

A Timeline of Brigham Young's Rise to the First Presidency

The purpose of this timeline is to show how Brigham Young over the years changed his position several times regarding who should lead the church after the death of the Prophet Joseph Smith.

First I would like to point out what the Law unto the church was concerning Joseph's successor in the Prophetic office once he was taken.

Doctrine and Covenants 43:1-7. "O hearken, ye elders of my church, and give ear to the words which I shall speak unto you. 2. For behold, verily, verily, I say unto you, that ye have received a commandment for a law unto my church, through him whom I have appointed unto you to receive commandments and revelations from my hand. 3. And this ye shall know assuredly – that there is none other appointed unto you to receive commandments and revelations until he be taken, if he abides in me. 4. But verily, verily, I say unto you, that none else shall be appointed unto this gift except it be through him; for if it be taken from him he shall not have power except to appoint another in his stead. 5. And this shall be a law unto you, that ye receive not the teachings of any that shall come before you as revelations or commandments; 6. And this I give unto you that you may not be deceived, that you may know they are not of me. 7. For verily I say unto you, that he that is ordained of me shall come in at the gate and be ordained as I have told you before, to teach those revelations which you have received and shall receive through him whom I have appointed."

James J. Strang is the only man who has come in at the gate and claimed to be ordained by Angels to the Prophetic office. At that time of the Angelic ordination, James was given the keys to the Kingdom and the keys to the Mysteries and Revelations, making him a Lawgiver Prophet. D. & C. Section 28:7. "For I have given him the keys of the mysteries, and the revelations which are sealed, until I shall appoint unto them another in his stead." The Prophetic office is sole and he speaketh even as Moses. See D. & C. Section 107:91-92.

He also received a letter of appointment through Joseph Smith giving him the right to be his lawful successor. See a pamphlet called the "Diamond", page 2, James J. Strang.

The term "the gate" that is mentioned in verse 7, Section 43 of the Doctrine & Covenants refers to the legal and proper way to become a Prophet of God.

So, what is the proper way to be lawfully ordained a Prophet of God as Joseph Smith was, and all of the other Prophets before him? Here is an example of the proper way. It says in Acts 7:35. "This Moses whom they refused, saying, who made thee a ruler and a judge? The same did God send to be ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the angel which appeared to him in the bush."

In the pamphlet entitled "The Prophetic Controversy", James J. Strang on pages 13-14 tells about his ordination. "And at the same moment in which Joseph was slain I was visited by an Angel of God, accompanied by a numerous heavenly train, and anointed and ordained to the Prophetic office, as Moses and Joseph had been before me. So I was called by the voice of God, and sent by the hand of the Angels, as were the chief Prophets before me." Prophetic Controversy, James J. Strang, page 13. The numerous Angels that appeared unto James would have accompanied the other Angel to give him the various keys to the Prophetic office, like the keys for Baptism for the Dead, etc. See D. & C. 110.

Brigham Young's 1st Position regarding Joseph Smith's successor: 1844 / Was Joseph Smith III

James J. Strang states in his pamphlet entitled "The Prophetic Controversy" on page 3. "Knowing the attachment of the Saints to the family of the martyred prophet, it was skillfully insinuated that one of the sons of Joseph had been appointed, and that Brigham, to save him from being murdered by the Gentiles, as his father had been, was standing ostensibly in his place and governing by his authority, until the Church, being delivered from the fear of the Gentiles, should be able to acknowledge and defend their prophet. Anyone who was in Nauvoo in 1846, and 1847, knows that the majority of those who started on the western exodus started in this hope."

Bishop George Miller records this in a published correspondence. "Subsequent to these times of intense excitement I had frequent attempts at conversation with Brigham Young and H. C. Kimball in regard to Joseph's leaving one to succeed him in the prophetic office, and in all my attempts to ascertain the desired truth as to that personage, I was invariably met with the innuendo, stop, or hush, brother Miller, let there be nothing said in regard to this matter, or we will have little Joseph killed as his father was; inferring indirectly that Joseph Smith had appointed his son Joseph to succeed him in the prophetic office; and I believe this impression was not left on my mind alone, but on the brethren in general, and remains with many until this day." *The Prophetic Controversy*, page 4.

