AARON, BROTHER OF MOSES

Aaron was a son of Amram and Jochebed of the tribe of Levi (Ex. 6:20), and a brother of Moses and Miriam (Ex. 4:14; 15:20). God directed him to meet his brother at the “mount of God” (Ex. 4:27–28), and appointed him spokesman for Moses (Ex. 4:14–16; 7:1–2; 2 Ne. 3:17). The AARONIC PRIESTHOOD, or lesser priesthood in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, takes its name from Aaron.

While the Israelites were encamped at Sinai, Aaron, two of his sons, and seventy elders accompanied Moses to the holy mountain, where they saw God (Ex. 24:1, 9–11). Aaron and his sons were called by God through the prophet Moses to serve in the priest’s office (Ex. 28:1), Aaron becoming the “high,” or chief, priest over the Levitical order (Num. 3:32). His call from God through a prophet is used as an example for all who receive any PRIESTHOOD appointment of God (Heb. 5:4). He held the MELCHIZEDEK PRIESTHOOD, but as chief priest of the lesser priesthood he served in a lesser position equivalent to that of the modern Presiding Bishop (John Taylor, Items on the Priesthood, p. 5, Salt Lake City, 1881). Direct descendants of the firstborn son of Aaron have a legal right to the presidency of this priesthood (i.e., BISHOP; D&C 68:15–18; 107:16–17), but such an appointment requires a call from the FIRST PRESIDENCY of the Church (D&C 68:20).

Aaron was not privileged to enter the land of promise (Num. 20:7–13). Malachi prophesied that, in the latter days, the sons of Levi—which would include Aaron’s descendants—would again offer an offering in righteousness (Mal. 3:1–3; cf D&C 13:1). Moreover, all who receive both the Aaronic and Melchizedek priesthoods and magnify their CALLINGS through sacrifice and righteous lives are spoken of as the sons of Moses and of Aaron (D&C 84:18, 27, 30–32, 34).

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AARONIC PRIESTHOOD

POWERS AND OFFICES
The two divisions of PRIESTHOOD in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are the Aaronic and the Melchizedek. Young men twelve to eighteen years of age, and older men who are new converts, are ordained to offices in the Aaronic Priesthood, “which holds the keys [governing or

The Aaronic Priesthood does not have the power to confer the Holy Ghost (Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:7–8; John 1:33–34; JS—H 1:70) or to administer totally the affairs of the kingdom of God. It is power and authority God has given to man to prepare him and those to whom he ministers to receive the greater power, authority, and blessings of the Melchizedek Priesthood.

Distinctive LDS insights into the origins of the Aaronic Priesthood stem from modern revelations indicating that when Moses led Israel out of Egypt, the Lord purposed to confer upon worthy men of all tribes the higher Melchizedek Priesthood. Disobedience and loss of faith and worthiness, however, caused the Israelites to harden their hearts against the Lord and Moses. Therefore, the Lord eventually took Moses out of their midst, and the Holy Priesthood also; and the lesser priesthood continued, which priesthood holdeth 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, which the Lord in his wrath caused to continue with the house of Aaron among the children of Israel until John [the Baptist], whom God raised up [D&C 84:25–27].

The Israelites, unwilling to abide by the higher law of the fulness of the gospel with its greater priesthood, were given the law of carnal commandments, as a portion of the LAW OF MOSES, with its emphasis on offering symbolic, redemptive sacrifices to prepare them to receive the divine Redeemer, and they were given the lesser priesthood to administer that law. The Lord called Aaron and his sons to be the priests and preside over this lesser priesthood (Num. 8). Only direct descendants of Aaron could be ordained priests. The firstborn among the sons of Aaron would preside over the other priests. To assist Aaron and his posterity, particularly with the tabernacle and the preparing and offering of sacrifices, the Lord also called other male members of the tribe of Levi (not of the family of Aaron) to receive and carry out assignments in the lesser priesthood (Num. 3:5–13). The Levites held lesser offices of the Aaronic Priesthood and functioned under the keys or directive authority of that priesthood conferred upon Aaron and his sons (Widtsoe, pp. 12–17). Hence, the lesser priesthood was called the Aaronic Priesthood, after Aaron, but a portion of that priesthood was also called the Levitical Priesthood because all those to whom it was given belonged to the tribe of Levi. This type of priesthood organization and service continued in Israel until Jesus Christ came.

