

WHAT IS YOUR AUTHORITY?

An examination of the Mormon Priesthoods in the light of God's Word, the Bible

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints claims to be the only true church on earth today.¹ They also claim to hold the only true priesthood authority.² Supposedly the Aaronic priesthood was conferred on Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery on May 15, 1829, and then, sometime in June of the same year, Peter, James and John supposedly appeared and conferred the Melchizedek priesthood to them.³ When Christians attempt to confront the teachings of the LDS Church, the frequent response of the Mormon is “What is your authority?” Mormons truly believe they have a special authority from God as presented by the priesthood. But, the question we must ask is this—does the Bible support these ideas? Does the Bible present a special priesthood authority as the Mormon Church claims? Let's examine this idea.

THE AARONIC PRIESTHOOD

The presentation of the Aaronic priesthood as found in the Bible demonstrates clearly that Aaronic priests were ordained to that position in quite a different way than LDS men are today.⁴ The duties of the Aaronic priests were also inconsistent with those of the priests of Mormonism.⁵ What is even more important for our purposes is the fact that the requirements for the Biblical Aaronic priests are very different from those of Mormon teaching. The priesthood of Aaron is reserved solely and eternally⁶ for the descendants of Aaron. Hence, the only ones who can hold the Aaronic priesthood, according to the Bible, are those who are the physical offspring of the tribe of Levi, the family of Aaron.⁷

When we look at LDS practice, however, we find that in the individual's “Patriarchal blessing” he is told to what tribe he belongs. Normally, the tribe is that of Ephraim or Manassah. We have never encountered any Mormon who claimed to be of the tribe of Levi, let alone the family of Aaron. Clearly the Mormon person must not be claiming to hold the *same* priesthood as spoken of in the Bible, as very few of the members of the LDS Church are Jewish in lineage!

The most telling objection to be raised to the entire idea of a modern functioning Aaronic priesthood is the simple teaching of the New Testament that in the one-time sacrifice of Jesus Christ the entire sacrificial system, along with its priesthood duties, was fulfilled and completed. To go back to the old system is to undo the work of Jesus at Calvary! For example—the veil of the Temple in Jerusalem was torn in two from top to bottom when Christ died (Matthew 27:51). This veil had stood for the separating wall between God and man that

was bridged but once a year by the one high priest⁸ when he offered the sacrifice of atonement for the people.⁹ Christ, however, offered the final sacrifice and in doing so opened the way permanently for all who would come to God by Him. Christ did not *do away* with the priesthood—rather he *fulfilled* it—its purpose was done, finished, completed.¹⁰ Since this is so, anyone today who wishes to revive the old ways of the Aaronic priesthood sadly misunderstands the work of Christ on the cross.¹¹

THE MELCHIZEDEK PRIESTHOOD

Much more important than the “Aaronic” priesthood in Mormon thought is the “Holy Priesthood after the Order of the Son of God” or the “Melchizedek Priesthood.” This priesthood “comprehends the Aaronic or Levitical Priesthood, and is the grand head, and holds the highest authority which pertains to the priesthood... and is the channel through which all knowledge, doctrine, the plan of salvation and every important matter is revealed from heaven.”¹² Obviously this supposed authority is very important to the LDS Church. But again, does the Bible support such a teaching?

Let us first examine the qualifications of the “Melchizedek” priest as given in the Bible. Hebrews 7:3 tells us that Melchizedek was “without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, or end of life...” Only Melchizedek and Christ meet those qualifications,¹³ for this priesthood is unique—no one but Melchizedek and Christ has ever held it. Indeed, Hebrews 7:3 also makes clear that Melchizedek is only *like* the son of God—he was not the pattern that Jesus followed but rather he was a “type”—the mere reflection of the full expression of the Son of God. This priesthood is also seen, on the basis of this passage, to be one that is not passed on from one to another¹⁴ like the Aaronic priesthood was.

The work of the Melchizedek priest is seen in Hebrews 7:24-25, where the Bible says, “But this man (Jesus), because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore, he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.” The priesthood Jesus holds is His “unchangeably” or “permanently.” Some translate it by the word “intransmissible”¹⁵ indicating that no one else can hold this priesthood. Though some would argue with the translation of the word, the fact is clear that the person holding this priesthood by right of eternal life is able to save completely those who come unto God by him—a

claim that few Mormons would knowingly make. However, if the LDS Church is going to declare that it has this priesthood, it must face the fact that it is professing to have that which according to the Bible, is the property of Jesus Christ alone.

A passage that is frequently cited in this discussion is Hebrews 5:6 which mentions the “order of Melchizedek.” The LDS Church teaches that this indicates that there was an “order” of priests after Melchizedek—that it is a priesthood that is passed on much like the Aaronic.¹⁶ The whole point of the discourse, however, is just the opposite—the priesthood of Jesus is superior to that of Aaron and one of the reasons is that it is *not* passed from one to another. It is not invested in men who will die, but is given only to the One who has died and lives on forever, the Lord Jesus Christ! To miss this point is to misunderstand the entire argument of Hebrews! It must also be pointed out that the word translated “order” means “of the same kind”¹⁷ or “nature, quality, manner, condition, appearance.”¹⁸ It does not refer to a lineage of priests, but rather to the *kind* of priest. It must again be stressed that Jesus’ priesthood is His *uniquely* and that *no one* can claim to hold what is His by right as the one great High Priest, the one Mediator between God and man (I Timothy 2:5). Therefore, the LDS Church’s claim to hold this priesthood is without Biblical or historical basis,¹⁹ and far more importantly, it strikes at the very core of the work and office of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We do not pretend that these few points cover all there is to say on this subject.—such a discussion would not be practical in this small space. We do feel, however, that the above information makes it very clear that the Mormon view of “authority” is separate from, and contradicted by, the Word of God.

