Joseph, Brigham and the Twelve: A Succession of Continuity
The tragic murder of Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum in June 1844 sent shockwaves through Nauvoo. Thousand experienced a sense of deep personal loss; it was difficult to conceive of another filing Joseph's shoes. Despair and bewilderment combined with pervasive sorrow as the reality of the calamity settled over the city. Some, fearing that the internal dissension that had contributed to the Prophet's death would intensify, must have wondered whether the Church could survive.

A visitor to Nauvoo a few months later, however, would have encountered not chaos and confusion, but harmony and optimism. He would have seen the Saints, under new leadership, purposefully pushing forward the "measures" of their deceased prophet with more energy and intensity that even before. What had happened to the crisis? How had potential disaster been avoided? For Nauvoo resident John Fullmer, the answer was that before his death Joseph Smith had succeeded in completely organizing the Church, conferring keys, authority and endowments upon the Apostles and others, so that the work can go on as well as when he alone was propelling it; and better, because there are more now to push it, each holding all the power which he held in the priestly office. In Fullmer's view, Joseph Smith had prepared for his death.

What actually occurred in succession—and why—has been much discussed but little understood. This is true partly because the Nauvoo antecedents of succession have received inadequate attention. This study, a summary of a larger work, provides an overview of the entire process of succession, introducing and illustrating the themes and events that contribute to an understanding of what occurred after the Prophet's death. It is appropriate to begin with an examination of how Joseph Smith understood his personal role and mission and how that understanding influenced the Nauvoo experience of the Saints.

I. Nauvoo and the Mission of Joseph Smith

Joseph Smith saw himself as head of the dispensation of the fulness of times, presiding over the restoration of "all things" and charged with the establishment of a new Zion on earth in preparation for the eventual return the Christ. Zion, the new kingdom, was to be a theocracy, a community of
the righteous centered on the temple and governed by revelation through God’s priesthood. Though this vision had helped shape Joseph’s community-building efforts in Kirtland and Missouri, only in Nauvoo did he have the security and the resources to embark on what historian Robert B. Flanders has called “the first full-scale model of the Mormon kingdom.” Sustained by a personal sense of urgency, the Prophet in Nauvoo introduced a series of innovations aimed at completing the foundation for and implementing the full pattern of the kingdom of Zion.

For Joseph Smith, Mormonism had never been static. Changing circumstances provided challenges and new opportunities. Moreover, he preached continuous revelation and believed in a “line upon line, precept upon precept” unfolding of ancient patterns and eternal truths—both to himself as prophet and through him to his people as they were prepared. “I could explain a hundred fold more than I ever have of the glories of the kingdoms manifest to me,” he once remarked, “were I permitted, and were the people prepared to receive them.” He had an expansive vision of the kingdom and worked to implement it and to prepare his people to accept it.

But many did not accept new teachings easily, some not at all. “Many seal up the door of heaven,” complained Joseph, “by saying so far God may reveal and I will believe, but no further.” He once compared the difficulty of getting “anything into the heads of this generation . . . Even the Saints were slow to understand,” with trying to split a hemlock knot “with a Corn do[d]ger for a wedge and a pumkin for a beetle”; that is, it could not be done. “I have tried for a number of years to get the minds of the Saints prepared to receive the things of God, but we frequently see some of them after suffering all they have for the work of God will fly to peaces like glass as soon as any thing comes that is contrary to their traditions, they cannot stand the fire at all.”

Again, this concern was not new to Nauvoo. In connection with the Kirtland temple ordinances, according to George A. Smith, some apostatized because there was too much and some because there was too little. He felt that had the Lord “on that occasion revealed one sentiment further . . . He would have upset the whole of us.” The resistance to change and the slowness to accept an expanding gospel were important factors in the Kirtland difficulties; in Nauvoo they became even more significant.

In Nauvoo the Prophet consciously labored to prepare the Saints for innovations and succeeded in introducing many. Where resistance was too great, he concluded to move ahead privately among those he felt would embrace the expanded teachings, preserve them, and eventually deliver them to the Church. While this commitment to private teachings greatly complicated Nauvoo society, it unburdened a prophet who felt the necessity of delivering the full plan to the Saints. In the spring of 1842, as regular private
instruction increased, Heber C. Kimball understood the Prophet’s mood: “Brother Joseph feel as well as I Ever see him,” he wrote to Parley P. Pratt. “One reason is he has got a Small company, that he feels safe in there ha[n]ds. And that is not all, he can open his bosom to[o] and feel him Self safe.”

Though comfortable for the Prophet, the private circle itself was not without difficulties. Even among those whom he selected to receive additional instruction were those who failed to keep confidences or who could not accept what he taught them. Consequently, Joseph moved cautiously even with those closest to him. To one of the Prophet’s characteristic warnings that if he told all he knew of the kingdom of God many would leave him or even rise up and kill him, Brigham Young is said to have replied, “[Then do not] tell me anything that I can’t bear, for I don’t want to apostatize.”

In Nauvoo, then, there was a private gnosis, in this case an authorized private teaching under the direction of the Prophet. Joseph once said that he had taught all his “strongest doctrines” in public, and it may be true that existing accounts of public utterances reveal allusions to perhaps all the Prophet’s doctrines. But he did not develop and explain his teachings in public as he did in private. There were, in Nauvoo, different levels of understanding among the Saints.

Reading the Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith or The Words of Joseph Smith leaves the impression that we have essentially all that the Prophet taught. Such accounts do present his recorded teachings and words, but the original records in fact contain probably less than twenty percent of his known public discourses and almost nothing of his private amplifications. Wilford Woodruff, a man who expended much time and energy to preserve accounts of Joseph’s public teachings, characteristically reported of lengthy private sessions merely that “we received good instruction” or “we received some instructions concerning the Priesthood.” This was apparently so because of an explicit policy of not writing, even privately, the private teachings. Other examples illustrate this policy.

In the spring of 1842, Apostle Parley P. Pratt presided over the British Mission while other Apostles in Nauvoo received vital private teachings. Excited to share the new developments with his colleague, Apostle Heber C. Kimball wrote his fellow-apostle Pratt that they had “recieved some pressious things through the Prophet on the preasthood that would caus your Soul to rejoice;” but then had to note: “I can not give them to you on paper fore they are not to be riten.”

A comment by Brigham Young in the September 1844 trial of Sidney Rigdon makes a similar point. To demonstrate Rigdon’s standing in the Church, William Marks referred to written revelation. No man, he concluded, had been ordained to as much as President Rigdon. Brigham Young responded:
I have known that Brother Marks “had no evidence but the written word;” But if this people have no evidence but the written word, it is quite time to go to the river and be baptised for the remission of their sins. . . . Brother Marks . . . don’t know all the ordinations, nor he wont till he knows something more than the written word.

Later Brigham added, “As to a person not Knowing more than the written word, let me tell you that there are keys that the written word never spoke of, nor never will.”

Private teaching continued to complicate Nauvoo society. Frequent private sessions involving an expanding group of intimates could not be entirely hidden. Furthermore, as part of his effort to prepare the Saints eventually to receive these things, the Prophet—and later Hyrum Smith, Brigham Young, and others—alluded in public to these private teachings. As might be expected, Nauvoo rumor mills churned out speculations and distorted versions of supposed private teachings. Many learned of these things first in mutilated form through the grapevine. All of this occasioned the strong and repeated Nauvoo admonitions that “the mysteries of the kingdom” were not to be taught unless authorized, and certainly not by the elders when preaching aboard. They would be taught only in Nauvoo, Church leaders counseled, although in connection with the temple they would later become available to every Saint who prepared.

Nauvoo innovations and the secrecy that surrounded some of them led to a doctrinal divergence of considerable proportions and to division and apostasy that eventually endangered the city and contributed to the Prophet’s death. Many came to accept the plurality of gods, new temple ordinances, new theocratic practices, and even plural marriage, while others mistrusted and finally rejected the whole Nauvoo “package.” Even among those privately taught by the Prophet, the new teachings appeared to some as the capstone on a finally completed edifice, while for others they became a stumbling block that could neither be ignored nor removed.

Why did Joseph Smith resolutely move ahead with such problematic innovations? Was this simply a case of misjudgment and mismanagement by a leader who, in the view of one historian, “was losing control of many affairs, and perhaps of himself”? Did Joseph become unbalanced by the pressures from enemies, on the one hand, and a growing sense of power and control in Nauvoo, on the other, or had he embarked fearlessly on a course he felt to be required whether or not it caused offense?

The Prophet clearly enjoyed his position at the head of a growing Nauvoo theocracy and found the trappings of his station to his liking. It is doubtful that these things unbalanced him, however, and they certainly do not explain his actions. What makes his actions comprehensible is an awareness of his internal agenda and personal timetable. Early in the Nauvoo
period, Joseph Smith concluded that his own time was short and that he simply had to accomplish certain things regardless of the cost. Furthermore, there is evidence that, at least to some extent, he understood the probable cost. If Nauvoo, for the first time, provided the opportunity to develop new institutional and doctrinal patterns, it was also in Nauvoo that he felt a growing sense of personal urgency to do so—a relentless feeling that he would not have another chance.

Many documents preserve this sense of foreboding and urgency. On the eve of the Nauvoo experience, for example, Lyman Wight witnessed Joseph Smith prophesying in Liberty Jail that he would never live to see his fortieth birthday. Immediately after the Prophet's death, several of the Twelve testified he had frequently said, "Brethren, the Lord bids me hasten the work in which we are engaged," or "I know not why; but for some reason I am constrained to hasten my preparations." Such statements led one intimate of Joseph Smith to conclude that "the Lord had pushed things forward rather prematurely on account of the shortness [of] Joseph's time." There is also striking evidence during Joseph Smith's lifetime. His April 1842 remarks to the Female Relief Society were especially revealing. The Church was not yet fully or properly organized, he told the sisters, something he could remedy only in connection with the temple and temple ordinances. He spoke of "Big Elders" who had caused difficulties because they spoke publicly of the things he taught them privately. Nonetheless, he told them, he intended to deliver vital keys to the Relief Society and to the Church, for "according to his prayers God had appointed him elsewhere." Specifically, he continued, "he did not know as he should have many opportunities of teaching them—that they were going to be left to themselves... that the church would not have his instruction long, and the world would not be troubled with him a great while."

This sense of personal foreboding led him that spring to increase the tempo of his "preparations," including a few days later the administration of the first temple-related endowments in Nauvoo. Other statements in the months of life remaining indicate Joseph Smith's continuing awareness that his own time would be shortened. Far from his death's catching him totally unprepared, this awareness drove the Prophet to action and innovations that otherwise might have awaited a more propitious time.

