

Comments on Doctrine & Covenants 107

As a general background comment, we will address the word "priesthood". In Greek the term is "hiera'teuma" appearing in 1 Peter 2:5, 9 which most literally translates to "sacred-effect". Also used is the Greek "hierosun'e" appearing in Hebrews 7 and most literally translates to "sacred-togetherness". And priests in the New Testament are called "hiereus'" which literally translates to "sacred". The purpose of the Priesthood is to administer saving ordinances which have sanctifying effects upon people (e.g., baptism and the laying on of hands for the reception of the Holy Ghost), thereby attending their being spiritually born again (cf. John 3).

It is not the purpose of the Priesthood to create an institutional bureaucracy for self-promoters, cf. D&C 121:34-46. The outline of the organization given in this section effectively prevents such things from happening, particularly in the event of the succession of the Presidency (v. 21-24).

As a historical review, the first ecclesiastical administrative bureaucracy documented in the Scriptures was established under Moses at the behest of Jethro, his father-in-law, cf. Exod. 18. A group of seventy elders acting in some administrative capacity also appears to have its root in Moses' time, cf. Exod. 24:1. The number 70 may be a remembrance of the number of offspring Jacob bore, cf. Exod. 1:5. Seventy were also called during NT times, cf. Luke 10. The earliest appearance of the Quorum of Twelve is Matt 10, and that is obviously numbered after the twelve tribes of Israel. Also note that the number of the size of quorums in v. 85-92 is by twelves with it increasing in each quorum. His might be as a type of the promise to Abraham that his seed would be multiplied as the sands of the sea. In this case the number twelve is multiplied at each quorum level.

Based upon topic, the text of this section can be divided as follows:

- Introduction: Two orders of Priesthood in the Church (v. 1)
- Details on the two orders (v. 2-20)
 - The Melchizedek Priesthood (v. 2-6)
 - The right of presidency (v. 7-12)
 - The Aaronic Priesthood (v. 13-17)
- Inward and outward ordinances (v. 18-20)

- Presidencies, quorums and authority of such (v. 21-57)
 - Presiding officers (v. 21-26)
 - Quorum decisions by unanimous voice (v. 27-32)
 - The Twelve in relation to other bodies of authority (v. 33-39)
 - Parenthesis on bestowal of M. Priesthood via Patriarchy (v. 40-57)
- The order of officers in the Church (v. 58-92)
 - Various Church presidencies (v. 58-67)
 - Parenthesis on the office of the Bishop (v. 68-76d)
 - Parenthesis on when inappropriate for Bishops to judge independently (v. 76e-84)
 - Order and numbers of Priesthood Presidencies (v. 85-92)
 - Order and numbers of the Seventy (v. 93-98)
- Closing admonition (v. 99-100)

1 THERE are, in the church, two priesthoods, namely, the Melchizedek and Aaronic, including the Levitical Priesthood.

v1 Introduction to the section which identifies two orders of Priesthood in the Church, namely the Melchizedek Priesthood and the Aaronic Priesthood.

v2-20 Assorted details on the two orders.

2 why the first is called the Melchizedek Priesthood is because Melchizedek was such a great high priest. **3** Before his day it was called the Holy Priesthood, after the Order of the Son of God. **4** 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. **5** All other authorities or offices in the church are appendages to this priesthood. **6** But there are two divisions or grand heads--one is the Melchizedek Priesthood, and the other is the Aaronic or Levitical Priesthood.

v2-6 explain why the higher order of the Priesthood is called the Melchizedek Priesthood. All Priesthood authority falls under this Priesthood. The second order is the Aaronic Priesthood, which would be an appendage to the Melchizedek Priesthood, cf. v. 14.

7 The office of an elder comes under the priesthood of

Melchizedek. 8 The Melchizedek Priesthood holds the right of presidency, and has power and authority over all the offices in the church in all ages of the world, to administer in spiritual things. 9 The Presidency of the High Priesthood, after the order of Melchizedek, have a right to officiate in all the offices in the church. 10 High priests after the order of the Melchizedek Priesthood have a right to officiate in their own standing, under the direction of the presidency, in administering spiritual things, and also in the office of an elder, priest (of the Levitical order), teacher, deacon, and member. 11 An elder has a right to officiate in his stead when the high priest is not present. 12 The high priest and elder are to administer in spiritual things, agreeable to the covenants and commandments of the church; and they have a right to officiate in all these offices of the church when there are no higher authorities present.

v7-12 The Melchizedek Priesthood holds the right to preside and administer in spiritual things, which is in contrast to the Aaronic Priesthood (v. 13-17).

13 The second priesthood is called the Priesthood of Aaron, because it was conferred upon Aaron and his seed, throughout all their generations. 14 Why it is called the lesser priesthood is because it is an appendage to the greater, or the Melchizedek Priesthood, and has power in administering outward ordinances. 15 The bishopric is the presidency of this priesthood, and holds the keys or authority of the same. 16 No man has a legal right to this office, to hold the keys of this priesthood, except he be a literal descendant of Aaron. 17 But as a high priest of the Melchizedek Priesthood has authority to officiate in all the lesser offices, he may officiate in the office of bishop when no literal descendant of Aaron can be found, provided he is called and set apart and ordained unto this power by the hands of the Presidency of the Melchizedek Priesthood.

v13-17 The Aaronic Priesthood is a lesser Priesthood conferred upon the lineage of Aaron. Only literal descendants have a right to the Aaronic Priesthood and the office of Bishop, cp. v. 76. In the absence of literal descendants a high priest of the Melchizedek Priesthood may fill the office of Bishop.

