

The Heresies of Joseph Smith's Priesthood

The Foundations of Heresy

In the last two chapters we explored both the Melchizedek and Aaronic priesthoods and their true meaning within the Biblical record. We concluded that neither priesthood order is legitimate within the Christian church today. If that is the case, how did Joseph Smith end up with both of them in his church? As we discussed in chapters 2 and 4, Joseph's earliest supernatural experiences, which led him to start a church, left him with a "low" view of the Bible and of the Christian church at large. Remember, the spiritual visitor quoted scriptures to him with a number of variations from the Bible of his day, the King James Version. And at the same time he told Joseph that all existing churches were an abomination to God. Having neither the ability nor inclination to critically evaluate the messages he was receiving, Joseph was easy prey for all that these spirits wanted him to do. His story ought to be a most somber warning to all Christians who place personal feeling or experience over the word of God. Christians who are largely ignorant of God's word actually have very little alternative, as did Joseph Smith. It was exactly this kind of spiritual immaturity that the author of Hebrews had in mind when scolding his Jewish brethren.

"We have much to say to you about this [Jesus Christ being after the order of Melchizedek], but is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. *But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.*" (Heb. 5:11–14, emphasis mine)

Therefore, because of Joseph Smith's ignorance, spiritual immaturity and an overactive occult life, he became the source of some of the most obnoxious heresies ever foisted upon the world. Why? Because he had no ability to distinguish right from wrong. That ability is gained solely through the word of God, whose *constant use* "trains [us] to distinguish good from evil."

The Building Blocks of Heresy

Contradictory Supernatural Experience. The apostle Paul knew well the fallen nature of the human spirit, and how susceptible we are to deception. He therefore counseled the churches in Galatia, "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!" (Gal. 1:8). The first and foremost thing to be understood and trusted is the sure word of the Lord. Otherwise we are open prey to those fallen angels whose work it is to lead us astray.

Joseph Smith's entire experience can be categorized as a work of spiritual deception. It is possible that he was sincere, that he felt he was actually being led by God at times. It is also possible that he was a charlatan. But whether he was sincere or not does not change the fact that he was deceived, and that he has deceived countless others. From the very beginning his visiting spirits told him that the word of God was actually unreliable. Their use of God's word was done in such a way as to cause him to *question* it, not *trust* it. Because what the spirits really wanted was for him to trust *them*, not God's word. And that's exactly what Joseph did. It is most significant to note that this is precisely the way satan deceived Eve in the Garden of Eden. He quoted enough of God's word to gain credibility, and then he interjected his own heresy, with catastrophic results. If Joseph had possessed any degree of spiritual discernment, these contradictory supernatural experiences would have been a major warning for him. But he didn't. He played right into their hands. Just like Eve did.

Therefore, when these spirits said they were now coming to reveal the Book of Mormon, changes to the Bible or any number of other things, they were welcomed with open arms. And when they came to confer the Aaronic and Melchizedek priesthoods, Joseph was more than willing to receive them. And pass them along.

The Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon portrays a significantly different picture of Israel's priesthood than the Bible does. But because most RLDS believe the Book of Mormon is actually a higher form of revelation than the Bible, these differences are often quickly put aside. Some of these distortions are outlined in the heresies below.

Melchizedek is also portrayed in quite a different way in the Book of Mormon than in the Bible. In fact, the very first evidence of Melchizedek in the work of Joseph Smith appears in the Book of Mormon. He is included as the primary figure in a distorted discussion of the "high priesthood" (*BM*, Alma 9:63–10:16). He is mentioned in 10 verses (*BM*, Alma 10:7–16), and nowhere else in the Book of Mormon. Because of its significance, this passage has been reproduced in Appendix D.

Joseph Smith's Inspired Version of the Bible. Through his earliest visitations, Joseph became convinced that the Bible was unreliable, and that he was going to be used by God as a channel to restore it to its original condition. We learned in chapter 9 that this resulted in Joseph's own revision of the King James Bible, coming to be known within his churches as the *Inspired Version*.

Joseph's "Inspired Version" of the Bible included a massive revision of the account of Melchizedek in Genesis 14, and a significant alteration of the one in Hebrews 7:3. The original account in Genesis contains just three verses (18–20), while Joseph's version was enlarged to contain 24 verses (17–40, *IV*). This added material provided a further foundation for the establishment of a Melchizedek priesthood in his evolving concept of a church. This material is also significant because it gives the impression that the Melchizedek priesthood concept had been around since the days of the Enoch of Genesis 5.

RLDS are taught that the Inspired Version is a dramatic improvement over the King James Version, with most (if not all) of the KJV errors having been corrected therein. It is highly preferred over any other version, and the only version held to be authoritative. Many RLDS, therefore, (1) don't use any other version, (2) are unaware that this Genesis 14 material is not in any other version and (3) assume that this Genesis 14 insertion is actually a part of the legitimate

Biblical record.

Because of their significance, these insertions into Genesis 14 and Hebrews 7 are reproduced in Appendix D, compared side by side to the King James Version.

The Doctrine & Covenants. This book, much of it supernaturally generated, contains the philosophical underpinnings for Joseph's priesthood system, as well as many detailed instructions for its present-day implementation. Pertinent sections of the *D&C* are referenced in chapter 11 as well as in the discussion to follow. Joseph also further embellished his concept of Melchizedek in his *Doctrine & Covenants*. The principal sections relating to Melchizedek are 68, 83 and 104. Because of their length, these sections have not been reproduced.

