

LESSON33
President Brigham Young Leads the Saints
D&C 107:22-24, Our Heritage, pages 66-71

OVERVIEW:

The Prophet Joseph Smith gave the Twelve the keys of the kingdom and taught the principles of succession in the Presidency. After Joseph Smith's martyrdom, the Twelve presided over the Church until Brigham Young was sustained as President. Before leaving Nauvoo, the Saints received temple ordinances. The Saints experienced trials and miracles as they began journeying west.

(Joseph Fielding Smith: No man of himself can lead this church. It is the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ; he is at the head... He chooses men and calls them to be instruments in his hands to accomplish his purposes, and he guides and directs them in their labors. But men are only instruments in the Lord's hands, and the honor and glory for all that his servants accomplish is and should be ascribed unto him forever. If this were the work of man, it would fail, but it is the work of the Lord, and he does not fail. CR, Apr 1970, 113)

SCRIPTURES:

Doctrine and Covenants
Section 107: 22-24

22 Of the ^aMelchizedek Priesthood, three ^bPresiding High Priests, (The Quorum of the First Presidency) chosen by the body, (Though somewhat ambiguous as used in this verse, "the body" is the newly formed Quorum of the Twelve to which this revelation was given. Precedence accords that at the death of the president of the Church, his counselors are released and the quorum of the First Presidency is dissolved. "The body" responsible to form the new presidency of the Church is the Quorum of the Twelve. When the First Presidency is dissolved by the death of its president, the Quorum of the Twelve then becomes the leading quorum in the Church. Its president, the senior apostle of God on earth, presides over the Church by virtue of the fact that he presides over its leading quorum. No other man on earth has the right to lead. Indeed, the Quorum of the Twelve cannot even meet unless the senior apostle calls a meeting. When such a meeting is called, he presides over it. If revelation is to come, it must, according to the order of the Church, come through him. At the death of the President of the Church, the president of the Quorum of the Twelve automatically succeeds him. He is the mouthpiece of the Lord to the Church; no one else has a rightful claim to that privilege. From Brigham Young to the present day, this has always been the case. Can the Lord change that order if he wants to? Of course; it's his Church and he runs it. But should he choose to change the order he has established, he must, according to his word, do it through the channels he has ordained. The only man on earth who can receive a revelation that the president of the quorum of the Twelve should not lead the Church is the president of that quorum. No other individual or quorum can receive that revelation until it has come through the channel the Lord has ordained. If a man is worthy and capable of presiding over the Quorum of the Twelve, he is certainly worthy and capable of presiding over the Church. What if the senior apostle is serving as a counselor in the First Presidency at the death of the president of the Church rather than as president of the Quorum of the Twelve? A senior apostle serving in the First Presidency is sustained as a member of the First Presidency and as president of the Quorum of the Twelve. The next senior apostle is sustained as "acting president" over that quorum. When the First Presidency is dissolved by the death of its president, the counselor who is the senior apostle assumes his rightful position as the president of the Twelve. The system of succession in the presidency of the Church is but one of many illustrations of the Lord's genius. No room exists for contention, aspirations of the unworthy, or uncertainty. Nor is the Church left without inspired leadership for so much as a moment, for with his last breath one prophet bequeaths the

office to another according to a system instituted by the God of heaven himself. Revelations of the Restoration, p. 790-91. Wilford Woodruff: Do you know of any reason in case of the death of the President of the Church why the Twelve Apostles should not choose some other than the President of the Twelve to be the President of the Church? I know of several reasons why they should not. First, at the death of the President of the Church the Twelve Apostles become the presiding authority of the Church, and the president of the Twelve is really the President of the Church, by virtue of his office as much while presiding over the Twelve Apostles as while presiding over his two counselors. . . . Second, in case of the death of the President of the Church it takes a majority of the Twelve Apostles to appoint the President of the Church, and it is very unreasonable to suppose that the majority of that quorum could be converted to depart from the course marked out by inspiration and followed by the Apostles at the death of Christ and by the Twelve Apostles at the death of Joseph Smith. (Wilford Woodruff, March 28, 1877, p. 561.) appointed and ordained to that office, and upheld by the confidence, faith, and prayer of the church, (J. Reuben Clark, Jr.: Anyone not desiring to sustain anyone proposed may not only indicate his dissent here but he may, if he wishes, present his objections to the proper authority of the Church, and will be given an appropriate hearing. This is the rule and order of the Church. CR, Apr 1940, p. 71-74) form a quorum of the Presidency of the Church.

23 The ^atwelve traveling councilors are called to be the Twelve ^bApostles, (Quorum of the Twelve) or special ^cwitnesses (Joseph Fielding Smith: "These twelve men are endowed with the power and responsibility to serve as the special witnesses for Christ. They are entitled to have the inspiration and necessary guidance of the Holy Ghost to fit and qualify them for this important mission. All men may, by virtue of the priesthood and the gift of the Holy Ghost, become witnesses for Christ. In fact that is just what every elder in the Church should be, but there is a special calling which is given to the twelve special witnesses that separates them from other elders of the Church in the nature of their calling as witnesses. These twelve men as a quorum hold the fulness of authority, keys, and priesthood, to open up the way for the preaching of the gospel to every nation, kindred, and tongue. Others who go forth go under their direction are subject unto them. This work of proselyting is in their hands, and under the counsel of the First Presidency they are called upon to conduct all the affairs of the Church and the preaching of the gospel to every creature." Doctrines of Salvation, 3:146) of the name of Christ in all the world (Joseph Fielding Smith: The question frequently arises: "Is it necessary for the members of the Council of the twelve to see the Savior in order to be an apostle?" It is their privilege to see him if occasion requires, but the Lord has taught that there is a stronger witness than seeing a personage, even of the Son of God, in a vision. I wish we could get this clear in the minds of the members of the Church. The Savior said: "Wherefore I say unto you, all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men; but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him, but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come." (Matt. 12:31-32.) Therefore the seeing, even the Savior, does not leave as deep an impression in the mind as does the testimony of the Holy Ghost to the spirit. Both Peter and Paul understood this. Here are the words of Paul: "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame." (Heb. 6:4-6.) What is the lesson to be learned from this? That the impressions on the soul that come from the Holy Ghost are far more significant than a vision. It is where Spirit speaks to spirit, and the imprint upon the soul is far more difficult to erase. Every member of the Church should have the impressions on his soul made by the Holy Ghost that Jesus is the Son of God indelibly pictured so that they cannot be forgotten. We read that it is the Spirit that giveth life. [2 Cor. 3:6.] (Address to Seminary and Institute Faculty, "The Twelve Apostles," 1958, p. 6.)) —thus differing from other officers in the church in the duties of their calling. (James E. Talmage: The title "Apostle" is one of special significance and sanctity; it has been given of

