

Hard Questions in Church History

Lynne Hilton Wilson

The Priesthood and Race—Historical and Scriptural Analysis

Questions to Consider:

1. Did Joseph Smith ordain African-Americans to the priesthood?
2. Why did God mark different people in the scriptures?
3. What is the history of the ban on the priesthood?
4. Why didn't God stop Brigham Young and others from teaching falsehoods?
5. Why wait so long for the policy change?
6. What motivated the change?

Introduction

This is a very delicate subject both historically and now. It requires meek and humble prayer. We will only be able to give a bird's eye view here. It is one that has a tendency to offend and polarize feelings. My hope here is to encourage people to understand the ban and also the 1978 declaration in their broad religious, historical and cultural perspectives. With much available on the subject, I would encourage you to look at the detailed historical sources included in this paper and beyond to find answers to your questions. Most of all, I hope you take your questions to God.

My thesis is that God welcomes all to come unto Him. He authors diversity, not racism. God realizes and has informed us that for everything there is a time and season. I adapted the following five initial points from Darius Grey.

1. Think of humanity inclusively as one human race, one family from Adam and Eve
2. God as our Creator is the author of physical diversity
3. God did not withhold the Priesthood due to skin pigmentation
4. We should glory in our diversity
5. There are different ethnicities and cultures

I will look at scriptural and historical data on the priesthood, on racism, and finish with Pres. Spencer W Kimball's declaration from 1978.

Brief Scriptural History: Acquiring God's Priesthood

Understanding the scriptural background related to receiving God's priesthood helps appreciate the uniqueness of Pres. Kimball's declaration. Since the time of Adam, scriptural accounts speak of God calling a select few to serve Him as priesthood holders. They covenant to serve Him and God gives them keys to perform saving ordinances. Sometimes those "few" were first born sons, other times a more righteous brother, or the descendants of Levi, or Aaron. It was most often a select few chosen who sought and obeyed God. These few were to bless the world by serving and uplifting their fellow human beings. Priests also typified the Promised Messiah who would come and take on the role as both the great High Priest, as well as the sacrificial Lamb of God.

Scriptural accounts that speak God calling certain people to serve Him with priesthood power and keys have been interpreted differently over time. Most adverse confusion, though, comes ultimately from Satan who tries to affect interpretations that mingle falsehoods with scripture, within the membership of the Church as well as in the wider cultures the world over.

This final dispensation is the first time—with the restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ—that offers the blessings of the eternal priesthood to all worthy and willing males and endowed women (see Pres. Russell M. Nelson, *Conference Report* on October 5, 2019). As the Restoration began, the Prophet Joseph accepted and embrace this inclusive nature—but either the Saints and the world were not ready to fully embrace it, or issues and policies were misunderstood or improperly applied for a century before it was completely taught again through Pres. Kimball’s 1978 Declaration.

Brief Scriptural History: God’s Curses, Marks, & Separations

God gives consequences to human’s sin. Sinners lose God’s companionship until they repent. Sometimes When the sin is grievous, the in scripture this separation from God is referred to as a curse. “Inasmuch as they will not hearken unto thy words they shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord. And behold, they were cut off from his presence. And he had caused the cursing to come upon them, yea, even a sore cursing, because of their iniquity” (2 Nephi 5:20-25; 4:6; Alma 17:15, etc.). This is one of the themes of the Book of Mormon: when we are disobedient, we are removed from God’s presence. If the wicked repent, the curse of separation from God is removed, and they are welcomed back into God’s presence (Alma 23:18).

It appears in the scriptures that God actively tries to teach humanity the principles of righteousness. He uses blessings and punishment in a myriad of teaching opportunities for his great purpose of bringing “to pass the immortality and eternal life man” (Moses 1:39). It helps to use this verse as a benchmark to all we know about God’s dealings with humanity. We know we do not have a full record of God’s dealings with humanity, and the record we have is subject to interpretation. So when some scriptural passages do not align with God’s purpose, we may not have the whole story or may be interpreting the passage incorrectly. But if we keep Moses 1:39 in mind, it helps to understand God’s motivations even when we do not see clearly.

God’s punishments or curses are often direct consequences to the sin. For example, God curses the ground (Genesis 5:29, 8:21; also see Jacob 3:5; Helaman 13:17; Ether 14:1; etc.). Sometimes, these consequences were extended into the tenth generation and beyond. I will look at a few of the problems dealing with our scriptural understanding of God’s Curses, Marks, and Separation.

