

Lesson #33

PRESIDENT BRIGHAM YOUNG LEADS THE SAINTS

by Ted L. Gibbons

God chooses his leaders. This is true at every level of church administration. Joseph was chosen by the Lord and so were those who came after him. But in those early years., before the practice of succession in the church had be formalized, some members were uncertain of the format succession ought to follow. In an August meeting held to resolve the matter of succession, the Lord placed the stamp of his approval on Brigham Young. One account gives the record in these words:

Furthermore, the Spirit of God bore record to the Church on that occasion that the mantle of the Prophet Joseph--the power and authority that he was possessed of--were resting upon Brigham Young. The deceased Prophet's spirit was clearly reflected upon his utterances. A remarkable circumstance occurred on that occasion. Brigham Young was transfigured before the people, not only in voice but in appearance. President George Q. Cannon, who was present on that occasion, says:

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 (Tullidge's Life of Brigham Young, page 115).

1. THE PROPHET JOSEPH SMITH GAVE THE TWELVE THE KEYS OF THE KINGDOM AND TAUGHT THE PRINCIPLES OF SUCCESSION IN THE PRESIDENCY.

Wilford Woodruff wrote of the way in which the Prophet prepared the Twelve

for the care of the Church.

"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." (James R. Clark, *Messages of the First Presidency*, Vol.3, p.134)

With the death of President Joseph Smith, the First Presidency was dissolved.

"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." (President Harold B. Lee, *Improvement Era*, June 1970, p. 28)

The Saints, mourning their slain Prophet, wondered who would now lead the Church. Even though the Prophet had explained that the Twelve presided when he was gone, the principle had never been implemented before. Sidney Rigdon, had been first counselor to the Prophet, but he had gone into self-imposed exile in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, contrary to revelation (see D&C 124:108-109). He reappeared in the city on Aug. 3, 1844, and

asserted his right to be appointed “Guardian” of the Church. According to the words of Joseph Smith quoted by President Lee, what was wrong with his claim? (When Joseph [or any President of the Church dies] the First Presidency is dissolved). Of the twelve apostles, only Elder Taylor, who was severely wounded at Carthage and still recovering, and Elder Richards, were in Nauvoo. The rest of the Twelve were still en route back to Nauvoo from missions in the Eastern states, and Sidney was able to get some support for his claims. A meeting was called for August 8, 1844 to consider the matter.

Most of the Apostles returned to Nauvoo on Aug. 6, 1844. The matter of the leadership of the Church had become a real crisis because Sydney Rigdon was publicly asserting his right to take over the *guardianship* of the Church.

Something happened on Aug. 8 to make clear to the membership of the Church the Lord’s will in the matter of succession.

- T A meeting was held the morning of Aug. 8 at ten o’clock.
- T Sidney Rigdon spoke for 90 minutes about his desire to be appointed the “guardian” of the church.
- T Brigham Young also spoke, at a meeting held at 2:00 pm the same day. While he was speaking, he was miraculously transfigured before the congregation. To many of the assembled Saints, wondering who should now lead the Church, Brigham spoke with the voice of, and had the appearance of, Joseph Smith. Read the testimony of Wilford Woodruff:

“Every man and every woman in that assembly, which perhaps might number thousands, could bear the same testimony. I was there, the Twelve were there, and a good many others, and all can bear the same testimony . . . just as quick as Brigham Young rose in that assembly, his face was that of Joseph Smith—the mantle of Joseph Smith had fallen on him, the power of God that was upon Joseph Smith was upon him, he had the voice of Joseph, and it was the voice of the shepherd. There was no person in that assembly, Rigdon, himself, not

excepted, but was satisfied in his own mind that Brigham was the proper leader of the people . . . There was a reason for this in the mind of God; it convinced the people. They saw and heard for themselves, and it was by the power of God.” (JD, 15:81)

The process of succession in the Presidency of the Church has occurred a number of times and now follows the pattern outlined below.