God, and belongs only to those who have been called and ordained as "special witnesses of the name of Christ in all the world, thus differing from other officers in the Church in the duties of their calling." (D&C 107:23.) By derivation the word "Apostle" is the English equivalent of the Greek "apostolos," indicating a messenger, an ambassador, or literally "one who is sent." It signifies that he who is rightly so called, speaks and acts not of himself, but as the representative of a higher power whence his commission issued; and in this sense the title is that of a servant, rather than of a superior. Even the Christ, however, is called an Apostle, with reference to His ministry in the flesh (Hebrews 3:1); and this appellation is justified by His repeated declarations that He came to earth to do not His own will but that of the Father by whom He was sent. [John 4:34; 5:30; 6:38-39.] So great is the sanctity of this special calling, that the title "Apostle" should not be used lightly as the common or ordinary form of address applied to living men called to this office. The quorum or council of the Twelve Apostles as existent in the Church today may better be spoken of as the "Quorum of the Twelve," the "Council of the Twelve," or simply as the "Twelve," and as the "Twelve Apostles," except as particular occasion may warrant the use of the more sacred term. It is advised that the title "Apostle" be not applied as a prefix to the name of any member of the Council of the Twelve; but that such a one be addressed or spoken of as Brother_____ or Elder_____, and when necessary or desirable, as in announcing his presence in a public assembly, an explanatory clause may be added, thus, "Elder_____ one of the Council of the Twelve." (LEJ, February 24, 1914, 11:580-81.) Wilford Woodruff: I, Wilford Woodruff, being the last man living in the flesh who was present upon that occasion feel it a duty I owe The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, to the House of Israel, and to the whole world to bear this my last testimony to all nations, that in the winter of 1843-44, Joseph Smith, the Prophet of God, called the twelve apostles together in the City of Nauvoo, and spent many days with us in giving us our endowments, and teaching us those glorious principles which God had revealed to him. And upon one occasion he stood upon his feet in our midst for nearly three hours declaring unto us the great and last dispensation which God had set His hand to perform upon the earth in these last days. The room was filled as if with consuming fire; the Prophet was clothed upon with much of the power of God, and his face shone and was transparently clear, and he closed that speech, never-to-be-forgotten in time or in eternity, with the following language: "Brethren, I have had great sorrow of heart for fear that I might be taken from the earth with the keys of the Kingdom of God upon me, without sealing them upon the heads of other men. God has sealed upon my head all the keys of the kingdom of God upon the earth, and to prepare the Saints for the coming of the Son of Man. Now brethren, I thank God I have lived to see the day that I have been enabled to give you your endowments, and I have now sealed upon your heads all the powers of the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods and Apostleship, with all the keys and powers thereof, which God has sealed upon me; and I now roll off all the labor, burden and care of this Church and Kingdom of God before heaven and earth, and before God, angels and men; and if you don't do it you will be damned." And the same spirit that filled the room at that time burns in my bosom while I record this testimony, and the Prophet of God appointed no one else but the Apostles to stand at the head of the Church and direct its affairs. (Pamphlet—Church Historical Department, October 1888.))

24 And they form a quorum, ^aequal in authority and power to the three presidents previously mentioned. (They each hold all priesthood keys.) Elder Hyrum M. Smith and Janne M. Sjodahl explained that "there can never be two or three quorums of equal authority at the same time; therefore in the revelation where it reads that the Twelve Apostles form a quorum equal in authority with the First Presidency, and that the Seventies form a quorum equal in authority with the Twelve, it should be understood that this condition of equality could prevail only when the ranking quorum is no longer in existence, through death or otherwise. When the First Presidency becomes disorganized on the death of the President, then the Apostles become the presiding quorum, or council, of the Church with all the power to organize again the First Presidency, when they fall back again as the second ranking quorum of the Church. So with the Seventies, they would become equal only on the condition that the first two quorums ceased to exist. In regard to the Seventies, this provision, of course, concerns the first quorum of the Seventies"

(Doctrine and Covenants Commentary, 700). If through some catastrophe the two leading quorums of the Church were dissolved, the First Quorum of the Seventy would become the leading quorum in the Church. It would be that quorum's responsibility to reorganize the Quorum of the Twelve, which in turn would reorganize the First Presidency. Revelations of the Restoration, p. 792-93. Joseph Smith: "Brethren, I have had great sorrow of heart for fear that I might be taken from the earth with the keys of the Kingdom of God upon me, without sealing them upon the heads of other men. God has sealed upon my head all the keys of the Kingdom of God necessary for organizing and building up of the Church, Zion, and Kingdom of God upon the earth, and to prepare the Saints for the coming of the Son of Man. Now, brethren, I thank God I have lived to see the day that I have been enabled to give you your endowments, and I have now sealed upon your heads all the powers of the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods and Apostleship, with all the keys and powers thereof, which God has sealed upon me; and I now roll off all the labor, burden and care of this Church and Kingdom of God upon your shoulders, and I now command you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to round up your shoulders, and bear off this Church and Kingdom of God before heaven and earth, and before God, angels and men; and if you don't do it you will be damned" (Clark, Messages, 3:134).)

Our Heritage: Pages 66-71:

Succession in the Presidency

When the Prophet Joseph and Hyrum Smith were murdered in Carthage Jail, many of the Quorum of the Twelve and other Church leaders were serving missions and were absent from Nauvoo. Several days passed before these men learned of the deaths. When Brigham Young heard the news, he knew that the keys of priesthood leadership were still with the Church, for these keys had been given to the Quorum of the Twelve. However, not all Church members understood who would replace Joseph Smith as the Lord's prophet, seer, and revelator.

Sidney Rigdon, First Counselor in the First Presidency, arrived from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on 3 August 1844. In the year before this time, he had begun taking a course contrary to the counsel of the Prophet Joseph Smith and had become estranged from the Church. He refused to meet with the three members of the Twelve already in Nauvoo and instead spoke to a large group of the Saints assembled for their Sunday worship service. He told them of a vision he had received in which he had learned that no one could replace Joseph Smith. He said that a guardian to the Church should be appointed and that guardian should be Sidney Rigdon. Few Saints supported him.

Brigham Young, President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, did not return to Nauvoo until 6 August 1844. He declared that he wanted only to know "what God says" about who should lead the Church. The Twelve called a meeting for Thursday, 8 August 1844. Sidney Rigdon spoke in the morning session for more than one hour. He won few if any adherents to his position.

Brigham Young then spoke briefly, comforting the hearts of the Saints. As Brigham spoke, George Q. Cannon remembered, "it was the voice of Joseph himself," and "it seemed in the eyes of the people as if it were the very person of Joseph which stood before them." William C. Staines testified that Brigham Young spoke like the voice of the Prophet Joseph. "I thought it was he," Staines said, "and so did thousands who heard it. Wilford Woodruff also recalled that wonderful moment and wrote, "If I had not seen him with my own eyes, there is no one that could have convinced me that it was not Joseph Smith, and anyone can testify to this who was acquainted with these two men." This miraculous manifestation, seen by many, made clear to the Saints that the Lord had chosen Brigham Young to succeed Joseph Smith as leader of the Church.

In the afternoon session, Brigham Young again spoke, testifying that the Prophet Joseph had ordained the Apostles to hold the keys of the kingdom of God in all the world. He prophesied that those who did not follow the Twelve would not prosper and that only the Apostles would be victorious in building up the kingdom of God.

Following his talk, President Young asked Sidney Rigdon to talk, but he chose not to. Following remarks by William W. Phelps and Parley P. Pratt, Brigham Young spoke again. He talked of completing the Nauvoo Temple, obtaining the endowment before going into the wilderness, and the importance of the scriptures. He spoke of his love for Joseph Smith and his affection for the Prophet's family. The Saints then voted unanimously in favor of the Twelve Apostles as leaders of the Church.

While a few others would claim a right to the Presidency of the Church, for most Latter-day Saints the succession crisis was over. Brigham Young, the senior Apostle and President of the Quorum of the Twelve, was the man God had chosen to lead his people, and the people had united to sustain him.

Preparing to Leave Nauvoo

Leaders of the Church had talked since at least 1834 about moving the Saints west to the Rocky Mountains, where they could live in peace. As the years went by, leaders discussed actual sites with explorers and studied maps to find the right place to settle. By the end of 1845, Church leaders possessed the most up-to-date information available about the West.

As persecutions in Nauvoo intensified, it became apparent that the Saints would have to leave. By November 1845, Nauvoo was bustling with the activities of preparation. Captains of hundreds, fifties, and tens were called to lead the Saints on their exodus. Each group of 100 established one or more wagon shops. Wheelwrights, carpenters, and cabinetmakers worked far into the night preparing timber and constructing wagons. Members were sent east to purchase iron, and blacksmiths constructed materials needed for the journey and farm equipment necessary to colonize a new Zion. Families collected food and housekeeping items and filled storage containers with dried fruits, rice, flour, and medicines. Working together for the common good, the Saints accomplished more than seemed possible in so short a time.

The Trials of a Winter Trek

The evacuation of Nauvoo was originally planned to take place in April 1846. But as a result of threats that the state militia intended to prevent the Saints from going west, the Twelve Apostles and other leading citizens hurriedly met in council on 2 February 1846. They agreed that it was imperative to start west immediately, and the exodus began on 4 February. Under the direction of Brigham Young, the first group of Saints eagerly began their journey. However, that eagerness faced a great test, for there were many miles to be covered before permanent camps gave them respite from late winter weather and an exceptionally rainy spring.

