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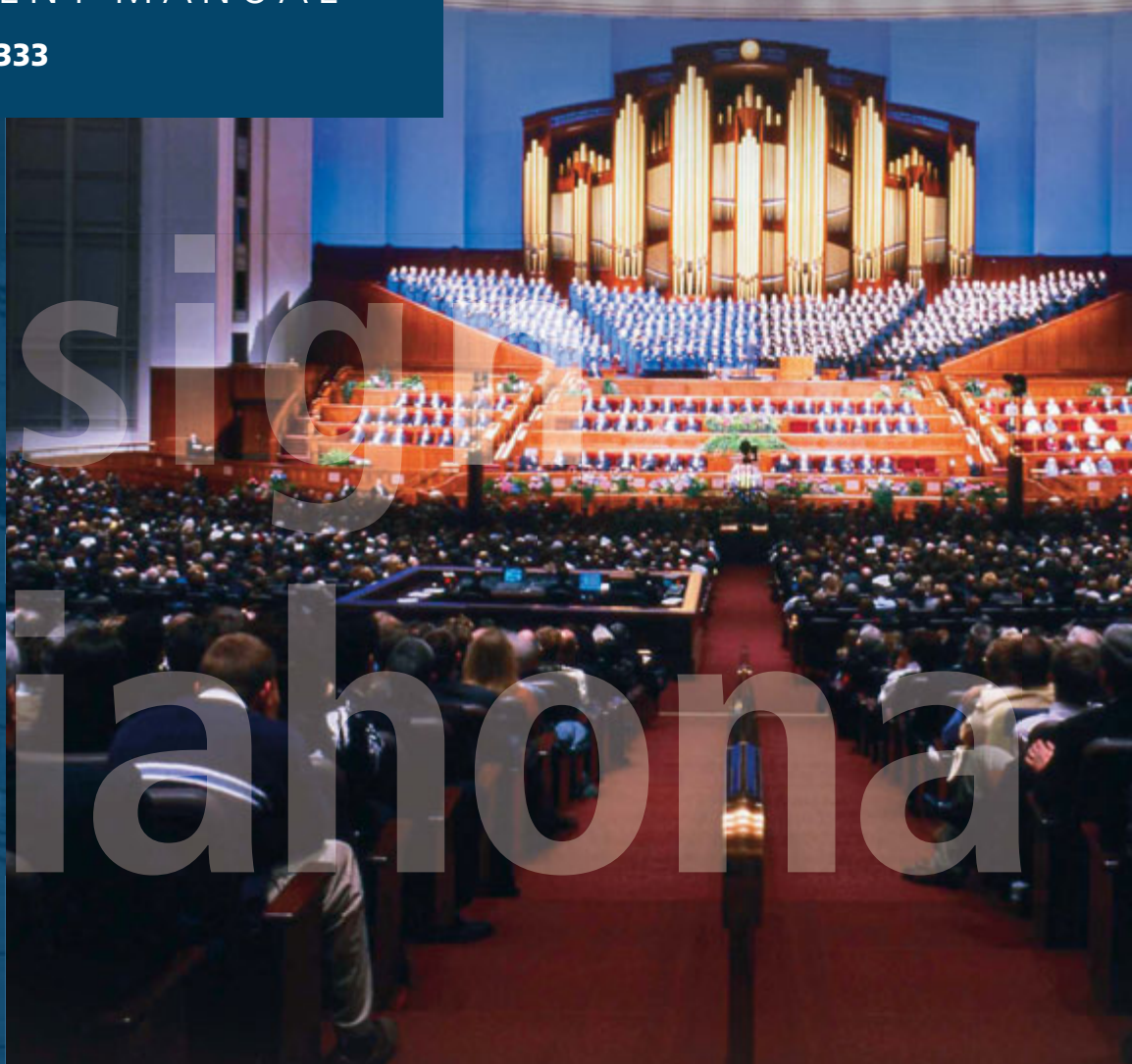
# TEACHINGS OF THE LIVING PROPHETS

STUDENT MANUAL

**Religion 333**

podcast

Ensign  
Liahona



# TEACHINGS OF THE LIVING PROPHETS

STUDENT MANUAL

**Religion 333**

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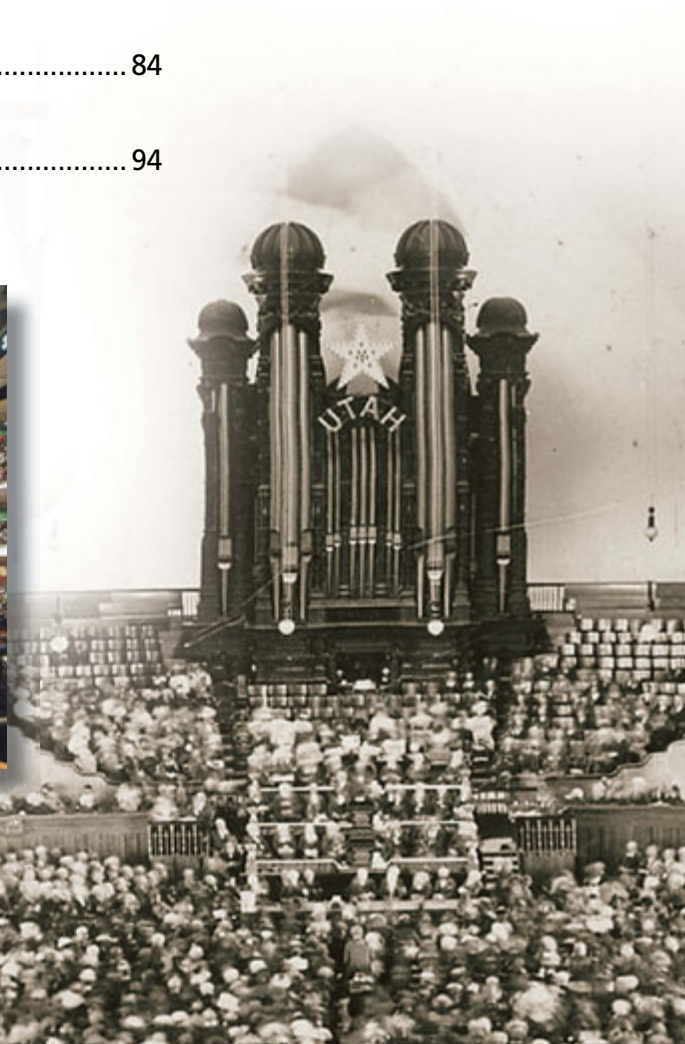
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# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	..... 1
<b>Chapter 1</b>	<b>Our Need for Living Prophets</b> ..... 4
<b>Chapter 2</b>	<b>The Living Prophet: The President of the Church</b> ..... 14
<b>Chapter 3</b>	<b>Succession in the Presidency</b> ..... 28
<b>Chapter 4</b>	<b>The Quorum of the First Presidency</b> ..... 42
<b>Chapter 5</b>	<b>The Quorum of the Twelve Apostles</b> ..... 56
<b>Chapter 6</b>	<b>General Conference</b> ..... 70
<b>Chapter 7</b>	<b>Studying General Conference Addresses</b> ..... 84
<b>Index</b>	..... 94







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# Introduction

President James E. Faust (1920–2007) of the First Presidency explained the role of prophets and the need for the revelation they receive:

“The prophets, seers, and revelators have had and still have the responsibility and privilege of receiving and declaring the word of God for the world. . . .