John the Baptist, a descendant of Aaron through both parents and thus a Levite, was the son of Zacharias, a righteous priest in Israel at the time of the birth of Christ. It was this John whom God chose to prepare the way for Christ’s ministry on earth. From John’s birth his mission was set and his priesthood functions anticipated (D&C 84:28; Luke 1:5–17).

After being baptized by John, Jesus called his apostles (some of them from among John’s disciples) and ordained them (John 15:16); later he conferred upon Peter, James, and John the keys of the kingdom of God and a higher priesthood (see MOUNT OF TRANSFIGURATION). Following his death, resurrection, and ascension, Christ continued to direct his Church by giving commandments to the apostles through the power of the Holy Ghost (Acts 1:2) and through the authority of the higher Melchizedek Priesthood that he had conferred upon them. After the death of the apostles there followed a general apostasy, during which many gospel principles were lost and all the powers of the priesthood were withdrawn from the earth (2 Thes. 2:1–4; 2 Tim. 3:1–5).

On May 15, 1829, John the Baptist appeared to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery as a resurrected messenger from God and conferred the ancient “Priesthood of Aaron” upon them (D&C 13). As the organization of the Church proceeded through the following months and years, many male members received the Aaronic Priesthood and were organized into quorums of priests, teachers, and deacons. In the Restoration, the Aaronic Priesthood has not been restricted to those who are literal descendants of Aaron or of Levi, since those lineages are not at present identified and the priesthood authority that implemented the ordinances of the law of Moses has been replaced by the higher priesthood and laws and ordinances of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Beginning with the reorganization of the priesthood in 1877, the Church established the current practice of ordaining boys to the Aaronic Priesthood during their early teen-
age years, organizing them at the ward level into PRIESTHOOD QUORUMS by age group and PRIESTHOOD OFFICE, and advancing them periodically to higher offices and eventually to the higher priesthood. The BISHOP of each ward presides over the Aaronic Priesthood in the ward.

Over the Aaronic Priesthood, the “president is to be a bishop; for this is one of the duties of this priesthood” (D&C 107:88), but bishops are also ordained high priests of the Melchizedek Priesthood because they preside and are not literal descendants of Aaron. The other three offices of the Aaronic Priesthood are deacon, teacher, and priest. Under the direction of the bishop, someone with proper authority confers the Aaronic Priesthood upon a worthy young man when he is twelve years old, ordaining him to the office of deacon. If he remains faithful and worthy, he is ordained to the office of teacher when he is fourteen years old and is given additional responsibilities. If he continues to remain faithful and worthy, he is ordained to the office of priest in the Aaronic Priesthood when he is sixteen years old, again receiving increased responsibilities. As young men progress in the priesthood, they retain all the rights and duties of lower offices.

The Lord has instructed the Church that bearers of the priesthood be organized into quorums (D&C 107:85–88). Some reasons for this are to establish order, to facilitate effective instruction in gospel principles and priesthood duties, and to prepare them for greater service and leadership in the Church. In the Aaronic Priesthood, a president and two counselors, chosen from the quorum members, preside over each quorum of deacons and teachers. This presidency is set apart (given powers of presidency) to preside over, sit in council with, and teach the members of the quorum their duty. The bishop is president of the priests quorum. He selects one or more boys as leaders under his presiding leadership and trains them to direct the other members of the quorum. Though the bishop and his two counselors in the bishopric hold all of the keys of the Aaronic Priesthood for the ward, the bishop usually calls an adult adviser to help train the boy leaders and to help instruct quorum members. However, the adviser has no presiding authority.

Thus the Aaronic Priesthood continues in its role as a preparatory priesthood, training young men in gospel principles and priesthood powers as they mature in service related to the preparatory gospel: faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, repentance, baptism for the remission of sins, and love of God and fellow beings. These responsibilities are most evident as the young men prepare, bless, and pass the SACRAMENT of the Lord’s Supper each Sabbath day in the SACRAMENT MEETINGS of the Church and as they otherwise assist the bishop in serving the people of the ward.

