

The Priesthood Restoration

An Evidence-Based Timeline of Mormonism's
Foundational Authority Claim



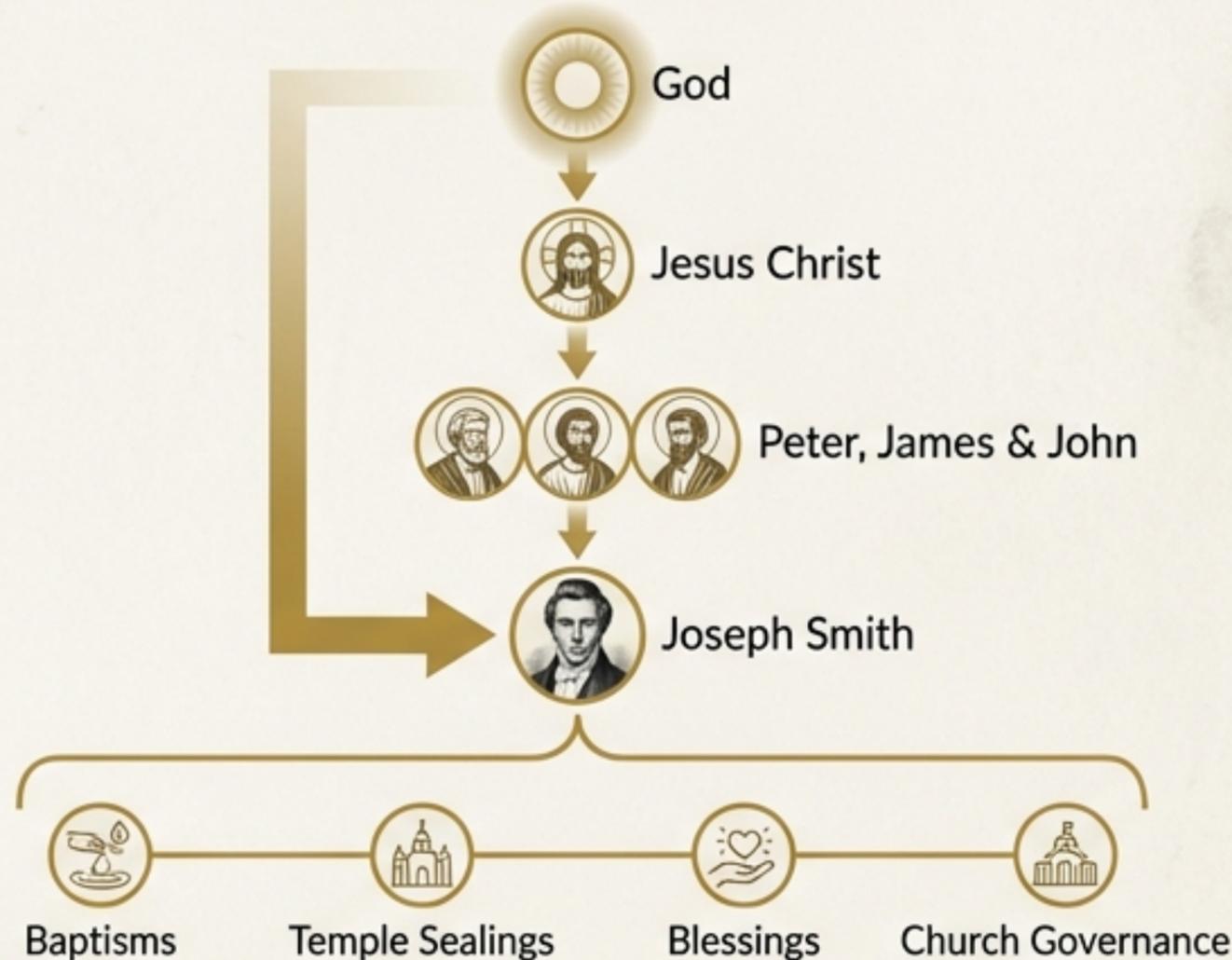
Why the Priesthood Claim is 'The Whole Enchilada'

Authority: Mormonism claims to be the *only* church with God's "stamp of approval." This authority, called the Priesthood, legitimizes all its ordinances (e.g., baptisms, marriages). All other churches are considered illegitimate in the eyes of God.