“ . . . These are the prophetic oracles who have tuned in over the centuries to the ‘celestial transmitting station,’ with a responsibility to relay the Lord’s word to others. . . .

“This Church constantly needs the guidance of its head, the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. This was well taught by President George Q. Cannon, [while serving in] the First Presidency: ‘We have the Bible, the Book of Mormon and the Book of Doctrine and Covenants; but all these books, without the living oracles and a constant stream of revelation from the Lord, would not lead any people into the Celestial Kingdom of God’ [*Gospel Truth: Discourses and Writings of President George Q. Cannon*, 2 vols., sel. Jerreld L. Newquist (1974), 1:323]. . . .

“Revelation was required to establish this Church. Revelation has brought it from its humble beginnings to its present course. Revelation has come like flowing, living water. Continuing revelation will lead it forward to the windup scene. But as President [J. Reuben] Clark told us, we do not need more or different prophets. We need more people with ‘a listening ear’ (in Conference Report, Oct. 1948, 82)” (“Continuing Revelation,” *Ensign*, Aug. 1996, 2, 4, 6–7).

**In the Hall of the Prophets, located in the Conference Center, sculpted representations of prophets of this dispensation are a stately reminder that continuous revelation is being received.**

Today, as during the meridian of time, the foundation of the Church is the apostles and prophets (see Ephesians 2:20) and the revelation they receive (see Amos 3:7; Matthew 16:16–18). The Lord reveals His will through His servants the prophets and has declared, “My word shall not pass away, but shall all be fulfilled, whether by mine own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the same” (D&C 1:38).





Your testimony will be strengthened as you study the words of the living prophets.

## The Purpose of This Manual

The purpose of the *Teachings of the Living Prophets Student Manual* is to help you strengthen your testimony of living prophets and their teachings. It discusses our need for living prophets, the role of the President of the Church, the divine order of succession in the Presidency, the Quorum of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, and the importance of general conferences. President Harold B. Lee (1899–1973) taught, “It is not alone sufficient for us as Latter-day Saints to follow our leaders and to accept their counsel, but we have the greater obligation to gain for ourselves the unshakable testimony of the divine appointment of these men and the witness that what they have told us is the will of our Heavenly Father” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1950, 130). A witness of the

divine appointment of the living prophets is promised to each of us as we study the counsel of the Brethren and resolve to sustain them through our obedience. This manual will assist you in your study of the living prophets.

## How This Manual Is Organized

Each chapter of this student manual has four parts: “Introduction,” “Commentary,” “Points to Ponder,” and “Suggested Assignments.”

### Introduction

Each chapter begins with a brief introduction. This will help you focus on the chapter’s central topic.

### Commentary

Scriptures and the words of prophets, apostles, and other General Authorities in the “Commentary” section explain and clarify the doctrines and principles associated with the chapter’s central topic. Careful reading of the commentary will help you understand the need and role of living prophets in an ever-changing world.

### Points to Ponder

The “Points to Ponder” section will help you ponder what you have learned. Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles affirmed that pondering brings valuable results: “As you ponder and pray about doctrinal principles, the Holy Ghost will speak to your mind and your heart. . . . New insights will come and principles relevant to your situation will distill upon your heart” (in Conference Report, Oct. 2000, 19; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2000, 18).

### Suggested Assignments

At the conclusion of each chapter are assignments that encourage personal application. Please note that these assignments are suggestions and can be adapted according to your individual needs and direction from the Holy Ghost. If you are enrolled in the Teachings of the Living

Prophets institute course (Religion 333), your teacher may incorporate some of these assignments into your course. Taking time to do these assignments will give you additional opportunities to be taught by the Holy Ghost.

*Note:* To more effectively use the “Points to Ponder” and “Suggested Assignments” sections, you may want to use a study journal or notebook to record questions, thoughts, goals, and impressions from your study. Elder Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles encouraged us to write down impressions from the Spirit: “It is through the repeated process of feeling impressions, recording them, and obeying them that one learns to depend on the direction of the Spirit more than on communication through the five senses” (“Helping Others to Be Spiritually Led” [address to religious educators, Aug. 11, 1998], 3).

### **Information for Those with Disabilities**

If you have difficulty using this manual due to a disability, please contact your instructor for additional resources. Alternative formats of this student manual may be available at [si.lds.org](http://si.lds.org).



A man with light brown hair, wearing a light blue button-down shirt and brown trousers, is kneeling on a dirt path in a forest. He is looking upwards with his hands raised in a gesture of prayer or awe. Sunlight rays stream down from the top of the frame, illuminating the scene. The background is filled with large, dark tree trunks and dense foliage.

**Chapter**

**1**

# **Our Need for Living Prophets**

## Introduction

Since the days of Adam, one way the Lord has communicated His will to His children has been through prophets (see Amos 3:7). Prophets teach us God's will and reveal His divine character. They are preachers of righteousness and denounce sin, and when inspired to do so, prophets foretell future events. Most importantly, prophets bear witness of Jesus Christ. The Lord promised that if we "give heed" to the words of the prophet, "the gates of hell shall not prevail

against you; yea, and the Lord God will disperse the powers of darkness from before you, and cause the heavens to shake for your good, and his name's glory" (D&C 21:4, 6). With prophets to guide us, we can be sure of God's will concerning us. We can be assured that when we follow the counsel of living prophets, we can better navigate through the troubled times we live in.

## Commentary

### The Lord Reveals His Will to Living Prophets Now as He Did in the Past

- Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles explained that from Adam down to the current President of the Church, prophets have been an important part of the Lord's plan:

"The very first [dispensation of the gospel] was in the time of Adam. Then came dispensations of Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and others [see Bible Dictionary, "Dispensations," 657–58].

