
Melchizedek Priesthood

D&C 18: Introduction

The Prophet Joseph Smith wrote that after receiving the Aaronic Priesthood from John the Baptist on May 15, 1829, he and Oliver Cowdery

became anxious to have that promise realized to us, which the angel that conferred upon us the Aaronic Priesthood had given us, viz., that provided we continued faithful, we should also have the Melchizedek Priesthood, which holds the authority of the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost. We had for some time made this matter a subject of humble prayer, and at length we got together in the chamber of Mr. Whitmer's house, in order more particularly to seek of the Lord what we now so earnestly desired.¹

The Melchizedek Priesthood was bestowed upon Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery by ancient apostles Peter, James, and John. Oliver Cowdery said, "I was . . . present with Joseph when the Melchizedek Priesthood was conferred by the holy angels of god,—which we then confirmed on each other by the will and commandment of god."²

As to the date or place the Melchizedek Priesthood was restored, precious little is known. It appears that the Prophet Joseph and his scribe Oliver were more concerned with what it meant to hold the Melchizedek Priesthood than recording the date or place other than "in the wilderness between Harmony, Susquehanna county, and Colesville, Broome county, on the Susquehanna river" (D&C 128:20). In 1878 Elders Orson Pratt and Joseph F. Smith asked David Whitmer, "Can you tell the date of the bestowal of the Apostleship

¹ "History of Joseph Smith," *Times and Seasons* 3, no. 22 (September 15, 1842): 915.

² Reuben Miller Journal, October 21, 1848. Church History Library.

upon Joseph, by Peter, James, and John?" David replied, "I do not know, Joseph never told me."³

Latter-day Saint historians suggest that the Melchizedek Priesthood was given to Joseph and Oliver between May 15, 1829, and the end of June 1829. Recent evidence narrows the date between the 15th and 29th of May 1829. If an 1881 Addison Everett letter is reliable, then a few additional facts of the Melchizedek Priesthood restoration are known. In the letter, Everett pens of overhearing a conversation between Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum Smith regarding a time when Joseph and Oliver Cowdery were escaping from enemies in Colesville, New York. Everett describes the escape being at

night and they traveled through brush and water and mud, fell over logs, etc., until Oliver was exhausted; then Joseph helped him along through brush and water, almost carrying him. They traveled all night, and just at the break of day Oliver gave out entirely and exclaimed, "O Lord! Brother Joseph, how long have we got to endure this thing?" They sat down on a log to rest and Joseph said that at that very time Peter, James, and John came to them and ordained them to the Apostleship.⁴

In 1882 Elder Erastus Snow gave a similar account in his general conference address:

It was at a period when [Joseph and Oliver] were being pursued by their enemies and had to travel all night, and in the dawn of the coming day when they were weary and worn who should appear to them but Peter, James, and John, for the purpose of conferring upon them the Apostleship, the keys of which they themselves had held while upon the earth, which had been bestowed upon them by the Savior.⁵

Note that the word used by Addison Everett and Elder Snow was "apostleship," not Melchizedek Priesthood

³ "Report of Elders Orson Pratt and Joseph F. Smith," *Millennial Star* 40, no. 49 (December 9, 1878): 771.

⁴ Everett, "Letter of Addison Everett to Oliver B. Huntington, February 17, 1881," *Young Woman's Journal* 2 (November 1890): 75–76.

⁵ Erastus Snow, "God's Peculiar People called a Kingdom of Priests, etc.," *Journal of Discourses*, 23:183.