

Why Do We Have TWO PRIESTHOODS?

In Adam’s day and for a long time afterward, there was one priesthood. We now have two—the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods. Here is the history behind this division in the priesthood.

Adam was given the Melchizedek Priesthood, which was passed along through the prophets and patriarchs of the book of Genesis and eventually to Moses. Then “Moses . . . sought diligently to sanctify his people that they might behold the face of God; but they hardened their hearts and could not endure his presence. . . . Therefore, [the Lord] took Moses out of their midst, and the Holy [Melchizedek] Priesthood also; and the lesser [Aaronic] priesthood continued” (D&C 84:23–26).

The higher keys and blessings were taken away from the people, but others remained.¹ During the ministry of the Savior and His Apostles, the Melchizedek Priesthood was restored and its blessings were again seen among the people. But eventually all priesthood authority was lost. Each of the divisions in the priesthood—Aaronic and Melchizedek—was restored separately through Joseph Smith, and we still have both of them today. Here is a very basic outline of their keys, blessings, and roles.

AARONIC PRIESTHOOD	MELCHIZEDEK PRIESTHOOD
Holds the “keys of the ministering of angels” (D&C 13:1). ²	Holds the “key of the knowledge of God” (D&C 84:19).
Holds the key of the preparatory gospel, which includes repentance and baptism (see D&C 84:26–27).	Administers the fulness of the gospel (see D&C 84:19).
Administers in outward ordinances (see D&C 107:20), such as sacrifices anciently and the sacrament today.	Holds “the keys of all the spiritual blessings of the church” (D&C 107:18), such as the gift of the Holy Ghost, temple ordinances, blessings of healing and comfort, and revelation to the Church. ³
Is “an appendage to . . . the Melchizedek Priesthood” (D&C 107:14). ⁴	“Holds the right of presidency, and has power and authority over all the offices in the church” (D&C 107:8).

NOTES

1. Though the blessings of the Melchizedek Priesthood were not generally available to the people after the days of Moses, Joseph Smith explained that “all the prophets had the Melchizedek Priesthood” (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* [2007], 109).
2. Joseph Smith taught, “The Melchizedek Priesthood . . . is the channel through which all knowledge, doctrine, the plan of salvation, and every important matter is revealed from heaven” (*Teachings: Joseph Smith*, 108).
3. Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has taught: “Angels speak by the power of the Holy Ghost; wherefore, they speak the words of Christ’ (2 Nephi 32:3). So it is that those who hold the Aaronic Priesthood open the door for all Church members who worthily partake of the sacrament to enjoy the companionship of the Spirit of the Lord and the ministering of angels” (“The Aaronic Priesthood and the Sacrament,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1998, 39).
4. As the Prophet Joseph Smith taught, “The Melchizedek Priesthood comprehends [includes or encompasses] the Aaronic . . . Priesthood” (*Teachings: Joseph Smith*, 108). He also taught, “All priesthood is Melchizedek; but there are different portions or degrees of it” (109).