

“Commissioned of Jesus Christ”: Oliver Cowdery and D&C 13

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When Joseph Smith and his associates prepared to publish the Doctrine and Covenants in 1835, they rearranged the order of revelations from their original placement in the Book of Commandments, adding greater emphasis to priesthood. This change in formatting included the addition of boldface headings to introduce the subject of three of the earliest sections as priesthood, and it included a similar heading more than halfway through the book to introduce a number of sections collectively as addressing priesthood and callings. Joseph also added revelatory material to some of these sections, including information on priesthood and its role in the Church of Jesus Christ. We expect this. We know that revelation is given precept upon precept, line upon line, here a little and there a little (see Isaiah 28:10) and that the canon of revelation is still open.

During 1875 and into 1876, Orson Pratt, acting under the direction of Brigham Young, rearranged the sections in the Doctrine and Covenants into a generally chronological order and added a significant number of additional revelations to the volume, including Moroni’s words promising priesthood

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restoration (see section 2) and John the Baptist’s words restoring priesthood authority and keys (see section 13). John the Baptist’s words were already available to members in two different accounts published by Franklin D. Richards in the 1851 *Pearl of Great Price*, where he included not only Joseph Smith’s history but also a footnote with Oliver Cowdery’s retelling of the same event.¹ But those accounts were not yet considered scripture, and the inclusion of section 13 elevated Joseph’s recitation of John the Baptist’s words, making them more widely available as part of the official canon.

While the *Pearl of Great Price* gave two alternate renditions of John the Baptist’s words for readers to draw on, both viewed by many members today as scripture,² the inclusion of Joseph’s account in the *Doctrine and Covenants* elevated its status and gave it primacy. When Franklin D. Richards and James A. Little compiled their *Compendium of the Doctrines of the Gospel* in 1882, one of the first detailed expositions of Latter-day Saint doctrine, they cited the account published six years earlier in *Doctrine and Covenants* 13 as representing the testimony of both Joseph and Oliver to the restoration of the Aaronic Priesthood.³

Even though many members of the Church consider both recitations of John the Baptist’s words as scripture, a few scholars have noted there are subtle differences in Joseph’s and Oliver’s accounts, with one concluding that Oliver’s account is “a bit more precise.”⁴ But they have not addressed all of the differences or attempted to explain why, if Oliver’s account is more precise, Joseph’s account deserves a place in our scriptural canon.⁵

I believe that Oliver Cowdery cited John the Baptist’s words exactly as they were spoken but that Joseph Smith drew on revelation he received afterward and used his mantle as a prophet of God to add inspired commentary to those words. Oliver’s account focuses on the fulfillment of revelation in Malachi, while Joseph’s account focuses on the role of priesthood in the Church until that revelation is fulfilled. As a result, D&C 13 is not only more complete doctrinally but more useful to the restored Church of Jesus Christ.

Original Text

Both Joseph’s and Oliver’s accounts of John the Baptist ordaining them to priesthood were given as part of longer recitations of their experiences in Harmony, Pennsylvania. Joseph recalled being forced to keep secret the circumstances of both his ordination and his baptism because of local

persecution (see Joseph Smith—History 1:74), and there is no evidence he shared oral accounts of his experience early in his history. Some of his associates even recalled not being told initially about priesthood restoration. Although Joseph mentioned receiving authority from angels in an 1832 account,⁶ the first documented time he shared the circumstances surrounding receiving priesthood authority with others was on April 21, 1834, when he, Oliver Cowdery, Sidney Rigdon, and others gathered fifty-one miles south of Kirtland in Norton, Ohio, at the home of local gristmill operator and member Benjamin Carpenter. Joseph elected to share his experiences with the priesthood in the context of discussions about building a temple in Kirtland. When Sidney Rigdon addressed the congregation after Joseph, he discussed, among other things, “the Endowment of the Elders with power from on High according to former promises.” After this, both Joseph and Sidney spoke to the congregation on the endowment of power and shared revelations about the proposed Kirtland Temple.⁷ Joseph delivered these sermons after he “gave a relation of obtaining and translating the Book of Mormon, the revelation of the priesthood of Aaron . . . [and] the revelation of the high priesthood.”⁸ Unfortunately, Oliver, who kept minutes in that meeting, did not record the content of Joseph’s account of priesthood restoration. When Oliver returned to Norton five months later, however, he sat down on September 7, 1834, in the evening after Sunday meetings, and wrote a letter describing what happened. His account was intended for readers of the Church-owned Missouri newspaper *Evening and Morning Star* who did not have regular access to Joseph’s sermons, but “owing to a press of other matter” it was held over and published in the first issue of the Kirtland newspaper *Messenger and Advocate*.⁹

