

Timeline and History of Blacks Receiving the Priesthood in the LDS Church

The following is a timeline of major events leading up to the 1978 Revelation on the Priesthood granting black Africans who are worthy the ability to be ordained to the priesthood and receive temple ordinances. This is largely a summary of a BYU Studies article called [Spencer W. Kimball and the Revelation on Priesthood](#) by his son Edward L. Kimball.

1836: "Elijah Abel, an early black convert, pioneer, and missionary, was ordained an elder."

1849: "The first known direct statement by a Church President that blacks were denied the priesthood came from Brigham Young in February 1849 when he said of "the Africans": "The curse remained upon them because Cain cut off the lives of Abel. . . . The Lord had cursed Cain's seed with blackness and prohibited them the Priesthood."

1852: "Wilford Woodruff reported that Brigham Young, speaking to the Utah territorial legislature, took personal responsibility for articulating the restriction: "Any man having one drop of the seed of Cane [sic] in him Cannot hold the priesthood & if no other Prophet ever spake it Before I will say it now in the name of Jesus Christ. I know it is true."

1879: "Joseph F. Smith noted that Elijah Abel had two certificates identifying him as a seventy."

1908: "Joseph F. Smith stated his understanding that Joseph Smith himself declared Abel's ordination null and void. ...President Smith offered no basis for that assertion. Abel did not believe that his ordination had ever been nullified."

1931: "[Joseph Fielding Smith] said that the Bible cannot answer the question about why Negro men cannot have the priesthood, but that the Pearl of Great Price and the teachings of early Church leaders offer some information."

1948: "During the George Albert Smith administration, priesthood leaders in the Philippines were authorized by the First Presidency to ordain Negrito men to the priesthood. These were native men with black skin who had no known African ancestry. Descent from black Africans only—not skin color ...became the disqualifying factor."

1954: "President McKay is said to have appointed a special committee of the Twelve to study the issue. They concluded that the priesthood ban had no clear basis in scripture but that Church members were not prepared for change."

1958: "[President McKay] authorized Church leaders to ordain Fijian men to the priesthood based on his understanding that, despite their blackness, they were not related to Africans."

1961: "LaMar Williams [secretary to the Church Missionary Committee] ...was sent to Nigeria in 1961. He was met at the airport by ten pastors he had been corresponding with and discovered that they were unaware of one another. Williams returned with the names of fifteen thousand unbaptized converts who were waiting for the Church to come to them."

1963: Joseph Fielding Smith said, "You do not have to believe that Negroes are denied the priesthood because of the pre-existence. I have always assumed that because it was what I was taught. ...But you don't have to believe it to be in good standing, because it is not definitely stated in the scriptures. And I have received no revelation on the matter."

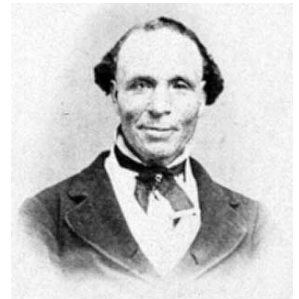
1965: "Assuming a male convert qualified to receive the priesthood unless there was evidence to the contrary was applied ...in Brazil and soon afterward applied generally. Candidates were no longer required to provide pedigrees."

1968: "At least a dozen demonstrations or violent acts occurred when BYU athletic teams played other schools. Opposing players refused to participate or wore black armbands. One spectator threw acid, and another threw a Molotov cocktail that failed to ignite. Stanford severed athletic relations with BYU."

1971: "Three black Mormons in Salt Lake City, Ruffin Bridgeforth, Darius Gray, and Eugene Orr, petitioned the Church for help in keeping and reactivating the relatively small number of black members in the city. ...In October, Bridgeforth, a member for eighteen years, was set apart as the president of the Genesis Group, with Gray and Orr as his counselors. Genesis members attended sacrament meeting in their geographical wards but met together monthly to hear speakers and bear testimony and weekly for Relief Society, Primary, and youth meetings."

1972: President Harold B. Lee said: "For those who don't believe in modern revelation there is no adequate explanation. Those who do understand revelation stand by and wait until the Lord speaks. ...It's only a matter of time before the black achieves full status in the Church. We must believe in the justice of God."