To seek safety from their persecutors, thousands of Saints first had to cross the wide Mississippi River to Iowa territory. The perils of their journey began early when an ox kicked a hole in a boat carrying a number of Saints and the boat sank. One observer saw the unfortunate passengers hanging on to feather beds, sticks of wood, "lumber or any thing they could get hold of and were tossed and sported on the water at the mercy of the cold and unrelenting waves. ... Some climbed on the top of the wagon which did not go quite under and were more comfortable while the cows and oxen on board were seen

swimming to the shore from whence they came.” Finally all the people were pulled onto boats and brought to the other side.

Two weeks after the first crossing, the river froze over for a time. Though the ice was slippery, it supported wagons and teams and made the crossing easier. But the cold weather caused much suffering as the Saints plodded through the snow. In the encampment at Sugar Creek on the other side of the river, a steady wind blew snow that fell to a depth of almost eight inches. Then a thaw caused the ground to become muddy. Around, above, and below, the elements combined to produce a miserable environment for the 2,000 Saints huddled in tents, wagons, and hastily erected shelters while they waited for the command to continue on.

The most difficult part of the journey was this early stage through Iowa. Hosea Stout recorded that he “prepared for the night by erecting a temporary tent out of bed clothes. At this time my wife was hardly able to sit up and my little son was sick with a very high fever and would not even notice any thing that was going on.” Many other Saints also suffered greatly.

All Is Well

The faith, courage, and determination of these Saints carried them through cold, hunger, and the deaths of loved ones. William Clayton was called to be in one of the first groups to leave Nauvoo and left his wife, Diantha, with her parents, only a month away from delivering her first child. Slogging through muddy roads and camping in cold tents wore his nerves thin as he worried about Diantha’s well-being. Two months later, he still did not know if she had delivered safely but finally received the joyful word that a “fine fat boy” had been born. Almost as soon as he heard the news, William sat down and wrote a song that not only had special meaning to him but would become an anthem of inspiration and gratitude to Church members for generations. The song was “Come, Come, Ye Saints,” and the famous lines expressed his faith and the faith of the thousands of Saints who sang in the midst of adversity: “All is well! All is well!” They, like the members who have followed them, found the joy and peace that are the rewards of sacrifice and obedience in the kingdom of God.

Talk given by President Harold B. Lee, First Counselor in the First Presidency and President of the Council of the Twelve

The Day in Which We Live

I echo the sentiments of my beloved colleague, President Kimball, in welcoming into our circle of General Authorities our beloved associates, Brother Boyd K. Packer, Brother Joseph Anderson, Brother David B. Haight and Brother William H. Bennett. As you brethren and sisters come to know them as we know them, you will feel a great strength in their leadership.

President David O. McKay

We cannot pass this moment without remembering our beloved President McKay, and likewise to you, Sister McKay, if you are listening in, and to the remarkable family that President McKay has, we extend our love and blessings as we pass now to another era in the history of the Church.

Today The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints opens a new chapter in its 140 years' history since its organization in this, the dispensation of the fulness of times, as it is spoken of in the scriptures.

Another prophet, our noble President David O. McKay, has been called home to make a report of his stewardship as the earthly head of the Church. Always with the passing of a prophet-leader, there have been great happenings following thereafter, both in the Church and in the world. I have wondered if it could be that the report of the prophet to our Maker has had great significance in the affairs of men here on the earth.

Change in Church administration

The transition, in making the change of administration of the Church, is by a procedure unique and by an ordained plan that avoids, as Elder Kimball has said, the possibility of using political devices or revolutionary methods that could cause much confusion and frustration in the work of the Lord.

President David O. McKay and all of his predecessors as Presidents of the Church have bequeathed to us rich treasures of wisdom and knowledge. In the passing of each President, the hearts of a grateful people were in a figurative sense taken up with each of them. The records of their lives and their works, their words, and their ministries are fortunately lesson books, documented in the written history of the Church and in the memories of those who have followed after them. May God bless that legacy to the faithful everywhere. After all, their greatest records will be written in the hearts of those whom they sought diligently to serve.

It may be instructive and enlightening to many of the Church members and others who may be listening to these services to say something as it pertains to the reorganization of the Church following the death of the President.

The President of the Church

To those who ask the question: How is the President of the Church chosen or elected? the correct and simple answer should be a quotation of the Fifth Article of Faith: "We believe that a man must be called of God, by prophecy, and by the laying on of hands, by those who are in authority to preach the Gospel and administer in the ordinances thereof."

The beginning of the call of one to be President of the Church actually begins then he is called, ordained, and set apart to become a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Such a call by prophecy, or in other words, by the inspiration of the Lord to the one holding the keys of presidency, and the subsequent ordination and setting apart by the laying on of hands by that same authority, places each apostle in a priesthood quorum of twelve men holding the apostleship.

Each apostle so ordained under the hands of the President of the Church, who holds the keys of the kingdom of God in concert with all other ordained apostles, has given to him the priesthood authority necessary to hold every position in the Church, even to a position of presidency over the Church if he were called by the presiding authority and sustained by a vote of a constituent assembly of the membership of the Church.

The Quorum of the Twelve

The Prophet Joseph Smith declared that "where the president is not, there is no First Presidency." Immediately following the death of a President, the next ranking body, the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, becomes the presiding authority, with the President of the Twelve automatically becoming the

acting President of the Church until a President of the Church is officially ordained and sustained in his office.

Early in this dispensation, because of certain conditions, the Council of Twelve continued to preside as a body for as long as three years before the reorganization has effected. As conditions in the Church became more stabilized, the reorganization has effected promptly following the passing of the President of the Church.

All members of the First Presidency and the Twelve are regularly sustained as "prophets, seers, and revelators," as you have done today. This means that any one of the apostles, so chosen and ordained, could preside over the Church if he were "chosen by the body [which has been interpreted to mean, the entire Quorum of the Twelve, appointed and ordained to that office, and upheld by the confidence, faith, and prayer of the church," to quote from a revelation on this subject, on one condition, and that being that he was the senior member, or the president, of that body. (See D&C 107:22.)

Senior member of Twelve

Occasionally the question is asked as to whether or not one other than the senior member of the Twelve could become President. Some thought on this matter would suggest that any other than the senior member could become President of the Church only if the Lord reveals to that President of the Twelve that someone other than himself could be selected.

Orderly plan revealed

The Lord revealed to the first prophet of this dispensation the orderly plan from the Church leadership by predetermined organization of the earthly kingdom of God. He gave these specific guidelines, as we might speak of them:

Of the Melchizedek Priesthood three Presiding High Priests, chosen by the body, appointed and ordained to that office, and upheld by the confidence, faith, and prayer of the church, form a quorum of the [First] Presidency of the Church.

"The twelve traveling councilors are called to be the Twelve Apostles, or special witnesses of the name of Christ is all the world—thus differing from other officers in the Church in the duties of their calling.

"And they form a quorum, equal in authority and power to the three presidents previously mentioned." (D&C 107:22-24.)

Wilford Woodruff's letter

With reference to this subject, the fourth President of the Church, Wilford Woodruff, made a few observations in a letter to President Heber J. Grant, then a member of the Twelve, under date of March 28, 1887. I quote from that letter: ". . . when the President of the Church dies, who then is the Presiding Authority of the Church? It is the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles (ordained and organized by the revelations of God and none else). Then while these Twelve Apostles preside over the Church, who is the President of the Church [?] It is the President of the Twelve Apostles. And he is virtually as much the President of the Church while presiding over Twelve men as he is when organized as the Presidency of the Church, and presiding over two men." And this principle has been carried out now for 140 years—ever since the organization of the Church. Then President Woodruff continued:

"As far as I am concerned it would require . . . a revelation from the same God who had organized the church and guided it by inspiration in the channel in which it has travelled for 57 years, before I could give my vote or influence to depart from the paths followed by the Apostles since the organization of the Church and followed by the inspiration of Almighty God, for the past 57 years, by the apostles, as recorded in the history of the Church."

