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SUCCESSION TO BRIGHAM YOUNG

"For he that diligently seeketh shall find; and the mysteries of God shall be unfolded unto them, by the power of the Holy Ghost, as well in these times as in times of old, and as well in times of old as in times to come; wherefore, the course of the Lord is one eternal round." (1 Nephi 10:19)

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INTRODUCTION

Brigham Young is considered to be one of the most controversial Church Presidents in the history of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, potentially surpassing even the religion's founder, Joseph Smith. While acknowledged by many believing members to be the legitimate successor to Joseph Smith and the great temporal leader needed after the Prophet's death to preserve the Saints, still many find his spiritual leadership and prophetic calling lacking. This leads some to ask: Was Brigham Young considered to be a Prophet of God in his day, or just a temporal leader and Church President?

Two miraculous events are sometimes referenced as evidence that Brigham Young was called of God to be Joseph Smith's rightful successor. The first event was an alleged transfiguration of Brigham Young in 1844 to both look and sound like Joseph Smith, wherein Joseph and God showed the Saints that the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, led by President Young, should lead the Church. The second event is a lesser known miracle said to have occurred in December 1847. On December 5, 1847 it is alleged that the Quorum of the Twelve received a revelation calling Brigham Young to step forward and reorganize the Quorum of the First Presidency.

Both of these events have been disputed by those who oppose succession to the Quorum of the Twelve, as well as by some academic historians. These issues then become the subjects of this issue

of *One Eternal Round*: is there credible historical evidence to support the Transfiguration of Brigham Young? And is there evidence that the reorganization of the First Presidency in December 1847 was the result of revelation? This paper addresses the historical dialogue as well as new sources and perspectives concerning these events.

SUCCESSION TO BRIGHAM YOUNG

by
Jacob Vidrine

WAS BRIGHAM YOUNG CONSIDERED A PROPHET?

It is sometimes said or assumed that Brigham Young wasn't really a prophet, spiritual leader, or theologian and was only considered to be a good temporal leader or a strong hand to preserve the Church after the death of Joseph Smith. But was this really the case?

While Brigham Young didn't prefer to be called by the title "the Prophet" he consistently believed that he was inspired by God in his doctrinal teachings and revelations:

"A person was mentioned today who did not believe that Brigham Young was a Prophet, Seer, and Revelator. I wish to ask every member of this whole community, if they ever heard him profess to be a Prophet, Seer, and Revelator, as Joseph Smith was? He professed to be an Apostle of Jesus Christ, called and sent of God to save

Israel. If you know what the calling of an Apostle is, and if there were ten thousand of them on the earth at the same time, you must know that the words of an Apostle who magnifies his calling are the words of the Almighty to the people all the time. He never need be called in question whether he revealed the mind of the Lord or not.”¹

“‘Well, brother Brigham, have you had visions?’ Yes, I have. ‘Have you had revelations?’ Yes, I have them all the time, I live constantly by the principle of revelation.”²

In reflecting on the Adam-God Doctrine,³ he remarked:

“How much unbelief exists in the minds of the Latter-day Saints in regard to one particular doctrine which I revealed to them, and which God revealed to me — namely that Adam is our Father and God — I do not know, I do not inquire, I care nothing about it. Our Father Adam helped to make this earth, it was created expressly for him, and after it was made he and his companions came here. He brought one of his wives with him, and she was called Eve, because she was the first woman upon the earth.”⁴

As evidence that Brigham Young considered himself a Prophet, it is clear that he sincerely

¹ *Journal of Discourses* vol. 6 <7 April 1852> pages 319–320.

² *Journal of Discourses* vol. 3 <17 February 1856> page 209.

³ The Adam-God Doctrine and its history will be addressed at length in several future issues of *One Eternal Round*.

⁴ *Complete Discourses of Brigham Young* <8 June 1873> page 2971.

believed that the revelations he received built upon the revelations received by Joseph Smith:

“Will the time ever come that we can commence and organize this people as a family? It will. Do we know how? Yes; what was lacking in these revelations from Joseph to enable us to do so was revealed to me.”⁵

Other Church leaders under Brigham Young also considered him to be a Prophet, Seer, and Revelator who communed with God, and also reflected on the people’s struggles to accept his revelations. John Taylor said on one occasion:

“When Joseph Smith had anything from God to communicate to the children of men or to the Church, what was it he had to fight against all the day long? It was the prejudices of the people; and, in many instances, he could not and dared not reveal the word of God to the people, for fear they would rise up and reject it. How many times has he faltered? It was not that he was particularly afraid; but he had to look after the welfare and salvation of the people.

If the Prophet Joseph had revealed everything which the Lord manifested to him, it would have proven the overthrow of the people in many instances; hence he had to treat them like children, and feed them upon milk, and unfold principles gradually, just as they could receive them. Was all this because it was so hard to comprehend correct principles? No; it was because we were babes and children, and could not understand.

How is it now, under the administration of President Young? Much the same, in this respect. He has often

⁵ *Journal of Discourses* vol. 11 <10 February 1867> page 326.

found it very difficult to make the people understand things as the Lord has revealed them unto him.”⁶

Heber C. Kimball similarly preached:

“Brother Joseph is gone, and now brother Brigham Young, the Governor of the Territory of Utah, is our Prophet, our leader, our Revelator; and it is for me and you to listen to him with all diligence, the same as we would listen to Joseph were he alive. Brother Brigham is his successor; his word is sacred; and if you do not observe it, it will not be well, and there is where I fear for you, brethren.

...The question is asked many times, ‘Has brother Brigham got the Urim and Thummim?’ Yes, he has got everything; everything that is necessary for him to receive the will and mind of God to this people. Do I know it? Yes, I know all about it.”⁷

Wilford Woodruff also taught that Brigham Young was a Prophet:

“Any man who has traveled with President Young knows he is a prophet of God. He has foretold a great many things that have come to pass. All the Saints who are well acquainted with him know that he is governed and controlled by the power of God and the revelations of Jesus Christ. His works are before the world; they are before the heavens; before the earth; before the wicked as well as the righteous; and it is the influence of

⁶ *Journal of Discourses* vol. 6 <17 January 1858> page 165.

⁷ *Journal of Discourses* vol. 2 <13 August 1853> pages 107, 110–111.

President Young that the world is opposed to.”⁸

After the death of President Young he was still considered to be an inspired Prophet of the Lord. President George Q. Cannon on one occasion preached:

“Talk about revelation! You go and read the sermons of President [Brigham] Young, and if you do not believe now that he was a Prophet, I think after you have read them you will be sure he was, because he talked as a Prophet to this people concerning their future, and his words were full of godlike wisdom, and he poured them out in a constant stream during his lifetime.”⁹

In the Salt Lake School of the Prophets, John Taylor shared his view that Brigham Young moving to make the Word of Wisdom a binding commandment on church members was further revelation from God:

“I am pleased to see the zeal of the brethren regarding the Word of Wisdom, and according to the words of President Brigham Young, it had now become a law unto us. Some ask what right had President Young to do this? Just as much right as Joseph had to give a portion of a revelation at one time and then add to it afterwards.”¹⁰

Writing in 1887 about the Law of Adoption, a principle taught only on rare occasion by other

⁸ *Journal of Discourses* vol. 13 <12 December 1869> page 165.

⁹ *Millennial Star* vol. 53 <6 April 1891> page 450.

¹⁰ *Salt Lake School of the Prophet Minutes* <12 October 1883> page 528.

church leaders but preached upon many times by Brigham Young, Wilford Woodruff stated:

“Paul talked a good deal about Adoptions, but we did not understand much about it, until the Lord revealed it to Joseph Smith, and we may not, perhaps, understand it now as fully as we should. Still the Sealings and Adoptions are true principles, or *our Prophets* have been badly deceived.”¹¹

But when did Brigham Young begin to be considered a Prophet by himself and by others? Was it a gradual development, or an abrupt change?

While some mistakenly believe that Brigham Young was appointed Joseph Smith’s successor by Joseph himself while he was alive, that was not the case. As Lorenzo Snow said in the Temple Lot Case: “He was not appointed by Joseph Smith as the President. I do not understand that Joseph Smith designated him as his successor, and Brigham Young never claimed that he did.”¹²

It is true that Brigham Young was close to the Prophet during the Nauvoo period, participating from the beginning in the Holy Order, Council of Fifty, and the secret introduction of Plural Marriage. It is also true that Brigham Young received the Sealing Keys of Elijah and all the priesthood one man can give another from the

¹¹ *The Development of LDS Temple Worship 1846–2000* < 8 June 1877> page 66, emphasis and italics added.

¹² *Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Complainant, vs. the Church of Christ at Independence, Missouri* page 323.

Prophet Joseph Smith, as well as the “Last Charge” to bear off the Church and Kingdom to the world.

But the reality is that over 20 men received the Fullness of the Priesthood with its Sealing Power from Joseph Smith; Brigham Young was not alone in receiving it. Additionally, while the Twelve would use the “Last Charge” to promote their claims to Succession after Joseph Smith died, the Last Charge in reality was given to *all* the Priesthood Brethren of the Council of Fifty.

President Young himself admitted that when he heard that Joseph was killed, he did not think that he was the Prophet’s successor, and that himself being the successor was the last thing in the world to him:

“When I first heard of Joseph’s death the first flash across my mind was, ‘are the keys of the priesthood here?’ I was sat leaning in a chair, with Orson Pratt upon my left, **and I had no more idea, of it falling upon me than of the most unlikely thing in the world**, and I felt it come like a flash of lightening to my mind, and I said, ‘the keys of the kingdom are here.’ **I did not think it was with me**, but I felt that they were here, but knew that it was the Lord’s business.”¹³

So when did Brigham Young become Joseph Smith’s successor? He was first called to stand in Joseph’s shoes at a special conference of the Church on August 8, 1844, through a miracle that occurred at that conference, which in Church history is known as the *Transfiguration of Brigham*

¹³ *Complete Discourses of Brigham Young* <25 December 1857> page 1386, emphasis added.

Young. This miracle occurred due to the Succession Crisis — Joseph Smith had no designated successor living in August 1844 to lead the Saints, and his sons which he hoped would eventually succeed him were still young children, so it took a miracle from God to show the Saints who it was that they should follow.

THE SUCCESSION CRISIS

The Prophet Joseph Smith was not originally planning to die in 1844. The Lord did not intend for Joseph to die either. Instead of turning himself in to Carthage, the Prophet was given revelation to flee to the Rocky Mountains, understanding that if he was captured again, he would certainly be killed. He initially crossed the Missouri River with his brother Hyrum to flee Illinois, but returned and turned himself in due to some Saints saying he would be as a shepherd who fled when “the wolves came for the flock” and they insisting that he should give himself up.¹⁴ Brigham Young recalled:

“If Joseph Smith, jun., the Prophet, had followed the Spirit of revelation in him he never would have gone to Carthage. Do you understand that? ...Joseph intended to go West; he designed to raise a company to come to the very country we now occupy. He said, ‘I can see life and liberty and revelation in that course, but if I return to give myself up, it is death and darkness to the full; I am like a lamb led to the slaughter,’ and never for one moment did he say that he had one particle of light in

¹⁴ See *History of the Church* vol. 6 pages 545–550.

him after he started back from Montrose to give himself up in Nauvoo. This he did through the persuasion of others.”¹⁵

The Prophet foreknew the possibility that he would be killed. As early as 1842 and 1843 he expressed that this was a possibility in his sermons:

“I have sometimes thought that I should have felt more reconciled to have been called away myself if it had been the will of God; yet I know we ought to be still and know it is of God, and be reconciled to His will; all is right. It will be but a short time before we shall all in like manner be called: it may be the case with me as well as you. Some have supposed that Brother Joseph could not die; but this is a mistake: it is true there have been times when I have had the promise of my life to accomplish such and such things, but, having now accomplished those things, I have not at present any lease of my life, I am as liable to die as other men.”¹⁶

“I understand my mission and business. God Almighty is my shield; and what can men do if God is my friend. I shall not be sacrificed until my time comes; then I shall be offered freely.”¹⁷

In 1844 he expressed this sentiment as well to the Council of Fifty, remarking:

“If I can know that a man is susceptible of good feelings and integrity and will stand by his friends, he is my friend. The only thing I am afraid of is, that I will not

¹⁵ *Complete Discourses of Brigham Young* <21 March 1858> page 1412.

