

Priesthood Restoration

It was during February and the early days of March 1831, in Kirtland, that Joseph Smith continued his revision of the Old Testament. For the book of Genesis he added a large amount of text to chapter 14 concerning Melchizedek, the king of Salem (known later as Jerusalem). The King James Version mentions that Melchizedek was "the priest of the most high God."¹ Smith stated that Melchizedek "was ordained a high Priest after the order of the covenant which God made with Enoch it being after the order of the Son of God."² The new text continues:

for God having sworn unto Enoch and unto his seed with an oath by himself that every one being ordained after this order and calling should have power by faith to break Mountains to divide the seas to dry up watters [waters] to turn them out of their course to put at defiance [defiance] the armies of nations to divide the earth to break every band to stand in the presence of God to do all things according to his will according to his command subdue principalities and powers³

These ideas relating to a High Priesthood in Old Testament times were similar to those written in 1829 in the Book of Mormon, where the high priesthood was related to the order of the Son of God. The following lengthy excerpt illustrates the importance of being called, obtaining the office of the high priesthood, and being a high priest forever:

and thus being called by this holy calling, and ordained unto the High Priesthood of the holy order of God, to teach his commandments unto the children of men, that they also might enter into his rest, this High Priesthood being after the order of his Son, which order was from the foundation of the world; or in other words, being without beginning of days or end of years, being prepared from eternity to all eternity . . . taking upon them the High Priesthood of the holy order, which calling, and ordinance, and High Priesthood, is without beginning or end

yea, humble yourselves even as the people in the days of Melchizedek, who was also a High Priest after this same order which I have spoken, who also took upon him the High Priesthood forever. . . . Now these ordinances were given after this manner, that thereby the people might look forward on the Son of God, it being a type of his order, or it being his order . . . but Melchizedek having exercised mighty faith, and received the office of the High Priesthood, according to the holy order of God, did preach repentance unto his people. . . . Now there

¹ Gen. 14:18, KJV.

² Old Testament Dictated Manuscript (OT MS 1), 33-34, CCLA; Genesis 14:27-28 (JST); see also 14:37 (JST).

³ OT MS 1, 34; Genesis 14:30-31 (JST).

were many before him, and also there were many afterwards, but none were greater; therefore of him they have more particularly made mention.⁴

In a revelation received at the third conference held at Fayette, New York on January 2, 1831, church members were commanded to go to the state of Ohio. They were told "there I will give unto you my law & there you shall be endowed with power from on high, & from thence, whomsoever I will, shall go forth among all Nations."⁵ Another revelation given a few days later instructed, "& inasmuch as my People shall assemble themselves to the [state of] Ohio [Ohio] I have kept in store a blessing such as is not known among the children of men & it shall be poured forth upon their heads & from thence men shall go forth into all Nations."⁶ Also a revelation received at Kirtland in February says, "Sanctify yourselves & ye shall be endowed with power."⁷

Joseph Smith wrote to his brother Hyrum in March, "I think <you> had better Come into this Country immediately for the Lord has Commanded us that we should Call the Elders of this Church to gether unto this place as soon as possable."⁸ And finally in May a revelation revealed, "let my servant Ezra [Thayer] humble himself & at the conference meeting he shall be ordained unto power from on high."⁹

The first general conference in Ohio was held early in June 1831. Various dates have been given for the conference meeting. In the recollections of those who attended, June 3 (Friday), June 4 (Saturday), and June 6 (Monday) have been given as the conference dates. At a previous conference held on April 9, the minutes record the "Conference adjourned until the first Saturday in June next" which would be June 4. A church member named John Smith (not Joseph Smith's uncle) wrote, "friday June th[e] 3 went to Kirtland to attend Conference but did not reach [reach] there till sat th[e] 4 & Conference was over & I Continued their [there] untill th[e] 6."¹⁰ The conference was held on June 3 probably lasting the full day and into the night.¹¹ There appears to have been a number of meetings after the conference. A revelation was given on June 6 for those called to go on missions.

The conference was opened by Joseph Smith Jr. in exhortation and prayer. Sidney Rigdon also exhorted the congregation. John Whitmer in his history wrote:

The spirit of the Lord fell upon Joseph in an unusual manner. And prophecied that John the Revelator was then among the ten tribes of Israel who had been led away

⁴ 1830 BOM, 259-60; LDS Alma 13:6-8, 14, 16, 18-19; RLDS 9:69-72; 10:7, 9, 12, 15. Melchizedek is also mentioned in the Epistle to the Hebrews.

⁵ BCR, 52; BC 40:28; LDS D&C 38:32-33; RLDS D&C 38:7.

⁶ BCR, 59; BC 41:14-15; D&C 39:15; RLDS D&C 39:4.

⁷ BCR, 68; BC 45:16, LDS D&C 43:16; RLDS D&C 43:4.

⁸ Joseph Smith to Hyrum Smith, March 3-4, 1831, CHL; Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 257.

⁹ BCR, 85.

¹⁰ John Smith Journal, June 1831, CHL. John Smith was the father of Eden Smith.

¹¹ Cannon and Cook, *Far West Record*, 6-7. The minutes copied in the Far West Record have the date as June 3, 1831. John Whitmer was the clerk of the conference. Manuscript History A-1 has the date of the conference as June 6 with the revelation being received the next day, June 7. See Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith* 1:352-53.

by Salmanaser King of israel [sic; Assyria], to prepare them for their return, from their Long dispersion, to again possess the land of their fathers.¹²

Joseph Smith laid his hands upon the head of Lyman Wight and ordained him to the High Priesthood after the Holy Order of God.¹³ Lyman Wight then gave an exhortation to the saints. John Whitmer recorded:

And the Spirit fell upon Lyman, and he prophecied, concerning the coming of Christ, he said that there were some in this congregation that should live until the Savior shou[l]d de[s]cend from heaven, with a Shout, with all the holy angels with him. . . . He saw the hevans [heavens] opened, and the Son of man sitting on the right hand of the Father.¹⁴

Joseph Smith then ordained Harvey Whitlock. The devil bound Harvey Whitlock and he could not speak. Ezra Booth who had been ordained to the High Priesthood, but later left the church reported his comments in a letter written on October 31, 1831:

Another Elder [Harvey Whitlock], who had been ordained to the same office as Wite [Wight], at the bidding of Smith stept [stepped] upon the floor. Then ensued a scene, of which you can form no adequate conception; and which, I would forbear relating, did not truth require it. This Elder moved upon the floor, his legs inclining to a bend; one shoulder elevated above the other, upon which the head seemed disposed to recline, his arms partly extended; his hands half clenched; his mouth half open, and contracted in the shape of an italic O;¹⁵ his eyes assumed a wild and ferocious cast, and his whole appearance presented a frightful object to the view of the beholder. "Speak, Brother Harvey" said [Joseph] Smith. But Harvey intimated by signs, that his power of articulation was in a state of suspense, and that he was unable to speak. Some conjectured that Harvey was possessed of the Devil, but Smith said, "The Lord binds in order to set at liberty." After different opinions had been given, and there had been much confusion, Smith learnt [learned] by the spirit, that Harvey was under a diabolical influence, and that Satan had bound him; and he commanded the unclean spirit to come out of him.¹⁶

¹² Westergren, *From Historian to Dissident*, 69-70. Whitmer recorded his history circa 1836-38.

¹³ Ezra Booth who was in attendance wrote, "Wite [Wright] arose, and presented a pale countenance, a fierce look, with his arms extended, and his hands cramped backward, the whole system agitated, and a very unpleasant object to gaze upon." *Ohio Star 2* (November 3, 1831):3.

¹⁴ Westergren, *From Historian to Dissident*, 70.