God’s Curse

Genesis 4:12 Cain coveted Abel’s flocks and the praise he received from God when Abel followed God’s command to sacrifice a lamb after the similitude of His Son. Satan tempted Cain, and he killed Abel. Afterwards God punished Cain: “when thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth.” As a farmer who wanted more, God’s curse was a natural consequence. He cursed Cain’s lands and separated Himself from Cain. (For more see scriptures when the *ground* is cursed in Genesis 5:29, 8:21; Moses 7:8; 8:4; 1 Nephi 17:35; Enos 1:10; Alma 37:28; Helaman 13:17; Ether 14:1; etc.). We have no scriptural evidence that Cain or his children’s skin was changed.

- **Mistaken Interpretation:** *God cursed Cain with a mark (rather than cursed his land). Furthermore, it would be passed onto his descendants.*
- **Scriptural Evidence:** Repeatedly we find God’s curse as a separation from Him. In Genesis, God also cursed Cain’s land. We have no scriptural account of God cursing Cain by adding pigment to his skin nor his posterity.
- **Correction:** Pigmentation to skin is a blessing in more environments.

Genesis 4:15; Moses 5:39-40—God “set a mark upon Cain” to protect him from being killed. The mark was a distinction. We have no mention of Cain’s skin color, but six generations afterward a biblical group of people *became* black (Moses 7:8, 22). The name, Canaanite, is tricky as it was used for different groups of good and bad people throughout the Bible. Many see pigmentation as a blessing from God. We have no evidence that the group of Canaanites were descended from Cain. They were also all destroyed in Noah’s flood (Abr 7:12), with possibly, one exception, a righteous woman, Egyptus, the wife of Ham (Abr 1:21–22).

- *Mistaken Interpretation: The mark God put on Cain was more pigment in his posterities’ skin.*
- **Scriptural Evidence:** Cain’s “mark” was for his protection, though we do not know what it was.

Gen 25:31-32; 27:36; 1 Chronicles 5:1—“Reuben the firstborn of Israel . . . defiled his father's bed, [so] his birthright was given unto the sons of Joseph.” Priesthood was often given to the most righteous son, not the first out of the womb (including second born sons: Isaac, Jacob, Ephraim, etc.). In times of polygamy, the priesthood often was passed on through the first born of the “queen” wife, as in the case of Jacob’s son Joseph, not necessarily the first son.

- *Mistaken Interpretation: First born son of the patriarch was “most righteous,”*

Abraham 1:27—“Pharaoh being of that lineage by which he could not have the right of Priesthood.” Noah’s son Shem received the priesthood as “the great high priest,” not Japheth or Ham (D&C 138:41).

- *Mistaken Interpretation: Denial of priesthood should continue always to descendants of Pharaoh.*
- **Scriptural Evidence:** Initially, the Lord gave the priesthood to a very few through lineage, but other times from righteous desires (i.e. Abraham, Lehi, etc.)

Abraham 1:4—“I sought for mine appointment unto the Priesthood . . . it came down from the fathers, from the beginning of time.” Priesthood was handed down at the time to the righteous who sought it.

- *Mistaken Interpretation: Abraham’s birth father held God’s Priesthood.*
- **Scriptural Evidence:** The “fathers” referred to righteous patriarchs like Melchizedek and Enoch, who both developed Zion societies. God took both cities to live in a heavenly state.

Abraham 3:22—“among all these there were many of the noble and great ones.” All who came to earth honored their first estate and chose to follow Christ (Abraham 3:23-28; Jude 1:6).

- *Mistaken Interpretation: Some premortal spirits were less than noble. These lesser spirits were sent to earth through the lineage of Cain to experience mortality, but without priesthood.*

- **Scriptural Evidence:** All who came to earth valiantly chose to follow our Heavenly Parent's plan and accept Christ as their Leader (Abraham 3:21-26). Also, all are judged by their own desires as Article of Faith #2 says: "Man will be punished for his own sins," not their ancestors.

Moses 7:12 "Enoch continued to call upon all the people, save it were the people of Canaan, to repent."

