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Priesthood Restoration Concerns & Questions

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PRIESTHOOD RESTORATION

Concerns & Questions

“The late appearance of these accounts raises the possibility of later fabrication.”

– LDS HISTORIAN AND SCHOLAR RICHARD BUSHMAN *ROUGH STONE ROLLING*, P. 75

*The late appearance of these accounts raises the possibility of later fabrication. Did Joseph add the stories of angels to embellish his early history and make himself more of a visionary? **If so, he made little of the occurrence. Cowdery was the first to recount the story of John’s appearance, not Joseph himself.** In an 1834 Church newspaper, Cowdery exulted in his still fresh memory of the experience. “On a sudden, as from the midst of eternity, the voice of the Redeemer spake peace unto us, while the vail 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!” When Joseph described John’s visit, he was much more plainspoken. Moreover, he inserted the story into a history composed in 1838 but not published until 1842. It circulated without fanfare, more like a refurbished memory than a triumphant announcement. [Emphasis added]*

– FULL PARAGRAPH FROM LDS HISTORIAN AND SCHOLAR RICHARD BUSHMAN *ROUGH STONE ROLLING*, P. 75. BUSHMAN DOES NOT BELIEVE THAT THIS WAS A LATER FABRICATION.

SHORT ANSWER:

Your insistence that nobody knew about the priesthood restoration is based on faulty assumptions, not facts. Priesthood is all over the Book of Mormon and in early revelations, and Richard Bushman, your primary source for this assertion, does not agree with you.

LONG ANSWER:

1. Like the first vision story, none of the members of the Church or Joseph Smith's family had ever heard prior to 1832 about a priesthood restoration from John the Baptist or Peter, James, and John.

And like your error with regard to the First Vision story, you assume that if something wasn't yet written down in its entirety, that constitutes proof that it was never spoken of or discussed, which is a wholly ridiculous assumption.

Although the priesthood is now taught to have been restored in 1829, Joseph and Oliver made no such claim until 1832, if that.

Joseph and Oliver made no claim of anything until 1832, because 1832 was the year they started writing down history. People were being ordained to the priesthood beginning in 1830. How could they be ordained if Joseph and Oliver made no claim to its restoration?

Even in 1832, there were no claims of a restoration of the priesthood (just a 'reception' of the priesthood)...

I am certain you can make no substantive distinction between "reception" and "restoration." This is straining at gnats.

... and there certainly was no specific claims of John the Baptist, Peter, James, and John.

The written documentation came in 1834, but there's no reason to believe it wasn't discussed. Joseph didn't write anything about this until 1838, as Bushman recounts above. When Joseph did make the claim, it "circulated without fanfare," which would be surprising if this were a sensational piece of information that the Saints had never heard before.

Like the first vision accounts, the story later got more elaborate and bold with specific claims of miraculous visitations from resurrected John the Baptist, Peter, James, and John.

Lots of problems with this. The 1835 First Vision account is shorter and less elaborate than the 1832 account. Written records of Church history began in 1832, and Oliver wrote something down about this in 1834, after every worthy male member had received the priesthood. This is continuing your mistaken assumption that anything not written down didn't happen.

LDS historian and scholar, Richard Bushman, acknowledges this in *Rough Stone Rolling*:

“Summarizing the key events in his religious life in an 1830 statement, he mentioned translation but said nothing about the restoration of priesthood or the visit of an angel. The first compilation of revelations in 1833 also omitted an account of John the Baptist. David Whitmer later told an interviewer he had heard nothing of John the Baptist until four years after the Church’s organization. Not until writing in his 1832 history did Joseph include ‘reception of the holy Priesthood by the ministering of angels to administer the letter of the Gospel’ among the cardinal events of his history, a glancing reference at best...The late appearance of these accounts raises the possibility of later fabrication.”

You keep trying to imply Bushman agrees with your analysis here. and he doesn't. Bushman, who is a believing Latter-day Saint, provides solid reasons for why Joseph was reticent to discuss these things openly in the 62 words you deliberately omit with your ellipsis, likely because they undermine your premise. Here they are, as you may not have read them before:

... a glancing reference at best. Joseph had not told his mother about his First Vision, and spoke to his father about Moroni only when commanded. His reticence may have shown a fear of disbelief. Although obscure, Joseph was proud. He did not like to appear the fool. Or he may have felt the visions were too sacred to be discussed openly. They were better kept to himself. The late appearance...



Richard Bushman

A scholar who does not agree with Jeremy Runnells, regardless of how often Jeremy Runnells quotes him

Why did it take 3 plus years for Joseph or Oliver to tell members of the Church about the restoration of the priesthood under the hands of John the Baptist and Peter, James, and John?