**Each prophet had a divine commission to teach of the divinity and the doctrine of the Lord Jesus Christ.** In each age these teachings were meant to help the people. But their disobedience resulted in apostasy. . . .

"Thus a complete restoration was required. God the Father and Jesus Christ called upon the Prophet Joseph Smith to be the prophet of this dispensation. All divine powers of previous dispensations were to be restored through him" (in Conference Report, Oct. 2006, 83–84; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2006, 79–80; emphasis added).

- ◀ **The visit of the Father and the Son to Joseph Smith opened up a new dispensation of the gospel on the earth.**

- The final gospel dispensation began with the calling of a



President James E. Faust

prophet—Joseph Smith. As in past dispensations, God's will is given to His children

through the process of revelation. President James E. Faust (1920–2007) of the First Presidency discussed the necessity for constant revelation: "Much revelation received, in this time as well as anciently, has been doctrinal. Some of it has been operational and tactical. Much of it is not spectacular. President John Taylor reminds us: 'Adam's revelation did not instruct Noah to build his ark; nor did Noah's revelation tell Lot to forsake Sodom; nor did either of these speak of the departure of the children of Israel from Egypt. **These all had revelations for themselves'** (*Millennial Star*, 1 Nov. 1847, 323)" ("Continuing Revelation," *Ensign*, Aug. 1996, 5; emphasis added).

## Chapter 1 Overview

1. *The Lord reveals His will to living prophets now as He did in the past.*
2. *Today's problems are met with divine solutions.*
3. *Revelation is constant in this dispensation.*
4. *The Lord's Church is built on the foundation of apostles and prophets.*
5. *The First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles are prophets, seers, and revelators.*
6. *What are prophets, seers, and revelators?*
7. *Prophets help us build faith in Jesus Christ.*
8. *Prophets teach for our benefit.*
9. *Safety comes in knowing and applying the teachings of the living prophets.*
10. *One of our greatest needs is to hearken to the prophets.*



Notes

- President Hugh B. Brown (1883–1975) of the First Presidency described a conversation he had with a member of the British House of Commons and former justice of the Supreme Court of England, who was not a member of the Church, about the need for living prophets and the revelation they receive:  
 “[I said,] ‘I am submitting to you in all seriousness that it was standard procedure in Bible times for God to talk to men.’  
 “[He responded,] ‘I think I will admit that, but it stopped shortly after the first century of the Christian era.’  
 “‘Why do you think it stopped?’  
 “‘I can’t say.’  
 “‘You think that God hasn’t spoken since then?’  
 “‘Not to my knowledge.’  
 “‘May I suggest some possible reasons why he has not spoken. Perhaps it is because he cannot. He has lost the power.’  
 “He said, ‘Of course that would be blasphemous.’  
 “‘Well, then, if you don’t accept that, perhaps he doesn’t speak to men because he doesn’t love us anymore. He is no longer interested in the affairs of men.’  
 “‘No,’ he said, ‘God loves all men, and he is no respecter of persons.’  
 “‘Well, . . . then the only other possible answer as I see it is that we don’t need him. We have made such

rapid strides in education and science that we don’t need God anymore.’

“And then he said, and his voice trembled as he thought of impending war [World War II], ‘Mr. Brown, **there never was a time in the history of the world when the voice of God was needed as it is needed now.** Perhaps you can tell me why he doesn’t speak.’

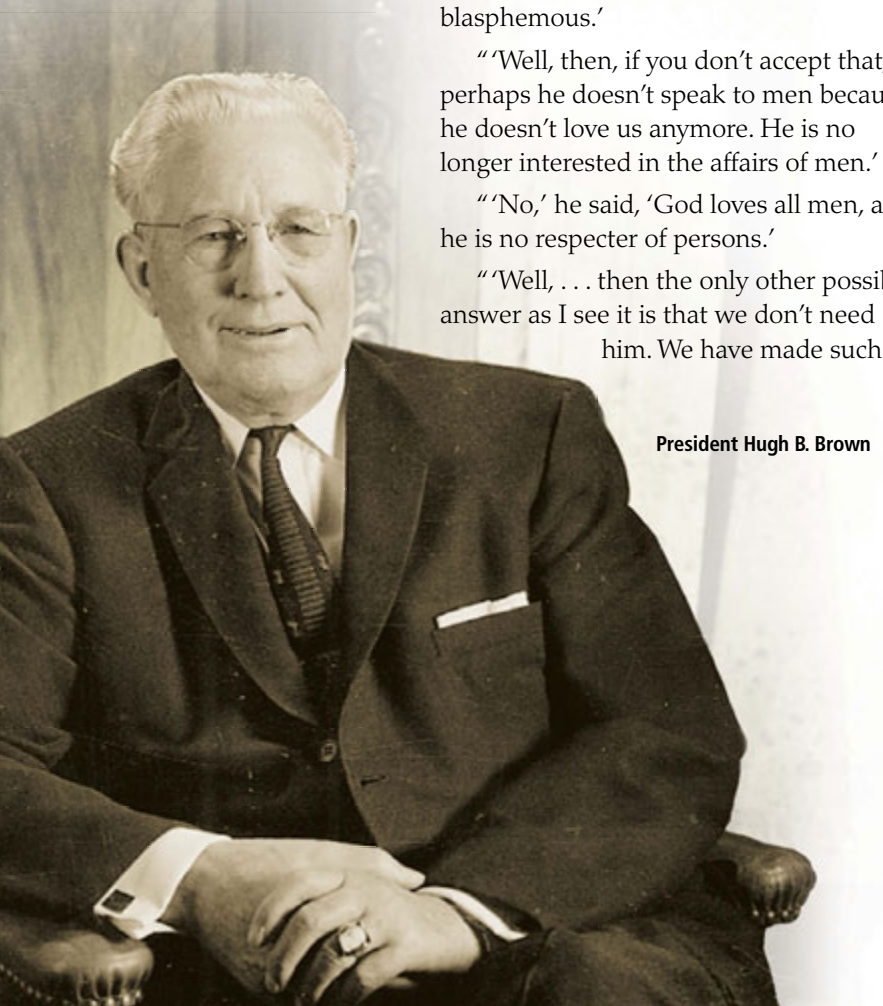
“My answer was, ‘He does speak, he has spoken; but men need faith to hear him.’

“Then we proceeded to examine what I may call a ‘profile of a prophet.’ . . .