AN IMPORTANT DECISION

Given the Bible’s teaching about the “priesthood” as claimed by the LDS Church, the individual Mormon is left with a decision to make—will he follow the teachings of his church, or the teachings of Jesus Christ and his apostles as contained in the Bible? In making this decision, it is important for the Mormon to realize that the *real* Jesus Christ is vastly superior to the concept he or she has been taught. He is not simply one of the many offspring of a god who was once a man—He is the one true God of creation, who holds all things together by His power (Col. 1:15-17). His priesthood is far above anything that we humans can imagine, and His work cannot be imitated by men who claim religious “authority.” He does not dispense His power and authority through man-made channels, but rather He gives His real authority to *each and every person* who comes to Him by faith.²⁰ There is no separate “class” of believers to whom some special priesthood is given—all

believers in the true Jesus Christ are “kings and priests unto God”—not priests that stand before God for others as in the Old Testament—but priests *unto God* in that they have direct access to God through the Lord Jesus Christ. This kind of authority is not “passed on” through religious ceremony, but is given by the Sovereign Holy Spirit at the time of conversion.

At this present time you may reject what we have said. Our plea to you would be that you would remember these words, for *someday*, when you need a **true** foundation—a solid basis in real truth, you will need to deal with what we have said. When you desire a full and vital personal relationship with the living God rather than the dry husks of formal religion, remember His truth as presented in His Word, the Bible. Turn your life over to the one true God of eternity. He offers you full salvation. Remember that Jesus is “able to save completely those who come to God through Him, because He always lives to intercede for them.”

¹ Mormon Doctrine by Bruce R. McConkie page 670, The Seer by Orson Pratt, pg. 255.

² Mormon Doctrine pgs. 136-137, D&C 107

³ D&C 27:8, 12. However, these verses were added to the original revelation (by Joseph Smith). Over 400 words have been added to or deleted from this “revelation” since it was originally given.

⁴ Exodus 29, Leviticus 8.

⁵ Leviticus chapters 4 through 10.

⁶ Numbers 16:40, 18:7

⁷ Exodus 28:1, 29:9, 44, 40:15, Numbers 18:1-7, Nehemiah 7:61-65

⁸ Much could be said concerning the fact that there was only one high priest, not the many which can be found in Mormonism. Indeed, according to the book of Hebrews, we have today but one high priest, the Lord Jesus Christ. Anyone claiming to be a “high priest” is usurping Jesus’ position (Hebrews 7:26-28).

⁹ Leviticus 16, Hebrews 9:7

¹⁰ Hebrews 7:12 says that there has been a “change” in the Aaronic priesthood. The Greek term indicates that the Aaronic priesthood has been completed. As Dr. A. T. Robertson said in reference to this verse, “God’s choice of another kind of priesthood for his Son, left the Levitical line off to one side, forever discounted, passed by ‘the order of Aaron.’”

¹¹ Hebrews 9:10-28. We also must ask why Joseph Smith taught that during the millennial kingdom the Old Testament animal sacrifices would be reinstated (see DHC 4:211, Mormon Doctrine pg. 666)? Doesn’t such a teaching along with the LDS doctrine of blood atonement show how little is known of the Biblical doctrine of the atonement of Christ within Mormonism?

Also, should someone feel that John 15:16 refers to the “ordination” of the apostles and the granting to them some special “authority,” we would like to point out that the word translated “ordained” in 15:16 is simply a synonym for “chosen” that is translated in modern versions as “appointed.”

It has no reference whatsoever to the idea of a special religious “ordination” of priests.

¹² Mormon Doctrine pg. 476.

¹³ Jesus being the eternal God—of course, since Mormonism believes God is a man and Jesus one of his many offspring, they would misunderstand the point made here.

¹⁴ There were *no* “Melchizedek” priests between Genesis 14 and the coming of the Lord Jesus—Melchizedek did not “give” the priesthood to Jesus (or anyone else for that matter)—it was Jesus’ by right.

¹⁵ See, for example, Strong’s Concordance (“not passing away, intransferable, unchangeable”), J.H. Thayer’s Lexicon (“unchangeable, and therefore not liable to pass to a successor”) the Zondervan Interlinear (“intransmissible”) The Expositor’s Greek Testament (“...that the new priest is sole and perpetual occupant of the office, giving place to no successor”) and Dr. A.T. Robertson (“God placed Christ in this priesthood and no one else can step into it”).

¹⁶ This can be seen in the fact that the Mormon Church “passes on” its idea of the Melchizedek priesthood by the laying on of hands, etc.

¹⁷ The rendering of J.C. Ward as suggested by Dr. Leon Morris.

¹⁸ Walter Bauer, A Greek-English lexicon of the New

Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, 3rd ed. Edited by Arndt, Gingrich and Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979) pp. 803-804. See also W. E. Vine’s Expositor’s Dictionary of New Testament Words (Old Tappan new Jersey: Revell Company, 1966) p. 145.

¹⁹ There is really no historical basis for the supposed “restoration” of the priesthood, as mentioned briefly above. The sections in the Doctrine and Covenants (specifically section 27) have been edited to make it look as though this teaching was a part of the Mormon theology from the beginning when this is not so. David Whitmer rightly pointed these changes out in his book “An Address to All Believers in Christ” pages 56 and following. The evidence for a visit in June of 1829 of Peter, James and John is slim to none.

²⁰ As the Bible says, “But as many as received him, to them gave he power (gr: *exousia* meaning power, authority) to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.” (John 1:12). Note that we *become* the children of God—not that we have always *been* the children of God.

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