1974: In his first press conference, held immediately after his ordination, President [Spencer W.] Kimball said: "[I have given it] a great deal of thought, a great deal of prayer. The day might come when they would be given the priesthood, but that day has not come yet. Should the day come it will be a matter of revelation. Before changing any important policy, it has to be through a revelation from the Lord."



Elijah Abel

1975: “President Kimball referred to his counselors various statements by early Church leaders about blacks and the priesthood and asked for their reactions. ...He asked the Apostles to join him as colleagues in extended study and supplication.”

1977: “Spencer invited at least three General Authorities to give him memos on the implications of the subject. Elder McConkie wrote a long memorandum concluding that there was no scriptural barrier to a change in policy that would give priesthood to black men.”

1978: “During the months leading up to June 1978, President Kimball spoke with the Twelve repeatedly about the question, asking them to speak freely. He invited associates who had not expressed themselves in the group setting to talk with him in private. He seemed so intent on solving the problem that others worried about him.”

Feb 1978: “On returning from the airport in February 1978 after one of his trips, Spencer asked the driver to let him off at the temple and sent Camilla home alone. ... Some days he went more than once, often alone. ...He obtained a key that gave him access to the temple night or day without having to involve anyone else.”

March 9, 1978: “As the First Presidency and Twelve met in the temple, the Apostles unanimously expressed their feeling that if the policy were to change, any change must be based on revelation received and announced by the prophet. President Kimball then urged a concerted effort from all of them to learn the will of the Lord. He suggested they engage in concerted individual fasting and prayer.”

March 23, 1978: “Spencer reported to his counselors that he had spent much of the night in reflection and his impression then was to lift the restriction on blacks. His counselors said they were prepared to sustain.”

April 20, 1978: “President Kimball asked the Twelve to join the Presidency in praying that God would give them an answer. Thereafter he talked with the Twelve individually and continued to spend many hours alone in prayer and meditation in the Holy of Holies, often after hours when the temple was still.”

May 30, 1978: “Spencer read his counselors a tentative statement in longhand removing racial restrictions on priesthood and said he had a “good, warm feeling” about it.”

June 1, 1978: “The First Presidency, Twelve, and Seventies met in their regularly scheduled monthly temple meeting at 9:00 a.m., fasting. ...[At the conclusion] President Kimball asked the Twelve to remain. ...He outlined to them the direction his thoughts had carried him—the fading of his reluctance, the disappearance of objections, the growing assurance he had received, the tentative decision he had reached, and his desire for a clear answer. Once more he asked the Twelve to speak. ...all [responded] favorable. ...The decision process bonded them in unity. They then sought divine confirmation. President Kimball asked, “Do you mind if I lead you in prayer?” There were things he wanted to say to the Lord. He had reached a decision after great struggle, and he wanted the Lord’s confirmation, if it would come. They surrounded the altar in a prayer circle.” Elder McConkie said this of what happened next: “All of the Brethren at once knew and felt in their souls what the answer to the importuning petition of President Kimball was. . . . Some of the Brethren were weeping. All were sober and somewhat overcome. When President Kimball stood up, several of the Brethren, in turn, threw their arms around him.” Elder L. Tom Perry recalled: “While he was praying we had a marvelous experience. We had just a unity of feeling. ... I felt something like the rushing of wind. There was a feeling that came over the whole group. When President Kimball got up he was visibly relieved and overjoyed.”

June 7, 1978: “President Kimball [said] ...the time had come to announce the removal of priesthood restrictions on black male members and that he had asked three of the Twelve to propose drafts of an announcement.”

June 8, 1978: “The Presidency presented to the Twelve the proposed announcement. All of the Twelve present had a chance to comment, and minor editorial changes were made.”

June 9, 1978: “A vote [of the Seventies] approved the decision unanimously. Spencer put his hand on President Tanner’s knee and said, “Eldon, go tell the world.” ... President Tanner returned in a few moments and reported: “It’s done. ...Without addressing questions of history or justification, the announcement said simply God had revealed that the day had come for granting priesthood and temple blessings to all who are worthy. The final text [was] canonized as [Official Declaration–2 in the Doctrine and Covenants.](#)”



President Spencer W. Kimball



Quorum of the 12 Apostles at the time of the Revelation on the Priesthood for Blacks