Power: Priesthood is also viewed as a literal power from God to perform miracles, heal the sick, and cast out evil spirits.

Exclusivity: Without a legitimate, historical restoration of this Priesthood, the church's core value proposition—that it is God's "one true church"—collapses.

The Chain of Authority



"I would almost say it's it's priesthood and authority that really is the whole enchilada."
- John Dehlin, *Mormon Stories Podcast*

The Official Timeline of Events



The church's timeline is super simple, super clean.
You need to have the priesthood restored before the church is restored.

Does the Contemporary Evidence Match the Official Story?

The official account is simple and powerful. But like any historical claim, it must be tested against the earliest available evidence.

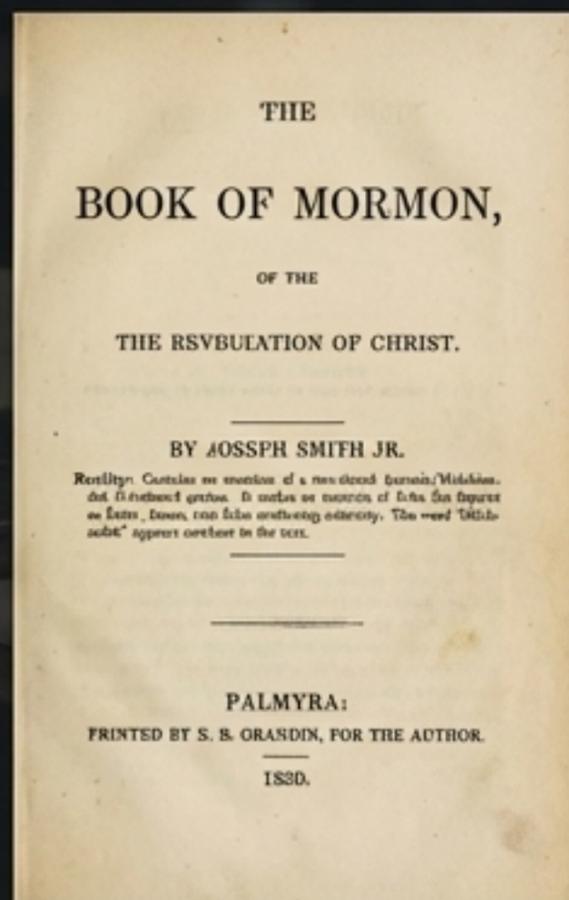
We will now examine the historical record chronologically, from 1829 forward, to see what was said, written, and understood at the time.

A critical pattern emerges: a consistent *absence* of the angelic ordination story in the most important early documents.

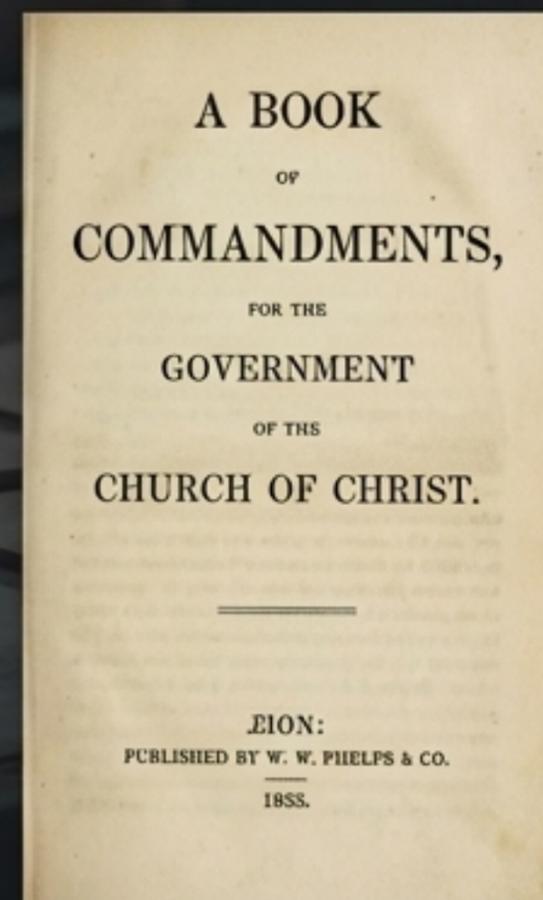


1829

Exhibit A: A Conspicuous Silence in the Foundational Books



- **Claim:** Taught as the “fullness of the gospel.”
- **Reality:** Contains no mention of a two-tiered Aaronic/Melchizedek Priesthood system. It makes no mention of John the Baptist or Peter, James, and John conferring authority. The word “Melchizedek” appears nowhere in the text.