II. The Quorum of the Twelve

A brief review of the history of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles under Joseph Smith is another essential preliminary to understanding succession. The Quorum of the Twelve was first organized February 1835 in Kirtland. A month later the new Apostles received a revealed charter, now known as section 107 of the Doctrine and Covenants. It outlined, though
not without ambiguities, the scope of their authority and their relationship to other quorums. From this beginning both the “theology” of the Twelve and scriptural precedent allowed for and suggested an exalted role for the new quorum.23

In practice, however, such a role never developed in Kirtland, much to the discomfiture of some of the Apostles. There the Prophet made it clear that the high councils had jurisdiction over the stakes of Zion, while the Apostles presided elsewhere only. As a result, the Apostles had perhaps less influence and certainly less public prominence than the high council or the stake presidencies. Nor were they as intimate with Joseph Smith or relied upon as heavily by him as were these other officials.24

Brigham Young came to believe that this “period of humiliation,” a time when Joseph Smith occasionally seemed to snub the Apostles intentionally, was a necessary preparation for later expanded service. If it were a test, many did not pass, for partly due to the frustrations of their position, most of this first Twelve fell away within three years of their ordination, although some only temporarily, and the Twelve ceased to function as a quorum after the first fifteen months or so of its existence.25 Before that occurred, however, the Apostles forced the Prophet to clarify whether or not they were above the high council in authority. The Twelve, Joseph declared in January 1836, stood in authority next to the Presidency “and are not subject to any other than the first presidency.”26

The Missouri and Kirtland difficulties of 1837–1838 gave opportunity for some of the Apostles, especially Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball, to demonstrate their firm loyalty to the Prophet. It was there that Joseph Smith first came to look towards Apostles Young, Kimball, and others to fill larger roles. He selected Heber C. Kimball to head the first mission abroad. And when David Whitmer and the Missouri presidency were removed in the spring of 1838, he installed Thomas Marsh, David Patten, and Brigham Young—the three senior Apostles—as the presidency pro tem of that stake of Zion.27 With Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, and others in jail a few months later, the Presidency wrote an important letter to Apostles Kimball and Young, stating explicitly that inasmuch as the Presidency were unavailable, the leadership of the Church devolved “upon you, that is the twelve.” Even before this formal delegation, the two Apostles had recognized their authority and their responsibility and had stepped forward to lead the beleaguered Saints.28

It was as temporary leaders during this time of crisis that the Twelve for the first time functioned effectively as an administrative unit. At first only Apostles Young, Kimball, and newly ordained John Taylor were available to assist in the Missouri migration.29 Soon, however, John E. Page, George A. Smith, and Wilford Woodruff—earlier named as Apostles by the
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Prophet—began to function with their brethren. Joseph Smith's release from jail in the spring of 1839 inaugurated for the Twelve a season of frequent councils with the Presidency, something earlier Apostles had only dreamed of, to instruct them as a quorum before their departure for England. And it was in England that the Twelve came into its own as a powerful and united entity, functioning with remarkable effectiveness both as a missionary cadre and as an administrative quorum.

Not all of the Twelve participated in their quorum mission to England, and it is notable that only those who did figured prominently in succession. Apparently this shared experience, especially the individual demonstration of faith and commitment to the mission under adverse conditions, was an almost necessary school for later leadership. The experience unified the Apostles and taught them to rely on each other and on the Lord. They left England with a greater sense of the power and responsibility of their office and with new confidence in themselves and in Brigham Young as their leader. It was more than coincidence that the nine of the Twelve who filled this mission were the same nine who later received ordinances and additional authority under the hands of the Prophet which the other three Apostles did not and that they were the ones who led the body of the Church to the West after his death.

Initially, seven of the Twelve traveled to England. In their first quorum meeting abroad, April 1840, Brigham Young ordained to the apostleship his cousin Willard Richards, named by the Prophet to that office in 1838 but unordained because of his absence in England. That ordination completed the cast of those Apostles important to succession. As the eight Apostles laboring in England prepared to leave in the spring of 1841, Orson Hyde, traveling alone on his special appointment to Jerusalem, joined them. That April in Manchester nine of the Twelve—Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, Orson Hyde, Parley P. Pratt, Orson Pratt, John Taylor, Wilford Woodruff, George A. Smith, and Willard Richards, all of the Apostles who would later join with Brigham Young in leading the Saints—met as a quorum for the first time.

Enthusiastic and confident, the Apostles returned to a prophet who more than ever needed their assistance in the increasing labors of his office. The success, demonstrated maturity, and selfless dedication of the Apostles' English labors gave them new credibility among the Saints at home and satisfied Joseph Smith that finally he had a quorum he could fully rely upon. Consequently, only one month after their return to Nauvoo, Joseph Smith, in August 1841, formally and explicitly gave them an enduring grant of new authority. "The twelve should be authorized," he told a special conference, "to assist in managing the affairs of the Kingdom in this place," that is, in Nauvoo, an organized stake of Zion, indeed the headquarters
stake. Henceforth, according to the minutes, the Apostles were to regulate and superintend “the affairs of the Church,” not merely as a temporary expediency but as “the duties of their office.” The time had come “when the twelve should be called upon to stand in their place next to the first presidency”—not only abroad but “at the stakes.” Willard Richards's terse diary notation following the meeting probably accurately expressed the sense of the occasion: “Conference—Business of the Church given to the 12.” When Wilford Woodruff returned to Nauvoo a short time later, he too preserved the essence of the new arrangement in a phrase: “The temporal business of the Church is laid upon the hands of the Twelve.”

While the new involvements of the Twelve extended considerably beyond “temporal affairs,” it is probable that the workaday realities of their enlarged assignment probably fit closely Elder Woodruff's assessment. They became involved in both raising funds for and in constructing of the Nauvoo House and the temple, in aiding the poor, in managing land and other church temporalities. They directed the settlement of new emigrants into Nauvoo and participated in both political decisions and in decisions affecting Nauvoo business and economic development. In harmony with a February 1842 revelation, the Twelve soon controlled the Times and Seasons and eventually all Church publishing. The Quorum of the Twelve also directed the calling, assigning, and instructing of missionaries, presided over conferences both in the field and in Nauvoo, and regulated the branches abroad.

Unlike some of the earlier Apostles, impatient for additional prestige and authority, the Twelve in 1841 apparently accepted their new responsibilities as duty and, especially at first, exercised their expanded authority cautiously. Aware that the high council had previously exercised exclusive jurisdiction in the stakes, Brigham Young felt it necessary to deny explicitly in the August 1841 conference that he and his colleagues had ambitiously sought new authority. “Nothing could be farther from his wishes and that of his Quorum,” he assured his listeners, “than to interpose with church affairs at Zion and her stakes.” Nonetheless, he affirmed, he and the brethren would do whatever Joseph assigned.

While many of the Twelve's Nauvoo involvements were public, available for all to see and to judge, the Prophet also made further private clarification of their authority. When it was suggested that the high council and not the Twelve should preside over a certain trial, the Prophet said that the high council had no jurisdiction in the matter, that “the twelve had jurisdiction over all places and this in all the world—he spoke of the dignified station of the twelve and wished them to arise and magnify their calling.” As if they were still too cautious or timid, he then reproved the Apostles for lack of diligence. In contrast to Kirtland, from August 1841 on, the
Twelve in Nauvoo were never overshadowed either publicly or privately by the high council or any other leadership quorum.

III. Preparations for Succession

The new involvements of the Twelve were not limited to the temporal. Concern with the teachings and ordinances of the temple—not just financing and construction—is one thread that runs throughout their Nauvoo experience, a thread of tremendous importance for succession.38 Almost immediately after their return from England they participated in baptisms for the dead, including assisting the Prophet in dedicating a temporary baptismal font for that purpose. As early as December 1841 the Apostles published a general epistle to the Saints titled “Baptism for the Dead” which stressed the importance of the temple and its ordinances.39 Once in Nauvoo they also resumed the council meetings and close personal relationship with Joseph Smith that they had first experienced in the summer of 1839. The Prophet manifested his “mighty power and wisdom and knowledge” more clearly in such councils “in the midst of his intimate friends” than in any other setting, thought Wilford Woodruff. “My soul has been much edified of late from time to time in hearing Joseph the Seer convers about the mysteries of the Kingdom of God.”40

In the months ahead such meetings provided the Twelve a literal “school of the prophets.” A December 1841 meeting, one of the few for which we have some detail, foreshadows later Nauvoo developments and was perhaps typical of such private discussions. The Apostles and a few others met at the Prophet’s home on a Sunday evening. Heber Kimball’s explanation of the parable of the potter, stressing that all must be pliable in the hands of God, received Joseph’s approbation. Joseph followed with an acknowledgment that some dissatisfaction existed in Nauvoo because he did not deliver to the Saints more of the word of God. The Saints, he said in defense, were not prepared to receive what he had, “No (says he) not one in this room.” He then chastised those present for unbelief and further explained that one reason the Saints did not have the secrets of the Lord was their inability to maintain confidences, “I can keep a secret till doomsday,” he added. Brigham Young followed with an admonition “to keep each commandment as it came from the Lord by the mouth of the prophet.” Interestingly, this was one of the last occasions that Wilford Woodruff recorded in his diary the Prophet’s nonpublic teachings. The Lord and the Prophet had commanded that a temple be built, and “we should do it speedily,” concluded Brigham Young.41 For their part, the Apostles determined to be pliable, obedient, and, where necessary, silent.

By the spring of 1842 Joseph Smith had concluded that the introduction of additional temple ordinances could not await the completion of the
temple. On 4 May 1842, in the second story of his Red Brick Store, he introduced the first full temple endowments. Among the nine men involved that day were the three Apostles who later formed the First Presidency: Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, and Willard Richards. From that beginning, Joseph Smith intimately involved the Twelve in each step as he unfolded all of the temple-related keys, ordinances, and teachings. Eventually, nine of the Twelve—the same nine who first met as a quorum in England—received the fulness of the priesthood ordinances in Nauvoo under the Prophet’s direction. After the Martyrdom, these Apostles mobilized the Saints to finish the temple and then administered to them the same ordinances.

During his final months Joseph Smith completed the introduction of all temple ordinances, the implementation of new institutional patterns, and the preparation of the Twelve to administer these things in his absence. As one close associate wrote soon after the Martyrdom:

> All had been done. Joseph and Hyram had done all that they could have done and the Foundation of the great Work of the last Days was laid so that it could be finished by the 12 Apostles who had been instructed in all things pertaining to the Kingdom of God on the Earth.

During this same period the Prophet also expressed concretely his feelings for the responsibilities and privileges of his own seed in continuing the work he had begun. Three propositions, amplified and discussed below, focus attention on themes central to these final preparations:

1. That because of the proven competence and loyalty of the Twelve, Joseph Smith privately prepared them and fully authorized them by priesthood keys and the knowledge of temple ordinances and doctrine to carry on his mission. No other quorum or group of men was similarly authorized, prepared, and charged.

2. That Joseph Smith anticipated later important leadership roles for his sons, and that birthright and lineal descent were significant concepts both to him and to Brigham Young and the Twelve.

3. That neither the Prophet nor the Twelve saw apostolic possession of the keys of the kingdom—with concomitant responsibility to bear off the kingdom in Joseph’s absence—and lineal priesthood rights as incompatible. During the last months of Joseph’s life the two were closely intertwined, and throughout the nineteenth century Brigham Young and the Apostles viewed the possibility of the Prophet’s sons fulfilling their birthright as complementary to their own responsibilities.

A chronological review of the Prophet’s essential actions in 1843–1844 illustrates the interrelationship of these concerns.
Full priesthood authority was not yet available in the Church, Brigham Young told the Philadelphia Saints as late as August 1843. For one to have the fulness of the Melchizedek Priesthood, he “must be a king and a priest,” he told them, and if any yet were, he was not aware of it. Brigham Young here referred to a specific temple-related anointing that he anticipated but had not yet received. He probably understood what had so far prevented the introduction of the ordinance, and he no doubt would have agreed with the Prophet’s decision to move ahead as soon as the way opened, in spite of the absence of most of the Twelve.

On 27 August in Nauvoo Joseph Smith discussed the fulness of the priesthood publicly in more detail than at any other time. The ordinance imparted, he taught, “all that could be given to man on the earth.” One month later, Joseph Smith introduced for the first time the fulness of the priesthood anointing. Of the Apostles only John Taylor, who received his endowments on the same day, was present. In October, before the arrival of the other Apostles, the Prophet presided over the fulness ordinance for a handful of men, including his brother Hyrum and Stake President William Marks. Brigham Young received the same ordinance 22 November 1843, soon after his return from the East, and under his direction other members of his quorum soon followed.