¹⁵ Zebedee Coltrin also mentioned that Whitlock's mouth "went into the shape of an italic O." Testimony of Coltrin, February 5, 1878, as cited in Merle H. Graffam, ed., *Salt Lake School of the Prophets, Minute Book, 1883* (Palm Desert, CA: ULC Press, 1981), 70, original in CHL. Levi Hancock wrote about Whitlock: "his eyes was in the shape of Ovil [Oval] Oes [O's]." *Life of Levi W. Hancock*, CHL.

¹⁶ Booth to Rev. Ira Eddy, October 31, 1831, *Ohio Star 2* (November 3, 1831):3, emphasis omitted.

Parley P. Pratt who attended the meeting wrote about the conference: "Here also were some strange manifestations of false spirits, which were immediately rebuked. Several were then selected by revelation, through President Smith, and ordained to the High Priesthood after the order of the Son of God; which is after the order of Melchizedek. This was the first occasion in which this priesthood had been revealed and conferred upon the Elders in this dispensation, although the office of an Elder is the same in a certain degree, but not in the fulness. On this occasion I was ordained to this holy ordinance and calling by President Smith."¹⁷

A copy of the minutes of the conference kept by John Whitmer shows that it contains an abbreviated version of the events of the conference.¹⁸ Whitmer, who had been appointed church historian, wrote his recollections of the June 3 conference:

Joseph Smith Jr. Prophecied the day Previous that the man of Sin should be revealed. While the Lord poured out his spirit upon his servants, the Devil took occasion [occasion], to make known his power, he bound Harvey Whitlock <and John Murdock> so that he could not speak and others were affected but the Lord showed to Joseph the Seer the design of this thing, he commanded the devil in the name of Christ and he departed to our joy and comfort.¹⁹

It was reported that there was an exhortation by Harvey Whitlock who "bore record of the opening of the heavens and of the coming of the Son of Man."²⁰

Joseph Smith ordained three more elders to the High Priesthood. The devil entered Lemam Copley and was cast out by Lyman Wight. Also Harvey Green was thrown to the floor.²¹ Lyman Wight ordained an additional eighteen elders. Those included were Edward Partridge, Ezra Thayer, Joseph Smith Jr., and Sidney Rigdon. Joseph Smith and Lyman Wight performed all of the ordinations to the High Priesthood and Bishop Partridge blessed those ordained. Wight also ordained John Corry and Isaac Morley as assistants to Bishop Partridge. An interesting account of the Kirtland conference is that recorded by Levi Hancock who attended the conference:

The fourth [sic] of June came and we all met [in] a little string of Buildings under the hill nere Isaac Morley[']s in Kirtland Geauga County Ohio we all went to a school house on the hill about one fourth of a mile ascending nearly all the way it was builded of logs this was filled with slab Benches here the elders was seated the me[e]ting was opened as usual Joseph [Smith] began to speak he said that the kingdom that Christ spoke of that was like a grain of musterd seed was now before him and some should see it put forth its branches And the angels of heaven would some day come like Birds to its branches Just as the Saviour said and some of you shall live to see it come with great glory some of you must die for the testimony of this work and looked at Lyman White [Wight] and said you shall see

¹⁷ *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*, 53. Pratt dated the meeting as June 6, 1831.

¹⁸ Cannon and Cook, *Far West Record*, 7.

¹⁹ Westergren, *From Historian to Dissident*, 71.

²⁰ Philo Dibble, *Juvenile Instructor* 27 (May 15, 1892):303, Salt Lake City.

²¹ Life of Levi W. Hancock, CHL. See also Zebedee Coltrin (February 5, 1878) in Graffam, *Salt Lake School of the Prophets*, 69; Philo Dibble, *Juvenile Instructor* 27 (May 15, 1892):303.

the Lord and me[e]t him nere the Corner of the house and laid his hands upon him and blessed him with the visions of heaven he then stepped out on the floor and said I now see God and Jesus Christ at his right hand let them kill me I should not feel death as I am now.

Continuing his detailed account Hancock described the ordinations and other occurrences:

Joseph put his hands on Harvey Whitlock and ordained him to the high Priesthood he turned as black as Lyman was white his fingers were set like Claws he went [a]round the Room and showed his hands and tryed to speak his eyes was in the shape of Ovil [Oval] Oes [O's] Hiram Smith said Joseph that is not [of] God Joseph said do not speak against this I will not believe said Hyrum unless you inquire of God and [he] owns it Joseph bowed his head a short time and got up and commanded satan to leave Haray [Harvey] laying his hands upon his head at the same time At that very instant an old man said to way [weigh] two hundred and fourteen pounds sitting in the window turned a complete summerset in the house and came his back across a bench and lay helpless Joseph told Lyman to cast satan out he did the mans name was Leamon Copley [Leman Copley] formaly [sic] a shaker The evil spirit left him and as quick as lightning Harvey <Green> fell bound and screamed like a Panther satan was cast out of him but amediately entered so I heard it continued all day and the greater part of the night.

Levi Hancock then wrote about the ordinations, John the Revelator, and what Whitlock and Green said:

But to return to the meting said Joseph now if you elders have sined it will do you no good to preach if you have not repented Heamon Basset you sit still the Devil wants to sift you and then ordained Jacob Scot²² and some others to the high priesthood he came to Zebidee Coltrin and myself and told us that we had an other calling as high as any man in the house I was glad for that for I was so scared I would not stir without his liberty for all the <world> And I knew the things I had seen was not made

said Joseph John was to tarry untill Christ came he is now with the ten tribes a preaching and when we can git ready for them they will come Joseph Smith called Lyman White to Lay his hands on his head and say what God should tell him to say he did and the thing was so large I can not write them After this we went down to the house And he[a]rd Harvy Whitlock say when Hiram Smith Said it was not God he disdained him in his hart and when the Devil was Cast out he was convinced it was satan that was in him and he [k]new it I also herd Harvy Green say that he could not describe the Aful feelings he experienced while in the hands of Satan.²³

²² The minutes indicate that Jacob Scott was ordained by Lyman Wight. Cannon and Cook, *Far West Record*, 7.

²³ Life of Levi W. Hancock, CHL. Philo Dibble in his late recollection also indicated that Hyrum Smith had questions relating to the spirit that attended Harvey Whitlock. *Juvenile Instructor* 27

Ezra Booth mentioned, "Many of them [Mormonite preachers] have been ordained to the High Priesthood, or the order of Milchesidec; and profess to be endowed with the same power as the ancient apostles were."²⁴ John Corrill wrote about the promise to receive an endowment at the conference. He stated, "The Melchisedec priesthood was then for the first time introduced and confer[r]ed on several of the elders. In this chiefly consisted the endowment, - It being a new order and bestowed <authority>. However, some doubting took place among the elders, and considerable conversation <was held> on the subject."²⁵

The Manuscript History of the church written in 1842-43, records: "the Lord displayed his power in a manner that could not be mistaken. The man of sin was revealed, and the authority of the Melchisedec <priesthood> was manifested and conferred for the first time, upon several of the elders."²⁶ Levi Hancock recalled:

June fifth [sic] we all assembled on the hill in a field whare there was a larg concours of people collected. Lyman White spoke. Joseph said from that . . . time the Elders would have large congregations to speak to and they must soon take there [their] departure into the Reagions west. when the meting was out we went to [Sidney] Gilberts and Solomon [Hancock] sang some and we talk with brother Whitnier [Whitmer] and told him what hapend at the conference He asked me if what Joseph had said was fulfilled about Some one seeing the Lord I told him I considered it so do you said he yes sir said I was you not there I understood him no[t].²⁷

Brother Whitmer may have been David Whitmer who was listed as being present but who was not ordained to the high priesthood at the conference. From many accounts, it can be determined that prior to June 1831 the elders in the church did not have conferred upon them the Melchizedek Priesthood. The first ordinations to the high priesthood in June 1831 were the equivalent of those men being ordained to the office of high priest.

