

Brigham Young's Selection as Church President

Most LDS members are well-acquainted with the story of Brigham Young's transfiguration as Joseph Smith at the crucial meeting in Nauvoo on August 8, 1844, where several people presented their credentials for being named as Joseph Smith's successor. Less well-known in particular details, but assumed and accepted by LDS members as correct, is the story of how the Quorum of the Twelve stepped forward and unanimously chose Brigham Young, the senior apostle, to be the second President of the Church. This paper will take a closer look at the historical record in an effort to verify what really happened.

I. Transfiguration of Brigham Young

A. Faithful History Account. As recently as August 1996, the *Ensign* carried an article about the well-known story of Brigham Young's transfiguration as Joseph Smith on August 8, 1844: "Another event had a profound impact on the Saints. As President Young spoke to the congregation, the Lord manifested in a most miraculous manner that Brigham Young was indeed chosen to lead the Church at that time." The article then quotes Benjamin F. Johnson and George Q. Cannon describing the miracle. (Brent L. Top and Lawrence R. Flake, "The Kingdom of God Will Roll On," *Ensign*, August 1996, p. 25.)

B. Morning or Afternoon? "Two public meetings were held on 8 August. The morning meeting is sometimes called a prayer meeting, and the afternoon meeting is sometimes called a special conference. Both meetings were in the grove near the temple site. B. H. Roberts, in both the *History of the Church* and *Comprehensive History*, says that the transfiguration occurred in the afternoon session. The 1980 Gospel Doctrine manual and the Institute [of Religion]'s text on Church history locate the event during the morning session. Thomas G. Alexander and Leonard Arrington also place the transformation in the morning." (Reid L. Harper, "The Mantle of Joseph: Creation of a Mormon Myth," *Journal of Mormon History*, Fall 1996, p. 39.)

C. Wilford Woodruff Account. At the April 1872 general conference, Wilford Woodruff related the incident, and added: "Every man and every woman in that assembly, which perhaps might number thousands could bear the same testimony. I was there, the Twelve were there, and a good many others, and all can bear the same testimony." (*Journal of Discourses*, 15:81.)

1. Powerful Testimony of Event. As President of the Church, in 1892, Wilford Woodruff announced: "I do not know if there was any one present here tonight but myself who was there at that [8 August 1844] conference. There are but few living who were present on that occasion . . . and when Brigham arose and commenced speaking, as has been said, if my eyes had not been so I could see, if I had not seen him with my own eyes, there is no one that could have convinced me that it was not Joseph Smith speaking. It was with the voice and face of Joseph Smith; and many can testify to this who was acquainted with the two men." (*History of the Church*, 7:236; *Deseret Evening News*, March 12, 1892.)

2. Not Present at Meeting; Journal Does Not Mention It. However, BYU professor Thomas Alexander points out: "The major problem with Woodruff's account is that it was given years later. Woodruff's journal indicates that he was not present at the morning meeting, where the transfiguration took place, but in the afternoon, and his journal does not record the event." (Thomas C. Alexander, *Things in Heaven and Earth: The Life and Times of Wilford Woodruff, a Mormon Prophet*, 1991, 4p. 371, f106.)

3. His Account—Years Later—Used for Account in *History of the Church*. "Woodruff's lengthy entry (about 2,200 words) for 8 August 1844 provides the basis for the version found in the *History of the Church*. His journal mentions the prayer meeting in the morning but adds (and this phrase is *not* included in the *History of the Church* version) that the Twelve 'spent their time in the fore part of the day at the office and in the afternoon met at the grove.' Woodruff therefore recounts only the afternoon meeting. He says nothing about a miracle, a transfiguration, a mantle, or any resemblance between Brigham Young and Joseph Smith. If such an event had occurred, it seems unlikely that he would have omitted it, since Woodruff was quick to see the miraculous and to

note God's hand in his life and in the progress of the church. Woodruff, by his own account, did not attend the morning meeting. However, Brigham Young arrived while Sidney Rigdon was giving his speech from a wagon, made a few remarks afterwards, and announced another meeting for the afternoon.” (Reid L. Harper, "The Mantle of Joseph: Creation of a Mormon Myth," *Journal of Mormon History*, Fall 1996, p. 41.)

4. No Mention of Transformation. “A fourth account, found at the end of the 'History of Joseph Smith,' was completed in 1856 by George A. Smith and Wilford Woodruff as 'Historians' and 'carefully revised under the strict inspection of President Brigham Young and approved by him.' This portion of the history, which ends with the events of 8 August 1844, was serialized in the *Deseret News* in 1858 and in the *Millennial Star* in 1863. There is no mention of a mantle, a transfiguration, or a physical similarity between Young and Smith.” (*Ibid.*, 43.)

D. Sources Unavailable. In recent years, some have questioned the accuracy of this event. Those trying to prove or disprove it have very little first-hand information to go on. “The original minutes of this 8 August 1844 meeting, presently controlled by the Quorum of the Twelve, are ‘not available for public scrutiny’ (F. Michael Watson, secretary to the First Presidency, to Richard Van Wagoner, 14 June 1993). The account of the meeting in William Clayton's diary (in possession of the First Presidency) is also unavailable.” The available journals of those who were present, and wrote about it at the time, do not mention the incident. (Richard Van Wagoner, "The Making of a Mormon Myth: The 1844 Transfiguration of Brigham Young," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Winter 1995, p. 7.)