With the Apostles in Nauvoo, Joseph Smith in December launched a period of intensive private instruction and ordinance work. Sometimes he met only with the Quorum of the Twelve; more often during this period he convened all of those who had been endowed, a group also referred to as a “quorum.” By early December this group included eight of the Twelve, with a ninth added 23 December.

Saturday, 2 December: Wilford Woodruff, George A. Smith, Parley Pratt, and Orson Hyde “met with the quorum and conversed upon a variety of subjects” and were endowed “preparatory to further Blessings.” From then throughout December and January, Joseph Smith continued his frequent private teaching. Sunday, 17 December: “Met with the quorum.... President Joseph Smith met with us also. We received good instruction.” Saturday, 23 December: “Met with the quorum through the day...” — to conduct business, including the endowment of Orson Pratt. Sunday, 24 December: “In the evening I again met with the quorum.... We received some instructions concerning the Priesthood.” Saturday, 30 December: “Met in council in the afternoon and herd a lecture delivered... which was truly interesting and edifying.” Sunday, 7 January 1844: “Met with the quorum and we had an interesting time of instruction.” Sunday, 14 January: “Met with the quorum of the Twelve. Conversed upon a variety of subjects, building the Temple, the endowment etc. Some good ideas advanced.”
Wednesday, 17 January: In the middle of this period of intensive temple-related ordinance work and instruction, the Prophet blessed his oldest son Joseph that his own anointing “shall be upon the head of my son” and that “he shall be my successor... which appointment belongeth to him by blessing, and also by right.” Rather than a bestowal of authority, this was a conditional designation or call to later leadership. According to reminiscences, John Taylor was present on this occasion, and the other Apostles were probably soon informed. A few days later Joseph Smith directed that eight more of the Twelve receive their fulness-of-the-priesthood anointings.

In retrospect, the Twelve saw this period as essential in their own preparation to carry on Joseph Smith’s work after him. Would this blessing of young Joseph have surprised, disturbed, or confused them? Probably not. For one thing, they were not yet willing in January 1844 to acknowledge, even to themselves, that the Prophet had need for an immediate successor. Because of their love for him and their unwillingness to part with him, they had discounted his portentous remarks and refused to entertain thoughts of an imminent change in their relationship. That, along with the fact that young Joseph was not yet twelve, must have encouraged their propensity to relegate any question of succession to the future. In the meantime, intent on learning their own duties, they focused on the demands of the immediate future.

It should also be noted that a future role for Joseph’s sons was not a new idea for the Apostles. No doubt they knew of the statement in the important revelation of January 1841 that Joseph Smith’s blessing and anointing “shall also be put upon the head of his posterity after him” and that in him and his seed, as with Abraham before him, “shall the kindred of the earth be blessed.” It is also possible that part of the private instruction of this period included expression from the Prophet of his hopes for his sons, with explanations of how their role would relate to the apostolic charge, and it is certain that bloodlines, chosen lineage, and priesthood rights were part of those temple-related private teachings.

On 20 January, the Saturday following Joseph’s blessing of his son, Heber C. Kimball became the second of the Apostles to receive the fulness of the priesthood ordinances—this under the direction of Joseph Smith, but with Brigham Young, his quorum president, officiating. During the next eleven days the remainder of the nine Apostles received those ordinances under the hands of, as Wilford Woodruff expressed it, “Apostles Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball by order of Joseph the prophet.”

Sunday, 21 January, may have been the day that Joseph Smith, following his regular Sunday preaching, answered a question about who would be his successor by pointing out his young son Joseph seated with him on
the stand. Appropriately, in the midst of this period of intensive ordinance work and instruction, Joseph’s sermon that day discussed temple ordinances: “My ownly trouble at the present,” he told the Saints, “is concerning ourselves that the Saints will be divided and broken up and scattered before we get our Salvation Secure.” He noted that many asked if it were not possible to be saved “without going through all these ordinances.” The fulness of salvation, he answered, was not possible without them.

That evening Parley Pratt received the fulness of the priesthood. He and others in attendance with the Prophet received “many god exhortations . . . concerning the things of God.” Between 25 January and 31 January, Orson Hyde, Orson Pratt, Willard Richards, Wilford Woodruff, John Taylor, and George A. Smith received the same keys and blessings. Throughout this period “the Twelve and others” continued to meet “for instruction.”

The story of Joseph Smith’s concern for his lineage and their birthright does not end with the blessing of his young son Joseph. The same January 1841 revelation that spoke of the blessings upon his own seed also designated his brother Hyrum to share with him all the powers of the priesthood. Had Hyrum outlived Joseph, he would have had the authority to preside. However, in connection with premonitions about his own death, the Prophet might also have had presentiments about Hyrum, for he apparently told Newel K. Whitney that “if he and Hyrum were taken away” his younger brother Samuel H. Smith “would be his successor.” At any rate, while Joseph felt his entire lineage had a special birthright, he was especially concerned about his own descendants. Not only did he bless his oldest son Joseph, several sources indicate he also left prophetic promises about his youngest son, David Hyrum Smith. “Unborn, yet blessed and prophetically announced . . . to be at some future time the ruler of the Mormon Church” is how one nineteenth-century author phrased it, citing John M. Bernhisel, an intimate associate of the family, as his source. Born the November following the Prophet’s death, David would have been conceived in February, after the blessing of young Joseph. Perhaps as the first son born to Joseph and Emma after their eternal marriage, the first-born in the covenant, he was considered to have a special birthright. The prophetic promises of future leadership were not forgotten.

During February, the Twelve continued frequent meetings with Joseph, many of them for planning a major Western expedition to search out possible locations for the Saints. Some plans for the West had been formulated at least as early as the winter of 1840–1841, while the Twelve were in England, and interest had continued, so the Twelve were likely neither unaware nor totally uninvolved before this. But now Joseph expressly delegated to the Apostles the overseeing and planning for this expedition. And in this context the Prophet told them that within five years the Saints would
be “rid of” their old enemies “whether they were Apostates or of the world” and asked them to record it as a prophecy. For the Twelve this was fulfilled precisely on schedule in the move to the Great Basin, leaving behind both apostates and old enemies.

In late February Joseph concluded to defer further discussion of the West until he organized a long-contemplated new council, the now well-known Council of Fifty. With assistance of the Apostles, who were involved in every facet of its organization and deliberations, the Prophet began in early March 1844 to organize and instruct this forum. Although a revelation relating to the Council dates from that same spring of 1842 that saw the organization of the Relief Society and the first endowments, it became in the spring of 1844 the last of the institutional models that Joseph Smith would introduce.

Although the Council of Fifty had no opportunity to mature into a vital institution under Joseph Smith, its organization was of great symbolic importance. Its members thought of it as a government in embryo, one that would in the millennial kingdom have full power. “The Kingdom is organized,” wrote Apostles Young and Richards a few weeks later, “and although it is as yet no bigger than a grain of Mustard seed the little plant is in a flourishing condition and our prospects brighter than ever.”

In another letter Brigham Young noted Joseph had told them “the kingdom is set up, and you have the perfect pattern, and you can go and build up the kingdom.”

Shortly after the organization of this council, Joseph Smith convened the Twelve and others for a solemn, yet dramatic meeting. The men met above Joseph’s store in the same room where nearly two years earlier endowments were first given. Reminiscent dating of the meeting as 23 March 1844 may be in error; more likely it occurred between 24–26 March and certainly before 4 April when Orson Hyde left Nauvoo for his Eastern mission.

In this extraordinary council, a depressed Joseph Smith again expressed forebodings about his own life. One thing remained undone, he told those assembled, before he could go “with all pleasure and satisfaction, knowing my work is done, and the foundation laid upon which the Kingdom of God is to be reared”: “Upon the shoulders of the Twelve must the responsibility of leading this Church henceforth rest until,” he admonished the Apostles, “you shall appoint others to succeed you.” Concerned that “this power and these Keys” be perpetuated, he noted that since all the Apostles present held the same keys, should some be killed others could be ordained to the same calling. After this “appointment,” “confirmed by the holy anointing under the hands of Joseph and Hyrum,” the prophet charged them: “I roll the burthen and responsibility of leading this Church off from my shoulders on to yours. Now, round up your shoulders and stand under it like
men; for the Lord is going to let me rest a while.” The Twelve now stood accountable, wrote one of the Apostles a few months later, “to lead this church, and to take the entire responsibility of all its affairs.”

On this same occasion, according to Parley P. Pratt, Joseph conferred “the keys of the sealing power” on Brigham Young, President of the Twelve. The Prophet taught them that it was the “last key,” the “most sacred of all,” and that it pertained “exclusively to the first presidency.”

All of this left an indelible imprint on those present. “Never shall we forget [Joseph’s] feelings or his words,” attested the certificate of the Twelve, and their subsequent actions and statements lend credence to the proposition that they did not forget. After the event, Joseph Smith on several occasion publicly affirmed that he had given the Twelve full authority and rolled the burden of the kingdom onto them. Many not present at the dramatic meeting itself later testified that they heard Joseph so remark. The preparations were now complete. Barely three months later, Joseph Smith was dead.

**IV. Succession as It Occurred**

The initial reaction in Nauvoo to news of the murders was profound shock, disbelief, confusion. Emotions overwhelmed, the Patriarch and Prophet gone, most of the Twelve in the East, many of the Saints indeed felt as sheep without a shepherd. As William Clayton, clerk to Joseph Smith and intimate of the Twelve, wrote in early July:

> The greatest danger that now threatens us is dissensions and strifes amongst the Church. There are already 4 or 5 men pointed out as successors to the Trustee & President & there is danger of feelings being manifest. All the brethren who stand at the head seem to feel the delicacy of the business.

For a time in July many must have wondered what would become of the Church and who could possibly lead them in the Prophet’s absence. Nevertheless, once the initial shock had passed, this period of uncertainly was probably less traumatic and undoubtedly shorter than we have usually thought. The wounded John Taylor and his fellow-apostle Willard Richards, private secretary to Joseph Smith, helped maintain order in Nauvoo and encourage patience throughout this period. Under their direction work immediately resumed on the temple—a visible demonstration that the martyred leader’s labors would live after him. Prompted in late June to leave his Eastern mission, Parley Pratt soon joined Elders Taylor and Richards in Nauvoo. The three Apostles, meeting daily at the bedside of Elder Taylor and united in council to the Saints, brought a measure of calm to replace initial confusion. As Parley Pratt later described July, they “were enabled to baffle all the designs of aspiring men . . . (who strove to reorga-
nize and lead the Church, or divide them), and to keep the Church in a measure of union, peace and quiet" until the rest of the Apostles returned.72

Whatever confusion lingered through July ended in early August. The 8 August vote to sustain the Twelve firmly determined the direction of the Church: the Twelve would lead and their agenda would be that prepared by the martyred prophet. For reason that we shall review, not all could accept that decision. The decision, nonetheless, was made; confusion ended. After 8 August those not responsive to the program of Joseph and the appeal of the Twelve faced a clear choice: adjust to a continuation under the new leaders or leave the body of the Church. Only those who made the latter choice faced confusion about a new leader. This becomes more clear as we examine the events of August and September.

Though the broad outlines of Sidney Rigdon's confrontation with the Twelve are well known, there are little-known but important aspects of the story worth reviewing. First is the frequent assumption that Sidney Rigdon had resided in Pittsburgh for some time before the Prophet's death. His virtual absence from the Nauvoo records the winter and spring of 1842–1843 can be traced, however, to his almost total lack of involvement in the life of the Church rather than to his removal from Nauvoo. He did not finally leave Nauvoo for Pittsburgh until within ten days of the Martyrdom.73

Second, it is important that Sidney Rigdon broke his self-imposed isolation in April 1844 with a major public address, his first in months. This speech appears to have been in part a challenge to Joseph Smith, a straw in the wind to measure the mounting dissatisfaction with Nauvoo developments, a testing of his own strength and influence. Rigdon's impressive performance, which included many allusions to "the mysteries," undoubtedly entered into the Prophet's decision to preach the King Follett discourse.74 The experience likely persuaded Sidney Rigdon that he had little influence, and he quietly retreated once again from the public scene until his mid-June departure for Pittsburgh. Convinced that developing events would result in Joseph's death, he awaited word that would bring him hurrying back.

