

RICHARD NEITZEL HOLZAPFEL

1844

*The Prophet's Final Charge
to the Twelve*

*A*n election year in the United States, 1844 was filled with political concerns and issues for the Saints as well as doctrinal insights, administrative challenges of a growing community in Nauvoo and Church in North America and the British Isles, and continued opposition to Joseph Smith and his prophetic mission.¹ B. H. Roberts observed, “Accusations were repeatedly being made about this time that President Smith was a fallen prophet. But when the mighty doctrines [in his final general conference address delivered on April 6, 1844] are taken into account, and the spiritual power with which he is delivering them is reckoned with, no more complete refutation of his being a fallen prophet could be made. The Prophet lived his life in *crescendo*. From

Richard Neitzel Holzapfel is a professor of Church history and doctrine at Brigham Young University.

small beginnings, it rose in breadth and power as he neared its close.”²

This chapter will focus on the Prophet’s last six months of life—the hectic months of January through June. It will also address the important transition of authority from his ministry to that of the Apostles, including the last charge he gave them in the spring of 1844.

Overview of Key Dates

On Friday, January 19, the Prophet gave a lecture on the Constitution of the United States and on the candidacy of those who were running for president.³ Two days later, on Sunday, January 21, the Prophet preached to several thousand people on sealing the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to the fathers, providing for the first time a precise interpretation of Malachi 4, which he alluded to in September 1842.⁴ “How are [the Saints] to become Saviors on Mount Zion?” the Prophet asked rhetorically and then answered his own question: “By building their temples, erecting their baptismal fonts, and going forth and receiving all the ordinances, baptisms, confirmations, washings, anointings, ordinations, and sealing powers upon our heads in behalf of all our progenitors who are dead and redeem them; that they may come forth in the first resurrection and be exalted to thrones of glory with us. Herein is the chain that binds the hearts of the fathers to the children and the children to the fathers, which fulfills the mission of Elijah.”⁵ Since the very first appearance of the angel Moroni in Palmyra in 1823, the Lord had been preparing Joseph for one of the culminating events of his ministry: the institution of the ordinances that would seal families together for eternity (see *Doctrine and Covenants 2*). Many of the scriptures cited by Moroni in 1823 pertain to the

THE PROPHET'S FINAL CHARGE TO THE TWELVE

"family kingdom" of the patriarchal priesthood (see Joseph Smith—History 1:36–39).

At first the Restoration focused on the salvation and eternal life of individuals. The Book of Mormon, published in March 1830, outlined the fulness of the gospel—that by believing in Christ, repenting of one's sins, accepting baptism by one who has authority, receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost, and enduring to the end, individuals could be saved in Christ's kingdom and obtain eternal life (see 2 Nephi 31; 3 Nephi 27:19–20). But as the Restoration unfolded, the passages cited by the angel Moroni came into focus. It became apparent that God intended rewards in addition to salvation and eternal life. For example, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "Great is your reward *in heaven*" (Matthew 5:12; emphasis added). Heaven is not the ultimate reward, but a further reward is promised after one is in heaven⁶—something in addition to salvation or eternal life. The Lord indicated that the reward was exaltation and eternal lives. The first of four exaltation revelations (Doctrine and Covenants 76; 84; 88; 93) was received in February 1832.⁷ It was clear that salvation had two meanings: first, to come forth in the Resurrection in any kingdom of glory; and second, in the fullest sense, to enter into the glory of the celestial kingdom, or obtain eternal life. Eternal life is available to individuals, but exaltation and eternal lives are available only to families (see Doctrine and Covenants 131:1–2). Sealing families together—bringing them together in the temple—was the ultimate purpose of the Restoration and the focus of the Prophet's last years. Only at the end of his ministry did the passages cited by the angel Moroni become meaningful.

That same month, the Prophet was nominated by local Nauvoo citizens as a candidate for president of the United States.⁸ It is impossible to know whether Joseph Smith actually believed

JOSEPH SMITH, THE PROPHET AND SEER

that he could win the election or whether he ran as a protest against the leading candidates, who were unwilling to intervene in state affairs even when minorities were persecuted, as had been the case in Missouri in 1838 for Latter-day Saints.⁹ His candidacy also gave the missionaries additional opportunities to talk about the Church and to publicize the injustices Church members had experienced in Missouri. It is not unusual for people in city, county, state, or even national elections to vote out of principle for a candidate who could not conceivably win, feeling they could not in good conscience support the other candidates. Joseph Smith probably felt he could not support the major political candidates, James K. Polk and Henry Clay, after attempting to ascertain what they would do for minority faiths, including the Latter-day Saints. The Prophet certainly was concerned for the Latter-day Saints' welfare, but he also was concerned about other persecuted minorities in America.¹⁰ About six months earlier, Joseph noted:

Why is it this babbler gains so many followers and retains them? Because I possess the principle of love. All I can offer the world is a good heart and a good hand.

Mormons can testify whether I am willing to lay down my life for a Mormon. If it has been demonstrated that I have been willing to die for a Mormon, I am bold to declare before heaven that I am just as ready to die for a Presbyterian, a Baptist, or any other denomination.