1. Minutes 'Never Transcribed.' “Several sets of minutes of the afternoon meeting, each in the hand of a different scribe, make it clear that they saw no mystical occurrence during that gathering. Furthermore, virtually all retrospective accounts mention that Young was 'transfigured' when he began to speak after Rigdon had spoken. Rigdon only addressed the congregation in the morning session, he did not speak in the afternoon. While minutes of the morning gathering do exist, in stenographer Thomas Bullock's shorthand, they have never been transcribed. By order of the current LDS Quorum of the Twelve Apostles they remain 'unavailable for public scrutiny.’” (*Ibid.*, p. 9.)

2. No Contemporary Record. “. . . no known contemporary record supports a supernatural occurrence on either the morning or afternoon of 8 August [1844] . . .” (*Ibid.*, p. 14.)

E. Story Evolved in Utah. “The earliest detailed accounts of a purported transfiguration did not begin to surface until long after the Saints were settled in the Great Basin. The fact that no accounting was included in 'Joseph Smith's History,' completed in August 1856, or in *The Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*, completed before his 1857 death, suggests that the myth was not fully developed by this period. . . . Retrospective retellings of a 'transfiguration,' in a variety of forms, can be found in dozens of sources, yet no two seem to agree on precise details.” (*Ibid.*, p. 16.)

1. A Mormon Myth. “As I contemplated these six Woodruff documents in order, they seemed to show the growth of a Mormon myth. The two earliest accounts, both in 1844, say nothing about a miracle. The third document, an 1845 letter, uses the 'mantle' image as a simple metaphor, without elaboration. The fourth account, prepared for publication was based upon the 1844 journal account. Only much later, speaking extempore in 1872 and 1892, does Woodruff term the events miraculous. If the transfiguration occurred in the morning meeting, Woodruff, who was not present, could not have been an eyewitness as he later claims. If the transformation took place in the afternoon meeting, Woodruff's silence about the event until 1872 and 1892 seems very curious.” ((Reid L. Harper, "The Mantle of Joseph: Creation of a Mormon Myth," *Journal of Mormon History*, Fall 1996, p. 45.)

F. John D. Lee's Account. John D. Lee wrote in 1881: "I myself, *at the time* imagined that I saw and heard a strong resemblance to the Prophet in him, and felt that he was the man to lead us until Joseph's legal successor should grow up to manhood, when he should surrender the Presidency to the man who held the birthright." (John D. Lee, *Mormonism Unveiled; including the Remarkable Life and Confessions of the Late Mormon Bishop, John D. Lee*, St. Louis, Mo., 1881, p. 155.)

1. Lee Not Present. "Claim to the contrary, Lee could not have witnessed this. His personal diary makes it clear that he did not return to Nauvoo until 20 August, nearly two weeks later." (See Juanita Brooks, *John Doyle Lee: Zealot—Pioneer Builder—Scapegoat*, 1961, p. 62; Richard S. Van Wagoner, "The Making of a Mormon Myth: The 1844 Transfiguration of Brigham Young," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Winter 1995, p. 17.)

G. Orson Hyde's Account. At the October 1869 general conference, apostle Orson Hyde gave a first person account of the transfiguration: "President Young went on the stand. Well, he spoke, and his words went through me like electricity. 'Am I mistaken?' said I, 'or is it really the voice of Joseph Smith?' This is my testimony; it was not only the voice of Joseph, but there were the features, the gestures and even the *stature* of Joseph before us in the person of Brigham. . . . I sat myself down in the midst of the congregation, with my two wives, whom Joseph had given and sealed to me. When President Young began to speak, one of them said, 'It is the voice of Joseph! It is Joseph Smith!' The exclamation of the other was, 'I do not see him, where is he?'" (*Journal of Discourses*, 13:181.)

1. Hyde Not Present. "Apostle Orson Hyde, prone to exaggerate, particularly when attempting to undermine the succession claims of his archenemy Sidney Rigdon, did not arrive in Nauvoo until 13 August. Yet he left two elaborate personal reminiscences of a 'transfiguration' he could not possibly have witnessed, either." (Richard S. Van Wagoner, "The Making of a Mormon Myth: The 1844 Transfiguration of Brigham Young," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Winter 1995, p.179.)

2. Returned to Nauvoo Five Days Later. "Hyde's recollection is troublesome because, on 8 August, he was in Kirtland or thereabouts, en route to Nauvoo from a mission in the East.' Wilford Woodruff's journal for 13 August notes: "Elder O. Hyde returned home to Nauvoo to day." That was five days after the event he claims to have witnessed personally.