- *Mistaken Interpretation: Canaan, must be populated with descendants of Cain.* Over centuries of time we have many different peoples and cultures from similar sounding cities.
- **Scriptural Evidence:** After Enoch is translated, Gen 9:18 mentions a man named Canaan, who was a descendant of Ham. Noah denounced him for wickedness, "Cursed *be* Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren. Blessed *be* the Lord, The God of Shem, And may Canaan be his servant. May God enlarge Japheth . . . And may Canaan be his servant" (Gen 9:25-27).

2 Nephi 5:20-25—"Inasmuch as they [Laman and Lemuel's community] will not harken unto thy words they shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord. And behold, they were cut off from his presence. And he had caused the cursing to come upon them, yea, even a sore cursing, because of their iniquity. For behold they had hardened their hearts against him" (also see 2 Nephi 4:6; Alma 17:15, etc.).

- *Mistaken Interpretation: cursing is skin color rather than removal from God's influence.*
- **Scriptural Evidence:** The cursing is different than the mark.

God's Mark

God's "marks" are used differently than cursing's. Marks were used at times to separate or protect people physically or spiritually. We do not know what "mark" God placed on Cain, only that it was a protection. At times, God separates humanity in an effort to create an atmosphere where the Spirit can dwell and He can teach His people Eternal truths. Repeatedly, God tries to raise a righteous people to protect the pure and innocent by removing the most wicked element. Sometimes God separates peoples is physically and other times it is with a mark or even language change, as He did at the time of Tower of Babel (Gen 11:9). However, as we see repeatedly in scripture, the righteous can become wicked within one generation or two.

In the Book of Mormon, Nephi recorded, "the Lord did cause a skin of blackness to come upon" Laman and Lemuel's descendants so they would "not be enticing to my people." Their mark separated them to avoid further apostasy, particularly through intermixing with incorrect traditions (Alma 3:8; see Deut. 7:3-4; Judg. 3:1-8). We have no reason to believe that God changed Laman and Lemuel's pigment. More likely, they intermarried with others already living in nearby lands (i.e. remnants of Jaredites or other peoples) with darker skins. Yet, after several generations, the mark had nothing to do with righteous or wicked people:

- *Mistaken Interpretation—Darker skin color was God's curse.*
- **Scriptural Evidence:** God often separates His people to discourage apostasy and to protect the innocent and those who keep their covenants with Him

Cursing for Wickedness

2 Nephi 4:6—Lehi’s blessing to the children of Laman, “. . . if ye are cursed, behold I leave my blessing upon you, that the cursing may be taken from you and answered upon the heads of your parents.”

2 Nephi 5:23-25—“and cursed shall be the seed of him that mixeth with their seed for they shall be cursed even with the same cursing And the Lord spake it and it was done they did become an idol people full of mischief subtlety and . . . seek in the wilderness for the beast of prey.

And the Lord God said unto me they shall be a scourge and stir them up in remembrance of me”

Alma 17:15— “thus they were a very indolent people, many of whom did worship idols, and the curse of God had fallen upon them because of the traditions of their fathers; notwithstanding the promises on the conditions of repentance”

A Mark for Separation

2 Nephi 5:21b-22—“Wherefore as they were white and exceeding fare and delightsome, that they might not be enticing to my people, the Lord did cause a skin of blackness to come upon them. And thus sayeth the Lord God: I will cause they shall be loathsome unto thy people, save they shall repent of their iniquities.”

Alma 3:13-17—“the Amlicites . . . set the mark upon themselves, yea, even a mark of red upon their foreheads. Thus the word of God is the fulfilled to Nephi . . . Behold the Lamanites have I cursed, and I will set a mark on them that they and their seed may be separated from thee and thy seed, from henceforth and forever, except they repent of their wickedness and turn to me that I may have mercy on him . . . I will set a mark upon him that fighteth against thee and thy seed. And again, I say he that departeth from thee shall no more be called thy seed”

Genesis 11:1-9—God separated wicked people by confusing languages at the Tower of Babel

Why God Curses, Marks, & Separates

These scriptural interpretations from the books of Genesis, Moses, and Abraham have not always been interpreted correctly. In the 1840s, and more so in the 1850’s, some church members interpreted God’s curse as His mark. Further misinterpretations grew in an attempt to justify the cultural thought and practices. We see the same theological mazes in other faith traditions where searching apologists developed a narrative to justify untruths.

