



Lesson Two: The Formative Years, 1844-46

Inquiry Questions:

- Have you ever had a disagreement with someone that you couldn't solve? If so, what happened?

Historical Context: Biographies of a few possible successors of Joseph Smith Jr.

James J. Strang was baptized by Joseph Smith Jr. on February 25, 1844, and ordained an elder a week later. After Joseph's death, Strang claimed he had been secretly appointed by letter on June 18, 1844 as Joseph's successor; he also claimed that he had been ordained by an angel at the hour of Joseph's death. Strang was a charismatic leader and at one point had up to 2,000 followers, including William Marks (Nauvoo Stake President), John C. Bennett (former counselor in the First Presidency), William McClellin (former apostle in Kirtland), and apostles William Smith, John E. Page and George J. Adams. Strang continued Joseph's charismatic leadership style and published several new revelations. In his new church, Strang continued baptism for the dead, used an "urim and thummin" to translate ancient documents, developed an endowment ceremony known as the "Order of Illuminati," and secretly, then openly, practiced polygamy. Strang gathered a large group around him in Voree, Wisconsin and then Beaver Island, Michigan but was eventually assassinated by opposing factions of the group.

Brigham Young was ordained an apostle on February 14, 1835; he was the president of the Council of Twelve Apostles at the time of Joseph's death. Young and some of the other apostles felt that Joseph Smith in a charge given to the apostles on March 23, 1844 had committed to them the "keys of the kingdom" and had passed the authority from himself to the apostles. At the August 1844 conference, attendees voted to make the Twelve Apostles the acting presidency of the church, but not the permanent presidency. Some in the audience later described seeing Young transfigured into Joseph, in voice and appearance, during this conference, but early on Young promised that there could never be a replacement for Joseph, the Twelve could merely act in his stead. Young and the Twelve had the support of most of the members in Nauvoo but only 50 percent of the church's membership made the trek west to the Salt Lake Valley.

Sidney Rigdon was ordained to the First Presidency on March 8, 1832 at the same time it was first organized as a quorum. Rigdon brought great oration skills to the church when he joined in November 1830. He was a minister in Kirtland, Ohio area, serving at least seventeen congregations when he joined the Latter Day Saint church. Rigdon's conversion practically doubled the size of the church, as he brought many of his former congregants with him. Rigdon's claim to succession rested in the fact that he was the only remaining member of the First Presidency, but at the August 1844 conference the attendees voted in favor of the Twelve. On September 8, 1844, Sidney Rigdon was excommunicated by the Twelve. On April 6, 1845 Rigdon organized his own church known as the Church of Christ in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The church focused on the doctrines and practices introduced in Kirtland and attracted a following of a few hundred, but by 1847, Rigdon's church was virtually non-existent. He led a



second church, organized in 1863 and known as the Children of Zion. In his second church Rigdon received several revelations and organized a female priesthood that assisted in the ordination of apostles.

Lyman Wight was ordained as the first member of the High Priesthood by Joseph Smith in June 1831. On the same day Wight ordained both Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon to the High Priesthood. Wight was ordained an apostle on April 8, 1841, and in 1843 he led a mission to the pineries in Wisconsin in order to supply lumber for the Nauvoo Temple and a boarding house known as the Nauvoo House. By 1844, Joseph and the Twelve were considering resettling outside of Nauvoo and authorized Wight to lead a group of saints to Texas. Before the expedition could be arranged, Wight and several others were sent east to campaign for Joseph as a candidate for President of the United States. Even after Joseph was assassinated, Lyman Wight believed he was authorized to lead a group to Texas. The apostles did not support the Texas mission, but Wight took a small group and settled in Texas. Surprisingly, Wight had no aspirations to lead the church; he felt that by lineage it was Joseph III's place to succeed his father. Lyman Wight died in 1858. Several of Wight's followers later joined the Reorganization.

Pre-Class Reading:

Joseph Smith III: A Pragmatic Prophet by Roger Launius, Chapter Two: The Formative Years, 1844-46

Discussion Questions:

“Never attempt anything but what you can do openly; free from fear of consequences.” Joseph III tried to live his life by this rule, quoted on page 44.

- What does this mean to you?
- If you decided to start living your life by this rule today (if you don't already) how would it affect your life, as well as those around you?

In the leadership struggle following Joseph Jr.'s death, Joseph III's mother and Brigham Young appeared to find themselves on opposite sides of many important questions. As a young man, Joseph III witnessed some of these interactions.

- How do you think Joseph III viewed these interactions between Emma and Brigham?
- What influences and situations may have shaped his views?

Early members were united by their faith, but did not have the same opinions about everything. After Joseph Smith, Jr.'s death, questions about succession and theology became sources of disagreement for many.

- What can you do to minimize disappointment and frustration in situations where everyone doesn't agree?
- If the difference is irreconcilable, how do you move forward?



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Class Activity: Individually, or as a group, make a list of the strengths and weaknesses of each possible successor to Joseph Smith Jr.

If time permits, divide into small groups. Each group will create a campaign poster for one of the possible successors to Joseph Jr. Each group will present their candidate's case to the class.

Reading Assignment:

Joseph Smith III: Pragmatic Prophet, Chapter Three: Maturity, 1846-56

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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