H. Benjamin F. Johnson's Account. In 1903, in a letter to George F. Gibbs, then secretary to the First Presidency, Benjamin F. Johnson noted: "President Brigham Young arose and spoke. I saw him arise, but as soon as he spoke I jumped upon my feet, for in every possible degree it was Joseph's voice, and his person, in look, attitude, dress and appearance was Joseph himself, personified and I knew in a moment the spirit and mantle of Joseph was upon him." This appears to be Johnson's earliest recording of the event. He added: "So deeply was I impressed with what I saw and heard in this transfiguration, that for years I dared not publicly tell what was given me of the Lord to see. But when in later years I did publicly bear this testimony, I found that others could testify to having seen and heard the same." (Reid L. Harper, "The Mantle of Joseph: Creation of a Mormon Myth," *Journal of Mormon History*, Fall 1996, p. 48.) It is this 1903 account that was cited in the Gospel Doctrine manual as the source for the story. The date was not mentioned..

I. Zina D. H. Young's Account. In 1877 Mormon matriarch Zina D. H. Young, married to both Joseph Smith and Brigham Young, wrote of the incident: "It was the voice of Joseph Smith—not that of Brigham Young. His very person was changed. The mantle was truly given to another. There was no doubting this in the minds of that vast assembly. All witnessed the transfiguration, and even to-day thousands bear testimony thereof. I closed my eyes. I could have exclaimed, I know that is Joseph Smith's voice! Yet I knew he had gone. But the same spirit was with the people; the comforter remained." (Edward W. Tullidge, *The Women of Mormondom*, 1877, pp. 326-7.)

1. Zina Not Present. However, Zina kept a daily journal in Nauvoo. Her entry for August 8, 1844 reads: “I went to meeting in the afternoon. Thanks be to Him who reigns on high, the majority of the Twelve are her[e]. Brigham Young spoke and the Church voted that the 12 should act in the office of there calling next to Joseph or the three first presidents.” “Like Woodruff, she did not attend the morning meeting; her diary makes no mention of the miraculous transfiguration of Brigham Young—an event that in 1877 she said ‘thousands bear testimony thereof.’” (Reid L. Harper, “The Mantle of Joseph: Creation of a Mormon Myth,” *Journal of Mormon History*, Fall 1996, p. 49.)

J. Contemporary Letters Silent. “Two letters, written from Nauvoo within days of the conference, likewise fail to mention a miraculous event. On 11 August 1844, Brigham Young wrote to his daughter Vilate: ‘Through the great anxiety of the Church there was a Conference held last Thursday. The power of the Priesthood was ex-plained and the order thereof on which the whole Church lifted up their voice and hands for the Twelve to move forward and organize the Church and lead it as Joseph led it. Which is our indispensable duty to do. We shall organize the Church as soon as possible.’ Surely, he would have confirmed this rational explanation with the seal of a miracle had one occurred.” (Reid L. Harper, “The Mantle of Joseph: Creation of a Mormon Myth,” *Journal of Mormon History*, Fall 1996, p. 53.)

1. No Mention. “Sarah Scott, writing to her mother in Massachusetts the day after the conference, summarizes briskly: ‘The twelve were appointed to take charge of all the concerns of the Church both spiritual and temporal. Brigham Young said if he had been there he wouldn't have consented to give Joseph up and he would be damned if he would give himself up to the law of the land. He would see them *all* in hell first.” (*Ibid.*, p. 54.)

K. James J. Strang. Had the evidence been strong that Brigham Young and the Twelve were to succeed Joseph Smith, one would expect that most Church leaders would follow him. However, that was not the case. One claimant in particular, James J. Strang, announced that he had been appointed Joseph’s successor by an angel the day following Joseph’s death. “Many members of the Smith family accepted Strang’s claims, as did ‘all the living witnesses of the Book of Mormon save one.’” (Oliver Cowdery was the one exception.) (Michael Maraquardt, “Martin Harris: The Kirtland Years: 1831-1870. *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Fall 2002, 20.)

1. Martin Harris a Missionary for Strang. One witness, Martin Harris, even left on a mission to preach for Strang, arriving in England in October 1846. (*Ibid.*, p. 22.) Later, he fell out with Strang, and joined William E. McLellin’s Church of Christ, being baptized, confirmed and reordained. (*Ibid.*, p. 26.) In September 1847, Martin converted David Whitmer and baptized him into McLellin’s new church. (*Ibid.*, p. 27.)

2. Smiths Followed Strang. “It is interesting that three of the Whitmers—David, John, and Jacob—and Martin Harris, Hiram Page, William Smith, and Lucy Mack Smith all followed Strang’s leadership from 1846 to 1847, even though none of them had ever met him.” . . . On May 11 1846, Lucy Smith, in a letter to Reuben Hedlock, wrote ‘I am satisfied that Joseph appointed J. J. Strang. It is verily so.’ The same day former apostle William Smith informed Hedlock: ‘James J. Strang has the appointment and we have evidence of it. The whole Smith family excepting Hyrum’s widow uphold Strang.’” (Cited in Grant H. Palmer, *An Insider’s View of Mormon Origins*, 2002, p. 211.)

L. General Epistle. The *Times and Seasons* for 15 August 1844 printed a general epistle from the Twelve, over the signature of Brigham Young as President of the Twelve. It was addressed to the Saints in “Nauvoo and all the world.” It made no mention of any miraculous event at the conference, which ended the previous week. (*Times and Seasons*, Vol. 5, p. 618.)