It is a love of liberty which inspires my soul. Civil and religious liberty were diffused into my soul by my grandfathers while they dandled me on their knees. And shall I want [for] friends? No!¹¹

Another possible reason for the Prophet's presidential run was that he intended to become an important political power

THE PROPHET'S FINAL CHARGE TO THE TWELVE

broker for the region to protect his people through political influence.

For whatever reason, Joseph Smith's announcement raised some questions about the separation of church and state. Ironically in the American tradition, pastors, ministers, and rabbis have run for city, county, state, and national offices. Nevertheless, many people in Hancock County were concerned about Joseph Smith's increasing influence.¹²

On Sunday, February 4, Joseph related to temple architect William Weeks the vision he had received concerning the appearance and design of the Nauvoo Temple.¹³ He spent the following day with Weeks trying to make the temple plans fit that pattern. When God commanded Moses to build the tabernacle, the first permanent temple-type structure mentioned in the Old Testament, the book of Exodus says, “And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, . . . let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them. According to all that I shew thee, *after* the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the instruments thereof, even so shall ye make it” (Exodus 25:1, 5–9, 27; emphasis added). The Nauvoo Temple, like the earlier Kirtland Temple, was planned as a multiuse building. The ground floor was dedicated to be a general assembly room (analogous to a modern chapel or a stake center). The second floor was reserved for education and training (analogous to BYU campuses, seminary and institute buildings, or one of the MTC complexes). The attic story was organized for performing temple ordinances (like temples today), and an administrative office (like the Church Administration Office in Salt Lake City).

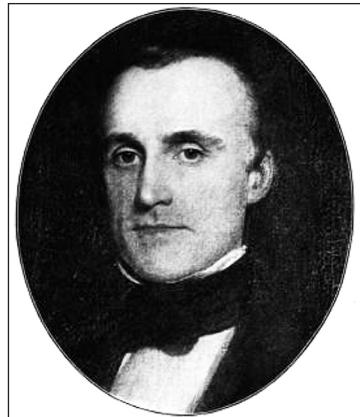
However, unlike the Kirtland Temple, the Nauvoo Temple had a full basement that accommodated a baptismal font on the backs of twelve oxen (see 1 Kings 7:25). The font was used for baptisms, including baptisms for the dead.¹⁴ Locating the

font in the basement may have been symbolic of the grave. The exterior displayed additional symbolic features: a weather vane with the figure of the angel Moroni dressed in priestly sacral clothing with a cap and flowing robe and a square and a compass, as well as star stones, moon stones, and sun stones.¹⁵

On Monday, February 12, Joseph Smith signed a document titled “A Memorial to Congress,” which outlined the Latter-day Saints’ sufferings in Missouri, and dispatched Elder Orson Pratt to present it before government officials in Washington DC.¹⁶

Beginning in early March 1844, Joseph Smith organized the kingdom of God, with a leadership composed of over fifty men and described as the Council of the Kingdom or the Council of Fifty. This body represented the legislative body of the government of God on earth.¹⁷

On Sunday, April 7, the Prophet delivered his last general conference address in the east grove, often called the King Follett discourse.¹⁸ The death of King Follett on March 9, 1844, nearly a month earlier, influenced its subject matter—the eternity of man. “I want you to know the first principle of this law,” the Prophet stated, “how consoling to the mourner when they part with a friend to know that though they lay down this body, it will rise and dwell . . . to be an heir of God and joint heir with Jesus Christ, enjoying the same rise, exaltation, and glory, until you arrive at the station of a God.”¹⁹ This discourse may be correctly identified as an official eulogy.²⁰



Josiah Quincy

THE PROPHET'S FINAL CHARGE TO THE TWELVE



Charles Francis Adams

On Wednesday, May 15, Josiah Quincy (future mayor of Boston), Charles Francis Adams (son of U.S. president John Quincy Adams and grandson of U.S. president John Adams), and Dr. William G. Goforth (campaign organizer for U.S. presidential candidate Henry Clay) visited Joseph Smith, providing an interesting outsider view of the Latter-day Saints and their Prophet.²¹ Years later, Quincy suggested that “it is by no means improbable that some future textbook,

for the use of generations yet unborn, will contain a question something like this: What historical American of the nineteenth century has exerted the most powerful influence upon the destinies of his countrymen? And it is by no means impossible that the answer to the interrogatory may thus be written: *Joseph Smith the Mormon prophet.*”²²

On Friday, May 17, the Reform Party, a third-party ticket, officially nominated Joseph Smith as their presidential candidate at a state convention in Illinois.²³

Opposition within the Church grew—from both former associates of the Prophet, such as William Law, and some lay members who wanted to return to the theologically conservative New York period (which emphasized salvation and eternal life) and the limited ecclesiastical administrative Kirtland era,

rejecting the doctrinal revelations implemented at Nauvoo. On Friday, June 7, some of these dissident members published the first and only issue of the *Nauvoo Expositor* in an attempt to embarrass Church leaders and kindle animosity among non-Mormons in the region.²⁴ On Monday, June 10, the city council declared the *Nauvoo Expositor* a public nuisance because they thought it might incite additional acts of violence against the Saints.²⁵ According to one scholar, the city council legally decided to destroy the press on which the newspaper was printed, recalling “a legal basis for this action in the Illinois law of 1844. . . . The guarantee of freedom of the press in the United States Constitution was not declared applicable to the actions of city and state governments until 1931, and then only by a five-to-four Court’s reliance on a constitutional amendment adopted in 1868.”²⁶ Nevertheless, this act sparked opposition to the point that the mayor of Nauvoo (Joseph Smith) and the city council were arrested. This began a series of legal maneuvers that placed Joseph Smith in custody in Carthage without protection.²⁷

Before he surrendered himself, Joseph gave a sermon on June 16 in the grove east of the temple regarding the Godhead.²⁸ Each member of the Godhead is “a different or separate person,” the Prophet taught. “Separate persons, but they all agree in one or the self same thing.”²⁹ The sermon was an important doctrinal statement and summary of his teachings of the Nauvoo period.

