



Lesson Four: Origins of the Reorganization

Inquiry Questions:

- Who has the authority to make decisions for a group or a church?

Historical Context: Bishop Roger's autobiography from the RLDS Church History

"In 1841 most of the branch came west, many going to Nauvoo, but I seemed to be led to stop in DeKalb County, and settled on a farm not far from Sandwich, Illinois. My house was always a home for representatives of the different factions which sprung up after the disorganization of the church. Many efforts were made to convert me to their way of thinking, but without success.

"About the year 1850 I heard that William Smith, brother of the Martyr, claimed to be president pro tem of the church, until young Joseph (as the present president was then called) should take his father's place. I went to Amboy to see him, and united with his cause, and was ordained his counselor, but did not continue with him long, as I soon discovered he was teaching the spiritual wife doctrine, which I knew was false. Those were dark days. I was denied the privilege of church fellowship after this until the year 1859, when Bro. E. C. Briggs and W. W. Blair visited me. I received them coolly. My wife, however, became interested in the teachings of these young men and treated them kindly.

Written by Bishop Rogers and included in *History of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints*, Volume 3, page 778.

Pre-Class Reading:

Joseph Smith III: A Pragmatic Prophet by Roger Launius, Chapter Four: Origins of the Reorganization

Discussion Questions:

There has been frequent mention in this text of the concept of a "prophet." Connected to a prophet is revelation. Traditionally, revelation comes from one person, but in this chapter revelations are presented from Jason Briggs, Zenos Gurley, and Henry Deam.

- Would you consider each of these men a prophet?
- Who receives revelation, if anyone?
- Was revelation understood differently in this time period?

By Joseph Smith Jr.'s death, Brigham Young was an experienced church leader; James Strang had a strong spiritual experience but was relatively unknown, having only recently been baptized. Both men assembled a large number of followers after Joseph's death.

- In a movement that believes strongly in the spiritual, does previous spiritual experience render one more likely to hold a leadership position?
- What about previous administrative experience? Is either more important than the other?



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So much written on early Restoration history focuses on the main movement from New York, to Ohio, Missouri, and ultimately to Illinois. The reader experiences the church through its key leaders and its crucial decisions in Kirtland, Far West, Independence, and Nauvoo. In Chapter 4, we meet Zenos Gurley and Jason Briggs, pastors of congregations that are not located in Nauvoo. Some historians estimate, during the Nauvoo period (1839-1846), as much as half the church membership did not live in Nauvoo itself. We see a glimpse of this life through Gurley and Briggs.

- What are some of the differences between living in headquarters, and living in a branch outside?
- How was Gurley and Briggs' experience different from the main body?
- Why do we not hear as much about those not living in the main cities?
- How did this impact their ultimate course into the future?

Class Activity:

List some of the reasons for the failure of James Strang's church. It may be helpful to list the reasons on a dry-erase board, or large notepad, so that the entire class may see the list. Additionally, list some of the reasons William Smith's church failed.

If time permits, compare the two lists and/or two movements.

Reading Assignment:

Joseph Smith III: Pragmatic Prophet, Chapter Five: The Search

Joseph Smith III: Pragmatic Prophet by Roger Launius and a variety of historical reprints are available at www.redbrickstore.com. All Red Brick Store purchases help preserve Community of Christ historic sites.

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