Revelation concerning Hyrum Smith

This calling of Joseph Fielding Smith to become President of the Church has a special significance: In a revelation given to the Prophet Joseph Smith in reference to Hyrum Smith, the grandfather of Joseph Fielding Smith, the Lord said this:

And again, verily I say unto you . . . that my servant Hyrum may take the office of Priesthood and Patriarch, which was appointed unto him by his father, by blessing and also by right;

"That from henceforth he shall hold the keys of the patriarchal blessings upon the heads of all my people.

"That whoever he blesses shall be blessed, and whoever he curses shall be cursed; that whatsoever he shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever he shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." (D&C 124:91-93.)

But in addition to this office, he was given another endowment which has never been given to any other patriarch to the Church who has succeeded him in this additional calling:

"And from this time forth I appoint unto him that he may be a prophet, and a seer, and a revelator unto my church, as well as my servant Joseph;

"That he may act in concert also with my servant Joseph; and that he shall receive counsel from my servant Joseph, who shall show unto him the keys whereby he may ask and receive, and be crowned with the same blessing, and glory, and honor, and priesthood, and gifts of the priesthood, that once were put upon him that was my servant Oliver Cowdery;

"That my servant Hyrum may bear record of the things which I shall show unto him, that his name may be had in honorable remembrance from generation to generation, forever and ever." (D&C 124:94-96.)

President Joseph F. Smith

His son Joseph F. Smith served as the sixth President of the Church from 1901 to 1918. President Joseph F. Smith, as a child, passed through the trying scenes of Missouri and Illinois. After his father, Hyrum Smith, was martyred by a mob at Carthage along with his uncle, Joseph Smith the Prophet, young Joseph F., although but a boy of nine years of age, drove an ox team across the plains from Missouri River, arriving in Salt Lake Valley in 1848. In 1852 his mother died, and two years thereafter he left for a mission to the Hawaiian Islands when but 15 years of age.

A noble son and grandson

This is the fibre of the Hyrum Smith ancestry from which our President Joseph Fielding Smith has come. I am confident that heaven is pleased today, and I doubt not but during the ministry of this noble son

and grandson, those who have gone on before will be permitted to draw near to their descendant, whom the Lord has now honored with this challenging responsibility, despite its great age. I would not at all be surprised if they were with us on this occasion.

I have said to members of Hyrum Smith's posterity, after I have quoted the prophecy to which I have made reference, that it is for them to strive with all their souls to be loyal to the royal blood of who prophets of this dispensation that flows through their veins.

Dependence upon God

Today's happenings have brought to me some of the most sobering reflections of my whole life. During the last ten weeks that have elapsed since the momentous spiritual experience, in company with 13 of my brethren holding the holy apostleship, in an upper room of the temple, where members of the new Presidency of the Church were chosen and ordained, I have lived my whole life in retrospect and the days ahead in prospect, to some extent.

Throughout these weeks, I have recognized my limitations and have realized more than ever before my utter dependence upon Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, for strength beyond my natural strength and wisdom beyond man's wisdom and spiritual insight into problems that might be my responsibilities now. Only with God's help can I begin to fill the position to which I have been chosen by the President of the Church and the Quorum of the Twelve, and now sustained by the vast body of the priesthood of the Church and by the membership of the Church in this Tabernacle and by the many faithful beyond our sight, who have participated in the proceedings of this solemn assembly.

I find myself almost trembling with a sense of my own inadequacy when I recall the great leaders of this dispensation who have preceded us in leadership positions. As I have thought of this, through long hours of meditation and prayer, I sense the reality of the fact that one, such as I, does not take the place of those who have gone on before.

We who are called to occupy these positions merely fill the vacancies created by the passing of time. Those who have gone on before still hold their places in the eternal worlds and in the hearts of the hundreds of thousands whom they have served.

"Led by the Spirit"

More than ever before, I understand what the ancient prophet Nephi felt when he had been given the seemingly insurmountable task by his father, Lehi, to gain possession of the brass plates in which were contained the scriptures of the prophets of the Old Testament, as we now know them.

Nephi had written of this experience: ". . . I, Nephi, crept into the city and went forth towards the house of Laban.

"And I was led by the Spirit; not knowing beforehand the things which I should do." (1 Ne. 4:5- 6.)

I understand now more than ever before the poignant prayer of the suppliant:

"Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom;

Lead thou me on!

The night is dark, and I am far from home;

Lead thou me on!

Keep thou my feet; I do not ask to see

The distant scene—one step enough for me."

—Hymns, No. 119

That, I too now sense very deeply.

I must go on many occasions, as did Nephi of old, being "led by the Spirit, not knowing beforehand the things which I should do." Yes, though the night be dark, "I do not ask to see the distant scene—one step [is] enough for me."

Pledge to serve

With all my soul I pledge to you faithful saints all my strength of body and mind and spirit, realizing full well, as the faithful King Benjamin taught, that though I spend my days in your service, "I do not desire to boast, for I have only been in the service of God." (Mosiah 9:16.)

I pray fervently that I too may learn that when I am in the service of you, my faithful brothers and sisters, saints of the most high God, I am "only in the service of your God," and my God.

I bear you my witness, as the Spirit has before, and does now bear witness to my soul, that there has been entrusted to this, the true Church of Jesus Christ in these latter days the true doctrines of salvation by which mankind may be redeemed, through the atonement of our Lord and Master, the Savior of the world. The Lord Jesus Christ does live and presides from his holy dwelling place, over this, his kingdom of God on this earth, through him who has been sustained this day as your President, a prophet, seer, and revelator.

I bear this testimony humbly and beseech of you your faith, your loyal support to put to flight all the conditions in the Church that could cause disturbance. May we continue to have the support of your faith and your prayers. And we pledge ourselves anew, to sustain you as faithful saints to the most high God. This I do humbly, and bear solemn witness this day, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

April 5, 1970

"The Kingdom of God Will Roll On": Succession in the Presidency

By Brent L. Top and Lawrence R. Flake

Through Joseph Smith, the Lord taught fundamental principles of succession that would be needed following the Prophet's death.

Ensign, Aug. 1996, 22

As the immediate shock and horror accompanying the news of the Martyrdom of Joseph the Prophet and

Hyrum the Patriarch subsided and the bodies of the fallen leaders were laid to rest, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was confronted with a challenge unlike any other it had faced before.

The Saints had endured persecution from their enemies—both from within and outside the Church. They had lost their lands and homes and had been driven from place to place. They had witnessed the apostasy of and betrayal by some of the Church's leading officers. Some of the actions of these apostates helped bring about the infamous Extermination Order by Missouri's governor Lilburn W. Boggs. Despite these difficult challenges, the Church survived.

Many of the Saints had come to believe they would be able to withstand any assault on the Church as long as the Prophet Joseph stood at their head. Following his death, the Church's enemies exulted in the prospects of what they considered the certain demise of the Church. Many of the Saints, weighed down with their profound sense of loss, faced deep uncertainty about their future. At the time of the Martyrdom, all but two members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles were serving missions in the eastern United States. Elder Wilford Woodruff and several of these brethren returned to Nauvoo on 6 August 1844. Of this occasion, Elder Woodruff recorded (original spelling and punctuation retained throughout): "When we landed in the City there was a deep gloom seemed to rest over the City of Nauvoo which we never experienced before. ... We were recived with gladness by the Saints throughout the City they felt like sheep without a shepherd, as being without a father, as their head had been taken away." But this feeling of gloom would soon be lifted, and the Saints' concerns about who would lead them would be quickly resolved through the leadership of President Brigham Young and the Twelve.