Historian Armand Mauss described the century long apologetic misunderstandings that were created by some to justify the church’s practice of banning the priesthood to those of black African descent. He sees this as wrong:

In the pre-existence, certain of the spirits were set aside, in God’s wisdom, to come to Earth through a lineage that was cursed and marked, first by Cain’s fratricide and obeisance to Satan, and then again later by Ham’s . . . We aren’t exactly sure *why* this lineage was set apart in the pre-existence, but it was probably for reasons that do not reflect well on the premortal valiancy of the partakers of that lineage.

This misunderstanding was adopted by church leaders too.

It is difficult for Saints who believe Pres. Wilford Woodruff's promise: "The Lord will never permit me or any other man who stands as President of this Church to lead you astray." Yet we also believe in agency and human fallibility. As a master teacher, our God allows us to learn by our mistakes, to learn from our own experiences between good and evil. We also believe that God will compensate for all wrongs in the life hereafter. We have less of a problem with the lost 116 pages knowing the small plates were prepared as a backup plan by God. Like with the children of Israel who rejected God's higher law in the wilderness, the Lord had a lesser law that he introduced through His prophet Moses.

The Scriptures are full of examples where peoples have to suffer because of human fallibility: Hagar and Ishmael going hungry, Leah's rejection, Esau's missed blessing, the abuse suffered by Alma's early converts at the Waters of Mormon, and so forth. Perhaps the most pervasive across the history of the world is the injustice that some young children suffer from the hands of inattentive or wicked parents. Yet we also hope and believe that all things will work together for the good of those who love the Lord (Romans 8:28). God's mercy and justice provide an eternal solution to human foibles.

In the New Testament, we realize that Jesus grew up in a society saturated with slavery, although most of these slaves came from conquered lands in Europe and Asia. Race had little to do with Roman slavery. One half of the population of Jerusalem at the time lived in servitude. Slavery has plagued much of the world's history. John the Baptist and apostles Peter encouraged slave owners to be kind and servants to obey their masters. But neither the prophets nor the Lord were recorded as denouncing the cultural institution of servitude. Instead, Jesus turned the social hierarchy upside down and taught leaders how to serve one another. He himself said "[I] came not to be served but to serve" (Mark 10:45, BLB).

What Do the Scriptures Say about Racism?

As disciples of Jesus Christ, we should not condone or tolerate racism in any form. In the Bible, the Lord reminds His prophet Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For *the LORD does not see* as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). The Book of Mormon denounces bigotry: "Wherefore, a commandment I give unto you, which is the word of God, that ye revile no more against them because of the darkness of their skins . . . but ye shall remember your own filthiness" (Jacob 3:9, see 1-10). God commands His disciples to strive for a society without -isms and -ites, a society without rich and poor, a society in which "black and white, bond and free . . . [are all] alike unto God" (2 Nephi 26:33; Alma 11:44; 4 Nephi 1:15-17).

You may ask, "Why then do we find discriminatory comments about skin color in scripture?" This question has been addressed thoroughly by other colleagues. I have already offered my research and summary—in scripture, skin color is not God's curse when he initially pronounces the cursing. But over time looking back, writers have warped the Lord's original message. Unfortunately, between misinterpretations and societal misunderstandings, many church leaders in the nineteenth-and twentieth-century made statements that are laced with cultural racism.

We realize our leaders are not infallible. And that is why they once corrected people like Elder Bruce R. McConkie acknowledged his errors, apologized for prejudiced views, and encouraged members of the church to change in order to align our thoughts to love as Jesus does.

Forget everything that I have said, or what President Brigham Young or President George Q. Cannon or whomsoever has said in days past that is contrary to the present revelation. We spoke with a limited understanding and without the light and knowledge that now has come into the world” (<https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/bruce-r-mcconkie/alike-unto-god/>).