18 The power and authority of the higher, or Melchizedek Priesthood, is to hold the keys of all the spiritual blessings of the church-- 19 To have the privilege of receiving the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, to have the heavens opened unto them, to commune with the general assembly and church of the Firstborn, and to enjoy the communion and presence of God the Father, and Jesus the mediator of the new covenant. 20 The

power and authority of the lesser, or Aaronic Priesthood, is to hold the keys of the ministering of angels, and to administer in outward ordinances, the letter of the gospel, the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, agreeable to the covenants and commandments.

v18-20 The Melchizedek Priesthood incorporates all Priesthood keys. The Melchizedek Priesthood holds the keys to the inward spiritual ordinances and blessings while the Aaronic Priesthood holds the keys to the outward ordinances.

v21-57 Presidencies, quorums and authority of such are laid out.

21 Of necessity there are presidents, or presiding officers growing out of, or appointed of or from among those who are ordained to the several offices in these two priesthoods. 22 Of the Melchizedek Priesthood, three Presiding High Priests, chosen by the body, appointed and ordained to that office, and upheld by the confidence, faith, and prayer of the church, form a quorum of the Presidency of the Church. 23 The twelve traveling councilors are called to be the Twelve Apostles, or special witnesses of the name of Christ in all the world--thus differing from other officers in the church in the duties of their calling. 24 And they form a quorum, equal in authority and power to the three presidents previously mentioned. 25 The Seventy are also called to preach the gospel, and to be especial witnesses unto the Gentiles and in all the world--thus differing from other officers in the church in the duties of their calling. 26 And they form a quorum, equal in authority to that of the Twelve special witnesses or Apostles just named.

v21-26 Presiding officers and the quorums of Twelve and Seventy are laid out.

v24 While the Twelve are under the direction of the First Presidency (cf. v. 33), when the Presidency is dissolved by the death of the President the Twelve constitute the President's authority.

27 And every decision made by either of these quorums must be by the unanimous voice of the same; that is, every member in each quorum must be agreed to its decisions, in order to make their decisions of the same power or validity one with the other-- 28 A majority may form a quorum when circumstances render it impossible to be otherwise-- 29 Unless this is the case, their decisions are not entitled to the same blessings which the decisions of a quorum of three presidents were anciently, who

were ordained after the order of Melchizedek, and were righteous and holy men. 30 The decisions of these quorums, or either of them, are to be made in all righteousness, in holiness, and lowliness of heart, meekness and long suffering, and in faith, and virtue, and knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness and charity; 31 Because the promise is, if these things abound in them they shall not be unfruitful in the knowledge of the Lord. 32 And in case that any decision of these quorums is made in unrighteousness, it may be brought before a general assembly of the several quorums, which constitute the spiritual authorities of the church; otherwise there can be no appeal from their decision.

v27-32 Quorum decisions are to be made by unanimous voice, and in all righteousness. This necessarily requires that the members of these respective quorums are righteous and full of virtue per v. 30. If this is the case, they will be filled with the wisdom of the Lord per v. 31, cp. D&C 63:23, D&C 76:7-10.

33 The Twelve are a Traveling Presiding High Council, to officiate in the name of the Lord, under the direction of the Presidency of the Church, agreeable to the institution of heaven; to build up the church, and regulate all the affairs of the same in all nations, first unto the Gentiles and secondly unto the Jews. 34 The Seventy are to act in the name of the Lord, under the direction of the Twelve or the traveling high council, in building up the church and regulating all the affairs of the same in all nations, first unto the Gentiles and then to the Jews; 35 The Twelve being sent out, holding the keys, to open the door by the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and first unto the Gentiles and then unto the Jews. 36 The standing high councils, at the stakes of Zion, form a quorum equal in authority in the affairs of the church, in all their decisions, to the quorum of the presidency, or to the traveling high council. 37 The high council in Zion form a quorum equal in authority in the affairs of the church, in all their decisions, to the councils of the Twelve at the stakes of Zion. 38 It is the duty of the traveling high council to call upon the Seventy, when they need assistance, to fill the several calls for preaching and administering the gospel, instead of any others. 39 It is the duty of the Twelve, in all large branches of the church, to ordain evangelical ministers, as they shall be designated unto them by revelation--

v33-39 Details on the Twelve in relation to other bodies of authority. The Twelve are to travel throughout the world establishing the Church among all nations. They may be assisted by the Seventy in their labors. They are to establish

"evangelical ministers", more commonly called "Patriarchs".

V33 "the Jews", using the Isaianic definition where it generally refers to those of Natural Israel and not specifically those of the lineage of Judah, cp. 2 Ne. 29:5, Mormon 5:14. Whenever the term "Jew" is used in conjunction with "Gentiles" it means that both natural Israel and non-Israelites are being referred to.