Bushman's above explanation is a good one, which is probably why you ignore it and cherry-pick *Rough Stone Rolling* out of context.

In any case, it's likely they didn't. Joseph and Oliver announced they had been baptized and ordained the day the Church was organized, and revelations prior to 1834 make reference to their priesthood authority. When the story was printed, nobody treated it like it was news, which would be surprising if it were the first time they had heard about it.

2. David Whitmer, one of the witnesses to the Book of Mormon, had this to say about the Priesthood restoration:

“I never heard that an Angel had ordained Joseph and Oliver to the Aaronic Priesthood until the year 1834[,] [183]5, or [183]6 – in Ohio...I do not believe that John the Baptist ever ordained Joseph and Oliver...”

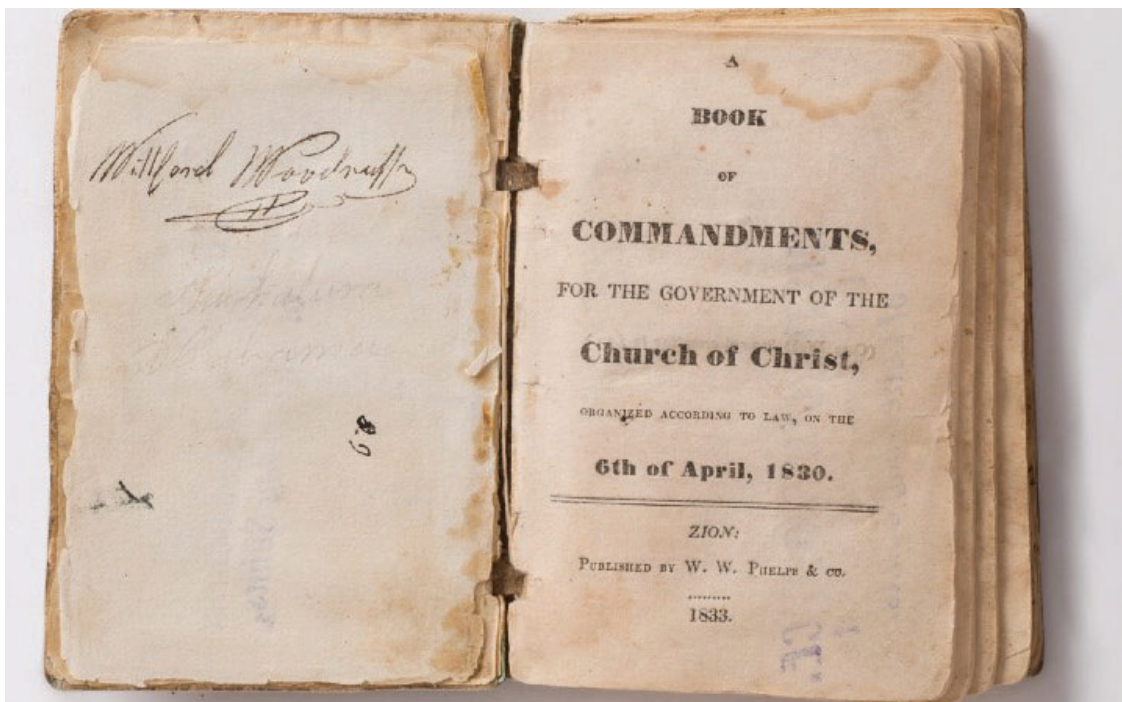
– *Early Mormon Documents*, 5:137

Whitmer himself was given priesthood authority in 1829, as referenced in a contemporaneous revelation recorded in [D&C 18:9](#). He didn't doubt the veracity of that authority while he was a member of the Church. Only decades later, when he was severely disaffected from Joseph Smith, does he begin to criticize the details.

Your selective use of David Whitmer as a source is problematic for you. If you're willing to accept his skepticism about the priesthood restoration, you have to account for the fact that he stood by his testimony of the Book of Mormon until the day he died. If Joseph were a fraud, wouldn't Whitmer have recanted his testimony as one of the Three Witnesses?

3. Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery changed the wording of an earlier revelation when they compiled the 1835 Doctrine & Covenants, adding verses about the appearances of Elijah, John the Baptist, and Peter, James, and John **as if those appearances were mentioned in the earlier revelation in the Book of Commandments, which they weren't.** [Emphasis added]

And how did they do that? Did they add a verse that said, “By the way, this stuff was totally mentioned in the Book of Commandments?” This is an absurd charge. They made no attempt to claim this language was in the earlier version.