¹⁶ *History of the Church* vol. 4 <9 April 1842> page 587.

¹⁷ *History of the Church* vol. 5 <22 January 1843> page 259.

live long enough to enjoy the society of these my friends as long as I want to.”¹⁸

In the event of his death, Joseph Smith had intended his brothers Hyrum or Samuel to stand in his shoes as his successor until one of his sons became of age.¹⁹ Tragically, Hyrum was killed minutes before Joseph on June 27, 1844, and Samuel died only a few weeks later, inaugurating a succession crisis in the Church.

The Prophet originally did not intend to reveal and confer the Temple Ordinances pertaining to the Fullness of the Priesthood until the Nauvoo Temple was completed. Yet because of his concern that he might be killed before its completion, he was strongly impressed to confer those ordinances on select men and women before the Temple was finished. As John Taylor recalled:

“Joseph Smith, before his death, was much exercised about the completion of the Temple in Nauvoo, and the administering of ordinances therein. In his anxiety and for fear he should not live to see the Temple completed, he prepared a place over what was known as the brick store — which many of you who lived in Nauvoo will recollect — where to a chosen few he administered those ordinances that we now have today associated with endowments, so that if anything should happen to him

¹⁸ *Joseph Smith Papers: Council of Fifty Minutes* <11 April 1844> page 100.

¹⁹ For Samuel Smith’s appointment in the event of Joseph and Hyrum being both killed, see William Clayton Journal, 12 July 1844, *An Intimate Chronicle* page 138; for the fact that Joseph intended his sons to be his successors, see *One Eternal Round* issue #8 “Patriarchal Succession and the Birthright of Joseph Smith.”

— which he evidently contemplated — he would feel that he had then fulfilled his mission, that he had conferred upon others all the keys given to him by the manifestations of the power of God.”²⁰

Orson Hyde testified that Joseph Smith said he was doing this because of revelation and commandment from God:

“Brethren, the Lord bids me hasten the work in which we are engaged. He will not suffer that you should wait for your endowments until the Temple is done. 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 powers 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.”²¹

Between May 1842 and May 1844 the Prophet took select individuals through endowment ordinances and a “holy anointing” in order to confer upon them all the keys and power of the priesthood that one mortal could give to another mortal.

Finally, in March 1844 Joseph Smith organized the Council of Fifty to be the presiding body to *wield* the Theocratic powers of the Fullness

²⁰ John Taylor, *Journal of Discourses* vol. 25 <18 May 1884> page 83.

²¹ Joseph Smith, as recalled in a statement of the Quorum of the Twelve, March 1845, written by Orson Hyde, Brigham Young Office Files, LDS Archives.

of the Priesthood. As he initiated the priesthood brethren into the council, he gave them a charge to bear the responsibility of the Church and Kingdom of God on their shoulders. The apostles and others recalled a significant speech Joseph gave to the council in March 1844 wherein he reviewed his life of sacrifices and accomplishments, and told them that it would now be on their shoulders to bear off the Kingdom to the world or else they would be damned, for the Lord had accepted his labors and would permit him to rest.²²

It was by virtue of receiving the temple ordinances and a charge to bear off the kingdom that the Twelve Apostles believed and argued that they were fully authorized to lead the Church and perpetuate what Joseph Smith had restored and taught them.

But since the apostles themselves admitted that over thirty men had received the highest priesthood authority from Joseph Smith,²³ and every member of the Council of Fifty received the Last Charge,²⁴ it took revelation from God to determine

²² For more on the “Last Charge” see *One Eternal Round* issue #4 “New Light on Joseph Smith’s Last Charge.”

²³ “He [Sidney Rigdon] was not in the council pertaining to the High Priesthood until just before he started for Pittsburgh. Brother [W. W.] Phelps was the means of bringing him in, but he has not got the same authority as others; there are more than thirty men who have got higher authority than he has. ...There are men here, brethren who have got authority, but we don't want to mention their names, for the enemy will try to kill them.” (Heber C. Kimball, *Times and Season* vol. 5 <1 October 1844> page 663–664)

²⁴ “In regard to Joseph’s remarks [at the Last Charge], he did not mention any thing about the anointing; he said it was this council of fifty which had to bear the responsibility of

who specifically was to be called to lead the Saints. Ultimately, the Saints recalled a divine manifestation directing that Brigham Young and the Twelve Apostles were the right individuals to step forward and lead the Church — which they did, in connection to receiving the sustaining vote of the Saints in Nauvoo.

THE TRANSFIGURATION OF BRIGHAM YOUNG

When Joseph Smith died the majority of the Quorum of the Twelve were in the East on missions preaching his candidacy to be elected President of the United States.

Brigham Young recalled that Orson Pratt was with him in Massachusetts when they received the news that Joseph and Hyrum were killed. Brigham recalled “I felt as though my head would crack” and that his first thought was “is the Priesthood taken from the Earth?” Brigham then recalled that in an instant “it came like a clap – the keys of the Kingdom are here.”²⁵

While the apostles were still on their way to return to Nauvoo, Emma Smith, Sidney Rigdon, and William Marks, who were all against Joseph Smith’s secret teachings, were plotting to rush the succession issue before the apostles returned. On

establishing the kingdom in all the world.” (Brigham Young, *Joseph Smith Papers: Council of Fifty Minutes* <25 March 1845> page 380)

²⁵ *Complete Discourses of Brigham Young* <12 February 1849> page 317.

August 4, 1844 William Clayton learned that Rigdon and Marks were planning a meeting on August 8th to appoint a Guardian for the Church.²⁶

The apostles returned to Nauvoo two days later on August 6th, and the next day Brigham addressed the subject of succession with ambiguity:

“I do not care who leads the church, even though [if] it were Ann Lee; but one thing I must know, and that is what God says about it. I have the keys and the means of obtaining the mind of God on the subject.

I know there are those in our midst who will seek the lives of the Twelve as they did the lives of Joseph and Hyrum. We shall ordain others and give [them] the fullness of the priesthood, so that if we are killed the fullness of the priesthood may remain.”²⁷

The next day was the planned conference. The apostles had barely returned to Nauvoo two days prior, and at least several of the apostles were apparently not aware of it, for they did not attend but were busy in their own council at the time.²⁸

Brigham Young and some of the others apostles did make it to attend part of the meeting, as near the end of Sidney Rigdon’s remarks, when Brigham Young stood up many Saints experienced a miracle — at that brief moment President Young

²⁶ See *An Intimate Chronicle: The Journals of William Clayton* pages 136–141.

²⁷ *Complete Discourses of Brigham Young* <7 August 1844> page 39.

²⁸ *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal* vol. 2 <8 August 1844> page 434; *An Intimate Chronicle: The Journals of William Clayton* <8 August 1844> page 142.

both looked and sounded like the Prophet Joseph Smith. As Benjamin F. Johnson testified:

“A conference was assembled, and President Rigdon was called upon to put forth his claim before the people, which he did, and after closing his remarks, which were void of all power or influence, President Brigham Young arose and spoke. I saw him arise, but as soon as he 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.”²⁹

It was this experience that confirmed to many Saints in Nauvoo that Brigham Young was called of God to stand in the Prophet’s shoes and for the Quorum of the Twelve, under Brigham’s leadership, to govern and lead the Church.

Yet Brigham Young barely spoke on this occasion, only to call on the saints to meet again for an afternoon conference to discuss the issue of succession.

At the afternoon conference on August 8, 1844, Brigham Young and many others spoke and argued that instead of a Guardian, that the Church should continue to be organized as it was currently, except with the Apostles acting in the place of the First Presidency, having been anointed and ordained to bear off the keys of the Kingdom of God to all the world. They additionally proposed that Sidney Rigdon and Amasa Lyman continue in their callings as counsellors to the Presidency, as acting as

²⁹ Benjamin F. Johnson, *My Life’s Review* (1997 edition) pages 92–93.

counsellors to the Twelve. This ushered in a period of “Apostolic Interregnum” where the Quorum of the Twelve acted as the First Presidency until the time came that a new First Presidency would be organized.

ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE TRANSFIGURATION

In recent years it has become an increasingly popular belief that the Transfiguration of Brigham Young was a “Mormon Myth” made up years after the fact to bolster Brigham’s leadership claims. This view was strongly articulated by Richard Van Wagoner in his 1995 article “The Making of a Mormon Myth: The 1844 Transfiguration of Brigham Young” and reiterated the following year in Reid L. Harper’s article “The Mantle of Joseph: Creation of a Mormon Miracle.”³⁰

In response to this new position, in 1996 Lynne Watkins Jorgensen compiled accounts from over 100 different individuals who gave testimony to witnessing the Transfiguration of Brigham Young.³¹ Additionally, in 2014 Fred C. Collier

³⁰ Richard S. Van Wagoner, “The Making of a Mormon Myth: The 1844 Transfiguration of Brigham Young,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* vol. 28 no. 4 <Winter 1995> pages 1–24; Reid L. Harper, “The Mantle of Joseph: Creation of a Mormon Miracle” *Journal of Mormon History* vol. 22 no. 2 <Fall 1996> pages 35–71.

³¹ Lynne Watkins Jorgensen, “The Mantle of the Prophet Joseph Passes to Brother Brigham: A Collective Spiritual Witness,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* vol. 36 no. 4 <Winter 1996> pages 125–204. An updated version of this paper appears in

wrote a review of Van Wagoner's paper entitled "The Transfiguration of Brigham Young: Mormon Myth or Sacred History?" to also defend the historicity of the Transfiguration.³²

The three key arguments made against the Transfiguration are 1) That all the sources for it come years after the fact as a Utah-era myth that developed over time, 2) There were people who claimed to witness the Transfiguration who were not there, proving that it was a lie, and 3) some people did not experience it, and so it must have been invented.

NO EARLY WITNESSES?

The first argument commonly made against the historicity of the Transfiguration of Brigham Young is that there are no contemporary accounts of it and that all accounts of it come from the late 1850s at the earliest. While it is true that there were no explicit contemporary records of the Transfiguration, and that many accounts were given decades later, the reality is there were a number of early accounts of it only months later.

On November 15, 1844 Henry and Catherine Brooke wrote a letter stating that Brigham "favours brother Joseph, both in person,

Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations 1820-1844 published in 2017. I will be citing her 2017 updated essay in this paper.