1. A man whom the Lord has chosen to preside one day over the church is called by revelation into the Quorum of the Twelve.
2. He is trained for his future calling as he outlives members of the Quorum above him until he is President of the Quorum of the Twelve, and only the president of the Church has been an apostle longer than he has.
3. At the death of the President, the First Presidency is dissolved and the Twelve become the presiding quorum in the Church. The President of the Twelve becomes the presiding authority (See D&C 107:22-24)
4. Counselors to the former President, if they were apostles, return to their places in the Quorum. Members of the Quorum assemble in the Temple and sustain the senior member of the Twelve as the President of the Church. Other members of the Quorum lay their hands on his head and set him apart as President of the Church.
5. The new President chooses two men (usually members of the Twelve) to be his counselors.
6. Any vacancies in the Quorum of the Twelve caused by the reorganization of the Presidency are filled.

2. AFTER JOSEPH SMITH’S MARTYRDOM, THE TWELVE PRESIDED OVER THE CHURCH AND BRIGHAM YOUNG WAS SUSTAINED AS PRESIDENT.

Prior to the completion of the temple, [Joseph] took the Twelve and certain other men, who were chosen, and bestowed upon them a holy anointing similar to that which was received on the day of Pentecost by the Twelve, who had been told to tarry at Jerusalem. This endowment was bestowed upon the chosen few whom Joseph anointed and ordained, giving unto them the keys of the Holy Priesthood, the power and authority which he himself

held, to build up the Kingdom of God in all the earth and accomplish the great purposes of our Heavenly Father; and it was by virtue of this authority on the death of Joseph that President Young, as President of the Quorum of the Twelve, presided over the Church. (Dec. 5, 1869, JD 13:49)

Following the martyrdom, the Quorum of the Twelve presided over the Church. This they did by virtue of the revelation stating that the quorum of the Twelve is equal in authority to the quorum of the First Presidency (see D&C 107:22-24) Thus, with the dissolving of the presidency they were authorized to preside in the Church. It was not until December 27, 1847, that the First Presidency was formally reorganized with Brigham Young as the President. But the Lord had already made his will known in this matter. Orson Hyde reported that the Twelve

“Were in council, communing together; and what took place on that occasion? The voice of God came from on high, and spake to the Council . . . What did it say unto us? “Let my servant Brigham step forth and receive the full power of the presiding Priesthood in my Church and kingdom.” This was the voice of the Almighty unto us at Council Bluffs

“Men, women, and children came running together where we were, and asked us what was the matter. They said that their houses shook and the ground trembled, and they did not know but that there was an earthquake. We told them that there was nothing the matter—not to be alarmed; the Lord was only whispering to us a little, and that he was probably not very far off. . . .” (Elder Orson Hyde, JD, Vol. 8. P. 234)

3 BEFORE LEAVING NAUVOO, THE SAINTS RECEIVED TEMPLE ORDINANCES.

In 1845 and early 1846 the Saints had two great goals. One was to finish the temple; the other was to leave it behind and go west. The Nauvoo Temple itself was dedicated and put into service in sections. Thus people could enjoy many of the blessings of the House of the Lord even before the house was completed.

The main outside walls of the temple were only partially completed when Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum were murdered in 1844. The martyrdom, however, caused only a temporary lull in temple construction. Even though the Saints knew they would soon be forced to leave Nauvoo and lose access to the temple, they were willing to spend approximately one million dollars to fulfill their Prophet's vision of erecting the House of the Lord. By December 1845, the rooms in the temple were sufficiently completed that endowments could be given there. During the next eight weeks 5,500 persons received these blessings even as they were hurriedly preparing for their exodus to the West. Brigham Young and other officiators stayed in the temple day and night. To maintain order, Heber C. Kimball insisted that only those with official invitations be admitted to the temple, which perhaps marked the beginning of issuing temple recommends. (*Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, Vol.4, TEMPLES)

Even after Brigham announced that the work in the temple would cease, the people continued to come and to hope. Their longing for the ordinances of God's house should be a lesson to us all.