Wilford Woodruff's Copy of the Book of Commandments
Incomplete, but not infallible

As mentioned earlier, Joseph changed the wording of several verses in the Book of Mormon after it was first published. He edited a number of his revelations over the course of his life. That's actually the very nature of the Restoration – we do not believe in inerrant prophets or in inerrant scripture, and, unlike Catholics or Protestants who believe in a closed canon, we believe more light and knowledge is always welcome.

Compare the [1833 Book of Commandments Chapter 28 \(XXVIII\)](#) to the [1835 Doctrine and Covenants Section 50 \(L\)](#). The chapter in modern Doctrine and Covenants is [D&C 27](#). This section claims to be a revelation from the Lord to Joseph Smith in August 1830.

The following text is what Joseph and Oliver added to the 1830 revelation in 1835 while presenting it as if this was already part of the original revelation given to Joseph by the Lord in August 1830.

You're making a mistaken assumption here, namely that the Book of Commandments was intended as a comprehensive, infallible collection of all revelations given to Joseph Smith. It wasn't, nor was it ever intended to be.

From the [Millennial Star, 1857](#):

Joseph, the Prophet, in selecting the revelations from the Manuscripts, and arranging them for publication, did not arrange them according to the order of the date in which they were given, neither did he think it necessary to publish them all in the Book of Doctrine and Covenants, but left them to be published more fully in his History. Hence, paragraphs taken from revelations of a later date, are, in a few instances, incorporated with those of an earlier date. Indeed, at the time of compilation, **the Prophet was inspired in several instances to write additional sentences and paragraphs to the earlier revelations.** In this manner the Lord did truly give 'line upon line, here a little and there a little,' the same as He did to a revelation that Jeremiah received, which, after being burned by the wicked king of Israel, the Lord revealed over again with great numbers of additional words (See [Jeremiah 36:32](#)) [Emphasis added]

Notice how it's packed with miraculous claims of visitations and receptions of authority by these resurrected beings that the original 1830 revelation does not contain.

It looks, actually, like a revelatory expansion consistent with how the Millennial Star described the process by which Joseph expanded and revised his revelations. Richard Bushman, who does not agree with you, [put it this way](#) in *Rough Stone Rolling*:

The editing process uncovered Joseph's anomalous assumptions about the nature of revealed words. He never considered the wording infallible. God's language stood in an indefinite relationship to the human language coming through the Prophet. The revealed preface to the Book of Commandments specified that the language of the revelations was Joseph Smith's: 'These commandments are of me, and were given unto my servants in their weakness, after the manner of their language, that they might come to understanding.' They were couched in language suitable to Joseph's time. The idioms, the grammar, even the tone had to be comprehensible to 1830s

Americans. Recognizing the pliability of the revealed words, Joseph freely edited the revelations 'by the Holy Spirit,' making emendations with each new edition. He thought of his revelations as imprinted on his mind, not graven in stone. With each edition, he patched pieces together and altered the wording to clarify meaning. The words were both his and God's."

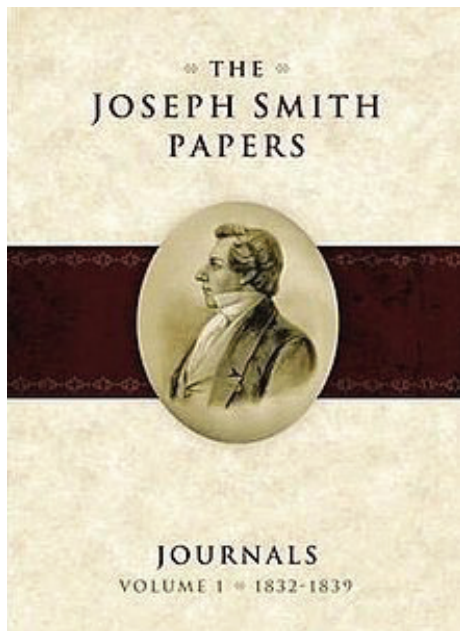
That principle applies to your lengthy excerpts quoted below:

2. ...and with Moroni, whom I have sent unto you to reveal the book of Mormon, containing the fulness of my everlasting gospel; to whom I have committed the keys of the record of the stick of Ephraim; and also with Elias, to whom I have committed the keys of bringing to pass the restoration of all things, or the restorer of all things spoken by the mouth of all the holy prophets since the world began, concerning the last days: and also John the son of Zacharias, which Zacharias he (Elias) visited and gave promise that he should have a son, and his name should be John, and he should be filled with the spirit of Elias; which John I have sent unto you, my servants, Joseph Smith, jr. and Oliver Cowdery, to ordain you unto this first priesthood which you have received, that you might be called and ordained even as Aaron: and also Elijah, unto whom I have committed the keys of the power of turning the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to the fathers, that the whole earth may not be smitten with a curse: and also, with Joseph, and Jacob, and Isaac, and Abraham your fathers; by whom the promises remain; and also with Michael, or Adam, the father of all, the prince of all, the ancient of days:

3. And also with Peter, and James, and John, whom I have sent unto you, by whom I have ordained you and confirmed you to be apostles and especial witnesses of my name, and bear the keys of your ministry: and of the same things which I revealed unto them: unto whom I have committed the keys of my kingdom, and a dispensation of the gospel for the last times; and for the fulness of times, in the which I will gather together in one all things both which are in heaven and which are on earth: and also with all those whom my Father hath given me out of the world: wherefore lift up your hearts and rejoice, and gird up your loins, and take upon you my whole armor, that ye may be able to withstand the evil day, having done all ye may be able to stand. Stand, therefore, having your loins girt about with truth; having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace which I have sent mine angels to commit unto you, taking the shield of faith wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of my Spirit, which I will pour out upon you, and my word which I reveal unto you, and be agreed as touching all things whatsoever ye ask of me, and be faithful until I come, and ye shall be caught up that where I am ye shall be also. Amen.

That was long.

You can see and compare for yourself on the Joseph Smith Papers (LDS owned and operated) website. The direct links are above.



*The Joseph Smith Papers
A Really Lousy Cover-Up*

I don't understand. Wasn't your whole faith crisis precipitated by the Church trying to suppress such information? Providing the primary sources for everything Joseph Smith ever wrote is a remarkable act of transparency for a Church that's supposedly hiding everything from its members.

4. Had the restoration of the Aaronic Priesthood under the hand of John the Baptist been recorded prior to 1833, it would have been **expected** to appear in the Book of Commandments. [Emphasis added]

Expected by whom? Expectations are not universal, and your continued assumption that everyone shares yours is not a sign of good scholarship.

The Book of Commandments was not designed to be comprehensive, and a number of Joseph's early revelations were not included. It was certainly never

presumed to be a closed canon by Joseph Smith or his contemporaries. Their expectations were apparently quite different from yours.

However, nowhere in the Book of Commandments is this miraculous and doctrinally vital event recorded.

And even today, the First Vision is only obliquely mentioned in the Doctrine and Covenants. If we should have expected John the Baptist and Peter, James, and John in the Book of Commandments, shouldn't we expect the First Vision there, too? Joseph first wrote it down in 1832, yet it still hasn't made its way into any of the D&C sections.

Your deeply flawed expectation that the Book of Commandments was a complete, perfect, and finished summation of all of Joseph's revelations and history is the problem here.

Had the restoration of the Melchizedek Priesthood under the hands of Peter, James, and John been recorded prior to 1833, it likewise would have been expected to appear in the Book of Commandments.

The passive voice - "it would have been expected" - hides your assumptive flaws. What you're actually saying is "I, Jeremy Runnells, expected the Book of Commandments to include everything significant that ever happened to Joseph Smith." That's not what the Book of Commandments was designed to be, and simply announcing that your expectations were repeatedly unmet is not a credible indictment of the book itself.

However, nowhere in the Book of Commandments is this miraculous and doctrinally vital event recorded.

See my previous answer to this sentence. This repeated complaint rings hollow, as you believe the event is fictional and not miraculous or doctrinally relevant.

5. It wasn't until the 1835 edition Doctrine & Covenants that Joseph and Oliver backdated and retrofitted Priesthood restoration events to an 1829-30 time period – none of which existed in any previous Church records; including Doctrine & Covenants' precursor, Book of Commandments...

Didn't you just say this? What is the value in repeating a flimsy charge almost verbatim as a newly numbered item right after saying it the first time? Does it make my argument stronger if I cut and paste my previous answers to your previously-stated questions?

... nor the original Church history as published in *The Evening and Morning Star*.

What original Church history in *The Evening and Morning Star*? *The Evening and Morning Star* contains revelations, speculative essays, and items of instruction, not Church history. Items like the translation of the Book of Mormon and the visits of Moroni, which you concede were commonly discussed prior to 1830, don't get a mention in them, either. It was a newspaper, not an "original Church history," and certainly nothing close to a comprehensive one.

6. Melchizedek Priesthood given by Lyman Wight – not Peter, James, and John:

"During the turbulent meeting, Joseph ordained five men to the high priesthood, and Lyman Wight ordained eighteen others, including Joseph. The ordinations to the high priesthood marked a milestone in Mormon ecclesiology. Until that time, the word 'priesthood,' although it appeared in the Book of Mormon, had not been used in Mormon sermonizing or modern revelations. Later accounts applied the term retroactively, but the June 1831 conference marked its first appearance in contemporary records..."