Although Sidney Rigdon returned ahead of Brigham Young and most of the other Apostles, his appeals were ineffective. The Prophet's attempt to remove him as a counselor in 1843 as well as his long estrangement from church affairs was well known. Even the great orator's lengthy discourse of 8 August fell largely on deaf ears; he simply had little remaining credibility with the Saints.75

Compare this to Brigham Young. When he addressed the Saints that 8 August, he spoke in every respect from a position of strength. He stood as the president of the quorum that had for years proved its loyalty to the Prophet and its effective dedication to the Saints. Once before when the
Saints faced disaster in Missouri, their prophet imprisoned, the Twelve had stepped forward. In Nauvoo the Saints had learned to rely further on them and to trust them. Church members also understood the Twelve's relationship to Joseph Smith, and in some measure many were aware of the private training as well as the public responsibilities. Finally, the church administrative structure was already firmly in the hands of the Twelve. Under the circumstances there was little reason to look beyond the Twelve, and certainly no realistic expectation that anyone else could lead the body of the Church without their cooperation.

When the Apostles returned to Nauvoo in early August, they encountered not chaos but discouragement and grief. Though they were “hailed with Joy by all the Citizens,” the relief at the return of the Twelve did not mask deep hurt and foreboding. “A deep gloom seemed to rest over the City of Nauvoo,” thought Wilford Woodruff. Brigham Young similarly assessed the scene. “The Brethren were overjoyed to see us come home,” he wrote, “for they were little Children without a Father, and they felt so you may be sure.” In the East, Brigham Young had concealed his own pain and deep sense of loss to buoy up the Saints. “Be of good cheer,” he comforted when they learned of the Martyrdom. “When God sends a man to do a work all the devils in hell cannot kill him until he gets through his work. So with Joseph. He prepared all things gave the keys to men on the earth and said I may be soon taken from you.” In Nauvoo Brigham faced the larger task of dispelling the gloom and reanimating thousands for whom the Prophet had been a daily strength. While the meeting on 8 August was to determine the leadership and direction of the Church, it was also to revive the Saints, to replace despair with renewed confidence and purpose. “The Saints looked as through they had lost a friend,” wrote Brigham Young of that day, one “able and willing to counsel them in all things[.] . . . In this time of sorrow,” he continued, “I arose and spoke to the people. My heart was swelled with compassion towards them and by the power of the Holy Ghost even the spirit of the Prophets I was enabled to comfort the hearts of the Saints.”

“When it touches the salvation of the people, I am the man that walks to the line,” said Brigham Young in September 1844. That sense of concern and duty, not ambition, best describes Brigham’s motivation as he addressed the Saints on 8 August. A close reading of his remarks then reveals allusions to specific events and understandings associated with the months of private instruction climaxed by the Prophet’s dramatic charge to the Twelve. It was shown, wrote one observer, “that Joseph had told the 12 after he had instructed them in all things that on them would rest the Responsibility and the Care of the Church in Case he should be taken away.” Confident in his authority and in the necessity of stepping out,
 Brigham Young presented the Apostles as men “ordained and anointed to bear off the keys of the Kingdom of God in all the world.” The Church has a head, he told the assembled Saints, “and that head is the Apostleship.... If you let the Twelve remain and act in their place the keys of the Kingdom are with them, and they can manage the affairs of the Church and direct all things aright.”

To those who would seek to divide the Church, “Let [them] try it,” Brigham challenged, “and they will find out that there is power with the apostles.” Those who want President Rigdon might have him, he added, “but I say unto you that the quorum of the Twelve have the keys.” Could not another be appointed to lead? some wondered. “If one was to be chosen,” Brigham explained, the Apostles would have to ordain him “unto that appointment,” for they had the keys. If the Saints should choose to follow another, Brigham concluded, “take him, and we will go our way to build up the kingdom in all the world.”

Many of the Saints no doubt accepted the Twelve without hesitation and without reservation. An awareness of the relationship the Twelve shared with Joseph and long experience with them prepared many Nauvoo residents to trust the Apostles as capable men properly in place to lead. For others Brigham Young’s review of the apostleship must have brought home the meaning of things they had heard or witnessed during the Prophet’s lifetime. Also, dozens later testified that Joseph’s spirit or mantle seemed to rest on Brigham, transforming him to look or sound like the deceased leader. “The Saints soon began to see how things were,” wrote Joseph Fielding, “and that the 12 must now hold the Keys of Power and Authority according to the revelation which says the 12 are equal with the first Presidency.... It was now no hard thing determining who should lead the Church.”

The results of the 8 August meeting were not ambiguous. The Saints, wrote Brigham Young in his diary, “wanted the twelve to lead the church as Brother Joseph had dun in his day... and... with one hart and voice lifted up their hands for the twelve to preside.” That day, according to the diary of Willard Richards, the Twelve were “unanimously voted... to stand as the first presidency of the church.” “The church chose the Twelve to be theare Leaders,” penned Heber C. Kimball, by “unanimous vote, all seemed pleased.” Wilford Woodruff recorded a “sea of hands, a universal vote” for the “Twelve to Stand as the head, the first Presidency of the Church and at the head of this Kingdom in all the world.” “The power of the Preast-hood was explained and the order there off [sic],” Brigham Young summarized a few days later, “on which the hol Church lifted up there voices and hands for the twelve to moove forward and organize the Church and lead it as Joseph lead it;” which, he added, it is “our indespencable duty
to due."  

It was, indeed, a matter of duty. If the Apostles were to be faithful to the charge given them by the Prophet in March, they had no choice but to step forward and shoulder the burden. Once they had the sustaining vote of the Saints, Brigham and the Twelve immediately proceeded to business. Would the people consent to be tithed until the temple was complete? they asked that same afternoon. Would they let the Twelve regulate the financial concerns of the Church? Would they let the Twelve designate a patriarch from the Smith family? And the question continued. In each instance the Twelve received “a Universal vote” of support.

The ascendency of Brigham Young and the Twelve can in part be seen as a natural culmination of the process set in motion by the Prophet in 1841. Because of long preparation and the full support of most of the Saints, they could now lead firmly without vacillation or delay. There would be no spinning of wheels or period of confusion. The day following the meeting in the grove, the Twelve met with other Church leaders to “right up” the quorums and give “every one his place.” Within ten days they had prepared detailed plans and had explained the priorities by epistle to the Church aboard and in conference to the Saints at home. About one priority there was little doubt. The Saints wanted their endowments, Brigham wrote the Sunday following the crucial meeting; consequently, work on the temple “is going ahead faster than ever, we shall push it with all our might.” “All things,” he could further report, “are now reviving up again.”

The Saints had needed renewed courage and uplifted spirits, and the enthusiasm and energy of the Twelve helped provide that. It seems likely that the “mantle of Joseph upon Brigham” Experience associate with the meeting in the grove—a confirmation that the Lord remained with the Saints—also contributed to renewal. Along with confidence in the Apostles, that feeling of assurance released energy and optimism. “I never attended a better Conference for union and Business. . . . A good feeling prevailed,” wrote one participant in the first general conference under the Twelve. By October Nauvoo had regained full momentum and by the April 1845 conference, less than a year after the Martyrdom, observers commented on the strength, energy, unity, and record numbers of Saints attending, while noting that more had been accomplished on the temple than during any other similar length of time.

What happened to Sidney Rigdon after the 8 August meeting was merely postscript. Acknowledging his earlier years of faithful service, the Twelve fellowshipped him in spite of what they saw as his self-serving misrepresentations, but they would not allow him to mislead the Saints. “He shall not lead the innocent to destruction,” vowed Brigham Young; “I say it in the name of Israel’s God.” When Sidney began privately to introduce
things for which he had no authority, including secret ordinations and unauthorized temple-related ordinances, they moved to cut him off.93

Sidney Rigdon’s trial, 8 September 1844, provided the most extensive public airing of the temple-related issues at the heart of succession and served as an important forum for making the Saints more aware of the private instructions, keys, and anticipated ordinances. Listening to the extended discussion, many must have felt as one man expressed two weeks earlier after a related address provided him a new perspective: “Orson Hyde told . . . what it was for, that they [the Twelve] were in Council with Joseph so much last spring. He said that Joseph was preparing them for the work that they have got to do.”94 Sidney Rigdon had no such preparation.

V. A Succession of Confidence and Continuity

Throughout the so-called succession crisis, the Twelve appeared unthreatened and fully confident of their authority before God and man. Whether firm and decisive (as in the case of James J. Strang) or patient (as with William Smith), they always seemed assured of their own position. Their reaction to the claims of James J. Strang illustrates this self-assurance. Local leaders in Wisconsin had excommunicated Strang even before the Twelve reached Nauvoo in early August. In a 26 August council the Twelve upheld that action by cutting off Strang and an associate for “circulating a ‘revelation’ (falsely called) purporting to have been received by Joseph Smith.” When James J. Strang demanded justification for their action, John Taylor and Orson Hyde answered for the Twelve. They knew of no record that God had conducted an investigation or debated authority with Lucifer after cutting him off, they wrote, nor would they. “Your case has been disposed of by the authorities of the Church. Being satisfied with our power and calling, we have no disposition to ask from whence yours came.”95

Throughout this period the Twelve acted in a way that showed they deeply believed all they said about authority and duty.96 Perhaps the conviction upon which their bold leadership rested was best expressed in 1847. Soon after their first arrival in the Salt Lake Valley the Apostles testified that an “invisible agency” had buoyed them continually, making them cheerful in the face of danger, “stimulating them forward to accomplish the things required at their hands.” They had, they declared, “enjoy[ed] the liberty of the Sons of Light, which is to be exempt from fear, from doubt, from anxiety about consequences, knowing—absolutely knowing—that all things shall work together for their good and for establishing the Kingdom of God upon the earth.”97

Not only confidence but continuity rather than innovation characterized the leadership of the Twelve throughout this period. “I defy any man
to show that we have adopted any measure, only what Joseph has directed us,” Orson Hyde challenged during the September trial of Sidney Rigdon. Rather than offering new revelation, Parley Pratt affirmed, “we have spent all our time, early and late, to do the things the God of Heaven commanded us to do through brother Joseph.”

In instance after instance it can be shown that without delay the Apostles continued the measures of the Prophet. They discussed the endowment “quorum” the day following their sustaining and three days later began presiding over the meetings of the group. They solemnized new plural marriages within weeks of the Martyrdom. They continued the Prophet’s emphasis on the temple, the Nauvoo House, the gathering, and the West. Once the temple was sufficiently near completion, the Apostles administered to thousands of the Saints the same ordinances that they had received from Joseph. Under their direction, the Council of Fifty continued; they also emphasized the principles of priesthood theocracy the Prophet had practiced. All things, they stressed to the Saints, must be done “according to the pattern that has been commenced.” As Heber Kimball phrased it in October 1844, “We have got to carry out Joseph’s measures and you have got to assist us.”

As noted earlier, not all were equally comfortable with the Nauvoo innovations of the Prophet, and some critics of the Twelve now came out openly against them. This was not necessarily to the disadvantage of the Apostles, however, for often such a position served as an implicit demonstration that they followed the deceased Prophet.