³² Fred C. Collier, *Doctrine of the Priesthood* vol. 32 no. 3 <March 2014> "The Transfiguration of Brigham Young: Mormon Myth or Sacred History?"

and manner of speaking, more than any person ever you saw”:

“The loss of Brothers Joseph and Hyrum has been greatly felt but we have the twelve apostles to preside in their stead. Brother Brigham Young is president of the twelve and stands as prophet, seer, and revelator to the Church. He is an excellent man, and favours brother Joseph, both in person, and manner of speaking, more than any person ever you saw [or ever] looks like another.”³³

On December 8, 1844 Jesse C. Little wrote a letter to Brigham Young mentioning a previous letter he had received from Howard Egan:

“I rec[eive]d a Letter from brother [Howard] Egan at the time of the Conference he said if a man had been blinded he would hardly have known if it were not Joseph.”³⁴

This letter by Jesse Little only three months after the August 1844 Conference clearly indicates that at least one earlier letter about the Transfiguration has not survived.

Even Brigham Young’s own personal August 1844 letter to his daughter about the special conference appears to allude to the Transfiguration

³³ Henry and Catharine Brooke to Leonard Pickell, 15 November 1844, Yale University, cited in Jorgenson, “The Mantle of the Prophet Joseph” <2017> page 433; D. Michael Quinn, “The Mormon Succession Crisis of 1844,” *BYU Studies* Vol 16: <Winter 1976> page 212.

³⁴ Jesse C. Little letter to Brigham Young, 8 December 1844, Brigham Young Office Files, LDS Archives, cited in Jorgenson, “The Mantle of the Prophet Joseph” <2017> page 439.

experience. Brigham did not mention the Transfiguration, but he said that the “spirit of Joseph” was with them and implied he couldn’t tell the particulars, but then *immediately* mentioned the August 8, 1844 conference:

“All things are now reviving up again. The brethren prayed with all faith for us to return. I cannot say much about the families of brothers Joseph and Hyrum Smith, for I have not had time to call on them yet. I have been in council almost all the time since I arrived here. **This much I can say: the Spirit of Joseph is here though we cannot enjoy his person [in the flesh].**

Through the great anxiety of the Church there was a conference held last Thursday [i.e. August 8, 1844]. The power of the Priesthood was explained and the order thereof on which the whole Church lifted up their voices and hands for the Twelve to move forward and organize the Church and lead it as Joseph led it. Which is our indispensable duty to do.”³⁵

In May 1845, William Burton returned to Nauvoo from serving a mission, and wrote that the “spirit of Joseph appeared to rest upon Brigham”:

“We arrived in Nauvoo [in] May [1845]. . . . [There] was one change more that had taken place during the time that I was out on my mission, that greivious [sic] and hard to be borne, this was the Martyrdom of the Prophet and Seer and Patriarch, whose voices I could not hear,

³⁵ Brigham Young letter to Vilate Young, 11 August 1844, LDS Archives, emphasis added, quoted in Fred Collier, *Doctrine of the Priesthood* vol. 32 no. 3 “The Transfiguration of Brigham Young: Mormon Myth or Sacred History?” pages 25–26.

declaring the truths of heaven. But their [Joseph's and Hyrum's] places were filled by others much better than I once was supposed they could have been, the spirit of Joseph appeared to rest upon Brigham [but] lest I close these subjects I shall make my Journal to[o] lengthy. Great and mysterious are the ways of God."³⁶

So at least three 1844 accounts and one 1845 account of the Transfiguration of Brigham Young exist. Two of these accounts reference Brigham visually looking like Joseph Smith, and two of the accounts state that the "spirit of Joseph" was with Brigham.

Additionally, we have two accounts written in the early 1850s: Emily Hoyt wrote an account in her reminiscences and Caroline Barnes Crosby wrote one in her autobiography. Emily Hoyt wrote:

"The people were convened in the Old Bowry where Joseph had last spoken to the people. Sydney Rigdon made a speech and claimed to have authority to lead the Church others had similar claims. None appeared reasonable to me. The last one arose. It was the, then President of the Twelve, Brigham Young. He spoke to the people altogether in a different style from any of those who had preceded him.

A crowd of witnesses arose after Brigham Young had sat down and testified to the truth of what he had said. President Brigham Young arose from his seat the second time and addressed the audience. I had been well

³⁶ William Burton Diaries 1839–1851, May 1845 entry, LDS Archives, cited in Jorgenson, "The Mantle of the Prophet Joseph" <2017> page 435; D. Michael Quinn, "The Mormon Succession Crisis of 1844," *BYU Studies* Vol 16: <Winter 1976> page 212.

acquainted with Joseph the latter part of his life. We had been at his home many times and Joseph, Hiram and families felt at home with us.

...the God of Heaven who had said it was his business to provide for his saints, sent President Brigham Young home just in time, and clothed him not [just] with ‘the mantle of Elijah,’ but the spirit and power which had rested on Joseph. I was an eye, and ear, witness. The manner of reasoning, the expression of the countenance, the sound of the voice thrilled my whole soul. My own eyes had beheld Joseph’s murdered body. My own hands, had felt death’s icy coldness on his once noble forehead. I knew that Joseph was dead. And yet I often startled and involuntarily looked at the stand to see if it was not Joseph. It was not, it was Brigham Young and if any one doubts the right of Brigham to manage affairs for the Saints, all I have to say to them is this. Get the spirit of God and know for yourselves. The Lord will provide for his own. Has the word of the Lord ever failed. Brother [Brigham] Young will not live forever clothed with mortality. But He who rules in heaven and on earth will control all things by the counsel of his own will.”³⁷

Caroline Barnes Crosby began her autobiography in 1851, and wrote it up to 1857, indicating her account of the Transfiguration was also written in the early 1850s:

“Sidney Rigdon came to the stand and tried to show to the people that he was the rightful successor of Joseph. And his arguments were so powerful that many were

³⁷ Emily Smith Hoyt, *Reminiscences and Diaries*, LDS Archives, cited in Jorgensen, “Mantle of the Prophet Joseph” <2017> page 447.

almost persuaded to believe him such. But as soon as the twelve apostles with brother Brigham Young at their head took the stand it was shown conclusively where the power rested. It was the first time that I ever thought he [Brigham] resembled brother Joseph. But almost every one exclaimed that the mantle of Joseph had fallen on Brigham. For one I never had any doubts afterwards.”³⁸

NO CONTEMPORARY JOURNALS?

It is sometimes stated that for such an important miracle, Saints would have recorded it in their journals, and it is remarkably absent from journal accounts of August 8, 1844. To counter this claim, there are several *late* accounts that have been accidentally identified as journal accounts, and one journal entry that is potentially identified as an account of the Transfiguration.

In B. H. Robert’s 1903 publication of the *History of the Church*, he added a footnote to the August 8, 1844 speech saying that “in the Journal of William C. Staines of the date of August 8, 1844, the following statement is recorded” and quotes Staines’ account of the Transfiguration of Brigham Young.³⁹ The problem with this source is it was originally published as “reminiscences of William C. Staines” in 1891 — so it was his *reminiscences*, and not a contemporary journal.⁴⁰

³⁸ *The 1807-1857 Life Writings of Caroline Barnes Crosby* page 63, cited in Jorgensen, “Mantle of the Prophet Joseph” <2017> page 438.

³⁹ *History of the Church* vol. 7 <8 August 1844> page 236.

⁴⁰ William C. Staines, “Reminiscences of William C. Staines,” in *The Contributor* vol. 12 <June 1891> page 315.

A second alleged early journal entry is the account of the Transfiguration of Brigham Young recorded in the diary of George Laub, first published by Eugene England in 1978.

In March 1846 George Laub wrote a retrospective account in his journal of the August 8, 1844 succession meeting, and later made a second copy of his Nauvoo journal in early Utah. Eugene England mistakenly said that the account of this meeting with the Transfiguration was the original journal, and that the early Utah copy he wrote an account of the meeting but made no mention of the Transfiguration was a later journal.⁴¹

A careful study of both journals shows that Eugene England had the two journals backwards. The version of George Laub's journal with the Transfiguration was his expanded journal in early Utah that had additional details added to many entries and was written uniformly with the same ink. The earlier journal was written with a wider variety of ink indicating they were contemporary journal entries written over a longer period of time.⁴²

To counter the point that Saints who kept journals at the time in Nauvoo would have recorded it in them, Lynn Jorgenson pointed out:

"Some diarists who had been keeping fairly regular diaries stopped writing around the time of the martyrdom and did not resume until later. For example,

⁴¹ Eugene England, "George Laub's Nauvoo Journal," *BYU Studies* vol. 18 no. 2 <1978> pages 152, 166.

⁴² Van Wagoner, "The Making of a Mormon Myth" pages 20–21, footnote 76.

Thomas Bullock's personal journal shows a gap from June 15 until October 8, 1844, Charles Coulson Rich made no entries from June 28, 1844 to January 1, 1845 and Eliza Roxcy Snow ceased writing in April 1843 and did not resume until February 1846."⁴³

Van Wagoner arguably counters this by pointing out the absence of it in some journal entries written that day:

"Apostles Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, Willard Richards, and Wilford Woodruff, all of whom made 8 August 1844 entries in their diaries, make no reference to an epiphany. Such an event, had it truly transpired, would have stood at the apogee of world history, a physical metamorphosis unsurpassed except for the transfiguration and resurrection of Jesus Christ."

"Although Woodruff's recounting of the day consists of one of the longest, single-entry accounts in his voluminous diary, nearly 2,200 words, he makes no mention of anything miraculous."⁴⁴

Van Wagoner contrasts this long journal entry with no mention of the Transfiguration to many accounts of the Transfiguration given by Woodruff decades later. Yet Woodruff's "nearly 2,200 word" journal entry is not so impressive an argument, when you realize that all but 90 words of that entry were just recording Woodruff's notes from the speeches given that afternoon — it was not a detailed entry of Woodruff's personal thoughts

⁴³ Jorgenson, Jorgensen, "Mantle of the Prophet Joseph" <2017> page 151, footnote 63.

⁴⁴ Van Wagoner, "The Making of a Mormon Myth" pages 22–16.

and experiences that day by any stretch. Additionally, Woodruff left blank space, possibly anticipating writing further about that day, but apparently never did so.

What is significant is that Wilford Woodruff did allude to the Transfiguration in his February 1845 recollection to the Saints in Great Britain:

“On the second day after our arrival, Aug. 8th, 1844, we met in a special conference, all the quorums, authorities, and members of the Church, that could assemble in Nauvoo. They were addressed by elder Brigham Young, the president of the quorum of the twelve. **It was evident to the Saints that the mantle of Joseph had fallen upon him,** the road that he pointed out could be seen so plainly, that none need err therein; the spirit of wisdom and counsel attended all his teachings, he struck upon a chord, with which all hearts beat in unison.”⁴⁵

Additionally, it appears that Brigham Young may have subtly made note of the Transfiguration experience in his diary, contrary to Van Wagoner’s claim that he didn’t. In mentioning his brief morning speech to the Saints after Rigdon’s talk, Brigham Young wrote:

“...after Brother Rigdon had made a long speech to the saints (I should think 5 thousand) I arose and spoke to the people, my hart [sic] was swollen with compas[s]ion to[w]ards them and by the power of the Holy g[h]ost

⁴⁵ *Millennial Star* vol. 5 no. 9 <February 1845> page 138, emphasis added.

even the spirit of the Prophets I was enabled to comfort the hart of the Saints.”⁴⁶

Fred Collier pointed out in his 1988 paper “The Trinity and the Holy Spirits — The Doctrine as Joseph Taught it” that this statement may actually be even more direct than just feeling the Holy Ghost present with him in his remarks and noting that he comforted the Saints.