Joseph was aware of Oliver’s effort to describe John the Baptist’s visit, and he offered to “assist” Oliver in producing his history, although the extent of Joseph’s involvement in the effort is not known. This letter turned out to be the first of a series of letters Oliver published outlining the early history of the Church, and it was reprinted in the Nauvoo Church newspaper *Times and Seasons* in November 1840 as Joseph was preparing his own history of the same events for publication.¹⁰

Joseph Smith began dictating his history in 1838, but the portion that included his account of John the Baptist’s restoration of priesthood authority was lost, and the earliest surviving document dates to 1839 when he prepared a copy for publication.¹¹ In October 1840, Joseph dictated a “Treatise

on Priesthood” to his scribe as though it were revelation, touching on John the Baptist’s visit. This sermon was read in general conference the day after Joseph announced plans for the construction of the Nauvoo Temple.¹² Joseph’s 1839 account of John the Baptist’s visit was eventually published in the August 1842 *Times and Seasons*.¹³ This newspaper account later served as the source for the Pearl of Great Price version and ultimately D&C 13.

D&C 2 and the Context of John the Baptist’s Visit

Ancient prophets anticipated John the Baptist’s visit with Joseph and Oliver. Many early Latter-day Saints viewed his appearance as a fulfillment of the prophecy found in the book of Revelation describing an angel “fly[ing] in the midst of heaven” who would come with the everlasting gospel (Revelation 14:6–7).¹⁴ Joseph’s religious contemporaries understood that Elijah in the Old Testament was referenced in the New Testament using the Greek form of his name, Elias, and that this name was sometimes applied to John the Baptist, such as when the angel in the temple promised Zacharias his son would go before the Lord “in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (Luke 1:17).

When Orson Pratt selected part of Moroni’s instructions to Joseph in 1876 for inclusion in the Doctrine and Covenants as section 2, he recognized this reference to Old Testament prophecy (see Malachi 4:5–6) was at least partially fulfilled in the coming of John the Baptist. A few years earlier, Orson preached a lengthy sermon on the subject and argued that Isaiah and Malachi both foresaw John the Baptist’s role in priesthood restoration. Most nineteenth-century readers of the New Testament already understood that Elias would “make a people prepared for the Lord” during his sojourn on earth, but Orson argued Elias was also called “not only to prepare the way for the first coming but prepare for His second coming” as well.¹⁵ He also explained that Malachi knew a messenger would be sent “that the sons of Levi might be prepared to offer an offering in righteousness,” and he asked, “Who was that messenger? John the Baptist. . . . Did John accomplish all things predicted by the prophet Malachi during his first mission upon the earth? No.”¹⁶ He went on to argue that the Lord did not come suddenly to his temple during the first visit but to a manger, and the wicked were able to abide the day of his first coming. Orson Pratt argued that Malachi foresaw John the Baptist’s second

mission as well, a mission when John would come to prepare the sons of Levi to make an offering in righteousness for the Lord when he came suddenly to his temple.¹⁷

Joseph Smith later specifically addressed the topic of the spirit of Elias in his recounting the restoration of the Aaronic Priesthood. In order to fully appreciate his comments, however, we need to consider Joseph's and Oliver's recitations of John the Baptist's words when they were ordained.

Quoting John the Baptist?

Joseph's and Oliver's wording. When Joseph Smith recounted what took place in the Harmony woods on May 15, 1829, he had access to Oliver Cowdery's narrative of the same events and even had Oliver's account reprinted as he prepared his own. He could easily have corrected Oliver's letter before it was reprinted if he felt it was inaccurate, or he could have drawn from Oliver's words if he felt they represented what he wanted to say. Instead, he let Oliver's account stand but provided his own as well.

Oliver Cowdery's 1834 citation of John the Baptist's words during the priesthood ordination reads as follows:

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!

Joseph Smith's 1839 rendition is somewhat longer, and I have emphasized here in italics the places where he differs from Oliver.