40 The order of this priesthood was confirmed to be handed down from father to son, and rightly belongs to the literal descendants of the chosen seed, to whom the promises were made. 41 This order was instituted in the days of Adam, and came down by lineage in the following manner: 42 From Adam to Seth, who was ordained by Adam at the age of sixty-nine years, and was blessed by him three years previous to his (Adam's) death, and received the promise of God by his father, that his posterity should be the chosen of the Lord, and that they should be preserved unto the end of the earth; 43 Because he (Seth) was a perfect man, and his likeness was the express likeness of his father, insomuch that he seemed to be like unto his father in all things, and could be distinguished from him only by his age. 44 Enos was ordained at the age of one hundred and thirty-four years and four months, by the hand of Adam. 45 God called upon Cainan in the wilderness in the fortieth year of his age; and he met Adam in journeying to the place Shedolamak. He was eighty-seven years old when he received his ordination. 46 Mahalaleel was four hundred and ninety-six years and seven days old when he was ordained by the hand of Adam, who also blessed him. 47 Jared was two hundred years old when he was ordained under the hand of Adam, who also blessed him. 48 Enoch was twenty-five years old when he was ordained under the hand of Adam; and he was sixty-five and Adam blessed him. 49 And he saw the Lord, and he walked with him, and was before his face continually; and he walked with God three hundred and sixty-five years, making him four hundred and thirty years old when he was translated. 50 Methuselah was one hundred years old when he was ordained under the hand of Adam. 51 Lamech was thirty-two years old when he was ordained under the hand of Seth. 52 Noah was ten years old when he was ordained under the hand of Methuselah. 53 Three years previous to the death of Adam, he called Seth, Enos, Cainan, Mahalaleel, Jared, Enoch, and Methuselah, who were all high priests, with the residue of his posterity who were righteous, into the valley of Adam-ondi-Ahman, and there bestowed upon them his last blessing. 54 And the Lord appeared unto them, and they rose up and blessed Adam, and called him Michael, the prince, the archangel. 55 And the Lord administered comfort unto Adam, and said unto him: I have set thee to be at the head; a multitude of nations shall come of thee, and thou art a prince over them forever. 56 And Adam stood up in the

midst of the congregation; and, notwithstanding he was bowed down with age, being full of the Holy Ghost, predicted whatsoever should befall his posterity unto the latest generation. 57 These things were all written in the book of Enoch, and are to be testified of in due time.

v40-57 Parenthesis on disbursement of the Melchizedek Priesthood via Patriarchy. This section of text traces the disbursement of the Melchizedek Priesthood via lineage from Adam to Noah (cf. v. 42-52) and then recounts the right of the Patriarch exercised by Adam at the close of his life (v. 53-56). This right is exercised today by local Stake Patriarchs.

The Patriarchal Priesthood, sometimes referred to by Smith as the Third Order of the Priesthood appears to possess the same keys as the Melchizedek Priesthood. The only difference appears to be the manner of disbursement was strictly by lineage. This appears to be the ideal manner of disbursement, and is in part continued today via the Temple ordinances of sealing which are administered by the Melchizedek Priesthood. Smith comments on the matter:

There are three grand orders of priesthood referred to here.

1st. The King of Shiloam (Salem) had power and authority over that of Abraham, holding the key and the power of endless life. Angels desire to look into it, but they have set up too many stakes. God cursed the children of Israel because they would not receive the last law from Moses....

What was the power of Melchizedek? 'Twas not the Priesthood of Aaron which administers in outward ordinances, and the offering of sacrifices. Those holding the fullness of the Melchizedek Priesthood are kings and priests of the Most High God, holding the keys of power and blessings. In fact, that priesthood is a perfect law of theocracy, and stands as God to give laws to the people, administering endless lives to the sons and daughters of Adam....

The 2nd Priesthood is Patriarchal authority. Go to and finish the temple, and God will fill it with power, and you will then receive more knowledge concerning this priesthood.

The 3rd is what is called the Levitical Priesthood, consisting of priests to administer in

outward ordinance, made without an oath; but the Priesthood of Melchizedek is by an oath and covenant. (Joseph Smith, History of the Church Volume Vol. 5, page 554-555)

The Patriarchal Order of the Priesthood as it operates today is confined strictly to Temple Ordinances and seals families together.

V57 Compare 2 Ne. 30:16-18, D&C 88:108.

v58-92 The order of officers in the Church.

58 It is the duty of the Twelve, also, to ordain and set in order all the other officers of the church, agreeable to the revelation which says: 59 To the church of Christ in the land of Zion, in addition to the church laws respecting church business-- 60 Verily, I say unto you, saith the Lord of Hosts, there must needs be presiding elders to preside over those who are of the office of an elder; 61 And also priests to preside over those who are of the office of a priest; 62 And also teachers to preside over those who are of the office of a teacher, in like manner, and also the deacons-- 63 Wherefore, from deacon to teacher, and from teacher to priest, and from priest to elder, severally as they are appointed, according to the covenants and commandments of the church. 64 Then comes the High Priesthood, which is the greatest of all. 65 Wherefore, it must needs be that one be appointed of the High Priesthood to preside over the priesthood, and he shall be called President of the High Priesthood of the Church; 66 Or, in other words, the Presiding High Priest over the High Priesthood of the Church. 67 From the same comes the administering of ordinances and blessings upon the church, by the laying on of the hands.

v58-67 Various Church presidencies. Each respective quorum is to have a president. And all quorums are ultimately under the President of the High Priesthood, i.e., the President of the Church.