At least as early as November 1844, for example, Sidney Rigdon taught that Joseph Smith had fallen because of polygamy. In Kirtland Rigdon’s principal lieutenant preached that “Brother Joseph was cut off for transgression, and the twelve are carrying out his principles” and, with all who follow them, are also in transgression. He himself rejected the entire Nauvoo experience. Before his excommunication he threatened to write a history of the Saints, exposing “all of their iniquity” “since they came to Nauvoo.” Later in reply to a request that he write a history of the Mormons, he stated there would have to be two histories, for from 1830 to 1840 historical developments “created an unbroken chain of history” which then ended. From 1840 on the history of the Saints “trended in a different direction and found its level in the order of things which now exist in Utah,” he concluded. Brigham Young and the Twelve, in other words, had followed the Nauvoo program of the Prophet. It is also noteworthy that those who eventually joined the Reorganization under Joseph Smith III similarly rejected Nauvoo developments; the new doctrines, ordinances, and institutions of Nauvoo are not evident in that movement.

Recognizing the basic issue, the Twelve made the temple a central symbol of their commitment. “God, the Temple and the Twelve” became a ral-
lying cry as they pledged to carry out “all the plans of Joseph.” Joseph lived and died a prophet, they affirmed. “I don’t want any one to fellowship the Twelve who says that Joseph is fallen,” Brigham Young announced. That is what the dissenters intimated even when they did not openly proclaim it. The “Brighamites” or “Twelvites” were in truth the real “Josephites,” a title by which those loyal to the Twelve in Kirtland were known by members of the Rigdon faction who proclaimed Joseph fallen.

Like Sidney Rigdon, some others who rejected the Twelve eventually acknowledged that the Apostles continued what Joseph Smith had been about in Nauvoo. Perhaps the most interesting analysis of this continuity appeared in the Whitmerite publication The Return. After careful investigation and comparison, Charles W. Lamb concluded, “We have seen that the two” — the Nauvoo temple ordinances and the Utah practices — run parallel all the way through, and that the evidence is undeniable, that the two are one and the same. And thus “Brigham and associates” were truly, as they always claimed, “carrying out Joseph’s measures,” in finishing the temple and giving the kind of endowment they did. In fact I believe they have been “carrying out the measures of our martyred prophet” all the time, and in every other particular.

Why, then, did not this author and those to whom he wrote follow the Twelve? It was not because they disbelieved the Twelve were carrying out Joseph’s program, but because they had concluded that Joseph and his Nauvoo program were not of God. As another writer in The Return wrote of the Twelve’s declarations that the Prophet had prepared and charged them to continue his work:

> We verily believe they thought they were doing the will of God in carrying out the measures they knew he introduced with them. . . . But we never believed those measures were God’s work, or we should have gone with them instead of opposing them.

That analysis focuses on the central issue of the succession period: Was Joseph Smith’s Nauvoo program of God? Such concerns over program complicated succession, of course, but were not limited to the succession period. They neither began with the death of the Prophet nor ended with the ascendancy of the Twelve. Instead, the Prophet’s death can be seen as a result of this ongoing split that had its roots in Kirtland and continued at least through the exodus period. Throughout the years of removal from Nauvoo and the trek to Utah, 1846–1852, those less committed to the program— to the gathering and a theocratic community, to the temple and its ordinances, and, above all, to plural marriage— continued to leave the Church. Strictly speaking, then, this was not a succession crisis, for most of the dissenters were less concerned about the ability or authority of the Apostles than about the propriety and inspiration of measures that had,
in fact, originated with Joseph.

An examination of dissenters from the Twelve demonstrates that authority was not the central issue. As long as his “kingdom” was perceived as moderate, James J. Strang, for example, enjoyed considerable success in attracting those who sought an alternative to the program and direction of the Twelve. But when he introduced his own version of the mysteries, including plural marriage, he lost adherents as precipitously as he had earlier gained them. Celebrated dissenters like William Smith and George J. Adams initially accepted the authority of Brigham Young and the Twelve, parting later mainly because the Apostles, exercising that authority, frustrated the dissenters’ desires.108 Following confrontations, both men concluded that it was not to their personal advantage to remain with the Twelve. During this period some branches in the East experienced major defections. Generally, however, this occurred only where earlier abuses by William Smith, George J. Adams, and Sam Brannan had divided the branches even before the death of the Prophet, precipitating a mistrust of the leadership and the program. The privations and hardships of the exodus also contributed to losses. It was no small task to live for several years in temporary homes and makeshift communities and then with inadequate equipment and insufficient provisions to move a family across plains and mountains to an unsettled region. Many who started out with the Twelve simply did not last the course. In this context, concerns about authority, if mentioned at all, were more of an excuse than a cause for leaving.

This is not to say that some, believing that there should have been a different outcome, did not reject the leadership of Brigham Young and the Twelve over the issue of authority and succession itself. It seems clear, however, that other things—personal discouragement, disagreement with the specific actions of individuals, or concerns over direction—motivated so-called succession losses far more frequently than did any quarrel over the right and authority of the Twelve to preside. And those who raised the latter issue often first experienced other difficulties. On the issues of preparation and authority the Twelve were virtually unassailable and few dissenters ever attempted to make that case against them.

Several additional things should be noted about succession-period losses. First, to a certain degree, especially initially, the losses were beneficial. During the last months of the Prophet’s life, Nauvoo was anything but united. Some, like William Law and his associates, actively opposed the Prophet, while others who resisted Rome measures could not bring themselves to break personally with him. Their departure following Joseph’s murder left Nauvoo more unified. Had those most opposed to the program not left, the Church could not have experienced the renewal of energy and harmony that saw the rapid completion of the temple and the successful
preparation for the move west. As one anonymous letter-writer expressed in the fall of 1844, “We need not wonder that the atmosphere feels more pure and more wholesome, for much of the unfruitful and corrupt matter is purged”—those not in agreement, in other words, had left—”and consequently we may expect to be more healthy.”

Second, aside from the specific need for greater unity, theology suggested that a continual sifting was a necessary part of the process of perfecting the Saints; always there would be some who from weakness or inclination would not stay, but their place would be filled by others. Although specific losses caused pain and there was grief over those misled, the Twelve seem not to have felt threatened or unduly troubled by this sifting. They saw it partly as desirable and, at any rate, inevitable. By acting boldly, they “saved the sheep and none but the Goats have gone,” Heber Kimball proclaimed in 1845. Now unified, the sheep “like the salt they get from the Shepherds.”

Finally, it appears that approximately half of those who were members of the Church at the death of Joseph Smith did follow the Twelve through all the difficulties of the succession-exodus period. Because the Prophet had carefully prepared the Twelve to provide continuity and the majority of the Saints recognized their leadership, institutional damage to the Church was minimal. Given the circumstances, one is impressed not by how many remained behind or were “sifted” out but by how many traveled west. Neither the 1844 succession of the Twelve to leadership nor the 1846–1852 exodus to the West resulted in the breaking up of the Church.

VI. The Apostles and the Sons of Joseph

The sons of the Prophet were in 1844 too young to have voice in or direct influence on succession. Nonetheless the Prophet had prophesied concerning them, and a few dissatisfied with the Twelve or their program may have remained behind with the hope that the sons would eventually provide an alternative. More important, some, and perhaps many, of those who remained firmly committed to the Twelve and “the measures of Joseph” also expected that in time one or the other of the Prophet’s sons would step forward as leader in the Church.

Brigham Young and the Twelve, for their part, genuinely hoped—even if they knew enough about Emma Smith’s antipathy to plural marriage not to immediately expect—that the sons would join them in the West. Throughout the period of succession and exodus Brigham Young responded to questions about young Joseph by cautioning that little should be said, for if the enemies of the Church learned of the promises upon his head it would endanger the boy’s life. Critics turned such remarks into sinister, self-serving assertions manufactured merely to blunt talk of a potential rival.
It seems more likely that Brigham genuinely felt there was danger to the boy and was sincere in his concern. The records preserve no evidence Brigham Young feared the potential influence of young Joseph or tried to dissuade him from joining the Saints in the West. On the contrary, for a decade and more he continued to acknowledge openly the possibility, indeed to invite it, and young Joseph received many invitations from those associated with the Apostles, urging him to join them.

It should be noted that although the Twelve were sustained in August 1844 as the Presidency over the whole Church and Brigham Young was early acknowledged as President of the Church, the Apostles employed no language in reference to themselves or to succession that precluded a future leadership role for Joseph’s sons. Even Brigham Young’s affirmation of the authority of the Twelve before the 8 August vote expressly acknowledge at least a theoretical possibility of another head. The Apostles were the Presidency of the Church, he declared; they stood next to Joseph and held the keys from him “and would have to ordain any man unto that appointment that should be chosen i.e if one was to be chosen.” Brigham Young here suggested that not only did the Apostles have authority from the Prophet, but they also had the power to convey that authority to others, including in time the Prophet’s sons.

Presumably it was John Taylor who editorialized soon after the Martyrdom in reply to the question “Who shall be the successor of Joseph Smith?” Be patient, he urged his readers, “be patient a little, till the proper time comes, and we will tell you all.” After reporting the vote “that the ‘Twelve’ should preside over the whole church,” he then promised “when any alteration in the presidency shall be required, seasonable notice will be given.” The editorial did not shut the door on future alternatives or claim that succession was now forever established. As Brigham Young declared in a 7 August meeting with Sidney Rigdon, he with the Twelve had the keys and through those keys could learn the mind and will of God. Then and in the future they would do with those keys whatever the Lord directed for the leadership of His Church.

Given this apparent flexibility, one wonders if the Apostles declined to organize a new First Presidency in Nauvoo partly in deference to the Prophet’s sons. While that may have been a factor, it is clear that other circumstances more directly influenced their timing.

Independent of young Joseph, it may have been more difficult for the Saints to accept immediately Brigham Young’s leadership over the Church as the President of a new First Presidency replacing the Martyrs than it was to sustain him and his colleagues in their familiar calling as Apostles. But if that were the only reason for delay they would probably have moved ahead with the organization of a presidency in 1845 or 1846 when critics carped.
about the “defect” in the “present organization,” i.e., the absence of a First Presidency, a quorum that all the Saints expected and only Sidney Rigdon and James Strang provided. There is no evidence that the Twelve ever doubted their authority to organize the First Presidency and Brigham Young later emphasized on several occasions that he had known in August 1844 they eventually would do so. That the Apostles failed to correct the “defect” even when it became problematical may have been due to their interpretation of the charge they received from the Prophet. Not just Brigham Young (or Brigham and counselors) but the Twelve as a quorum were charged to complete the temple, assist the Saints in obtaining their endowments, and find a new home for the Church in the West. Not until these tasks were accomplished did the Twelve move in December of 1847 to form a new presidency.

Aware that lengthy discussion and some disagreement preceded the 1847 decision to organize the First Presidency, some have felt that not all the Apostles agreed with Brigham Young’s right to move ahead even then. The minutes demonstrate, however, that none of the Twelve questioned Brigham Young’s authority to organize a presidency or his right to preside over it. At issue was the expediency of organizing then, with the Twelve functioning so successfully as a quorum. There was hesitancy to change the share of administration when no exigency seemed to demand it. Part of this involved a realistic anticipation that Brigham Young, as President of the new First Presidency, would not involve individual quorum members as fully in administration as he had as President of the Twelve. The Apostles had enjoyed and appreciated the opportunity of sharing administrative responsibilities and were reluctant to give that up. These personal feelings along with queries about the necessity for change personal feelings along with queries about the necessity for change prompted the deliberations, not differences over doctrine or authority. Since young Joseph had just turned fifteen, it is not surprising that a potential future role for him was not part of the lengthy discussions.¹¹⁹

This is not to suggest that by 1847 the Apostles had forgotten young Joseph, rather that he still had to come of age, prove himself, and enter in “at the gate” to receive authority. Later statements of the Apostles confirm this attitude. In 1856 Heber Kimball noted that the Prophet’s boys “lay apparently in a state of slumber,” though “by and by,” he thought, “God will wake them up, and they will roar like the thunders of mount Sinai.”¹²⁰ In early 1860 Brigham Young remarked that young Joseph would in time be a good Latter-day Saint. It was President Young’s faith that “blessings will rest on the posterity of Joseph Smith the Prophet; and the spirit of the Lord will probably rest upon Joseph that he will be constrained to enquire of the Lord what he would have him to do.” There can be no doubt that
Brigham Young was greatly disappointed to learn soon after this that young Joseph had joined with the Reorganization, “those apostates,” in Brigham’s view. Realizing that the Prophet’s eldest son had made his choice, Brigham Young concluded “that Joseph might be a prophet and do a good work, but he never would [now] be leader of this people. David would be the leader of the Church.”