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, untill the sons of Levi do offer again* an offering unto the Lord in righteousness.¹⁸

The name of Messiah. If we ignore differences in punctuation, since they were obviously not part of John the Baptist's original dialog, it is noteworthy that Oliver and Joseph used identical language when citing John the Baptist's introduction to the ordination: "Upon you my fellow servants, in the name of Messiah." To our ears the lack of a definite article before Messiah is noticeable and we want to hear "in the name of *the* Messiah." Joseph and Oliver's

contemporaries would have longed to hear the same definite article. While using “the name of Messiah” is acceptable English, and it appeared in some publications during the early nineteenth century, a digital search of word usage in more than twenty million books suggests the phrase was extremely rare during that period and readers were much more likely to come across “name of *the* Messiah.”¹⁹ This is exactly the word choice Oliver and Joseph consistently used in their other writings.²⁰ Oliver even used “*the* Messiah” twice elsewhere in the same letter where he cited John the Baptist. The lack of a definite article with the word *Messiah* in both Joseph’s and Oliver’s citations of John the Baptist was clearly intentional.

The reference to priesthood. Oliver and Joseph differ slightly in their phrasing of the messenger’s next statement, with Oliver quoting John the Baptist saying, “I confer *this* Priesthood and *this* authority,” while Joseph reports him saying, “I confer the Priesthood of Aaron” (D&C 13:1). Since the word *this* as used by Oliver clearly referred to a statement that was not included, he implied that John the Baptist addressed the priesthood before beginning the ordination. Joseph confirmed this in his Nauvoo account of priesthood restoration discussed below.

Joseph Smith’s use of “the Priesthood of Aaron” appears to have been added for clarification. Surviving sources indicate that the terms *Aaronic* and *Melchizedek* were not initially associated with the restored priesthood. Religious writers in early nineteenth-century America sometimes wrote about priesthood in the Old Testament as Aaronic Priesthood, the Priesthood of Aaron, or, taking their cue from the New Testament, the order of Aaron (see Hebrews 7:11), and some even talked about a continuation of Aaronic Priesthood after the crucifixion.²¹ Although these terms were familiar to nineteenth-century speakers, they were not initially used in the restored Church. The earliest sources consistently referred to authority restored by John the Baptist as “lesser priesthood,” a term unique to Mormonism that implied that all priesthood was not equivalent but could be divided into distinct spheres of influence.²²

As late as September 1832, when Joseph Smith received a major revelation on priesthood now published as D&C 84, authority was described as the “greater priesthood” (v. 19) and “the lesser priesthood” (v. 26). The revelation indicated that the greater, also known as “*the* priesthood,” was “received . . . from Melchizedek” (v. 14) while the lesser, known as “*a* priesthood” (v. 18),

had been conferred on Aaron. This reference to the two individuals usually associated with authority placed them in a more familiar nineteenth-century context, but it did not tie them to the names of these authorities, and a year later when Joseph ordained his father as patriarch, he still referenced the two distinct authorities as “the lesser priesthood, and . . . the holy priesthood.”²³

The September 1832 revelation indicated that priesthood was connected to Melchizedek and Aaron (and it emphasized this “lesser priesthood” had passed through generations to John the Baptist), but it did not specifically give a name for these two spheres of authority other than referring to them as “lesser” and “greater.” By the time Joseph gave his sermon in Norton, Ohio, on April 21, 1834, however, he was speaking about “the revelation of the priesthood of Aaron.”²⁴ On March 28, 1835, Joseph dictated a revelation which specifically named the two priesthoods Melchizedek and Aaronic and explained why they each received their designated name (see D&C 107:1–6, 13–14, 18–20). Oliver then began to make a transition in terminology but was still more comfortable with the “lesser” and “greater” usage that appears in earlier documents. He recalled a few months after Joseph’s revelation receiving “the lesser or Aaronic priesthood. . . . After this we received the high and holy priesthood.”²⁵

By 1839, when Joseph Smith wrote his account of John the Baptist’s visit, the terms *Aaronic* and *Melchizedek* were fully entrenched in Latter-day Saint discourse, and he used them both in his account of John the Baptist’s visit.²⁶ After Joseph published his account of priesthood restoration, however, he summarized the same events in 1844, using different terminology in a lengthy account. Joseph said, “I must go back to the time at Susquehannah river when I retired in the woods pouring out my soul in prayer to Almighty God. An Angel came down from heaven and laid his hands upon me and ordained me to the power of Elias and that authorised me to bapitise with water unto repentance. It is a power or a preparatory work for something greater . . . that is the power of the Aronick preisthood.”²⁷ Joseph said the angel gave him instructions on the nature of the “power of Elias” when he explained, “This said the Angel is the Spirit of Elias.”²⁸ He expounded, “The spirit of Elias is to prepare the way for a greater revelation of God which is the [purpose of the] priesthood of Elias or the Priesthood that Aaron was ordained unto.”²⁹ Joseph added that John the Baptist had ordained him to “be a priest after

the order of Aaron,” which connected this authority to the ancient patriarch Aaron in terms familiar to the Saints since their days in Kirtland.³⁰