“The judge sat and listened intently. He asked some very pointed and searching questions, and at the end of the interview he said, ‘Mr. Brown, I wonder if your people appreciate the import of your message. Do you?’ He said, ‘If what you have told me is true, it is the greatest message that has come to this earth since the angels announced the birth of Christ’” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1967, 118, 120; emphasis added; see also *The Profile of a Prophet*, Brigham Young University Speeches of the Year [Oct. 4, 1955], 4–5, 8; or “The Profile of a Prophet,” *Ensign*, June 2006, 36–37, 39).

## Today’s Problems Are Met with Divine Solutions

- The Prophet Joseph Smith (1805–44) taught that we need continuing divine direction “adapted to the circumstances” of the people in this dispensation (see *History of the Church*, 5:135). He also taught that “we are differently situated from any other people that ever existed upon this earth” and, therefore, need unique revelation and direction (see *History of the Church*, 2:52; see also *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* [2007], 195). “We believe all that God has revealed, all that He does now reveal, and we believe that He will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God” (Articles of Faith 1:9).



President Hugh B. Brown

- In an 1883 revelation given through President John Taylor (1808–87), the Lord promised that He would continue to bless the Church with revelations: “I will reveal unto you, from time to time, through the channels that I have appointed, everything that shall be necessary for the future development and perfection of my Church, for the adjustment and rolling forth of my kingdom, and for the building up and the establishment of my Zion” (in James R. Clark, comp., *Messages of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 6 vols. [1965–75], 2:354).

- President Boyd K. Packer of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles reminded Latter-day Saints that constancy and change in the Church are both dictated by revelation:

“There will be changes made in the future as in the past. Whether the Brethren [the prophet and apostles] make changes or resist them depends entirely upon the instructions they receive through the channels of revelation which were established in the beginning.

“The doctrines will remain fixed, eternal; the organization, programs, and procedures will be altered as directed by Him whose church this is” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1989, 19; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1989, 16).

- President John Taylor spoke of the need for present-day revelation as part of the Lord’s true religion:



President John Taylor

“We believe that it is necessary for man to be placed in communication with God; that he should have revelation from him, and that unless

he is placed under the influence of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit he can know nothing about the things of God.

... **Whoever heard of true religion without communication with God?** To me the thing is the most absurd that the human mind could conceive of. I do not wonder, when the people generally reject



“From the prophet of the Restoration to the prophet

of our own year, the communication line is unbroken, the authority is continuous, a light, brilliant and penetrating, continues to shine.”

President Spencer W. Kimball



The Prophet Joseph Smith revealed the mind and will of God to the Saints.

the principle of present revelation, that skepticism and infidelity prevail to such an alarming extent. I do not wonder that so many men treat religion with contempt, and regard it as something not worth the attention of intelligent beings, for without revelation religion is a mockery and a farce. . . .

“The principle of present revelation then, is the very foundation of our religion” (“Discourse by Elder John Taylor,” *Deseret News*, Mar. 4, 1874, 68; emphasis added; see also *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: John Taylor* [2001], 158–59).

## Revelation Is Constant in This Dispensation

- President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) testified that the flow of revelation is constant in our dispensation: “I say, in the deepest of humility, but also by the power and force of a burning testimony in my soul, that from the prophet of the Restoration to the prophet of our own year, the communication line is unbroken, the authority is continuous, a light, brilliant and penetrating, continues to shine. The sound of the voice of the Lord is a continuous melody and a thunderous appeal” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1977, 115; or *Ensign*, May 1977, 78; see also *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Spencer W. Kimball* [2006], 241).



Notes

- President George Q. Cannon (1827–1901) of the First Presidency taught: **“This Church from the day of its organization up to the present time has never been one hour, yea, I may say, one moment without revelation,** without having a man in our midst who can tell us as a people the mind and will of God, who can point out to us that which we should do, who can teach us the doctrines of Christ, who can point out to us that which is false and incorrect, and who can, upon all matters that come within the range of our experience, and that are necessary for us to attend to give us the necessary counsel and instruction. This has been the case always” (“Discourse by President George Q. Cannon,” *Deseret News*, Jan. 21, 1885, 3; emphasis added).

### The Lord’s Church Is Built on the Foundation of Apostles and Prophets

- President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) testified:  
 “This is the restored Church of Jesus Christ. We as a people are Latter-day Saints. We testify that the heavens have been opened, that the curtains have been parted, that God has spoken, and that Jesus Christ has manifested Himself, followed by a bestowal of divine authority.  
 “Jesus Christ is the cornerstone of this work, and it is built upon a ‘foundation

of . . . apostles and prophets’ (Ephesians 2:20)” (in Conference Report, Oct. 2002, 87; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2002, 81).

- Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles explained why the foundation of apostles and prophets is needed today: “The apostolic and prophetic foundation of the Church was to bless in all times, but *especially* in times of adversity or danger, times when we might feel like children, confused or disoriented, perhaps a little fearful, times in which the devious hand of men or the maliciousness of the devil would attempt to unsettle or mislead. . . . In New Testament times, in Book of Mormon times, and in modern times these officers form the foundation stones of the true Church, positioned around and gaining their strength from the chief cornerstone, ‘the rock of our Redeemer, who is [Jesus] Christ, the Son of God’ [Helaman 5:12]” (in Conference Report, Oct. 2004, 5; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2004, 7).

### The First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles Are Prophets, Seers, and Revelators

- President Harold B. Lee (1899–1973) taught what it means when we sustain the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles as prophets, seers, and revelators: **“All members of the First Presidency and the Twelve are regularly sustained as ‘prophets, seers, and revelators.’** . . . This means that any one of the apostles, so chosen and ordained, could preside over the Church if he were ‘chosen by the body [which has been interpreted to mean, the entire Quorum of the Twelve], appointed and ordained to that office, and upheld by the confidence, faith, and prayer of the church,’ to quote from a revelation on this subject, on one condition, and that being that he was the senior member, or the president, of that body. (See D&C 107:22.)”

Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, 2009



(in Conference Report, Apr. 1970, 123; or *Improvement Era*, June 1970, 28; emphasis added; see also *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Harold B. Lee* [2000], 82).

- President J. Reuben Clark Jr. (1871–1961) of the First Presidency explained that “some of the General Authorities [the Apostles] have had assigned to them a special calling; they possess a special gift; they are sustained as prophets, seers, and revelators, which gives them a special spiritual endowment in connection with their teaching of the people. **They have the right, the power, and authority to declare the mind and will of God to his people,** subject to the over-all power and authority of the President of the Church” (“When Are Church Leaders’ Words Entitled to Claim of Scripture?” *Church News*, July 31, 1954, 9; emphasis added).



President J. Reuben Clark Jr.

