

Priesthood in Mormonism – Part 3

by Marvin W. Cowan

Our last two articles have shown that “priesthood” is *all-important* to Mormons. Brigham Young, the second Mormon Prophet described LDS priesthood as “*invisible, almighty God-like power*” (*Journal of Discourses*, vol. 3, p. 259). It certainly is *invisible*, but to say it is an “almighty God-like” power is another matter.

Jesus showed “God-like” power in the presence of both believers and unbelievers when He instantly healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, and raised Lazarus back to life when he had been dead for four days. Do Mormons have that same “God-like” power?

People make all kinds of claims. The question is, are they true? For example, I could claim the Lord personally called and ordained me with invisible “apostolic-power” which authorized me to baptize and ordain others with the same “apostolic-power” as well as to establish His true church and do everything necessary to enter His eternal kingdom. Since my “apostolic-power” is invisible, I don’t have any real proof that I have it. Mormonism’s invisible “priesthood power” has the same problem. It lacks evidence to prove that it really exists.

All active LDS males over 12 years of age are ordained to an office in the Aaronic or Melchizedek Priesthood by someone who was ordained before them in that priesthood and so on back to Joseph Smith or Oliver Cowdery who were the first to receive it in the LDS Church. Joseph and Oliver claim that they received the Aaronic Priesthood from John the Baptist and later received the Melchizedek Priesthood from Peter, James and John who got it from Jesus Christ.

The restoration of the Aaronic Priesthood is recorded in Mormon scripture in the *Pearl of Great Price*, Joseph Smith History 1:68-75. It says that while Smith was translating the gold plates of the *Book of Mormon* in May 1829, he came across the subject of baptism for the remission of sins and wanted to understand it better. So, he and Oliver Cowdery went into the woods to ask God about it.

While they were praying, John the Baptist appeared and laid his hands on both of them and conferred the Priesthood of Aaron upon them. John then told Joseph to baptize Oliver and Oliver to baptize Joseph. Then he told Joseph to ordain Oliver and Oliver to ordain Joseph to the Aaronic Priesthood.

But there are problems with this story in addition to the fact that John the Baptist was beheaded before Christ was crucified. It does not follow the LDS rules for how

baptisms and ordinations are to be handled in the LDS Church today even though Mormons often claim that God always works the same way in His Church.

In this account Joseph and Oliver both received the Aaronic Priesthood from John the Baptist *before* they were baptized for the remission of their sins, which would not be acceptable in the LDS Church today. Joseph had not been baptized when he baptized Oliver, which would also make Oliver's baptism unacceptable since LDS claim only those who have been properly baptized and ordained can legitimately baptize others.

If Oliver's baptism was not valid by LDS standards today he could not legitimately baptize Joseph. But he baptized him anyway which would also invalidate Joseph's baptism. If Joseph was not properly baptized when he ordained Oliver to the Aaronic Priesthood then Oliver's ordination would not be acceptable either. And if Oliver was not properly baptized and ordained when he ordained Joseph to the Aaronic Priesthood, Joseph's ordination would also be invalid.

If Joseph and Oliver were ordained to the Aaronic Priesthood by John the Baptist before they baptized each other, why did they need to ordain each other to the same priesthood again after they baptized each other? Was the ordination of Joseph and Oliver by John the Baptist washed away when they baptized each other? Since Joseph and Oliver ordained each other to the Aaronic Priesthood, their ordination by John the Baptist seems to have been unnecessary and irrelevant.

The Melchizedek Priesthood is the most important priesthood in Mormonism, yet the only reference in LDS scripture to its restoration is in the *Pearl of Great Price*, Joseph Smith-History 1:72. But that text does not say exactly how or when Peter, James and John "restored" it to Joseph and Oliver. It also shows that Peter and James, who had been dead for centuries, did as much as John even though John supposedly has been alive doing the Lord's work ever since His first coming.

LDS scripture says John the Apostle as well as three of the twelve apostles Jesus had in America, *never died* and will remain on earth and bring souls to Jesus *until He returns* (*Doctrine and Covenants, Sec. 7; The Book of Mormon* in III Nephi 28). Surely those apostles as well as their converts must have that all-important priesthood that LDS claim is necessary to baptize, ordain and so on.

If LDS scripture is true, there should have been thousands of men with the priesthood on earth at the same time Joseph Smith claimed he "restored" it, which would make the restoration of it unnecessary! All LDS priesthood comes from this confusing account given by Joseph Smith in Mormon scripture.

Biblical Christians believe in the *priesthood of all believers* and *reject* the LDS claim that God only accepts baptisms, ordinations, etc., performed by someone with invisible LDS priesthood power.

Next time we will discuss some of the biblical texts that LDS use to teach the necessity of their priesthood. Those who want to read more about LDS priesthood can do so in *Gospel Doctrine* by the 6th LDS prophet, Joseph F. Smith, published by Deseret Book.

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