"At Nauvoo Young often promised that the boy, born in 1832, would succeed his father." [Young states] "I am not the leader of the church, nor the prophet of the church." he told James Whitehead, Joseph Smith's secretary; "we know who that is; it is Joseph, the son of Joseph the Martyr." Stanley P. Hirshson - *The Lion of the Lord*, page 58.

The following was taken from page 305 of the book entitled "William B. Smith: In the Shadow of a Prophet", by Kyle R. Walker. "He [Brigham Young] also outlined his shifting view of succession, promoting the rights of the Smith family, including mentioning for the first time publicly the right of Joseph Smith III, son of Joseph Smith as the lawful heir to the office, being the oldest son of the deceased prophet."

The Prophetic office does not go by lineal descent. The Patriarch Priesthood is the only priesthood handed down father to son. See D. & C. 107:39-53. Joseph Smith Sen. was the first Patriarch of the church and then it was passed down to his son Hyrum Smith. Also of note, Peter who succeeded Jesus as Prophet was not related to him. Neither was James to Peter.

Brigham Young's 2nd Position: was that no one could take Joseph Smith's place as Prophet: August 15th, 1844.

"Let no man presume for a moment that his [Joseph Smith's] place will be filled by another; for remember he stands in his own place and always will, and the twelve Apostles of this dispensation stand in their own place and always will, both in time and eternity, to minister, preside, and regulate the affairs of the whole church." *Times and Seasons*, Volume 5, page 618.

James J. Strang writes concerning this issue in his pamphlet entitled "The Prophetic Controversy", page

9. “Yes, tell me, why did the Apostles, returning from their eastern mission by different routes, encourage all the Saints, saying, “fear not, for if Joseph is taken, he has appointed another to take his place, and the appointment will be proclaimed as soon as we reach Nauvoo.”

“Why were all the Saints in and out of Nauvoo assured, by the few men left in authority there, that Joseph had left important documents in their hands, under seal, which were to be opened on the return of the Apostles, and would show who was to lead the Church.” Prophetic Controversy, page 9.

When the Apostles returned from their missions and opened the sealed documents, why did they not announce who was to lead the church? If it was Brigham Young who was appointed, then why was he not made the successor at that point. It was because he was not named the successor, and it was James J. Strang instead.

In a pamphlet entitled the Revelations of James on page 22, we have the testimony of Jonathan Summer who states: “I Johnathan Summer, do hereby testify that I was present at the conference held in Nauvoo soon after the martyrdom of Joseph and Hyrum Smith, which was called by those who sought to place Sidney Rigdon at the head of the church. While in conversation with a number of elders, talking on the question of Sidney Rigdon’s right to lead. John P. Green, marshal of the city, said; “They need not trouble themselves about it, for Joseph had appointed one to stand in his stead. I asked him why he was not here to take his place? He said he was not ready, but would be here ‘after a time.’ I asked him where he lived, and he said, ‘Up north a considerable distance.’ I asked his name and he said, James J. Strang.’ I asked, what sort of a man, and he said, ‘A young man.’ I then asked whether he had ever been in Nauvoo, and he said he had been and that Joseph baptized him.” [Signed] Johnathan Summer, Voree, June 30, 1846. Signed in the presence of Benjamin C. Ellsworth, George Ebersson, Phineas Wright.”

James J. Strang tells of an event that occurred in Joseph Smith’s house before he was martyred, “go back to the time when the prophet Joseph in his own house, in the presence of a multitude of witnesses, prophesied on my head, all that has happened to me, saying that by my hand God shall deliver his people in the day of their distress, for he would give unto me the keys of the kingdom and the mysteries and revelations, that standing at the head of the dispensation, I might lead his people to another [Voree] land, where they should receive an everlasting inheritance as Abraham did, and should be delivered from the power of their enemies.” Prophetic Controversy, pages 9-10.