For many years that became the theme of Brigham Young’s comments on the sons of Joseph Smith, as the following example illustrates:

I have already said that young Joseph Smith will never be the leader of the Latter day Saints; to put your minds at rest, I will say it again; while the sun shines, the water runs, the grass grows, and the earth remains, young Joseph Smith will never be the leader of the Latter-day Saints! But if [David] the one that Joseph the prophet predicted, should step forth to become the leader of this Church, he will come to us like a little child.

For Brigham Young, the problem with Joseph’s sons was clear: they were following Emma Bidamon and not Joseph the Prophet. “I am sorry for them, and I have my own faith regarding them,” Brigham Young told the Saints.

I think the Lord will find them by and by—not Joseph, I have told the people times enough, they never may depend on Joseph Smith who is now living; but David, who was born after the death of his father, I still look for the day to come when the Lord will touch his eyes. But I do not look for it while his mother lives. The Lord would do it now if David were willing; but he is not, he places his mother first.

It is significant that Brigham Young did not call himself the successor to Joseph Smith. For one thing, he believed the Prophet held the keys of presidency over this dispensation for eternity and no one would or could replace him. But more than that, he thought of himself as Joseph’s disciple, as an apostle of the martyred prophet authorized and charged to carry on his work, more than as his successor. In 1860 when news of Joseph III’s joining the Reorganization began to make a stir in Utah, Heber Kimball testified that no matter how many potential heirs to the priesthood arise, “I know that Brigham Young will lead this people till the time comes for a change. If the Lord wants another man to take oversight of this people,” he continued, “He will ‘in due time make it manifest’ to President Young. In the meantime, the Saints could rest assured that Brigham Young was the man to lead and that he would ‘lead them aright.’ President Young, said Heber Kimball, was the ‘legal administrator and successor . . . the legal successor of Joseph Smith.’ In responding, Brigham Young once again left open the door:

The brethren testify that brother Brigham is brother Joseph’s legal successor. You never heard me say also so. I say that I am a good hand to keep...
the dogs and wolves out of the flock... I do not think anything about being Joseph's successor... [but concern myself with] Father, what do you require of me, and what can I do to promote your kingdom on the earth, and save myself and brethren?

As to the sons of the Prophet, Brigham remained certain that they were in the hands of God and that if ever they made an appearance before the Saints "full of his power, there are none but what will say—'Amen! we are ready to receive you.'"  

The sons, Brigham Young emphasized, must come in through the gate. By the he meant they must qualify themselves by obedience and worthiness and then receive the keys from those who received them from their father before they could have a place in the kingdom. "Young Joseph does not possess one particle of... priesthood," Brigham reminded the Saints in 1866; he had made another choice. But still President Young had hope for the other son of promise. "I am looking for the time when the Lord will speak to David," he continued, "but let him persue the course he is now persuing, and he will never preside over the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in time or in eternity. He has got to repent... embrace the gospel of life and salvation, and be an obedient son of God, or he never can walk up to possess his right." If he would walk "in the true path of duty," concluded Brigham, it would be his right to preside. "I hope and pray that he had the whole family will repent."  

"What might have been if the son of the Prophet had taken the only legitimate course to obtain the keys and powers of the Holy Melchisedek Priesthood is not for us to say," concluded one nineteenth-century writer. "But the facts are that he holds neither Priesthood nor presidency to-day." Could Brigham Young and the Twelve have harmonized apostolic succession with lineal rights had the sons of Joseph come to them? This same author argued that even had they been worthy and ordained "to the fullness of the Priesthood held by the Prophet" it would not automatically follow they would preside over the Church. Heirship relates to priesthood but not necessarily to presidency, he thought.  

While it is not possible to know "what might have been," it is clear that Brigham Young's perspective allowed for presidency. The experience of Joseph F. Smith may provide the best guide as to how. As a son of Hyrum Smith, Joseph F. also had a birthright relating to priesthood and to office. He had first to demonstrate worthiness and commitment, but the fact that he was ordained to the apostleship at an early age was not unrelated to his lineage. And though he was a man of ability, it was similarly not unrelated to his lineage that there were several discussions about placing him at the head independent of his "turn" by apostolic seniority. However, in each instance the apostolic order was maintained. It was believed, nonetheless,
that the senior Apostle held the keys to know the mind and will of God and had the right, if God directed, to designate another. If a son of the martyred prophet had come into the Church, it is possible he would have been so designated. Otherwise he might, as did Joseph F. Smith, son of the martyred patriarch, eventually have presided over the Church as senior Apostle.

And what was the thinking of Joseph III through these years? Why did he not claim his station? In his memoirs he wrote of an 1856 visit by his cousin George A. Smith and Erastus Snow, who urged him to go to Utah, “for they really thought that my place.” The principal reason he declined the invitation, he told them, was his disbelief in what they taught and practiced. Polygamy? they asked. “Yes; I could never accept or countenance that doctrine,” he replied. To join the Utah Mormons, he thought, “would have been tantamount to admitting” that his father was “responsible for, and the human author of” that system which he did not and would not believe. “To admit that my father was the author of such false theories... or that he practiced them in any form, was not only repellent in itself to my feelings and strongly condemned by my judgment, but it was contrary to my knowledge of, and belief in him.”

He published these feelings in 1860 as he took the helm of the Reorganization. “I know that many stories are now being circulated in reference to what will be the result of the step I have taken,” he wrote. Acknowledging that many believed he would emigrate to Salt Lake, he concluded:

To those who know me, it is needless for me to say that I am not going to do any such thing while the doctrine of polygamy and disobedience to the laws are countenanced there.... numbers of my readers... know my sentiments in regards to those obnoxious features of Utah Mormonism.

It was program and not the authority of the Apostles that Joseph III rejected. Indeed, there is evidence that he saw the Twelve as the proper authority to succeed the Prophet in 1844. Even as late as 1865 he argued that the Apostles had properly rejected Sidney Rigdon and legally excommunicated him. Nonetheless, he felt justified in refusing to follow them because, in his view, they introduced new doctrines and practices. He never accepted that these measures of Brigham Young and the Twelve had originated with his father.

Once Joseph III made his choice, the hopes of Brigham Young and others for the posterity of Joseph centered on David. When it became evident that David, too, declined to lend his talents to his father’s work, anticipations shifted to a more remote future time for the fulfillment of the Prophet’s predictions. Apostle John Henry Smith wrote to his cousin Joseph III in 1886:

The promise made to your father, “that in him and his seed all of the families of the earth should be blessed” cannot fail; if, you and your brothers
fail to come forward and perform your part, God will raise up through your children, or, childrens children seed that will yet honor all of His laws, sustain every principle, being mighty among the Saints; for, your fathers words will not fail.133

Earlier George Q. Cannon of the First Presidency had publicly expressed a similar opinion. Faithful men might have less faithful sons, he taught, but faithful posterity will come, just as I believe it will be the case with the Prophet Joseph's seed. . . . Just as sure as God lives, just as sure as God had made promises, so sure will some one of Joseph Smith's posterity rise up and be numbered with this Church and bear the everlasting Priesthood that Joseph himself had. It may be delayed in the wise providence of our God . . . but these promises are unalterable.134

Progress in the kingdom did not, however, depend on that timetable. Able men stood steadfast, exercising that fulness of priesthood authority they had received directly from the Prophet. As Brigham Young assured the people many years before, although “Joseph Smith lived and died a prophet,” sealing his testimony with his blood, “the voice of the Lord is still heard for this people. . . . I never pretended to be Joseph Smith,” he continued, nor the man who brought forth the Book of Mormon, “but I do testify of the truth of it.” Instructed, prepared, authorized of Joseph, “I am an apostle to bear testimony.”135 While Brigham Young and the Apostles stood ready to make room for the seed of Joseph, they resolutely pursued the goals and managed the stewardship left them by their martyred prophet.

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1. John Fullmer to Uncle John, 27 September 1844, John S. Fullmer Letterbook, Church Archives, Historical Department of the church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Salt Lake City, Utah; hereafter cited as Church Archives. In this and other quotations from the manuscript materials, abbreviations have been expanded and minimum and capitalization supplies to improve readability.


4. Joseph Smith Diary, 11 June 1843, Joseph Smith Collection, Church Archives.
This resistance to innovation was in spite of the article of faith which proclaimed, "We believe all that God has revealed, all that He does now reveal, and we believe that He will yet reveal many great and important things..."

5. Diary of Wilford Woodruff, 21 January 1844, Wilford Woodruff Papers, Church Archives.


7. Heber C. Kimball to Parley P. Pratt, 17 June 1842, Parley P. Pratt Papers, Church Archives. While some private councils mainly involved the Twelve, others involved the "Quorum" of those who had received temple ordinances and instruction under Joseph Smith. The "Small company" mentioned here was of the latter type.


9. A careful reading of Stan Larson, "The King Follett Discourse: A Newly Amalgamated Text," Brigham Young University Studies 18 (Winter 1978): 198–208, is instructive in this regard. While this carefully recorded sermon is thought to be one of the boldest and most explicit the Prophet ever preached, Wilford Woodruff apparently had from private instruction a fuller understanding of many of the concepts mentioned. The italicized portions of the amalgamated text are additions that only the Woodruff version provides. The explanation for these expansions by Wilford Woodruff is probably not that he heard what other recorders did not, but that he already understood and could therefore clarify what the Prophet only alluded to. The teachings of the King Follett Discourse were not new to Wilford Woodruff and others who had been privately taught by the Prophet.

10. According to historian Dean Jessee, contemporary records mention more than 250 public sermons and there were no doubt others. No verbatim transcripts exist of any of those (clerks skilled in shorthand were not available in the Church until just after the Prophet's death) and reasonably adequate summaries of only about fifty.


15. The official description of the first Nauvoo endowments in May 1842 included the explanation that "nothing was made known to these men but what will be made known to all the Saints of the last days, so soon as they are prepared to receive, and a proper place is prepared to communicate them" (History of the Church, 5:2). It is clear that public allusions created in the Saints a sense of anticipation about the new teachings to accompany the completion of the temple.


17. According to Brigham Young, Joseph said on more than one occasion that he expected the introduction of plural marriage could lead to his death (Discourse by Brigham Young, 8 October 1866, Brigham Young Papers, Church Archives).

18. Wilford Woodruff Diary, 28 July 1844. Lyman Wight told this to his fellow-apostles as they traveled back to Nauvoo after the Martyrdom. He said Joseph warned him not to reveal it until after the Prophet's death.