As we strive to become a Zion society—a society where we are “of one heart and one mind, and [dwell] in righteousness; and there [is] no poor among [us]” (Moses 7:18)—we find unity. When the Lord’s church is ready to live in righteousness, then our Savior will come to rule and reign (Rev 19:7; see Elder Renlund, *General Conference*, Oct 2021)

Further Study—Scripture Chain

- 1 Samuel 16:7
- John 8:7
- John 9:2-3
- John 17:21-22
- 1 Nephi 2:19-24
- 1 Nephi 13:24-29
- 1 Nephi 17:35-38
- 2 Nephi 4:5-6
- 2 Nephi 4:34
- 2 Nephi 5:20-23
- 2 Nephi 26:33
- 2 Nephi 30:5-6
- Alma 3:9-10
- Alma 3:14
- Alma 3:18-19
- Alma 17:15
- Alma 23:16-18
- 3 Nephi 2:15-16
- 3 Nephi 13:24
- Mormon 9:6
- D&C 9:7
- D&C 29:41
- D&C 38:27
- D&C 98:11-12
- D&C 104:14-18
- D&C 108:7
- Abraham 1:26-27
- Abraham 3:22-28
- Moses 5:36
- Second Article of Faith

A Short Historical Treatment of Black Americans in the Church and Priesthood

Christ restored His gospel to the earth in through the Prophet Joseph Smith. For at least fourteen years between 1830 and 1844, Joseph and others ordained African Americans to the Priesthood. In that difficult antebellum environment of US History, there was an important difference between being anti-slavery and an abolitionist:

The American Anti-Slavery Society (AASS), an organization that advocated for the “immediate abandonment” of slavery “without expatriation.” The number of local antislavery societies grew rapidly. By 1836, the AASS itself had organized well over 500 branches in communities across the United States, including 133 in Ohio—the most in any state (<https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/letter-to-oliver-cowdery-circa-9-april-1836/1#historical-intro>).

Abolitionists on the other hand wanted to abolish slavery at all and any cost and would resort to violence to achieve their aims. Seven short historical vignettes on race and the priesthood follow.

The Prophet Joseph Smith: Anti-Slavery not an Abolitionist

The prophet consistently opposed abusive slavery and encouraged the people of different colors to live together (which was radical at that time). For example, Joseph and Emma asked their dear friend, Jane Manning, if she would like to be sealed as family even though she was of African descent. However, Joseph was not an abolitionist—which at the time included terrorist behaviors. If you find a statement from Joseph that sounds questionably prejudice keep in mind the whole picture. Joseph

tried to remove himself from violent abolitionists while denouncing slavery. We also need to be cautious about reading all that Joseph said on the subject and not take any single statement outside of his collective statements nor the 19th-century cultural context.

In 1844 when he ran for US President, Joseph Smith's campaign platform presented his plan to free the slaves and reimburse the slave owners for their financial investments by using the profits from the sale of public lands (which then could be used as pay for hired help in the future). His plan never caught on, as he was murdered in June, 1844, well before the November election.

Missouri Neighbors Asked Saints to Prove They are not Abolitionist

In the early years of the Saints arrival in Missouri, the government asked them to prove that they were not abolitionists. The Saints were not willing to use terrorist behaviors to stop slavery immediately. Many leaders, including Joseph, initially tried to distance themselves from abolitionists to offer proof to the governor of Missouri. For their safety, they printed things using their best judgment. As we read these statements over a century later, we must use historical sensitivity. As we study, we need to understand the very different cultural times; we are in no place to throw stones at them.

Church leaders in Missouri, who were focused on trying to maintain Jackson County Missouri for a future city of Zion in Missouri, ironically made statements that were anything but God's ideal "of one heart and one mind." Before W.W. Phelps left the church for a season, he and others tried to be politically correct at the time to not offend their slave owning neighbors. We previously discussed Missouri documents from 1833 and 1838 that sound prejudice to our ears. Even though the Lord's revelations called the Saints to be a people of peace, there were some members who were abolitionists.

The problem was twofold. First, Missouri was a slave state at that time. They had laws and regulations for freed African Americans, which limited significantly their rights. But most Saints were opposed to slavery. W.W. Phelps printed an article entitled: "Free People of Color," in the Jackson County newspaper: *Evening and Morning Star*. The article dealt with the challenge of immigrating saints pouring into Missouri—some of whom included African American converts. The editorial addressed their immigration and said: "So long as we have no special rule in the church as to people of color, let prudence guide."

Secondly, the Missourians had hard feelings against most Native Americans and wanted their lands. On the other hand, the saints honored them as long-lost diluted ancestors of the Lord's people—from Lehi and Sariah, Ishmael and his wife, the Mulekites, and Jaredites. The Book of Mormon was written to them and they honored them as distant descendants of Israelites.