Remember, the D. & C. Section 43 tells us, “to not accept any ones teachings” who were contrary to the law giving in that revelation. That Joseph would appoint another in his stead if he were taken. James J. Strang is the only man who ever claimed to be appointed by Joseph Smith.

Brigham Young’s 3rd. Position: was that the Twelve would assume control of the affairs of the church: Sept., 1st. 1844.

The following is taken from the Times and Seasons, Sept. 1st, 1844, Vol. 5, page 637-638. “Elder Phelps opened the meeting by prayer, and Brigham Young proceeded to speak, and give his views of the present situation of the church, now that the prophet and patriarch were taken from our midst by wickedness of our enemies. For the first time since he became a member of the church; a servant of God, a messenger to the nations in the nineteenth century; for the first time in the kingdom of God, the Twelve Apostles of the Lamb, chosen by revelation, in this last dispensation of the gospel for the

winding up scene, present themselves before the saints to stand in their lot according to appointment.”

Later in that same meeting it is recorded that Brigham Young continued his remarks. ...“he asked the saints what they wanted. Do you want a guardian, a Prophet, a spokesman, or what do you want? If you want any of these officers signify it by raising the right hand. Not a hand was raised.”

After much discussion a vote was taken. ...“All in favor of supporting the Twelve in the calling, every quorum, man and women, signify it by the uplifted hand; and the vote was unanimous, no hand being raised in the negative.”

The problem with the Twelve was that they were not the next in line to take over the leadership of the church. They didn't have the highest authority that was left in the church after Joseph's death. The councilors under Joseph, the First Presidency, would have had the right to rule. Sidney Rigdon was the highest ranking officer in the church to remain alive. He presented himself as the rightful person to lead the church after Joseph's death. Sidney had a higher priesthood than the Twelve and had the right to rule over them. However, Sidney Rigdon was not aware at that time that James J. Strang had already been appointed and ordained as Joseph's successor. The Twelve were to act under the direction of the First Presidency. See D. & C. Section 107:33. Also, Section 112:14-30. Unfortunately that did not happen. Sidney Rigdon was brushed aside by Brigham Young and the Twelve.

Times and Season, Vol. 5, page 638. ... “He [Brigham] then gave the saints his view of what the Lord wanted. Here are the Twelve, appointed by the finger of God, who holds the keys of the priesthood, and the authority to set in order and regulate the church in all the world. Here is elder Amasa Lyman and elder Sidney Rigdon; they were Counselors in the First Presidency,” [Brigham makes a mistake here, Amasa Lyman is a counselor in the High Priest Quorum, not the First Presidency] and they are Counselors to the Twelve still, if they keep their places; but if either wishes to act as spokesman for the prophet Joseph, he must go behind the veil, where Joseph is.”

Where does it say in the scriptures that the remaining Counselors are not allowed to keep their offices and lead the church, until a new Prophet arises? In the interregnum, or interim law they would have the right to rule until the next Prophet is chosen by God and takes his place in the Church; then the remaining Counselors would act under the direction of the new Prophet. [See D. & C. 107:11-12.] This was a slight of hand by Brigham in an attempt to get Sidney Rigdon out of the way so that the Twelve could rule instead. Sidney Rigdon knew he was being railroaded and declined to be considered to act as a “spokesman” to the church because Brigham Young and the Twelve over powered him in that meeting of August 8th, 1844.

What gave Brigham Young the belief that the Twelve had the right to rule over the affairs of the church? It was the misunderstanding of a statement that Joseph Smith made concerning the Twelve, “I now roll the kingdom upon the shoulders of the Twelve, and they must bear off the kingdom.” Brigham took these words out of context and used them to his own advantage. In the Prophetic Controversy, page 10, James J. Strang explains what Joseph was referring to. “By their [Brighamites] history of the matter, Joseph was complaining of the Quorums generally, and the Quorum of the Twelve in particular, that they had not attended to the duties devolving on them by their callings; but that he had the duties of all of the Quorums to do; and reminding the Twelve that they had the charge of sending out Elders to preach the gospel in all the world, and the keys of opening the gospel to the nations, and that in that

sense the responsibility of bearing off the kingdom rested upon them; he told them he would do their duties and carry them on his back no longer; but that he would now roll the kingdom upon their shoulders.