M. No Contemporary Evidence. “When 8 August 1844 is stripped of emotional overlay, there is not a shred of irrefutable contemporary evidence to support the occurrence of a mystical event either in the morning or

afternoon gatherings of that day. . . . Apostles Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, Willard Richards, and Wilford Woodruff, all of whom made 8 August 1844 entries in their diaries, make no reference to an epiphany. Such an event, had it truly transpired, would have stood at the apogee of world history, a physical metamorphosis unsurpassed except for the transfiguration and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Yet neither the *Times and Seasons* nor the *Nauvoo Neighbor*, local newspapers owned by the church, mention such a wonder. Neither do the 1844 and 1845 accounts of Jedediah Grant and Orson Hyde, specifically written to refute Sidney Rigdon's robust challenge to the Quorum of the Twelve's succession claims. The most damning evidence to claims of a transfiguration is the fact that on 8 August 1844 the congregation sustained a committee rather than an individual to run the church. They confirmed the collective Quorum of the Twelve as their presiding authority. Furthermore, Young's ascent to the presidency was no ceremonial stroll, as could be expected if something as phenomenal as a transfiguration occurred. His emergence as the dominant, uncontested Mormon guiding force was not complete until late 1847, after the pioneer trek west. Even then there was substantial opposition to Brigham setting himself apart from his brethren." (Richard S. Van Wagoner, "The Making of a Mormon Myth: The 1844 Transfiguration of Brigham Young," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Winter 1995, p.22.)

N. Times and Seasons Account. Three weeks after the conference, the *Times and Seasons* referred to anxiety over a successor to Joseph Smith: "Great excitement prevails throughout the world to know 'who shall be the successor of Joseph Smith?' In reply, we say, be patient, *be patient* a little, till the proper time comes, and we will tell you all. 'Great wheels move slow.' At present, we can say that a special conference of the church was held in Nauvoo on the 8th ult., and it was carried *without a dissenting voice*, that the 'Twelve' should preside over the whole church, and when any alteration in the presidency shall be required, seasonable notice will be given." (*Times and Seasons*, Vol. 5 [2 September 1844], p. 632.)

O. George Laub Journal. In 1978, the "1845-1846 Journal of George Laub" was printed in *BYU Studies*. It included this paragraph: "Now when President Young arose to address the congregation his Voice was the Voice of Bro. Joseph and his face appeared as Joseph's face, & Should I not have seen his face but herd his Voice I Should have declared that it was Joseph." The journal's editor, former BYU professor Eugene England, noted this incident and wrote that this is "the earliest yet found that specifically mentions the change in voice and appearance in the 'transfiguration.'" "Since 1978, however, Richard S. Van Wagoner has demonstrated that this document is actually a revision of the original diary, rewritten by Laub in Utah, no earlier than 1852 and probably in or after 1857. The original diary's account of that meeting, probably written in March 1846, makes no reference to any likeness, miraculous or otherwise, of Young to Smith." ("George Laub's Nauvoo Journal," edited by Eugene England, *BYU Studies*, Winter 1978, p. 166; Harper, *Journal of Mormon History*, Fall 1996, p. 52.)

1. Diary Revised. "The original diary, recently donated to the LDS Church Archives, was apparently unavailable to Quinn or England. Quite clearly, however, the strongest contender as the earliest contemporary account of the 'mantle' miracle is, like many other sources, actually late in origin. It raises a disturbing question: Why did George Laub, a faithful Latter-day Saint, feel a need to revise his diary as he copied it to accommodate an event that had not been important enough to include earlier?" (*Ibid.*, p. 53.)

P. Congregation Rising to its Feet. "A third problem is the reaction of those present. Some of the late accounts record that many witnesses say they 'jumped up' or 'arose' when they heard the voice of the Prophet coming from Brigham Young and that they 'exclaimed' or cried out. Ivan J. Barrett writes, 'A blind man leaped to his feet exclaiming, 'Joseph is not dead, He's speaking to us!'" [Barrett's book, written as a manual for institute classes, does not cite a source for this story.] Benjamin F. Johnson, William Adams, Drusilla Dorris Hendricks, and Jacob Hamblin also say that they arose to their feet. 'Eliza Ann Perry Benson reminisced that the Saints arose 'from their seats en mass' exclaiming 'Joseph has come! He is here.' . . . It is difficult to believe that all these arisings and exclamations would be totally unnoticed in all contemporary sources." (*Ibid.*, p. 68.)

Q. BYU Studies Rebuttal. In 1996, *BYU Studies* reviewed all of the evidence presented by Richard Van Wagoner and others, and printed an 85-page "rebuttal." Ronald K. Esplin is quoted: "Though there is no contemporary diary account, the number of later retellings, many in remarkable detail, argues for the reality of

some such experience.” They build their case by stating, “At least one hundred people wrote or otherwise passed on their remembrances of this witness.” To explain the discrepancies of time, they noted: “Some people mention that the transformation occurred when Brigham stood to speak after Sidney Rigdon had concluded— possibly indicating that they witnessed the phenomenon at the end of the morning session of the conference; others say they saw the miracle in the afternoon session. The accounts of still others indicate that they witnessed a transformation not on August 8, but rather on a later date.” (Lynne Watkins Jorgensen and BYU Studies Staff, “The Mantle of the Prophet Joseph Passes to Brother Brigham: A Collective Spiritual Witness,” *BYU Studies*, 36:4 [1996-97], pp. 125-204.)

