

Priesthood: Past and Present

By Bob Moore

The Reorganization traditionally maintains that whenever God works among mankind, he authorizes priesthood to fulfill ministerial duties. The following article will show that its position agrees with Biblical injunctions, historical records, and early Christian interpretations. In particular, the Bible shows that there are two priesthood orders, one named after Melchisedec and the other named after Aaron. The Melchisedec order exists whenever priesthood exists, but the Aaronic order is confined to Israelite dispensations. This means that not all ministers, including those in ancient Israel and pre-Christian America, hold the Aaronic priesthood or are required to be descendants of Levi or Aaron. The accusation that the priesthood and its ministrations as described in the Book of Mormon violates the Bible is groundless. While the Aaronic order contains an office of high priest, which is occupied by only one person at a time, the Melchisedec order contains an office, also called high priest. It is a different office with different duties and greater power. It is not limited to only one occupant at a time. The various priesthood offices of deacon, teacher, priest, elder, bishop, high priest, seventy, evangelist, and apostle existed in past dispensations and were restored in the Restoration. Men are placed in their respective offices by both a call and an ordination. The church leaders in the first centuries of the church held the fulness of the Melchisedec order, which fulness was absent on earth from Moses until Jesus. Under its authority its ministers can remit sin, heal the sick, cast out devils, preach the gospel, and administer the Lord's ordinances. The Restoration returned the fulness of the Melchisedec priesthood, along with its various offices. It also restored the Aaronic order along with the Levitical priesthood so that the "sons of Levi," who are gathered through the preaching of the latter-day gospel from Israel's long dispersion, might be cleansed and empowered to make an offering in righteousness and, in so doing, fulfill the Biblical promise.

The Melchisedec and Aaronic Priesthoods

The Bible shows the presence of two priesthoods or orders of divinely authorized officers. The Hebrew epistle states, "If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood, (for under it the people received the law,) what further need was there that another priest should rise after the order of Melchisedec, and not be called after the order of Aaron?" (Heb 7:11). This verse contrasts the order of Melchisedec with the order of Aaron and the Levitical priesthood. By stating that perfection is not attainable through the Levitical priesthood, or order of Aaron, it shows the need for another type of priest, a priest whose commission rests in a different priesthood. The Bible calls one priesthood the order of Aaron and names the other the order of Melchisedec.

Moses initiated the entire Aaronic priesthood. He began by ordaining Aaron. According to Exodus, God told Moses, "Take thou unto thee Aaron thy brother, and his sons with him, from among the children of Israel, that he may minister unto me in the priest's office" (Ex 28:1). Because Aaron was the first person to hold this priesthood, the order was named after him. However, Aaron and his descendants were not the only men assigned priestly duties. All Levites received divine responsibility. God established the rest of the Levitical priesthood when he commissioned them. He said, "I have taken the Levites from among the children of Israel instead of all the firstborn that openeth the matrix among the children of Israel: therefore the Levites shall be mine" (Num 3:12). Their duty centered in "service of the tabernacle of the congregation" (Num 18:21).

The Levitical priesthood assigned duties to its members for the care of the Tabernacle during

the time the Hebrews wandered in the wilderness and for the Temple after Solomon built the sacred edifice, but God assigned some Levites to other responsibilities. Those duties included caring for the congregation, maintaining the places where they worshiped, and teaching the law. For instance, porters tended the doors where the congregation gathered (1 Chr 9:21). They also distributed the Lord's oblations (2 Chr 31:14). Some priests taught the people God's law. The Bible records, "Now for a long season Israel hath been without the true God, and without a teaching priest, and without law" (2 Chr 15:3). Any service for the people that was attached to true religion and its rites was assigned to members of the Levitical priesthood.

While the Aaronic order began with Aaron, he was not the first divinely authorized minister. Priests of God functioned before him. The first priest mentioned in the King James Bible was Melchisedec. The sacred text says, "And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God" (Gen 14:18). The New Testament calls Melchisedec "king of Salem, priest of the most high God" (Heb 7:1). Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, also served as a priest. The Bible calls Jethro "the priest of Midian" (Ex 3:1) and describes how he offered sacrifices to God (Ex 18:10-12). This service reveals that Jethro was no pagan priest, but a divinely recognized minister. God also commissioned Moses (Ex 3:4) and called him "my servant" (Num 12:7-8). The Bible also calls Moses the Lord's servant in both the Old Testament (Ex 14:31) and the New (Heb 3:5, Rev 15:3). The divine commission God gave Moses provided the authority for Moses to initiate the Aaronic order and ordain Aaron as its first high priest.

Priests apparently served among the Hebrews before Moses ordained Aaron or established the Aaronic order. When the Israelites first entered the wilderness of Sinai and Moses first ascended the holy mount, before God gave Moses the Ten Commandments or commissioned him to ordain Aaron, he told Moses to sanctify the Hebrews. They washed their clothes and fasted from their wives for three days. When God next spoke to Moses, he said, "Go down, charge the people, lest they break through unto the Lord and gaze, and many of them perish. And let the priests also, which come near the Lord, sanctify themselves, lest the Lord break forth upon them" (Ex 19:21-22). Who were these priests, for Moses did not ordain Aaron to be high priest until after he received the Ten Commandments (Ex 28:1)? These priests, although called to see God, did not. Perhaps they were unwilling or unprepared. The Lord told Moses, "Thou shalt come up, thou, and Aaron with thee: but let not the priests and the people break through to come up unto the Lord, lest he break forth upon them" (Ex 19:24).

The priests that ministered before Aaron's ordination, like Melchisedec and Jethro, or the Hebrew priests at Sinai, could not have been members of the Aaronic order, for Moses had not yet initiated that priesthood. While the Aaronic order served the tabernacle, the older priesthood did not. They were divinely commissioned before Moses fashioned the tabernacle or revealed the law. These men must have held a different priesthood. The Bible agrees. After revealing the existence of two different priesthoods, it says, "For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law" (Heb 7:12). The priesthood was changed, both by Moses when he initiated the Mosaic law and by Jesus when he fulfilled it. The Bible calls the older, different priesthood, which functioned under a different law than the Mosaic code, the Melchisedec order.

While the Aaronic order resulted from a change in priesthood accompanied by a change in the law, the older priesthood did not forever cease at that change. Jesus, who was born almost a millennium and a half after Aaron's ordination, served as a Melchisedec priest. The Bible says that Jesus was "made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec" (Heb 6:20). The Savior's service in that office shows that the Melchisedec priesthood existed after the Mosaic law.

The Mosaic law requires ministers of the Aaronic order to be descendants of Levi and the high priest to descend from Aaron. The Melchisedec order is free of any such requirement. Jesus serves as an outstanding example. His lineage stemmed from David and Judah, not Aaron and Levi. The Bible explains: “Our Lord sprang out of Juda; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood. And it is yet far more evident: for that after the similitude of Melchisedec there ariseth another priest, who is made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life. For he testifieth, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec” (Heb 7:14-17). Divinely commissioned men of various descents can lawfully serve as ministers in the Melchisedec order.