- **Claim:** The first compilation of Joseph Smith’s revelations from God.
- **Reality:** Contains the key revelations about baptism and church organization but makes no mention of the Aaronic Priesthood, the Melchizedek Priesthood, John the Baptist, or Peter, James, and John.

The 1831 Conference: An Ordination That Shouldn't Have Been Necessary

- **Event:** At a church conference in June 1831, the “High Priesthood” is introduced for the first time.
- **The Shocking Detail:** Joseph Smith himself is ordained to this “High Priesthood” by another man, Lyman Wight.

“The Melchizedek Priesthood, mormons now believe, had been bestowed a year or two earlier... **If so, why did contemporaries say the high priesthood was given given for the first time in June 1831?** Joseph Smith himself was ordained to this high priesthood...”

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A Motive Emerges: The Power Struggle in Missouri



****Context**:** In 1831, Joseph Smith clashed with Bishop Edward Partridge in Missouri over leadership and the purchase of land for the “City of Zion.”

Partridge, as the ordained Bishop, believed he had the authority to run the church in Missouri. Joseph insisted his prophetic authority superseded the Bishop’s.

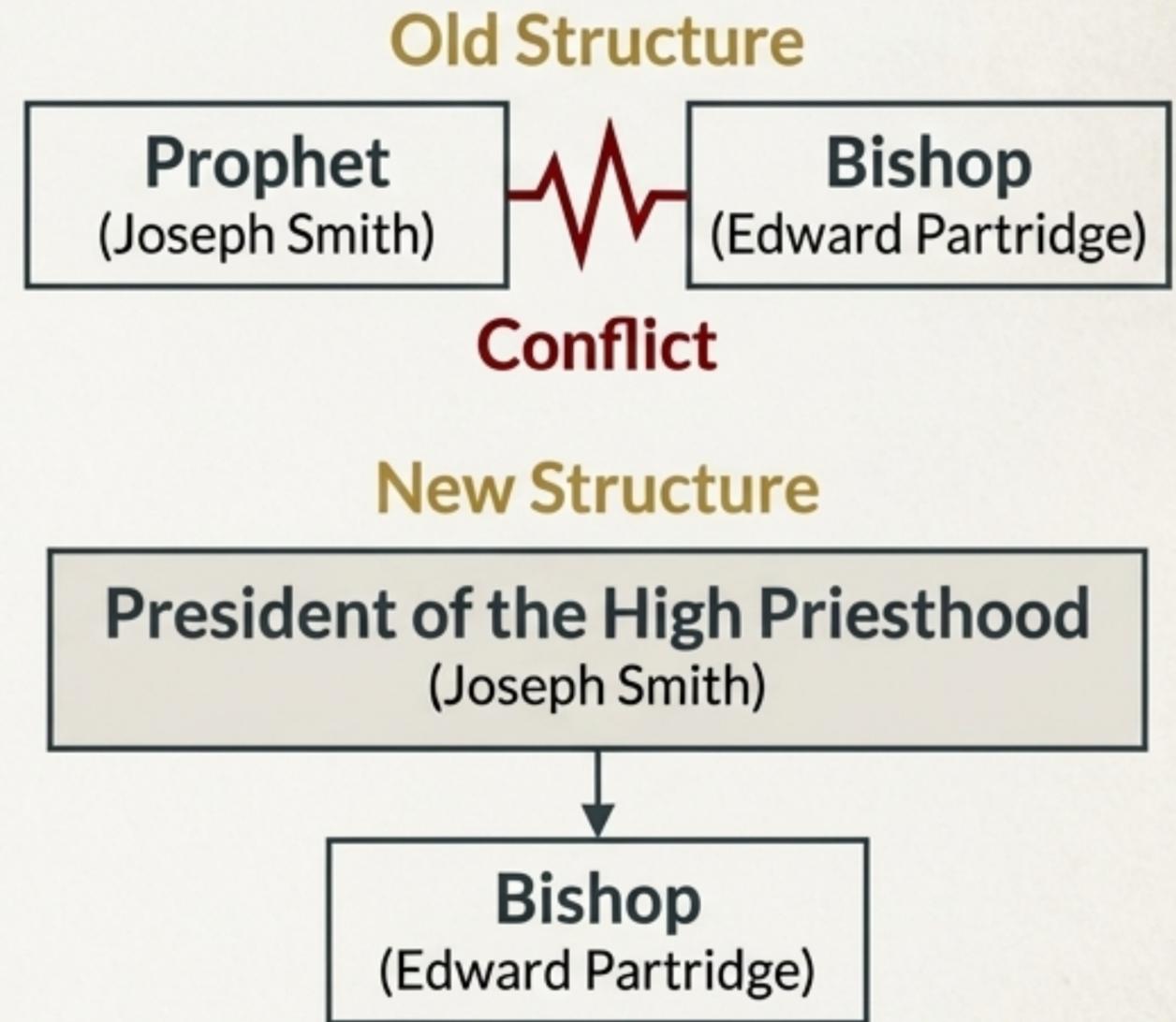
Partridge accused Joseph of false prophecy and acting with “violent passion bordering on madness” when challenged.