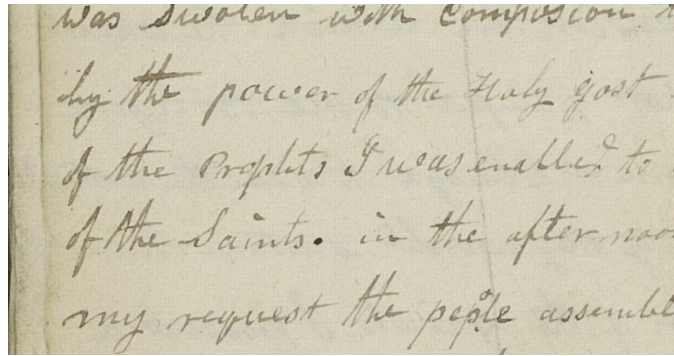
Fred views that the statement “by the power of the Holy Ghost even the spirit of the Prophets” actually reads “by the power of the Holy Ghost even the Spirit of the Prophet,” with a comma instead of a ‘s’ at the end. This would indicate that Brigham was alluding to Joseph Smith being the “spirit of the Prophet” with him on that occasion.⁴⁷ This of course would fit perfectly with Brigham’s letter to his daughter Vilate stating “This much I can say: the Spirit of Joseph is here though we cannot enjoy his person.”⁴⁸

Yet looking at the high resolution scans of Brigham’s journal, it isn’t clear cut, but the case certainly could be made that this was a direct reference to Joseph Smith:

⁴⁶ *Brigham Young: Colonizer of the American West, Diaries and Office Journals* vol. 1 <8 August 1844> page 95.

⁴⁷ Fred C. Collier, “The Trinity and the Holy Spirits—The Doctrine As Joseph Taught it” <1988> page 51.

⁴⁸ Brigham Young letter to Vilate Young, 11 August 1844, LDS Archives.



Brigham Young Journal, 8 August 1844, LDS Archives.

FALSE WITNESSES?

Another common claim made against the Transfiguration is that there were two individuals who claimed to witness it but were not present for the August 8, 1844 conference: Orson Hyde and John D. Lee who both gave accounts of seeing Brigham Young transfigured to look like Joseph Smith, yet neither were in Nauvoo at the time of the conference. Orson Hyde did not return to Nauvoo until August 13th, and John D. Lee did not return to Nauvoo until August 20th.⁴⁹

Yet John D. Lee was sincere in his belief *even after apostatizing* and in writing his autobiography recalled that he witnessed a “resemblance” of Brigham to Joseph in Nauvoo:

⁴⁹ Richard S. Van Wagoner, “The Making of a Mormon Myth: The 1844 Transfiguration of Brigham Young,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* vol. 28 no. 4 <Winter 1995> pages 17–18.

“Time passed on until the whole twelve got in from their missions, and a conference was held, and the several claimants came forward with their claims. Sidney Rigdon was the first who appeared upon the stand. He had been considered rather in the background for some-time previous to the death of the Prophet. He made but a weak claim, Strang did not file any. Just then Brigham Young arose and roared like a young lion, imitating the style and voice of Joseph the Prophet. Many of the brethren declared that they saw the mantle of Joseph fall upon him. I myself, at that time, imagined that I saw and heard a strong resemblance to the Prophet in him, and felt that he was the man to lead us until Joseph’s legal successor should grow up to manhood, when he should surrender the Presidency to the man who held the birthright.”⁵⁰

Was John D. Lee just an incompetent liar? It seems improbable that *if* he had adopted this as a cultural myth in Utah that his blinders wouldn’t have fallen off by the time he knew he was going to be executed for the Mountain Meadows Massacre. John D. Lee at this time was extremely bitter against Brigham Young, believing himself to be a scapegoat for a crime committed by many others and not just himself.

Orson Hyde is another individual accused of bearing a false testimony to being a witness to the Transfiguration. One of Orson Hyde’s accounts of the Transfiguration was in 1869:

“We went among the congregation and President [Brigham] Young went on the stand. Well, he spoke, and

⁵⁰ *Mormonism Unveiled: Or the Life and Confessions of John D. Lee* <1877> page 155.

his words went through me like electricity. ‘Am I mistaken?’ said I, ‘or is it really the voice of Joseph Smith?’ This is my testimony; it was not only the voice of Joseph, but there were the features, the gestures and even the stature of Joseph before us in the person of Brigham. And though it may be said that President Young is a complete mimic, and can mimic anybody, I would like to see the man who can mimic another in stature who was about four or five inches higher than himself. Everyone in the congregation — everyone who was inspired by the Spirit of the Lord — felt it. They knew it. They realized it.”⁵¹

The solution to these problematic accounts lies in the *earliest* accounts of the Transfiguration of Brigham Young. Many of the early accounts of the Transfiguration clearly did not speak of it as a one-time event but as a continuous experience. If the Transfiguration miracle occurred on later occasions after August 8, 1844, then neither John D. Lee or Orson Hyde necessarily were lying and could have been sincere in their testimonies.

Henry and Catherine Brooke in their November 1844 letter stated that Brigham “favours brother Joseph, both in person, and manner of speaking, more than any person ever you [ever] saw [or ever] looks like another”, apparently viewing it as an on-going event rather than stating it as only occurring on August 8, 1844.⁵² Similarly, William

⁵¹ *Journal of Discourses* vol. 13 <6 October 1869> page 181.

⁵² Henry and Catharine Brooke to Leonard Pickell, November 15, 1844, Yale University, cited in Jorgenson, “The Mantle of the Prophet Joseph” <2017> page 433; D. Michael Quinn, “The Mormon Succession Crisis of 1844,” *BYU Studies* vol. 16 <Winter 1976> page 212.

Burton, who was not in Nauvoo for the August 1844 conference, wrote in early 1845 “the spirit of Joseph appeared to rest upon Brigham,” also indicating it was an on-going experience.⁵³

Caroline Barnes Crosby’s account tied the Transfiguration to the conference in August 1844, yet she implied that wasn’t the only time that she saw Brigham look like Joseph, stating “It was the *first* time that I ever thought he [Brigham] resembled brother Joseph.”⁵⁴

Lynne Jorgenson noted that she, Ron Esplin, and Leonard Arrington all held the view that the Transfiguration was not a one-time experience, and that while the majority of Transfiguration accounts describe witnessing it during the morning meeting of August 8th, a smaller portion the afternoon meeting, and a few tie it to even later occasions.⁵⁵

If Brigham Young was accurate in his testimony, Albert Carrington stated that it was at the *October* 1844 Conference that he witnessed the transfiguration, not the August 1844 conference:

⁵³ William Burton diaries 1839–1851, May 1845 entry, LDS Archives, cited in Jorgenson, “The Mantle of the Prophet Joseph” <2017> page 435; D. Michael Quinn, “The Mormon Succession Crisis of 1844,” *BYU Studies* vol. 16 <Winter 1976> page 212.

⁵⁴ *The 1807-1857 Life Writings of Caroline Barnes Crosby* page 63, cited in Lynne Watkins Jorgensen, “Mantle of the Prophet Joseph” <2017> page 438.

⁵⁵ Lynne Watkins Jorgensen, “Mantle of the Prophet Joseph” <2017> pages 402, 404. Fred C. Collier also argues this view in his paper “The Transfiguration of Brigham Young: Mormon Myth or Sacred History?”

“Brother Carrington’s testimony proves to you that men’s eyes are liable to be deceived. It may appear strange to some that he could not tell me from Joseph Smith, when I was speaking in the stand in Nauvoo during the **October Conference of 1844**. Somebody came along and passed a finger over his eyes and he could not see anyone but Joseph speaking, until I got through addressing the congregation.”⁵⁶

Orson Hyde’s 1869 account seems to describe the October 1844 general conference as well, which would be fitting considering he was not present for the August 1844 conference.⁵⁷ William Clayton in a letter to Wilford Woodruff about the events in Nauvoo in September and October 1844, possibly also gives a later reference to it, writing:

“God is with us. He is with the Twelve in all their movements and if you was here you would see the mantle of the Prophet on brother Brigham very plain.”⁵⁸

Zadoc Knapp Judd recalled witnessing Brigham both look and sound like Joseph during a meeting in the Nauvoo temple, likely during the winter of 1845–6:

“This circumstance I am going to relate happened late in the fall or early winter. The people had usually convened for meeting [in] a little grove near the temple. A bowery had been built, and seats arranged to accommodate all.

⁵⁶ *Journal of Discourse* vol. 5 <19 July 1857> page 58, emphasis added.

⁵⁷ *Journal of Discourses* vol. 13 <6 October 1869> page 181.

⁵⁸ William Clayton letter to Wilford Woodruff, 7 October 1844, LDS Archives, cited in John G. Turner, *Brigham Young: Pioneer Prophet* page 113.

...In the meantime the building of the temple had progressed; the roof was on, the windows were in, the floor was laid, but no seats arranged. It was [a] very cold, wet Sunday and a drizzling rain. The meeting had been adjourned from the grove to the temple for their people could get shelter.

While waiting for the people to gather and also for the hour of meeting, Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball and some others of the quorum of the twelve had come to an upper room or kind of gallery and seemed to be passing and repassing an open door and window and from the position I had chosen, which was next to the wall and near the stand, I could see them very plainly, and although I knew Joseph was dead, I could scarcely make myself believe he was not there. His look, his motion, his walk, were precisely like that of Joseph and yet it was Brigham Young, and when he came and commenced to speak to the people his voice was like that of Joseph's.

In the meantime people had gathered in and standing, huddled close together, made such an immense weight on the floor that the propping under the center gave way and let the floor settle a few inches, which caused a panic among the people and some tried to rush for the door, but the loud voice of the prophet Joseph soon restored quiet and only a few were hurt by being pushed down and stepped on. No damage was done, only a few broken windows. The change of voice and appearance I could not account for only that the mantle of Joseph had fallen on Brigham Young.”⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Zadoc Knapp Judd, “Autobiography of Zadoc Knapp Judd, 1827–1909,” 1900, LDS Archives; cited in Lynne Watkins Jorgensen, “Mantle of the Prophet Joseph” <2017> page 456.

In his 1985 book, *Brigham Young: American Moses*, Leonard Arrington implied there are even later accounts of the Transfiguration that continued to describe Brigham Young looking and sounding like Joseph Smith long after 1844, writing: “It was not uncommon for people to see Joseph speaking through Brigham many years after ‘the mantle had fallen on him’.”⁶⁰

Leonard Arrington noting this fact should be compelling, particularly because he was the first academic historian to act as Church Historian, and had far more liberal access to materials in the church archives than most historians.

Arrington unfortunately does not cite any example sources, so this is an area that would require additional historical study. Yet Brigham Young, in the same talk where he referenced Albert Carrington’s account of the Transfiguration, also seemed to imply that it was still on-going to some degree, mentioning: “Brother Carrington has told you that God can carry on his own work, and the spirit of Joseph which fell upon me is ready to fall upon somebody else when I am removed.”⁶¹

SOME DIDN’T WITNESS THE MIRACLE

Another argument used to say that the Transfiguration of Brigham Young was a “Mormon

⁶⁰ Leonard J. Arrington, *Brigham Young: American Moses* page 115.

⁶¹ *Journal of Discourse* vol. 5 <19 July 1857> page 57.