## What Are Prophets, Seers, and Revelators?

### Prophet

- A prophet is “a person who has been called by and speaks for God. As a messenger of God, a prophet receives commandments, prophecies, and revelations from God. His responsibility is to make known God’s will and true character to mankind and to show the meaning of his dealings with them. A prophet denounces sin and foretells its consequences. He is a preacher of righteousness. On occasion, prophets may be inspired to foretell the future for the benefit of mankind. **His primary responsibility, however, is to bear witness of Christ.** The President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is God’s prophet on earth today. Members of the First Presidency and the Twelve Apostles are sustained as prophets, seers, and revelators” (Guide to the Scriptures, “Prophet,” scriptures.lds.org; emphasis added).

### Seer

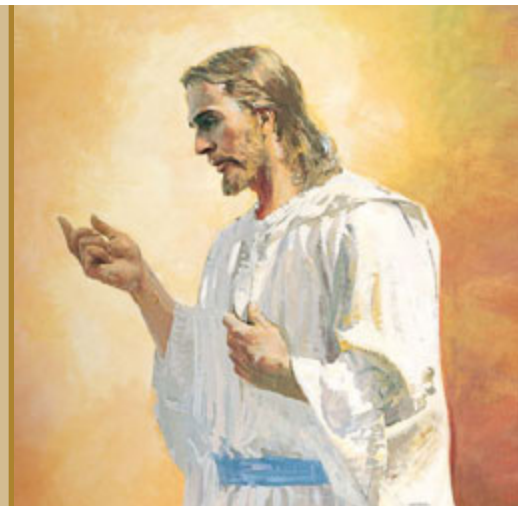
- A seer is “a person authorized of God to **see with spiritual eyes things which God has hidden from the world** (Moses 6:35–38). He is a revelator and a prophet (Mosiah 8:13–16). In the Book of Mormon, Ammon taught that only a seer could use special interpreters, or a Urim and Thummim (Mosiah 8:13; 28:16). A seer knows the past, present, and future. Anciently, a prophet was often called a seer (1 Sam. 9:9; 2 Sam. 24:11).



“In New Testament times, in Book of Mormon times, and in modern times

[prophets and apostles] form the foundation stones of the true Church, positioned around and gaining their strength from the chief cornerstone, ‘the rock of our Redeemer, who is [Jesus] Christ, the Son of God.’”

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland



“Joseph Smith is the great seer of the latter days (D&C 21:1; 135:3). In addition, the First Presidency and the Council of the Twelve are sustained as prophets, seers, and revelators” (Guide to the Scriptures, “Seer,” scriptures.lds.org; emphasis added).

- Elder John A. Widtsoe (1872–1952) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles explained: “A seer is one who sees with spiritual eyes. He perceives the meaning of that which seems obscure to others; therefore he is an interpreter and clarifier of eternal truth. . . . In short, he is one who sees, who walks in the Lord’s light with open eyes [see Mosiah 8:15–17]” (*Evidences and Reconciliations*, arr. G. Homer Durham, 3 vols. in 1 [1960], 258).
- President Joseph Fielding Smith (1876–1972) described one of his counselors as

Notes



As a seer, Isaiah saw into the future.



**"A revelator makes known, with the Lord's help, something before unknown. It may be new or forgotten truth, or a new or forgotten application of known truth to man's need."**

*Elder John A. Widtsoe*

one who possessed the gift of seership: "President Harold B. Lee is a pillar of truth and righteousness, a true seer who has great spiritual strength and insight and wisdom, and whose knowledge and understanding of the Church and its needs is not surpassed by any man" (in Conference Report, Apr. 1970, 114; or *Improvement Era*, June 1970, 27).

### Revelator

- As revelators, the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles make known the will of the Lord for the Church and for mankind in general. **They reveal His will in both spiritual and temporal affairs**, though all things are spiritual to the Lord (see D&C 29:34). They teach doctrine, direct priesthood quorums, guide auxiliaries, supervise the construction of meetinghouses and temples, and do whatever else is necessary so that "the gospel [will] roll forth unto the ends of the earth, as the stone which is cut out of the mountain without hands shall roll forth, until it has filled the whole earth" (D&C 65:2).
- Elder John A. Widtsoe taught: "A revelator makes known, with the Lord's help, something before unknown. It may be new or forgotten truth, or a new or forgotten application of known truth to man's need" (*Evidences and Reconciliations*, 258).

### Prophets Help Us Build Faith in Jesus Christ

- Listening to and following the words of the living prophets strengthen our faith in Jesus Christ (see Romans 10:17). The Prophet Joseph Smith taught, **"Faith comes by hearing the word of God, through the testimony of the servants of God;** that testimony is always attended by the Spirit of prophecy and revelation [see Revelation 19:10]" (in *History of the Church*, 3:379; emphasis added). Prophets declare the word of God by the spirit of prophecy so that those who hear may exercise faith in Jesus Christ.
- Because He loves His children, and "knowing the calamity which should come upon the inhabitants of the earth" (D&C 1:17), Heavenly Father provided a solution: He restored the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ through the Prophet Joseph Smith. In doing so, the Lord prepared the way so that "faith . . . might increase in the earth" (D&C 1:21). He promised, "Though the heavens and the earth pass away, my word shall not pass away, but shall all be fulfilled, whether by mine own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the same" (D&C 1:38). As we hear the word of the Lord through the teachings of the prophets and witness its fulfillment, our faith grows. That faith brings us peace, hope, and joy, even in a world racked by doubt, wickedness, and calamities.

### Prophets Teach for Our Benefit

- To those tempted to resist the counsel and warning of the prophets, President Gordon B. Hinckley offered this assurance:
 

"Please know that our pleadings are not motivated by any selfish desire. Please know that our warnings are not without substance and reason. Please know that the decisions to speak out on various matters are not reached without deliberation, discussion, and prayer. Please know that our only ambition is to



help each of you with your problems, your struggles, your families, your lives. . . .

“We have no selfish desire . . . other than the wish that our brethren and sisters will be happy, that peace and love will be found in their homes, that they will be blessed by the power of the Almighty in their various undertakings in righteousness” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1992, 80; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1992, 59–60).

### Safety Comes in Knowing and Applying the Teachings of the Living Prophets

- The temporal and spiritual dangers facing the world today are evidence of how much we need prophetic guidance. President James E. Faust described how we can be safe from those dangers: “We have been promised that the President of the Church, as the revelator for the Church, will receive guidance for all of us. **Our safety lies in paying heed to that which he says and following his counsel**” (*Ensign*, Aug. 1996, 6; emphasis added).