Priesthood keys. Joseph Smith’s account continued by including a phrase not used by Oliver Cowdery: “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” (D&C 13:1). This definition of “keys” associated with the Priesthood of Aaron reflects revelations Joseph received in Kirtland.

In Joseph’s September 1832 revelation on priesthood, he learned that the keys of the mysteries of the kingdom belonged to the “greater priesthood” (D&C 84:19) while the “lesser priesthood” held “the key of the ministering of angels and the preparatory gospel; which gospel is the gospel of repentance and of baptism, and the remission of sins, and the law of carnal commandments” (D&C 84:26–27). The revelation then noted that this priesthood had been passed on through a direct lineage from Aaron to John the Baptist, who used it to prepare people for the first coming of the Lord. Since the Book of Mormon addressed the role of ministering angels as “to call men unto repentance, and to fulfil and to do the work of the covenants of the Father” (Moroni 7:29–31), the September 1832 revelation’s reference to ministering angels emphasized the role of Aaronic Priesthood as centered on repentance and on its preparatory role for something greater.

The 1832 revelation went on to declare that those faithful in obtaining both the lesser and greater priesthood would become these sons of Moses and Aaron that would offer an acceptable offering and sacrifice in the house of the Lord (see D&C 84:27–37). Less than three years later, the Apostles in the restored Church asked for a written revelation to express the mind and will of the Lord concerning their duty.³¹ They received through Joseph Smith a revelation which defined, among other things, the lesser priesthood as the priesthood of Aaron and addressed its keys as “the keys of the ministering of angels, and to administer in outward ordinances” such as baptism (D&C 107:20).

Aaronic Priesthood to “remain” or be “taken.” Joseph and Oliver concluded their accounts by returning to identical words spoken by John the Baptist, but these were preceded by some subtle, yet significant, differences. Oliver Cowdery cited John as saying this authority would “remain upon earth, *that* the Sons of Levi may yet offer an offering unto the Lord in righteousness” while Joseph Smith related that the authority would “never be taken again

from the earth, *until* the sons of Levi do offer again an offering unto the Lord in righteousness.” The statements are not contradictory, since authority can “remain” on the earth so the sons of Levi “may yet” make an offering while not being “taken . . . until” the offering is made “again,” but the emphasis in the two accounts differs.

Oliver Cowdery’s narrative emphasized the Second Coming of Jesus Christ and the role of the lesser priesthood in that event. This is consistent with doctrine Joseph taught. In October 1840, Joseph prepared one of his few formal written sermons, a “Treatise on Priesthood,” that he had his scribe, Robert B. Thompson, read on his behalf in general conference the day after he announced plans for construction of the Nauvoo Temple. In his sermon, Joseph noted, “All things had under the Authority of the Priesthood at any former period shall be had again—bringing to pass the restoration spoken of by the mouth of all the Holy Prophets. Then shall the sons of Levi offer an acceptable sacrifice to the Lord.”³² Joseph indicated that this would fulfill the prophecy in Malachi 3:3–4 that this sacrifice would be made at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Oliver’s account emphasized the importance of this event—John the Baptist restored the priesthood that was essential to carrying out this sacrifice. Oliver even used wording consistent with Malachi, which emphasized the enabling aspect of authority that the sons of Levi “may” offer an offering in righteousness in the temple (Malachi 3:3).

While Oliver Cowdery’s account emphasized the sacrifice and thus the Second Coming, Joseph Smith’s account emphasized the preparatory role of the lesser priesthood and the important interim period “until” the acceptable sacrifice would be made. Joseph’s account was more useful to Latter-day Saints since it emphasized the period in which we currently live and, in conjunction with his insertion of an identification of specific keys connected to that authority, outlined the purpose of that priesthood until the prophesied sacrifice was made. Joseph’s use of *until* emphasized the role of priesthood up to that point in time; it did not attempt to address the role of Aaronic Priesthood after the sacrifice would be made.