THE SAINTS EXPERIENCED TRIALS AND MIRACLES AS THEY BEGAN JOURNEYING WEST.

Brigham Young was concerned that church enemies might make an attempt to prevent the departure of the Latter-day Saints and he was understandably anxious to begin the journey.

President Young determined that it could be at any moment. He directed that the brethren procure boats and have them in readiness to convey the wagons and teams across the river. The families who were ready should be prepared with four hours' notice to be on their way.

"If we are here many days," President Young observed, "our way will be hedged up. Our enemies have resolved to intercept us whenever we start."

President Young desired that the Saints would be on their way

before their enemies were aware of their movements. (Church News: 2/24/96)

Thus the first company of Saints departed in February of 1846.

On February 22, 1846 a raging blizzard, leaving twelve inches of snow, struck the Mormon pioneers huddled in their temporary camp at Sugar Creek, Iowa. Following this terrible storm, the weather turned frigid, "12 below Zero," even sealing the great Mississippi River from shore to shore. On one of these nights nine babies came into camp, born under almost every variety of frontier camp life imaginable. Eliza R Snow tells of one in a rude improvised shelter, the sides of which were formed of blankets fastened to poles stuck in the ground. The owner of the hut had peeled bark from cottonwood trees and had made a sort of a roof covering through which the water leaked, but helpful sisters held pans over the newborn child and its mother. (Elder Adam S. Bennion, C.R., April 1954, p. 96)

By September of 1846, almost all of the Saints were out of Nauvoo, but the last ones to leave were the ones least prepared to leave. They were forced out by heartless, brutal enemies intent on ridding Illinois of the Mormons and on the acquisition of property. These saints, facing the onset of winter and starvation, received a blessing from the Lord:

"On the 9th of October, while our teams were waiting on the banks of the Mississippi for the poor saints, * * * left without any of the necessaries of life. * * * and nothing to start their journey with, the Lord sent flocks of quail, which lit upon their wagons and their empty tables, and upon the ground within their reach, which the saints, and even the sick caught with their hands until they were satisfied." (History of Brigham Young, Ms., bk. 2, pp. 382-3). This phenomenon extended some 30 or 40 miles along the river, and was generally observed. The quail in immense quantities had attempted to cross the river, but it being beyond their strength, had dropped into the river boats or on the bank. (CHC, vol III, p. 136)

4. THE SAINTS EXPERIENCED TRIALS AND MIRACLES AS THEY

BEGAN JOURNEYING WEST.

Those who have observed the settlements and the success of the Saints in the valleys of the mountains might form an incorrect opinion about why they came here.

It might be thought by the casual reader of the history of the Latter-day Saints, that their coming into these valleys when and as they did was merely a matter of necessity, without design so far as the purposes of the Lord were concerned. President George A. Smith, one of these pioneers, very frequently stated—speaking of Latter-day Saints—"that we came here of our own free will and choice, because we had to." (Joseph Fielding Smith: Doctrines of Salvation, vol III, p. 347)

I suspect that there was another purpose at work, underlying the trials and travels of the saints. Jerry Lund, author of the Work and the Glory series, said it this way:

The question was asked, how Brigham Young was able to colonize a desert. The answer came simply that by the time he said "this is the right place" most of the physically weak had died and all of the spiritually weak had been left behind . . . [the Lord] was out to forge steel so hard it could become an instrument for his purposes. And if the metal was flawed, sometimes it must go back into the fire. ("A Stone Cut Out," CES Symposium, August 1989)

CONCLUSION:

In 1 Nephi 20:10 we read this promise:

For behold, I have refined thee, I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction.

By the time the Lord had located his people in a place where they could be relatively free for some time from persecution, he had a group of latter-day saints who had demonstrated repeatedly that they would keep their covenants by sacrifice (see D&C 97:8). With their assistance—their

discipleship—he could proceed to change the world.

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