Elder Quentin L. Cook

- Elder Quentin L. Cook of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles gave an example of how a prophetic teaching protected faithful Church members from danger:

**“Prophets are inspired to provide us with prophetic priorities to protect us from dangers.**

As an example, President Heber J. Grant, the prophet from 1918 to 1945, was inspired to emphasize adherence to the Word of Wisdom [see *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Heber J. Grant* (2002), 189–97], the principle with a promise revealed by the Lord to the Prophet Joseph [see D&C 89]. He stressed the importance of not smoking or drinking alcoholic beverages and directed the bishops to review these principles in temple recommend interviews.

“At that time, smoking was accepted by society as an appropriate, even glamorous,

behavior. The medical profession accepted smoking with little concern because the scientific studies linking cigarette smoking with several kinds of cancer were far in the future. President Grant counseled with great vigor, and we became known as a people who abstained from drinking and smoking. . . .

“Obeying the Word of Wisdom gave our members, especially our youth, a preventive inoculation against drug use and the resulting health problems and moral hazards” (in Conference Report, Apr. 2008, 48–49; or *Ensign*, May 2008, 48; emphasis added).

- Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles warned that because



Elder M. Russell Ballard

safety is found in following the words of the living prophet, we should guard against obstacles that have kept some from heeding the prophet’s words:

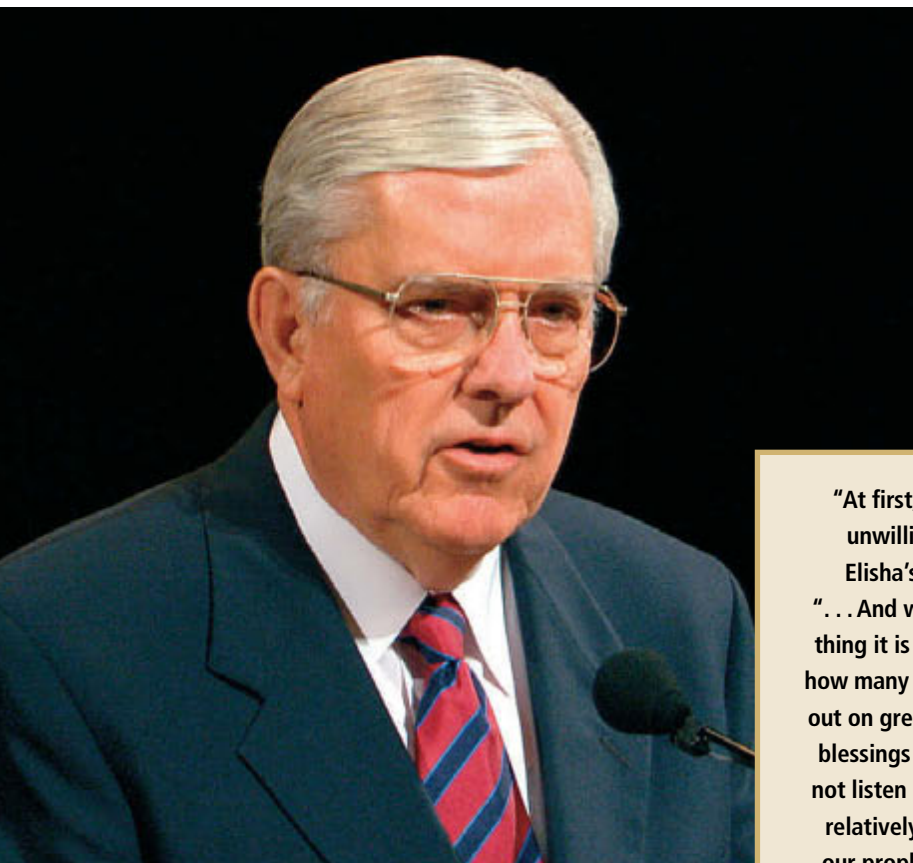
“It is no small thing, my brothers and sisters, to have a prophet of God in our midst. . . . When we hear the counsel of the Lord expressed through the words of the President of the Church, our response should be positive and prompt. History

Notes

Inside the Conference Center during a general conference of the Church.







**"At first, Naaman was unwilling to follow Elisha's counsel. . . .  
". . . And what a humbling thing it is to contemplate how many of us might miss out on great and promised blessings because we do not listen *and then do* the relatively simple things our prophet is telling us to do today."**

*Elder M. Russell Ballard*

shows that there is safety, peace, prosperity, and happiness in responding to prophetic counsel as did Nephi of old: 'I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded' (1 Nephi 3:7).

"We know of the experience of Naaman, who was struck with leprosy and who eventually contacted the prophet Elisha and was instructed to 'go and wash in [the] Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean' (2 Kings 5:10).

"At first, Naaman was unwilling to follow Elisha's counsel. He couldn't understand the thing he had been asked to do—to wash seven times in the Jordan river. In other words, his pride and stubbornness were keeping him from receiving the Lord's blessing through His prophet. Finally he went down and 'dipped himself seven times in Jordan,

according to the saying of the man of God: and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean' (2 Kings 5:14).

"What a humbling thing it must have been for Naaman to realize how close he came to allowing his own pride and his unwillingness to listen to the counsel of the prophet to prevent him from receiving such a great, cleansing blessing. And what a humbling thing it is to contemplate how many of us might miss out on great

and promised blessings because we do not listen *and then do* the relatively simple things our prophet is telling us to do today. . . .

"Today I make you a promise. It's a simple one, but it is true. **If you will listen to the living prophet and the apostles and heed our counsel, you will not go astray**" (in Conference Report, Apr. 2001, 84–85; or *Ensign*, May 2001, 65–66; emphasis added).

- President Dieter F. Uchtdorf of the First Presidency reminded us that blessings come when we act upon inspired answers given to us by the prophet:



President Dieter F. Uchtdorf

"We have a living prophet on the face of the earth. . . . He knows our challenges and fears. He has inspired answers. . . .

"The prophets speak to us in the name of the Lord and in plainness. As the Book of Mormon confirms, 'the Lord God giveth light unto the understanding; for he speaketh unto men according to their language, unto their understanding' (2 Nephi 31:3).

**"It is our responsibility not only to listen but also to act upon His word,** that we may claim the blessings of the

ordinances and covenants of the restored gospel. He said, 'I, the Lord, am bound when ye do what I say; but when ye do not what I say, ye have no promise' (D&C 82:10).

"There may be times when we may feel overwhelmed, hurt, or on the edge of discouragement as we are trying so hard to be perfect members of the Church. Be assured, there is balm in Gilead. Let us listen to the prophets of our day as they help us to focus on the things that are central to the Creator's plan for the eternal destiny of His children" (in Conference Report, Oct. 2002, 10–11; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2002, 12; emphasis added).