19. Undated Certificate of the Twelve, ca. fall 1844 or winter 1845, Brigham Young Papers; and 1 January 1844 public proclamation of Parley P. Pratt, Millennial Star 5 (March 1845): 151. See also Orson Hyde's remarks in Times and Seasons 5 (15 Septem-
ber 1844): 651.
Have Known That He Was Not a Fallen Prophet: The Nauvoo Journal of Joseph Field-
21. Minutes of the Nauvoo Female Relief Society, 28 April 1842, Church Archives.
22. For a discussion of some of these, see Richard L. Anderson, “Joseph Smith’s
Prophecies of Martyrdom,” The Eight Annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium: A Sesqui-
centennial Look at Church History, January 26, 1980 (Provo, Utah: Church Educational
23. See, for example, Doctrine & Covenants 107:24. Before the Apostles had a cen-
tral role in practice, other Revelation also suggested this potential (see especially Doc-
24. For details, see Ronald K. Esplin, “The Emergence of Brigham Young and the
Twelve to Mormon Leadership, 1830–1841” (Ph.D. dissertation, Brigham Young Uni-
26. Joseph Smith Diary, 16 January 1836; see also the discussion in Esplin, “Emer-
gence of Brigham Young and the Twelve,” pp. 182–85. It should be noted that at this
time such a clarification had no immediate implications for succession. As D. Michael
Quinn carefully demonstrated in “The Mormon Succession Crisis of 1844,” BYU Stud-
ies 16 (Winter 1976): 187–201, had Joseph Smith died in 1836 there were several other
potential modes of succession.
27. See “History of Heber Chase Kimball by his own Dictation,” Heber C. Kimball
Papers, Church Archives; and Minutes, 6–8 April 1838, Far West Record, Church
Archives.
28. See President Heber C. Kimball’s Journal, Seventh Book of the Faith-Promoting
Series (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1882), pp. 66–67 for the full text of the
letter. Esplin, “Emergence of Brigham Young and the Twelve,” pp. 360–64, discusses
the letter and provides the location of manuscript copies.
29. Parley Pratt was in jail, Orson Pratt was unavailable, David Pattern had been
killed, Orson Hyde had apostatized with Thomas Marsh, and William Smith was look-
ing out mainly for himself. Some appointed to fill vacancies had not yet been ordained.
30. William Smith and John E. Page failed to obey the call; Lyman Wight was not
named to the quorum until just before the Apostles returned to America.
31. Esplin, “Emergence of Brigham Young and the Twelve,” pp. 427–29; the entire
mission experience is detailed and its impact analyzed on pp. 427–98.
32. Minutes, 16 August 1841, General Minutes Collection, Church Archives; and
a printed version in Times and Seasons 2 (1 September 1841): 521–22.
33. Willard Richard Diary, 16 August 1841, Willard Richards Papers, Church
Archives; and Wilford Woodruff Diary, 8 October 1841.
34. Wilford Woodruff Diary, 8 February 1842: “A Revelation was given a few days
Since for the Twelve to obtain the printing establishment . . . and govern the printing of
the Times and Seasons and all the church publications as they are directed by my Holy
Spirit in the midst of their Councils saith the Lord.”
35. Although enough data about other involvements of the Twelve is now avail-
able to expand his analysis, T. Edgar Lyon in “Nauvoo and the Council of the Twelve,”
The Restoration Movement: Essays in Mormon History, pp. 167–205, still provides a
useful overview of the Nauvoo activities of the Apostles. For examples of the score of
apostolic authority and of the relationship of the Twelve to the Presidency, see notices
in Times and Seasons 3 (16 May 1842): 798.
36. Minutes, 16 August 1841, Times and Seasons 2 (1 September 1841): 521; see also Epistle of the Twelve, Times and Seasons 3 (1 April 1842): 736, 738.
37. Levi Richards Diary, 27 May 1843, Church Archives; I appreciate Andrew Ehat for bringing this source to my attention.
38. For a comprehensive treatment of the temple and succession, see the unpublished manuscript by Andrew F. Ehat, “Joseph Smith’s Introduction of Temple Ordinances and the 1844 Mormon Succession Question.” A condensed version of this important study will appear in a future issue of BYU Studies.
40. Wilford Woodruff Diary, 19 February 1842. For examples of earlier meetings, see Woodruff entries for 31 October, 28 and 30 November, and 27 December 1841.
41. Wilford Woodruff Diary, 19 December 1841.
42. History of the Church, 5:1–2. See also Ehat’s discussion of this in “Nauvoo Journal of Joseph Fielding,” p. 159, n. 77.
44. Wilford Woodruff Diary, 6 August 1843. Later that month Joseph Smith alluded to the same things when he said publicly that “Abrahams Patriarchal power . . . is the greatest yet experienced in this church” (Franklin D. Richards, “Scriptural Items,” 27 August 1843, as quoted in Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, eds. The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph [Provo: Religious Studies Center, 1980], p. 245.)
45. See Ehat, “Joseph Smith’s Introduction of Temple Ordinances,” for analysis of the factors which influenced the Prophet’s timing.
46. Quotation is from Heber C. Kimball Diary, 26 December 1845. For information about “fulness of the priesthood” and the ordinance, see the Prophet’s discourse, 27 August 1843, in Ehat and Cook, eds. The Words of Joseph Smith, pp. 243–47, along with editorial notes on pp.302–307, especially n. 30.
47. Dates for individual ordinances have been drawn from Andrew F. Ehat, “A Summary of Data on the Individuals Who Received the Endowment before Ordinance Work Began in the Nauvoo Temple,” used by permission; copy in possession of the author. Ehat prepared this summary after extensive work in relevant primary materials.
48. Wilford Woodruff Diary, 2 December 1843. Quotations from December and January that follow are also from the Woodruff diary.
49. The Thomas Bullock text of the 17 January 1844 blessing is in the RLDS Library-Archives, The Auditorium, Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Independence, Missouri. Both the text and the memory of young Joseph confirm that his was a blessing or designation, not an ordination. “I was not ordained by my father as his successor,” he later declared, “according to my understanding of the word ordain, I was not. I was blessed and designated.” This constituted a conditional call, “a blessing conferred upon me, and by the act conferring certain privileges upon me, or to designate me to a certain work, depending as I understood it then, and understand it now, upon good behavior, and upon any subsequent call I might receive.” (Testimony of Joseph Smith III in “Temple Lot Suit,” Complainant’s Abstract of Pleading and Evidence [Lamoni, Iowa: Herald Publishing House, 1983], p. 79; italics as in the original.) For scriptural use of “call” in this conditional sense, see Matthew 20:16 and D&C 121: 34ff. For a treatment of the RLDS view of this designation, see W. Grant McMurray, “‘True Son of a True Father’: Joseph Smith III and the Succession Question,” Restoration Studies I, Sesquicentennial Edition, ed. Maurice L. Draper and Clare D. Vlahos (Independence: Temple School, the Auditorium, 1980), pp. 131–41.


52. This was the same order followed in the Kirtland Temple where Quorum President Thomas B. Marsh was anointed and authorized to officiate for his quorum.

53. Note at beginning of Wilford Woodruff Diary for 1847–1853.

54. James Whitehead, whose several reminiscent accounts are not internally consistent and who sometimes included details that are demonstrably in error, insisted that this occurred on the Sunday meeting following the blessing (see Complainant’s Abstract, pp. 32–33, 376–37). Here he was correct in saying that the blessing occurred in the winter of 1843–1844 and in remembering a Wednesday. In another account, however, he thought it occurred soon after the Council of Fifty was organized, while other informants remembered an occasion shortly before Joseph Smith went to Carthage. It is possible some such public mention was made, perhaps on more than one occasion, as was the case with the Prophet’s announcement that he had shifted the burden of the kingdom to the Twelve, but it seems unlikely any formal action was taken publicly and no record survives.


57. For Brigham Young’s understanding of this concern and of why it was appropriate, see his discourses on 9 October 1859, Journal of Discourses, 7:289, and 16 February 1847, Brigham Young Papers.


60. T. B. H. Stenhouse, The Rocky Mountains Saints: A Full and Complete History of the Mormons . . . (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1873), p. 213. See also W. W. Blpaia Diary, 17 June 1874, RLDS Library—Archives, where he recorder that James Whitehead “Says D [avi]d will yet be a Prince so it was predicted by J. S.” As noted on p. 337, Brigham Young made similar statements on several occasions.

61. Wilford Woodruff Diary, 25 February 1844.


63. Brigham Young and Willard Richards to Reuben Hedlock, 3 May 1844, Brigham Young Papers; see also History of the Church, 6:351–54.

64. Brigham Young to Orson Spencer, 23 January 1848, Millennial Star 10 (15 April 1848): 115.

65. Remarks of Orson Hyde, Nauvoo High Council Minutes, 30 November 1844, Church Archives; and 25 (15 September 1844): 651.

66. Undated Certificate of the Twelve, ca. fall 1844 or winter 1845, Brigham Young
Papers. This is an early and detailed account of the “last charge,” including Joseph’s Smith’s “own language to us on that occasion, as nearly as we can recollect.” The Apostles first discussed this charge with the Nauvoo Saints in August-September 1844. Latter they left dozens of descriptions and testimonies of this event. For early printed accounts see Times and Seasons 5 (15 September 1844): 650–51, and 5 (1 November 1844): 698; also Millennial Star 5 (March 1845): 151. The first detailed public discussion was probably Orson Hyde’s August address reported in Samuel W. Richards to Franklin D. Richards, letter begun 23 August 1844, Franklin D. Richards Papers, Church Archives.


68. Proclamation of Parley P. Pratt, 1 January 1845, Millennial Star 5 (March 1845): 151.

69. Undated Certificate of the Twelve, ca. fall 1844 or winter 1845, Brigham Young Papers.

70. Heber C. Kimball testified that hundreds had heard the Prophet proclaim the Apostles had “all the power, Priesthood, and authority that God ever conferred on me” (Discourse by Heber C. Kimball, 8 October 1852, Journal of Discourses, 1:206). For other examples, see the letter to Preston Nibley copied in the Lorenzo H. Hatch Journal, 14 July 1906, Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, and the statement of James W. Phippen, The Young Woman’s Journal 17 (December 1906): 54. Bathsheba W. Smith, wife of Apostle George A. Smith, remembered hearing Joseph Smith make such a statement publicly and in a private meeting (Affidavit, 19 November 1903, Church Archives).

71. William Clayton Diary, 6 July 1844, as quoted in James B. Allen, “One Man’s Nauvoo: William Clayton’s Experience in Mormon Illinois,” Journal of Mormon History 6 (1979): 58. As mentioned previously, one of those “pointed out as successors” might have been Samuel H. Smith. However, Lucy Smith, mother of Joseph, Hyrum, and Samuel, thought it Samuel’s right to succeed Hyrum in the patriarchal office rather than Joseph as head of the Church. William Clayton recorded on 2 July 1844 that “Mother Smith wants Samuel to move into Nauvoo and take the Patriarch’s office,” an office that ultimately went to younger brother William Smith after Samuel’s untimely death in late July.

Another of those “pointed out” during those post-Martyrdom speculations might have been William Marks, a man briefly considered as a possible successor to Joseph Smith as Trustee for the Church. But Newel K. Whitney argued that Marks’s “opposition to Joseph and the quorum” in the “most important matters” disqualified him from further service (see Clayton, 12 July 1844, typescript of entry in possession of author). Moreover, William Marks could boast neither of lineage, designation, nor superior ecclesiastical position. Those who later argued that William Marks, as president of Nauvoo Stake, should have succeeded Joseph Smith, instead of the Apostles doing so, engaged in wishful thinking sparked by their intense need to find some acceptable alternative to the Twelve and the continuity they represented with the Prophet’s Nauvoo measures. Emma Smith’s similar argument in favor of William Marks as recorded by James Monroe, 24 April 1845 (copy, Utah State Historical Society, Salt Lake City), simply does not fit the facts. (See Joseph Smith diary, 16 January 1836, Joseph Smith Papers, and also the discussion on pp. 308, 310–12 for the Prophets clear designation of the Apostles as superior.