Thursday, 8 August 1844, stands as one of the most significant days in the history of the restored Church. A special council meeting had been convened a day earlier to hear and consider President Sidney Rigdon's claim to be the "guardian" of the Church. At the time of the Martyrdom, President Rigdon, First Counselor in the First Presidency to the Prophet Joseph Smith, was in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, having gone there contrary to revelation. Upon hearing of the deaths of Joseph and Hyrum, he hurried to Nauvoo. On 7 August he told the Saints about a vision he claimed to have received instructing him that the "church must be built up to Joseph, and that all the blessings we receive must come through him." Sidney Rigdon further declared: "I have been ordained a spokesman to Joseph, and I must ... see that the church is governed in a proper manner. Joseph sustains the same relationship to this church as he has always done. No man can be the successor of Joseph." Following Sidney Rigdon's lengthy remarks, President Brigham Young briefly addressed the council and announced that a special conference would be held the next day, 8 August, to consider Sidney Rigdon's claim.



Brigham Young



Sidney Rigdon

During these meetings two events occurred that dramatically affected the Saints' perception of this crisis and determined the course the Church would follow. The first was President Young's statement on 7 August, at the first meeting, wherein he confidently and succinctly outlined who had the authority to appoint a successor to Joseph. "I do not care who leads the church ...," he proclaimed, "but one thing I

must know, and that is what God says about it.” He then boldly declared how God’s will was to be made known. “I have the keys and the means of obtaining the mind of God on the subject.” A day later, at an 8 August meeting of the brethren, President Young said that the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles held all the keys of the kingdom of God on earth and therefore constituted the Presidency of the Church:

“Their has been much said about President Rigdon being president of the Church leading the People, being the head, &c. If the People want President Rigdon to lead them, they may have him. But I say unto you that the quorum of The Twelve have the keys of the kingdom of God in all the world. They stand next to Joseph and are the Presidency of the Church, and hold the keys and would have to ordain any man unto that appointment that should be Chosen, ie. if one was to be chosen. You Cannot appoint any man at our head. We should have to ordain him. You Cannot appoint a man at our head. But if you want any other man to lead you, take him, and we will go our way to build up the kingdom in all the world.

“... But who is the head? The Twelve. If one Thousand rise up and say they have the Prophets Joseph shoes I know they are impostures. ... Now If you want Rigdon Lyman or Law to lead you or any body else, you may have them. But I tel you in the name of the Lord, that no man Can put another between the Twelve and the Prophet Joseph. Why? Because Joseph was their file leader and he has Committed into there hands the keys of the kingdom for all the world. Dont put a thread between the Priesthood and God.”



Benjamin F. Johnson

In addition to President Young’s powerful and persuasive teachings regarding the authority and leadership of the Twelve, with himself at their head, another event had a profound impact on the Saints. As President Young spoke to the congregation, the Lord manifested in a most miraculous manner that Brigham Young was indeed chosen to lead the Church at that time. Benjamin F. Johnson, a 26-year-old member of the Church who was present that day, later recalled that as President Young spoke, “I jumped upon my feet, for in every possible degree it was Joseph’s voice, and his person, in look, attitude, dress and appearance was Joseph himself, personified; and I knew in a moment the spirit and mantle of Joseph was upon him.” Several others who were present bore similar testimonies, including a 17-year-old British convert, George Q. Cannon:



George Q. Cannon

“If Joseph had risen from the dead and again spoken in their hearing, the effect could not have been more startling than it was to many present at that meeting; it was the voice of Joseph himself; and not

only was it the voice of Joseph which was heard, but it seemed in the eyes of the people as if it were the very person of Joseph which stood before them. A more wonderful and miraculous event than was wrought that day in the presence of that congregation we never heard of. The Lord gave his people a testimony that left no room for doubt as to who was the man chosen to lead them.”



Joseph Fielding

Even before this special conference convened, most of the Saints had already accepted the leadership of the Twelve. Others who may have had unresolved questions undoubtedly were influenced by President Young’s powerful discourse and the miraculous transformation that demonstrated that Joseph’s prophetic mantle had fallen upon President Young. Because of that event and the Saints’ awareness of the special relationship between Joseph and the Twelve and the unique roles the Prophet assigned them during his later years, “the Saints soon began to see how things were,” Joseph Fielding reported. They also saw “that the 12 must now hold the Keys of Power and Authority according to the Revelation which says the 12 are equal with the First Presidency. ... It was now no hard thing determining who should lead the Church.”

The Saints overwhelmingly accepted the Twelve, with Brigham Young as President of the Church. The minutes of the special conference recorded that almost every hand was raised when President Young asked: “Does the church want, and is it their only desire to sustain the Twelve as the First Presidency of this people? ... All that are in favor of this, ... manifest it by holding up the right hand.” The cloud of gloom and uncertainty that had been over the Saints was removed, and in its place came confidence, renewed dedication, and almost universal support of the Quorum of the Twelve and President Young as their head.

Principles of Succession Revealed “Line upon Line”

Like many doctrines, as well as much of the structure and organization of the Church, the principles and procedures of succession in the presidency were revealed “line upon line, precept upon precept” (**D&C 98:12; D&C 128:21**). At the organization of the Church on 6 April 1830 there were no priesthood quorums or First Presidency. Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery were designated by the Lord and sustained by the Church as Apostles of Jesus Christ and as “first elder” and “second elder,” respectively (see **D&C 20:2–3**). Less than a year earlier and under the hands of heavenly messengers, they received priesthood authority and the keys of the kingdom essential to the establishment and governance of the kingdom of God on earth (see **D&C 13; JS—H 1:68–72**).

While there is little historical evidence indicating that Joseph or Oliver had given much thought to who would lead the Church in the case of Joseph’s death, based on the priesthood principles then revealed, Oliver Cowdery could have been considered Joseph’s successor. Oliver was, in fact, the “Assistant President” of the Church and the co-holder of all priesthood keys with Joseph. Even after counselors were called to assist the Prophet Joseph in March 1832 (see **D&C 81**) and after the formal organization

of the First Presidency in March 1833, Oliver continued in his office as “assistant-president to the High and Holy Priesthood” until his excommunication from the Church in 1838.

The Lord revealed to Joseph Smith in 1832 that the keys of the kingdom “belong always unto the Presidency of the High Priesthood” (**D&C 81:2**). A year later the Lord further revealed that the counselors in the First Presidency “are accounted as equal with [Joseph Smith] in holding the keys of this last kingdom” (**D&C 90:6**). Two years later the Lord stated that these “three Presiding High Priests ... form a quorum of the Presidency of the Church” (**D&C 107:22**). Despite these revelations, there seems to have been very little known by the Church about succession in the presidency in these early years. But in his wisdom, the Lord continued to organize the Church, reveal essential doctrines of salvation, and lay the foundational principles of succession that would be needed in subsequent years.

In February 1835, guided by previous revelation (see **D&C 18:37–38**) and a vision from the Lord, Joseph Smith authorized the Three Witnesses to select and ordain the first Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in this dispensation. The role of the Twelve Apostles was clarified to the Church “line upon line.” Initially the Twelve were primarily sent forth as missionaries and to set in order and preside over branches of the Church where there were no local presidencies or “standing high councils” (**D&C 107:36**).

“They are the Twelve Apostles, who are called to the office of the Travelling High Council, who are to preside over the churches of the Saints, among the Gentiles, where there is *no* presidency established; and they are to travel and preach among the Gentiles until the Lord shall command them to go to the Jews,” the Prophet Joseph taught. “They are to hold the keys of this ministry, to unlock the door of the Kingdom of heaven unto all nations, and to preach the Gospel to every creature. This is the power, authority, and virtue of their apostleship.”

In those early years the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles did not play as prominent a role in Church administration as it does now, nor did the Prophet Joseph rely on the quorum as heavily for counsel as he did other priesthood leaders. There was, in fact, some question in the minds of some as to whether the Twelve Apostles were above the “standing high councils.” A revelation on priesthood had indicated for a period that the “standing high councils” were “equal in authority” with the First Presidency (see **D&C 107:36–37**). But in January 1836 Joseph clarified the authority of the Twelve when he declared that they stood next to the First Presidency in authority “and are not subject to any other than the first presidency.”