****Key Insight**:** This conflict revealed a critical weakness in the church’s early structure: there was no clear hierarchy placing Joseph Smith’s authority above all others.

Forging a Chain of Command Through Revelation

Joseph Smith's Response:

- * **Revelation 1 (D&C 64):** Immediately after the conflict, Joseph dictates a revelation stating that Bishop Partridge "hath sinned, and Satan seeketh to destroy his soul."
- * **Revelation 2 (D&C 107):** A few months later, a revelation calls for Joseph Smith to be the "President of the High Priesthood," clarifying that "the office of a bishop is not equal" to his.
- * **Action:** In January 1832, Sidney Rigdon ordains Joseph to this newly created position.



Conclusion: Joseph Smith solved the practical problem of a challenge to his authority by creating a new, higher office for himself and codifying it as a revelation from God.

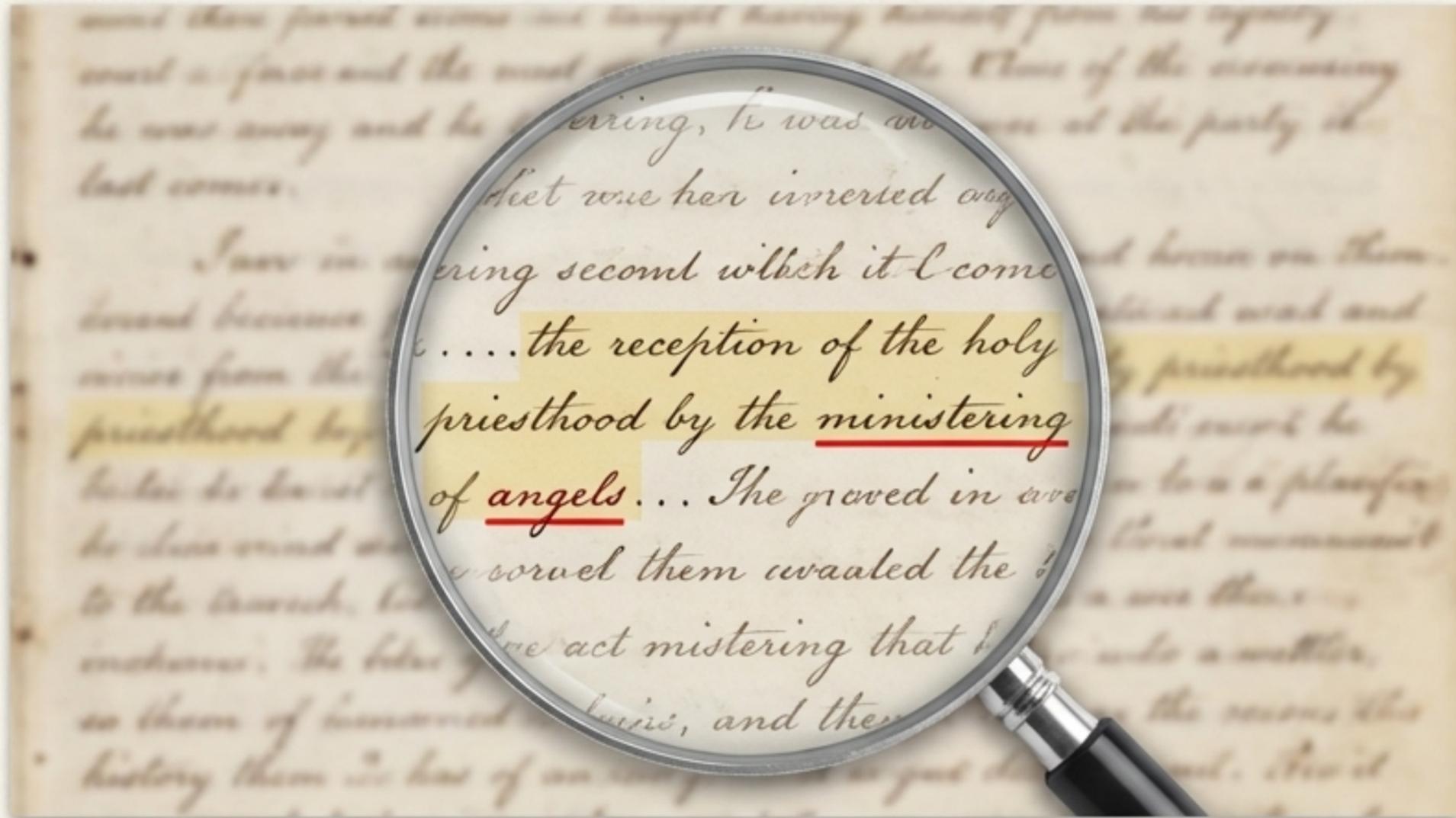
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The First Draft of the Story Appears