The freedom for men from differing descents to serve in the Melchisedec priesthood is confirmed by the Bible. It says, “Without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life” (Heb 7:3). Some believe that this characteristic describes Melchisedec, not the priesthood in which he served. If Melchisedec had no father or mother, lacked descent, and was without a birth or death, he must have been immortal. Men are mortal. The Bible teaches that all men sin (Rom 3:23) and, as a result, die. If Melchisedec had “no end of life,” he must have also been without sin. Such a being could not be a man. The Bible, however, clearly teaches that Melchisedec was a man. It says, “Now consider how great this man was, unto whom even the patriarch Abraham gave the tenth of the spoils” (Heb 7:4). Since Melchisedec was a man, the characteristics cited in the Hebrew epistle must refer to the priesthood in which he served. This conclusion is confirmed by the Bible. It maintains that the Melchisedec order, the priesthood in which Jesus served, is “an unchangeable priesthood” (Heb 7:24). The Melchisedec priesthood continues without descent and does not end in death. That is why Jesus could re-institute the fullness of the Melchisedec priesthood over a millennium after Moses.

The Melchisedec priesthood carries more power than the Aaronic order. One evidence for this conclusion is the fact that Moses initiated the Aaronic order. He was not an Aaronic priest, but the person who ordained the first Aaronic priest. The priesthood from which Moses authorized Aaron must have been greater than the priesthood Aaron received, for a stream of water cannot rise higher than its source. The Aaronic order cannot rise to higher authority than that spiritual power residing in the priesthood that authorized it.

A second indication that the Melchisedec priesthood is superior is Abraham’s payment of tithes to the king of Salem (Gen 14:20). This action placed Abraham in submission to Melchisedec. Since both Levi and Aaron were present in the loins of their father Abraham, his submission to Melchisedec placed them in subjection to that priest, too. The Bible explains, “He whose descent is not counted from them received tithes of Abraham, and blessed him that had the promises. And without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better” (Heb 7:6-7). By this statement, the Bible shows the superiority of the Melchisedec priesthood.

A third evidence that the Melchisedec priesthood is greater comes from the inability of the Aaronic order. The epistle to the Hebrews reveals that it cannot produce perfection (Heb 7:11). The law by which the Aaronic order functions contains insufficient authority to perfect its officers or adherents. This is because that law cannot cause perfection. The Bible states, “For the law made nothing perfect” (Heb 7:19). The limitations resident within the Aaronic order required Jesus to carry a priesthood that more fully expressed his authority. The Melchisedec order provided that ability. The Savior’s preference for and service in the Melchisedec order shows that it contains greater spiritual power than the Aaronic order.

Jesus preached the gospel, healed the sick, cast out devils, and forgave sins. This power

resides in Jesus and the Melchisedec priesthood that he carried. When Jesus taught, he taught with an authority not resident among the Jews. The gospels state, “And they were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes” (Mark 1:22). The authority by which Jesus healed the sick and cast out devils was also unavailable through the Levitical priesthood. The Bible relates, “And they were all amazed, and spake among themselves, saying, What a word is this! for with authority and power he commandeth the unclean spirits, and they come out” (Lu 4:36). Likewise, the authority by which Jesus remitted sins was unknown in Palestine. When the Savior told the man stricken with palsy that he would not only heal him, but forgive his sins, the scribes and Pharisees complained: “Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? who can forgive sins but God only?” (Mark 2:7). Jesus demonstrated his divine authority to remit sins by healing the palsy-inflicted man. All these powers resided in Jesus. They were expressions of the priesthood in which he functioned. That priesthood was the Melchisedec priesthood.

Jesus gave the same priesthood authority that he held to his disciples. He commissioned the twelve to preach the gospel and clothed them with the heavenly power that would help them fulfill that authorization. The Bible explains: “Then he called his twelve disciples together, and gave them power and authority over all devils, and to cure diseases. And he sent them to preach the kingdom of God, and to heal the sick (Lu 9:1-20). At another time, he told the seventy, “Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you” (Lu 10:19). After his resurrection, the Savior empowered his disciples to forgive sins. He told them, “Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained” (Jn 20:21).

When Jesus authorized the twelve and the seventy to preach the gospel, heal the sick, cast out devils, and remit sins, he bestowed on them the same power that he exercised. He endowed them with the authority resident in the Melchisedec priesthood. Some maintain that the divine power that Jesus gave to his disciples, although a calling, was not an ordination to priesthood authority. The gospels state differently. Mark recorded, “And he [Jesus] ordained twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach and to have power to heal sicknesses, and to cast out devils” (Mark 3:14-15). Some maintain that the ordination to which Mark referred was merely the Savior’s appointment. John stated that Jesus not only called the disciples, but he ordained them. He preserved what Jesus told the disciples on the night of his betrayal: “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you” (John 15:16). John’s testimony shows that ordination and appointment are two different things. Paul, who later served as an apostle, claimed that he was ordained. He wrote, “Whereunto I am ordained a preacher, and an apostle” (1 Tim 2:7). He was ordained after he was called, the account confirming that the apostles received their authority by both a divine call and then an ordination. Luke recorded, “As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away” (Acts 13:2-3). The Bible clearly shows that the apostles were ordained and that their ordination gave them power to perform the same miracles that Jesus performed. The apostles were ordained to the Melchisedec priesthood and, as a result, received the same priesthood in which Jesus served.

After the Savior’s ascension, the apostles ordained others to priesthood responsibility in which they provided ministry. The Bible states, “And when they [Paul and Barnabas] had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord” (Acts 14:23). Acts also mentions those “that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem” (Acts 16:4). Paul instructed Titus to ordain ministers. He wrote the new minister, “For

this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee” (Titus 1:5). Early Christian writers also recorded how the apostles and their appointees ordained others to ministerial responsibility. Clement, who is mentioned in the Bible (Phil 4:3) wrote, “Our apostles also knew, through our Lord Jesus Christ, and there would be strife on account of the office of the episcopate. For this reason, therefore, inasmuch as they obtained a perfect fore-knowledge of this, they appointed those [ministers] already mentioned, and afterwards gave instructions, that when these should fall asleep, other approved men should succeed them in their ministry.”¹ The same priesthood order that existed before Aaron and which Jesus restored in his personal ministry, continued among the Savior’s disciples and their appointees to office during the early Christian era.

The Bible clearly teaches that there are two priesthood orders, the Melchisedec priesthood and the Aaronic priesthood. It reveals that God’s priests who lived before Aaron held priesthood authority, but not after the order of Aaron. Their commission entailed different duties and greater spiritual authority. The priesthood that they held was the Melchisedec priesthood, which order did not fully exist among the Jews at the time Jesus was born. The holy order in which Moses served ceased after his death and returned at the appearance of Jesus. Jesus served in that priesthood and ordained his disciples to that order. They, in turn, ordained others. As a result, men, both before and after Jesus who were not of the lineage of either Levi or Aaron, held the Melchisedec priesthood.

Priesthood in the Book of Mormon

The Book of Mormon claims to be a record of ancient inhabitants of Central America who migrated to the Western Hemisphere about the time of Nebuchadnezzar’s conquest of Jerusalem. The members of this immigrating party were Jews, citizens of Judah, the Southern Kingdom, but its leader, Lehi, and his family descended from Joseph (1 Ne 1:165), specifically from Manasseh (Alma 8:3). They were devout and obedient, keeping the Mosaic law as best they could. The Book of Mormon states, “And we did observe to keep the judgments, and the statutes, and the commandments of the Lord, in all things, according to the law of Moses” (2 Ne 4:14).

The Mosaic law established the Aaronic priesthood through whose service Israelites could fulfill the divine obligations it placed on them. Priests, whose lineage descended from Aaron, performed sacrifices and other sacred duties that directed the Hebrews toward God and their divine responsibilities. The pre-Christian immigrants to America observed the sacrifices specified in the Mosaic law. The book states, “They also took of the firstlings of their flocks, that they might offer sacrifice and burnt offerings, according to the law of Moses” (Mos 1:30). Book of Mormon critics point out that no Aaronic priests or any Levites accompanied this Jewish migration. At least there is no mention of their presence. They wonder how Jews anywhere, including those in America, could make an acceptable sacrifice without an Aaronic priest.