David Whitmer used his brother's history in explaining his view that the ordination of high priests in the church was a grievous error and that he was mistaken about it for many years. His position was that the true church under the New Covenant never had a high priest in it. He wrote in 1887:

In Kirtland, Ohio, in June, 1831, at a conference of the church, the first High Priests were ordained into the church. Brother Joseph ordained Lyman Wight,

(May 15, 1892):303. John Murdock wrote, "There was a great out poring of the Spirit manifested in that Conference." John Murdock, *Autobiography*, CHL.

²⁴ Booth to Rev. Ira Eddy, October 2, 1831, *Ohio Star* 2 (October 20, 1831):3. The spelling "Melchisedec" comes from King James Version of Hebrews 5-7 while that of "Melchizedek" is from Genesis 14.

²⁵ John Corrill, *Brief History of the Church of Christ of Latter Day Saints*, original in the Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis, Missouri. See *Brief History of the Church of Christ of Latter Day Saints* (St. Louis: Printed for the Author, 1839), 18.

²⁶ Manuscript History A-1:118, CHL. This was published in *Times and Seasons* 5 (February 1, 1844):416, before handwritten changes in the text. See Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith* 1:353.

²⁷ Life of Levi W. Hancock, CHL.

John Murdock, Harvey Whitlock, Hyrum Smith, Reynolds Cahoon and others to the office of a High Priest. When they were ordained, right there at the time, the devil caught and bound Harvey Whitlock so he could not speak, his face being twisted into demon-like shape. Also John Murdock and others were caught by the devil in a similar manner. Now brethren, do you not see that the displeasure of the Lord was upon their proceedings in ordaining High Priests? Of course it was. These facts were recorded in the History of the Church - written by my brother, John Whitmer, who was the regularly appointed church historian. I was not at that conference, being then in Hiram, which is near Kirtland, Ohio.²⁸

The minutes kept by John Whitmer lists David Whitmer as being present. Whether he was present all the time is not known. David Whitmer was ordained to the high priesthood (a high priest) at the general conference held on October 25, 1831. William E. McLellin recorded in his journal for this date:

Here I first saw brother Joseph the Seer, also brothers Oliver [Cowdery], John [Whitmer] & Sidney [Rigdon] and a great many other Elders &c. This conference was attended by me with much spiritual edification & comfort to my heart. And Tuesday night in conference, a number of Elders were ordained to the High-Priesthood of the Holy order of God among whom though I felt unworthy I was ordained and took upon me the high responsibility of that office—A number of others present were ordained to the lesser Priest-Hood.²⁹

When the first baptisms were performed in May 1829, they were administered by Joseph Smith and his co-worker Oliver Cowdery. Both of these men claimed to have received the authorization through communication with God. How this was accomplished, when and where it occurred, and the words used have all been questions that need to be explored. Many writers and historians emphasized some of the documentation but have not taken into account the broader spectrum of what this may have meant to the early participants of the early church.

By June 1829 the text of the Book of Mormon was considered to be God's word, rock, church, and gospel. The authority of the forthcoming church was to be through that book.³⁰ Those who were called to be elders (apostles) waited until their ordination for the authorization to preach.³¹ Hyrum Smith was instructed to wait until the Book of Mormon was printed for the doctrines of the gospel would be contained in it.³² Shortly after the printing of the book, the Church of Christ was organized in Manchester, New York. Those previously called to preach were ordained to church offices in the new church.

The terms priesthood, authority, commission, power of God, called of God, and ordained are considered essentially the same. Since the organization of the church on April 6, 1830, the

²⁸ Whitmer, *An Address to All Believers in Christ*, 64-65. David Whitmer wrote that in 1848 he understood the ordinations were in error.

²⁹ Shipps and Welch, *Journals of William E. McLellin*, 44-45.

³⁰ 1830 BOM, 31; LDS 1 Ne. 13:36; RLDS 3:186. BC 15:3-4, the word "foundation" was added twice to the 1835 D&C. Compare with LDS D&C 18:4-5; RLDS D&C 16:1.

³¹ BC 15:10-11; LDS D&C 18:9; RLDS D&C 16:3.

³² BC 10:8; LDS D&C 11:15-17; RLDS D&C 10:8.

church recognized those who were to perform ordinances as representatives of the church and gave licenses to them. Except in a few instances where ordinations were considered void, or done without proper authorization, all ceremonies have been considered proper and recognized by the church.

During the dictation of the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery contemplated a passage in Third Nephi relating to baptism for the remission of sins. They went to pray regarding their own baptism and received a response that baptism was needed and they should baptize each other. Their testimony is that they received from an angel authority to baptize and then ordain each other. By this authority they could baptize others. Samuel Harrison Smith received the ordinance of baptism in May 1829, and in June a few more baptisms were performed.

The Book of Mormon presents ministers and prophets who had received a call as high priests, elders, priests, and teachers as being ordained after the holy order of God. Melchizedek was an ideal person who had mighty faith and whom those ordained should emulate.³³ In the account of Jesus Christ ministering in America, Nephi is given power to baptize.³⁴ The Book of Mormon reported Jesus saying:

On this wise shall ye baptize; and there shall be no disputations among you. Verily I say unto you, that whoso repenteth of his sins through your words, and desireth to be baptized in my name, on this wise shall ye baptize them: Behold, ye shall go down and stand in the water, and in my name shall ye baptize them. And now behold, these are the words which ye shall say, calling them by name, saying:

Having authority given me of Jesus Christ, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen. And then shall ye immerse them in the water, and come forth again out of the water.³⁵

It was after the dictation of Jesus's ministry to the Book of Mormon people that Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery enquired of the Lord concerning the authority to baptize. Smith and Cowdery gradually unfolded the story of the priesthood restoration to the membership of the early church.³⁶ Early church members believed they had been baptized and ordained by those who were called of God but they did not refer to angel visitations to Joseph Smith and Oliver

³³ See G. St. John Stott, "Ordination and Ministry in the Book of Mormon," *Restoration Studies III* (Independence, MO: Herald Publishing House, 1986), 244-53. Melchizedek is described as having "received the office of the High Priesthood, according to the holy order of God" and became a high priest. 1830 BOM, 260; LDS Alma 13:18, 14; RLDS 10:12, 7. Power to seal on earth and in heaven is mentioned in 1830 BOM, 435; LDS Hel. 10:7; RLDS 3:120.

³⁴ 1830 BOM, 477-78; LDS 3 Ne. 11:21; RLDS 5:21.

³⁵ 1830 BOM, 478; LDS 3 Nephi 11:22-26; RLDS 5:23-26.

³⁶ See Mario S. De Pillis, "The Quest for Religious Authority and the Rise of Mormonism," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 1 (Spring 1966):68-88; William G. Hartley, "'Upon You My Fellow Servants': Restoration of the Priesthood," in Larry C. Porter and Susan Easton Black, eds., *The Prophet Joseph: Essays on the Life and Mission of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988), 49-72; and Vogel, *Religious Seekers and the Advent of Mormonism*, 97-128.

Cowdery for this authority.³⁷ Lucy Mack Smith described what she had heard about the events that led to Joseph being baptized:

One morning, however, they sat down to their usual work when the first thing that presented itself to Joseph was a commandment from God that he and Oliver should repair to the water, [and] each of them be baptized. They immediately went down to the Susquehannah River and obeyed the mandate given them through the urim and Thum[m]im. . . . They had now received authority to baptize.³⁸

How accurate Lucy Smith was in her recollection is difficult to ascertain because she was not with Joseph. The various tellings by Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery need to be considered. The first printed account was written by Oliver Cowdery in a letter to William W. Phelps and his *Messenger and Advocate* audience. The language of Cowdery is flowery; and in his writing, he quotes what he says were the words of an angel. He states the experience occurred in May and that both of them were "wrapped in the vision of the Almighty":

After writing the account given of the Savior's ministry to the remnant of the seed of Jacob, upon this continent . . .