68 wherefore, the office of a bishop is not equal unto it; for the office of a bishop is in administering all temporal things; 69 Nevertheless a bishop must be chosen from the High Priesthood, unless he is a literal descendant of Aaron; 70 For unless he is a literal descendant of Aaron he cannot hold the keys of that priesthood. 71 Nevertheless, a high priest, that is, after the order of Melchizedek, may be set apart unto the ministering of temporal things, having a knowledge of them by the Spirit of truth; 72 And also to be a judge in Israel, to do

the business of the church, to sit in judgment upon transgressors upon testimony as it shall be laid before him according to the laws, by the assistance of his counselors, whom he has chosen or will choose among the elders of the church. 73 This is the duty of a bishop who is not a literal descendant of Aaron, but has been ordained to the High Priesthood after the order of Melchizedek. 74 Thus shall he be a judge, even a common judge among the inhabitants of Zion, or in a stake of Zion, or in any branch of the church where he shall be set apart unto this ministry, until the borders of Zion are enlarged and it becomes necessary to have other bishops or judges in Zion or elsewhere. 75 And inasmuch as there are other bishops appointed they shall act in the same office. 76 But a literal descendant of Aaron has a legal right to the presidency of this priesthood, to the keys of this ministry, to act in the office of bishop independently, without counselors,

v68-76d Parenthesis on the office of the Bishop, which is the president of the Aaronic Priesthood. In the absence of a literal descendant of Aaron, the office of Bishop may be filled by a High Priest of the Melchizedek Priesthood order, cp. D&C 68:16-18.

For the various statements in these verses about literal descendants of Aaron, contrast D&C 84:18-27 where Gentiles are being adopted into the lineage of Aaron by receiving his priesthood, and therefore at least partially fulfilling the predictions of Malachi 3. Here, it is plainly talking about non-Gentiles who are literal descendants of Aaron, or [cohen](#).

These passages concerning the literal descendants of Aaron having patrilineal rights to the priesthood offices within the Church organization are outliers, given the Church is largely composed of Gentiles, and very rarely proselytes Jewish converts. For a Jewish convert to claim the office of Bishop by patrilineal right seems odd in the Church, as a convert would be eligible for the Melchizedek Priesthood. What is at play here is unclear.

Even more obscure is the present discussion is over judging of apparent transgressions among the ecclesia by councils, whether or not they much confer with councilors, and not the officiating in priesthood ordinances. And, while it says the sons of Aaron are entitled to the position of bishopric, there is nothing in the text to suggest they are entitled to the keys of the Melchizedek Priesthood which our contemporary Bishops hold.

From a theological perspective, it makes it clear there are

some aspects of the Law of Moses that are still in force. We typically assume the Law of Moses and the Law of literal Sacrifice are over and done with per Acts. 10, 3 Ne. 15:2-8 and 4 Ne. 1:12. However, there is a caveat in 3 Ne. 15:6-8 where the Lord says there are still some unfulfilled matters that will yet be fulfilled. Perhaps the continuance of the lineal right to the Aaronic Priesthood, presumably among faithful adherents of Judaism, continues to this day.

In an eschatological context, it may be related to Ezek. 40-44, Zech. 14, Mal. 3:3 and Rev. 16:18-21, Rev. 19:11-21. If there are authoritative sacrifices performed in an eschatological temple, there must be cohen to perform [korban](#). Now, non-authoritative sacrifices can be performed, but the various passages certainly seem to suggest they are authoritative.

except in a case where a President of the High Priesthood, after the order of Melchizedek, is tried, to sit as a judge in Israel. 77 And the decision of either of these councils, agreeable to the commandment which says: 78 Again, verily, I say unto you, the most important business of the church, and the most difficult cases of the church, inasmuch as there is not satisfaction upon the decision of the bishop or judges, it shall be handed over and carried up unto the council of the church, before the Presidency of the High Priesthood. 79 And the Presidency of the council of the High Priesthood shall have power to call other high priests, even twelve, to assist as counselors; and thus the Presidency of the High Priesthood and its counselors shall have power to decide upon testimony according to the laws of the church. 80 And after this decision it shall be had in remembrance no more before the Lord; for this is the highest council of the church of God, and a final decision upon controversies in spiritual matters.

v76e-84 Parenthesis on when inappropriate for Bishops to judge independently. A Bishop of the lineage of Aaron is permitted to administer his office in the absence of counselors. However, in matters of judging difficult cases (cp. D&C 102) pertaining to the President of the High Priesthood, the bishop is not permitted to judge the matter in the absence of counselors.

81 There is not any person belonging to the church who is exempt from this council of the church. 82 And inasmuch as a President of the High Priesthood shall transgress, he shall be had in remembrance before the common council of the church, who shall be assisted by twelve counselors of the High Priesthood; 83 And their decision upon his head shall be an end of controversy

concerning him. 84 Thus, none shall be exempted from the justice and the laws of God, that all things may be done in order and in solemnity before him, according to truth and righteousness.

v81-84 These verses indicate all members from lowest to highest with respect to Priesthood authority are subject to the common council in the instance of transgression.

