

Melchizedek Priesthood under the Law of Moses

Joseph Fielding Smith, President of the Council of the Twelve, “Your Question,” *Improvement Era*, June 1963, 446–447. Bold emphasis added.

Question: *“There is some misunderstanding among the members of our class regarding the statement in the Doctrine and Covenants where we read that the Melchizedek Priesthood was taken away from Israel after the departure of Moss, and the house of Israel was left with the Aaronic Priesthood which holds ‘the keys of the administering of angels and the preparatory gospel,’ and the carnal commandments. (D&C 84:25–26.) What we are troubled about is how could Israel exist with only the Aaronic Priesthood and the law of Moses or carnal commandments? Now if we understand correctly it requires the Melchizedek Priesthood in order to confirm members of the Church. If the statement is correct, then there was no one left to officiate in the bestowal of the Holy Ghost. Yet Peter states ‘For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy man of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.’ (2 Pet 1:21.) We were unable to understand how Israel could continue without ministers who could officiate in the ordinances of the gospel in the offices of the Melchizedek Priesthood. Is there a clear statement in relation to this problem?”*

Answer: When the Israelites left the land of Egypt, the Lord offered to give them the full powers of the priesthood if they would obey his commandments and be faithful to their covenants. They did not prove themselves worthy or prepared for such a blessing. Therefore the Lord withdrew the blessings of the Melchizedek Priesthood from male members of the tribes of Israel and left with them the Aaronic Priesthood, and this likewise was confined to the tribe of Levi which tribe officiated in sacrifices for Israel. This is a very interesting story and should prove to be a lesson to modern Israel.

All through the journey of the Israelites in the wilderness, the Lord gave them an abundance of blessings and poured out upon them many miracles, showing his kindness and consideration for all of which they manifested ingratitude. Their wanderings reveal a very interesting history which should be a benefit and a lesson to us in our journeyings and responsibilities in this the final dispensation so that we will not bring down upon us the displeasure of the Lord.

All through their sojourn in the wilderness, Israel showed the disposition of spoiled children. They evidently failed to comprehend the teachings of the Lord that were given to Moses. Therefore when the time came for Israel to cross the Jordan and enter into their inheritance, the prophetic warning the Lord had given them was fulfilled as recorded in the book of Numbers.... [See Num 14:26–33. Quoted]

Therefore when the time came for the crossing of the Jordan, the adults who had left Egypt had perished, all except two men who had maintained their integrity. Even Moses and Aaron were denied the privilege of entering the promised land.

For forty years the Israelites murmured and showed the spirit of rebellion. They failed to comprehend the great manifestations of the Lord from time to time in their behalf. The Lord blessed them with manna in the wilderness, with quail when they clamored for meat, for springs of water miraculously discovered, and in a thousand ways manifested his love and power in their behalf. Notwithstanding all of this the Lord still loved them and made

great promises to them.

When Moses went into the mountain and remained for forty days, they rebelled and turned to the false worship of the Egyptians. On that visit into the mountain the Lord gave to Moses certain commandments written on tables of stone. When Moses discovered the rebellion and idolatry of Israel, he threw down these tables and broke them. What did they contain? Commandments pertaining to the fulness of the gospel! After this act the Lord called Moses back into the mountain and gave him other commandments on the second tables of stone. **Did the second tables contain the same things which were written on the first? No! Not in all things!** In the Bible translations that are current it is stated that these tables contained the same things which were written on the first, however through the revelation to the Prophet Joseph Smith we have learned that **the second tables did not contain all of the things that were on the first.** The first contained the authority of the gospel which pertained to the blessings of the Melchizedek Priesthood. Had Israel accepted the first plates in sincere faith, Israel would have had the blessings of the Melchizedek Priesthood and the clear principles of the gospel. The Lord substituted the commandments, and we have them as they are recorded in the book of Exodus and the blessings of the universal bestowal of the Melchizedek Priesthood was withdrawn.

We read in the translation, or inspired revision which was given by divine commandment to the Prophet Joseph Smith concerning the second tables, the following: [JST Ex 34:1–2 quoted.]

So we see that Israel through rebellion lost the blessings that were first offered to them. Let it be remembered that it was the intention of the Lord, had Israel been faithful, to give them the fulness of the priesthood. This blessing they could not receive, and therefore they were given the lesser priesthood and the carnal, or temporal law.

Let us not lose sight of the fact that all through the history of Israel until the coming of our Redeemer, the blessings of the Holy Priesthood were restricted. It was not given universally to the tribes, but of necessity there had to be some faithful men upon whom the Melchizedek Priesthood was conferred. All of the prophets held the Melchizedek Priesthood, but the Prophet Joseph Smith has informed us that in each case it was by special divine appointment. (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 180–181.) There was never a time in Israel when there was not a prophet with divine authority with power to confirm and perform other ordinances. **We are informed that Elijah was the last of the ancient prophets upon whom the fulness was bestowed.** He had power to seal the heavens that it did not rain. He had power to call down fire from heaven, to increase the widow's meal, and to raise the widow's son; the son had died. So other prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel were blessed with the Melchizedek Priesthood. They could officiate among the people, but there was no universal bestowing of authority among the tribes, from the time of the entrance of Israel into the promised land, until the coming of our Savior. When he came, the fulness of the gospel and of divine authority was restored.