On Saturday, June 22, John and Patrick Calhoun, sons of U.S. presidential candidate John C. Calhoun, visited Joseph Smith in Nauvoo. According to Calhoun, Joseph “gave us a full exposition of his faith, frequently calling himself the Prophet, in the course of conversation.” That same day, Illinois governor Thomas Ford ordered Joseph and other Church leaders to

THE PROPHET'S FINAL CHARGE TO THE TWELVE

appear in Carthage, the county seat, to “submit yourself to be arrested.”³⁰

The conspiracy to place Joseph Smith in custody in Carthage culminated in the murder of the Prophet and the Patriarch on Thursday, June 27.³¹ On Friday, June 28, their bodies were returned to the mourning citizens of Nauvoo, and on the following day, Joseph and Hyrum were secretly buried in Nauvoo.³²

The Kingdom of God Established

As part of the restoration of the fulness of times, the Prophet established the kingdom of God on earth in preparation for Christ’s millennial reign. As noted, this effort antagonized some of the Prophet’s enemies. Richard Bushman and Dean Jessee observed:

To add to his unpopularity, in the final six months of his life Joseph Smith set out on a course of political action that outraged his critics. In January 1844, he announced his candidacy for president of the United States and a few months later organized a shadow government called the Kingdom of God, which may have been envisioned as a prototype of Christ’s millennial government of the earth. Whether or not he believed he could win the presidency, he spoke optimistically, as candidates do in the beginning of a campaign. Certainly his patience with government had run out. The Mormons had been abused many times with no compensation for confiscated property from any level of government, and in 1844 they felt the tide of hatred rising again. Smith could not understand why the Constitution did not compel the government to protect the rights of Mormons. His platform defended all downtrodden people of his time:

JOSEPH SMITH, THE PROPHET AND SEER

slaves, whom he felt should be purchased from their masters with revenues from public lands; prisoners held under cruel and unsanitary conditions; court-martialed soldiers; and sailors, whose suffering at the hands of tyrannical ship captains was attracting the sympathy of reformers. To all, he promised justice.³³

The Prophet believed that the kingdom of God grew out of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and was a distinct organization. The Church of Jesus Christ, the ecclesiastical organization, provided the message of salvation, while the kingdom of God, the political or family kingdom—what Bushman and Jessee termed “a shadow government”—will rule during the Millennium when “the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever” (Revelation 11:15).³⁴ Although the terms are often used synonymously today, it is important to understand their use in the 1840s to appreciate the Prophet’s teachings on the subject. For Joseph Smith, the Church and the kingdom were linked together through temple covenants and ordinances. The Lord, through the Prophet, established the Church and the kingdom as part of the restoration of all things.

Joseph Smith believed that the establishment of the kingdom of God was part of the fulfillment of Daniel’s prophecy: “And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever. Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the

THE PROPHET'S FINAL CHARGE TO THE TWELVE

king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure" (Daniel 2:44–45).

It is important to note that Daniel saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands. This Old Testament metaphor is symbolic of God's activity, meaning without "human hands." The Lord began his work in 1842 when he revealed the name of the kingdom: "Verily thus saith the Lord, this is the name by which you shall be called, the Kingdom of God and his Laws, with the Keys and power thereof, and judgment in the hands of his servants, Ahman Christ."³⁵ The Church had received its full and complete name in April 1838 (see Doctrine and Covenants 115:4), and in April 1842 the Lord also revealed the name of God's kingdom.

Soon after receiving this revelation, the Prophet wrote an editorial, "The Government of God," in the *Times and Seasons* in July 1842.³⁶ Joseph Smith declared that the governments of men "have failed in all their attempts to promote eternal power, peace and happiness. . . . [Even] our nation, which possesses greater resources than any other, is rent, from center to circumference, with party strife, political intrigues, and sectional interest."³⁷ Joseph Smith knew that the Lord had a hand in founding the government of the United States and that he raised up wise men to prepare the Constitution (see Doctrine and Covenants 101:80). But even this government had failed to provide the protection and prosperity that God intended for human happiness in the promised land, especially among the large American slave population, native peoples, and religious minorities.

Speaking of ancient Israel, Joseph Smith taught that "their government was a theocracy."³⁸ The Prophet added, "They had God to make their laws, and men chosen by Him to administer them. . . . [They were led] in both civil and ecclesiastical affairs.

... So will it be when the purposes of God shall be accomplished: when ‘the Lord shall be King over the whole earth’ and ‘Jerusalem His throne.’ ‘The law shall go forth from Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.’”³⁹ The Prophet understood that part of his mission was to prepare the earth for that kingdom—to prepare the Church for the coming of Christ.