85 And again, verily I say unto you, the duty of a president over the office of a deacon is to preside over twelve deacons, to sit in council with them, and to teach them their duty, edifying one another, as it is given according to the covenants. 86 And also the duty of the president over the office of the teachers is to preside over twenty-four of the teachers, and to sit in council with them, teaching them the duties of their office, as given in the covenants. 87 Also the duty of the president over the Priesthood of Aaron is to preside over forty-eight priests, and sit in council with them, to teach them the duties of their office, as is given in the covenants-- 88 This president is to be a bishop; for this is one of the duties of this priesthood. 89 Again, the duty of the president over the office of elders is to preside over ninety-six elders, and to sit in council with them, and to teach them according to the covenants. 90 This presidency is a distinct one from that of the seventy, and is designed for those who do not travel into all the world. 91 And again, the duty of the President of the office of the High Priesthood is to preside over the whole church, and to be like unto Moses-- 92 Behold, here is wisdom; yea, to be a seer, a revelator, a translator, and a prophet, having all the gifts of God which he bestows upon the head of the church.

v85-92 Order and numbers of Priesthood Presidencies. The subject resumes from v. 67 to continue on with the numbering of the various quorums.

93 And it is according to the vision showing the order of the Seventy, that they should have seven presidents to preside over them, chosen out of the number of the seventy; 94 And the seventh president of these presidents is to preside over the six; 95 And these seven presidents are to choose other seventy besides the first seventy to whom they belong, and are to preside over them; 96 And also other seventy, until seven times seventy, if the labor in the vineyard of necessity requires it. 97 And these seventy are to be traveling ministers, unto the Gentiles first and also unto the Jews. 98 whereas other officers of the church, who belong not unto the Twelve, neither to the Seventy, are not under the responsibility to travel among all nations, but are to travel as their circumstances shall allow, notwithstanding they may hold as high and responsible offices in

the church.

v93-98 Order and numbers of the Seventy. Seven quorums of Seventies are to be established, each with a president. A single president among the Seven is then established. Similar to the Quorum of the Twelve, the Seventies are to travel and administer the gospel to all nations.

99 wherefore, now let every man learn his duty, and to act in the office in which he is appointed, in all diligence. 100 He that is slothful shall not be counted worthy to stand, and he that learns not his duty and shows himself not approved shall not be counted worthy to stand. Even so. Amen.

v99-100 Closing admonition. Formerly the duties of the various offices, and establishment of quorums and so on had not been spelled out so explicitly. Now that it has been spelled out, the Lord expects them to act on it.

Historical Material Pertaining to Doctrine & Covenants 107

The first excerpt is from the Kirtland Minute Book, documenting the events contemporaneously. The second excerpt is from one of the apostles who was present. The third excerpt reviews the calling of the original Twelve Apostles and indicates that while they were equal in authority they were initially placed in order according to age. The fourth excerpt reviews the events resulting in the revelation of the text of this section. The fifth set of two excerpts discuss the events concerning leadership of the Church after Joseph's murder and how it reverted to the Quorum of the Twelve per v. 24 rather than Sidney Rigdon.

This section was first published in the Kirtland edition Doctrine and Covenants in 1835, pages 82-89. It was published in the Millennial Star, volume 1, number 1, pages 13-17, dated May, 1840.

Excerpt from Kirtland Council Minute Book

Kirtland March 28th 1836

This afternoon the Twelve met in council and had a time of general confession.

On reviewing our past course we are satisfied and feel to confess also that we have not realized the importance of our calling to that degree that we ought, we have been light minded and vain and in many things done wrong, wrong. For all these things we have asked the forgiveness of our Heavenly Father, and wherein we have grieved or wounded the feelings of the Presidency we ask their forgiveness.

The time has come when we are about to separate, and when we shall meet again, God only knows, We therefore feel to ask him whom we have acknowledged to be our Prophet and Seer that he enquire of God for us and obtain a written revelation, (if consistent) that we may look upon it when we are separated. that our hearts may be comforted. Our worthiness has not inspired us to make this request but our unworthiness.

We have unitedly asked God, our Heavenly Father to grant unto us through his Seer, a revelation of his mind and will concerning our duty the coming season even a great revelation that will enlarge our hearts, comfort us in adversity and brighten our hopes amidst the powers of Darkness.

To President J. Smith Junr.)

Orson Hyde) Clerks

Kirtland Ohio) Wm E. McLellin)
([Kirtland Council Minute Book](#), page 198)

Excerpt from Journal of Heber C. Kimball

After being chosen there being but nine of us present, we assembled from time to time as opportunity would permit and received such instructions as the Lord would bestow upon us; and truly he blessed us with his spirit to inspire, and his prophet to speak for our edification. 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. (Heber C. Kimball, [Journal](#), pages 22-23)

Excerpt from Life of Joseph Smith

On the 14th day of February, 1835, the Prophet called an assemblage at Kirtland of all the men who had formed the Camp of Zion. He said to call this meeting he had been directed by the Almighty. The elders who had passed through the trials and sufferings of the journey to Zion were to be ordained to the ministry to go forth and prune the vineyard for the last time before the coming of the Lord. Twelve men were to be chosen as Apostles to bear testimony of the name of the Lord Jesus and to send it abroad among all nations, kindreds, tongues and people.