### One of Our Greatest Needs Is to Hearken to the Prophets

- President Harold B. Lee explained the value of heeding the prophet's counsel, even when our own views may differ from that counsel: "The only safety we have as members of this church is to do exactly what the Lord said to the Church in that day when the Church was organized. We must learn to give heed to the words and commandments that the Lord shall give through his prophet, 'as he receiveth them, walking in all holiness before me; . . . as if from mine own mouth, in all patience and faith.' (D&C 21:4–5.) There will be some things that take patience and faith. You may not like what comes from the authority of the Church. It may contradict your political views. It may contradict your social views. It may interfere with some of your social life. But if you listen to these things, as if from the mouth of the Lord himself, with patience and faith, the promise is that 'the gates of hell shall not prevail against you; yea, and the Lord God will disperse the powers of darkness from before you, and cause the heavens to shake for your good, and his name's glory.' (D&C 21:6.)" (in Conference Report, Oct. 1970, 152–53; or *Improvement Era*, Dec. 1970, 126; see also *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Harold B. Lee*, 84–85).

- Elder Robert D. Hales of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles assured us freedom from



Elder Robert D. Hales

"unnecessary pain" if we will follow prophetic counsel: "If we follow the counsel given by the prophets, we can have a life in mortality where we do not bring upon ourselves unnecessary pain and self-destruction. This does not mean we will not have challenges. We will. This does not mean we will not be tested. We will, for this is part of our purpose on earth. But if we will listen to the counsel of our prophet, we will become stronger and be able to withstand the tests of mortality. We will have hope and joy. All the words of counsel from the prophets have been given so that we may be strengthened and then be able to lift and strengthen others" (in Conference Report, Apr. 1995, 20; or *Ensign*, May 1995, 17; see also Mosiah 2:41; D&C 59:23).

Notes

### Points to Ponder

- According to the commentary in this chapter, why do we need the teachings of living prophets in addition to the writings of prophets in the scriptures?
- How would your life be different if you did not have the teachings of the living prophets?
- Elder M. Russell Ballard mentioned pride as one of the obstacles that keep people from following the prophet. What are some others? What can we do to overcome or guard against these obstacles?

### Suggested Assignments

- Write three short paragraphs explaining in your own words the terms *prophet*, *seer*, and *revelator*. What are the differences between these titles? Why are those differences important?
- Write about your feelings on the truthfulness of the following statement: Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints cannot accept the Lord while rejecting His prophet.

A photograph of three men in dark suits and ties standing outdoors in front of a light-colored building with windows. The man on the left is looking down, the man in the middle is looking to the right and smiling, and the man on the right is looking forward and smiling.

# Chapter 2

## The Living Prophet: The President of the Church



## Introduction

The President of the Church presides over all priesthood quorums and the general membership of the Church. President James E. Faust (1920–2007) of the First Presidency explained: “He is the senior Apostle on the earth. He has been ordained and set apart as the prophet, seer, and revelator to the world. He has been sustained as the President of the Church. He is the presiding high priest over all the priesthood on the earth. He alone holds and exercises all the keys of the kingdom under the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the head of this Church and is the chief cornerstone” (“Continuing Revelation,” *Ensign*, Aug. 1996, 5).

Elder Mark E. Petersen (1900–1984) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles testified that the living prophet is the Lord’s spokesman to

the Church and to the world: “People who are not members of this church may not sense the great significance attached to his ministry. Even some Latter-day Saints have not yet discovered it. But the president of the Church is in fact a prophet raised up in these last days to give inspired guidance, not only to Latter-day Saints, but to all mankind everywhere” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1972, 15; or *Ensign*, July 1972, 40).

A careful study of this chapter will deepen your appreciation for the President of the Church and the priesthood keys of authority he holds and will help you understand how safety comes to those who choose to heed his counsel.

## Commentary

### The Living Prophet Possesses All the Keys of the Priesthood

- President Boyd K. Packer of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles told of an experience when President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) declared that he, as the President of the Church, held the keys of the priesthood:

“In 1976 following a conference in Copenhagen, Denmark, President Spencer W. Kimball invited us to a small church to see the statues of Christ and the Twelve Apostles by Bertel Thorvaldsen. The *Christus* stands in an alcove beyond the altar. Standing in order along the sides of the chapel are the statues of the Twelve, with Paul replacing Judas Iscariot.

“President Kimball told the elderly caretaker that at the very time Thorvaldsen was creating those beautiful statues in Denmark, a restoration of the gospel of

Jesus Christ was taking place in America with apostles and prophets receiving authority from those who held it anciently.

“Gathering those present closer to him, he said to the caretaker, ‘We are living Apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ,’ and pointing to Elder Pinegar he said, ‘Here is a Seventy like those spoken of in the New Testament.’

“We were standing near the statue of Peter, whom the sculptor depicted holding keys in his hand, symbolic of the keys of the kingdom. President Kimball said, ‘We hold the real keys, as Peter did, and we use them every day.’

“Then came an experience I will never forget. President Kimball, this gentle prophet, turned to President Johan H. Benthin, of the Copenhagen Stake, and in a commanding voice said, ‘I want you to tell every prelate [religious leader] in

## Chapter 2 Overview

1. *The living prophet possesses all the keys of the priesthood.*
2. *The prophet is the Lord’s spokesman.*
3. *The Lord leads the Church by continuous revelation to His prophet.*
4. *The word of the Lord to the living prophet is timely and of utmost importance to us now.*
5. *The Lord will never permit the living prophet to lead the Church astray.*
6. *Some people will believe in past prophets but reject the living prophets.*

◀ **President Ezra Taft Benson (center) and his counselors, Gordon B. Hinckley and Thomas S. Monson**



Notes

Denmark that they do *not* hold the keys!  
*I hold the keys!*"

"There came to me that witness known to Latter-day Saints but difficult to describe to one who has not experienced it—a light, a power coursing through one's very soul—and I knew that, in very fact, here stood the living prophet who held the keys" (in Conference Report, Apr. 1995, 7; or *Ensign*, May 1995, 8).

- The prophet has the powers, gifts, and blessings that enable him to officiate in any office of the Church (see D&C 46:29; 107:91–92). Elder Bruce R. McConkie (1915–85) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles identified responsibilities of the President of the Church, the living prophet:

"He is the earthly head of the kingdom of God, the supreme officer of the Church, the 'President of the High Priesthood of the Church; Or, in other words, the Presiding High Priest over the High Priesthood of the Church.' (D. & C. 107:65–66.) His duty is 'to preside over the whole church. . . .' (D. & C. 107:91.)