A Kingdom of Priests

Even though the Lord had revealed the name and purpose of the kingdom of God in 1842, the Council of the Kingdom was not officially organized until 1844. During the interval between the 1842 revelation and the organization in 1844, Joseph Smith knew that the kingdom could only be established after God’s people had become a “kingdom of priests,” as outlined in the book of Exodus: “Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel; Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles’ wings, and brought you unto myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a *kingdom of priests*, and an holy nation” (Exodus 19:3–6; emphasis added). The Lord intended to gather modern Israel, as he did anciently, to prepare them to be a special treasure, a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation.

The Fulness of the Priesthood

The Prophet learned in a revelation given to the Church in January 1841 that the Nauvoo Temple was to be built so the fulness of the priesthood could be restored, “For there is not a place found on earth that he may come to and restore again that which was lost unto you, or which he hath taken away, even

THE PROPHET'S FINAL CHARGE TO THE TWELVE

the *fulness of the priesthood*" (Doctrine and Covenants 124:28; emphasis added). Later the Prophet observed, "Those holding the fulness of the Melchizedek Priesthood are kings and priests of the Most High God, holding the keys of power and blessings. In fact, that Priesthood is a perfect law of theocracy, and stands as God to give laws to the people, administering endless lives to the sons and daughters of Adam."⁴⁰

The endowment, as revealed in Nauvoo, prepared the Saints to become "kings and priests" and "queens and priestesses." Later, on September 28, 1843, Joseph and Emma received the fulness of the priesthood. Joseph Smith's journal entry for the day noted that he was "anointed and ordained to the highest and holiest order of the priesthood (and companion)."⁴¹ Soon thereafter others also received the fulness of the priesthood. Once the fulness of the priesthood was restored, Joseph Smith was inspired to establish the Council of the Kingdom.⁴²

The Prophet lived in a democracy and, like the Protestants, had a vision of a church of equals; however, he restored an administrative hierarchy of priesthood leaders consisting of a First Presidency, Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, and so forth. But often overlooked is the fact that he expanded and democratized the priesthood base by making the fulness of the priesthood available to all. In Nauvoo, both men and women received the ordinances associated with temple worship, including the fulness of the priesthood. The Prophet told the sisters of the Relief Society that every member of the Church who was worthy would be given the same priesthood blessings when a place was prepared for that purpose. No revelation or blessing was given to Joseph that the Lord would not give to all Saints when they were ready to receive it.⁴³

Reigning with Christ

The restoration of temple worship and the establishment of the kingdom of God was part of the fulfillment of other visions that pointed to the last dispensation. For example, in Revelation 1, John notes: “Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne; and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us *kings and priests* unto God and his Father” (Revelation 1:4–6; emphasis added).

John specifically notes that Jesus “hath made us kings and priests unto God.” That the Saints would be “kings and priests” enthroned in power under Christ is also emphasized in Revelation 3: “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. To him that overcometh will *I grant to sit with me in my throne*, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne” (vv. 20–21; emphasis added).

John, like Isaiah and Joseph Smith, saw into the heavens and into the temple made without hands—the throne room in the celestial temple in heaven:

And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.

And he came and took the book out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne.

THE PROPHET'S FINAL CHARGE TO THE TWELVE

And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints.

And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation;

And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth. (Revelation 5:6–10, emphasis added)

These passages from Revelation provide an important context for Joseph Smith's teachings in April and June of 1844.⁴⁴

John saw twelve thousand exalted high priests from each tribe (see Revelation 7:4; Doctrine and Covenants 77:11), saying, “After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands” (Revelation 7:9).

Old and New Testament symbols of temple worship included the colors white, red, and royal blue or purple (see Exodus 25:4–5). Latter-day Saints, like other Christians, interpret the white of the ancient temple to represent the sinless life of the Messiah, the purity of his sacrifice; the red represents blood sacrifice, his Atonement; and the royal blue or purple represents Jesus' kingship. But in John's heavenly vision, the temple colors change from white, red, and blue to white and green.

When the Maccabees entered Jerusalem to liberate the city from the Greeks in 164 BC, the people waved green palm fronds as a symbol of the Jewish victory against their enemies.⁴⁵ This action became a symbol of the Davidic Messiah's return

JOSEPH SMITH, THE PROPHET AND SEER

in power and glory. When Jesus entered Jerusalem in his triumphal entry, John tells us that palm branches were brought up and waved there also (see John 12:13). Ultimately, the palm fronds in Revelation symbolize Jesus' victory over the demonic forces in the cosmos.

The vision in the book of Revelation continues:

And [they] cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.

And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God,

Saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen.

And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they?

And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. (Revelation 7:10–14)

John then reveals the state of those who endure:

Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them.

They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat.