1. Arrington’s Cautious Response. The accounts include former Church Historian Leonard Arrington’s less than ringing endorsement “that an important event ‘took place’ but [Arrington] observes that there may be psychological explanations for the phenomenon and reserves judgment regarding whether a miraculous transfiguration occurred.” (126)

2. Incomplete Citation. *BYU Studies* cites Brigham Young: “. . . in the afternoon a corden [according] to my request the people assembled by thousands. I lade before them the order of the church and the Power of the Preasthood. after a long and laboras talk of a bout two ours in the open air with the wind blowing. the church was of one hart and one mind. they wanted the twelve to lead the church as Br Joseph had dun in his day.” They were forced to add, though: “However, records do not indicate that he publicly acknowledged the manifestations at the time they occurred.” (130)

3. 101 Testimonies Cited. The authors present their strongest argument: “Records currently known establish 101 written testimonies of people who say a transformation or spiritual manifestation occurred. Of these, 57 are firsthand documents: personal journals, personal narratives told to a scribe, or first-person testimonies published in Church magazine articles. Forty-two are secondhand testimonies: accounts gleaned from biographies written by family members or from historical compilations.” All 101 testimonies are given in an appendix. The casual reader will likely find this evidence impressive. Those who carefully read the footnotes, however, will find these reservations:

a. Diaries Silent. “A few Nauvoo Saints who kept daily records, personal or official, made entries on August 8, recording the results or proceedings of the meeting without mentioning a mantle experience at that time.” (150, f55.)

b. Official Record Keeper Silent. “Wilford Woodruff, concerned with keeping an official record, made careful notes on the comments made by the speakers during the conference but makes no mention of a specific spiritual manifestation at the meeting.” (150, f55.)

c. Clayton and Kimball Silent. “In their personal journals, William Clayton and Heber C. Kimball both briefly mention only the results of the vote taken at the meeting.” (150, f55.)

d. Willard Richards Silent. “The entry [in Willard Richard’s journal] marked August 8 is made up of a few short lines that simply state that Rigdon spoke in the morning and that the Twelve were voted by the Church to stand as the First Presidency.” (150, f55.)

4. Dates Testimonies Written Not Included. Appendix I is headed, “Firsthand Testimonies.” They are listed alphabetically, together with the individual’s birth date, death date, and their age on Aug. 8, 1844. A most important piece of information, the date when the firsthand testimony was written down or published, is strangely missing. By checking at the end of the article, in the footnotes, however, one learns that with the exception of one testimony recorded in May, 1845, virtually all of the testimonies were written down long after the fact. The testimony written in May, 1845 is that of William Burton, who wrote: “The spirit of Joseph appeared to rest upon Brigham. . . . Great and mysterious are the ways of God.” [Deletion in original.] (157).

a. Writer of Earliest Account Not Present. Only those diligent enough to turn to the footnote on page 181 learn that, “This is one of the earliest contemporary accounts to survive, written ten months after the event. Burton was not in Nauvoo in 1844. He was on a mission.” (181, f10.)

b. Testifier Not Present. Nancy Naomi Alexander Tracy’s impressive testimony is recorded: “I can testify that the mantle of Joseph fell upon Brigham that day as that of Elijah did fall upon Elisha, for it seemed that his voice, his gestures, and all were Joseph. It seemed that we had him again with us. He was sustained by the voice of the people to be the prophet, seer, and revelator.” (177) Those diligent enough to follow the footnote learn that, “The account [in this journal] indicates that Nancy and her husband were in the East at the time of the August 8 meeting, or that Nancy had confused the dates. Her story may have been secondhand or might be an account of something they experienced later.” (185, f58.)

c. Bullock’s Journal Has No Entry. “Thomas Bullock’s personal journal has no entries for August 8, 1844. However, he did attend the meeting and kept minutes. His notes for the afternoon meeting make no mention of a mantle experience. His minutes of the morning meeting, taken in his particular shorthand, are notes taken during Sidney’s and Brigham’s speeches, with no additional comment of any kind.” (151, f55.)

d. Hyde and Woodruff Not Present. “In this 1869 discourse, Orson Hyde speaks as if he had been present at the August 8 conference in Nauvoo. He mentions Rigdon’s speech to the congregation as well as Brigham Young’s. However, Wilford Woodruff’s diary places Orson’s arrival in Nauvoo on August 13.” [e.g., he wasn’t present at the meeting, but told a conference in 1869 that he was.] (152, f89.)

e. Benson’s Account Not First Person. “Ezra T. Benson makes no claim to having had a mantle vision personally but mentions and apparently accepts the experience of others. A number of Saints, whose reminiscent accounts have been located, are careful to record that they were at the meeting on August 8 but make no specific reference to a transfiguration.” (153, f103.)