The Lord, who is rich in mercy, and ever willing to answer the consistent prayer of the humble, after we had called upon Him in a fervent manner, aside from the abodes of men, condescended to manifest to us His will. On a sudden, as from the midst of eternity, the voice of the Redeemer spake peace to us, while the veil was parted and the angel of God came down clothed with glory, and delivered the anxiously looked for message, and the keys of the Gospel of repentance. . . . [O]ur eyes beheld, our ears heard, as in the "blaze of day"; yes, more—above the glitter of the May sunbeam, which then shed its brilliancy over the face of nature! Then his voice, though mild, pierced to the center, and his words, "I am thy fellow-servant," dispelled every fear. We listened, we gazed, we admired! 'Twas the voice of an angel from glory, 'twas a message from the Most High! And as we heard we rejoiced, while His love enkindled upon our souls, and we were wrapped in the vision of the Almighty!

Where was room for doubt? Nowhere; uncertainty had fled, doubt has sunk no more to rise, while fiction and deception had fled forever!

But, dear brother, think, further think for a moment, what joy filled our hearts, and with what surprise we must have bowed, (for who would not have bowed the knee for such a blessing?) when we received under his hand the Holy Priesthood as he said,

"Upon you my fellow-servants, in the name of Messiah, I confer this Priesthood and this authority, which shall remain upon earth, that the Sons of Levi may yet offer an offering unto the Lord in righteousness!"³⁹

³⁷ Palmer, *An Insider's View of Mormon Origins*, 215-34.

³⁸ Anderson, *Lucy's Book*, 439.

³⁹ Cowdery to Phelps, September 7, 1834, *Messenger and Advocate* 1 (October 1834):15-16.

In 1839 Joseph Smith dictated his own account and explained that a messenger (John the Baptist) appeared "in a cloud of light" to them:

We still continued the <work of> translation, when in the ensuing month (May, Eighteen hundred and twenty nine) we on a certain day went into the woods to pray and inquire of the Lord respecting baptism for the remission of sins as we found mentioned in the translation of the plates. While we were thus employed praying and calling upon the Lord, a Messenger from heaven, descended in a cloud of light, and having laid his hands upon us, he ordained us, saying unto us;

"Upon you my fellow servants in the name of Messiah I confer the priesthood of Aaron, which holds the keys of the minist[e]ring of angels and of the gospel of repentance, and of baptism by immersion for the remission of sins, and this shall never be taken again from the earth, untill the sons of Levi do offer again an offering unto the Lord in righteousness."

He said this Aaronic priesthood had not the power of laying on of hands, for the gift of the Holy Ghost . . . Accordingly we went and were baptized, I baptized him [Oliver] first, and afterwards he baptized me, after which I laid my hands upon his head and ordained him to the Aaronick priesthood, and afterward he laid his hands on me and ordained me to the same priesthood, for so we were commanded. . . .

It was on the fifteenth day of May, Eighteen hundred and twentynine that we were baptized; ~~under~~ and ordained under the hand of the Messenger.⁴⁰

The italicized words in Oliver Cowdery's account are also in Joseph Smith's account:

*Upon you my fellow-servants, in the name of Messiah, I confer this Priesthood and this authority, which shall remain upon earth, that the Sons of Levi may yet offer an offering unto the Lord in righteousness.*⁴¹

The wording of Joseph Smith is similar to that of Oliver Cowdery. Smith's recollection has the words "of Aaron, which holds the keys of the ministering of angels, and the gospel of repentance, and of baptism by immersion for the remission of sins." This wording is similar to that of a revelation in the Doctrine and Covenants dated September 1832.⁴² The priesthood of Aaron was not a term used in 1829.

The wording "the Sons of Levi may yet offer an offering unto the Lord in righteousness" is a text from Malachi 3:3. This passage states that the messenger (3:1) "shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in

⁴⁰ Manuscript History, Book A-1:17-18; Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith* 1:290-91; LDS D&C 13; and Joseph Smith-History 1:68-72, Pearl of Great Price.

⁴¹ Here the angel, who is later identified as John the Baptist, ordains Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery to the priesthood and the authority is now to remain upon the earth. The New Testament does not indicate that John the Baptist ever performed ordinations.

⁴² Marquardt, *Joseph Smith Revelations*, 213; LDS D&C 84:26-27; RLDS D&C 83:4.

righteousness." The New Testament refers to John the Baptist as the one to prepare the way before Jesus.⁴³

In addition, the reference to the sons of Levi may also indicate that, in process of the dictating Book of Mormon, Smith and Cowdery had reached the end of 3 Nephi, since the Malachi text is used as a prophecy "unto future generations."⁴⁴ The meaning of Malachi 3:3 developed during Smith's lifetime.⁴⁵

In November 1832 Joseph Smith dictated an account of his early life. In his introduction he stated, "thirdly the reception of the holy Priesthood by the minist[e]ring of Aangels [sic] to admin[i]ster the letter of the Gospel - <— the Law and commandments as they were given unto him —> and the ordinencs."⁴⁶ The reference to the "letter of the Gospel" and the ordinances evidently refers to having faith, repentance, and then receiving baptism and the Holy Ghost.

The 1832 account is the earliest written record of Joseph Smith receiving the priesthood. This account also mentions "fo[u]rthly a confirmation and reception of the high Priesthood after the holy order of the son of the living God power and ordinance from on high to preach the Gospel in the administration and demonstration of the spirit the Kees of the Kingdom of God conferred upon him." The third item mentions angels, while the fourth item contains no reference to angels and could refer to the authority to preach the gospel or ordaining elders to the high priesthood, which commenced in June 1831. The similarities in the September 1832 revelation on priesthood make it unclear what the words in the 1832 account would mean when put into an 1829 context.⁴⁷

On February 12, 1834, Joseph Smith made a brief remark in a meeting held in Kirtland, "I shall now endeavor to set forth before this council, the dignity of the office which has been conferred upon me by the ministering of the Angel of God, by his own voice and by the voice of this Church."⁴⁸ Five days later Smith said, "Jerusalem was the seat of the Church Council in ancient days. The apostle, Peter, was the president of the Council and held the keys of the Kingdom of God on the earth was appointed to this office by the voice of the Savior and acknowledged in it by the voice of the Church."⁴⁹ Smith is referring to his position as President of the Church and President of the Kirtland High Council. The minutes do not name the angel, or what office was conferred. On April 21 at a conference held at Norton, Ohio, Oliver Cowdery recorded further remarks made by Joseph Smith:

He then gave a relation of obtaining and translating the Book of Mormon, the revelation of the priesthood of Aaron, the organization of the Church in the year

⁴³ See Matthew 11:10; Mark 1:2 and Luke 7:27.

⁴⁴ 1830 BOM, 503-505; LDS 3 Nephi chapters 24-25; 26:2; RLDS chapter 11; 11:29.

⁴⁵ See LDS D&C 84:31; RLDS D&C 83:6 written nearly two years before the letter of Cowdery to Phelps. The revelation mentions "the sons of Aaron shall offer an acceptable offering and sacrifice in the house of the Lord" to be built in the city of New Jerusalem in the state of Missouri. See also LDS D&C 128:24.

⁴⁶ Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith* 1:3.

⁴⁷ Marquardt, *Joseph Smith Revelations*, 212-13; LDS D&C 84:6, 19, 26-27; RLDS D&C 83:2-4. See LDS D&C 78:1-2; RLDS D&C 77:1. See also LDS D&C 77:11.

