally impossible to understand these positions without first understanding Mormonism's racialization at the hands of outsiders."

Black Pete: Joined the Church in 1830 and soon claimed to receive revelations that he should marry a white woman. Soon left the Church but his example started the accusations that the Church was encouraging race mixing (which it was not).

William Phelps 1833 article in Jackson County about how blacks could (but might not want to) come to Missouri ("Free People of Color") prompted the persecution there, a factor in driving the Church out of the county and later the state. Missourians (slavery was legal) saw it as a call to blacks to rise up and seek for freedom, which would involve shedding white blood, they were certain. Riots of Jackson County happened just four days after Phelps' article.

Converts in the South included both slave owners and slaves, which posed a challenge. Other converts included strong abolitionist voices, such as Phelps. Early Church policies of allowing blacks quite radical for the time. Other churches had separate congregations. This early universalism opened the Church to accusations from others of race mixing, which in the end, resulted in the racial constrictions of the 1850s.

When JS ran for president, his platform included a plan to free the slaves by purchasing them from their owners using government funds. He expressed the idea that they would be equal with whites if freed from slavery (another radical idea for the time—"change their situation with the white & they would be like them") but also advocated strict laws to make interracial marriage illegal ("I would confine them by strict Laws to their own Species").

William McCrary at Winter Quarters, 1846-47: A runaway slave, married to Lucy Stanton, a white woman, who also courted other white women to be his plural wives (and committed adultery with several), was driven out by Church leaders after eight apostles interviewed him, even as they affirmed that black men were welcome among them and could hold the priesthood—

but also was the first discussion about priesthood restrictions and the scriptural justification for it, drawn from Genesis and the book of Abraham.

1852 announcement of the open practice of polygamy contributed to outsider views that the Church promoted amalgamation. A marriage practice considered barbaric by most was coupled with racial concerns to make Church members 'less white' to most Americans.

1852 also year that Utah leg. made Utah essentially a slave state, to allow Southern converts to bring their slaves with them without freeing them (didn't use the word "slave" but rather "servant," intending it to sound better than it was). With this, Brigham Young announced the first priesthood restriction, using scripture (Genesis and the curse of Cain) to assert a divine curse on blacks. Essentially, the priesthood restriction was a Church government issue, so make it impossible for blacks to govern whites. The Cain interpretation was common among Protestants of the day. Young: "When the Lord God cursed old Cain, He said, 'Until the last drop of Abel's blood receives the priesthood, and enjoys the blessings of the same Cain shall bear the curse.'" Orson Pratt spoke strongly against BY's position, but the legislation passed and that began more than a century of restrictions on blacks in the Church.

Black members who already held the priesthood or who were members since early days appealed to have their endowments and sealings done but were denied (Elijah Able and Jane Manning James, prominently, but others as well). This continued with each new president. Jane was last of the original black members to die in early 1900s. Joseph F. Smith, president, spoke at her funeral, praising her faithfulness. Shortly after her death, however, the policy of not ordaining blacks became Church doctrine and policy attributed to Joseph Smith, not Brigham Young, and so it was taught until the 1970s.

In the 1960s, Church leaders began to confront mixed-race family issues. Requests were handled on a case-by-case basis and typically the answer was no, but there were some sealings of mix-race families that were allowed (parents to children). In 1968, black members were permitted to do baptisms for the dead, something that not been permitted before. Then in 1978, President Kimball received the revelation extending all priesthood and temple blessings to all members, regardless of race—just before the Sao Paulo temple dedication, which allowed hundreds of members there to attend the dedication and the temple who would not have been able to do so under the old policy.

Women and the Priesthood in the Early Church

Formation of the RS as the women's quorum, equivalent to the elders. [See quotes from RS minutes]

Women giving blessings of health to other women and to children in Nauvoo and Utah, approved by early leaders (including JS). Finally ended for many reasons—improved health care (so greater reliance on medical practices over faith healing only), a concern that it was mimicking the priesthood and confusing some, and a general consolidation of authority over ordinances and practices as the Church standardized.

Women in temple worship—Emma received first endowments, then administered it to other women.

Temple Worship in the Early Church

Kirtland House of the Lord: Washings and anointings but also the "endowment of power," a singular event that prepared them for taking the gospel to the world. Women part of open services in Kirtland but not any temple ordinances.

Baptisms for the dead first done in Mississippi River, then in Nauvoo temple unfinished basement (once the font was completed). Women and men baptized interchangeably at first, later in Utah standardized just men for men, women for women.

First endowments in upper room, Red Brick store, May 1842. Only men at first, but after RS formed and Emma accepted plural marriage, women were included (28 September 1843). Endowments took several hours, moving from 'room' to 'room' (space divided by curtains or blankets) with lectures. A meal was often included at the end, and in a few cases, a dance with a live band.

Sealings were first done at various locations, then in the temple in Nauvoo once sufficiently completed.