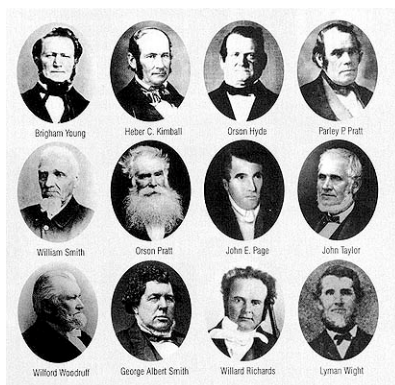
The authority of the Twelve and their relationship to the First Presidency was even more firmly established by revelation received by the Prophet Joseph in 1837. In Doctrine and Covenants 112:30–32 [**D&C 112:30–32**], the Lord declared:

“For unto you, the Twelve, and those, the First Presidency, who are appointed with you to be your counselors and your leaders, is the power of this priesthood given, for the last days and for the last time, in the which is the dispensation of the fulness of times.

“Which power you hold, in connection with all those who have received a dispensation at any time from the beginning of the creation;

“For verily I say unto you, the keys of the dispensation, which ye have received, have come down from the fathers, and last of all, being sent down from heaven unto you.”

The Twelve began to play a more prominent role in Church administration during the Missouri period, especially during the months of incarceration in Liberty Jail of Joseph, Hyrum Smith, Sidney Rigdon, and other leaders. The three senior members of the Twelve—Thomas B. Marsh, David W. Patten, and Brigham Young—were called to preside over the Church in Missouri after the excommunication of David Whitmer and his counselors in the spring of 1838. Later, several of the Twelve played key roles in leading the Saints during the Missouri persecutions.



The Twelve were “ordained and anointed to bear ... the keys of the Kingdom of God in all the world. ... The keys of the Kingdom are with them [the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles], and they can manage the affairs of the Church and direct all things aright,” said President Brigham Young to the Saints on 8 August 1844. At right are the members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles at the death of the Prophet Joseph Smith. Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, Orson Hyde, Parley P. Pratt, William Smith, Orson Pratt, John E. Page, John Taylor, Wilford Woodruff, George Albert Smith, Willard Richards, Lyman Wight

In Nauvoo, Joseph met more frequently in council with the Twelve, especially following the 1840–41 mission of nine of the Twelve in England. There they gained much experience through missionary service and through establishing branches and administering all aspects of the Church in Britain. The shared experiences of these Apostles increased their faith, dependence upon the Lord, and confidence in their leadership abilities. Their experiences also enlarged their view of their sacred office and divine authority.

Their return to Nauvoo in the summer of 1841 came at an important time when the Prophet Joseph especially needed their counsel and assistance in governing the Church. At a time of apostasy and renewed persecution, the Prophet gratefully reported that he now had a quorum upon which he could depend. It was at this time that the Twelve began to receive private instruction and increased authority from the Prophet that not only eased his burdens and blessed the Church but also paved the way for an eventual successor. At a special conference of the Church in 1841, Joseph said that the time had come for the Twelve to “assist to bear off the kingdom victorious to the nations.” Furthermore, the time had come “when the twelve should be called upon to stand in their place next to the first presidency” to administer the affairs of the Church on a general level.



Parley P. Pratt

From the summer of 1841 until the deaths of Joseph and Hyrum on 27 June 1844, the Twelve were extensively tutored by the Prophet and heavily involved with the temporal and spiritual governance of the Church. In the months before his death, the Prophet Joseph expressed his forebodings concerning his death. “He often observed that he was laying the foundation, but it would remain for the Twelve to complete the building,” observed Elder Parley P. Pratt. “Said [Joseph]: ... I am constrained to hasten my preparations, and to confer upon the Twelve all the ordinances, keys, covenants, endowments, and sealing ordinances of the priesthood, and so set before them a pattern in all things pertaining to the sanctuary and the endowment therein.

“Having done this he rejoiced exceedingly; for, said he, the Lord is about to lay the burden on your shoulders and let me rest awhile; and if they kill me, continued he, the kingdom of God will roll on, as I have now finished the work which was laid upon me, by committing to you all things for the building up of the kingdom according to the heavenly vision, and the pattern shown me from heaven.”



Wilford Woodruff

This last charge to the Twelve from Joseph the Prophet included not only instruction and the conferral of priesthood keys and authority to govern the Church, but also essential temple ordinances, including the endowment and the fulness of all priesthood blessings. This was an essential element of the Twelve’s claim to succession inasmuch as others who claimed the leadership of the Church after Joseph and Hyrum’s death had not received these priesthood ordinances and keys. Elder Wilford Woodruff testified that Joseph instructed the Quorum of the Twelve a few months before his death to prepare them for the endowment:

“And when they [the Twelve] received their endowment, and actually received the keys of the kingdom of God, ... he [Joseph] exclaimed, ‘upon your shoulders the kingdom rests, and you must round up your shoulders, and bear it; for I have had to do it until now. But now the responsibility rests upon you. It mattereth not what becomes of me.’ ”

In March 1844 nine members of the Twelve met with the Prophet Joseph and heard him prophetically declare:

“Brethren, the Lord bids me hasten the work in which we are engaged. ... Some important scene is near to take place. It may be that my enemies will kill me; and in case they should, and the keys and power

which rest on me not be imparted to you, they will be lost from the earth; but if I can only succeed in placing them upon your heads, then let me fall a victim to murderous hands if God will suffer it, and I can go with all pleasure and satisfaction, knowing that my work is done, and the foundation laid on which the kingdom of God is to be reared in this dispensation of the fulness of times. Upon the shoulders of the Twelve must the responsibility of leading this church henceforth rest until you shall appoint others to succeed you.”

With the deaths of Joseph and Hyrum Smith, the Twelve became the presiding quorum of the Church. President Brigham Young heard the news of the Martyrdom while on a mission in the East.

“The first thing which I thought of,” President Young recorded in his journal, “was whether Joseph had taken the keys of the kingdom with him from the earth; brother Orson Pratt sat on my left; we were both leaning back on our chairs. Bringing my hand down on my knee, I said the keys of the kingdom are right here with the Church.” Brigham was unwavering in his assurance that the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles had become the Presidency of the Church. With this assurance, Brigham declared to the Saints at the special conference in Nauvoo on 8 August 1844 that the Twelve were “ordained and anointed to bear off the keys of the Kingdom of God in all the world. ... If you let the Twelve remain and act in their place the keys of the Kingdom are with them, and they can manage the affairs of the Church and direct all things aright.”

“Where I Am Not, There Is No First Presidency”

Although Sidney Rigdon claimed, by virtue of his calling as Joseph’s spokesman (see **D&C 100:9**) and as a counselor in the First Presidency, that he should be sustained as “guardian,” his claim had no validity. The most obvious reason was that Elder Rigdon had virtually left the Church months earlier and had played no significant role in the administration of the spiritual affairs of the Church for a considerable period. In fact, Elder Rigdon had disregarded a revelation from the Lord regarding his calling in the First Presidency when he left Nauvoo and went to Pennsylvania (see **D&C 124:108–9**).

The Prophet Joseph essentially lost confidence in Elder Rigdon’s leadership, as evidenced by the Prophet’s desire as early as 1843 not to have him as a counselor. After Hyrum pleaded in Elder Rigdon’s behalf and the Church sustained him, Joseph responded, “I have thrown him off my shoulders, and you have put him on me. ... You may carry him, but I will not.” Perhaps it was Elder Rigdon’s failure to stay faithful in his calling and his lack of loyalty to the Prophet that Brigham Young alluded to when he declared to the Saints in Nauvoo following the Prophet’s death:

“Here is Brigham, have his knees ever faltered? Have his lips ever quivered? Here is Heber and the rest of the Twelve, an independent body who have the keys of the priesthood—the keys of the kingdom of God to deliver to all the world: this is true, so help me God. They stand next to Joseph, and are as the First Presidency of the Church.”