Under the hands of the Prophet the three witnesses of the Book of Mormon, Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer and Martin Harris were blessed by the direction of the Holy Spirit to choose the Twelve Apostles of the Church. The men thus selected were all equal in authority, but in a later time the Prophet designated the order in which they should sit in council that is, according to age the eldest first. And under this rule the first Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ in these last days were: Thomas B. Marsh, David W. Patten, Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, Orson Hyde, William E. McLellin, Parley P. Pratt, Luke Johnson, William Smith, Orson Pratt, John F. Boynton, and Lyman E. Johnson. (George Q. Cannon, Life of Joseph Smith, pages 177-178)

Excerpt from The Revelations of the Prophet Joseph Smith

In February 1835, members of the first Quorum of Twelve

Apostles were chosen by the Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon, in Kirtland, Ohio. The Prophet met periodically with the quorum after its organization and gave instruction to them. At one such meeting, held on 12 March 1835, it was decided that the Twelve should "take their first mission through the eastern States to the Atlantic Ocean and hold conferences in the vicinity of the several branches of the Church." Section 107, known as the "Revelation on Priesthood," is a composite of two revelations, and verses 1-58 were received while the Prophet met with members of the Twelve on 28 March 1835. In the late afternoon of the day, members of the quorum confessed their sins, committed themselves to greater service, and received instruction from Joseph Smith. Knowing that they would soon depart for the East, members of the quorum requested that the Prophet "enquire of God for us and obtain a written revelation (if consistent) that we may look upon it when we are separated that our hearts may be comforted." Pursuant to their request, section 107 (verses 1-58) was received. Some evidence suggests that Oliver Cowdery served as scribe.

Organizationally, verses 21-37 were significant because they tempered the earlier supremacy of the presidency of the high priesthood by equally dispersing presiding priesthood authority among five quorums of church government. Verses 76 and 82 established the machinery of Church government by which a member of the presidency of the high priesthood could be tried for misconduct. The revelation specified that such a case must be heard by the "common council" (i.e., a bishop, his counselors, and twelve high priests).

[Footnote to the last paragraph above reads as follows:

This arrangement was modified by revelation in January 1838, making it much more difficult to remove a member of the First Presidency:

Revelation Given at the French Farm in Kirtland, Geauga Co., Ohio. In the presence of J. Smith Jr., S. Rigdon V. Knight & Geo. W. Robinson January 12th 1838.

When inquiry was made of the Lord relative to the trial of the first Presidency of the Church of Christ of Latter Day Saints, For transgressions according to the item of law, found in the Book of Covenants 3rd Section 37 verse [D&C 107:82] Whether the decision of Such an Council of one Stake Shall be conclusive for

Zion and all her Stakes.

Thus Saith the Lord, Let the first Presidency of my Church, be held in full fellowship in Zion and all her Stakes, until they Shall be found transgressors, by Such an high Council as is named in the above alluded Section, in Zion, by three Witnesses Standing against Each member of Said Presidency, and these witnesses Shall be of long and faithful Standing, and Such also as cannot be impeached by other witnesses before Such Council, and when a decision is had by Such an Council in Zion, it Shall only be for Zion, it Shall not answer for her Stakes, but if Such decision be acknowledged by the Council of her Stakes, then it Shall answer for her Stakes. But if it is not acknowledged by the Stakes, other Such Stake[s] may have the privilege of hearing for themselves or if Such decision Shall be acknowledged by a majority of the Stakes, then it Shall answer for all her Stakes and again,

The Presidency of my Church may be tried by the voice of the whole body of the Church in Zion, and the voice of a majority of all her Stakes and again,

Except a majority is had by the voice of the Church of Zion and a majority of all her Stakes, The charges will be considered not Sustained and in order to Sustain Such Charge or Charges, before Such Church of Zion or her Stakes, Such witnesses must be had as is named above, that is the witnesses to Each President, who are of long and faithful Standing, that cannot be impeached by other witnesses before the Church of Zion, or her Stakes, And all this Saith the Lord because of wicked and aspiring men, Let all your doings be in meekness and in humility before me Even So Amen ("The Scryptory Book of Joseph Smith," pp. 51-53, Church Archives).]

(Lyndon W. Cook, The Revelations of the Prophet Joseph Smith, pages 215-216).

Excerpts from Comprehensive History of the Church

In the afternoon of the 7th, a meeting was held at which were present all the apostles that were in Nauvoo, excepting John Taylor. The high council of the Nauvoo stake of Zion was

present; the president of the stake, William Marks, and the high priests. The meeting was held in the Seventies' Hall.

Brigham Young called upon Elder Rigdon to make a statement concerning his message to the saints, "the vision and revelation he had received." In substance Elder Rigdon replied that the object of his visit was to offer himself to the saints as a "guardian" that it had been shown to him in vision at Pittsburg, that the church must be built up to Joseph, the martyr; that all the blessings the saints could receive would come through their late Prophet; that no man could be a successor to Joseph Smith. Elder Rigdon seemed to lay much stress upon the fact that he had been appointed and ordained a "spokesman" to Joseph Smith, and appeared to claim the right to speak for him even now that he was dead. He held that the church was not disorganized, though the head was gone. He had been commanded to come to Nauvoo and see that the church was governed properly, and propose himself as "guardian" to the people. "In this I have discharged my duty, and done what God has commanded me," he concluded, "and the people can please themselves whether they accept me or not."

To this Elder Brigham Young replied:

"I do not care who leads this church, even though it were Ann Lee, but one thing I must know, and that is what God says about it. I have the keys and the means of obtaining the mind of God on the subject.... Joseph conferred upon our heads all the keys and powers belonging to the apostleship which he himself held before he was taken away.... How often has Joseph said to the twelve, "I have laid the foundation and you must build thereon, for upon your shoulders the kingdom rests'."