Early Utah

When the Saints arrived in Utah, at least one endowment was performed on top of Ensign Peak, the hill at the north end of the Salt Lake valley, for Addison Pratt in 1849, just prior to him leaving on a mission. Soon the Council House was built (Dec 1850) which was designed as government offices but was also used for endowments at other times; 2,222 endowments were done in that building. In 1855, the Endowment House was opened, and all work switched to that building. Like the Kirtland building, it was called “House of the Lord” and had all the rooms that would later be built in the Salt Lake and other temples, though on a much smaller scale—washing and anointing rooms, Garden Room, World Room, and Terrestrial Room were on the first floor, with the Celestial and Sealing Rooms on the second floor and a baptismal font in the basement. Located where the Church Office Building is today, the Endowment House was used for live endowments only at first, then later for both living and dead, from May 1855 to September 1889 there were 54,170 live endowments, 31,052 live marriage sealings, 37,715 sealings for the dead, 694 second anointings, and 134,053 baptisms for the dead. When the St. George temple was first complete, Brigham Young shut it down, telling people to go to St. George. But in 1877, John Taylor reopened it for young couples and older people who had a difficult time with the long journey.

Work for the Dead

The first endowments for the dead were done in the St. George temple in 1877. The President of the temple, Wilford Woodruff, was charge to write down the endowment ceremony for the first time (several had it memorized up to that point but it had never been recorded). With editing by Brigham Young, Jr., John Nuttall, and John McAllister, they took two months to get it right. This helped keep the endowment consistent from temple to temple as they were built in Logan (1884), Manti (1888), Salt Lake (1893), and later Laie, Hawaii (1919), Cardston, Alberta, Canada (1923), Mesa, Arizona (1927), and Idaho Falls (1945).

Additional Changes

1906, First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve stopped using wine in their sacrament administrations in the temple.

1909, Word of Wisdom became part of the requirements to enter the temple, though they made allowances for older people who would have a hard time keeping that commandment so abruptly.

1937, baptisms for the living disallowed inside temples.

1940, ring ceremony removed from the marriage sealing; rooms with altars for private prayers removed.

Swiss temple (1955), Los Angeles temple (1956), New Zealand and London temples (1958), Oakland temple (1964), Provo and Ogden (1972), Sao Paulo temple (1978), Seattle (1980), Jordon River (1981).

1955, Gordon B. Hinckley asked by David O. McKay to find a way to translate the temple ceremonies into many languages for the Swiss temple. He suggested a filmed version of the endowment, which also made moving from room to room unnecessary. It was filmed first in the fifth floor of the Salt Lake temple, then at a special sound stage at BYU. The first creation sequence was licensed from the Disney movie, *Fantasia*. This was what was shown in the temple films until 1990.

Starting 1983, many smaller temples (and still some larger ones) began to be dedicated:

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|------------|-------------|------------|
| • 1983 – 6 | • 1996 – 2 | • 2005 – 3 |
| • 1984 – 6 | • 1997 – 2 | • 2006 – 1 |
| • 1985 – 5 | • 1998 – 2 | • 2008 – 4 |
| • 1986 – 3 | • 1999 – 14 | • 2009 – 2 |
| • 1989 – 2 | • 2000 – 31 | • 2010 – 4 |
| • 1990 – 1 | • 2001 – 5 | • 2011 – 2 |
| • 1993 – 1 | • 2002 – 6 | • 2012 – 4 |
| • 1994 – 1 | • 2003 – 2 | • 2013 – 1 |
| • 1995 – 1 | • 2004 – 3 | • 2014 – 3 |

- 2015 – 5
- 2016 – 6
- 2017 – 4
- 2018 – 2
- 2019 – 1
- Being renovated – 11
- Under construction – 12
- Announced – 27

Garments

In Nauvoo, you brought your own long underwear (white “union suits” down to wrists and ankles, up to neck, included a collar) and a worker cut the marks into it, which you then sewed up at home to make them permanent. In Carthage Jail, Joseph and Hyrum had removed their garments because of the heat, while Willard Richards kept his on. Brigham Young attributed Richard’s escaping uninjured to that and thus started the notion that garments could protect you from physical harm. (In 1998, the Church official discounted the idea of the garment being a shield from physical harm but rather a protection against temptation and evil.) In 1923, the collar was removed, buttons replaced tie-strings, and women could cut off the sleeves to the elbow and legs to the knees. In 1930, men could also wear the shorter garments (though the long ones were still required in the temple itself). In 1975, patrons could choose which style they wore in the temple. In 1979, the first two-piece garments were introduced.

Second Anointing

Introduced by Joseph Smith in 1843, a small group received this ordinance, becoming part of the Quorum of the Anointed. It was to confirm the anointing done prior to the endowment to make people kings and priests, queens and priestesses, and seal people up to their exaltation. The ordinance had two parts. First, in the temple, men and women were anointed with oil. Then second, at home, women symbolically prepared their husbands for death and resurrection, following the pattern of the woman who anointed Jesus prior to his death, by anointing his feet and wiping it with her hair. This sealed them both up together for eternal life.

In Nauvoo, 603 people received this ordinance. In the Endowment House, 694 people received it. At first bishops could recommend people, but as the Church grew, it was limited to stake presidents. Finally, in 1926, the First Presidency reserved that right to themselves and the Quorum of the Twelve. The ordinance is still performed today on a very limited basis (typically only General Authorities and their wives) but the First Presidency has confirmed since the days of Heber J. Grant that the second anointing is not required for exaltation.

Important Reading

The Church has several topic essays on these issues that should be consulted: See the list on the Gospel Topics pages, <https://www.lds.org/topics> and <https://www.lds.org/topics/essays>.

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