

THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER DAY SAINTS (STRANGITE) AND ITS' RELATIONSHIP TO A GENTILE REJECTED GOSPEL

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The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Strangite) claims to have a legitimate priesthood. To understand how a small church with under 100 active members can make such a claim, it is necessary to understand how they perceive former and latter-day revelations. Strangite Mormons believe the gospel restored by God through Joseph Smith was rejected by the Gentiles. Moreover, this overview will attempt to shed light into how the Strangites perceive their current status and projections for the future.

When Adam, Noah, Melchizedek, Peter, James, John, Joseph Smith and James J. Strang stood at the head of God's Church as Prophets [1] they could perform all duties associated with the fulness of the gospel. Conversely, the *Bible*, *Book of Mormon* and *Doctrine and Covenants* [2] tell about church leaders holding the office of High Priest were authorized leaders of the church. When this occurred, ordinances and activities that could only be practiced with a Prophet at the head of the church were forbidden, but duties and ordinances within the purview of the office of High Priest were sufficient to maintain the church as a functioning organization. The best known example is when Moses was ordained by his father-in-law Jethro to be a High Priest. [D&C 88:6] Jethro held a true priesthood, but could not ordain Moses to the Prophetic Office as the lesser cannot ordain the greater. [Hebrews 7:7] Moses became a Lawgiver Prophet when he received an angelic ordination. [Acts Seventh Chapter.] Jethro, until superseded by Moses' superior priesthood, was the leader of a remnant group. Strangites claim they possess the priesthood of up to and including that of High Priest, and believe it is like that held by Jethro in that it authorizes gospel ordinances such as baptism and confirmation which are necessary to perpetuate the church.

Early converts to Mormonism learned in the *Book of Mormon* that the first portion of the Dispensation of the Meridian of Times began with John the Baptist and the ministry of Jesus Christ. Mormons learned from discourses by their hierarchy and from studying the *Bible*, *Book of Mormon* and *Doctrine and Covenants* that the Jews rejected the Gospel in its fulness. Upon rejection, a Dispensation of the gospel was opened by the Apostle Paul to the Gentiles. [1 Corinthians 9:17] This portion of the Dispensation was also rejected after gospel principles and ordinances were changed by Catholic Church Councils. According to 1 Nephi 13:42, the Dispensation of the Fulness of Times in the latter-days would open with the ministry of a Lawgiver Prophet and the Gospel was presented to the Gentiles. Mormons believe this refers to Joseph Smith through whom God restored the gospel to the Gentiles. This prophecy also called for the gospel to be presented to the Jews. Early readers of The *Book of Mormon* were aware of the precarious status of the Gentiles. It was made clear they would either be blessed if they accepted the restored gospel or would be condemned if they opposed God's Church – as did the Jews and the Gentiles in the Dispensation of the Meridian of Times. The Gentile Saints were to “endure to the end”. [1 Nephi 13:36] However, God warned the Gentile nations to “hearken to the Lamb of God;” [1 Nephi 14:1] “harden not their hearts;” [1 Nephi 14:2 &

6] “repent;” [1 Nephi 14:5] and “repent and fight not against Zion.” [2 Nephi 6:12].

Jesus Christ in his post-resurrection ministry to the peoples in the Americas, reinforced the precarious situation of the Gentiles when the gospel would be restored through the ministry of Joseph Smith:

And thus commandeth the father that I should say unto you: At that day when the Gentiles shall sin against my gospel and shall be lifted up in the pride of their hearts above all nations, and above all people of the whole earth, and shall be filled with all manner of lyings, and of deceits, and of mischiefs, and all manner of hypocrisy, and murders, and priestcrafts, and whoredoms, and of secret abominations, and if they shall do all those things, and shall reject the fulness of my gospel, behold, saith the Father, I will bring the fulness of my gospel from among them. [3 Nephi 16:10]

Jesus then specified that gentile rejection of the fulness of the gospel would be followed by the fulness of the gospel being presented to the House of Israel: And then will I remember my covenant which I have made unto my people, O house of Israel, and I will bring my gospel unto them.

And I will show unto thee, O house of Israel, that the Gentiles shall not have power over you; but I will remember my covenant unto you, O house of Israel, and ye shall come unto the knowledge of the fulness of my gospel. [3 Nephi 16:11-12]

Hundreds of years after these prophecies were given they began to be fulfilled. An 1828 revelation to Joseph Smith, D&C 10:53, contained a reiteration of 1 Nephi 14:2 & 6: “And for this cause have I said: If this generation harden not their hearts, I will establish my church among them.”

In March 1829, a year before the establishment of the Church on April 6, 1830, Joseph Smith recorded a revelation which emphasized the status of the Gentiles was bleak:

And thus, if the people of this generation harden not their hearts, I will work a reformation among them. And now if this generation do harden their hearts against my work, behold I will deliver them up unto satan [sic] for he reigneth and hath much power at this time, for he hath got great hold upon the hearts of the people of this generation and not far from the iniquities of Sodom and Gomorrah, do they come at this time, and behold the sword of justice hangeth over their heads, and if they persist in the hardness of their hearts, the time cometh that it must fall upon them. [3]

Some nine months after the organization of the Church, Joseph Smith received a revelation at Kirtland, Ohio which specified when rejection was to occur:

And when the times of the Gentiles is come in, a light shall break forth among them that sit in darkness and it shall be the fulness of my gospel.