⁴⁸ Kirtland Council Minute Book, 27, CHL.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 30, meeting of February 17, 1834.

1830, the revelation of the high priesthood, and the gift of the Holy Spirit poured out upon the Church, &c.⁵⁰

These records of what Joseph Smith discussed show that, prior to Cowdery's 1834 *Messenger and Advocate* account, there was no public description of the events relating to restoration of the authority to preach and administer the ordinances of the gospel. Missionaries did not relate having their authority by heavenly messengers but only that they had been called by God.

After publishing his statement of the vision of the angel, Oliver Cowdery became Assistant President of the High and Holy Priesthood in the Church of the Latter Day Saints on December 5, 1834. In explaining his position as being next to Joseph Smith, Cowdery wrote, "This promise was made by the angel while in company with President Smith, at the time they received the office of the lesser priesthood." The minutes in Cowdery's hand mentions his formal ordination and the "keys of this kingdom."⁵¹ This ordination appears to have superseded the appointment of David Whitmer as Joseph Smith's successor.

In giving the general charge to the newly ordained Council of the Twelve Apostles on February 21, 1835, Cowdery told those Twelve in attendance, "You have been ordained to the Holy Priesthood. You have received it from those who had their power and authority from an angel."⁵² The minutes are not clear about who this angel was. The inference at this time was that the Holy Priesthood was the Apostleship the same authority given to Jesus' twelve apostles. In the instructions given by Joseph Smith in April 1835 details about priesthood offices are given but they do not mention receiving the priesthood through the ministering of angels.

When preparing the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants for publication, the presiding elders, including Cowdery and Smith, added wording not originally contained in revelations of 1829 and 1830. One of the early revelations dated September 1830, mentioned those who will drink wine on the earth with the Savior. The following are the additional words inserted into the text:

and also John the son of Zacharias, which Zacharias he (Elias) visited and gave promise that he should have a son, and his name should be John, and he should be filled with the spirit of Elias; which John I have sent unto you, my servants, Joseph Smith, jr. and Oliver Cowdery, to ordain you unto this first priesthood which you have received, that you might be called and ordained even as Aaron. . . .

And also with Peter, James, and John, whom I have sent unto you, by whom I have ordained you and confirmed you to be apostles and especial witnesses of my name, and bear the keys of your ministry: and of the same things which I revealed unto them: unto whom I have committed the keys of my kingdom, and a dispensation of the gospel for the last times: and for the fulness of times.⁵³

⁵⁰ Ibid., 44.

⁵¹ Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith* 1:21, 24. Compare with the journal of Joseph Smith, entry also by Oliver Cowdery for December 5, 1834 (Ibid., 2:36).

⁵² Kirtland Council Minute Book, 159.

⁵³ 1835 D&C 50:2-3. See Marquardt, *Joseph Smith Revelations*, 72-73; LDS D&C 27:7-8, 12-13; RLDS D&C 26:2-3.

This is probably the earliest identification of the angel who ordained Smith and Cowdery to the first priesthood being John the Baptist. Peter, James, and John reportedly ordained Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery "to be apostles and especial witnesses of my name, and bear the keys of your ministry." The added text explains that biblical personages were sent to Smith and Cowdery. The text is silent on whether the conferring of authority or priesthood was performed by the laying on of hands or was by voice command.

Joseph Smith provided no background information in the Manuscript History as to how he and Cowdery experienced Peter, James, and John appearing to them. Oliver Cowdery, while not giving the words of the ordination, or the circumstances of this vision, mentioned two things relating to this event. The first is he said, "This priesthood is also to remain upon the earth untill the Last remnant of time." The second important item was "we then confirmed [the priesthood] on each other by the will and comandment of god."⁵⁴ This conferral apparently refers to their ordination on April 6, 1830, at the church organization.

In the summer of 1835 some Egyptian papyri were purchased and Joseph Smith interpreted part of the material. He dictated to William Phelps information about priesthood in the lineage of the pharaohs of Egypt.⁵⁵ In September 1835, Oliver Cowdery wrote about the "heavenly vision" of the angel John. Oliver recorded the following account in the Patriarchal Blessing Book of Joseph Smith Sr.:

He [Joseph Smith] was ordained by the angel John, unto the lesser or Aaronic priesthood, in company with myself, in the town of Harmony, Susquehannah County, Pennsylvania, on Fryday, the 15th day of May, 1829. after which we repaired to the water, even to the Susquehannah River, and were baptized, he first ministering unto me and after I to him. But before baptism, our souls were drawn out in mighty prayer to know how we might obtain the blessings of baptism and of the Holy Spirit, according to the order of God. . . . [W]e repaired to the woods . . . and called upon the name of the Lord, and he answered us out of the heavens, and while we were in the heavenly vision the angel came down and bestowed upon us this priesthood; and then, as I have said, we repaired to the water and were baptized. After this we received the high and holy priesthood: but an account of this will be given elsewhere, or in another place.⁵⁶

The priesthood restoration by John the Baptist has enough background to determine the place, date, and significance relating to Cowdery and Smith. But information on receiving additional priesthood from Peter, James, and John is very scarce. Oliver Cowdery refers to a December 18, 1833, blessing he received from Joseph Smith. He then writes about a "Prophecy of Joseph," son of Jacob relating to the seer of the last days and the scribe. Oliver wrote that they received:

⁵⁴ Diary of Reuben Miller, October 21, 1848, CHL.

⁵⁵ Egyptian Alphabet, manuscript book, 1835, CHL. See Marquardt, *Joseph Smith Egyptian Papers*. See also LDS D&C 107:40-57; RLDS D&C 104:18-29 for a lineage of patriarchs from Adam to Noah "written in the book of Enoch."

⁵⁶ Patriarchal Blessing Book 1:8-9, CHL.

the holy priesthood under the hands of those who had been held in reserve for a long season, even those who received it under the hand of the Messiah, while he should dwell in the flesh, upon the earth.⁵⁷

When Joseph Smith reported the conferral of priesthood from John the Baptist, he stated that the Baptist said he "acted under the direction <of> Peter, James, and John, who held the keys of the priesthood of Melchisedek, whi[c]h priesthood he said should in due time be conferred on us. And that I should be called the first Elder of the Church and he [Oliver Cowdery] the second [Elder]."⁵⁸ The wording "due time" is connected with Smith and Cowdery and is the promise of having the priesthood conferred upon them and being ordained first and second elders of the church. Cowdery's 1834 writing does not mention the angel (John the Baptist) acting under instructions of Peter, James, and John or of a future conferral of authority from them.

Though a few baptisms were performed during June 1829, Joseph Smith's history tells about their being anxious about the promise of having the authority to bestow the Holy Ghost and receiving this additional authority. The first reference is a general statement:

We now became anxious to have that promise realized to us, which the Angel that conferred upon us the Aaronick Priesthood had given us, viz: that provided we continued faithful; we should also have the Melchesidec Priesthood, which holds the authority of the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost.

The Joseph Smith history then related that they prayed at Peter Whitmer Sr.'s house in Fayette Township: "for we had not long been engaged in solemn and fervent prayer, when the word of the Lord, came unto us in the Chamber [upper story of the Whitmer home], commanding us; that I should ordain Oliver Cowdery to be an Elder in the Church of Jesus Christ, And that he also should ordain me to the same office, ~~aeccordin~~ and then <to> ordain others."⁵⁹

From this account it appears that neither Smith nor Cowdery had been ordained elders by June 1829 while they were staying at the Peter Whitmer home. Smith further stated that they were "to defer" their ordination.⁶⁰ The wording is clear that they were to wait and not ordain each other as elders until commanded of God.⁶¹ But on April 6, 1830, Oliver Cowdery ordained Joseph Smith the first elder, seer, prophet, and apostle in the church and Smith ordained Cowdery as the second elder, also an apostle of Jesus Christ.