Both of these issues angered the slave holding populations of Independence, MO, and they organized a "Secret Constitution" to run the Mormons out of town. The mob claimed that the saints "Invite free Negroes and mulattos from other states to become 'Mormons,' and removed and settle among us." In response, W. W. Phelps published an "extra" or handbill that was filled with untruths and racism. Portions were wrong and unauthorized.

Our brethren will find an extract of the law of this state, relative to free people of color, on another page of this paper. Great care should be taken on this point. The Saints must shun every appearance of evil. As to slaves, we have nothing to say; in connection with the wonderful events of this age much is doing towards abolishing slavery, and colonizing the

blacks in Africa . . . To be short, we are opposed to having free people of color admitted into the state; and we say, that none will be admitted into the Church; for we are determined to obey the laws (<https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-a-1-23-december-1805-30-august-1834/332>).

The statement had no ecclesiastical authorization. The Prophet Joseph lived in Kirtland, and was unaware of it for some time. It appears that W. W. Phelps and a few other Saints over-stepped their bounds and made a poor decisions in Missouri. This affected the future of the Church. Meanwhile, up in Kirtland Joseph continued baptizing and ordaining free African Americans. The story of Joseph selling his horse for a slave to buy his son's freedom is well documented.

Obviously, this was a very hotly disputed and divisive issue in Joseph Smith's day. The issue of slavery found its way into D&C 134:12, published in Kirtland in 1835. Joseph tries to avoid getting embroiled in this issue. It says that Church missionaries should not jeopardize the lives of people by baptizing slaves, in jurisdiction that legally allowed slavery, except with permission of their masters. In 1837, a publisher named Elijah Lovejoy was killed in Alton, Illinois, downstream from Nauvoo and just upstream from St. Louis, by a mob, because he persisted in publishing abolitionist newspapers. This issue would soon boil over, erupting in the Civil War (1861-1865). It was a fiercely fought and devastatingly brutal war. In it, Missouri was one of the hardest hit of all the states.

Baptism and Priesthood Ordination of Elijah Able

In 1832 Elijah Able, a free African American joined the church in full fellowship. Elijah lived with Joseph and Emma for a period. The same year that the Kirtland Temple was dedicated, his Melchizedek priesthood ordination papers were signed referring to him as an elder on March 3, 1836. That same year on December 20, 1836, Elijah received his patriarchal blessing from Joseph, Sr. On April 4, 1841, Zebedee Coltrin ordained him to the office of a Seventy. After he traveled with the saints to Utah, he continued to serve in the 3rd quorum of the Seventy (*Encyclopedia of Mormonism*). He also served three missions for the Church.

Elijah worked as a carpenter. In Nauvoo, Joseph Smith appointed him "to the calling of an undertaker" ("Minutes of First Council of Seventy, 1859-1863," 5 Mar. 1879, p. 494, LDS Church Archives). In Nauvoo Elijah also participated in Baptisms for the Dead (See "Elijah Abel bapt for John F. Lancaster a friend," as contained in Nauvoo Temple Records Book A100, LDS Church Archives). He was present at the bedside when Joseph Sr. died. We also know that he attempted to rescue the prophet when arrested in Nauvoo for Missouri difficulties (*History of the Church*, 4:365).

Priesthood Ordination of Q. Walker Lewis

Q. Walker Lewis was born and raised in Massachusetts with Gahanna ancestors. After receiving his freedom, he earned his living as a barber. In 1826, shortly after his marriage to Elizabeth Lovejoy, he joined other black abolitionists to form the Massachusetts General Colored Association (MGCA). They sought release of all slaves by armed insurrection.

In 1843 Walker Lewis came in contact with a missionary and apostle, Parley Pratt. The Lewis' accepted the message of the restoration. In 1844, Apostle William Smith was serving a mission in Lowell, MA, and ordained Lewis to the priesthood. However, The *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* states that "there is no evidence that Joseph Smith authorized new ordinations in the 1840s" (so William's ordination may

have been without Joseph's authorization). In 1851, the Walker family immigrated to Utah. Walker remained in the church until at least October 1852, when he returned to Massachusetts.