Brigham Young

Additionally, Sidney Rigdon (as well as others who claimed the right to succeed Joseph) never received the fulness of priesthood ordinances as had the Twelve. The earlier teaching of Joseph Smith that “where I am not, there is no First Presidency over the Twelve” is of critical importance. Under this principle, Sidney Rigdon and Amasa Lyman were automatically released as counselors in the First Presidency upon the death of Joseph Smith and had no rightful claim or authority to lead the Church. During the special conference on 8 August 1844, an understanding of this important principle led President Brigham Young to state:

“I now wish to speak of the organization of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter day Saints; Sidney Rigdon and Amasa Lyman were Counsellors to Joseph. I ask where is Joseph? He is gone beyond the vail, and for them to act in their office as his Councillors they must go beyond the veil where he is. ...

“Elder S. Rigdon Claims to be a spokesman to Joseph. Vary well he is. But can he now act in that office? If he wants now to be a spokesman to the prophet, he must go [to] the other side of the veil for the Prophet is there. But Elder Rigdon is here.”



Amasa Lyman

After Brigham Young had addressed the Saints, Amasa Lyman spoke briefly and acknowledged the principle taught by President Young and supported him and the Twelve, stating, “If Joseph Smith had any power to bear off the kingdom of God, the Twelve have the same.”



Heber C. Kimball

There was perhaps one exception to this principle, even though it did not play a role in the 1844 succession or in any subsequent succession. Hyrum Smith, who was not only the Patriarch of the Church but also a counselor in the First Presidency, had been ordained in 1841 as Assistant President of the Church (see **D&C 124:91–96**). He, like Oliver Cowdery until his excommunication in 1838, held the keys jointly with the Prophet Joseph and would have been the rightful successor to the Prophet. But such a scenario was moot when Hyrum fell as a martyr with Joseph. With the deaths of both Joseph and Hyrum, there was no “First Presidency over the Twelve.” Of this fact Elder Heber C. Kimball testified:

“Joseph has passed behind the vail and he pulled off his shoes, and some one else puts them on, until he passes the vail to Bro. Joseph. President Young is our president, and our head, and he puts the shoes on first. If Brother Hyrum had remained here, he would have put them on—Hyrum is gone with Joseph and

is still his counsellor. The Twelve have received the keys of the kingdom and as long as there is one of them left, he will hold them in preference to any one else.”

With these principles firmly established and taught to the Saints, there was really no other alternative than for the Twelve to succeed Joseph. Some, including Emma Smith, later advocated that William Marks, president of the Nauvoo Stake and the presiding officer of the “standing high council” in Nauvoo, was the rightful successor. William Marks, however, made no such claim himself and in fact supported Sidney Rigdon’s claim to the presidency. A few months after President Brigham Young and others of the Twelve had addressed the Saints in Nauvoo, William Marks recognized his error and publicly supported Brigham Young and the Twelve as the rightful leaders of the Church.



William Marks

“After mature and candid deliberation, I am fully and satisfactorily convinced that Mr. Sidney Rigdon’s claims to the presidency of the church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, are not founded in truth. I have been deceived by his specious pretences, and now feel to warn every one over whom I may have any influence to beware of him, and his pretended visions and revelations. The Twelve are the proper persons to lead the church.”

Not all the Saints accepted the leadership of Brigham Young and the Twelve. Several sought the right to lead the Church or established their own churches based on various claims. Tracing their claims and their history, however, one can see the fulfillment of President Young’s prophecy, “All that want to draw away a party from the church after them, let them do it if they can, but they will not prosper.”

It is a fundamental truth that the Almighty knows the end from the beginning. It is his gospel, his Church, his kingdom. He has foreordained all the prophets from the foundations of the world. These prophets, he said, “I will make my rulers” (**Abr. 3:23**). The Lord God then tries, tests, and tutors each of his chosen servants. Each is prepared for a specific time and responsibility in carrying on the Lord’s work on earth. Therefore, all speculation relating to various avenues to succession are just that—speculation. The Lord knew who the successor of the Prophet Joseph Smith would be. He knew who the successors to Presidents Young, Taylor, Woodruff, and every other Church President would be.

Since God is omniscient, it is foolish to suppose that he left his infant Church to flounder without a clear path to succession.

The Principles of Succession in the Church Today

While specific procedures and protocol of various successions in the presidency since the death of the Prophet Joseph Smith differ slightly from one another, the fundamental principles are the same and are founded securely on revelation. Four foundational principles and practices were operative in 1844 and have been manifest in every succession since.



Harold B. Lee

1. Keys of the kingdom given to the Twelve. The first principle or step in succession is the conferral of the keys of the kingdom on every man who is ordained to the holy apostleship and set apart as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles (see **D&C 27:12–13**). “The beginning of the call of one to be President of the Church,” President Harold B. Lee taught, “actually begins when he is called, ordained, and set apart to become a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Such a call by prophecy, or in other words, by the inspiration of the Lord to the one holding the keys of presidency, and the subsequent ordination and setting apart by the laying on of hands by that same authority, places each apostle in a priesthood quorum of twelve men holding the apostleship.

“Each apostle so ordained under the hands of the President of the Church, who holds the keys of the kingdom of God in concert with all other ordained apostles, has given to him the priesthood authority necessary to hold every position in the Church, even to a position of presidency over the Church if he were called by the presiding authority and sustained by a vote of a constituent assembly of the membership of the Church.”



James E. Faust

With the Quorum of the Twelve holding the same keys of the kingdom as do the First Presidency, these two presiding quorums work together as the highest council of the Church—the Council of the First Presidency and the Twelve. The revelations also decree that the decisions made by these prophets, seers, and revelators “must be by the unanimous voice of the same; that is, every member in each quorum must be agreed to its decisions, in order to make their decisions of the same power or validity one with the other” (**D&C 107:27**). This principle of unanimity is a profound blessing to the entire Church. As Elder James E. Faust of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said, it “provides a check on bias and personal idiosyncrasies. It ensures that God rules through the Spirit, not man through majority or compromise. ... It guards against the foibles of man.”



Gordon B. Hinckley

The principles of councils, quorums, keys, and unanimity ensure that the Church will roll forward under the guiding hand of the Lord regardless of the mortal limitations and inadequacies that individual leaders may possess. What happens, however, if, whenever it might be, a Church President is not able to fully function in his office? Is the Church left without prophetic leadership? Even if the President of the Church is slowed in his service or debilitated in any way by advanced age or serious illness, the Lord's divine system of Church government allows for counselors and councils composed of men sustained as prophets, seers, and revelators endowed with the same keys as the President to continue to direct and lead the kingdom of God on earth. There have been several times in the history of the Church when the President has been incapacitated to some degree and it was expedient that the First Presidency and Twelve continue with the governance of the Church. This should not in any way trouble the membership of the Church, but rather should be a source of inspiration as we witness the Lord's perfect system of governance in operation as it has been revealed. President Gordon B. Hinckley, who knows from personal experience how these principles operate when the President of the Church is ill and incapacitated, has testified that "God is at the helm" and that He has made provision for the ongoing divine governance of the Church: "[There have been] Presidents of the Church [who] have ... been ill or unable to function fully in the closing months or years of their lives. It is possible that this will happen in the future.

"The principles and procedures which the Lord has put in place for the governance of His church make provision for any such circumstance. It is important ... that there be no doubts or concerns about the governance of the Church and the exercise of the prophetic gifts, including the right to inspiration and revelation in administering the affairs and programs of the Church, when the President may be ill or is not able to function fully.

"The First Presidency and the Council of the Twelve Apostles, called and ordained to hold the keys of the priesthood, have the authority and responsibility to govern the Church, to administer its ordinances, to expound its doctrine, and to establish and maintain its practices. Each man who is ordained an Apostle and sustained a member of the Council of the Twelve is sustained as a prophet, seer, and revelator. ... Therefore, all incumbent members of the Quorum of the First Presidency and of the Council of the Twelve have been recipients of the keys, rights, and authority pertaining to the holy apostleship. ...