Source: Joseph Smith's 1832 handwritten history (the same document containing the first account of the First Vision).

Conclusion: This was written to bolster his authority in response to the Missouri infighting, but the detailed story taught today did not yet exist.

Critical Analysis

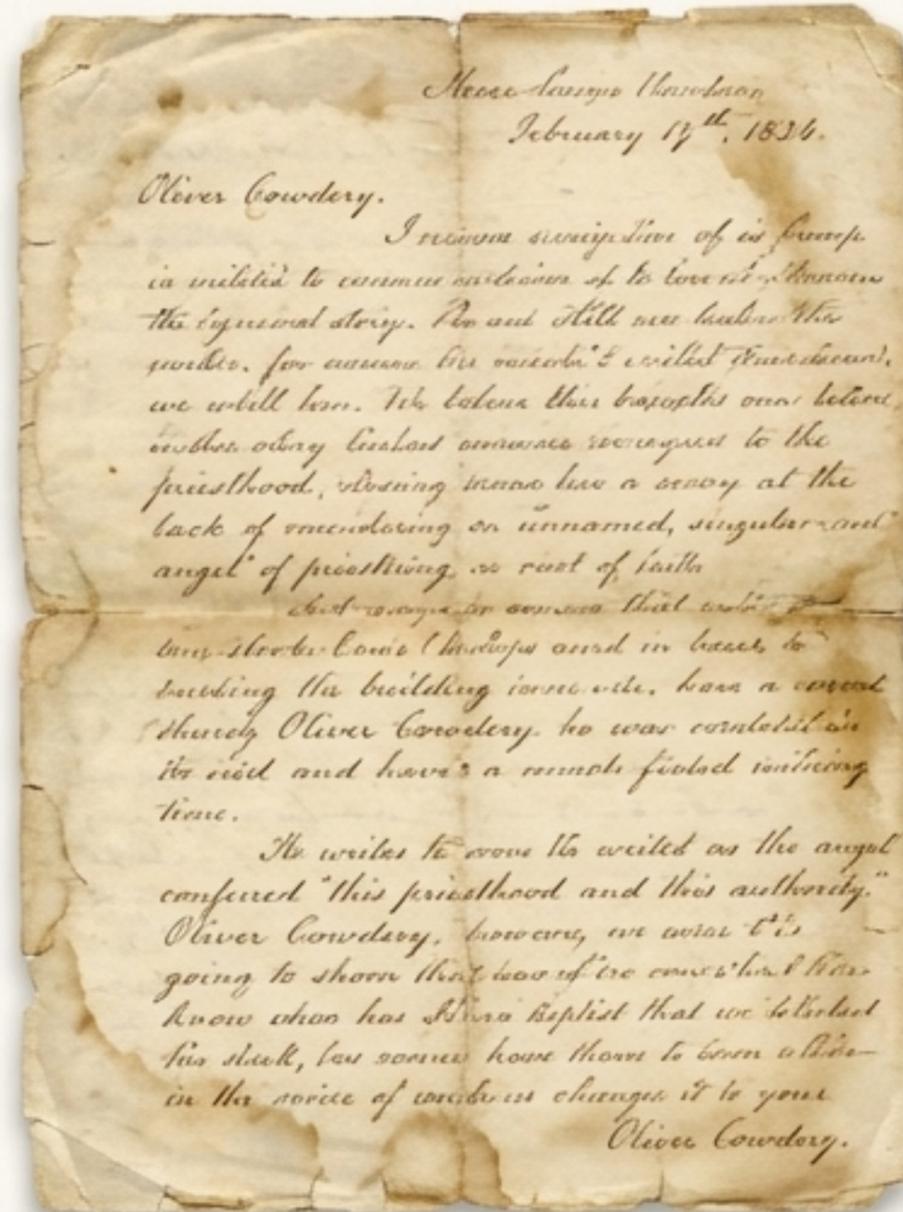
- * **"Vague:** He uses the plural "angels," not a singular angel like John the Baptist.
- * **"Unnamed:** There is no mention of John the Baptist or Peter, James, and John.
- * **"No Tiers":** There is no distinction between an "Aaronic" and "Melchizedek" Priesthood.