For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. (Revelation 7:15–17)

The Council of the Kingdom

With the fulness of the priesthood restored, the stage was set for an important meeting on April 18, 1844, when Joseph Smith organized the Council of the Kingdom.⁴⁶ After attempts to prepare a constitution for this body failed, the Prophet asked and the Lord responded: “Ye are my Constitution and I am your God and ye are my spokesmen, therefore from henceforth keep my commandments.”⁴⁷ In other words, the kingdom of God would not have a written constitution but would instead have a “living constitution,” made up of those who had been called to preside. President John Taylor said: “These words are pregnant with meaning and full of intelligence and point out our position in regard of these matters—it is expected of us that [we] can act right—that our interests [are] bound up in the K[ingdom] of God. That we should consider we are not acting for ourselves, but we are the Spokesmen of God selected for that purpose in the interest of God and to bless and exalt all humanity. We acknowledge him as our God and all men who enter this body must acknowledge him here. There is peculiar significance to these things which needs some consideration.”⁴⁸ Elder Orson Pratt added, “In the Church we take the Law of God and his Priesthood as the Constitution of his Church—here in this Council we have a living constitution not a written one—which we must conform to.”⁴⁹ However, rules governing this body were eventually recorded.

One of the rules of the kingdom was that “to pass, a motion must be unanimous in the affirmative. Voting is done after the ancient order: each person voting in turn from the oldest to the youngest member of the Council, commencing with the standing chairman. If any member has any objections he is under covenant to fully and freely make them known to the Council. But if he cannot be convinced of the rightness of the

JOSEPH SMITH, THE PROPHET AND SEER

course pursued by the Council he must either yield or withdraw membership in the Council.”⁵⁰

The reason Joseph Smith waited until April 1844 to establish this council was that the kingdom of God could not be organized until there were men and women who had received the fulness of priesthood. Just as the high priesthood had to be restored before the First Presidency could be organized, the apostleship had to be restored before the Quorum of the Twelve was organized. So likewise, the fulness of the temple ordinances had to be restored before the kingdom of God could be organized.

When Christ comes, as the book of Revelation outlines, the kingdom of God will already be on the earth, prepared for Christ’s millennial reign. The Lord revealed through Joseph Smith the kingdom’s name, constitution, and governing rules. More importantly, he restored the ordinances necessary to prepare a people to receive the fulness of the priesthood. When the millennial day comes, the banner of heaven, or the flag of the kingdom of God, will be raised. Such sentiments are expressed nicely in Joel H. Johnson’s oft-sung hymn:

High on the mountain top
A banner is unfurled.
Ye nations, now look up;
It waves to all the world.⁵¹

Christ will then reign as King of Kings and Lord of Lords and establish peace, prosperity, and justice for a thousand years (see Revelation 19:11–16).

Succession in Church Leadership

Joseph Smith took one final decisive step in his prophetic mission as he prepared the Church for his departure. The Prophet

THE PROPHET'S FINAL CHARGE TO THE TWELVE

did not want to die without establishing proper succession of authority. He had already faced some difficult situations when early Church leaders like David Whitmer, Oliver Cowdery, and Martin Harris fell away. There must have been a concern in Joseph's mind that the people he had relied on at the beginning of his ministry, who had experienced many marvelous visions and revelations with him, did not remain in full fellowship. Sources suggest that Joseph contemplated various succession models during his ministry. Early on, Oliver Cowdery, the second elder of the Church, could have succeeded Joseph Smith. Another possible successor, as articulated in Doctrine and Covenants section 124, was Hyrum Smith, but Hyrum died in Carthage just minutes before the Prophet.

Another succession model was established in the spring of 1844 and focused on the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Brigham Young, Willard Richards, John Taylor, Wilford Woodruff, and others had already received the keys of the kingdom, and Young had become the President of the Twelve.⁵² These men had been tested by the Lord and had remained faithful to the Church and to the prophetic mission of Joseph Smith.

The principal test in Nauvoo had been plural marriage. It tried the hearts and souls of both men and women in the Church. By 1844, some leaders, including William Law of the First Presidency, had failed the test and had become enemies to the Prophet and his work. They believed that Joseph had been called of God but that he was now a fallen prophet. With good humor Joseph said, "I had rather be a fallen true prophet, than a false prophet."⁵³ However, Joseph testified that "he was not a fallen prophet, and never in any nearer relationship to God than at the present time."⁵⁴

JOSEPH SMITH, THE PROPHET AND SEER

In those early months of 1844, the dissident movement of former Church members grew. The numbers are difficult to determine, but maybe as many as three to five hundred people may have attached themselves to a reformed church, led by William Law as president (but not as prophet).⁵⁵ Law set up an organization that resembled the 1830s Kirtland-period Church, simply setting aside the Nauvoo period ordinances, practices, revelations, and teachings.

However, most Saints in Nauvoo, including the Twelve, remained faithful and testified that Joseph was still a prophet. William Clayton, a convert from England, noted after hearing the Prophet preach in Nauvoo, “It seems like heaven began on earth.”⁵⁶ To him, the doctrinal revelations of Nauvoo were not only prophetic but exhilarating.