But they receive it not, for they perceive not the light and they turn their hearts from me

because of the precepts of men.

And *in that generation* shall the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled. [D&C 45:28-30., emphasis authors]

Another revelation to Joseph Smith was given in the area of Shalerville and Ravena, Ohio between 8 and 10 January 1832 which said “that the day of vengeance was coming upon this generation like a thief in the night; that prejudice, blindness and darkness filled the minds of many, and caused them to persecute the true Church, and reject the true light.”[4] Less than two weeks after receiving the revelation known as the Civil War Prophecy (D&C 87), Joseph Smith wrote N. C. Saxton, the editor of a Rochester, New York newspaper on January 4, 1833, describing “the manifest withdrawal of God’s Holy Spirit, and the vail [sic] of stupidity which seems to be drawn over the hearts of the people and upon the other hand beholding the Judgments of God that have swept and are still sweeping hundreds and thousands of our race (and I feel unprepared) down to the shades of death ...”[5]

Other Mormons spoke out about what they considered to be the Gentile rejection of the gospel. Sidney Rigdon, a leading member of Joseph Smith’s hierarchy, captured the general Mormon belief about the status of Gentile acceptance of the restored gospel in that time. Writing in the November 1834 issue of the *Latter Day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate*, Rigdon explained “That the Gentiles have fallen from their high standing before God, and incurred his displeasure, cannot be doubted by any man acquainted with the scriptures: All the grand distinguished characteristics of the kingdom of heaven have disappeared among them.” [6] Rigdon regularly returned to this message in the *Messenger and Advocate* in a four part series titled “Millenium [sic] during 1834 and 1835:

The apostasy of the Gentiles is a subject, that I believe, is no where disputed in all the professing world—It is acknowledged by all that the present generation of religious Gentiles is in a state of confusion and distraction:... and that, when the time came (I mean the time to prepare for the cutting off of the Gentiles,) that the Lord would set his hand again to recover his people. [7]

The Gentiles have ceased to bring forth the fruit which they brought forth when the kingdom of heaven was first given unto them, and that the gospel which the apostles preached is considered heresy among them.... The apostasy of the Gentiles is so great, that they know not the doctrine of Christ when they hear it. [8]

Joseph Smith declared at Nauvoo, Illinois on March 4, 1840 “I see by the visions of the Almighty, the end of this nation, if she continues to disregard the cries and petitions of her virtuous citizens, as she has done, and is now doing.” [9] Four months later, Smith, disillusioned by the failure of the President and Congress to provide redress for the Mormon losses in Missouri in 1838, proclaimed: “Since Congress has decided against us , the Lord has begun to vex this nation, and He will continue to do so except they repent”

[10].

An article written by a person using the pseudonym “B,” published in the April 1, 1841 issue of the *Times and Seasons* drew an unflattering comparison between Jews and Gentiles: “When the Jewish church were in a state of apostasy, and were about to be broken off because of their unbelief; (as is the condition of the Gentiles)...”[11]

On October 15, 1843, Joseph Smith prophesied “in the name of the Lord God [that] anguish and wrath and tremulity [sic] and tribulation and the withdrawing of the spirit of God await this generation until they are visited with utter destruction.”[12] Three months later on December 16, 1843, commenting upon the planned Mormon petition to Congress to seek redress for Mormons losses in Missouri, Joseph Smith said “by virtue of the holy Priesthood vested in me, and in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that, if Congress will not hear our petition and grant us protection, they shall be broken up as a government, and God shall damn them, and there shall nothing be left of them—not even a grease spot.”[13] Congress did not act upon the Mormon petition.

At this late date it is difficult to comprehend the feelings Mormons had for the Gentiles after the Nauvoo martyrdom of Joseph and Hyrum Smith. Two accounts are representative. William Clayton, a clerk of Joseph Smith, poured out his feelings in his journal after learning of the murders:

And now O God wilt thou not come out of thy hiding place and avenge the blood of thy servants—that blood which thou hast so long watched over with a fatherly care—that blood so noble—so generous—so dignified, so heavenly you O Lord will thou not avenge it [the murders] speedily and bring down vengeance upon the murderers of thy servants that they may be rid from off the earth and that the earth may be cleansed from these scenes, even so O Lord thy will be done. We look to thee for justice. Hear thy people O God of Jacob even so Amen.[14]

Apostle Wilford Woodruff recorded in his journal:

I asked my heavenly father in the name of Jesus Christ and by virtue of the Holy Priesthood and the Keys of the kingdom of God that he would speedily avenge the blood of Joseph the Prophet Seer and Revelator, and Hiram the Patriarch which had been shed by the hands of the American gentile nation, upon all the heads of the Nation and State that have aided, abetted or perpetrated the horrid deed, of shedding [sic] the blood of those righteous men even the Lords anointed.[15]