D. & C. 112:15. “Exalt not [Twelve] yourselves; rebel not against my servant Joseph; for verily I say unto you, I am with him, and my hand shall be over him; and the [c] keys which I have given unto him, and also to youward, shall not be taken from him till I come.”

Notice the footnote “c” in the verse. There are two different types of keys that are inferred in this verse, one type was given unto Joseph, and the other was given unto the Twelve. Joseph was given all of the keys, which only the Prophetic Lawgiver can hold. These keys include that of mysteries and revelations as well as the keys of the kingdom. When you look up the footnote “c” in verse 15, it refers you to D. & C., Section 28: 2, 7. “But, behold, verily, verily, I say unto thee, no one shall be appointed to receive commandments and revelations in this church excepting my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., for he receiveth them even as Moses. 7. For I have given him the keys of mysteries and the revelations which are sealed, until I shall appoint unto them another in his stead.”

D. & C. 27:12-13. “And also, with Peter, and James, and John, whom I have sent unto you, by whom I have ordained you and confirmed you to be apostles, and especial witnesses of my name, and bear the keys of your ministry and of same things which I revealed unto them. 13, Unto whom I have committed the keys of my kingdom, and a dispensation of the gospel for the last times; and for the fullness of times, in the which I will gather together in one all things, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth;”

Notice the difference between the two different types of keys. The keys of mysteries and revelations only pertain to the Prophet, who is the only one who can receive revelations for the church. The keys of the Kingdom can be held by more than one person at a time. Both Oliver Cowdry and Joseph Smith held the keys of the Kingdom together and later they were given unto the Twelve.

The Twelve were given the keys of the kingdom which is to act under the First Presidency and be sent by them to preach the gospel to all nations of the world. D. & C. 112:20-21. “Whosoever receiveth my word receiveth me, receiveth those, the First Presidency, whom I have sent, whom I have made counselors for my name’s sake unto [Twelve] you. 21. And again, I say unto you, that whosoever ye shall send in my name, by the voice of your brethren, the Twelve, duly recommended and authorized by you, shall have power to open the door of my kingdom unto any nation whithersoever ye shall send them.” See D. & C. 18:26-33.

Brigham’s main problem is that he did not understand that there is a difference between the keys of the Kingdom and the keys of Mysteries and Revelations. James J. Strang explains this on pages 25-26, in the Prophetic Controversy.

“The argument is, that I [James] could not receive the keys of the kingdom from Joseph, because he holds them in the world to come; and thus I could not receive them from an angel, because last on earth before Joseph, they were held by Peter, James, and John, and they gave them to Joseph, who alone holds them forever. All the force of this argument is in the false assumption that no one can impart the keys of the kingdom without divesting himself of them; and that but one can hold them at a time. The falsity of the assumption is apparent in the fact that Peter, James and John were all possessed of the keys when they conferred them on Joseph.”

... “And that they [Brighamites] may succeed by means of so flimsy pretences, they have a custom of darkening counsel by words, without knowledge, in which the keys of the kingdom, and the keys of mysteries and revelations are referred to, as though they were one and the same thing. Now the keys of the kingdom represent the power in its several degrees, belonging to those who attain to a [Melchizedek] Royal Priesthood on earth, if faithfully used, ever survives and is exercised in the resurrection and everlasting life, and may be held by ten or ten thousand each in his several rank or place. But the keys of mysteries and revelations represent that power by which a prophet and seer on earth obtains from God commandments and revelations, and knowledge of mysteries to communicate unto men. It therefore cannot survive this life, for in another state of existence it has no office work to perform.” [Because God and Angels are in heaven and can teach men there, but on the earth a prophet is sent to reveal the word of God to the people.] Starting with this position, it is easy to see how Joseph may appoint a successor to hold the keys of mysteries and revelations, and yet himself, as well as the worthies before and after him, hold the keys of the kingdom in this world and also in the world to come.”