*The Melchizedek Priesthood, Mormons now believe, had been bestowed a year or two earlier with the visit of Peter, James, and John. If so, **why did contemporaries say the high priesthood was given for the first time in June 1831? Joseph Smith himself was ordained to this 'high priesthood' by Lyman Wight. If Joseph was already an elder and apostle, what was the necessity of being ordained again?"***
– *Rough Stone Rolling*, p.157-158 7 (emphasis added)

I think your readers are entitled to know that Richard Bushman, who does not agree with you, did not simply ask this question and leave it hanging, unanswerable, as if the entire lie of the Priesthood had been exposed once and for all. He actually answers the question in his very next sentence:

The usual explanation is that Joseph meant to say "high priest," one of the offices in the Melchizedek Priesthood, not "high priesthood." By this interpretation, high priests, officers in the priesthood, were ordained for the first time at the conference, though the Melchizedek Priesthood was received earlier.

That would be my answer - the confusion, I think, is largely semantic, and that the different terminology is being used to describe ordination to a priesthood office. This is the first time people were specifically labeled as high priests.

Bushman doesn't stop there. ("But that is not what Joseph said," he notes in his next sentence.) His further explanation is as follows:

The confusion may indicate that the division into two priesthoods, with elders in the higher and priests and teachers in the lower, was not clear before 1831. Joseph may not have realized that elders were part of the Melchizedek Priesthood already and were being ordained to the office of high priest rather than receiving the powers of the high priesthood. Although he understood the distinction by the 1840s, he seems to have fallen back into the confusion of those early years when he wrote about the ordinations. In this case, experience may have outrun comprehension.



*Melchizedek
Not Lyman Wight*

You have to account for confusion here because the Melchizedek Priesthood is all over the Book of Mormon, which, of course, was published in 1830. Alma 13:14 says "Yea, humble yourselves even as the people in the days of Melchizedek, who was also a high priest after this same order which I have spoken, who also took upon him the high priesthood forever." All of Chapter 13, which has undergone no significant revision since it was first published, outlines the high priesthood and ordination in terms that are still consistent with how priesthood is exercised to this day. If Joseph had written the Book of Mormon, it seems unlikely that he'd have outlined how all this works in 1830 and then made up a fresh new fraudulent invention in 1831.

IF PETER, JAMES, AND JOHN ORDAINED JOSEPH SMITH TO THE MELCHIZEDEK PRIESTHOOD IN 1829 , WHY DID LYMAN WIGHT ORDAIN JOSEPH SMITH TO THE MELCHIZEDEK PRIESTHOOD AGAIN IN 1831?

All caps! You clearly mean business! Regardless, here are three questions that undermine the premise of your question, along with the answers.

1. Why would Lyman Wight think he had the authority to give Joseph Smith the priesthood? (Because he had already received that priesthood moments before under the hand of Joseph Smith. So clearly this was an ordination to an office, not the first bestowal of the priesthood.)
2. Why would Joseph Smith think he needed Lyman Wight to give him the priesthood after Joseph gave the priesthood to Lyman Wight and four other men moments earlier? (Because this was an ordination to an office in the priesthood, not the bestowal of the priesthood itself.)
3. Why do Section 20 of the Doctrine & Covenants, written in 1829, and the Book of Mormon, written in 1830, describe the high priesthood in great detail if it wasn't invented until 1831? (Because the concept of the high priesthood wasn't a later invention as the CES

Letter erroneously posits.)

Forgive me for not using all caps. I don't think them necessary to refute your weak argument.

The actual minutes of this June 1831 conference showing “Joseph Smith jr. & Sidney Rigdon were ordained to the High Priesthood under the hand of br. Lyman Wight” can be viewed on the official [Joseph Smith Papers website](#).

There's that lousy Church suppression again - how dare they make all primary sources available to anyone with a wireless connection!

That same site, incidentally, notes that “Brs. Lyman Wight John Murdock Reynolds Cahoon Harvey Whitlock & Hyrum Smith were ordained to the high Priesthood under the hand < of > br. Joseph Smith jr.” prior to Lyman Wight ordaining Joseph Smith to the office of high priest. How, exactly, would you ordain someone when you don't have the priesthood yourself?



“[The story of the priesthood restoration] circulated without fanfare, more like a refurbished memory than a triumphant announcement.”

- Richard Bushman, who does not agree with Jeremy Runnells