No reference in Joseph Smith's history gives background about a visitation of the three apostles Peter, James, and John. Brigham H. Roberts, assistant Church historian, wrote, "there is no definite account of the event in the history of the Prophet Joseph, or, for matter of that, in any

⁵⁷ Patriarchal Blessing Book 1:12, blessing for Oliver Cowdery by Joseph Smith Jr. This portion appears to be an 1835 addition to the original 1833 blessing. It was written and recorded by Oliver Cowdery on October 2, 1835.

⁵⁸ Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith* 1:291.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 1:299.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 1:239, 299.

⁶¹ BCR, 29; BC 22:13-14; LDS D&C 21:10-11; RLDS D&C 19:3.

of our annals."⁶² There is no account about Peter, James, and John extant, nor is there any location, date, or ordination prayer relating to this experience by Smith.

Various individuals have proposed that the vision of the three ancient apostles to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery occurred (1) in May or June 1829 before the church was organized; (2) about June-July 1830 after the establishment of the church; and (3) in June 1831, at the time that the high priesthood was conferred upon some of the church elders. These writings will be examined in reverse order.

In 1861 Brigham Young, who was baptized in April 1832, made the following comment, "When he [Joseph Smith] received the Melchisedek Priesthood, he had another revelation. Peter, James, and John came to him. You can read the revelation at your leisure. When he received this revelation in Kirtland, the Lord revealed to him that he should begin and ordain High Priests."⁶³ The appearance to Joseph Smith of Peter, James, and John is considered by Brigham Young to be a revelation. Smith received the high priesthood (high priest) on June 3, 1831.

A late recollection places the visitation of the three apostles in 1830. This comes from letters of Addison Everett. He wrote in 1881 that he had overheard a conversation thirty-five years earlier relating to a time when Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery were being persecuted for their religion in southern New York.⁶⁴ This would have been in July 1830 if the information is correct. Additional wording to a revelation, as discussed above, has also been used to indicate the appearance to 1830.⁶⁵ Addison Everett and Erastus Snow placed the appearance of Peter, James, and John to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery after the organization of the church.

The more commonly held view is that the Peter, James, and John's appearance occurred in May or June 1829, prior to Smith and Cowdery's arriving in Fayette, Seneca County, to complete the writing of the Book of Mormon.⁶⁶ In 1842 Joseph Smith dictated a letter to William Clayton that contains a brief mention of a general location of where he heard the "voice" of the apostles. Smith wrote, "The voice of Peter, James & John, [came] in the wilderness, between Harmony, Susquehanna County, [Pennsylvania] and Colesville, Broom[e] County, [New York] on the [bank of the] Susquehanna river, declaring themselves as possessing the keys of the kingdom, and of the dispensation of the fulness of times."⁶⁷

This letter gives no date on when the voice was heard, nor does it mention conferral of priesthood. Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery were together during the dictation process of the Book of Mormon prior to their move to Fayette in early June 1829. In 1844 Joseph Smith

⁶² B. H. Roberts, ed., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1959), 1:40, footnote. First edition published in 1902.

⁶³ *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (London and Liverpool: LDS Booksellers Depot, 1854-86), 9:89, discourse of May 7, 1861.

⁶⁴ Addison Everett to Oliver B. Huntington, February 17, 1881, Oliver B. Huntington Journal, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library. See Erastus Snow, *Journal of Discourses* 23:183, discourse of May 6, 1882.

⁶⁵ Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism*, 163, 240-41n55. Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*, 118, 588n35.

⁶⁶ See Roberts, *History of the Church* 1:61, footnote; Joseph F. Smith, Jr., "Restoration of the Melchizedek Priesthood," *Improvement Era* 7 (October 1904):938-43; and Larry C. Porter, "Dating the Restoration of the Melchizedek Priesthood," *Ensign* 9 (June 1979):5-10.

⁶⁷ Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith* 2:474, letter dated September 6, 1842. See LDS D&C 128:20. The original letter written by William Clayton is in the CHL.

mentioned "the vision of his ordination to the priesthood of Aaron" but no mention of the vision of Peter, James, and John.⁶⁸ Richard Bushman noted: "But the difficulties with both the proposed dates—summer 1829 or summer 1830—means that we will not know for certain until more information is uncovered."⁶⁹

A few members wrote that they had heard on different occasions that Joseph Smith mentioned that the keys of the kingdom were given him by Peter, James, and John. Two late recollections are from Philo Dibble and Benjamin Winchester. Dibble said he remembered that in 1832, when Sidney Rigdon was making false pretensions, that Joseph Smith said, "No power can pluck those keys from me, except the power that gave them to me; that was Peter, James and John."⁷⁰ Winchester mentions the meeting when David Whitmer was ordained successor to Joseph Smith in July 1834:

Joseph said at that time that the keys of the kingdom had been given to him through the angels, Peter, James and John, and that he himself had finished his work so far as a complete organization of the church was concerned. He then, in a conference, ordained David Whitmer to be his successor in case of accident to himself.⁷¹

Orson Pratt wrote about the early events of the church in which he was involved:

In that early day the prophet Joseph said to me that the Lord had revealed that twelve men were to be chosen as Apostles. A manuscript revelation to this effect, given in 1829—before the rise of this Church—was laid before me, and I read it. Joseph said to me . . . that I should be one of this Twelve.⁷²

The ordinations of those chosen for the quorum of the twelve apostles commenced in February 1835. This was during the time when textual additions were being made to the revelations of Joseph Smith.

Another consideration relating to problems of the priesthood restoration by Peter, James, and John is whether the event was by a physical ordination or by voice command.⁷³ In Joseph

⁶⁸ Franklin D. Richards, "Scriptural Items," March 10, 1844 in Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 334.

⁶⁹ Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism*, 241n55. Also Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*, 588n35.

⁷⁰ "Philo Dibble's Narrative," in *Early Scenes in Church History. Eighth Book of the Faith-Promoting Series* (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1882), 80.

⁷¹ *Daily Tribune*, September 22, 1889, Salt Lake City. See *History of the Church* 2:124 on Joseph Smith's statement that he had accomplished the great work the Lord had laid before him.

⁷² *Journal of Discourses* 12:85-86, discourse of August 11, 1867. Pratt was referring to a June 1829 revelation. See LDS D&C 18:27, 37; RLDS D&C 16:5-6.

⁷³ On the position that there was no physical ordination by Peter, James, and John, see RLDS writers Joseph Smith III and Heman C. Smith, in *The History of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints* (Independence, MO: Herald Publishing House, 1897), 1:63-66; Richard P. Howard in *Saints Herald* 121 (November 1974):53; 126 (May 1, 1979):29; 129 (May

Smith's 1839 account, the appearance of John the Baptist mentions two ordinations. The first ordination was from the angel and the second occurred after Smith's and Cowdery's baptism when they ordained each other. It is of interest that John the Baptist did not baptize them. As there is no account of Peter, James, and John, we have no circumstances to judge it by.

A very late recollection by David H. Cannon tells of an interview he had with David Whitmer in 1861. Whitmer recalled that, prior to Oliver Cowdery's death in 1850, Cowdery bore his testimony to the Book of Mormon and then "laid his hands upon his own head, saying to the people assembled there, 'Peter, James, and John have laid their hands upon this head and conferred the Holy Melchizedek Priesthood.'"⁷⁴

No Book of Mormon minister is recorded as conferring priesthood on Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery—only biblical personages. It appears that the power and authority that Smith and Cowdery received in their ordination as elders gave them additional duties beyond the baptism authority. When they were ordained on April 6, 1830, they had authority to ordain other elders and confer the Holy Ghost like the Book of Mormon twelve Nephite disciples.