Baptism and Possible Ordination of William McCary 1847

William McCary was a runaway slave, who worked as a musician and married a Caucasian member of the church, Lucy Stanton. The couple visited Nauvoo in 1845. William was baptized in Winter Quarters in 1847 by Orson Hyde. Some claim he received priesthood ordination as well, but I have not found a primary source document yet. Shortly after his baptism, Walker Lewis claimed the right to be the prophet and lead the church. This led to his excommunication and the eventual removal of his family from Winter Quarters. He started his own church which included a form of polygamy.

American Culture 1842-1852

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, most southern Americans felt that Africans were cursed by God, basing their beliefs on passages in the Bible. Most northern Americans took the opposite position, also calling on the Bible for support. In the Church, we do not know when, or why, but somewhere a restriction began against ordaining our saints with African ancestors. Perhaps it happened after the publication of Abraham 1:27, "that lineage by which he could not have the right of Priesthood." But that was a misunderstanding, because we see many descendants of Ham who held the priesthood including Ephraim.

There is no known revelation instructing the withholding of priesthood to begin. By 1849, Brigham Young is cited as making formal statements on priesthood exclusion to those of African descent. In 1852, Brigham Young also said that the "time will come when they will have the privilege of all we have and more" (*Brigham Young Papers*, Church Archives, 2-5-1852). On December 3, 1854, Brigham said that the curse of Cain's posterity would be removed after the first resurrection (*Journal of Discourses*, 2:143). However, Brigham was misinformed in this.

Up until 1862, Utah Territory was required by the Federal Government to allow slavery. Utah was south of the line drawn by the US Compromise of 1850. Like New Mexico, it would have gone to the south if the Civil War hadn't intervened.

However, Brigham tried to change the slave culture, just as Paul did in the New Testament. Brigham taught slave owners to use kindness and generosity towards their fellow servants. Those southerners who brought their slaves to Utah were welcome like everyone else (documenting just how many is difficult, but it appears very few). Early church leaders' statements that sound prejudiced or false, often echo the thoughts of their contemporaries in antebellum American.

World Culture and Missionary Efforts in Stages, 1835-present

Although it exceeds the time and space available here, it is also important in talking about racism and religion in the world to realize how difficult the road has been for modernity to deal with. The problem went beyond racism to include the aftermath of the incredible atrocities of the enslavement of Black Africans in many parts of the world, especially in the Caribbean, Brazil, and the southern half of the United States in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Until after World War II, color lines existed in professional sports, public education, labor laws, civil rights, redlined neighborhood restrictions on home purchases, Baptist churches, and in many other areas of U.S. law and society. Large parts of Los Angeles, Detroit, and Newark were burned to the ground in racial protests in the 1960s. Progress

through the U.S Supreme Court was slow and hard fought in the 1950, 1960s, and early 1970s, for reasons that are hard for people today to even imagine.

Until 1978, the Church was located primarily in the Western United States, and it did not want to move preemptively on this issue until a revelation from the Lord made it clear that the time was right for the Church to open or expand its missionary efforts, particularly into Africa, the Caribbean, and Brazil. Typically, the Church had focused on particular areas of the world for concentrated missionary work, one at a time: England in the 1830s and 1840s; Denmark in the 1850s; Germany in the 1880s, etc. Where should the Church concentrate its efforts next?

In the mind 20th century, the Church was still relatively poor and small. For example, the Church reached out dramatically in the first half of the 20th century to serve disenfranchised native populations in New Zealand, Hawaii, and throughout Polynesia, where the Church had established and financed dozens of schools. This program drained the Church's finances to a point that in 1966 N. Eldon Tanner needed to be brought in to close most of those schools and prevent the Church from bankruptcy. This was on top of most missionary and welfare efforts in the 1950s and 1960s going into post-World War II Europe, running an Indian Placement Program, and beginning to open the work of the Church dramatically in Central and South America. With limited resources, expanding into new religious worlds, including Israel, presented its problems.

Although some may well argue with hindsight that the Church could have moved sooner into the racial arena, until a decisive revelation was received that could find unanimous support of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve, things needed to bide their time. Several Church leaders already were speaking of the coming time when these doors would open, and some patriarchal blessings spoke of the coming of this day as well. The final response came, all around the Church, when the long-awaited day was celebrated with rejoicing as all Church members in General Conference sustained the announcement by Spencer W. Kimball of Official Proclamation No. 2 in 1978.

