

D & C Lesson 33

PRESIDENT BRIGHAM YOUNG LEADS THE SAINTS

Prepared by Duane S. Crowther, September 2001

1. The Prophet Joseph gave the Twelve the keys of the kingdom and taught the principles of succession in the Presidency

A. “In Nauvoo in the winter of 1843-44, the Prophet Joseph Smith spent several days giving the Quorum of the Twelve their temple endowments and teaching them about their responsibilities. He told the Twelve that he had been concerned that he would soon die without having bestowed the keys of the kingdom on others. Wilford Woodruff, who was a member of the Quorum of the Twelve at the time, recalled the following words from the Prophet Joseph Smith:

“Now, brethren, I thank God I have lived to see the day that I have been enabled to give you your endowments, and *I have now sealed upon your heads all the powers of the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods and Apostleship, with all the keys and powers thereof, which God has sealed upon me; and I now roll off all the labor, burden and care of this Church and Kingdom of God upon your shoulders, and I now command you in the name of Jesus Christ to round up your shoulders, and bear off this Church and Kingdom of God before heaven and earth, and before God, angels and men*’ (In James R. Clark, comp., *Messages of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 6 vols., [1965-75], 3:134).” [*Gospel Doctrine Teacher’s Manual*, 1999, p. 191]

B. The essential principles of Church Presidency, from *D&C 107:21-24*:

1. “three Presiding High Priests, . . . form a quorum of the Presidency of the Church.” [v. 22]
2. The Twelve Apostles are “twelve traveling councilors” who are “special witnesses of the name of Christ in all the world.” [v. 23]
3. The Twelve apostles form a quorum equal in authority to the Quorum of the First Presidency. [v. 24]

2. The Lord guided the first succession of the prophet by making Brigham Young appear and sound like Joseph Smith as he talked to the saints on August 8, 1844

A. “The Twelve called a meeting for Thursday, 8 August 1844. Sidney Rigdon spoke in the morning session for more than one hour. He won few if any adherents to his position.

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

In the afternoon session, Brigham Young again spoke, testifying that the Prophet Joseph had ordained the Apostles to hold the keys of the kingdom of God in all the world. He prophesied that those

who did not follow the Twelve would not prosper and that only the Apostles would be victorious in building up the kingdom of God.

“Following his talk, President Young asked Sidney Rigdon to talk, but he chose not to. Following remarks by William W. Phelps and Parley P. Pratt, Brigham Young spoke again. He talked of completing the Nauvoo Temple, obtaining the endowment before going into the wilderness, and the importance of the scriptures. He spoke of his love for Joseph Smith and his affection for the Prophet’s family. The Saints then voted unanimously in favor of the Twelve Apostles as leaders of the Church.” [Our Heritage, pp. 66-67]

2. Statements concerning Church leadership by past Presidents of the Church

A. **Joseph Fielding Smith:** “No man of himself can lead this church. It is the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ; he is at the head. . . . He chooses men and calls them to be instruments in his hands to accomplish his purposes, and he guides and directs them in their labors. But men are only instruments in the Lord’s hands, and the honor and glory for all that his servants accomplish is and should be ascribed to him forever. If this were the work of man, it would fail, but it is the work of the Lord, and he does not fail.” [Improvement Era, June 1970, p. 26]

B. **Harold B. Lee:** “The Prophet Joseph Smith declared that ‘where the president is not, there is no First Presidency.’ Immediately following the death of a President, the next ranking body, the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, becomes the presiding authority, with the President of the Twelve automatically becoming the acting President of the Church until a President of the Church is officially ordained and sustained in his office.” [Improvement Era, June 1970, p. 28]

3. The process of succession in the Presidency of the Church

A. “A man who has been foreordained to preside one day over the Church is called by revelation to be a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

B. “He is trained for his future calling through his association with members of the Quorum and the First Presidency and through his assignments. As he outlives other members of the Quorum, he advances in seniority until he is President of the Quorum of the Twelve and only the President of the Church has been an Apostle longer than he has.

C. “When a President of the Church dies, the First Presidency is dissolved. Counselors in the First Presidency return to their places in the Quorum of the Twelve (if they were members of the quorum). The Quorum of the Twelve becomes the presiding quorum of the Church. The President of the Twelve becomes the presiding authority in the Church.

D. “Members of the Twelve assemble in the temple in a spirit of fasting and prayer. Guided by revelation, they come to a unanimous decision regarding the reorganization of the First Presidency. In accordance with this decision, they sustain the senior member of the Twelve as the President of the Church. They then lay their hands on his head and ordain him and set him apart as President of the Church.

E. “The new President chooses two men (usually members of the Quorum of the Twelve) to be his counselors.

F. “Vacancies in the Quorum of the Twelve caused by the reorganization of the Presidency are filled.” [Gospel Doctrine Teacher’s Manual, 1999, p. 195. For more information on the subject of succession, see “The Kingdom of God Will Roll On: Succession in the Presidency,” by Brent L. Top

and Lawrence R. Flake, *Ensign*, August 1996, pp. 22-35]

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