Today the Aaronic Priesthood gives young men experience and prepares them to receive the Melchizedek Priesthood when they are eighteen years old, with the greater privileges and responsibilities of its oath and covenant (D&C 84:33–40). The Melchizedek Priesthood increases their capacity to serve, perform the saving ordinances of the gospel, and direct the Church when called to do so.

A major activity program for Aaronic Priesthood boys in many areas of the world is SCOUTING. To effectively correlate priesthood and scouting activities, the bishop organizes the YOUNG MEN program in the ward. An adult man is called to serve as president of the Young Men under the bishop’s direction. Where scouting is organized, he and his two counselors generally also serve as the scout leaders. In wards with many boys, additional adults may be called to assist in the scouting program.

The bishop also organizes the girls of the ward into a YOUNG WOMEN program, with adult women advisers, and in age groups that correspond with ages of boys in Aaronic Priesthood quorums. Joint activities are planned and carried out regularly with the young men of the Aaronic Priesthood.

[For a more detailed history of the Aaronic Priesthood, see also Bishop, History of.]

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RESTORATION
On May 15, 1829, JOHN THE BAPTIST appeared to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery near Harmony, Pennsylvania, and bestowed the Aaronic Priesthood on them (see AARONIC PRIESTHOOD:
POWERS AND OFFICES). This ordination gave the two men authority to baptize (see BAPTISM), and they immediately performed that ordinance for one another in the Susquehanna River. The Prophet Joseph Smith had received no previous revelations authorizing him to baptize; to perform that ordinance properly required specific authorization from God. The return of John to bestow the Aaronic Priesthood confirmed that divine authority had been lost from the earth and that a heavenly visitation was necessary to restore it.

Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery were engaged in translating the Book of Mormon (see BOOK OF MORMON TRANSLATION BY JOSEPH SMITH) at the Prophet’s homestead on the Susquehanna River in Harmony when the question of baptism arose. A passage in 3 Nephi 11 (see BOOK OF MORMON: THIRD NEPHI), in which the resurrected Savior instructed the Nephites on the subject, led the two men to wonder about their own baptism. Determining to pray about it, they went to the woods, where, as Oliver later recounted, “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” (JS—H 1:71n). Joseph said that the angel placed his hands on them and ordained them, 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” (JS—H 1:69; D&C 13).

The angel informed them that the Aaronic Priesthood did not have the power of laying on of hands for the GIFT OF THE HOLY GHOST, but that that authority would be given to them later. He told Joseph to baptize Oliver, and Oliver to baptize Joseph, and each to ordain the other to the Aaronic Priesthood. The messenger 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 would be conferred later (JS—H 1:72; see MELCHIZEDEK PRIESTHOOD: RESTORATION).

In the time of Jesus, John the Baptist preached repentance to the Jews and baptized in the Jordan River. He baptized Jesus (Matt. 3:13–17; cf. 2 Ne. 31:4–13). John was a direct descendant of Aaron, through both his priestly father Zacharias and his mother Elisabeth, one of the “daughters of Aaron” (Luke 1:5). A later revelation to Joseph Smith said that an angel bestowed authority on John to perform his earthly mission when he was eight days old (D&C 84:28).

By ordination and calling, John the Baptist held the keys of the Aaronic Priesthood. These include the keys of the “ministering of angels,” meaning that holders of the Aaronic Priesthood are eligible to have angels minister to them. This priesthood also has the keys of the preparatory gospel, which embraces the “gospel of repentance and of baptism, and the remission of sins, and the law of carnal commandments” (D&C 84:27).

As others were also to enjoy the blessings associated with baptism for the remission of sins administered under priesthood authority, a revelation was given in 1829 regarding the exact words and procedure that were to be followed in conducting the ordinance for those who repent and ask for baptism.

Behold ye shall go down & stand in the water & in my name shall ye baptize them. And now behold these are the words which ye shall say calling them by name saying. Having authority given me of Jesus Christ I baptize you in the name of the Father & the Son & of the Holy Ghost Amen. And then shall ye immerse them in water [Cowdery, 1829 Ms.].

In the LDS Church today, only those having either the office of priest in the Aaronic Priesthood or the Melchizedek Priesthood may baptize people.

Monuments commemorating the restoration of the Aaronic Priesthood have been erected at TEMPLE SQUARE, Salt Lake City (1958), and in Harmony, Pennsylvania (1960).

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