Myth” is that some people at the Conference, such as George Miller, did not appear to witness it.⁶² Yet even those who witnessed the Transfiguration acknowledged that it was something that some people experienced, while others didn’t. It was a miracle for those saints who had the Spirit of God. Orson Hyde recalled that one of his two wives did not experience it, while his other wife did:

“I sat myself down in the midst of the congregation, with my two wives, whom Joseph had given and sealed to me. When President Young began to speak, one of them said, ‘It is the voice of Joseph! It is Joseph Smith!’ The exclamation of the other was, ‘I do not see him, where is he?’ Well, the thought occurred to my mind respecting the Scripture which President Young has just quoted — ‘My sheep know my voice and follow me.’ Where is the one that recognized the voice of Joseph in President Young? Where is she? She is in the line of her duty. But where is the other? Gone where I wish she were not. The sheep of the good shepherd will follow the voice they know, but they will not follow the voice of a stranger.”⁶³

⁶² “On the return of the twelve a public meeting was called. The apostles and Sidney Rigdon were on the stand; Brigham Young acting as principal speaker. Sidney urged his pretensions as a kind of guardian or temporary leader. Young made a loud and long harangue, and as I had always taken him to be a blunderbuss in speaking,— and, on this occasion, to me apparently more so — for the life of me I could not see any point in the course of his remarks other than a wish to overturn Sidney Rigdon’s pretensions.” (George Miller letter to *The Northern Islander*, 28 June 1855, published in *Annual Publication of the Historical Society of Southern California* vol. 10 page 135)

⁶³ *Journal of Discourses* vol. 13 <6 October 1869> page 181.

BRIGHAM STANDS IN JOSEPH'S SHOES

The Transfiguration of Brigham Young let those Saints with oil in their lamps know to follow the Twelve, with Brigham Young at their head, standing in the Prophet Joseph Smith's shoes to perpetuate his teachings. Almost immediately Brigham Young began acting as the new Presiding Priest over the Holy Order in approving marriage sealings and endowments. Opposing Brigham, Sidney Rigdon was excommunicated on September 8, 1844 for giving illegal temple ordinances in an attempt to establish his own new Holy Order.

The Transfiguration experience likely factored into why 40 members of the Council of Fifty unanimously chose to support Brigham Young as the successor of Joseph in 1845, which body first sustained him as the next "chairman" in February 1845, then as the "successor to Joseph Smith" and acting "Prophet, Priest, and King" in March 1845:

"The chairman [Brigham Young] then asked if the council were all satisfied with each other, and to sustain him as chairman, and the vote was then taken in due form whether 'president B. Young shall be sustained as the standing chairman of this council and legal successor of our late president Joseph Smith.' The vote was unanimous in the affirmative."

"The question was then asked, do you receive President B. Young as successor of President Joseph Smith and prophet, priest, and king to this kingdom forever after?"

The vote was unanimous in the affirmative.”⁶⁴

Yet while the Saints in Nauvoo experienced the Transfiguration, the Saints abroad would not have. This may explain why Brigham Young being sustained as the “President of the whole Church” at the April 1845 conference was not publicly announced. D. Michael Quinn observed:

“The manuscript minutes of 7 April 1845 show that the conference sustained [Brigham] Young ‘as the President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles to this Church and nation, and all nations, and also as the President of the whole Church of Latter Day Saints.’ The apostles omitted these words from the published minutes of the conference so that only Nauvoo Mormons knew that Young had been sustained as church president. One of them soon wrote ‘Brother Brigham Young was President of the Church and of the Twelve.’ As was often the case, those who depended on the church newspaper had little knowledge of Mormonism’s most important developments.”⁶⁵

Yet while Brigham Young was acting as President of the Church, the Presiding Priest over the Holy Order, and sustained as the acting Prophet, Priest, and King by the Council of Fifty, over the next several years he had conflict with some of the other apostles who wanted to believe that they had equal authority as members of the Quorum of the

⁶⁴ *Joseph Smith Papers: Council of Fifty Minutes* <4 February 1845> page 225. <1 March 1845> page 256.

⁶⁵ D. Michael Quinn, *Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power* page 178.

Twelve to Brigham, and could act independent of him and contrary to his counsel.

While the majority of the Twelve Apostles stayed united with Brigham, there were several who took independent courses and attempted to scatter the Saints or undermine Brigham's leadership.

The first apostle to break away was Lyman Wight, leaving Nauvoo in August 1844 to take a small group of Saints to Texas, and refusing to hearken to messengers from the Twelve directing them to cancel the mission and return to Nauvoo.⁶⁶

In 1845 William Smith also tried to give Brigham trouble as well. After being called home to Nauvoo, William briefly attempted to usurp Church leadership from Brigham, and failed.⁶⁷

Ultimately, it was the rebellious actions of Parley P. Pratt and John Taylor in 1847 that led to the important discussions about the Church organization that culminated in the revelation calling Brigham Young to re-organize the First Presidency and fully preside as the next Prophet, Priest, and King after Joseph Smith.

TROUBLE ON THE TREK WEST

Shortly after leaving Nauvoo, hearing news of corruption among the leadership and apostasy in

⁶⁶ *Complete Discourses of Brigham Young* <18 August 1844> pages 45–46; Melvin C. Johnson, *Polygamy on the Pedernales: Lyman Wight's Mormon Villages in Antebellum Texas, 1845 to 1858* page 55.

⁶⁷ *An Intimate Chronicle: The Journals of William Clayton* <23 May 1845> page 166; see also *William B. Smith: In the Shadow of a Prophet* pages 264–268, 279–306.

England, the apostles decided they needed to send several members of their Quorum to England to address those troubles. Orson Hyde, Parley P. Pratt, and John Taylor were chosen to go.

Before leaving, the apostles convened a council and agreed that no marriage sealings should be performed anywhere but among the gathered saints in Zion, and that only the President of the Church could approve the ordinance:

“[July] 24th [1846]. Met in council with the Twelve in a tent on a high prairie ridge. Eleven of the quorum of the Twelve were present. We put on our robes. And offered up our prayers to God. Conversed upon principle. Decided in council that no man has a right to attend to the ordinance of sealing except the President of the Church or those who are directed by him so to do. And that the ordinance should be confined to Zion or her stakes. This was the last council we were expecting to hold altogether before O. Hyde, P. P. Pratt & J. Taylor took their departure for England.”⁶⁸

This decision was not a new policy, but was reiterating what had been taught in Nauvoo, and publicly explained to the Saints in early 1845 in response to unauthorized sealings being performed in the eastern churches.⁶⁹

Yet after arriving in England, Orson Hyde began to believe that Parley was involving himself in teaching plural marriage without authorization,

⁶⁸ *Wilford Woodruff's Journal* vol. 3 <24 July 1846> page 62.

⁶⁹ See Parley P. Pratt's editorial in *The Prophet*, 24 May 1845, quoted in *One Eternal Round* #7 “The One Anointed and Appointed over the Sealing Power, Part 2: Early Utah” pages 13–15.

and wrote him a strong letter of caution on November 2, 1846, to which Parley wrote a sharp denial in reply.⁷⁰ Yet contrary to counsel, John Taylor and Parley P. Pratt on the return from England sealed new plural wives to each other.⁷¹

Sealing plural wives to each other without Brigham's permission was just the beginning of Parley P. Pratt and John Taylor's insubordination. At Winter Quarters, after initially declining to join Brigham Young and the other apostles on the first trek to Utah, Parley P. Pratt and John Taylor decide to take over control of the second company to come to the valley. This second pioneer company originally was headed by Patriarch John Smith. Besides taking over the company, Pratt and Taylor drastically reorganized it, failing to take as many poor and Battalion families as intended, and also failing to take as many food-related provisions as Brigham counseled them to bring for each pioneer. This reorganization delayed their planned departure by several weeks.⁷²

Brigham Young and the apostles after selecting the Great Salt Lake as the gathering place with the first pioneer company, left a few weeks

⁷⁰ See Parley P. Pratt: *The Apostle Paul of Mormonism* pages 258–259; On December 6, 1847 Orson Hyde recalled warning Parley and Taylor about unauthorized polygamy: “O[rson] P[ratt]: If one of [the] Council take a wife under the same circumstances as W.W. P[helps] he would be in the same transgression — O[rson] H[yde]: I reasoned with bro Parley & bro Taylor on this very thing — B[righam] Y[oung]: They received instructions not to meddle with women.” (*Minutes of Meetings of the Quorum of the Twelve, 1835–1893* page 142)

⁷¹ Parley P. Pratt: *The Apostle Paul of Mormonism* page 262.

⁷² Parley P. Pratt: *The Apostle Paul of Mormonism* page 265.

later to return to Winter Quarters. On their trek back they ran into the second company headed by Parley P. Pratt and John Taylor. Wilford Woodruff recorded that Parley P. Pratt was “reproved sharply” by Brigham Young for his actions, saying:

“Brothers Parley P. Pratt and J[ohn] Taylor had been to England and done a good work. Had returned to winter quarters, and there done wrong by disorganizing the two divisions and companies that the Quorum of the Twelve had spent the whole winter in organizing and which was also governed by revelation. Brother Parley took the lead in the matter and entirely disregarded our organization and mixed the companies all up.

...When the majority of the Quorum of the Twelve plant a stake of Zion and establish a President over the Stake and Appoint a High Council there has the minority of the Twelve, one or more, any right to go and interfere with those Councils? No unless they should get corrupt and do wrong. ...But while the Councils are trying to do right it would be the duty of the Twelve who might be with them to assist them in carrying out those views that the majority of the Twelve had established.”⁷³

According to Woodruff, Parley P. Pratt initially responded with a “hard spirit” to the rebuke. The minutes of the meeting record Pratt retorting that he and Taylor “hold the keys as well as yourself and I will not be judged by you but by the quorum.”⁷⁴ Yet the Quorum of the Twelve were present and backed Brigham, so Parley repented

⁷³ *Wilford Woodruff's Journal* vol. 3 <4 September 1847> pages 265–266.

⁷⁴ Minutes of a Meeting, 4 September 1847, LDS Archives, cited in *Brigham Young: Pioneer Prophet* pages 171–172.

and “confessed his fault and the power of God rested upon Young and the whole quorum.”⁷⁵ Yet apparently the reproof Parley received did not sink totally in, as only months later he again attempted to challenge the Salt Lake High Council’s authority and claim that as an apostle that he had the right to ignore and overrule them.⁷⁶

After the apostles met with Jedediah M. Grant a few days later, and heard more details about the reorganization by Parley P. Pratt and John Taylor, Brigham remarked that he was “more and more convinced that there was a wrong with P[arley] P. Pratt and John Taylor in these things.”⁷⁷

When the Quorum of the Twelve returned to Winter Quarters, the controversies surrounding Parley P. Pratt and John Taylor reorganizing the companies and changing the organization in Winter Quarters, as well as the issue of them marrying new plural wives without permission, would lead to discussions about reorganizing the First Presidency.

PRELIMINARY DISCUSSIONS REGARDING A FIRST PRESIDENCY

Brigham Young recalled that even as early as August 1844 in Nauvoo “I had it in my mind all the time that there would have to be a Presidency of

⁷⁵ *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal* vol. 3 <4 September 1847> page 266.

⁷⁶ *Parley P. Pratt: The Apostle Paul of Mormonism* pages 273–274.

⁷⁷ *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal* vol. 3 <8 September 1847> pages 269.

three appointed but I knew the people could not bear it at the time.”⁷⁸ George Miller recalled that as early as January 1847 when D&C 136 was given that Brigham “intimated to me that a First Presidency would be organized.”⁷⁹ Brigham Young acknowledged it was something that his mind was more and more impressed on as the year 1847 progressed and that he would “leak out” about it: “it kept filling up in me after leaving Winter Quarters. In the course of the summer I would leak out such and such a thing.”⁸⁰ Brigham recalled that the impression he felt at that time was that “God had told me we would fall, if we did not organize a First Presidency.”⁸¹

In recollections, Brigham remembered that Wilford Woodruff was the first apostle he explicitly mentioned reorganizing the First Presidency to.⁸² This discussion occurred on October 12, 1847, a little over a month after meeting with Parley and Taylor and still on the trek back to Winter Quarters. Woodruff recorded:

⁷⁸ *Wilford Woodruff's Journal* vol. 3 <6 April 1848> page 387

⁷⁹ “The Life of George Miller, Written by Himself,” published in *Annual Publications of the Historical Society of Southern California* vol. 10 page 111. Brigham Young alluding to the desire to reorganize a First Presidency to George Miller would have made sense, as Miller had expressed his concern of the need for a Prophet and Presidency as far back as Nauvoo.