The Story Evolves Under Pressure

Editorial Historical Investigation

Context

- The **1834 failure of Zion's Camp** (a militia meant to reclaim land in Missouri) causes a major crisis of faith and further challenges to Joseph's leadership.
- **Oliver Cowdery's Letters:** To strengthen the shaken Missouri church, Oliver Cowdery writes a series of letters detailing the church's origins.



A New Detail: For the first time, he describes an unnamed, singular "angel" conferring a "priesthood" at the time of their 1829 baptism.

He writes the angel conferred "this priesthood and this authority."

Key Observation

The story is becoming more specific (a singular angel) but still lacks the key names (John the Baptist) and details of the official narrative. Oliver is building the story to solve a contemporary problem.

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The Smoking Gun: Retrofitting the Revelations

The Event: Between March and August 1835, Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery compile the new *Doctrine and Covenants* to replace the 1833 *Book of Commandments*. They don't just reprint the old revelations. They insert large blocks of new text into the original wording.

Book of Commandments, 1833

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Massive
Additions

Conclusion: This is not a clarification; it is the active invention and insertion of a foundational story into the scriptural record, five years after it supposedly happened.

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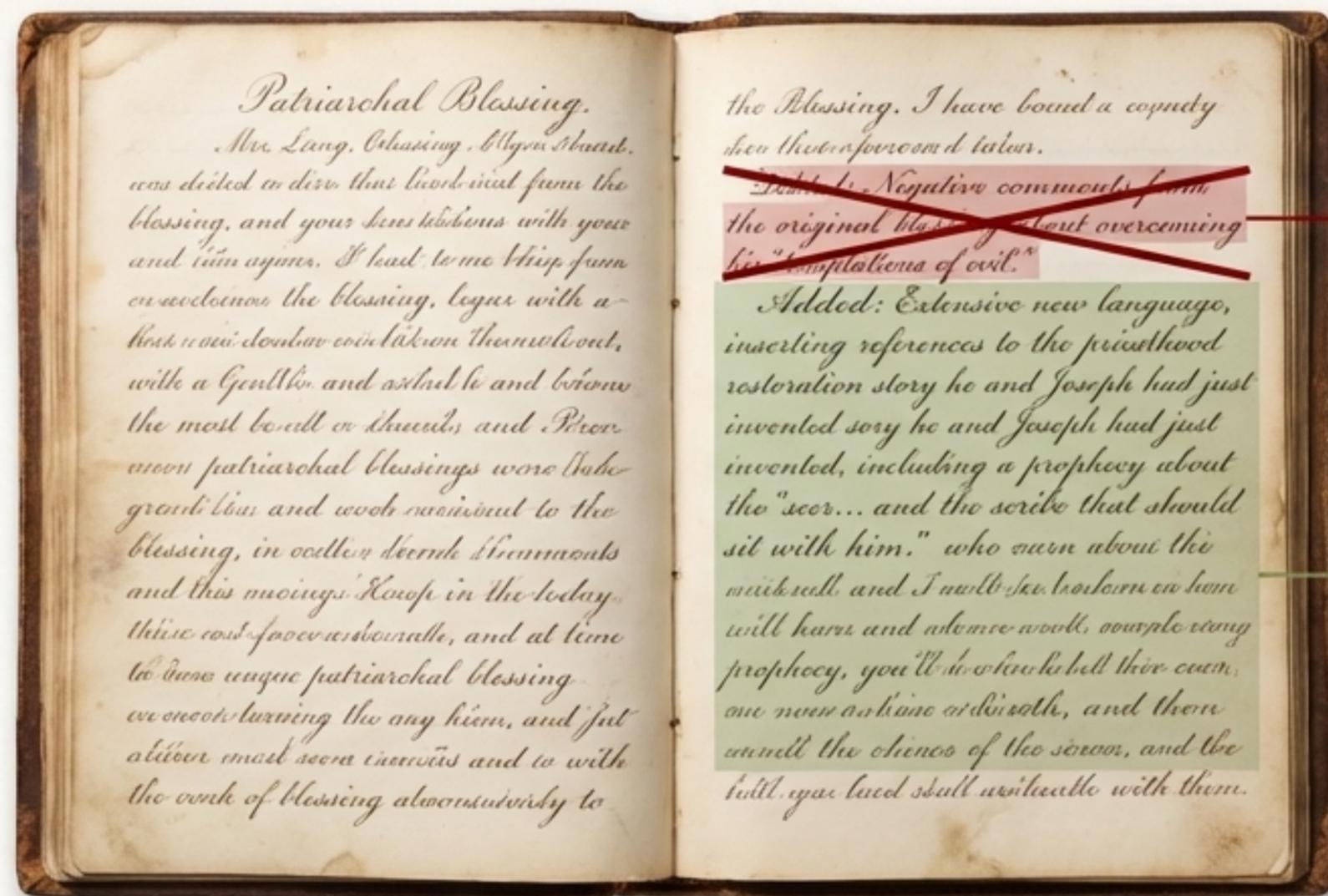
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Corroborating Intent: The Case of the Altered Blessing

Editorial Historical Investigation

Context: In October 1835, while preparing the D&C, Oliver Cowdery was also tasked with copying patriarchal blessings into an official record book.

The Action: Instead of faithfully copying a blessing Joseph Smith gave him in 1833, Cowdery made significant changes.



DELETED: Negative comments from the original about overcoming his "temptations of evil."

ADDED: Extensive new language, inserting references to the priesthood restoration story he and Joseph had just invented, including a prophecy about the "seer... and the scribe that should sit with him."

Conclusion: Oliver Cowdery's willingness to secretly alter a recorded blessing—a personal revelation from God—demonstrates a pattern of retrofitting history to match the evolving theology and bolster his own status.