Brigham Young's 4th Position: Brigham Young was elected First President over the church. - 1847

Prophetic Controversy, pages 5-6. “Minutes of a conference held Dec. 24th, 1847, at Winter Quarters, Council Bluffs, as taken by Jas Flanagan: [During the meeting this was stated] ... “Still the church was rolling on rapidly, and now, at this period of the church, they had to admit the first argument of the apostates [Strangites] (viz) that the organization was not complete was correct.” [That being that there was no Prophet to lead the Church. As the meeting continued they at one point called for a vote on officers to be elected to the First Presidency]

Amasa Lyman is speaking. ... “And the time has come when ends of the church could not be saved without a head, and the very man who was to be the head had been at the head all the time.” [Referring to Brigham Young] “It was moved and seconded that Brigham Young should be our First President. It was carried unanimously. It was next moved and carried that Heber C. Kimball be the first Counselor of Pres. B. Young. Carried unanimously. It was next moved and seconded that Dr. W. Richards be appointed second Counselor. Carried unanimously. It was moved that John Smith be appointed a Patriarch over the whole church. Carried unanimously. The band played a choice piece of music.”

James J. Strang has this to say regarding the Brighamites admitting they were in error in their first position on the First Presidency of the Church. The Brighamites originally claimed that James J. Strang could not receive the same prophetic keys that Joseph once held because he took them with him when he went beyond the veil. Prophetic Controversy, pages 4-6. “This was the burden of their argument continually, till the great mass had got up as far as the Missouri River, and a little beginning made at Salt Lake; when at the October Conference at the Tabernacle, at Council Bluffs, they suddenly turned and acknowledged that the argument had all the time been against them, because the Strangites had adhered to the original constitution of the Church, and they had departed from it; and in order to mend their case so that we should have the best of the argument no longer they then elected Brigham Young, Prophet, Seer, Revelator, First President, Successor to Joseph Smith, by whatever name the office may be called.

If an election by a local assembly of the Saints, called together without any such purpose, and authorized by no law to do such an act, is sufficient to make a man a prophet of God, a Seer and a Revelator, the representative on earth of the name and power of the Almighty, then, and then only, have

they helped their case.

To pretend that such an election is a fulfillment of that law which requires the leader of this church to be called by the voice of God, ordained as Joseph was, by the hand of Angels, is utterly bald that it need only be stated, not answered.” Another reason the Brighamites wanted to reinstitute the office of the First Presidency was because they knew that the Twelve would not be able to ordain other men to replace an Apostle after they departed from this life. Only the Prophet through revelation can appoint someone to replace another Apostle who leaves his office because of death or any other reason. Brigham Young admits this to be the case by stating the following. Prophetic Controversy, pages 15-16. “And on this pattern he continued to build for some four years; arguing, consistently with his own theory, that the Twelve were to have no successors; but that after their time the Seventies, or some other Quorum, would take the leadership.” They had no other choice than to make a Prophet by voting in Brigham Young and his Councilors in order to keep the office of the Twelve alive so they could lead the church as they conspired to do after the death of Joseph Smith.

From the Journal of Discourses, Vol. 8, page 69. Brigham Young said this on June 3rd. 1860, in the Tabernacle at Salt Lake City. “The brethren testify that brother Brigham is brother Joseph’s legal successor. You never heard me say so. I say that I am a good hand to keep the dogs and wolves out of the flock. I do not care a groat who rises up. I do not think anything about being Joseph’s successor.” This quote by Brigham Young was given 16 years after the death of the Prophet Joseph Smith.

Also, in the Journal of Discourses, Vol. 5, page 176, Brigham Young states. “I do not profess to be a Prophet. I never called myself so, but I actually believe I am, because people are all the time telling me that I am.”

One would think that if Brigham Young had been legally appointed and ordained by Angels a Prophet of God, he would have known it long before he finally came to that conclusion.