⁸⁰ *Complete Discourses of Brigham Young* <12 February 1849> page 317.

⁸¹ *Complete Discourses of Brigham Young* <8 October 1848> page 302.

⁸² *Journal of Discourses* vol. 8 <7 October 1860> pages 197–198.

“I had a question put to me by President Young what my opinion was concerning one of the Twelve Apostles being appointed as the President of the Church with his two counsellors. I answered that a quorum like the Twelve who had been appointed by revelation and confirmed by revelation from time to time I thought it would require a revelation to change the order of that Quorum.”⁸³

After the apostles returned to Winter Quarters, it wasn't Brigham Young that sparked the initial discussions in Winter Quarters about the possibility of a First Presidency: it was questions and comments by Orson Pratt and others that sparked those discussions.

On November 15, 1847 the apostles discussed the need to send different members of the Twelve out to preside over and lead the missionary work in various areas and countries. George A. Smith remarked “I feel that one of the Twelve should always be in England — another in the Eastern States and another about this place.”⁸⁴ This led to discussion about which apostles should be sent on missions and who should go to England. Brigham Young then remarked “There are principles to be weighed — how many of the Twelve can be spared to go and who shall go? Is it absolutely necessary they should go? Here is the strongest hold on the Mormons ever had on the opposite side of the [Missouri] river. There will be post offices — Land offices, etc. There will [also

⁸³ *Wilford Woodruff's Journal* vol. 3 <12 October 1847> page 283.

⁸⁴ *Minutes of Meetings of the Quorum of the Twelve, 1835–1893* <15 November 1847> page 105.

be] want [for] five to go over the mountain to form a quorum.”⁸⁵ “Form a quorum” had reference to the number of apostles necessary to join John Taylor and Parley P. Pratt in Utah, referring to the need to have 7 apostles — the majority of the Quorum — to act as the Church Presidency.

In reply to Brigham’s comment about the need for a majority of the Quorum in Utah, Orson Pratt immediately asked “Why cannot we delegate one man to have all the power there — or two or three?” This led Brigham to ask W.W. Phelps whether he thought the Twelve had the right to organize a new First Presidency, to which Phelps stated “my opinion is they have a right to appoint [one] — with the voice of the people.”⁸⁶

Orson Pratt would then ask another question that directly related to Brigham Young’s authority as the President — did Brigham have the right to publicly rebuke Parley P. Pratt for reorganizing the pioneer companies? And did Brigham have authority over the Quorum of the Twelve as a whole, or did the Quorum of the Twelve as a body have authority over Brigham?

Orson Pratt expressed his belief that Brigham alone did not hold authority over any member of the Quorum of the Twelve, but merely

⁸⁵*Minutes of Meetings of the Quorum of the Twelve, 1835–1893* <15 November 1847> page 106.

⁸⁶ *Minutes of Meetings of the Quorum of the Twelve, 1835–1893* <15 November 1847> page 106. Orson Pratt would later mention that this was how they presided in England, was delegating to two or three apostles to be able to represent the body while across the ocean.

represented the Quorum in chastisement, which view was not supported by the other apostles.⁸⁷

The apostles continued the discussion on Brigham's authority in relation to the Quorum's authority the next day. The minutes record:

Brigham Young: It is the right of one man to chastise this Church and if I have a right is not my lot higher than any one? If a lot falls on a man to be King — is he not King? I just will be perfectly untrammelled.

Heber C. Kimball: If we tie the President's hands, we tie our own.

Orson Pratt: I consider that the regulating power lies in this Quorum.

Willard Richards: I ask a Question. Is our God trammelled?

Brigham Young: He is trammelled by his Superior above him—

Orson Pratt: I consider the decision of 7 men as superior to the President.

Brigham Young: You can't speak the time or thing that I ever decided without having [the] Quorum [in union] with me. Do you, Orson Pratt, hold the Sealing Keys of the Priesthood?

Orson Pratt: [No,] Brigham Young has [them]! Yet this Quorum has to sit on judgment on every revelation. If we get a revelation the Quorum has to say whether it is right or wrong. I say that the decision of 7 men would be right — they would not decide that a thing is a revelation if it is not a revelation.

Brigham Young: There is not a set of men on the Earth who can say that a revelation from the Lord is wrong. I am God's freeman.

⁸⁷ *Minutes of Meetings of the Quorum of the Twelve, 1835–1893* <15 November 1847> page 107.

Heber C. Kimball: When a man speaks by the Holy Ghost I want to know it by the same Spirit.

Brigham Young: Why don't you vote — am I right or wrong?

Heber C. Kimball: I say you are right.

Willard Richards: And so say I.

Brigham Young: I am the President of the 12 — and they are the head of the people. I am mouth — I will say as I please and do as I please. If I am right all lift up the right hand.

[Those with their hands] up— [Heber C.] Kimball, [Willard] Richards, [George A.] Smith, [Wilford] Woodruff, [Ezra T.] Benson, [Amasa] Lyman, [W.W.] Phelps, and [Thomas] Bullock.

Brigham Young: Those who say Orson [Pratt] is right lift up the right hand—

Orson held a hand up.

Brigham Young: That is 9 to 1—

Brigham Young: I mean to improve by my tongue and guard it more — I mean to improve. [But] when I feel anything by the Spirit of the Almighty there is no flinch here. When things are done wrong publicly in the Kingdom of God — I have a right to deal with them publicly — I was right when I spoke of Parley and Taylor.

Orson Pratt: I wish to know [from] the President if it will be the privilege for every man to [also] speak plainly and freely?

Brigham Young: I say for heaven's sake let out what is in you — if it is wrong we may correct you and if right rub it up. Joseph once gave it to me on account of a slip of the tongue during the administration of the Sacrament for saying 'command' instead of 'entreat'. Let it out, if it is wrong or right."⁸⁸

⁸⁸ *Minutes of Meetings of the Quorum of the Twelve, 1835–1893* <16 November 1847> pages 113–114.

On November 30, 1847 during a meeting investigating W.W. Phelps marrying unauthorized plural wives, the subject of reorganizing the First Presidency was again touched upon and discussed, even though it wasn't the original subject of the meeting. In discussing whether the Seventies or High Council held higher authority, Brigham Young stated that the Seventies would preside if the Apostles were all annihilated, to which Orson Pratt said "The High Council are 12 — it takes 70 of the 70s. It looks natural the High Council would lead." Brigham replied:

"Instead of 70 men sitting every day they could make a First Presidency and the 12 can do so now. The keys are left with the Church and the Church can vote a President and he with his two councilors [will] preside over the Church. When a First Presidency [is] appointed, it sets the 70 at liberty to go and do their business."⁸⁹

This led Orson Pratt to question whether a First Presidency of three apostles would hold more authority and power than the remaining nine in the Quorum of the Twelve. Could three men overrule nine? And would it not be better to have seven men make decisions than three? Brigham Young retorted to this suggestion by Pratt "if I had not confidence in the three I would never go preaching." Pratt replied "I would like to see the Twelve hold together perfectly and unitedly, and seven to decide in all decisions." Heber C. Kimball stated "then you tie them up." Brigham then asked "Which is better,

⁸⁹ *Minutes of Meetings of the Quorum of the Twelve, 1835–1893* <30 November 1847> page 120.

to untie the feet of the Twelve and let them go to the nations, or always keep seven at home?”⁹⁰

While these discussions related to the details about potentially reorganizing the First Presidency, they should not be characterized as Brigham Young claiming to have a revelation, and facing serious resistance from the other apostles.

On December 5, 1847 when the apostles discussed and decided to appoint a First Presidency, Orson Pratt explicitly stated near the beginning of the meeting “*this is the first time the subject of [the] First Presidency is brought before the Council [of the Twelve]*” while acknowledging “it has been through in incidentally in conversation — both out of the Council and in our Council — there were some observations in relation to [the] subject — it’s a subject I have for some few weeks reflected on.”⁹¹

The discussions of the practicality and possibility of a First Presidency arose organically from the apostles, rather than being forced by Brigham Young. It arose through discussing the authority that Brigham Young had to rebuke the other apostles, whether the Quorum of the Twelve as a whole had authority over Brigham Young, and whether the Twelve could continue to fulfill their calling in the mission field. The mission of the Twelve to preach the Gospel to the world was a practical concern that overruled any hypothetical benefit to having more apostles governing the Saints at the central gathering place.

⁹⁰ *Minutes of Meetings of the Quorum of the Twelve, 1835–1893* <30 November 1847> pages 131–132.

⁹¹ *Minutes of Meetings of the Quorum of the Twelve, 1835–1893* <5 December 1847> page 135.

THE DECEMBER 5th MEETING

Contrary to claims that there was no revelation to reorganize a First Presidency at Winter Quarters, and it was merely the result of debate and strong-willed arguments, the minutes of the December 5, 1847 meeting do not describe a lengthy debate, but limited and frank feelings, with only significant opposition from Orson Pratt.

Wilford Woodruff recorded that Brigham Young “wished all of the quorum present to express their feelings upon this subject beginning at the oldest and each one of the following persons expressed their feelings in rotation: Heber C. Kimball, Orson Hyde, Orson Pratt, Willard Richards, Wilford Woodruff, George A. Smith, Amasa Lyman, and Ezra T. Benson and many interesting remarks were made by the various individuals who spoke.”⁹²

The minutes clearly describe that Brigham felt that the Spirit was telling him it was time to ask the Quorum whether they believed it was time to organize a First Presidency:

“The tappings of the Spirit to me is the Church ought to be now organized. The feeling that I have and the Spirit that guides, leads, and protects me is — if this is not right, right it — but the Spirit prompts me to obey those steps — if the church continues to stand as now — if the Twelve stand as [the] Presidency, or... if [the] Lord

⁹² *Wilford Woodruff's Journal* vol. 3 <5 December 1847> page 294.

requires and manifests that it be wisdom to have [the] First Presidency [reorganized] and liberate the Twelve?

...I am going to roll that responsibility off my shoulders and roll it on these my brethren — we can organize [a] First Presidency... [and] if not, the responsibility is on you.”⁹³

Heber C. Kimball and Orson Hyde spoke first, and both supported the idea saying they also felt the impression from the Spirit that it was the right thing to reorganize the First Presidency.⁹⁴ But Orson Pratt as the fourth oldest apostle resisted, yet franking admitted his reservations were from his own personal judgment on the matter:

“I feel the Church will appoint a First Presidency but I want to express my mind — I feel following the current of the Spirit is for me to decide according to the light I have upon it — that I would term deciding by the Spirit. ...I don’t think we should act right in the sight of God without [having] exercised our judgment.”⁹⁵

Orson Pratt reiterated his thoughts expressed in earlier meetings that he believed the decision of seven, nine, or twelve men would be preferable to decisions for the entire Church being made by three.

In response to this, Willard Richards spoke next and expressed “if that principle is good now I

⁹³ *Minutes of Meetings of the Quorum of the Twelve, 1835–1893* <5 December 1847> page 133.