The Final Charge to the Apostles

An important meeting occurred in the spring of 1844 when Joseph gathered the Apostles to receive their last charge from the Prophet.⁵⁷ Years later, President Wilford Woodruff recalled:

I, Wilford Woodruff, being the last man living in the flesh who was present upon that occasion feel it a duty I owe to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, to the House of Israel, and to the whole world to bear this my last testimony to all nations, that in the winter of 1843–4, Joseph Smith, the Prophet of God, called the Twelve Apostles together in the City of Nauvoo, and spent many days with us in giving us our endowments, and teaching us those glorious principles which God had revealed to him. And upon one occasion he stood upon his feet in our midst for nearly three hours declaring unto us the great and last dispensation which God

THE PROPHET'S FINAL CHARGE TO THE TWELVE

had set His hand to perform upon the earth in these last days. The room was filled as if with consuming fire; the Prophet was clothed upon with much of the power of God, and his face shone and was transparently clear, and he closed that speech, never-to-be-forgotten in time or in eternity, with the following language:

"Brethren, I have had great sorrow of heart for fear that I might be taken from the earth with the keys of the Kingdom of God upon me, without sealing them upon the heads of other men. God has sealed upon my head all the keys of the Kingdom of God necessary for organizing and building up of the Church, Zion, and Kingdom of God upon the earth, and to prepare the Saints for the coming of the Son of Man. Now, brethren, I thank God I have lived to see the day that I have been enabled to give you your endowments, and I have now sealed upon your heads all the powers of the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods and Apostleship, with all the keys and powers thereof, which God has sealed upon me; and I now roll off all the labor, burden and care of this Church and Kingdom of God upon your shoulders, and I now command you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to round up your shoulders, and bear off this Church and Kingdom of God before heaven and earth, and before God, angels and men; and if you don't do it you will be damned."

And the same spirit that filled the room at that time burns in my bosom while I record this testimony, and the Prophet of God appointed no one else but the Twelve Apostles to stand at the head of the Church and direct its affairs.⁵⁸

The Testimony of the Twelve

There is another important source about this monumental gathering that may be the earliest written document describing the meeting. Although it is unknown exactly when it was composed, it could have been written as early as September 1844. Speaking of the meeting, the Twelve recalled, “Joseph Smith seemed somewhat depressed in Spirit, and took the liberty to open his heart to us concerning his presentiments of the future.” The document then records what the Prophet said on that occasion. Joseph told the Twelve, “The Lord bids me hasten the work in which we are engaged.” The Prophet did not want the “keys and powers” to “be lost from the earth” so he placed them on the heads of the Twelve: “Upon the shoulders of the Twelve must the responsibility of leading this church henceforth rest until you shall appoint others to succeed you. Your enemies cannot kill you all at once and should any of you be killed you can lay your hands upon others and fill up the quorum. Thus can this power and these keys be perpetuated in the earth.”⁵⁹

Witnesses of Christ

On a cold winter day in December of 1805, Joseph Smith breathed his first breath. In 1844 on a hot and humid Thursday afternoon in Carthage, Illinois, the Prophet’s heart stopped beating. His enemies killed him, but they could not slay his testimony. They took his life, but they could not steal his witness. Joseph had been a dutiful son, a loving father, a kind neighbor, a visionary community leader, and a prophet of God.

Prophets from the beginning of time have had specific responsibilities. Noah built an ark, Moses led the children of Israel out of bondage, Joshua led the Israelites into the promised

THE PROPHET'S FINAL CHARGE TO THE TWELVE

land, Lehi and Jeremiah warned the inhabitants of Jerusalem about the impending exile, and Peter and Paul took the gospel to the people of the Mediterranean Basin. No matter the specific assignment they have had, all prophets have stood as witnesses of the Lord. The Prophet Joseph Smith was no different. He received numerous assignments from the Lord, but his greatest and most important work as a prophet was to be a modern witness of Jesus Christ. In 1820 he saw Jesus, who said to him: “Joseph, my son, thy sins are forgiven thee. Go thy way, walk in my statutes and keep my commandments. Behold I am the Lord of glory. I was crucified for the world that all those who believe on my name may have eternal life.”⁶⁰ The Prophet saw the Lord again in Hiram, Ohio, standing on the right hand of God in 1832, and he heard the voice bear witness that “by him, and through him, and of him, the worlds are and were created, and the inhabitants thereof are begotten sons and daughters unto God” (*Doctrine and Covenants* 76:24).

Joseph also saw Jesus Christ in the Kirtland Temple in April of 1836. He described the Lord as “standing upon the breastwork of the pulpit, . . . and his voice was as the sound of the rushing of great waters, even the voice of Jehovah, saying: I am the first and the last; I am he who liveth, I am he who was slain; I am your advocate with the Father” (*Doctrine and Covenants* 110:2–4).

The Prophet’s witness of the Savior was twofold. First, he was called to testify of Jesus as Savior and Redeemer. He did this primarily through the establishment of the Church of Jesus Christ and the bringing forth of the Book of Mormon, which teach that individual salvation and eternal life come only through Christ the Savior. Joseph’s witness of the Savior as Redeemer culminated in the restoration of the principles and ordinances of Christ’s gospel, which allow us to enter into the

JOSEPH SMITH, THE PROPHET AND SEER

celestial kingdom of God; this is the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Second, the Prophet was called to testify of Jesus as the author and finisher of our faith. He did this primarily through the revelations he received beginning in 1832 regarding exaltation and eternal lives. This witness saw its culmination in the Nauvoo Temple, where the Saints received the ordinances of the Church of the Firstborn, allowing them to come up into the presence of Elohim. All of the blessings and promises that the Prophet Joseph Smith announced to the inhabitants of the earth in this dispensation come by and through Jesus Christ, God's own Son and were aimed at establishing "a society filled with love and peace."⁶¹ Certainly it is all good news. Without Jesus Christ, we have nothing. The Prophet Joseph Smith said just a few days before he was martyred, "The Savior has the words of Eternal life; nothing else can profit us."⁶² As we listen to Joseph Smith's witness of Jesus Christ, we appreciate that "Jesus anointed that Prophet and Seer."⁶³