5. Millennial Star & Times and Seasons Silent. They mention that printed references to the “mantle of Joseph” falling on Brigham appeared in the *Millennial Star* and in the *Times and Seasons*, but have to add, “These two Church publications do not mention any visions among members of the congregation but simply focus on the point of ecclesiastical interest — that the mantle had fallen on Brigham Young.” (131)

6. We Don’t Know Why Journals Silent. They ask a pertinent question: “However, for 150 years, scholars have searched for a witness account written on the same day as the mantle experience. If the experience was so ‘intense and life-changing’ for followers of the Prophet Joseph, why were none of the accounts that record the miracle written on the day of the manifestation or shortly thereafter?” They are forced to answer: “It is a question that unfortunately cannot be answered definitively.” (136)

7. Some Positive Diaries “Not Available to Researchers.” Appendix II is entitled, “Secondhand Testimonies.” The reader is told, “These accounts concern people who reported a personal mantle experience but did not record their own story. Their oral testimonies were recorded later by others, usually family members.” This cryptic note is then added, “Other accounts in this appendix come from firsthand diaries that are unavailable to the author of this paper.” If they are so impressive, one wonders why they are unavailable to Church researchers working for *BYU Studies*, since BYU is where most Church history records are now kept. Those reading the footnotes for Appendix II will find the following additional information:

a. Lee’s Account Not Available. “When considering the timing of the mantle experience [for John D. Lee], one should note that Lee did not arrive in Nauvoo until Aug. 20, 1844, according to his diary. Because of the controversy surrounding the publication of Lee’s memoirs and because his original manuscript is not available, we have included this account in appendix II.” (203, f31.)

b. Lyman's Journal Silent. "This rather florid account is based, according to the authors, on information from Amasa Lyman Journals, 23 vols., LDS Church Archives. However, source checkers could find nothing in the journals other than the statement that Lyman spent the day with the brethren, so this account of the transfiguration may come from other family sources." (203, f32.)

c. BYU Studies Quote Not in Journal. James Palmer's testimony states, "the mantle of Joseph fell upon Brigham and it was as if the Prophet were speaking. It was truly the voice of the Prophet, and it seemed to be the Prophet in person!" (197). The footnote on p. 203 adds, however: "In Palmer's holograph account, he is less specific: 'Brigham Young, the President of the Twelve Apostles, came to the front and stated in a public meeting that the Twelve in their organized capacity had the authority and the legal right to preside over the Church in all the world and their rights were acknowledged by the main body of the people.'" What *BYU Studies* elected to print, it turns out, is not in the original diary, but came from a family biography published in 1963. (203, f.37.)

d. Story Recorded by Grandchild. Following the testimony of Peter Edmund Van Orden, a footnote adds, "This was recorded by an unnamed grandchild of Peter after listening to many of Peter's accounts." (204, f45.)

8. Significant Info Hidden. In summary, researchers for the Church have made a substantial effort to prove the validity of the 'mantle' story so well known to Church members. Their best effort, including almost 100 pages of "first person" testimonies, leaves one less sure than ever that this famous incident ever happened. The accounts are made believable only by hiding significant information from all but the most determined readers.

R. Half Refused to Follow Brigham to Utah. "I have previously described Mormonism after June 1844 as a movement 'in crisis,' and even a scholarly advocate of Brigham Young has acknowledged that half of the LDS membership as of 1844 refused to follow Young to Utah. (D. Michael Quinn, *Sunstone*, May 2005, p. 30; citing Ronald K Esplin, "Joseph, Brigham, and the Twelve: A Succession of Continuity," *BYU Studies*, 21 [Summer 1981], p. 333.)

II. Was Brigham Young to Be An Interim President?

A. Brigham Young Sustained as President. At the death of Joseph Smith in Nauvoo in 1844, the Quorum of the Twelve became the collective "Presidency" of the Church. Brigham Young, as senior apostle, was thrust into a leadership role. However, he was not sustained as President until December 1847 as he and others of the original pioneers returned to Winter Quarters to collect their families. Naming Young president was far from routine, however. Had the entire Quorum been present, the reorganization likely would not have occurred. John Taylor and Parley P. Pratt, both in the Salt Lake Valley, were opposed to the idea of a First Presidency. So was Lyman Wight, who had taken a group of followers into Texas. The seven apostles in Winter Quarters were far from united on the issue. Orson Pratt, Wilford Woodruff and George A. Smith all expressed reservations, and Pratt and Woodruff thought a direct revelation would be needed first." (Reid L. Harper, "The Mantle of Joseph," *The Journal of Mormon History*, Vol. 22 No. 2 [Fall 1996], p. 62.)