⁹⁴ *Minutes of Meetings of the Quorum of the Twelve, 1835–1893* <5 December 1847> pages 134–135.

⁹⁵ *Minutes of Meetings of the Quorum of the Twelve, 1835–1893* <5 December 1847> pages 135–136.

can't see why it did not always be so — I can't see why our Heavenly Father saw best to have a Presidency of three instead of seven.”⁹⁶ Willard Richards concluded in agreement with Brigham, Heber, and Orson Hyde that he felt the Spirit was in favor of a reorganization:

“My feelings are those that have originated from a Spirit to me and which are manifest to [me] before — it is mouthed to me — this is manifest to me clearly and that is an end of all controversy and that is the end of the law to me — I act by that spirit — it is right there should be a First Presidency.”⁹⁷

After Willard Richards expressed his feelings, Wilford Woodruff and George A. Smith followed. Wilford Woodruff was frank in admitting he had personal feelings against a reorganization, but that he admitted that “the President seems to be moved by the Spirit [so] I'm reconciled to it”:

“I desire the Quorum should continue as it was — I felt if the Quorum of the Twelve were to surrender their power unto three I should be totally opposed to it ...my feelings are our President who stands at our head has said he was moved upon by the Spirit to speak to us — our President seems to be moved upon by the Spirit — he stands between us and God and I for one don't want to tie his hands. I don't care what the Almighty wants — his will is my will. I am perfectly willing that should be the case.

⁹⁶ *Minutes of Meetings of the Quorum of the Twelve, 1835–1893* <5 December 1847> page 136.

⁹⁷ *Minutes of Meetings of the Quorum of the Twelve, 1835–1893* <5 December 1847> page 136.

...I don't want to stand in their way and tie up his hands [as] he [Brigham] is nearer God than I am and I would rather untie his hands. If the three First Presidency were set from us I've had some feelings, and perhaps they may be a selfish feeling — [yet] as the President seems to be moved on by the Spirit I'm reconciled to it. If I had the disposition to hedge up his way I could not do it — but I say God speed him.”⁹⁸

George A. Smith also said his feelings opposed to such a decision were at least partially due to his health: “my head aches most blastardly and I would like to sleep on it...I won't make any pledges — this kingdom will roll ahead, just take what course you please — if it's the will of the Lord that this course should be taken, I'll twist myself to it but it's not my will tonight. I'm not prepared about it, on account of my health.”⁹⁹ In response to this Brigham said:

“My feelings are precisely like yours — I would not be divided in our feelings or separated no more than you would. It [the Spirit] is in me like seven thunders rolling — I would not have hollered tonight but it's in me — I love this Quorum as I love my eyes — but if you contract the Kingdom you will throw us out — but the Kingdom will roll on.

...I know what it is to have a First Presidency — God has brought us where we are we have got to do it and if the Devil can get us to decide that we will not have a First Presidency [the Twelve will be thrown out] — [yet]

⁹⁸ *Minutes of Meetings of the Quorum of the Twelve, 1835–1893* <5 December 1847> pages 136–137.

⁹⁹ *Minutes of Meetings of the Quorum of the Twelve, 1835–1893* <5 December 1847> page 137.

if you throw the [management of the] Kingdom into the [hands of the] Quorum of Fifty they can't manage it and the Seventies can't do it [either]."¹⁰⁰

George A. Smith then replied "I have no objections, only my private feelings. This Kingdom will roll [on] — even if it rolls us out. I am perfectly ready to act in any place as one of the Twelve or anything that may be necessary."¹⁰¹

After all the others spoke, Amasa Lyman and Ezra T. Benson as the two youngest apostles were left to share their feelings. Amasa Lyman endorsed the decision:

"As to the Presidency I feel about it as when the Twelve assumed the responsibility of the Church — I felt then and now — that when the circumstances of the people require it then is the time to be concerned about it. Whenever it comes to the time for me know when I should feel I have always been perfectly satisfied [and] I expect the President to tell about the particulars. The end of the law was with me when he said the whisperings of the Spirit told him to do this — when the Spirit taps him it is right."¹⁰²

Ezra T. Benson also agreed: "I am perfectly willing you should take three and they govern and control me as the Lord would have it."¹⁰³ After Benson, the minutes record another brief comment of opposition from Orson Pratt, saying "we

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² *Minutes of Meetings of the Quorum of the Twelve, 1835–1893* <5 December 1847> pages 138–139.

¹⁰³ *Minutes of Meetings of the Quorum of the Twelve, 1835–1893* <5 December 1847> page 139.

acknowledge that brother Young has more and superior wisdom to any one single individual of this quorum” yet he disagreed with the sentiment “to say go when he says that the Spirit of the Lord says thus and so — I don’t consider we should act as machines. ...if all acquiesced where would be the use of counselling? If a man supposes he has the Spirit of God and the others unitedly think he is mistaken I believe they overrule the first.”¹⁰⁴

Orson then added “The necessity of having a President is seen in thousands of instances where it is not expedient that all should have to decide — even the Gentiles do not act as a body — the majority of the House of Representatives decides and not the spirit who sits as a President. And [similarly] I consider that our President does not control the Quorum.” To the analogy Pratt used, Brigham felt it was an insult and retorted “Shit on Congress — I won’t pattern after such a thing.”¹⁰⁵

A little over a year later Brigham recalled that “Orson Pratt pries into everything...Orson is a perfect little bull, we locked horns — and dug up everything that could be dug. I laid him over — ‘all right,’ said he, ‘go ahead’.”¹⁰⁶

The minutes record Orson Pratt’s objections ended with a speech by Brigham Young:

¹⁰⁴ *Minutes of Meetings of the Quorum of the Twelve, 1835–1893* <5 December 1847> page 140.

¹⁰⁵ *Minutes of Meetings of the Quorum of the Twelve, 1835–1893* <5 December 1847> page 140.

¹⁰⁶ *Complete Discourses of Brigham Young* <12 February 1849> page 317.

“It’s of importance now to organize the Church — that this Quorum may do as brother Amasa [Lyman] says — there ought to be one [apostle] in England, another in Germany, another in France, two in Canada, etc. Every man ought to be distributed all over the world. But your spirit now wants to say you are apostles and you can never be any bigger. We are to grow.

...I want to advance — you want your mind to expand [as] wide as Eternity. We must either ascend or descend — now is the time to take another stride. Here’s the nations of the earth to be gathered — cut your heart strings and let them expand. ...If you tie us up we can’t do anything, but only go out with the words of life and [the results will] be gathered up [and grown into] a thing bigger than we have now.”¹⁰⁷

The final comment Brigham made was to share that the previous night he had a dream of a personage visiting him and teaching him principles of Astronomy. Brigham interpreted this dream as meaning “the Lord God will give me revelations as plain as he ever told Joseph. And when it comes to you, you will see [it] just as plain.”¹⁰⁸ The minutes record that afterwards, Orson Hyde motioned for Brigham Young to be President of the Church and reorganize the First Presidency, and all the apostles sustained the motion.¹⁰⁹ Orson Pratt then proposed that Brigham select his two counsellors, to which he

¹⁰⁷ *Minutes of Meetings of the Quorum of the Twelve, 1835–1893* <5 December 1847> page 140.

¹⁰⁸ *Minutes of Meetings of the Quorum of the Twelve, 1835–1893* <5 December 1847> page 141.

¹⁰⁹ *Minutes of Meetings of the Quorum of the Twelve, 1835–1893* <5 December 1847> page 141.

selected Heber C. Kimball and Willard Richards, which the rest of the apostles sustained.

WAS THERE A REVELATION?

Three different apostles described the December 5, 1847 decision as being the result of a revelation. Orson Hyde recalled: “I am one that was present, and there are others here that were also present on that occasion, and did hear and feel the voice from heaven, and we were filled with the power of God.”¹¹⁰ When Orson Pratt announced this decision at a church conference two weeks later he also described it as a revelation:

“O. Pratt spoke at length on the policy of electing a First President. That God had saw proper to govern the Church by the Twelve since the death of Joseph the Prophet and that he could govern it by whatever authority he saw proper even by teachers and deacons. There was a time when this Church was governed by the Lesser Priesthood. But now the Lord manifested by his Spirit that it was best to appoint a First Presidency again that the organization of the Church might be perfected and the Twelve have a chance to spread abroad again to the nations, etc.”¹¹¹

Pratt saying that it was “manifested by Spirit” would be surprising, given that he presented vocal opposition to reorganizing the First Presidency, yet in a private meeting of the Quorum

¹¹⁰ *Journal of Discourses* vol. 8 <7 October 1860> page 234.

¹¹¹ *On the Mormon Frontier: The Diary of Hosea Stout* <24 December 1847> page 292.

of the Twelve in 1860 Brigham recalled that Orson “had the Spirit of God like us all in Pottawatomie and believed when the Revelation was given to us.”¹¹² When Orson Hyde spoke about the revelation on October 7, 1860 he used even strong language to describe their feelings:

“The voice of God came from on high, and spake to the Council. Every latent feeling was aroused, and every heart melted. 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, before I removed to what was called Kanessville.”¹¹³

According to the published account of this speech, Orson Hyde added a detail to the published sermon that he forgot to mention in delivering his discourse — that people ran from their houses thinking that an earthquake had occurred, and the apostles comforted them: “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.”¹¹⁴

While some may see Orson Hyde’s statement as an exaggeration or overstatement claiming an audible voice of God directed them to reorganize, a careful reading of Orson Hyde’s account indicates it was through the “whispering” of the Spirit and “feeling” the “voice from heaven” that they heard the voice of God: “the Lord was

¹¹² *Minutes of Meetings of the Quorum of the Twelve, 1835–1893* <4 April 1860> page 252.

¹¹³ *Journal of Discourses* vol. 8 <7 October 1860> page 234

¹¹⁴ *Journal of Discourses* vol. 8 <7 October 1860> page 234.

only whispering to us a little, and that he was probably not very far off.”¹¹⁵

On a later occasion Hyde again referred to the same experience, and makes the spiritual feeling as the source of revelation more apparent, comparing it to when Joseph Smith dictated the constitution for the Kingdom of God on April 28, 1844 in the Council of Fifty:

“All present on that occasion seemed to feel about the same as when the Prophet Joseph requested us to take pen, ink, and paper and write a constitution for the Kingdom of God. All at once, however, there was a power rested upon us that I had never felt before, and I may say that the voice of the Lord from heaven spoke to us and designated in a few words the way in which the Church should be organized and established.”¹¹⁶

As the minutes of the December 5th meeting clearly expressed, Brigham Young said he felt the Spirit “like seven thunders rolling — I would not have hollered tonight but it’s in me.”¹¹⁷ So Orson Hyde was not lying in saying that they believed at the time that they had the Spirit of the Lord direct them in making the decision.

AN EARTHQUAKE?

While Orson Hyde’s testimony that they felt and heard the voice of God tell them to reorganize

¹¹⁵ *Journal of Discourses* vol. 8 <7 October 1860> page 234.

¹¹⁶ Orson Hyde Sermon, 7 October 1867, LDS Archives.

¹¹⁷ *Minutes of Meetings of the Quorum of the Twelve, 1835–1893* <5 December 1847> page 137.

the First Presidency, the question remains, was he embellishing the story by saying that the people in the neighborhood felt an earthquake?