Orson Pratt recognized the preparatory nature of Aaronic Priesthood and that its role in bringing about repentance would lead to something greater. He argued, “The authority of the priesthood will continue until the end shall come, the end of the wicked . . . until the sons of Levi shall be purified.”³³ Joseph had taught this idea in Nauvoo when he preached that “the

power of Elias” restored through John the Baptist was “a preparatory work for something greater.”³⁴ Even though there was overlap between the New Testament Elias and the Old Testament Elijah in terms of John the Baptist, Joseph recognized that the “lesser” and “greater” priesthoods also divided the roles of an Elias and an Elijah to an extent, with the “lesser” priesthood fulfilling the preparatory role. The “person who holds the keys of Elias hath a preparatory work” that leads to the “spirit power & calling of Elijah,” he explained, which includes “the keys of the revelations ordinances, oracles powers & endowments of the fullness of the Melchizedek Priesthood.”³⁵

Joseph considered that the role of Elias would fold into that of Elijah and argued, “The Melchisadeck Priesthood comprehends the Aaronic or Levitical Priesthood and is the Grand head, and holds the highest Authority which pertains to the Priesthood the keys of the Kingdom of God in all ages of the world to the latest posterity on the earth and is the channel through which all knowledge, doctrine, the plan of salvation and every important matter is revealed from heaven.”³⁶ He used the word *comprehend* as a synonym for *include* to suggest the Melchizedek Priesthood is all encompassing.

Within this context, Joseph’s use of the word *until* in relation to the Aaronic Priesthood becomes clearer. After the Aaronic Priesthood accomplishes its preparatory role to lead us to what Joseph Smith called the spirit, ordinances, powers, and endowment of Elijah, it becomes subsumed into the Melchizedek Priesthood of which it is a part. Recognizing that the Melchizedek Priesthood both includes and supersedes the Aaronic Priesthood helps explain Joseph’s emphasis in his citation of John the Baptist’s words on the preparatory role the Aaronic Priesthood plays in divine communication, repentance, and baptism. Its purpose is to lead us to something greater.

In addition to the role of priesthood in preparing individuals for the coming of Jesus Christ, Joseph’s account of the offering to be made by the sons of Levi included the word *again* to emphasize the role of this sacrifice as part of the restoration of all things foretold in scripture. Brigham Young understood that this sacrifice would be made by literal descendants of Levi through Aaron. During a discussion on the Levitical Priesthood, he lamented “that no son of Levi has yet been found in these last days to minister at the altar.”³⁷ More than twenty years later he still expected that eventually these Levites would be available to perform ordinances, saying, “By and by the descendants of Aaron come along and they officiate in lesser priesthood but

they will receive their endowments,” as if to emphasize that they would still be subsumed within what Joseph Smith called the spirit, power, and calling of Elijah.³⁸ Brigham Young never saw that long-prophesied day of sacrifice fulfilled.

Conclusion

Both Oliver Cowdery’s and Joseph Smith’s accounts of priesthood restoration are significant. Oliver’s account was written closer to the actual event and appears to represent John the Baptist’s ordination as it was delivered. Any historical account of that important event would want to pay close attention to Oliver’s recollections. On the other hand, Joseph’s account provides an accurate summary of the event as it occurred but includes important doctrinal refinements building on Joseph’s later revelations that make it a significant revelation for Latter-day Saints in its own right and an important contribution to the Doctrine and Covenants.

God promised us in revelation that we would have his word through Joseph Smith (D&C 5:10) in order to become “born of [Him].” When this promise was republished in the Doctrine and Covenants, Joseph Smith included the inspired clarification that he and Oliver would not immediately be reborn through baptism, but “you must wait yet a little while, for ye are not yet ordained” (D&C 5:16–17), highlighting the role of proper authority. Even though they were already baptized when this clarification was added, it emphasized the importance to readers of proper authority in performing ordinances as later taught by Joseph when he said, “Being born again comes by the Spirit of God through ordinances.”³⁹ He also drew on inspiration to expand the words of John the Baptist in his account of priesthood restoration to emphasize the role priesthood would continue to play not just in eventually performing an important sacrifice by the sons of Levi but also in preparing us for that moment.