The Bible records that both kings and prophets, none of whom were Aaronic priests, offered acceptable sacrifices. Saul, a descendant of Benjamin and King of Israel, brought the spoils of the Amalikites for a sacrifice at Gilgal (1 Sam 15:15). Saul told Samuel. “The people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice unto the Lord” (1 Sam 15:15). King David, a descendant of Judah, offered sacrifice when the Levites brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem: “And they brought in the ark of the Lord, and set it in his place, in the midst of the tabernacle that David

¹Clement, *First Epistle*, Ch 44 as quoted in ANF 1:17

had pitched for it: and David offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the Lord” (2 Sam 6:17). Solomon also sacrificed to the Lord. The Bible states, “Solomon offered a sacrifice of peace offerings, which he offered unto the Lord” (1 Ki 8:63). The prophet Samuel offered an acceptable sacrifice. The Bible records, “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” (1 Sam 7:9). Elijah the prophet sacrificed. The account says, “And it came to pass at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near, and said, Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word. Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the Lord God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again. Then the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench” (1 Ki 18:36-38). Jonah promised to sacrifice to the Lord from the fish’s belly. He prayed, “I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving” (Jon 2:9). All these sacrifices were offered by men who, although they were the Lord’s ministers, were not descendants of Aaron.

Other Hebrews who carried no Aaronic priestly responsibility or privilege offered sacrifices. Manoah, a Danite and father of Sampson, offered a lamb when the angel prophesied his sons’s birth (Judg 13:19). Gideon, a Manassite living at Ophrah (Judg 6:11) offered a sacrifice when God commanded him to do so (Judg 6:25-26). Such sacrifices were within the law. Any Israelite man could offer a sacrifice, custom stipulating that a portion of it must be given to a priest if he or his servant happened to pass by at the time of the sacrifice. The Bible states, “And the priests’ custom with the people was, that, when any man offered sacrifice, the priest’s servant came, while the flesh was in seething, with a fleshhook of three teeth in his hand; and he struck it into the pan, or kettle, or caldron, or pot; all that the fleshhook brought up the priest took for himself. So they did in Shiloh unto all the Israelites that came thither” (1 Sam 2:13-14). Not only could men offer sacrifice without a priest, but the first command God gave for all Israel to offer sacrifice happened before the first Aaronic priest was ordained. On the night of the first Passover, God required every household to offer an unblemished lamb (Ex 12:3-11). No Aaronic priest existed to minister that commandment, yet God accepted the sacrifice. The angel of death passed over every home that had offered an unblemished lamb and stained its doorposts and lintel with the lamb’s blood. If Hebrews could offer acceptable sacrifices in ancient Israel without an Aaronic priest, then the Jews who migrated to Central America could lawfully perform their sacrifices without Aaronic priests.

According to the Book of Mormon, the American immigrants ordained ministers. The primary duty of these men centered in teaching God’s law. The Book of Mormon says, “And it came to pass that Alma, having authority from God, ordained priests; even one priest to every fifty of their number did he ordain to preach unto them, and to teach them concerning the things pertaining to the kingdom of God” (Mos 9:51). Book of Mormon critics point out that if no Levites accompanied the party that immigrated from Jerusalem, then the priests that Alma ordained had no lineal right to the Levitical order as defined in the Mosaic law. Some maintain that the ordination of such priests is a violation of the law and a contradiction of the scriptures. Since God would not contradict either his law or his word, these critics believe this contradiction proves that the Book of Mormon is not a divine book.

The Bible shows that men without Levitical descent can perform priestly functions. When the Pharisees confronted Jesus for allowing his hungry disciples to pick and eat corn on the Sabbath, Jesus did not debate the law, argue whether his disciples violated it, or assert their priestly authority. Instead, he appealed to an example set by David. He said, “Have ye not read so much as this, what

David did, when himself was an hungered, and they which were with him; how he went into the house of God, and did take and eat the shewbread, and gave also to them that were with him; which it is not lawful to eat but for the priests alone?" (Luke 6:3-4). David demanded the shewbread from a priest named Ahimelech and distributed it to his hungry men. (1 Sam 21:1-6). The Jews did not consider this act an infraction of the law because David had been anointed. His calling through the prophet Samuel to be king of Israel made him God's minister in the king's office. While he was not an Aaronic priest, he was called and ordained. His ordination allowed him to lawfully use the bread that the Mosaic law reserved for priests.

Jesus appealed to David's example because it so readily fit his circumstance. He was a descendant of David and, as a result, was present in the loins of his father when Samuel anointed his progenitor. While Samuel's anointing rightfully made Jesus king of Israel, he was also anointed by his heavenly Father. At the time of the Savior's baptism by John in the Jordan River, the Holy Ghost descended on him in the form of a dove. His anointing granted him priestly rights. Like David, he could gather food for his hungry disciples.

The Savior's reference to David's assumption of priestly privileges gives divine confirmation that Israel's kings held ministerial duties. Consider Saul. When he was anointed king (1 Sam 10:1), he prophesied among the prophets. During the anointing, Samuel told Saul, "And the Spirit of the Lord will come upon thee, and thou shalt prophesy with them" (1 Sam 10:6). Immediately after his anointing, Saul prophesied, astounding the Hebrews, who repeated the news in the proverb, "Is Saul also among the prophets" (1 Sam 10:12). Prophecy is a priestly function. The Lord made Aaron, from whom the Aaronic priesthood sprang, a prophet. God told Moses, "Aaron thy brother shall be thy prophet" (Ex 7:1). When Saul prophesied after his anointing, he showed all Israel that he received priestly privileges and responsibilities. Israel's first king carried priesthood, showing that his successors in office were called to be priests.

Those anointed to function in the ministry of the king's office were ordained to their office by prophets. The prophet who ordained both David and Saul was Samuel. If the prophet Samuel had the divine right to anoint, or ordain, someone not descended from Levi to priestly responsibility, then other prophets held that right, too. For instance, Nathan the prophet helped anoint Solomon, David's son, as king (1 K 1:45) and the prophet Elijah anointed Jehu to be king (1 K 19:16). Even Joshua, a member of the tribe of Ephraim (Num 13:8) whom Moses appointed to be his successor in leading the Israelites, received an ordination. The Bible records, "The Lord said unto Moses, Take thee Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay thine hand upon him; . . . and thou shalt put some of thine honor upon him. . . And Moses did as the Lord commanded him: and he took Joshua, and set him before Eleazar the priest, and before the congregation: and he laid hands upon him" (Nu 27:18-23).

The Bible reveals that Old Testament prophets were also God's ministers. The Holy Spirit spoke through Hosea: "I have spoken by the prophets, and I multiplied visions, and used similitudes, by the ministry of the prophets" (Hos 12:10). The Bible also places prophets in the same category as those anointed, such as David and Solomon. It says, "Touch not mine anointed and do my prophets no harm" (Ps 105:15). Aaron's commission as a prophet (Ex 7:1) shows the priestly nature of that office. Some prophets were ordained to their ministerial office. Elijah anointed Elisha (1 K 19:16) and God ordained Jeremiah. God told Jeremiah, "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations" (Jer 1:5). Even Saul, when he was ordained King of Israel by Samuel, ministered as a prophet. The ordination of prophets revealed that they were divinely commissioned to perform

a necessary ministry. That ministry included revealing God's will, offering sacrifices, ordaining others, and instructing the Lord's people.