In reality it wasn't Orson Hyde who remembered that the neighborhood felt an earthquake — as it was something he was reminded of by someone else after the discourse, and it was inserted in brackets in the published sermon:

“After seating myself in the stand, I was reminded of one circumstance that occurred, which I omitted in my discourse. 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. We felt no shaking of the earth or of the house, but were filled with the exceeding power and goodness of God.”¹¹⁸

Brigham Young presumably was the one who reminded him of this, as when Brigham delivered his discourse afterwards he said:

“Brother Hyde, in his remarks, spoke about the voice of God at a certain time. I could tell many incidents relating to that circumstance, which he did not take time to relate. We were in his house, which was some ten or twelve feet square. The houses in the neighborhood shook, or, if they did not, the people thought they did, for they ran together and inquired whether there had been an earthquake. We told them that the voice of God

¹¹⁸ *Journal of Discourses* vol. 8 <7 October 1860> page 234.

had reached the earth — that they need not be afraid; it was the power of God.”¹¹⁹

It is sometimes alleged that this story of an Earthquake was invented by Orson Hyde and Brigham Young to bolster their authority and to counteract Joseph Smith III’s claims to be called by revelation to lead the RLDS Church. While that may have influenced them *publicly sharing* the story, the reality is that Brigham Young had mentioned the story of an earthquake at least once in private before Joseph Smith III accepted the position of President of the RLDS Church.

The earliest recorded mention of the earthquake during the December 5th revelation was briefly during a private Quorum of the Twelve meeting on April 4, 1860. Rather than Joseph III being the subject of the meeting, it was discussing Brigham’s Adam-God teachings and Orson Pratt’s opposition to those teachings.

To counter Orson Pratt disagreeing with him on Adam-God, Brigham responded by pointing out that “Brother [Orson] Pratt had the Spirit of God like us all in Pottawatomie and believed when the Revelation was given to us.” In connection to this Brigham mentioned “at O[rson] Hyde’s the power came upon us, a shock that alarmed the neighborhood.”¹²⁰ Joseph III did not step forward to lead the Reorganization until a month later in May, so Brigham could not have possibly invented this

¹¹⁹ *Journal of Discourses* vol. 8 <7 October 1860> page 197.

¹²⁰ *Minutes of Meetings of the Quorum of the Twelve, 1835–1893* <4 April 1860> page 252.

story because of it, as he did not learn about it until May 14, 1860.¹²¹

While Wilford Woodruff denied remembering any earthquake at the time of the reorganization of the First Presidency,¹²² this should not be too surprising given that according to Orson Hyde, they the apostles did not feel it — it was the *neighbors* that felt it: “We felt no shaking of the earth or of the house, but were filled with the exceeding power and goodness of God.”¹²³

A lack of any contemporary or earlier references to this earthquake-like experience may cause skepticism, nonetheless it would be odd for Brigham to have invented the story while debating Orson Pratt on doctrine. Orson Hyde would give another account of it seven years later in 1867:

“In the winter of 1847 or 1848, according to my best recollection, the members of the Quorum of the Twelve had a little meeting in what was called Hyde Park, Pottawattamie County, Iowa. The subject under consideration was how the Church should be organized. There was considerable said in relation to the matter; but no one seemed disposed to make a motion on the subject. All present on that occasion seemed to feel about the same as when the Prophet Joseph requested us to take pen, ink, and paper and write a constitution for the Kingdom of God.

¹²¹ *Brigham Young: Colonizer of the American West: Diaries and Office Journals* vol. 2 <14 May 1860> page 172.

¹²² *The Diaries of Abraham H. Cannon, 1889–1895* <30 August 1894> page 544.

¹²³ *Journal of Discourses* vol. 8 <7 October 1860> page 234.

All at once, however, there was a power rested upon us that I had never felt before, and I may say that the voice of the Lord from heaven spoke to us and designated in a few words the way in which the Church should be organized and established. Perhaps some of you may think that I am enthusiastic when I say that the Lord spoke from Heaven on that occasion, but I will venture to say that there are those now within the sound of my voice who were not in the house where we were, but in the adjoining houses some five or three hundred yards distant, who can rise up in this congregation and testify that the earth shook and trembled, and that men, women, and children ran out of doors supposing it was an earthquake or something of that sort. What was the result? That President Brigham Young be the mouthpiece of God and the leader and guide to this people henceforth. I feel a little joy at this because it happened in my own neighborhood, and I think in one of my own houses. I have born my testimony to this fact once before in this town, but I felt that it was my duty and privilege to do it again to this large congregation.”¹²⁴

BRIGHAM YOUNG AS PROPHET, PRIEST, AND KING

Beyond re-organizing the First Presidency, the December 1847 revelation also was considered direction for Brigham Young to be secretly anointed to the office of the Prophet, Priest, and King, which Joseph Smith had held before him. This office was also known as the “Ruler over Israel” anointing, and explicitly stated that this individual administered in all the ordinances of the Kingdom of God, and was

¹²⁴ Orson Hyde sermon, 7 October 1867, LDS Archives.

the mouthpiece of God over the Church, Zion, the Kingdom, and the House of Israel.¹²⁵

Brigham acted in the capacity of Church President since August 8, 1844, yet did not *formally* become the President of the Church until December 1847. Similarly Brigham was sustained to act as the Prophet, Priest, and King over the Council of Fifty on March 1, 1845,¹²⁶ yet the available evidence indicates his Prophet, Priest, and King ordination did not occur until after December 1847.

While there is no date pinpointing when Brigham was ordained Prophet, Priest, and King, the strongest evidence that he did so comes from his successor, President John Taylor. In a discussion with George Q. Cannon in 1884 he mentioned that both Joseph and Brigham were ordained to the office of “King over the House of Israel” and that the Lord had commanded him to also receive this ordination.¹²⁷ The day that John Taylor received his ordination, on February 4, 1885, he also spoke of assisting in both Joseph Smith and Brigham Young being anointed to that same office.¹²⁸

Antagonistic sources are the most direct in linking this coronation to the late 1840s and early Utah. William Smith in 1850 stated “The people at the Salt Lakes govern their church by a secret lodge of 50 men. It is in this lodge that Brigham Young is

¹²⁵ For more on this office, see *One Eternal Round* issue #5 “The Prophet, Priest, and King over the Kingdom of God.”

¹²⁶ *Joseph Smith Papers: Council of Fifty Minutes* <1 March 1845> page 256.

¹²⁷ George Q. Cannon Journals, 12 June 1884.

¹²⁸ *Joseph Smith Papers: Council of Fifty Minutes* page 96 footnote 259.

crowned as a king, and is there seated upon a throne prepared for him.”¹²⁹ Andrew Cahoon testified:

“The King of that Kingdom that was set up on the earth was the head of the Church. Brigham Young proclaimed himself King here in Salt Lake Valley before there was a house built, in 1847.

...‘Did you hear it yourself?’ I did not. I wasn’t here until the next year [1848], but assumptions to that effect I heard. After I came here Brigham Young claimed to be the Head and Leader of the Church and King, — would-be King of this Kingdom.”¹³⁰

Most explicitly linking Brigham’s anointing to the December 1847 revelation, the newspaper *Zion’s Harbinger and Baneemy’s Organ* stated that after Joseph Smith “suffered himself to be ordained, anointed, and coronated a king” with Hyrum as “his Premier Counsellor and Successor to the Throne” that Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball did the same after Joseph and Hyrum were killed:

“After the death of the Smiths, Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball and their adherents, who were in the secret, conspired to perpetuate the said unlawful organization [i.e. the Council of Fifty]: and after having disinherited the Smith family, Brigham Young receive the honors of the Throne, and Heber C. Kimball those of his Premier Counsellor and Successor. These are the two

¹²⁹ William Smith, *Melchisedek and Aaronic Herald* vol. 1 no. 8 <February 1850> page 1.

¹³⁰ Andrew Cahoon Testimony, November 1889, published in *The Inside of Mormonism: A Judicial Examination of Endowment Oaths Administered in All the Mormon Temples* <1903> page 28.

horns of the second beast, which they created in December 1847, at Council Bluffs.”¹³¹

Given that John Taylor said he assisted in anointing Brigham Young as King over Israel, Brigham’s coronation did not occur in December 1847, but was something that most likely occurred in late 1848 when Brigham Young and the rest of the Saints in Winter Quarters gathered to Utah.

On February 12, 1849 Brigham Young appeared to allude to his ordination in repeatedly stating that he was “King and President.”¹³² Andrew Cahoon connected Brigham’s ordination with the early Utah hymn “Prophet, Priest, and King”:

“Mr. Baskin: ‘You have heard the children very often sing a song in which they designate Brigham Young as President, Priest, and King?’

A. ‘Yes, ‘Prophet, Priest, and King’. ¹³³

This hymn was published in the *Millennial Star* under the title “Hail to Brigham Young” and included the chorus “Hail to Brigham Young, Hail to Brigham Young, God bless our Prophet, Priest, and King, our Leader Brigham Young!”¹³⁴

Additional evidence include two allusions to Brigham’s office of King over Israel in the *Journal*

¹³¹ *Zion’s Harbinger and Baneemy’s Organ* vol. 2 <January 1852> page 3.

¹³² *Complete Discourses of Brigham Young* <12 February 1849> page 318.

¹³³ *The Inside of Mormonism: A Judicial Examination of Endowment Oaths Administered in All the Mormon Temples* <1903> page 28.

¹³⁴ *Millennial Star* vol. 29 <16 November 1867> page 736.

of Discourses, one being Orson Hyde stating that in December 1847 Brigham was directed to receive “the full power of the presiding Priesthood in my Church *and Kingdom*”:

“The voice of God came from on high, and spake to the Council. Every latent feeling was aroused, and every heart melted. 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, before I removed to what was called Kanesville.”¹³⁵

Heber C. Kimball also alluded to this office in one of his published sermons:

“The Church and kingdom to which we belong will become the kingdom of our God and his Christ, and brother Brigham Young will become President of the United States. [Voices responded, ‘Amen.’] And I tell you he will be something more; but we do not now want to give him the name: but he is called and ordained to a far greater station than that, and he is foreordained to take that station, and he has got it; and I am Vice-President, and brother Wells is the Secretary of the Interior — yes, and of all the armies in the flesh.”¹³⁶

CONCLUSION

While we only have four statements that some Saints felt an earthquake as a manifestation of the December 1847 revelation directing Brigham

¹³⁵ *Journal of Discourses* vol. 8 <7 October 1860> page 234

¹³⁶ *Journal of Discourses* vol. 5 <6 September 1857> page 219.

Young to formally become the Church President and King over Israel — two by Brigham Young and two by Orson Hyde — those who believe them to be honest and credible should find their testimonies compelling. Even if one is skeptical, the sources at least clearly document that the apostles believed they were directed by the Spirit to reorganize the First Presidency. Additionally, over 100 accounts of the Transfiguration of Brigham Young, several written in 1844, demonstrate clearly that many Saints sincerely believed that Brigham was called by God to be the next Prophet.

While Parley P. Pratt clashed with Brigham Young in 1847, after the First Presidency was reorganized he would testify to the legitimacy of Brigham's succession. On one occasion Parley P. Pratt preached:

“Had we undertaken President-making in this Church simply by our uninspired notions, Brigham Young held more keys than all our votes put together; and had we voted against him, we would have voted ourselves out of the kingdom of God. He and those that stood by him would have held the keys of the Priesthood, as they have and do, and would have built up the kingdom, while those who opposed them would have been like salt that had lost its savor. It was not in our power to manufacture this Presidency, but only to uphold and cleave to it; and blessed are we, inasmuch as we have done this thing.”¹³⁷

¹³⁷ *Journal of Discourses* vol. 5 <7 September 1856> page 200.

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