

Comments on Doctrine & Covenants 13

This section is a quotation of John Baptist when he appeared to Joseph and Oliver to bestow the Aaronic Priesthood on them.

In reading this section, we must refer to D&C 84:27-28 which informs us that during his mortality John Baptist was given the keys of the Aaronic Priesthood for the purpose of overthrowing that Order as presently constituted among the contemporary Jews. John appears to have kept those keys and here visits the earth to disburse them, as opposed to withdrawing them as he did in mortality.

1 UPON you my fellow servants, in the name of Messiah I confer the Priesthood of Aaron, which holds the keys of the ministering 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, until the sons of Levi do offer again an offering unto the Lord in righteousness.

"Upon you my fellow servants", Joseph and Oliver are identified as fellow servants with John Baptist. This title of "servant" might be drawn from the various non-Messiah servant passages in Isa. 40-47.

"in the name of Messiah", a unique and unusual authority statement. Typically, the specific name or name-title is invoked, but here John Baptist does not. One can speculate the reason for this is because John baptized Jesus and personally witness his Anointing by the Spirit wherein he was invested with the fullness of the Father, cf. D&C 93:15-15. Thus, John Baptist might hold a special position relative to his relationship to Christ where his use of this title is appropriate.

"Priesthood of Aaron", the Priesthood of the physical ordinances of the gospel as detailed in the subsequent three lines and in D&C 84:26-32.

"never be taken...offering unto the Lord in righteousness", a paraphrases of Malachi 2:4-7 and 3:3. Following the Malachi accounts, this event definitely falls after the Day of the Lord (i.e. the Second Advent) when the Lord has purged the dross from Israel.

"sons of Levi", the usage of this phrase in the scriptures typically presents a literal requirement, meaning they are literal descendants of Aaron probably through the lineage of Zaddock. Whenever a more figurative interpretation is presented the phrase "sons of Aaron" is used instead of "sons of Levi". cp.

D&C 84:31. One possible exception to this may be D&C 124:39. For additional references to "sons of Levi", cp. Ezek. 40:46, 3 Ne. 24:3, D&C 128:24.

"taken...in righteousness", the Aaronic/Levitical Priesthood was instituted because of hard-heartedness, cf D&C 84:23-27. With the elimination of this condition by the purging of Israel on the Day of the Lord, the restrictions of the lesser Priesthood will be eliminated. In other words, the Aaronic Priesthood will be eliminated because all will have the right to the Melchizedeck Priesthood. The lineage-based restrictions will be eliminated because of righteousness.

"an offering", whether this is a literal physical sacrifice or a spiritual figurative one only remains to be seen. That the Temple at Jerusalem is rebuilt and literal physical sacrifices are performed there is suggested in Ezek. 43, Dan. 11:31, Matt. 24:15, and Rev. 11:1-2. Whether this is the sacrifice the Lord will accept from them is doubtful, as they are still in a state of apostasy when the sacrifices are performed. Given statements such as that appearing in 3 Ne. 9:19, it seems likely the sacrifice in question will be a figurative spiritual one. However, Joseph Smith taught there would be literal sacrifices, cf. HofC 4:211.

Cowdery's Quotation of John Baptist

Cowdery quotes John Baptist as saying, "I confer this Priesthood and this authority, which shall remain upon the earth, that the Sons of Levi may yet offer an offering unto the Lord in righteousness" (Messenger & Advocate, Vol. 1, No. 1, Oct. 1834, page 16). This differs from Smith's account on one interesting point:

Cowdery	Smith
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I confer this Priesthood and this authority, which shall remain upon the earth, that the Sons of Levi may yet offer an offering unto the Lord in righteousness.	I confer the Priesthood of Aaron... and this shall never be taken again from the earth until the sons of Levi do offer again an offering unto the Lord in righteousness.

Cowdery's rendition implies it was necessary for the Aaronic Priesthood to be restored so the Sons of Levi might again make an offering to the Lord in righteousness. Smith's account makes no such implication. Cowdery's account may be a paraphrase which better portrays the purpose and intent, where Smith's appears to be more literally accurate. It is also interesting to note Smith apparently never corrected or made mention that Cowdery's version was inaccurate.

Recall the Aaronic Priesthood was done away among the Jews with the advent of John Baptist (cf. D&C 84:28). Thus, they could not legitimately offer the sacrifice spoken of in Mal. 3 unless a restoration occurred. Cowdery's version addresses issues pertaining to the gathering of natural Israel, which is the purpose of the BofM and the establishment of the LDS Church.

Historical Material Pertaining to Doctrine & Covenants 13

The first excerpt is Smith's recollection of the events surrounding the appearance of John Baptist, and the second is Cowdery's.