1. An Interim Appointment Few members today are aware that Brigham Young was not expected to be President of the Church for life. There was considerable opposition to naming him President at all, and at least four of the Twelve opposed his selection. John Taylor, Orson Hyde, Parley Pratt and Orson Pratt openly expressed opposition. Interestingly, Brigham Young, as President of the Twelve, had the official vote taken on December 5, 1847, at Kanesville, Iowa, far from the Salt Lake Valley. Apostles John Taylor, Orson Hyde and Parley Pratt were in Salt Lake at the time. The fourth dissenter, Orson Pratt, was called on a mission to England the following morning. To those surprised by the action, Brigham explained that eventually, one of the sons of

Joseph Smith would lead the Church, but Brigham would serve in the interim. (Samuel L. Taylor, *The Kingdom or Nothing: the Biography of John Taylor*, pp. 114, 137.)

B. Wilford Woodruff's Account. "In 1860, Young gave his version of the reorganization: he first discussed it with Woodruff when they were returning to Winter Quarters in late 1847. Woodruff, according to Young, agreed 'It is right; I believe it, and think a great deal of it, for it is from the Lord; the Church must be organized.' However, Woodruff recorded in his diary: 'I had a question put to me by President Young what my opinion was concerning one of the Twelve Apostles being appointed as the President of the Church with his two Councillors. I Answered that A quorum like the Twelve who had been appointed by revelation & confirmed by revelation from time to time I thought it would require A revelation to change the order of that quorum.'" With the slimnest of mandates, Brigham Young proceeded with the reorganization. (Reid L. Harper, *The Journal of Mormon History*, Vol. 22 No. 2 [Fall 1996], pp. 62-3.)

C. Joseph Smith III to Lead Church. "Even though Joseph had ordained four other men before 1844 to succeed him and had given the Quorum of the Twelve administrative authority over the church equal to the First Presidency, it is obvious that Joseph Smith intended his son Joseph Smith III to one day become president of the LDS Church. A revelation to Joseph Smith, Jr., given a month after the birth of young Joseph on 6 November 1832 stated that the priesthood 'must needs remain through you and your lineage until the restoration of all things,' and the revelation on priesthood and church officers of 19 January 1841 also stated, 'even so I say unto my servant Joseph: In thee and thy seed shall the nations of the earth be blessed.'" (D. Michael Quinn, *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal*, Vol. 1 [1981], p. 13.)

1. Joseph Appointed Many Relatives. Prior to this, Joseph had already advanced to be general authorities in the church his father, his brothers Hyrum and William, his uncle John, his aunt's first cousin Amasa M. Lyman, his first cousin George A. Smith, and his acknowledged fourth cousin Willard Richard, fifth cousin Heber C. Kimball, and six cousins Brigham Young, Parley P. Pratt, and Orson Pratt." (*Ibid.*, p. 13.)

2. Twelve in Charge Temporarily. Following the migration to Utah, the Saints "sustained the apostolic presidency of the Quorum of the Twelve, in anticipation that one day the sons of Joseph Smith the Martyr would also come to Utah and receive their priesthood opportunities." (*Ibid.*, p. 21.)

D. Joseph Smith III Joins RLDS. "... the burden of his prophetic heritage hung heavily upon young Joseph, and after rejecting Utah Mormonism out of hand because of his moral and physical revulsion at the practice of polygamy, Joseph Smith III felt inspired in the fall of 1859 to accept the leadership of the Reorganization. Members of the Reorganization were overjoyed that their long vigil for a presidential successor to the martyred prophet came to an end when Joseph Smith III became President of the RLDS Church on 6 April 1860."

(D. Michael Quinn, *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal*, Vol. 1 [1981], p. 13.)

E. Joseph Smith's Sons to Lead Church. In the October 1863 conference, Brigham Young said, "If one of Joseph's children takes the Lead of the church he will come and place himself at the head of *this* church and I will receive him as willing as any one here." (Manuscript minutes of Brigham Young sermon, 7 October 1863, reported by George D. Watt, Brigham Young Papers, LDS Historical Department; quoted in D. Michael Quinn, *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal*, Vol. 1 [1981], p. 23.)

1. Joseph's Announcement. "By March 1844, Joseph undoubtedly knew that Emma was pregnant and that he would now have a child who was born heir to the promises of the Holy Order [made up of those who had received their endowments] into which he and Emma had entered in 1843. On 10 March 1844 (just hours before he presided over the first provisional meeting of the theocratic Council of Fifty), Joseph gave a sermon in which he said that 'the Priesthood that he received, and the throne and kingdom of David is out of his lineage.'" (D.

Michael Quinn, *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal*, Vol. 1 [1981], p. 16.)

2. Future King David Would Be Joseph Smith's Son. "Mormons of the twentieth century have consistently interpreted these references by Joseph to the future King David as having some distant fulfillment by a Jew in the twenty-first century or beyond, but Joseph's contemporaries understood them to apply to his son who would be born in 1844 and who Joseph told Emma should bear the name of David." (*Ibid.*, p. 16.)

a. Most Thought of Biblical King David. "At the time of his birth, it was intimated by old Mrs Durphee and others that Joseph the prophet had said that he (David Hyrum, which name Joseph gave him before his death) was to be the David the Bible speaks of to rule over Israel forever, which David spoken of most people took to be old King David." (Oliver B. Huntington diary, 1:53; BYU; E. Cecil McGavin, *The Family of Joseph Smith*, Bookcraft, 1963, p. 138.)