73. Orson Hyde testified at Rigdon’s trial that Sidney was in Nauvoo “all the time,
but he did not attend our councils” (Times and Seasons 5 [15 September 1844]: 651). Heber C. Kimball made similar reference, and Rigdon’s defender, William Marks, confirmed that Sidney was in Nauvoo during this period and had brief connection with the Prophet’s inner circle before finally departing for Pittsburgh (Times and Seasons 5 [1 October 1844]: 664–65). Without Joseph’s authorization, W. W. Phelps introduced Sidney Rigdon to the circle; according to the Ehat Endowment Data Summary, that was on 11 May 1844. He attended few, if any, additional meetings and just over a month later left Nauvoo. (For a Nauvoo-postmarked letter confirming Rigdon’s presence, see Sidney Rigdon to Thomas Ford, 14 June 1844, Church Archives. See also the reminiscences of John W. Rigdon, as well as Ehat, ed., “Nauvoo Journal of Joseph Fielding,” p. 155, n. 63.)

74. Rigdon’s address began 6 April and was continued the morning of 7 April. Times and Seasons 5 (1 May 1844): 522–24 published only the first part. See Conference Minutes, 6–7 April 1844, Church Archives, for the remainder. It seems clear that the Prophet’s preliminary remarks of the King Follett Discourse the afternoon of 7 April were calculated to contrast with Rigdon’s powerful oratory that morning. According to the minutes, Joseph told the audience he intended to edify them “with simple truths from Heaven” rather than please their ears “with oratory with much learning.”

75. According to George A. Smith, at this time Stake President William Marks had more influence with the Saints than did Sidney Rigdon (Nauvoo High Council Minutes, 30 December 1844, Church Archives).

76. Wilford Woodruff Diary, 6–7 August 1844.

77. Brigham Young to Vilate Young, 11 August 1844, photocopy, Church Archives.

78. Wilford Woodruff Diary, 18 July 1844.

79. Brigham Young Diary, 8 August 1844, Brigham Young Papers.


82. Minutes, 8 August 1844, Church Archives.

83. Minutes, 8 August 1844, Church Archives, and Wilford Woodruff Diary, 8 August 1844. This statement was more tactful than that of Parley Pratt, who publicly declared that since the Apostles held the keys “if the people choose to be benefitted by them, it is their own blessing; if not, it is their own neglect.” Parley Pratt stressed that the Saints could neither add to nor diminish the Apostles’ authority, for it came from God, that He could bless their labors with success with or without the aid of the people. “And, in either case,” he concluded, “the result of our labours will be the restoration of the kingdom and government of God.” (Proclamation, 1 January 1845, Millennial Star 5 [March 1845]: 151).

84. Though there is no contemporary diary account, the number of later retellings, many in remarkable detail, argues for the reality of some such experience. While it may have convinced some who wavered, it would have functioned more importantly, it seems, to comfort and provide confirmation to all who witnessed it—a sign that the Lord was still with the Church and that the Apostles had the powers claimed from Joseph.


86. From the 8 August 1844 entries in the diaries of Brigham Young, Willard Richards, Heber C. Kimball, and Wilford Woodruff. Although the diaries use the term unanimous to stress the overwhelming vote in favor of the Twelve, there were some dissenters.

87. Brigham Young to Vilate Young, 11 August 1844, photocopy, Church Archives.

88. Wilford Woodruff Diary, 8 August 1844.

89. Willard Richards Diary, 9 August 1844.
90. Willard Richards Diary, 9 August 1844; Brigham Young to Vilate Young, 11 August 1844, photocopy, Church Archives.


93. Specifically, Sidney Rigdon was charged with pretending to have the fulness of the priesthood and giving it to others when he had never received it. As John Taylor explained, “He has been ordaining men to the offices of prophets, priests and kings; whereas he does not hold that office himself; who does not know that this is wrong?” Under the circumstances, thought John Taylor, “we have been as merciful as we could be in the fulfillment of our official duties.” (Times and Seasons 5 [1 October 1844]: 661–62. See also comments by Brigham Young and Parley Pratt in Times and Seasons 5 [15 September 1844]: 648, 652–53.)


96. For a detailed examination of the leadership of the Twelve in 1845, see Esplin, “Brigham Young and the Power of the Apostleship,” pp. 106ff.

97. Norton Jacobs Diary, 8 August 1847, typescript, Church Archives.

98. Times and Seasons 5 (15 September 1844): 651 and 653.

99. As one who had received the endowment “in the Days of Joseph and Hyram” testified, in the Nauvoo Temple the Apostles were “very strict in attending to the true and proper from” learned from the Prophet (Ehat, ed., “Nauvoo Journal of Joseph Fielding,” p. 159).

100. Epistle of the Twelve, Times and Seasons 5 (15 August 1844): 619; and Kimball address reported in Times and Seasons 5 (1 November 1844): 693–94. The epistle also stressed the keys and power the Apostles had received from the Prophet so they could “build up the kingdom upon the foundation that the prophet Joseph has laid” (p. 618).

101. Phineas H. Young et al. to Beloved Brethren, 31 December 1844, Brigham Young Papers; see also Thomas J. Gregory, “Sidney Rigdon: Post Nauvoo,” BYU Studies 21 (Winter 1981): 57. In his August 1844 bid for support in Nauvoo, Sidney Rigdon publicly professed confidence in the Prophet. However, privately he said that Joseph had not been led by God for a long time. As the Apostles recognized and made an issue at his trial, this was an implicit argument that the Prophet’s Nauvoo program need not be followed. Those who had confidence in Sidney Rigdon, they argued, “say they believe in Joseph Smith, and at the same time all their operations are to destroy and tear down what he has built up.” (Times and Seasons 5 [1 October 1844]: 667; see also pp. 655, 661, 666, and 686.)

102. Minutes, 8 September 1844, General Minutes Collection.
103. Sidney Rigdon to William Payne, 9 July 1858, Sidney Rigdon Collection, Church Archives.

104. Times and Seasons 5 (15 October 1844): See also Times and Seasons 5 (15 September 1844): 647. Earlier Brigham Young admitted that it made enough to fight "to hear any one heap charges on Brother Joseph who is dead" (Times and Seasons 5 [1 October 1844]: 664).


106. Ibid., 2 (April 1890): 253-54.

107. Kirtland problems—to a large extent occasioned by disagreements with Joseph Smith's directions—and the subsequent removal to Missouri offer an instructive parallel to Nauvoo problems and the removal to the Great Basin. Even without the complications of a succession question, losses to the Church during 1836–1839 were high. Indeed, the percentage who drifted away in that earlier crisis may have been larger than the percentage lost during 1844–1849.

108. In letters to Brigham Young, William Smith demonstrated his agreement with the position the Twelve had taken and acknowledged Brigham Young as the highest authority in the Church. As late as January 1845, he wrote a letter expressing his support for "the quorum of the Twelve as the presidency over the whole church" and even endorsing Parley P. Pratt's major statement about the preparation, authority, and duty of the Twelve (see Times and Seasons 6 [15 February 1845]: 814).


110. Thomas Bullock Minutes, 1 June 1845, Church Archives.

111. Although more work needs to be done and no incontrovertible figures are yet available, current data suggest that in 1844 there were between 35,000 and 40,000 members and certainly less than 50,000. This estimate is based on the actual membership "represented" in each conference in England; on census figures for Nauvoo; on other vital records that help estimate Mormon populations of Hancock County, Illinois, and Lee County, Iowa; and on a comprehensive survey of branches for the rest of the United States and Canada. Thanks to Donald L. Enders of the Church Arts and Sites Division and James L. Kimball of the Church Archives Search Room for sharing preliminary results of work still in progress, and to Glen M. Leonard of the Church Arts and Sites Division for sharing the estimates of historian T. Edgar Lyon. Lyon's earlier estimates suggested a total membership of not more than 34,500.

112. When his father was killed, young Joseph was only eleven and David was yet unborn. Their mother Emma did have influence, however, and was among those who hoped for an alternative to the Apostles and the measures she knew they espoused. Although she knew her brother-in-law William Smith too well to support him, she did briefly consider Sidney Rigdon and William Marks.

113. The stories about young Joseph's designation circulated widely enough to be preserved in an 1844 publication (see Henry Brown, History of Illinois [New York Press, 1844], p. 489, as quoted in D. Michael Quinn, "Organizational Development and Social Origins of the Mormon Hierarchy, 1832–1932: A Prosopographical Study," [M. A. thesis, University of Utah, 1973], p. 72). One who followed the Twelve to the West but later became disenchanted insisted it had been "the understanding of the people generally" that the Prophet's son would one day preside (Testimony of John H. Carter, Complainant's Abstract, p. 181).


115. In Nauvoo following the Martyrdom there were, it appears, substantial
rumors that all those who held the highest priesthood keys were in danger (see Vilate Kimball to Heber C. Kimball, 30 June 1844, quoted in Ronald K. Esplin, “Life in Nau-vo, June 1844: Vilate Kimball's Martyrdom Letters,” BYU Studies 19 [Winter 1979]: 238-39; and Sally Randall to Dear Friends, 1 July 1844, typescript, Church Archives). Similarly, in September 1844 Heber C. Kimball told a public audience there were present others who held authority in addition to the Twelve “but we dont want to mention their names for the enemy will try to kill them” (Times and Seasons 5 [1 October 1844]: 664). If those threats were taken seriously, it would not be difficult to credit Brigham Young's expressed concern that the prophesied heir to the birthright of the Prophet might also be in danger.

116. Wilford Woodruff Diary, 8 August 1844.
118. Minutes, 7 August 1844, Brigham Young Papers.
119. Minutes, November and December 1847, Brigham Young Papers.
121. Remarks by Brigham Young, Brigham Young Office Journal, 28 February and 15 August 1860, Brigham Young Papers.
122. Discourse by Brigham Young, 7 October 1863, Brigham Young Papers.
124. Brigham Young indicated he was uncomfortable, personally, being sustained as the Prophet, Seer and Revelator. While he often claimed to receive revelation, he said the title itself “always made me feel as though I am called more than I am deserving of. I am Brigham Young, an Apostle of Joseph Smith, and also of Jesus Christ.” (Discourse by Brigham Young, 6 October 1857, Journal of Discourses, 5:296.) He called himself “an Apostle of Joseph Smith” and a witness that Joseph was “a man of God and had the Revelation of Jesus Christ” (Discourse by Brigham Young, 17 February 1856, Journal of Discourses, 3:212).
126. Joseph Smith III disagreed with Brigham Young on where to find the proper gate, not on the necessity of entering the gate. “It is not necessarily a birthright to be President of the Church,” Joseph III said, noting that such leadership comes “by virtue of the fitness and qualification, I may say good behavior and the choice of the people, recognizing a call or right.” Seeing the need for ordination as well as birthright and designation, he claimed authority through Zenas Gurley and William Marks. (See Complainant’s Abstract, pp. 78–79 and 81.)
127. Discourse by Brigham Young, 7 October 1866, Brigham Young Papers.
131. Joseph Smith III supported the authority of the Twelve in a debate with Rigdon-follower Stephen Post (see Stephen Post to James Post, 25 December 1865, quoted by Gregory, “Sidney Rigdon,” pp. 65–66). Questioned many years later about the possibility that the Prophet had left “the Apostles at the head” even as had Jesus, Joseph Smith III is said to have replied, “Yes, they were the proper persons to take the lead at fathers death” (Interview with Joseph Smith III, 18 March 1896, Independence, Mo., photocopy, Church Archives). It appears he believed the Apostles possessed
proper authority until they introduced doctrines and practices “subversive of the faith of the church,” causing God to reject the Church “in its organized quorum capacity” (Complainant’s Abstract, p. 83).

132. Complainant’s Abstract, p. 70.
135. Discourse by Brigham Young, 7 April 1850, General Minutes Collection.