Notes

1. Oliver Cowdery, “The following communication . . .,” *Messenger and Advocate*, October 1834, 13–16.

2. An informal sample of Church History Department employees conducted in October 2011 suggests that about half of those asked consider the Cowdery Pearl of

Great Price account as scripture and half consider it equivalent to a section heading or other contextual material but not scripture. An informal sample of Church-service missionaries serving in the same department suggested that almost all of them considered Oliver Cowdery’s account as scripture.

3. Franklin D. Richards and James A. Little, *A Compendium of the Doctrines of the Gospel* (Salt Lake City: George Q. Cannon and Sons, 1882), 71.

4. Charles R. Harrell, “The Restoration of the Priesthood,” *Studies in Scripture, Vol. 1: The Doctrine and Covenants*, ed. Robert L. Millet and Kent P. Jackson (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 90.

5. This perspective is supported fully or in part by Hyrum M. Smith and Janne M. Sjodahl, *The Doctrine and Covenants Commentary*, rev. ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1967), 70; Daniel H. Ludlow, *A Companion to Your Study of the Doctrine and Covenants* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978), 1:115; Richard O. Cowan, *Doctrine and Covenants: Our Modern Scripture*, rev. ed. (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1978), 36; and Monte S. Nyman, *More Precious Than Gold: Commentary on The Doctrine and Covenants* (Orem, UT: Granite, 2008), 1:135.

6. Dean C. Jessee, ed., *The Papers of Joseph Smith*, vol. 1, *Autobiographical and Historical Writings* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 3.

7. Minute Book 1, April 21, 1834, 44–51, The Joseph Smith Papers, <http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/minute-book-1#48>.

8. Minute Book 1, 44.

9. Cowdery, “The following communication . . .,” 13.

10. Oliver Cowdery, “Copy of a Letter . . .,” *Times and Seasons*, November 1, 1840, 200–202.

11. Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 230–31, 265–67, 290.

12. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 1980), 38–44, 50–51.

13. Joseph Smith, “History of Joseph Smith,” *Times and Seasons*, August 1, 1842, 865–67.

14. Ronald O. Barney, “Priesthood Restoration Narratives in the Early LDS Church,” unpublished manuscript in author’s possession, cited with permission.

15. The original shorthand version of Orson Pratt’s sermon can be found in Orson Pratt, June 5, 1859, Papers of George D. Watt, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, MS 4534 box 3 disk 1, images 299–306. LaJean Carruth has transcribed this sermon, and I have confirmed and edited the transcription and punctuated the portion included here. Space limitations only allow for the reproduction of a small selection from the sermon. The entire sermon is in the author’s files. Pratt preached in part: “The authority of the [Aaronic] priesthood will continue until the end shall come—the end of the wicked. That was the promise of the angel when the angel came and conferred first authority of priesthood upon Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery [in] 1829. What was the promise of that angel before this church took its rise when he laid his hands on those two individuals? What did he say? ‘In the name of Messiah I confer this priesthood, which is the priesthood of Aaron, upon you,

and it shall continue upon you, and it shall never be taken from the earth while it shall stand. It shall continue upon you until the sons of Levi shall be purified and shall offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.' . . . Isaiah predicted that the messenger should be sent forth to prepare the way of [the] Lord not only to prepare the way for [his] first coming but prepare for his second coming. Read the 40 chapter of Isaiah. The same thing is quoted by the evangelist applying to John where he should be sent as messenger before his face and he should be as one crying in the wilderness make straight in the desert highway for our God, every valley exalted, and rough places made straight, etc. [See Mark 1:3, Matthew 3:3, Luke 3:4; John 1:23, and Isaiah 40:3–5]. Did John do all that as Isaiah predicted in forepart of 40 chapter? No. Yet he was the very person mentioned. . . . Why then not John come in last dispensation of fullness of times and confer that everlasting priesthood upon the heads of other chosen vessels, that they might act therein and be an instrument in hands of God by restoring authority that should prepare the way for the Savior's second advent? The same thing is predicted in 3 chapter prophecy of Malachi. 'Behold,' says he that prophet, or the Lord by his mouth, 'I will send my messenger before my face, and he shall prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant whom I delight in, behold he shall come. But who may abide the day of his coming, and who shall stand when he appeareth? For he is like devouring fire, and he shall sit upon the sons of Levi, and purify them as gold and silver, that they may offer to the Lord an offering in righteousness. And the offering of Judah and Jerusalem shall be pleasant unto the Lord as in former years.' Who was that messenger? John the Baptist. And applied to him by the evangelist. Did John accomplish all things predicted by the prophet Malachi during his first mission upon the earth? No."