Many prophets mentioned in the Bible descended from other Israelites besides Aaron. They could not be Aaronic priests and had no right by lineage to sacred ministry, yet God called them and endowed them. Samuel was a Levite, but not a descendant of Aaron (1 Ch 6:33-38). Israel's prophets after Solomon could not have descended from either Aaron or Levi. The Levites in the Northern kingdom fled to Jerusalem when Jeroboam set up the golden calves (2 Ch 11:14). This means that later prophets, such as Jehu, Elisha, or Elijah, could not have descended from Levi. The prophet Elijah, for instance, came from Gilead (1 K 17:1), the land that Moses gave to Machir, son of Manasseh (Num 32:40). He probably descended from Manasseh, the same patriarch from which Lehi descended. The Book of Mormon maintains that God called and instructed prophets among the ancient American peoples, most of whom descended from Lehi. Those prophets, like their Old World counterparts, received the right to minister, reveal God's will, instruct the Lord's people, and ordain others to ministerial responsibility. The ordination of men to priesthood in ancient America, although their descent did not come from Levi, is consistent with the instructions of the Savior and the words of the Bible.

The priests described in the Book of Mormon did not function like the Aaronic priests who performed daily sacrifices at the Temple or served the Tabernacle. Neither did they receive offerings, including sacrifices, from the people for their personal needs. Instead, they supported themselves and their families through their own labor. The record states, "And he [Alma] also commanded them that the priests, whom he had ordained, should labor with their own hands for their support" (Mos 9:57). The ancient American priests' ministerial duties centered around teaching the people God's law. The account continues, "And there was one day in every week that was set apart that they should gather themselves together to teach the people, and to worship the Lord their God" (Mos 9:58). The responsibility given the priesthood described in the Book of Mormon is more akin to the ministry performed by Hebrew prophets than the duties performed by Aaronic priests or their Levitical assistants. Priests and Levites served the Temple, but prophets revealed God's word. In so doing, they taught the Hebrews God's ways. The Bible quotes the prophet Samuel as saying: "I will teach you the good and the right way" (1 Sam 12:23). Even Israelite rulers taught their people. Joshua, an Ephraimite, received the word of the Lord (Josh 8:27). Gideon, the Manassite, who was called by God to judge Israel after delivering the nation from the Midianites, taught the princes and elders of Succoth (Judg 8:11). King David uttered God's word. "He said, The Spirit of the Lord spake to me, and his word was in my tongue" (2 Sam 23:1). The ordination of priests in ancient America who were not descendants of Levi to teaching and pastoral responsibilities that are not associated with service to the Temple is not a violation of God's law. Lineage never limits the Creator of the universe to authorize ministers for his people.

The Book of Mormon teaches that the office of high priest existed among America's ancient inhabitants. It says, "Alma was their high priest, he being the founder of their church" (Mos 11:17). The similarity of the name of the offices of high priest in ancient Israel and ancient America has led some to conclude that the high priest office mentioned in the Book of Mormon is the Aaronic office of high priest described in the Bible. Book of Mormon critics correctly point out that with no descendants of Aaron among Book of Mormon characters, none of them had the right to occupy the Aaronic office of high priest. Likewise, only one person at a time occupied the office of high priest in ancient Israel, but in ancient America, several men concurrently occupied the high priest office. For instance, the Book of Mormon says that "Helaman and his brethren" were "high priests over the

church” (Al 21:34). Elsewhere, it states “that the high priests and the teachers were themselves astonished beyond measure” (Hel 2:23). If the office described in the Book of Mormon is the same high priest office present in ancient Israel, then the Book of Mormon contradicts the Bible.

Like the Old Testament priesthood, the Book of Mormon priesthood includes the offices of priest and high priest. One reason both books use the term *high priest* is to distinguish between the supervising priest and the subservient priests. The Book of Mormon records that priests existed shortly after the Jewish migration. “I, Nephi, did consecrate Jacob and Joseph, that they should be priests and teachers over the land of my people” (2 N 4:42). Later it records, “King Mosiah granted unto Alma, that he might establish churches throughout all the land of Zarahemla; and gave him power to ordain priests and teachers over every church” (Mos 11:97). The supervisor of these priests and teachers was the head of the church. He held the title of high priest. “Alma was their high priest, he being the founder of their church” (Mos 11:17). The high priest decided issues brought to him by the priests. “They were brought before the priests, and delivered up unto the priests by the teachers; and the priests brought them before Alma, who was the high priest” (Mos 11:113). The responsibilities of the office of high priest among Book of Mormon priesthood included supervising priests and teachers, as well as directing the church. That direction included keeping order. Elsewhere, the record says, “Helaman and the high priests did also maintain order in the church” (Al 21:73). By describing the duties of high priests, the Book of Mormon discloses that the office held supervising responsibilities. As such, *high priest* means *head priest* or *chief priest*.

Neither the priests, teachers, nor high priests mentioned in the Book of Mormon served as members of the Aaronic or Levitical order. Their duties and authority were similar to the ministerial responsibilities of ancient Israel’s kings and prophets. King Mosiah was a prophet as well. The Book of Mormon states, “The same is called a seer. The king of the people who is in the land of Zarahemla, is the man that commanded to do these things, and who has this high gift from God” (Mos 5:74-75). Both the Old Testament (1 Sam 9:9) and the Book of Mormon (Mos 5:77) state that a seer is a prophet. Ammon, the son of Mosiah, was a minister (Al 12:28) who preached (Al 13:28). He was also a prophet (Al 12:129). Nephi and Lehi, the sons of Helaman, were preachers (Hel 2:47). The Book of Mormon states that both “did preach the word of God unto them, and did prophesy many things unto them” (Hel 3:1). Jacob, a priest, also prophesied (Jac 1:6). Alma, the high priest “went forth and began to preach and prophesy unto the people” (Al 6:42). The prophetic duties of Book of Mormon priesthood show that their ministry mirrors the ministry in Israel of prophets and kings, not of Aaronic priests or their Levitical assistants.

The priestly commission that was not attached to the Aaronic order but exercised by men in both the Old Testament and the Book of Mormon must have functioned within the Melchisedec order. After all, the epistle to the Hebrews reveals the existence of only two priesthood orders. If at least some prophets who ministered among the Jews in both ancient Israel and America were not under the Aaronic order, they must have served within the Melchisedec order. The presence of ministers with the Melchisedec order in ancient America is suggested by an elucidation on the ministry of Melchisedec high priests contained in the Book of Mormon (Al 10:1-15). Some critics may use the conclusion that men functioned under the Melchisedec order after the life of Moses to claim a contradiction with one of Joseph’s revelations. It states, “Therefore, he took Moses out of their midst and the holy priesthood also; and the lesser priesthood continued” (D&C 83:4c). The removal of what latter-day revelation calls the holy priesthood at Moses’ death does not mean that every aspect of the Melchisedec priesthood ceased until Jesus. That Bible says, “There arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face” (Deut 34:10). Moses also

prophesied, “The Lord God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall harken” (Deut 18:15). Apostle Paul taught that the predicted prophet is Jesus Christ (Acts 3:22, 7:37). These Biblical passages show that no prophet of the caliber of Moses appeared among the Hebrews until Christ. That revelation does not mean Israel enjoyed no prophets during that interval, for scripture records many prophets during that time. It simply means that those prophets functioned under a lesser endowment. Joseph Smith thought the same. His secretary, William Clayton, recorded Joseph’s view: “All priesthood is Melchizedeck; 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. All the Prophets had the Melchizedeck Priesthood and was ordained by God himself.”² The “holy order” that was removed after Moses and did not return until Jesus is the fulness of the Melchisedec priesthood — the right to function in all the powers and privileges of that priesthood. The power to function in a portion of that order remained. The mantle of that lesser portion rested on the prophets in ancient Israel and pre-Christian America.