As mentioned previously, in June 1831, Joseph Smith (Oliver Cowdery was in Missouri at the time), commenced ordaining elders to the office of the high priesthood (high priests). When Smith was ordained President of the High Priesthood on January 25, 1832, Sidney Rigdon "sealed upon his head the blessings which he had formerly received."⁷⁵ All of the known statements concerning priesthood restoration by Smith and Cowdery were told after the Presidency of the High Priesthood had been established in March 1832 with Joseph Smith and his two counselors Sidney Rigdon and Jesse Gause. This Presidency was to hold the keys of the kingdom of God on earth and the presidency of three was likened unto the three apostles of Jesus: Peter, James, and John.

The idea that Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery would develop the story of the visions of heavenly personages appearing to them is in line with other early embellishments. Examples of historical development of texts, location, name, and documents are as follows: (1) *Evening and Morning Star* reprint in Kirtland, with Oliver Cowdery as editor; (2) the change in the name of the church and the place it was organized; (3) significant revisions in some of the sacred texts of Joseph Smith's revelations permitted by the four members of Presidency for the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants; and (4) the expansion of blessings given in December 1833 and their recording in the fall of 1835.⁷⁶

1, 1982):28; and Howard, *The Church through the Years* (Independence, MO: Herald Publishing House, 1992) 1:146n6 and *Ibid.*, (1993) 2:481.

⁷⁴ Beatrice Cannon Evans and Janath Russell Cannon, eds., *Cannon Family Historical Treasury* (Salt Lake City: George Cannon Family Association, 1967), 251. This quotation is from his brief autobiography written in 1922 at the age of eighty-four (240).

⁷⁵ Watson, *The Orson Pratt Journals*, 11.

⁷⁶ See (1) *Evening and Morning Star*, Kirtland reprint; (2) H. Michael Marquardt, "An Appraisal of Manchester as Location for the Organization of the Church," *Sunstone* 16 (February 1992):49-57; (3) compare the texts between manuscript copies of certain revelations (appearing in the unfinished Book of Commandments and other revelatory documents not planned for publication in that book) with the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants; and (4) the recording of blessings in Joseph Smith's journal (Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith* 2:15-17) with Patriarchal Blessing Book 1 (CHL).

For Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery to baptize and confer authority upon each other by an impression or voice command was like action taken by other ministers of the gospel at the time. No exclusive authority by the laying on of angelic hands was promoted when the church was organized in April 1830. The early revelations and missionaries did not say their authority could be traced from biblical personages in the first few years, but they considered that they were called by inspiration, and in some cases, by Joseph Smith through a written revelation.

One short development was a conference or council of high priests where decisions could be made. On February 17, 1834, at Joseph Smith's home, he "proceeded to organize the high council of the Church of Christ, which was to consist of twelve high priests, and one, or three presidents, as the case might require."⁷⁷ The council was basically a church court to settle important difficulties between members including church discipline. Cases could be appealed to the "high Council at the seat of the general government of the church" (presidency of the high priesthood or first presidency). If there was a question of doctrine the president of the church high council could inquire and obtain the mind of the Lord by revelation. It was voted by those present at the meeting that Joseph Smith make corrections by the spirit of revelation on the proceedings of the day.

Joseph Smith Sr. was chosen to be on the Kirtland high council as was his son Samuel H. Smith. The elder Smith blessed his sons on February 19. After putting his hands on the head of twenty-eight-year-old Joseph, he blessed him saying:

Joseph, I lay my hands upon thy head, and pronounce the blessings of thy progenitors upon thee, that thou mayest hold the keys of the mysteries of the Kingdom of heaven until the coming of the Lord, Amen.⁷⁸

Concerning the president of the high council, the minutes of February 17 state:

The president of the church, who is also the president of the Council, is appointed by the voice of the Saviour and acknowledged in his administration by the voice of the Church.⁷⁹

The minutes of this meeting were copied into the Kirtland Revelations Book. Sometime later the above sentence was revised with the words "the voice of the Savior" crossed out and "revelation" written above the line. The sentence in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants read:

The president of the church who is also the president of the council, is appointed by revelation and acknowledged in his administration by the voice of the church.⁸⁰

There is another place in the minutes where nothing is recorded for correction but a mention of the twelve apostles appears in the printed minutes in the Doctrine and Covenants as follows:

⁷⁷ Corrected minutes in Kirtland Council Minute Book, 32. See LDS D&C 102:1; RLDS D&C 99:1.

⁷⁸ Kirtland Council Minute Book, 37.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 33.

⁸⁰ KRB, 112-13, CHL; compare 1835 D&C 5:6; LDS D&C 102:9; RLDS D&C 99:6.

There is a distinction between the high council of travelling high priests abroad, and the travelling high council composed of the twelve apostles, in their decisions: From the decision of the former there can be an appeal, but from the decision of the latter there cannot. The latter can only be called in question by the general authorities of the church in case of transgression.⁸¹

A number of changes to the minutes were made by Joseph Smith in accordance to instructions of the high council: "The document was received by the unanimous voice of the Council, with this provision, that, if the president should hereafter discover any lack in the same he should be privileged to fill it up."⁸²

According to a revelation given to Joseph Smith in June 1829 there were to be twelve disciples chosen by Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer.⁸³ David Marks, who visited the Peter Whitmer home in March 1830 commented, "They further stated, that twelve apostles were to be appointed."⁸⁴ As mentioned earlier Orson Pratt, an early convert to the church, said: "In that early day the prophet Joseph said to me that the Lord had revealed that twelve men were to be chosen as Apostles. A manuscript revelation to this effect, given in 1829—before the rise of this Church—was laid before me, and I read it. Joseph said to me . . . that I should be one of this Twelve."⁸⁵

At a conference held at Orange, Ohio, on October 26, 1831, Oliver Cowdery recorded "that the directions which himself & his br[other]. David Whitmer had received this morning respecting the choice of the twelve was that they would be ordained & sent forth from the Land of Zion [Missouri]."⁸⁶ Since the saints two years later had to abandon Jackson County, other arrangements moved forward by adding Martin Harris and having the ordinations take place in Kirtland. This now meant that the three witnesses to the Book of Mormon would be the committee to choose the Twelve Apostles.

A meeting was held on February 14, 1835, and after prayer President Joseph Smith spoke regarding those men who had gone to Missouri in Zion's Camp. He said "it was the Will of God, that they should be ordained to the ministry and go forth to prune the vineyard for the last times, or the coming of the Lord which was nigh, even fifty six years, should wind up the scene." The minutes recorded Smith saying:

The first business of the meeting was for the three witnesses of the Book of Mormon, to pray each one and then proceed to choose twelve men from the Church as Apostles to go to all nations, kindred, tounges [tongues] and people. The three Witnesses united in prayer (Viz.) Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer & Martin Harris. These three Witnesses were then blessed by the laying on of the

⁸¹ 1835 D&C 5:13; LDS D&C 102:30-32; RLDS D&C 99:13.

⁸² Kirtland Council Minute Book, 36.

⁸³ Marquardt, *Joseph Smith Revelations*, 48; BC 15:42; LDS D&C 18:37; RLDS D&C 16:6.

⁸⁴ *The Life of David Marks* (Limerick, ME: Printed at the Office of the Morning Star, 1831), 340.

⁸⁵ *Journal of Discourses* 12:85-86, discourse of August 11, 1867. Pratt was referring to the June 1829 revelation.