The next day was the one appointed by Sidney Rigdon for the church to assemble and choose a "guardian." The attendance was large, as intense interest had been awakened upon the subject to be considered. In the forenoon Sidney Rigdon addressed the assembly, setting forth his claim to the "guardianship" of the church. He had full opportunity to present his case, and for an hour and a half spoke without interruption; but despite his reputation as an "orator," he failed to convince the saints that "he was sent of God."

At the afternoon meeting appointed by Brigham Young and his fellow apostles, the quorums of the priesthood were grouped about the stand in the order of a general assembly of

priesthood; that is, the quorums of the Melchizedek priesthood were grouped together as high priests, seventies, elders; and the quorums of the Aaronic priesthood as priests, teachers, deacons. Questions to be settled by vote on such occasions are presented to each of these quorums of priesthood separately; and this general assembly of the quorums constitute the highest spiritual authority of the church. Such a general assembly of the quorums may even pass upon the decisions of the three great presiding councils of the Melchizedek priesthood, the first presidency, the quorum of the apostles, and the first quorum of the seventy, if the decision of these councils are made in unrighteousness.

“And in case that any decision of these quorums is made in unrighteousness, it may be brought before a general assembly of the several quorums, which constitute the spiritual authorities of the church, otherwise there can be no appeal from their decision.”

The following of the apostles' quorum were present on the above occasion; Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, Parley P. Pratt, Orson Pratt, Willard Richards, Wilford Woodruff, George A. Smith--seven, a majority of the quorum.

Amasa M. Lyman [an apostle who was chosen by Smith, just prior to his martyrdom, to succeed Sidney Rigdon in the position of First Counselor in the First Presidency but who was never ordained to that office] was also present, whose close association with the twelve at this period will be noted later. The opening services of the afternoon ended, Brigham Young arose---

“Attention all!”

And his voice rang out over the great multitude assembled, and hushed them into silence. Then, he continued:

“For the first time in my life, for the first time in your lives, for the first time in the kingdom of God in the 19th century, without a Prophet at our head, do I step forth to act in my calling in connection with the quorum of the twelve, as apostles of Jesus Christ unto this generation. Apostles whom God has called by revelation through the Prophet Joseph, who are ordained and anointed to bear off the

keys of the kingdom of God in all the world.... The first position I take in behalf of the twelve and the people is, to ask a few questions. I ask the Latter-day Saints: Do you, as individuals, at this time, want to choose a prophet or a guardian.... All that want some person to be a guardian, a spokesman, or something else, signify it by raising the right hand. [No votes]....

All that want to draw a party from the church after them, let them do it if they can, but they will not prosper.

If any man thinks he has influence among this people to lead away a party, let him try it, and he will find out that there is power with the apostles which will carry them victorious through all the world, and build up and defend the church and kingdom of God....

There has been much said about President Rigdon being president of the church, and leading the people, being the head, etc. Brother Rigdon has come 1,600 miles to tell you what he wants to do for you. If the people want President Rigdon to lead them they may have him; but I say unto you that the quorum of the twelve have the keys of the kingdom of God in all the world. The twelve are appointed by the finger of God.... Brother Joseph, the Prophet, has laid the foundation for a great work, and we will build upon it; you have never seen the quorums built one upon another. There is an almighty foundation laid, and we can build a kingdom such as there never was in the world....

Do you want the church properly organized, or do you want a spokesman?... Elder Rigdon claims to be spokesman to the Prophet. Very well, he was; but can he now act in that office? If he wants now to be spokesman to the Prophet, he must go to the other side of the veil, for the Prophet is there, but Elder Rigdon is here....

Now, if you want Sidney Rigdon or William Law to lead you, or anybody else, you are welcome to them; but I tell you, in the name of the Lord, that no man can put another between the twelve and the Prophet Joseph. Why? Because Joseph was their file leader, and he has committed into their hands the keys of the

kingdom in this last dispensation for all the world....

Now, all this does not lessen the character of President Rigdon; let him magnify his calling, and Joseph will want him beyond the veil--let him be careful what he does, lest that thread which binds us together is cut asunder."

There was much more said by President Young on this occasion, but the foregoing paragraphs represent the principal items of his position.

It was upon this occasion that, according to the testimony of many prominent brethren, and very many of the saints, that Brigham Young was transfigured into the likeness of Joseph Smith--voice, person, and manner. The late Elder George Q. Cannon, who was present on the occasion, said:

"If Joseph had arisen from the dead and again spoken in their hearing, the effect could not have been more startling than it was to many present at that meeting; it was the voice of Joseph himself; and not only was it the voice of Joseph which was heard, but it seemed in the eyes of the people as if it were the very person of Joseph which stood before them. A more wonderful and miraculous event than was wrought that day in the presence of that congregation we never heard of. The Lord gave his people a testimony that left no room for doubt as to who was the man chosen to lead them."

After Brigham Young's speech Amasa Lyman spoke in support of the twelve. Opportunity was given to Sidney Rigdon to speak; he declined, but requested W. W. Phelps to speak in his behalf. Elder Phelps was evidently desirous of saying kind things to Elder Rigdon, but at the same time he sustained the twelve in their claims to being the proper authorities, under the circumstances, to preside over the church. There were further remarks but all to the same effect. Finally Brigham Young arose to put the question as to whether the church would sustain the twelve or Sidney Rigdon. Before doing so he remarked:

"I do not ask you to take my counsel or advice alone, but every one of you act for yourselves; but if Brother Rigdon is the person you want to lead you,

vote for him as you did for Joseph.... And I would say the same for the twelve, don't make a covenant to support them unless you intend to abide by their counsel.... I want every man before he enters into a covenant, to know what he is going to do, but we want to know if this people will support the priesthood in the name of Israel's God. If you say you will, do so."