While the people described in the Book of Mormon observed the Mosaic law, ordained priests, and upheld a high priest, they did not contradict Biblical injunctions. The Mosaic law allowed individuals to perform their own sacrifices. God’s servants in ancient Israel ordained men not descended from Levi or Aaron to offices that held priestly rights. Those ministers could rightly teach God’s laws, prophesy, and offer sacrifices. The office of high priest in the Book of Mormon is not the same office as high priest in the order of Aaron. The priesthood officers described in the Book of Mormon, like their ministerial counterparts in ancient Israel, functioned under a portion of the Melchisedec order, but not in its fulness. The religious practices described in the Book of Mormon are consistent with the law as described in the Bible.

Priesthood in Apostolic Christianity

Jesus organized his church during his earthly ministry. The gospel records, “I will build my church” (Matt 16:18). The organization that he implemented among his disciples included priesthood offices. Apostle Paul wrote, “God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers” (1 Cor 12:28). Other priesthood positions mentioned in New Testament scripture include evangelist (Eph 4:11), seventy (Lu 10:1), bishop (1 Tim 3:1-2), elder (Acts 20:17), and deacon (1 Tim 3:10-13).

Christians placed priesthood in their respective office by ordination. Jesus ordained the first apostles (Mark 3:12). Paul testifies that he was ordained an apostle (1 Tim 2:7). He, like all others, was ordained through the laying on of hands. The Bible says, “The Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away” (Acts 13:2-3). The cited passage shows that early Christians authorized ministers through two separate actions: a divine call, given in this case by prophecy, and an ordination bestowed by the laying on of hands. Those who were ordained apostles in turn ordained elders throughout the church. Acts records, “And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on

²George D. Smith, *An Intimate Chronicle - The Journals of William Clayton*, Signature Books, Salt Lake, 1995, P 515.

whom they believed” (Acts 14:23). They also ordained deacons, “whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them” (Acts 6:6). Ordination to the office of evangelist is inferred. Timothy served as an evangelist. Paul told him, “Do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry” (2 Tim 4:5). Elsewhere, he admonishes Timothy to rely on the gift that he received through the laying on of hands bestowed after a prophetic gift, presumably his divine calling: “Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery” (1 Tim 4:14). He also wrote, “Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands” (2 Tim 1:6). The presumption is that the gift mentioned in scripture and given by the laying on of hands is the authority of the evangelist office.

The priesthood offices described in the New Testament continued in the early Christian Church. Their names were not generic titles given to Christian ministers in different localities for the same office work, but separate positions simultaneously serving throughout the early church. Ancient Christian writings reveal that all the cited priesthood offices mentioned in the Bible functioned at the earliest dates. Polycarp, a fellow-traveler with John, our Lord’s beloved disciple, mentions presbyter, which is Greek for *elder*, and deacons in the same text.³ Ignatius, martyred in 110 AD, lists deacons, bishops, and elders in the same epistle.⁴ Hermes, who many scholars thought was the same person saluted by Paul (Rom 16:4) but now believe may have been another who wrote about 140 AD, refers to “apostles, bishops, teachers, and deacons”⁵ in the same place. The Edessa documents record that Thaddeus, a seventy, was sent by apostle Thomas to their kingdom.⁶ Irenaeus speaks of evangelists and apostles together.⁷ These early writings link the various ministerial offices and show that different men concurrently served as apostle, seventy, evangelist, bishop, elder, teacher, and deacon during the earliest generations of the Christian church. At a later date, the office of teacher seems to have been made a specialized appendage to the office of presbyter, or elder. About 250, Cyprian wrote, “When with the teacher-presbyters we were carefully trying readers — in appointing Optatus from among the readers to be a teacher of the hearers.”⁸ The fusion of the office work for teachers with the duties of elders may explain why the office of teacher eventually disappeared from the Christian church.

The early church followed the Biblical pattern of ordaining men to ministerial offices through the laying on of hands. In his *Apostolic Tradition*, Hippolytus details the procedure for ordaining men to the office of bishop. He says, “Let the bishop be ordained being in all things without fault chosen by the people.”⁹ He goes on to specify, “One of the bishops present at the request of all, laying his hand on him who is ordained, shall pray thus.”¹⁰ Hippolytus also recorded the procedure for appointing elders. The *Tradition* states, “When a presbyter is ordained the bishop shall lay his hand upon his head, the presbyters also touching him. And he shall pray over him.”¹¹ The same

³Polycarp; *The Epistle of Polycarp*; Ch 5 as quoted in ANF 1:34.

⁴Ignatius; *Epistle of Ignatius to the Magnesians*; Ch 2 as quoted in ANF 1:59 and *Epistle of Ignatius to the Philadelphians*; Ch 10 as quoted in ANF 1:85.

⁵*The Pastor of Hermas*; Bk 1, Vision 3, Ch 5 as quoted in ANF 2:14.

⁶Eusebius, *The History of the Church*, Bk 1, No 13:10, P 32.

⁷Irenaeus, *Irenaeus Against Heresies*, Bk 1, Ch 3 as quoted in ANF 1:320.

⁸Cyprian; *Epistle 23* as quoted in ANF 5:301

⁹Hippolytus, *The Apostolic Tradition*, Part 1, ii:1, P 2.

¹⁰Hippolytus, *The Apostolic Tradition*, Part 1, ii 5, P 3.

¹¹Hippolytus, *The Apostolic Tradition*, Part 1, viii:2, P 13.

document records the procedure for ordaining deacons. It announces, “A deacon when he is appointed shall be chosen according to what has been said before, the bishop [alone] laying hands on him [in the same manner].”¹²

The first Christians viewed the ministerial authority resident in the church as an extension of or, in some cases, the continuation of the priesthood duties present among the Hebrews. Two church offices carried the same name as corresponding Hebrew bodies. Both elders and seventies served in ancient Israel. Moses repeatedly assembled and addressed the elders. One time occurred when “Moses and Aaron gathered together all the elders of the children of Israel” (Ex 4:29). Centuries later, elders assisted in the dedication of Solomon’s Temple. The account records, “And all the elders of Israel came, and the priests took up the ark” (1 K 8:3). They even continued among the Jews at the time of Jesus. The Bible says, “The chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask Barabbas, and destroy Jesus” (Mat 27:20).

Another group summoned by Moses was the seventy. They were part of the elders. The Lord told him, “Come up unto the Lord, thou, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel; and worship ye afar off” (Ex 24:1). Elsewhere, the Bible adds, “And the Lord came down in a cloud, and spake unto him, and took of the spirit that was upon him, and gave it unto the seventy elders: and it came to pass, that, when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied, and did not cease”(Num 11:25). The seventy elders were probably heads of the seventy clans in Israel, for when Moses numbered Israel (Num 2:64-51), he divided them according to the seventy sons of Jacob that the Bible says entered Egypt (Gen 26:8-25).