16. Orson Pratt, June 5, 1859, Papers of George D. Watt, Church History Library, MS 4534 box 3 disk 1, image 304.

17. Orson Pratt, June 5, 1859, images 303–5.

18. *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 290.

19. This evaluation was carried out using the Google Ngram feature.

20. Joseph Smith consistently used "the Messiah" in his own speech (see D&C 109:67 and Patriarchal Blessing Book, October 2, 1835, recording a blessing given December 18, 1833, as cited in Joseph Fielding Smith, "Restoration of the Melchizedek Priesthood," *Improvement Era*, October 1904, 943), and, although we don't know to what extent Joseph Smith's language patterns influenced his translation efforts, the definite article appears consistently throughout the Book of Mormon. See 1 Nephi 1:19; 10:4, 7, 9–10; 15:13; 2 Nephi 2:6, 8, 26; 3:5; 6:13–14; 25:14, 19; 26:3; Jarom 1:11; Mosiah 13:33; Helaman 8:13; and in references Joseph inserted into the Bible, see the Joseph Smith Translation of Genesis 50:24–25; Matthew 3:6; Mark 14:36. Other than his citation of John the Baptist's ordination, the only instance where Joseph Smith did not include a definite article with "Messiah" was when he cited words spoken directly by the Lord to Enoch (see Moses 7:53).

21. Joseph Smith related an anecdote of an Episcopal priest who claimed to hold the priesthood of Aaron. *Words of Joseph Smith*, 244.

22. Adam Clarke noted in his commentary on Hebrews 7:5 that “Melchisedec . . . therefore must be considered as having a more honourable priesthood than even Aaron himself” and thus implied that Melchizedek’s priesthood was greater, but he never used the terms “lesser” or “greater” in his commentary. Adam Clarke, *The Holy Bible . . . with a Commentary and Critical Notes* (New York: Daniel Hitt and Abraham Paul, 1817), chap. 7.

23. Joseph Smith, December 18, 1833, as cited in John W. Welch, ed., *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations, 1820–1844* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2005), 236. See Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 614n48 for an argument that this account may date to December 18, 1834.

24. Minute Book 1, April 21, 1834, 48.

25. Welch, *Opening the Heavens*, 243.

26. Oliver Cowdery would also later use Aaronic and Melchizedek for the lesser and higher priesthoods but continued to occasionally refer to “the Lesser Priesthood—and . . . the Greater,” see Welch, *Opening the Heavens*, 244–45. Joseph also remained flexible in his use of terminology, distinguishing the authorities on one occasion as “a priest after the order of Aaron & . . . a greater work.” *Words of Joseph Smith*, 327. Joseph also spoke of three distinct priesthoods using interchangeable names, Levitical or Aaronic, Patriarchal or Abrahamic, and Melchizedek. See *Words of Joseph Smith*, 243–47.

27. *Words of Joseph Smith*, 332–33.

28. *Words of Joseph Smith*, 334.

29. *Words of Joseph Smith*, 328; emphasis added.

30. *Words of Joseph Smith*, 327.

31. Minute Book 1, March 28, 1835. This revelation was combined with an earlier revelation received November 11, 1831, before it was published as D&C 107. See Robert J. Woodford, “The Historical Development of the Doctrine and Covenants” (PhD diss., Brigham Young University, 1974), 3:1398–1403; Revelation Book 1:122–23; and Revelation Book 2:84–86, in Robin Scott Jensen, Robert J. Woodford, and Steven C. Harper, *The Joseph Smith Papers: Revelations and Translations* (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2009), 1:217–19, 585–91.

32. *Words of Joseph Smith*, 42; struck-out words omitted.

33. Orson Pratt, June 5, 1859, Papers of George D. Watt, Church History Library, MS 4534 box 3 disk 1, image 304.

34. *Words of Joseph Smith*, 328, 332–34.

35. *Words of Joseph Smith*, 328–29.

36. *Words of Joseph Smith*, 38.

37. *Manuscript History of Brigham Young, 1846–1847*, ed. Elden J. Watson (Salt Lake City: Elden J. Watson, 1971), 503.

38. Brigham Young, School of the Prophets, January 27, 1868, Papers of George D. Watt, Church History Library, MS 45 34 box 5 disk 4, images 71–74, transcribed from shorthand by LaJean Carruth.

39. *Words of Joseph Smith*, 12.