"When the President is ill or not able to function fully in all of the duties of his office, his two Counselors together comprise a Quorum of the First Presidency. They carry on with the day-to-day work of the Presidency. In exceptional circumstances, when only one may be able to function, he may act in the authority of the office of the Presidency as set forth in the Doctrine and Covenants, section 102, verses 10–11. ...

“[After a new President of the Church is ordained and set apart and the First Presidency is reorganized and his Counselors are set apart, the President signs] with his own hand powers of agency giving each of his Counselors the authority to direct the business of the Church.

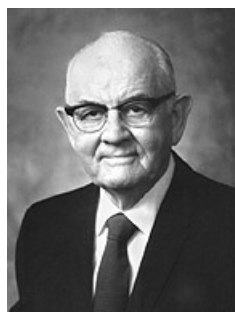
“Under these specific and plenary delegations of authority, the Counselors in the First Presidency carry on with the regular work of this office. But any major questions of policy, procedures, programs, or doctrine are considered deliberately and prayerfully by the First Presidency and the Twelve together. ...

“This procedure obtains even in the absence of the President of the Church. I hasten to add, however, that the Brethren would not be inclined to do anything which they feel would be out of harmony with the attitude, feelings, and position of their beloved leader, the prophet of the Lord.

“It must be recognized that the President, when he became the senior Apostle, had moved up through the ranks of seniority over a period of many years of service in the Quorum of the Twelve. During this time, his Brethren came to know him well. During the years of his ministry, he expressed himself on the many issues that came before that quorum. His views became well known. Those who love him, respect him, sustain and honor him as President of the Church and prophet, seer, and revelator of the Lord would not be disposed to go beyond what they recognize his position would be on any issue under consideration.

“I repeat for emphasis that all who have been ordained to the holy apostleship have had bestowed upon them the keys and the authority of this most high and sacred office. In this authority reside the powers of governance of the Church and kingdom of God in the earth. There is order in the exercise of that authority. It is specifically set forth in the revelations of the Lord. It is known to all of the Brethren and is observed by all.”

2. Seniority: a governing principle of presidency. The factor that determines who presides among the Twelve and who may actively exercise all the keys of the kingdom at the death of the President of the Church is the principle of seniority. In 1835, when the first Quorum of the Twelve was called, seniority was arranged by age. Since then, seniority has been determined by the date of ordination into the Quorum of the Twelve.



Spencer W. Kimball

“The matter of seniority is basic in the first quorums of the Church,” President Spencer W. Kimball explained. “All the apostles understand this perfectly, and all well-trained members of the Church are conversant with this perfect succession program.”

In addition to determining presidency, the principles of seniority provide rich, practical blessings in Church administration—wisdom, knowledge, and inspiration that have been acquired and tempered through plentiful experience. The omniscience of the Lord is always manifest in the preparation of his chosen prophets through their many assignments and responsibilities in the Twelve.



John A. Widtsoe

“This is a wise procedure,” Elder John A. Widtsoe said. “It places at the head of the Church the apostle who has been longest in service. He is known well to the people and trusted by them. He himself knows the procedure of Church affairs. He is no novice to be trained for the position.”

3. At the President’s death there is no First Presidency over the Twelve. Following the principles taught by the Prophet Joseph Smith, when the President of the Church dies, the quorum of the First Presidency is automatically dissolved and the counselors, if they previously had been in the Quorum of the Twelve, return to their respective places of seniority in that quorum. The senior Apostle, as President of the Twelve, automatically, by virtue of that seniority, becomes the “Presiding High Priest” of the Church and, as such, actively holds and exercises all the keys of the kingdom and “preside[s] over the whole church” (see **D&C 107:65–66, 91**). “Equal in authority” to the First Presidency, this presiding quorum of Twelve Apostles is as much a Presidency of the Church as the First Presidency is when it is fully organized and operative (see **D&C 107:23–24**). Likewise, the President of the Twelve at that time is as much the President of the Church in function and authority as when he becomes sustained as such in a newly organized First Presidency.



Joseph Fielding Smith

“There is no mystery about the choosing of the successor to the President of the Church,” President Joseph Fielding Smith confirmed. “The Lord settled this a long time ago, and the *senior apostle automatically becomes the presiding officer of the Church*, and he is so sustained by the Council of the Twelve which becomes the presiding body of the Church when there is no First Presidency.”

4. Reorganization of the First Presidency. As the presiding officer of the Church, the President of the Twelve has the prerogative to receive revelation regarding when to reorganize the First Presidency. This decision is made in consultation with and through the unanimous support of the Quorum of the Twelve. President Gordon B. Hinckley explained how this process worked upon the death of President Howard W. Hunter:

“With President Hunter’s passing, the First Presidency was dissolved. Brother Monson and I, who had served as his counselors, took our places in the Quorum of the Twelve, which became the presiding authority of the Church.

“[On Sunday, 12 March 1995] all of the living ordained Apostles gathered in a spirit of fasting and prayer in the upper room of the temple. Here we sang a sacred hymn and prayed together. We partook of the sacrament of the Lord’s supper, renewing in that sacred, symbolic testament our covenants and our relationship with Him who is our divine Redeemer.

“The presidency was then reorganized, following a precedent well established through generations of the past.

“There was no campaigning, no contest, no ambition for office. It was quiet, peaceful, simple, and sacred. It was done after the pattern which the Lord himself had put in place.”

The new President is ordained and set apart as the President of the Church by the members of the Quorum of the Twelve. He then selects his counselors and sets them apart in the First Presidency. When the First Presidency is reorganized, it once again assumes its revealed role as the “highest council of the church” (**D&C 107:80**). The Twelve return to their roles as councilors serving under the direction of the First Presidency. The second senior Apostle is always sustained as the new President of the Quorum of the Twelve. If he is called as a counselor in the newly organized First Presidency, then the next senior member of the Twelve not in the First Presidency is set apart as the Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. With these actions completed, the pattern and precedents followed, the leading quorums of the Church are again fully organized and operative.

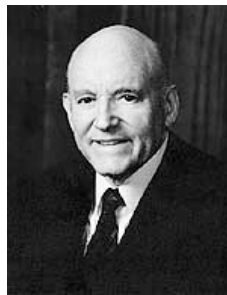


The application of the principle of seniority in the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles as a governing principle of presidency is seen here in the order of members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles at the dissolution of the First Presidency upon the death of President Howard W. Hunter in March 1995.

God’s earthly kingdom is a “house of order” and is governed in an orderly and systematic way. “What a divine plan!” declared President Spencer W. Kimball. “How wise our Lord, to organize so perfectly beyond the weakness of frail, grasping humans.” Today, members of the Church need no dramatic sign from heaven like the transfiguration of Brigham Young in 1844, for the principles have been clearly taught and the precedents firmly established. We need no special revelation to know that the Lord has selected whom he desires to lead the Church. But as we observe this inspired process of succession, we can see Divine Providence in operation. As we raise our arms to sustain a new prophet in solemn assembly, we can know within our hearts, by the power of the Holy Ghost, that the Lord has indeed spoken. It is through this inspired system of succession that the kingdom of God rolls on.



The First Presidency, left to right: President Thomas S. Monson, First Counselor, President Gordon B. Hinckley; and President James E. Faust, Second Counselor.



Howard W. Hunter

On the day that President Howard W. Hunter was sustained as President of the Church, he testified:

“Each man who is ordained an Apostle and set apart as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve is sustained as a prophet, seer, and revelator. The First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, called and ordained to hold the keys of the priesthood, have the authority and responsibility to govern the Church, to administer its ordinances, to teach its doctrine, and to establish and maintain its practices.

“When a President of the Church is ill or not able to function fully in all of the duties of his office, his two Counselors, who, with him, comprise a Quorum of the First Presidency, carry on the work of the Presidency. Any major questions, policies, programs, or doctrines are prayerfully considered in council by the Counselors in the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. No decision emanates from the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve without total unanimity among all concerned.

“Following this inspired pattern, the Church will move forward without interruption. The governance of the Church and the exercise of the prophetic gifts will always be vested in those apostolic authorities who hold and exercise all of the keys of the priesthood.”