The issue is not if the positions of seventy or elder in Israel carried priesthood authority. Even if they were only secular positions, they were recognized offices among the Hebrews whose titles were given by Jesus and his apostles to Christian ministers. Most latter-day saints believe that ministerial authority resided among at least some of ancient Israel’s officers such as seventy and elder. They are not alone. Dr. E. O. James, professor of the History and Philosophy of Religion at the University of London, wrote, “Before the seventh century priests were drawn from many other lines of descent — those of David (II Sam. 8:18), Nathan (I Kings 4:5), Micah (Judges 17:5), and Abinadab (I Sam. 7:1).”¹³

The Old Testament refers to other offices besides elder and seventy that continued in the Christian church. Teaching priests (2 Chr 15:3) foreshadowed New Testament teachers. Overseers, which the King James Bible translates as *officers*, and tax collectors, which the King James Bible renders as *exacters* — both words used in Isaiah 60:17 — signified bishops and deacons. *Bishop* is the Greek word for *overseer* and deacons act liked exacters when they received offerings and distributed them to the poor. Clement, whom Paul mentions in an epistle (Phil 4:3), makes this observation. After describing bishops and deacons, he wrote, “Nor was this any new thing, since indeed many ages before it was written concerning bishops and deacons. For thus saith the Scripture in a certain place, ‘I will appoint their bishops in righteousness, and their deacons in faith.’”¹⁴ Since only the office of apostle and evangelist were not specifically indicated in the Old Testament, Christians viewed the priesthood offices of the church as applications of the same divine authority that endowed ancient Israelite priests.

Neither the Bible nor early Christian texts mention the office of priest as a separate

¹²Hippolytus, *The Apostolic Tradition*, Part 1, ix:1, P 15.

¹³E. O. James, *The Nature and Function of Priesthood*, The Vanguard Press, NY, 1955, P 74.

¹⁴Clement; *First Epistle of Clement*; Ch 62 as quote in ANF 1:16

priesthood office functioning in the Christian church. The word seems to only be used as a reference to the priesthood in general. For instance, Papias calls Pantaenus “the priest of [the church] of the Alexandrians.”¹⁵ Eusebius reveals that before Pantaenus established his Christian school in Alexandria he served as an evangelist, taking the gospel as far east as India where he discovered that the apostle Bartholomew had already personally preached it there.¹⁶ A century later, Cyprian writes, “The priest should be chosen in the presence of the people under the eyes of all, and should be approved worthy and suitable by public judgment and testimony.”¹⁷ Later in the epistle, he shows that the priestly offices to which he referred are bishop, presbyters, and deacons. Elsewhere he admonished, “It behooves the deacon of whom you write to repent of his audacity, and to acknowledge the honour of the priest, and to satisfy the bishop set over him with full humility.”¹⁸ He also counsels, “The priest should be chosen in the presence of the people, under the eyes of all, and should be approved worthy and suitable by public judgment and testimony.”¹⁹ The office to which Cyprian is referring is the office of bishop. The *Apostolic Constitutions* state, “The presbyters are your priests, and your present deacons instead of your Levites.”²⁰ It adds, “Those who attend upon the Church ought to be maintained by the Church, as being priests, Levites, presidents, and ministers of God.”²¹

Like the title *priest*, early Christians seemed to reserve the phrase *high priest* for referring to church leaders, generally a bishop. Hippolytus wrote, “We, as being their [the apostles’] successors, and as participators in this grace, high-priesthood, and office of teaching, as well as being reputed guardians of the Church, must not be found deficient in vigilance or disposed to suppress correct doctrine.”²² Elsewhere, he called the bishop God’s “high priest.”²³ Tertullian called the bishop *chief priest*. He wrote, “It remains to put you in mind also of the due observance of giving and receiving baptism. Of giving it, the chief priest (who is the bishop) has the right.”²⁴ Jerome used the same terminology, calling a bishop the chief priest.²⁵ The *Apostolic Constitution* often refer to the bishop as the high priest. For example, it counsels, “As to a good shepherd, let the lay person honor him, love him, reverence him as his Lord, as his master, as the high priest of God.”²⁶ Elsewhere it advises, “You ought therefore, brethren, to bring your sacrifices and your oblations to the bishop, as to your high priest.”²⁷ Accordingly, its prescribed prayer for a bishop’s ordination contains the following: “Thy servant, whom thou hast chosen to be a bishop, may feed Thy holy flock, and discharge the office of an high priest to Thee.”²⁸ Early Christians regarded all their priesthood leaders as supervising priests, whom they occasionally called *high priests*.

¹⁵*Fragments of Papias*, No 9 as quoted in ANF 1:155.

¹⁶Eusebius, *The History of the Church*, Bk 5, No 10, P 156-157.

¹⁷Cyprian, *Epistle 67*, Sec 4 as quoted in ANF 5:370.

¹⁸Cyprian, *Epistle 64*, Sec 4 as quoted in ANF 5:366.

¹⁹Cyprian, *Epistle 67*, Sec 4 as quoted in ANF 5:370.

²⁰*Apostolic Constitutions*, Bk 2, Sec 4, No 25 as quoted in ANF 409.

²¹*Apostolic Constitutions*, Bk 2, Sec 4, No 25 as quoted in ANF 409.

²²Hippolytus, *The Refutation of all Heresies*, Bk 1 as quoted in ANF 5:10.

²³Hippolytus, *The Apostolic Tradition*, Ch 3.4, P 5.

²⁴Tertullian, *On Baptism*, Ch 17 as quoted in ANF 3:677.

²⁵Jerome, *The Dialogue Against the Luciferians*, Ch 9 as quoted in PNF, series 2, Vol 6, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, 1994, P 324.

²⁶*Apostolic Constitutions*, Bk 2, Sec 3, No 20 as quoted in ANF 7:404.

²⁷*Apostolic Constitutions*, Bk 2, Sec 4, No 27 as quoted in ANF 7:410.

²⁸*Apostolic Constitutions*, Bk 8, Sec 2, No 5, Oxford Manuscript as quoted in ANF 7:482.

From the time of the resurrection Christians maintained that Jesus fulfilled the Mosaic law. The Savior, himself, said, "These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me" (Luke 24:44). Paul taught the Mosaic law served as "our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ" (Gal 3:24). Once brought to Jesus, the need for the law vanished. Since Christians were sealed to the Savior, they had no need to observe the requirements of the Mosaic law. James decreed, the apostles and elders then present agreeing, that Christians should be bound by only four of its provisions: "That they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood" (Acts 15:20). This meant that the sacerdotal responsibilities of Levitical priests were completed when Jesus fulfilled the law of Moses. Their Mosaic duties were discharged, for Christians no longer sacrificed animals or worshiped either in the Tabernacle or at Solomon's Temple. However, because followers of Jesus sacrificed "the deeds of the body" (Rom 8:13) and worshiped Jesus, who became the temple of God when he tabernacled in the flesh, they applied Levitical authority to the offices of the Christian priesthood. They used the title of priest to refer to all Christian ministers.

Jesus not only fulfilled the law of Moses, but he completed the work of the high priest's office that Aaron initially held. The primary duty of the Aaronic high priest was to make offerings for Israel's sins. The Bible states, "For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins" (Heb 5:1). The Mosaic law required the high priest to offer daily sacrifices, including sacrificing a lamb. Consider the offering made for a healed leper. The law states that after the priest has slain the lamb, "the priest shall offer the burnt offering and the meat offering upon the altar: and the priest shall make an atonement for him, and he shall be clean" (Lev 14:20). Leprosy signifies sin. Every person is defiled by sin and, unless he is healed from it, suffers eternal death. Jesus is the Lamb of God (Jn 1:29), whose single sacrifice on the cross atoned for the sins of all, healing the repentant. His perfect and complete sacrifice fulfilled all Mosaic sacrifices and made future ones unnecessary. The Bible explains, "Every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but this man [Jesus], after he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down on the right hand of God; . . . for by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified" (Heb 10:11-14). With no need for Israel to ever again offer sacrifices, the requirement for Aaronic high priests to make offerings for sins ended with Jesus' atoning offering.