Today, the Church has established stakes and built temples in most parts of the world, including a flourishing of temples in Africa, Brazil, the Caribbean, and the previously hostile Southern States. The strongest Church growth rates anywhere in the world are found now in these areas, supported largely by central Church training, property management, humanitarian support, and outpourings of love.

History: Setting the Stage for 1978

For over two decades the leaders of the church sought the Lord's guidance on the policy of banning descendants of Africans from the priesthood. President Kimball was not the first to seek the Lord's guidance on this change. In David O McKay's biography we learn that this correction had been the desire of many church leaders for decades earlier. Pres. Harold B. Lee said he fasted for three days and asked, but felt the timing was not yet. The Lord's timing was not then.

Perhaps because of the lack of unity within the Quorum of the Twelve apostles and church members, or perhaps combined with other reasons, it was delayed. As mentioned earlier, the timing appears similar to the time of Moses when the prophet hoped to introduce the higher law, but he had to wait on the readiness of the children of Israel. If the children of Israel had been spiritually ready, they could have gone immediately into the promised land. However, they had to learn their lesson by wandering

in the wilderness for forty years. Even then, the Israelites were only ready for the lower law. So to in the Restoration, the Lord could not move forward until His people were ready for this higher law. Many members of the Church of Jesus Christ of latter-day Saints were eager to move ahead, especially those who sought their priesthood blessings.

Around the world blessings were given announcing the promised day was coming. For dozens of examples see an exhaustive research published by Pres. Spencer W. Kimball's son, Edward Kimball ("Spencer W. Kimball and the Revelation on Priesthood," *BYU Studies* 47.2). It is available on line with pages and pages of details under "Setting the Stage."

In 1964, Darius Gray, received a powerful witness from God that he should be baptized—even knowing his restriction against a priesthood ordination and temple blessings. With his remarkable faith, soft heart, and tenacious spirit, he was called to become one of the 1971 founding members of the "Genesis Group," organized under the direction of the Apostles for black members of the SLC area. Gray was inspired to know that the restriction against African descendants receiving the priesthood was not of God. In his own words, "it was not imposed by God, but it was allowed by God." He asked Pres. Gordon B. Hinckley "could I teach that?" and was granted permission.

Like his predecessors, Pres. Spencer W. Kimball asked the Lord and his colleagues for direction on this issue. Edward Kimball recorded that as his father began going to the temple at every spare moment—both night and morning. He would stay and pray for hours and hours. President Kimball recorded himself:

Day after day, and especially on Saturdays and Sundays when there were no organizations [sessions] in the temple, I went there when I could be alone. I was very humble . . . I was searching for this . . . I wanted to be sure. . . . I had a great deal to fight . . . myself, largely, because I had grown up with this thought that Negroes should not have the priesthood and I was prepared to go all the rest of my life until my death and fight for it and defend it as it was (ibid).

Others also mentioned Pres. Kimball's questions and prayers for two decades preparing his heart and the Saints for the Lord's will, "I prayed with such a fervency that I knew something was there."

Watching the process, Pres. Dallin Oaks acting as President of BYU observed:

Revelations will probably never come unless they are desired. I think few people receive revelations while lounging on the couch or while playing cards or while relaxing. I believe most revelations would come when a man is on his tip toes, reaching as high as he can for something which he knows he needs, and then their bursts upon him the answer to his problems (ibid).

For dozens of more first-hand accounts of those who were closely involved with Pres. Kimball, see Edward Kimball's research.

President Kimball's Revelation June 8, 1978

The timing of 1978 was truly miraculous. Church leaders and members across the world had been prepared. The revelation came to the united Quorum of the Twelve and First Presidency while praying in the temple together. Those in attendance claimed that it was the strongest spiritual outpouring in their lives. Like the three witnesses of the Book of Mormon who never denied their witness, those

apostles stood as sure witnesses to the Lord's revelation. It was Elder McConkie who hoped to make the new policy known to the world as soon as possible.

People of African descent in countries across the world rejoiced at the inspired change. The misunderstanding had been an impediment to the growth of the church for decades. From our limited perspective this is hard to understand. But if we can extend our faith to take an eternal view, we believe, no "unhallowed hand can stop this work" even if human errors may cause delays (*Joseph Smith Papers.org*, Wentworth Letter, 1842).

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