It is ironic that modern Strangites hold similar views about the Gentile rejection that leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints or Brighamites held for many years after the murders of Joseph and Hyrum Smith at Nauvoo. The Gentiles were formally rejected by General Conference vote on Tuesday, April 8, 1845 at

Nauvoo. Apostle Heber C. Kimball addressed the Conference and recommended that Mormons gather quickly to Nauvoo to help complete building the temple and Nauvoo House. He advised those coming to Nauvoo to “bring their firelocks, and learn to use them, and keep them well cleaned and loaded, and primed, so that they will go off the first shot, ...” After other inflammatory verbiage, Kimball “proposed to withdraw fellowship from the Gentiles eniquity, [sic] which was done by an unanimous vote.” The clerk concluded: “Now they are disfellowshipt [sic].”^[16] Brigham Young, the senior Apostle and acknowledged leader of the church, followed Kimball as speaker and said: “that by martyring the Prophet and Patriarch, the Gentiles have rejected the gospel. We have traveled and preached to them enough. If they want salvation let them come to us. As it was with the Jews...when they rejected the gospel in the days of the old apostles; Lo! They turned to the Gentiles: so, now, as they have rejected the gospel by killing the prophet of the last days, we turn to the Jews and the house of Israel.”^[17]

1 Nephi 13:42 provided the guideline for the components of two dispensations. The Dispensation of the Meridian of Times consisted of two parts. The Gospel was first presented to the Jews and then to the Gentiles. Both rejected the Gospel. The Dispensation of the Fulness of Times featured the presentation of the gospel to the Gentiles but it was rejected. Hence the saying, “the last shall be first, and the first shall be last.” Strangites believe they are a remnant church in an interregnum period of unknown duration until God sees fit to call and ordain a Prophet of the tribe of Judah. Their situation is not unlike that of Jethro and his family prior to Moses’s angelic ordination. Moreover, they believe they are guardians of a true priesthood until God ushers in the Jewish portion of the Dispensation. ^[18]

^[1] “Prophet,” in this context, signifies the authorized leader of the church who was called of God and ordained by angels. Other titles for this individual include President of the High Priesthood, Presiding Elder over the Church, Lawgiver Prophet, and First Degree Apostle. Strangites believe only one person at a time can be the President or Prophet. See D&C 107:65. As the lesser is ordained by the greater, only an angel or angels can ordain a man to be a Prophet. Specifically, this individual must be a seer, a revelator, a translator, and a prophet. Note the specification in D&C 107:91-92: And again, the duty of the President of the office of the High Priesthood is to preside over the whole church, and to be like unto Moses. Behold, here is wisdom; yea, to be a seer, a revelator, a translator, and a prophet, having all the gifts of God which he bestows upon the head of the church.

^[2] All *Doctrine and Covenants* and *Book of Mormon* references are in editions published by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints or the Mormon Church headquartered in Salt Lake City, Utah.

^[3] *A Book of Commandments, for the Government of the Church of Christ* (Independence: W W. Phelps and Co., 1833), chapter 4. This revelation was not included in the 1835 *Doctrine and Covenants*.

[4] Joseph Smith Jr. Et. Al, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, edited by B. H. Roberts,, 2d ed. Rev. (6 vols., 1902-12, Vol. 7, 1932; rpt., Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1951, 1:241.

[5] Dean C. Jesse, ed., *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1984), 270.

[6] Sidney Rigdon, "Millenium, No. IX," *LDS Messenger and Advocate* 1 (November 1834): 17.

[7] Rigdon, "Millenium, No. X," *Messenger and Advocate* 1 (December 1834): 39.

[8] Rigdon, "Millenium, No. XI," *Messenger and Advocate* 1 (January 1835): 53.

[9] "March 4, 1840," *History of the Church*. 4:89.

[10] "July 3, 1840," *Ibid*. 4:145.

[11] "Jewish Apostasy," *Times and Seasons* 2 (April 1, 1841): 367.

[12] Scott H. Furling, ed., *An American Prophet's Record: The Diaries and Journals of Joseph Smith*, 2d ed. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1980) < 421.

[13] "History of Joseph Smith," December 16, 1843, *Millennial Star* 22 (July 21, 1860: 445.

[14] Quoted in James B. Allen, *Trials of Discipleship: The Story of William Clayton, a Mormon* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 142-1-42.

[15] Scott G. Kenney, ed., *Wilford Woodruff's Journal, 1833-1898*, typescript, 9 vols. (Midvale, Utah, Signature Books, 1983-85), August 27, 1844, 2:437.

[16] "Speech delivered by Heber c. Kimball," April 8, 1845, *Times and Seasons* 6 (July 15, 1845): 971-73.

[17] "The Conference," *Nauvoo Neighbor* 2 (April 16, 1845): 2.

[18] This short overview does not include Strangite beliefs concerning the necessity of Joseph Smith appointing a single successor and the angelic ordination of this individual. See D&C 28:2 & 7; 43:2-7. Nor does it explain the prophecy concerning the Sticks of Ephraim and Judah. See Ezekiel 37:16-17. and 2 Nephi 3:11-13.