The Savior's sacrifice ended the need for the Aaronic high priest. No record documents its appearance as an office in the Christian church. While Christians used the term *priest* to signify divinely authorized ministers regardless of their respective offices, they sometimes used the term *high priest* to signify a supervisor of a group of ministers. When they did, they did not suggest that leading priesthood officers assumed any duties of an Aaronic high priest, but that they reflected the ministry of a high priest, presumably of the Melchisedec order. However the early Christians used the title *high priest*, they never referred to the Aaronic office. Since Jesus, the office of Aaronic high priest has not functioned in the church.

The absence of the priest's office in the early church did not mean that Christians did not recognize its existence. The Hebrew writer acknowledged priests of the Levitical order (Heb 7:11). Christians also recognized the right of Jewish priests to function under the Mosaic law, honoring them in their position. For instance, when the priests rebuked Paul for reviling the high priest, a violation of the Mosaic law, the apostle apologized by saying, "I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest: for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people" (Acts 23:5). Since Christians did not observe the rites prescribed by the law of Moses, they did not need its priests and

high priests.

Just as the first Christians acknowledged the existence of an office of priest, although they did not apparently fill it, they also recognized the presence of a high priesthood. Hippolytus wrote, “We, as being their [the apostles’] successors, and as participators in this grace, high-priesthood, and office of teaching, as well as being reputed guardians of the Church, must not be found deficient in vigilance or disposed to suppress correct doctrine.”²⁹ Note that the ancient bishop maintained that he participated in the high priesthood that the Lord’s apostles previously held. Whether the first Christians regarded their ministerial leaders as exercising an office of high priest may be debated. The historical record is not conclusive. What is clear is that they acknowledge its existence, at least in heavenly places. Origin, while speaking of the Savior’s redeeming crucifixion, wrote, “That He might be glorified by the heavenly elders who would receive his bounties, and by diviner high-priests who are ordained under the one High Priest.”³⁰ Origin recognized high priests ordained under the savior whose high priestly authority was of the Melchisedec order. The context of his statement may mean that he view those high priests as occupying heavenly places, but, at the very least, he consider the office a valid position.

The power of the high priestly office that resided in Jesus, which authority is couched in the fulness of the Melchisedec priesthood, also resided in the Savior’s apostles, given them through ordination. That same priesthood power descended to the apostles’ successors and energized the early Christian church. Just as Jesus, his apostles, and seventy, preached with authority, remitted sins, healed the sick, and cast out devils, their successors did too. During the third century, the prayer offered during the ordination of bishop included the request: “That thy high priestly Spirit may have authority to ‘forgive sins’ according to Thy command, ‘to assign lots’ according to thy bidding, ‘to loose every bond’ according to the authority Thou gavest the Apostles.”³¹ A century latter, the ordination prayer included, “In the spirit of the high priesthood have power to remit sins according to thy commandment, to give lots according tho thy injunction, to loose every bond according to the power which Thou hast given to the apostles.”³² These references confirm that the full power of the Melchisedec priesthood once resided among the early Christians. They may have refrained from using *priest* and *high priest* as names for specific ministerial offices, thereby avoiding confusion with the Jewish Aaronic order, but they certainly held its authority and applied its terminology to certain ministerial positions, such as bishop and apostles. Any reluctance on their part to institutionalize a priesthood office entitled *high priest*, does not mean that the position does not exist within the Melchisedec priesthood, that its powers were not present within their ministers, nor that it does not exist in heavenly places.

Jesus ordained some of his disciples, endowing them with divine authority. These men ordained others. Those they ordained held differing offices with specialized duties. The historical record identifies the names of those various offices to be apostle, seventy, evangelist, elder (or presbyter), bishop, teacher, and deacon. These offices all existed in the earliest days of the church. While the terms *priest* and *high priest* may not have been specific offices within the church, but terms applied to its ministers — *priest* to any ordained minister and *high priest* to supervising ministers — the first Christians acknowledged both offices. They recognized the high priestly power resident within the Melchisedec order, which order was occupied by Jesus and other “diviner high-

²⁹Hippolytus, *The Refutation of all Heresies*, Bk 1 as quoted in ANF 5:10.

³⁰Origin, *Commentary on Matthew*, Bk 12, Ch 20 as quoted in ANF 10:462.

³¹Hippolytus, *The Apostolic Tradition*, Part 1, Sec 3.5, P 5.

³²*Apostolic Constitutions*, Bk 8, Sec 2, No 5, Oxford Manuscript as quoted in ANF 7:482.

priests.” In so doing, they confirmed that the authority residing in their clergy was an extension of the divine authority resting in ancient Israel’s priesthood. Most Christian ministerial offices had their roots in the Aaronic and Levitical priesthood, as well as the kings and rulers of Israel. Seventy, elder, bishop, teacher, and deacon existed as separate positions among the Hebrews. They also existed as separate ministerial offices in the early Christian church. As the church passed through the generations, evolving from its original pristine apostolic condition, some of its priesthood offices, such as teacher, were lost. Their absence provides one evidence that the original church apostatized and needed restoration.

The Latter-day Priesthood

When the Jews rejected Jesus, God’s Son sent to rescue his people from sin’s oppression, they lost the divine favor and commission bestowed on them through the faithfulness of their progenitor, Abraham. Their fall paved the way for Gentiles to receive the benefits of the Abrahamic blessings and opened the door for salvation to liberate any believer in the Savior’s gospel. Paul wrote, “Through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles” (Rom 11:11). Elsewhere, he said, “That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ” (Gal 3:9).

The grafting of the Gentiles into the covenant included their ordination to priestly duties once reserved for the Israelites and vouchsafed in the offspring of Levi. The ministerial responsibilities given them were the administration of Christian ordinances, not the observance of Mosaic rites. All parts of the Levitical law were fulfilled and its only aspects binding on Christians were “that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood” (Acts 15:20). Christian ministers preached the Savior’s good news, presided over congregations of believers, and administered rites prescribed by Jesus himself.

Jesus endowed his ministers whom he personally called with divine authority that was given through ordination. The apostles, in turn, ordained others, placing them in various priesthood offices with differing responsibilities. Since those offices, which the New Testament lists as apostle, seventy, evangelist, elder, bishop, teacher, and deacon, carried priestly authority like that given Aaron and his sons, the early Christians regarded all its ministers as priests. They used the word *priest* to refer to all their divinely authorized clergy. The Aaronic office of high priest ceased as a legitimate priesthood office once Jesus fulfilled its responsibilities by offering himself on the cross as an atoning sacrifice for all.