Notes

1. For a biographical treatment of this period, see Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 526–50.
2. B. H. Roberts, "The King Follett Discourse: The Being and Kind of Being God Is; the Immortality of the Intelligence of Man," *Liahona, the Elders' Journal*, December 5, 1911, 376–77.
3. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2nd ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1980), 6:180.
4. Smith, *History of the Church*, 6:183–85; see Doctrine and Covenants 128:18.
5. *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph*, ed. Andrew F. Ehat and

THE PROPHET'S FINAL CHARGE TO THE TWELVE

Lyndon W. Cook (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1980), 318; spelling, punctuation, and grammar standardized.

6. See Ben Witherington II, *Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary* (Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys, 2006).
7. See Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 195–214.
8. Smith, *History of the Church*, 6:187–88.
9. For an example of this opinion—that Joseph Smith was dissatisfied with other candidates but did not necessarily believe he could win the election—see B. H. Roberts, *Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1930), 2:209. For a brief discussion of various interpretations, see Richard D. Poll, “Joseph Smith and the Presidency, 1844,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 3, no. 3 (Autumn 1968): 17–21; and James B. Allen, “I Have a Question,” *Ensign*, September 1973, 21–22. For book-length treatments on his presidential campaign, see Robert S. Wicks and Fred R. Foister, *Junius and Joseph: Presidential Politics and the Assassination of the First Mormon Prophet* (Logan: Utah State University Press); Arnold K. Garr, *Setting the Record Straight: Joseph Smith: Presidential Candidate* (Orem, UT: Millennial Press, 2007); and Newell G. Bringhurst and Craig L. Foster, *The Mormon Quest for the Presidency* (Independence, MO: John Whitmer Books, 2008), 7–49.
10. Smith, *History of the Church*, 6:478.
11. *Words of Joseph Smith*, 229; spelling, punctuation, grammar, and paragraphing modernized.
12. See Wicks and Foister, *Junius and Joseph*.
13. Smith, *History of the Church*, 6:196–97. For more information on the history of the Nauvoo temple, see Matthew S. McBride, *A House for the Most High: The Story of the Original Nauvoo Temple* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007); and Don F. Colvin, *Nauvoo Temple*:

JOSEPH SMITH, THE PROPHET AND SEER

A Story of Faith (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2002).

14. See D. Michael Quinn, “The Practice of Rebaptism at Nauvoo,” *BYU Studies* 18, no. 2 (Winter 1978): 226–32.
15. See Glen M. Leonard, *Nauvoo: A Place of Peace, a People of Promise* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2002), 242–65.
16. Smith, *History of the Church*, 6:212.
17. On the Council of Fifty, see D. Michael Quinn, “The Council of Fifty and Its Members, 1844–1945,” *Brigham Young University Studies* 20, no. 3 (Winter 1980): 163–97; and Andrew F. Ehat, “It Seems Like Heaven Began on Earth: Joseph Smith and the Constitution of the Kingdom of God,” *BYU Studies* 20, no. 3 (Winter 1980): 253–79.
18. See Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 533–37; LaMar C. Berrett and others, eds., *Sacred Places*, vol. 2: *Ohio and Illinois* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2002), 174–76.
19. *Words of Joseph Smith*, 345; spelling, punctuation, and grammar modernized.
20. Longhand notes of the King Follett sermon were recorded contemporaneously by four scribes; their notes were then amalgamated and edited into a coherent text on at least three different occasions. For transcriptions of the original notes, see *Words of Joseph Smith*, 340–62. The first amalgamation, done by Thomas Bullock, was published in *Times and Seasons*, August 15, 1844, 612–17; a new amalgamation by Jonathan Grimshaw was published in *Deseret News*, July 8, 1857; this became the standard text that was eventually published in *History of the Church*, 6:302–17, and Joseph Fielding Smith, comp., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 342–62. For a more recent amalgamation, see Stan Larson, “The King Follett Discourse: A Newly Amalgamated Text,” *BYU Studies* 18, no. 2 (Winter 1978): 193–208. For a parallel-column comparison of notes and two of the amalgamations, see Larry E. Dahl and Donald Q. Cannon, *The Prophet Joseph Smith’s*

THE PROPHET'S FINAL CHARGE TO THE TWELVE

King Follett Discourse: A Six-Column Comparison of Original Notes and Amalgamations with Introduction and Commentary (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1983); see also Van Hale, “The King Follett Discourse: Textual History and Criticism,” *Sunstone* 41 (September–October 1983): 5–12.