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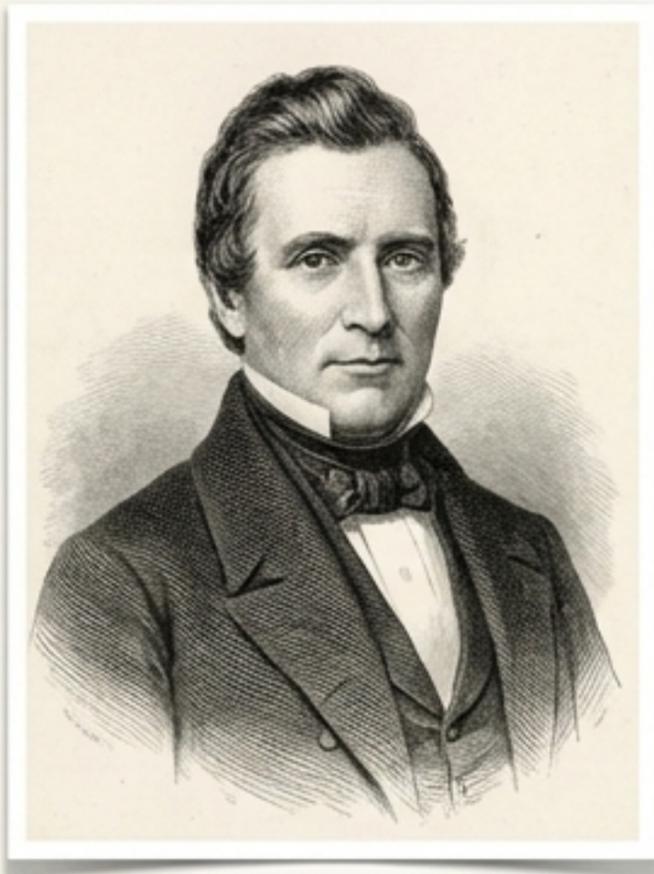
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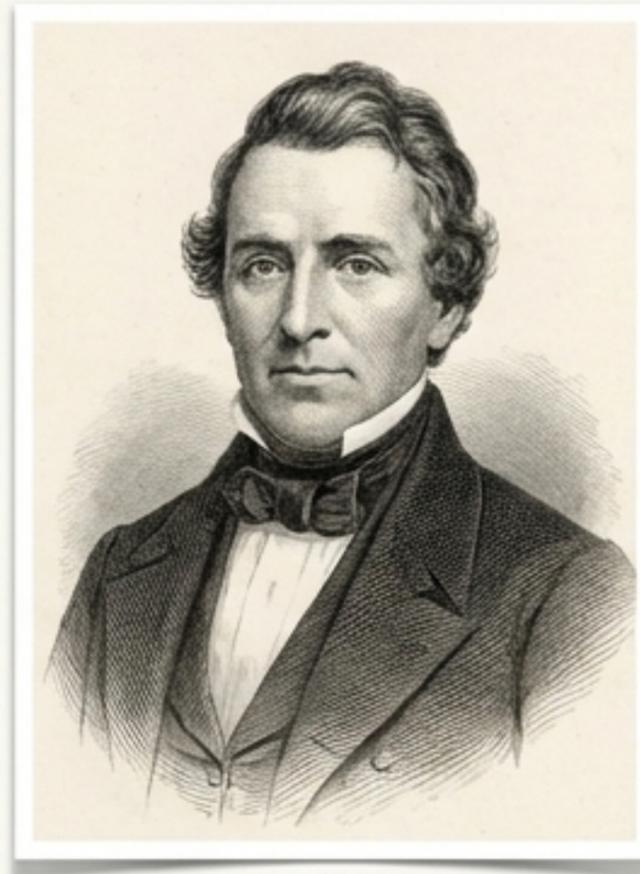
Testimony from Those Who Were There



One of the Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon

"I never heard that an angel had ordained Joseph and Oliver to the Aaronic Priesthood until the year 1834, 35, or 36... **I do not believe that John the Baptist ever ordained Joseph and Oliver.**"

"This matter of the two orders of the priesthood... priesthood... all originated in the mind of Sidney Rigdon... this is the way the high priest and the priesthood as you have it was introduced into the church... almost two years after its beginning."



Early Apostle

"I joined the church in 1831. For years I never heard of John the Baptist ordaining ordaining Joseph and Oliver. I had heard not of James Peter and John doing so."

A New Timeline: The Evolution of an Idea

Editorial Historical Investigation

The Evolution of Priesthood Authority



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The Evidence and Its Implications

The historical record shows that the story of the Priesthood Restoration was **not** reported in 1829. Instead, it was a concept that evolved over six years, driven by **internal power struggles and crises** of faith, culminating in its retroactive insertion into scripture in 1835.

“The late appearances of these priesthood restoration accounts raises the possibility of later fabrication... Did Joseph Smith add the stories of angels to embellish his early history and make himself more of a visionary?”

- Richard Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*

The evidence invites a fundamental re-evaluation of Mormonism's foundational claim to exclusive, divine authority.