Excerpt from History of the Church

We still continued the work of translation, when in the ensuing month (May, 1829), we on a certain day went into the woods to pray and inquire of the Lord respecting baptism for the remission of sins, that 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:

Upon you my fellow servants, in the name of Messiah I confer the Priesthood of Aaron, which holds the keys of the ministering 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, until 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 hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost, but that this should be conferred on us hereafter; and he commanded us to go and be baptized, and gave us directions that I should baptize Oliver Cowdery, and afterwards that he should baptize me. Accordingly we went and were baptized. I baptized him first, and afterwards he baptized me, after which I laid my hands upon his head and ordained him to the Aaronic Priesthood, and afterwards he laid his hands on me and ordained me to the same Priesthood-for so we were commanded.

The messenger who visited us on this occasion, and conferred this Priesthood upon us, said that his name was John, the same that is called John the Baptist in the New Testament, and that he acted under the direction of Peter, James and John who held the keys of the Priesthood of Melchizedek, which Priesthood he said would in due time be conferred on us,² and that I should be called the first Elder of the Church, and he (Oliver Cowdery) the second. It was on the 15th day of May, 1829, that we were ordained under the hand of this messenger and baptized.

Immediately on our coming up out of the water after we had been baptized, we experienced great and glorious blessings from our Heavenly Father. No sooner had I baptized Oliver Cowdery, than the Holy Ghost fell upon him, and he stood up and prophesied many things which should shortly come to pass. And again, so soon

as I had been baptized by him, I also had the spirit of prophecy, when standing up, I prophesied concerning the rise of this church, and many other things connected with the Church, and this generation of the children of men. We were filled with the Holy Ghost, and rejoiced in the God of our salvation.

Our minds being now enlightened, we began to have the Scriptures laid open to our understandings, and the true meaning and intention of their more mysterious passages revealed unto us in a manner which we never could attain to previously, nor ever before had thought of. In the meantime we were forced to keep secret the circumstances of having received the Priesthood and our having been baptized, owing to a spirit of persecution which had already manifested itself in the neighborhood. We had been threatened with being mobbed from time to time, and this, too, by professors of religion. And their intentions of mobbing us were only counteracted by the influence of my wife's father's family (under Divine providence), who had become very friendly to me, and who were opposed to mobs, and were willing that I should be allowed to continue the work of translation without interruption; and therefore offered and promised us protection from all unlawful proceedings as far as in them lay. (Joseph Smith, History of the Church, Vol. 1, pages 40-44)

Excerpt from Messenger & Advocate

After writing the account given of the Savior's ministry to the remnant of the seed of Jacob, upon this continent, it was easily to be seen, as the prophet said would be, that darkness covered the earth and gross darkness the minds of the people. On reflecting further, it was as easily to be seen, that amid the great strife and noise concerning religion, none had authority from God to administer the ordinances of the gospel. For, the question might be asked, have men authority to administer in the name of Christ, who deny revelations? when his testimony is no less than the spirit of prophecy? and his religion based, built, and sustained by immediate revelations in all ages of the world, when he has had a people on earth? If these facts were buried, and carefully concealed by men whose craft would have been in danger, if once permitted to shine in the faces of men, they were no longer to us; and we only waited for the commandment to be given, "Arise and be baptized."

This was not long desired before it was realized. 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! -- What joy! what wonder! what amazement! While the world were racked and distracted -- while millions were grouping as the blind for the wall, and while all men were resting upon uncertainty, as a general mass, our eyes beheld -- our ears heard. As in the "blaze of day;" yes, more -- above the glitter of the May Sun beam, 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 the 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 rapt in the vision of the Almighty! Where was room for doubt? No where: uncertainty had fled, doubt had 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!"

I shall not attempt to paint to you the feelings of this heart, nor the majestic beauty and glory which surrounded us on this occasion; but you will believe me when I say, that earth, nor men, with the eloquence of time, cannot begin to clothe language in as interesting and sublime a manner as this holy personage. No; nor has this earth power to give the joy, to bestow the peace, or comprehend the wisdom which was contained in each sentence as they were delivered by the power of the Holy Spirit! Man may deceive his fellow man; deception may follow deception, and the children of the wicked one may have power to seduce the foolish and untaught, till nought but fiction feeds the many, and the fruit of falsehood carries in its current the giddy to the grave; but one touch with the finger of his love, yes, one ray of glory from the upper world, or one word from the mouth of the Savior, from the bosom of eternity, strikes it all into insignificance, and blots it forever from the mind! The assurance that we were in the presence of an angel; the certainty that we heard the voice of Jesus, and the truth unsullied as it flowed from a pure personage, dictated by the will of God, is to me, past description, and I shall ever look upon this expression of the Savior's goodness with wonder and thanksgiving while I am permitted to tarry, and in those mansions where perfection dwells and sin never comes, I hope to adore in that DAY which shall never cease! (Oliver Cowdery, Messenger & Advocate, Vol. 1, October 1834, pages 15-16)

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