Elder Young was then about to put the question to the assembled quorums as to whether or not they wanted Elder Rigdon for a leader, but at the request of the latter, the question on supporting the twelve as the presiding quorum in the church was first put in the following manner:

"Do the church want and is their only desire to sustain the twelve as the first presidency of this people? ... If the church want the twelve to stand as the head, the first presidency of the church, and at the head of this kingdom in all the world, stand next to Joseph, walk up into their calling, and hold the keys of this kingdom--every man, every woman, every quorum is now put in order, and you are now the sole controllers of it--all that are in favor of this in all the congregation of the saints, manifest it by holding up the right hand. (There was a universal vote.) If there are any of the contrary mind--every man, every woman, who does not want the twelve to preside--lift up your hands in like manner. (No hands up). This supercedes the other question, and trying it by quorums."

This disposed of Sidney Rigdon's claims. He had full opportunity to present his case before the church. The saints had full opportunity and liberty to vote for him had they wanted him for their leader; but they rejected him and sustained the twelve.

Brigham Young, however, expressed kindly feelings toward Elder Rigdon on this occasion. "We feel as though we could take Brother Rigdon in our bosom along with us," said he; "we want such men as Brother Rigdon. He was sent away by Brother Joseph to build up a kingdom; let him keep the instruction and calling; let him raise up a mighty kingdom in Pittsburg, and we will lift up his hands to Almighty God." And later: "We are of one mind

with him and he with us. Will this congregation uphold him, in the place he occupies, by the prayer of faith and let him be one with us and we with him?" The vote was unanimous in the affirmative. (B. H. Roberts, Comprehensive History of the Church, Vol. 2, pages 415-420)

Sidney Rigdon himself outwardly seemed to acquiesce in the decision of the church with regard to himself. The Sunday following the meeting above described, he addressed the saints at great length. He "blessed them in the name of the Lord," telling them emphatically that he was with the twelve. He wished to know the mind of the church in relation to his returning to Pittsburg, they said, "Go in peace." Yet all the while he was thus seemingly accepting the decision of the church and seeking its counsel, secretly he was holding meetings with men of questionable integrity in the church, telling them that it was revealed to him before leaving Pittsburg that the church would reject him; but, nevertheless, he was the proper person to lead the church--to be its "guardian;" for to that position he had been called of God, and held the keys of authority higher than any conferred upon the Prophet Joseph--"the keys of David," which, according to his representations, gave him power to open and no man could shut; to shut and no man could open; and the power to organize armies for the destruction of the Gentiles. In fact his fervid imagination pictured himself a great military chieftain, and by his prowess all the enemies of God were to be subdued. He secretly ordained men to be prophets, priests and kings to the Gentiles. He also chose and appointed military officers to take command of the armies that were to be raised ere long to fight the battles of the great God. Meantime, while in public he had spoken in the highest terms of the virtues and honor of the martyred prophets, Joseph and Hyrum, in his secret meetings he had begun to cast reflections upon their conduct, and hint at the existence of grave iniquity among the twelve and in the church.

As soon as the twelve learned of these proceedings on the part of Elder Rigdon, they called upon him to explain by what authority he held secret meetings and ordained men to the aforesaid offices. He sought to evade the question, but finding that he was dealing with men not to be trifled with, he at last confessed to both holding the meetings and ordaining the officers. His brethren sought to convince him of his error, but at this point he refused to be corrected. The quorum of the

twelve, with the presiding bishop of the church held a council meeting to consider his conduct, and concluded to demand Elder Rigdon's license. He refused to surrender it, saying that he had not received it from the twelve and he would not give it up to them. He was then cited before the council of the church which has the right to try a president of the high priesthood, viz., the presiding bishop of the church, assisted by twelve high priests.

He refused to appear before this council, and therefore, after giving him due notice and an opportunity to appear and defend himself, the council convened in the presence of a large congregation of the saints on the 8th of September, 1844, and proceeded to hear evidence in the case. The evidence established the insubordination of Elder Rigdon and the irregularity of his course, and a motion that he be excommunicated from the church until he repented was carried both by the council composed of the bishop and the twelve high priests, and also by a great congregation of the saints. Ten only, and they of Rigdon's following, voting in the negative.

After his excommunication Rigdon made an attempt to organize a church, choosing twelve apostles, etc., but his effort amounted to but little. He soon retired from Nauvoo to Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, which he established as his headquarters and began the publication of the Messenger and Advocate--reviving the name of the second periodical published by the church. He sent missionaries to many branches of the church to represent his claims to the presidency, but they succeeded in getting only slight support, and that for the most part from among those weak in the faith. His "church," never strong, either in numbers or in men of strong character, soon crumbled into decay; Sidney Rigdon sank out of sight and in 1876 he died in obscurity in Allegheny county, state of New York. (B. H. Roberts, Comprehensive History of the Church, Vol. 2, pages 426-427)

Copyright © 2021 by S. Kurt Neumiller <kurt.neumiller@gmail.com>. All rights reserved. No part of this text may be reproduced in any form or by any means for commercial gain without the express written consent of the author. Digital or printed copies may be freely made and distributed for personal and public non-commercial use.