⁸⁶ Cannon and Cook, *Far West Record*, 26.

hands of the Presidency. They then according to a former commandment, proceeded to make choice of the twelve.⁸⁷

As indicated by Joseph Smith's instructions the following sequence relating to the three witnesses were: (1) prayed, (2) were blessed by the First Presidency, and (3) chose the Twelve. This committee was influenced by Smith in their choice of the only member of the Smith family to be in the quorum at their first organization. The minutes of the Quorum of the Twelve state:

The Three Special witnesses of the Book of Mormon being present . . . it was ascertained that the time had come when they should be chosen: Consequently They proceeded by the spirit of prophecy and revelation to choose and set apart from among all the elders of the church the following persons to fill that high and responsible station.⁸⁸

The following men were chosen to be among the twelve apostles: Luke Johnson (age 27), Lyman E. Johnson (age 23), Parley P. Pratt (age 27), Orson Pratt (age 23), Brigham Young (age 33), Heber C. Kimball (age 33), Orson Hyde (age 30), Thomas B. Marsh (age 34), David W. Patten (age 35; thought to be 34), John F. Boyington (age 23), William E. McLellin (age 29), and William Smith (age 23).

Statements by two of the committee, Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer, indicate that Phineas Young, brother to Brigham Young had originally been considered to be one of the twelve but that Joseph Smith requested they choose his brother William Smith. In a letter from Oliver Cowdery to Brigham Young, February 27, 1848, Cowdery wrote:

At the time the Twelve were chosen in Kirtland, and I may say before, it had been manifested that brother Phineas [Young] was entitled to occupy the station as one of that number; but owing to brother Joseph's urgent request at the time, Brother David [Whitmer] and myself yielded to his wishing and consented for William [Smith] to be selected, contrary to our feelings and judgment, and to our deep mortification ever since. Brother Phineas occupied at that time a relation to myself [brother-in-law] that caused me to feel delicate about urging his name and besides Brother Joseph, about that time was bearing down heavily upon Brother Phineas.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Kirtland Council Minute Book, 147, 149. On pruning the vineyard for the last time, see LDS D&C 24:19; RLDS D&C 23:7 (July 1830) and LDS D&C 39:17; RLDS D&C 39:5 (January 5, 1831).

⁸⁸ "A record of the transactions of the Twelve apostles," [1835], in Patriarchal Blessing Book 2, typed copy, CHL. See Ronald K. Esplin and Sharon E. Nielsen, "The Record of the Twelve, 1835: The Quorum of the Twelve Apostles' Call and 1835 Mission," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 51, no. 1 (2012):21.

⁸⁹ Cowdery to Brigham Young, February 27, 1848, as cited in Stanley R. Gunn, *Oliver Cowdery Second Elder and Scribe* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1962), 268.

David Whitmer when interviewed in 1885 was asked "Do you know how the first Twelve was chosen?" The manuscript page is damaged that has Whitmer's answer (proposed reading in brackets):

Yes. Cowdery and myself were appointed a com[mittee to choose] the Twelve but Jose[ph Smith] insisted that his brother William Smith should be put in as it was the only way by which he could be saved, otherwise we would not have chosen him.⁹⁰

This would indicate that originally three sets of brothers were chosen as apostles before two of the three witnesses were persuaded to replace the name of Phineas Young with William Smith.

A synopsis of the ordination blessings was later recorded in the Kirtland Council Minute Book. Three men were ordained on February 14 and six others on February 15. Lyman Johnson, who was the youngest apostle, received the following blessing on the fifteenth:

in the name of Jesus Christ, that he should bear the tidings of salvation to nations, tongues and people, until the utmost corners of the earth shall hear the tidings, and that he shall be a witness of the things of God, to nations & tongues, and that Holy Angels shall administer to him occasionally and that no power of the enemy shall prevent him from going forth and doing the work of the Lord. And that he should live until the gathering was accomplished, according to the Holy Prophets. And that he should be like unto Enoch And your faith shall be like unto his, and he shall be called great among all the living and Satan shall tremble before thee, and that he shall see the Saviour come and stand on the Earth with power and great glory.⁹¹

William Smith received the following apostolic blessing:

That he may be purified in heart, that he may have communion with God. That he may be equal with his brethren in holding the keys of this ministry That he may be kept and be instrumental in leading Israel forth, that he may be delivered from the hands of those who seek to destroy him; that he may be enabled to bear testimony to the nations, that Jesus lives. That he may stand in the midst of pestilence and destruction, he shall be mighty in the hands of God, in bringing about the restoration of Israel. The nations shall rejoice at the greatness of the gifts which God has bestowed upon him, That his tongue shall be loosed, he shall have power to do great things in the name of Jesus. He shall be preserved and remain on the earth, until Christ shall come to take vengeance on the wicked.⁹²

⁹⁰ Interview of David Whitmer by Zenas H. Gurley Jr., January 14, 1885, CHL. See Cook, *David Whitmer Interviews*, 157.

⁹¹ Kirtland Council Minute Book, 149-50.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 154.

The record indicates that Parley P. Pratt was ordained on February 21 by Joseph Smith, David Whitmer, and Oliver Cowdery. This was because Martin Harris left Kirtland for New York. Thomas B. Marsh and Orson Pratt were ordained to the apostleship on April 26.

A meeting of the Council of the Twelve was held on April 28. The minutes state that the Twelve "motioned and carried that we each forgive one another every wrong that has existed among us."⁹³ The twelve apostles were all present at this meeting and were preparing to go on their first mission. They wrote a letter to Joseph Smith asking, if possible, for a revelation that would spell out their duty.⁹⁴

Heber C. Kimball wrote concerning a meeting of the Twelve: "One evening when we were assembled to receive instruction, the revelation contained in the third section of the Book of Doctrine and Covenants, on Priesthood was given to Brother Joseph as he was instructing us, and we praised the Lord."⁹⁵ Joseph Smith commenced giving instructions to the Twelve Apostles:

There are, in the church, two priesthoods, namely: the Melchizedek, and the Aaronic, including the Levitical priesthood. Why the first is called the Melchizedek priesthood, is because Melchizedek was such a great high priest: before his day it was called *the holy priesthood, after the order of the Son of God*; but out of respect or reverence to the name of the Supreme Being, to avoid the too frequent repetition of his name, they, the church, in ancient days, called that priesthood after Melchizedek, or the Melchizedek priesthood.⁹⁶

As printed the instructions included a number of separate items given at various times. This composite document contained instructions from Joseph Smith including a November 1831 revelation that had been enlarged, an extract from a patriarchal blessing given to Joseph Smith Sr., and a record of a vision relating to the new office of Seventy.

The duties of the Twelve included being "special witnesses of the name of Christ, in all the world," and being a quorum equal in authority to the First Presidency. They were told, "The twelve are a travelling, presiding high council, to officiate in the name of the Lord, under the direction of the presidency of the church." The Twelve can ordain evangelical ministers (patriarchs) in large branches of the church.⁹⁷ While the Twelve Apostles were on their first church mission, a traveling showman arrived in Kirtland with four Egyptian mummies and some papyri as will be explained in the next chapter.

⁹³ "A record of the transactions of the Twelve apostles," minutes for April 28, 1835.

⁹⁴ Orson Hyde and William E. McLellin to Smith, [April 28, 1835]. The date of the letter was recorded in the Kirtland Council Minutes (198) as March 28, 1836. The month should be April rather than March and the proper year is 1835 before the Twelve Apostles went on their mission.

⁹⁵ "Extracts from H. C. Kimball's Journal," *Times and Seasons* 6 (April 15, 1845):869. See 1835 D&C 3; LDS D&C 107; RLDS D&C 104.

⁹⁶ Marquardt, *Joseph Smith Revelations*, 267, emphasis retained; LDS D&C 107:1-4; RLDS D&C 104:1 (April [28-30] 1835).

⁹⁷ Marquardt, *Joseph Smith Revelations*, 268-69; LDS D&C 107:23-24, 33, 39; RLDS D&C 104:11-12, 17. The jurisdiction of the Twelve was expanded in 1841.