21. Josiah Quincy, *Figures of the Past from the Leaves of Old Journals* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1883), 376–400.
22. Quincy, *Figures of the Past*, 382.
23. For the minutes of the convention, see Smith, *History of the Church*, 6:386–97; Berrett and others, *Sacred Places: Ohio and Illinois*, 141–43.
24. Smith, *History of the Church*, 6:430; see also Berrett and others, *Sacred Places: Ohio and Illinois*, 185–86.
25. Smith, *History of the Church*, 6:432–48.
26. Dallin H. Oaks, “Joseph Smith in a Personal World,” in *The Worlds of Joseph Smith: A Bicentennial Conference at the Library of Congress*, ed. John W. Welch (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2006), 160–61; and Dallin H. Oaks, “The Suppression of the *Nauvoo Expositor*,” *Utah Law Review* 9 (1965): 862–903.
27. For more on the legal details of the Prophet’s martyrdom and the subsequent trials of his murderers, see Dallin H. Oaks and Marvin S. Hill, *Carthage Conspiracy: The Trial of the Accused Assassins of Joseph Smith* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1975).
28. *Words of Joseph Smith*, 378–82; see also Berrett and others, *Sacred Places: Ohio and Illinois*, 174–76.
29. *Words of Joseph Smith*, 382.
30. Brian Q. Cannon, “John C. Calhoun, Jr., Meets the Prophet Joseph Smith Shortly before the Departure for Carthage,” *BYU Studies* 33, no. 4 (1993): 773–80.
31. *Times and Seasons*, July 15, 1844, 586; and *Times and Seasons*, August 1, 1844, 599.

JOSEPH SMITH, THE PROPHET AND SEER

32. Smith, *History of the Church*, 6:627–29; see also Berrett and others, *Sacred Places: Ohio and Illinois*, 139–40.
33. See Richard Lyman Bushman and Dean C. Jessee, “Joseph Smith and His Papers,” in Dean C. Jessee, Mark Ashurst-McGee, and Richard C. Jensen, eds., *Journals, Volume 1: 1832–1839*, vol. 1 of the Journals series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2008), xxxi.
34. Bushman and Jessee, “Joseph Smith and His Papers,” xxxi; see also Quinn, “The Council of Fifty and Its Members,” and Ehat, “It Seems Like Heaven Began on Earth.”
35. William Clayton, cited in Ehat, “It Seems Like Heaven Began on Earth,” 268.
36. *Times and Seasons*, July 15, 1842, 855–58; see also *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1938), 248–55.
37. Quoted in Smith, *Teachings*, 249.
38. Smith, *Teachings*, 252.
39. Smith, *Teachings*, 252.
40. Smith, *Teachings*, 322.
41. Joseph Smith Journal, September 28, 1843, in *An American Prophet’s Record: The Diaries and Journals of Joseph Smith*, ed. Scott H. Faulring (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989), 416; spelling modernized.
42. See Devery S. Anderson, “The Anointed Quorum in Nauvoo, 1842–45,” *Journal of Mormon History* 29, no. 2 (Fall 2003): 137–57; Devery S. Anderson and Gary James Bergera, *Joseph Smith’s Quorum of the Anointed, 1842–1845: A Documentary History* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2005); and Andrew F. Ehat, “Joseph Smith’s Introduction of Temple Ordinances and the 1844 Mormon Succession Question” (master’s thesis, Brigham Young University, 1982).
43. *Words of Joseph Smith*, 4.

THE PROPHET'S FINAL CHARGE TO THE TWELVE

44. *Words of Joseph Smith*, 338–84.
45. 2 Maccabees 10:1–8.
46. Ehat, “It Seems Like Heaven Began on Earth,” 253–80.
47. Quoted in Joseph F. Smith, Minutes of the Council of Fifty, 21 April 1880, cited in Ehat, “It Seems Like Heaven Began on Earth,” 259.
48. Minutes, in Ehat, “It Seems Like Heaven Began on Earth,” 259.
49. Minutes, in Ehat, “It Seems Like Heaven Began on Earth,” 260.
50. Ehat, “It Seems Like Heaven Began on Earth,” 260–61.
51. Joel H. Johnson, “High on the Mountain Top,” *Hymns* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985), no. 5.
52. Lynne Watkins Jorgensen, “The Mantle of the Prophet Joseph Passes to Brother Brigham: One Hundred Twenty One Testimonies of a Collective Spiritual Witness,” in *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations*, ed. John W. Welch (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press), 343–480.
53. *Words of Joseph Smith*, 367.
54. *Words of Joseph Smith*, 340.
55. See Lyndon W. Cook, “William Law, Nauvoo Dissident,” *BYU Studies* 22, no. 1 (Winter 1982): 47–72.
56. William Clayton, cited in Ehat, “It Seems Like Heaven Began on Earth,” 267.
57. *Times and Seasons*, September 15, 1844, 651.
58. James R. Clark, comp., *Messages of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 3:134; see Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and Steven C. Harper, “This Is My Testimony, Spoken by Myself into a Talking Machine,” *BYU Studies* 45, no. 2 (Spring 2006): 112–16.
59. Draft Declaration of the Twelve Apostles, reporting March 1844 meeting of Twelve, in Brigham Young Papers, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

JOSEPH SMITH, THE PROPHET AND SEER

60. *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, rev. ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2002), 11; spelling, capitalization, and punctuation standardized.
61. Bushman and Jessee, “Joseph Smith and His Papers,” xxxix.
62. *Words of Joseph Smith*, 365.
63. William W. Phelps, “Praise to the Man,” *Hymns*, no. 27.