The Heresies of Joseph Smith's Priesthood

With all of the occult input Joseph Smith had, it was inevitable that any priesthood system he developed would be rife with contradictions to God's word. Consider the following.

Heresy #1 – The Origin of the High Priesthood. As discussed in chapter 14, the concept of a great, or high priest originated within Israel at Mt. Sinai. Aaron was designated by God as the first such high priest. Adam was not the first high priest, nor was any high priesthood handed down by him in the unbroken chain from father to son as asserted by Joseph Smith in *D&C* 83:2. This fact also invalidates the concept of Melchizedek having been a high priest as asserted by Joseph's revision of Genesis 14 and Hebrews 7:3. It also betrays the Book of Mormon as a fraud because of its portrayal of Melchizedek as a high priest.

Heresy #2 – Priesthood not in Aaron's Lineage. Every priest and high priest within Israel was to be of Aaron's lineage. Every male descendant of Aaron was eligible for the priesthood, with the sole exception of those with physical deformities (Lev. 21:16–23). However, the Book of Mormon says nothing at all about this sole requirement in connection with its priests and high priests. Rather, the Book of Mormon people were supposedly descendants of Joseph through Manasseh, which would have made it *virtually impossible* for them to hold Israel's priesthood. Therefore, instead of being of Aaron's lineage, the Book of Mormon holds out faith, repentance and good works as the only qualifying criteria for ordination as high priests (*BM*, Alma 9:65,67; 10:2).

Furthermore, the Doctrine & Covenants teaches that this priesthood is something which can, and should be obtained by an individual's own initiative (*D&C* 83:6c). Israel's priesthood could never be "obtained" through individual initiative. And neither faith, repentance nor good works, as good as these things are, had anything to do with being a priest in Israel. Becoming a priest in Israel had everything to do with being a descendant of Aaron. Period. It was a legal right, excluding only those with physical deformity.

Heresy #3 – Multiple High Priests at the Same Time. As explained in chapter 14, there was only one high priest at a time in Israel, whose special duties revolved around entering the Most Holy Place once each year on the Day of Atonement with the blood of the atoning sacrifice. This high priesthood was passed down from father to son within Aaron's lineage. In the Book of Mormon, however, there are several references to there being multiple high priests at the same time (i.e., Mosiah 7:14; Alma 21:34; Helaman 2:23). This most obvious discrepancy also betrays the Book of Mormon itself as a fraud.

Heresy #4 – The Lineage of Melchizedek. All of Joseph Smith’s writings assert that Melchizedek was a high priest: the *Book of Mormon*, *Inspired Version* and *Doctrine & Covenants*. This obviously could not be true based on our Biblical analysis of the Melchizedek and Aaronic priesthoods contained in chapters 13 and 14, as well as the reasons contained in the 4 heresies discussed above.

But there is yet another problem with Joseph’s embellishment of Melchizedek. In describing the superiority of Melchizedek’s priesthood over that of Aaron, the author of Hebrews draws an important distinction between them. Melchizedek was “Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, like the Son of God he remains a priest forever” (Heb. 7:3).

As we said above, genealogy was everything to the Levitical priesthood. So much so that a satisfactory genealogy had to be presented before a man could be ordained to the priesthood. Furthermore, the day of his ordination was marked with elaborate ritual, and the day of his death recorded. And his posterity was also duly noted to substantiate future eligibility for priesthood.

The scriptural record of Melchizedek, however, stands in stark contrast to all of this. We know virtually nothing about his family tree, his father or mother, the day of his birth nor the day of his death. And regarding his priesthood we know nothing of his becoming a priest, who his successors may have been or the passing of his priesthood. In the scriptural record, he remains a priest the entire time. And because there is no recorded end to his priesthood, the author of Hebrews likens him to Jesus, whose priesthood also endures forever.

The writings of Joseph Smith, on the other hand, fly squarely in the face of all this. The *Book of Mormon* says that Melchizedek was subservient to his own father by reigning under him (Alma 10:14). And the *Doctrine & Covenants* claims that Melchizedek was merely one in an unbroken chain of high priests which started with Adam and continued right down to Moses and his sons (rather than Aaron and his sons) (*D&C* 83:2c–g). If accepted, therefore, the writings of Joseph Smith once again invalidate the legitimate word of God.

Heresy #5 – A Melchizedek Order of Priests. Every reference in the Bible to a Melchizedek priesthood is in reference to the specific and unique ministry which Jesus Christ alone fulfills as God’s chosen means of salvation for His people. Therefore, any attempt by mere humans to appropriate this title or ministry to themselves actually constitutes a form of blasphemy, by usurping a unique title and function which belong to Jesus alone. See chapter 13 for a complete explanation.

Heresy #6 – An Aaronic Priesthood in the Christian Era. The perfect sacrifice of Christ on the cross forever eliminated the need for a Levitical, or Aaronic priesthood to administer the sacrificial system of the Mosaic law. This includes the offices of both High Priest as well as Priest. The written code, together with its attendant Levitical priesthood, was made obsolete when Jesus “nailed it to the cross” (Col. 2:14). See chapter 14 for a complete explanation. Therefore, Joseph Smith’s attempt to revert back to the Levitical priesthood system shows contempt for the perfect and completed work of Jesus.