3. David Had the Right to Lead Church. "But Brigham insisted that Joseph Smith's sons could rightfully preside only over the LDS Church of Utah, not over a church which repudiated the practices Brigham had faithfully tried to implement as he had learned them from Joseph Smith the Prophet. Brigham was convinced that Joseph Smith III would never conform, but in 1866 expressed his fervent hope that David H. Smith would accept the fullness of the priesthood . . ." (*Ibid.*, p. 23.)

F. David Would Follow His Father. "Brigham Young said that in the spring of 1844 [possibly at a meeting of the Holy Order] Joseph Smith told him: 'I shall have a son born to me, and his name shall be called David; and on him, in some future time, will rest the responsibility that now rests upon me.' Young added that Smith made this statement to Young and several others." (Transcription of Brigham Young's unpublished sermon, 7 Oct. 1863, by George D. Watt, and Robert McQuarrie diary Oct 1863, LDS archives; cited by D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power*, 1994, pp. 230, 438f.)

G. God Will Wake Joseph's Boys. On June 29, 1856, Pres. Heber C. Kimball preached: "At present the Prophet Joseph's boys lay apparently in a state of slumber, every thing seems to be perfectly calm with them, but by and bye God will wake them up, and they will roar like the thunders of mount Sinai." (Heber C. Kimball, *Journal of Discourses* 4:6.)

H. Brigham Would Welcome Joseph's Sons. At the October 1863 general conference, Brigham Young said, "If one of Joseph's children takes the Lead of the church he will come and place himself at the head of *this* church [not the RLDS Church], and I will receive him as willing as any one here." (Brigham Young Papers, LDS Historical Department; cited in *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Summer 1982, p. 85.)

I. Doubts Expressed in 1866. At the Oct. 7, 1866 semi-annual general conference, Brigham Young said (as recorded by George D. Watt): "When Joseph the Prophet was killed his wife Emma was pregnant, Joseph said, previous to his death, 'She shall have a son, and his name shall be called David, and unto him the Lord will [unclear word]. I am looking for the time when the Lord will speak to David; but let him pursue the course he is now pursuing, 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 of his sins, and turn away from his iniquity, to cease to do evil, and learn to do well, embrace the Gospel of life and salvation, and be an obedient son of God, or he never can walk up to possess his right. It would be his right to preside over this Church, if he would only walk in the true path of duty. I hope and pray that he and the whole family will repent; and be a holy family. The likeliest son of Joseph Smith's family is dead. Now you old Mormons, stop your talking about young Joseph, and about David going to preside over the Church by and by; I wish he was prepared for it, would repent of his sins, and come in at the door, and be one with us, and walk up to the Twelve and the First Presidency saying, I am one with you, and am your servant." (Brigham Young Collection, LDS Church Archives; cited in *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Summer 1982, p. 85.)

J. David's Visit to Utah. David Hyrum Smith, the son of promise of Joseph and Emma, the first child born after they were sealed for eternity, did come to Utah in 1872, but as an RLDS missionary. After visiting with many of his Utah relatives, the troubled young man wrote home to a close friend: "I know my Mother believes just as we do in faith, repentance, baptism and all saving doctrines, in the books of the [RLDS] church and all, but I do not wish to ask her in regard to polygamy, for dear brother God forgive me if I am wrong—how can I tell you if I did not love you I could not. I believe there was something wrong. I don't know it, but I believe it, the testimony is too great for me to deny. Now you may give up everything if you must and cease to regard me as your friend but I never did deceive you and never will if my father sinned I can not help it. The truth to me is the same he must suffer for his sin. I do know that he did, and if I had not received such convincing testimony of the gospel my faith might fail but it does not even though he did sin. The bible is my guide and Christ my pattern there is no religion for me except the gospel we believe." (Letter to Brother Sherman, 27 July 1872, RLDS Research Library and Archives; cited in Quinn, *op. cit.*, p. 23.)

1. Tragic Aftermath. Shortly after his trip to Utah, David was named to the RLDS First Presidency. However, the shock to his nervous system from his findings in Utah was apparently more than this sensitive young man could absorb. Tragically, David was committed to the Illinois Hospital for the Insane on 10 January 1877. He remained there until his death in August 1904. (Paul Edwards, *BYU Studies*, Winter 1972, pp. 176, 179.)

K. Summary. With Joseph III and David Hyrum solidly connected to the RLDS Church, Brigham Young no longer had to contend with the possibility that they might arrive in Utah to claim the presidency of the LDS Church. Soon, all talk about the sons of Joseph and Emma Smith leading the Church evaporated, and Brigham was able to move decisively in establishing an orderly succession pattern which the LDS Church is still following (though it took two more presidential successions for it to become unquestioned).

1. Virtually none of this is referred to in current Church publications or histories. All assume Brigham Young was the clear, unanimous choice of the Twelve and the membership, to serve for life, though some might wonder why the new president was selected in Kanesville, Iowa in December 1847—three-and-a-half years after Joseph's martyrdom — rather than earlier, or at a regular general conference in the Salt Lake Valley.

Compiled by
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