The church which Jesus built while personally on earth (Matt 16:18) was attacked by heretics, whom Apostle Paul called “grievous wolves” (Acts 20:29). Those false teachers were not just future adversaries predicted in prophecy, but current antagonists of the first apostles. John said, “Even now there are many antichrists” (1 J 2:18). Their relentless assault eventually caused the church to change some teachings and ordinances, driving the humble pristine organization that Jesus established into the wilderness (Rev 12:14) and replacing it with an oppressive counterfeit. The Bible describes the organization that replaced the Savior’s church as a beast that persecuted all who did not receive its mark (Rev 13:16-17). The ensuing ecclesiastical organization that evolved from the original church organized by Jesus so altered the gospel and abused its right to govern that reformers finally fled its influence. Consider John Calvin’s complaint: “Whoever will duly examine and weigh the whole form of ecclesiastical government as now existing in the Papacy, will find that there is no kind of spoliation in which robbers act more licentiously, without law or measure. Certainly all things are so unlike, nay, so opposed to the institution of Christ, have so degenerated from the ancient customs and practices of the Church, are so repugnant to nature and reason, that a

greater injury cannot be done to Christ than to use his name in defending this disorderly rule.”³³

Most reformers hoped that the Reformation would re-establish the apostolic church in all its original purity. Unfortunately, they could not agree on what the original church was or the tenets that it taught. Within a decade it divided into the Lutheran and Reformed Churches. As the debate continued, additional sects appeared until Protestantism fragmented into an increasing number of denominations. Since historians could not uncover an acceptable description of the original church and theologians could not adequately deduce its initial theology, the Reformation stagnated. Without divine revelation, no return of the church that Jesus built and the apostles enlarged was possible. That restoration occurred when God sent angels to reveal the Savior’s gospel to Joseph Smith. Through his instrumentality the Reformation’s goal found fulfillment in the Restoration. It returned the original church, including its pristine ordinances and divinely authorized priesthood.

The Restoration is more than the return of the church from the wilderness complete with proper church organization and endowed with the glory of priestly power resident in the first apostles and their successors. It is the body divinely commissioned to gather Israel, all Jacob’s descendants dispersed at various times from the Lord’s ancient covenant. Paul prophesied that Israel would eventually come back to the covenant and predicted that it would occur during the fulness of the Gentile. He said, “Blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved” (Rom 11:25-26). The Gentiles inherited Europe. The rise of Western Civilization to world dominance marked the period of Gentile fulness predicted by apostle Paul.

The restoration of the priesthood as originally constituted and endowed included the return of the priesthood present in both the Gentile church and the Hebrew congregation. Ancient prophets predicted a time when the Levitical priesthood would function in purity as it offered acceptable oblations. Malachi described one part of the Messiah’s mission: “He shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness” (Mal 3:3). The sons of Levi never offered an acceptable offering to Jesus during his first advent. Instead, they conspired with the priests and other Jewish fraternities to crucify their Master when he appeared among them. Their failure to let his gospel cleanse their ministrations leaves their purification and acceptable offering to the time of the Savior’s second advent.

The Restoration is God’s way of preparing the world for the return of his Son, the promised descent of the Savior to rule his kingdom established on earth. That preparation includes the purification of the sons of Levi prophesied by Malachi. When the Lord restored his church, he not only provided the means of purifying descendants of Levi, but he also conferred the Levitical offices in which they can offer an acceptable offering. The Restoration united the priesthoods present among both the ancient Hebrews and the more recent Christians by placing two priesthood orders in the restored church. They are the Aaronic priesthood and the Melchisedec priesthood. The Aaronic priesthood includes the office of priest, placing it where it initially functioned, as well as other Levitical duties. The Melchisedec priesthood contains the authority Jesus placed in his apostles and their successors, as well as the commission granted ministers living before Moses. These are the “diviner high-priests” dwelling in heavenly places to which the great Christian thinker referred.³⁴ The office of Patriarch appeared in the Melchisedec priesthood and gave opportunity for

³³John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book 4, Ch 5.13, Translated by Henry Beveridge, Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 1994, P 348

³⁴Origin, *Commentary on Matthew*, Bk 12, Ch 20 as quoted in ANF 10:462.

latter-day Israel to receive the same patriarchal blessings available before Moses instituted the Aaronic order. What the early Christian church refrained from doing, probably to avoid confusion with Judaism, which was the union of the Melchisedec and Aaronic orders within a single ecclesiastical structure, the Restoration accomplished. God knew that the early church would never gather all Israel, but the restored church will. For that reason, he provided the Restoration with means to achieve all his promises.

The acceptable offerings that purified Levitical ministers are to offer are not animal sacrifices. David reveals that an acceptable offering is a broken heart and a contrite spirit. He said, "For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart" (Ps 51:17). Solomon verbalized the idea this way: "To do justice and judgment is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice" (Prov 21:3). Through Isaiah the Lord made a more explicit statement. He began with a complaint against ancient Israel: "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood. Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isa 1:11-18). The acceptable offerings that the sons of Levi will someday bring are ministrations of divinely endowed men who are cleansed by the Savior's redemption.

Jesus offered himself during his first advent as an atonement for sin. His sacrifice cleanses all those who embrace him. Apostle John said that Jesus "washed us from our sins in his own blood" (Rev 1:5). When Jesus built his church, he placed the ordinance of baptism in it so that its water would remit the sins of all who receive the Savior. When Peter convicted the Jews at Pentecost for their sins, they asked what they should do to be saved. "Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:38). Because baptism was restored in the Restoration, those sons of Levi who receive the Savior's gospel in our dispensation will find their sins remitted in that ordinance. Their cleansing allows them to offer an acceptable offering of a broken heart and a contrite spirit. When they minister in that condition, their ministrations edify believers, point others to Jesus Christ, and glorify their heavenly Father.

The office of high priest functions in the restored church as Melchisedec discharged it, not as Aaron performed it. The Aaronic high priest office ended in Jesus and the sacrifice that he offered. Jesus fulfilled the sacrificial duties of the Aaronic high priest as "an high priest after the order of Melchisedec" (Heb 5:10), a greater priesthood that has authority to function in lesser offices. Some critics teach that the Melchisedec priesthood has no office of high priest. They base their conclusion on the fact that the Bible consistently identifies Melchisedec as a priest. However, the passage from the Hebrew epistle just cited mentions a position "an high priest after the order of

Melchisedec” (Heb 5:10). Origin disclosed that “diviner high-priests” reside in heavenly places.³⁵

The high priest authority in which Jesus functioned continued after the Savior’s ascent, for the Melchisedec priesthood is an everlasting, eternal priesthood, without progenitors as the Hebrew epistle reveals (Heb 7:3). It is the authority of the Melchisedec priesthood that Jesus placed in his apostles and which he restored in the latter-day apostles of the Restoration. Just as supervising priests in other dispensations in which divinely authorized priests functioned were called high priests, supervising priests in the restored church are called high priests and function as Melchisedec high priests. Their title helps distinguish them from priests who function in the Aaronic order. Restoration high priests, if faithful in their discharge of that office, also carry the fulness of the Melchisedec order. They can preach the gospel, heal the sick, cast out devils, and remit sins like the Savior’s first apostles. They can commune with the general assembly of the first born like the early Christians (Heb 12:22) and stand in the presence of God like Moses (Nu 11:25).

The fulness of priesthood authority restored under the superintendency of Joseph Smith contains the commission given to both the ancient Israelites and the first Christians. That restoration provides the means by which divinely commissioned men today can call both Hebrew and Gentile descendants to repentance and prepare them for the fulfillment of all the divine covenants given their progenitors. Those promises include an acceptable offering by sons of Levi who are purged from sin through the Savior’s atoning grace and placed by ordination in their Levitical offices. Jesus will receive their acceptable offering when he descends to govern his people in peace and righteousness.

³⁵Origin, *Commentary on Matthew*, Bk 12, Ch 20 as quoted in ANF 10:462.