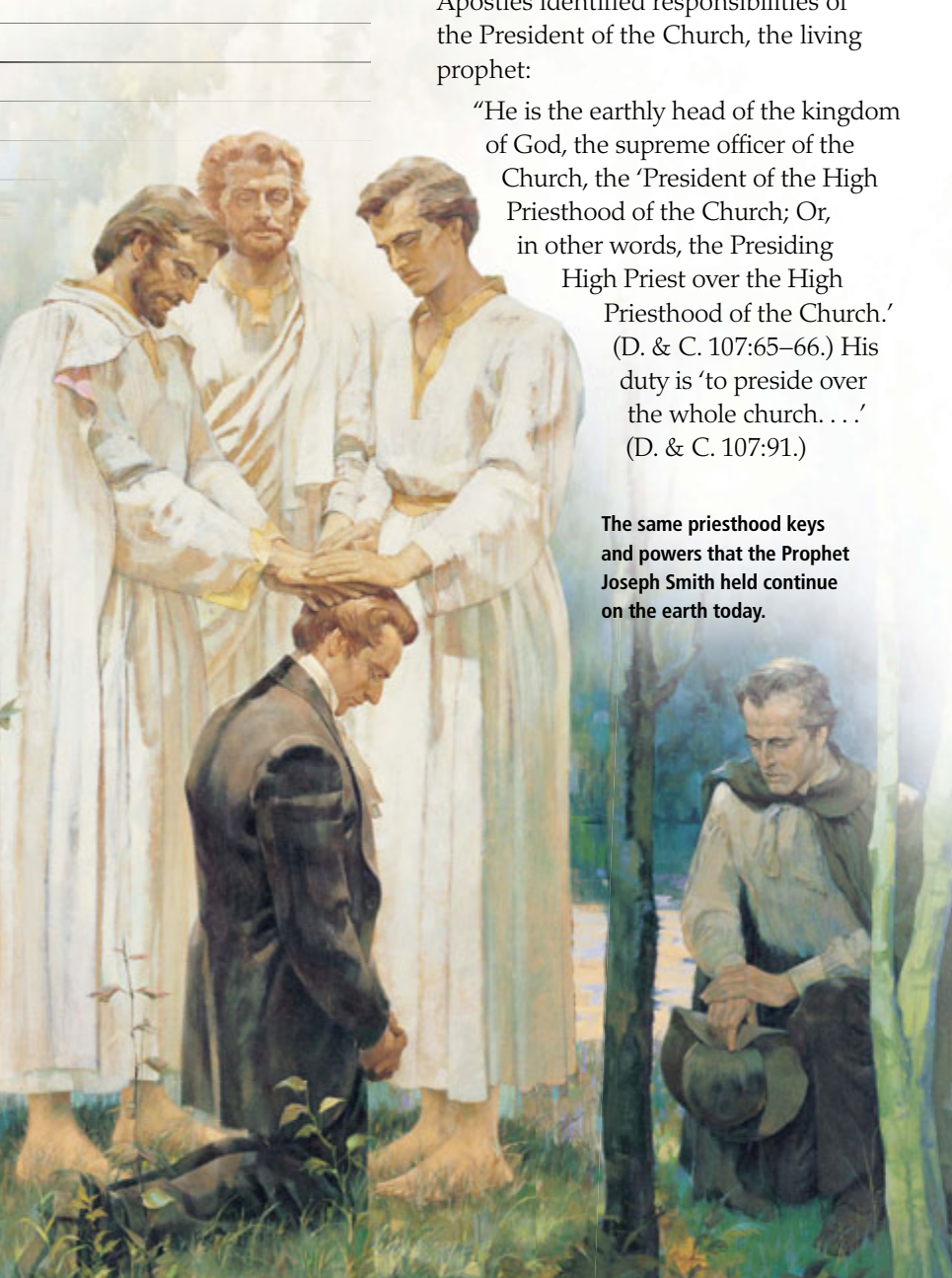
The same priesthood keys and powers that the Prophet Joseph Smith held continue on the earth today.

"He is the one man on earth at a time who can both hold and exercise the keys of the kingdom in their fulness. (D. & C. 132:7.) **By the authority vested in him, all ordinances of the gospel are performed, all teaching of the truths of salvation is authorized, and through the keys which he holds, salvation itself is made available to men of his day**" (*Mormon Doctrine*, 2nd ed. [1966], 591–92; emphasis added).

- President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) explained how the priesthood keys continue from the Prophet Joseph Smith to the current living prophet in this dispensation: "That same authority which Joseph held, those same keys and powers which were the very essence of his divinely given right to preside, were by him conferred upon the Twelve Apostles with Brigham Young at their head. Every president of the Church since then has come to that most high and sacred office out of the Council of the Twelve. Each of these men has been blessed with the spirit and power of revelation from on high. There has been an unbroken chain from Joseph Smith, Jr., to Spencer W. Kimball [who was the current prophet]. Of that I bear solemn witness and testimony before you this day. This Church is built upon the sure word of prophecy and revelation—built, as Paul wrote to the Ephesians, 'upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone.' (Eph. 2:20.)" (in Conference Report, Apr. 1981, 27–28; or *Ensign*, May 1981, 22).

### The Prophet Is the Lord's Spokesman

- President Harold B. Lee (1899–1973) indicated that the Saints need never be deceived, for the Lord has established an unmistakable channel of instruction: "**When there is to be anything different**



from that which the Lord has told us already, he will give it to his prophet not to some Tom, Dick, or Harry that is thumbing his way across the country as we have had people tell the story; and not through someone, as another story relates, who swooned and came up and gave a revelation. I have said, 'Do you suppose that when the Lord has his prophet on the earth, that he is going to take some round-about means of revealing things to his children? That is what he has a prophet for, and when he has something to give to this Church, he will give it to the President, and the President will see that the presidents of stakes and missions get it, along with the General Authorities; and they in turn will see that the people are advised of any new change' ("The Place of the Living Prophet, Seer, and Revelator" [address to CES religious educators, July 8, 1964], 11; emphasis added).

- President Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994) taught that we should value the words of the prophet more than those of any other person: "Of all mortal men, we should keep our eyes most firmly fixed on the captain, the prophet, seer, and revelator, and president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This is the man who stands closest to the fountain of living waters. There are some heavenly instructions for us that we can only receive through the prophet. A good way to measure your standing with the Lord is to see how you feel about, and act upon, the inspired words of his earthly representative, the prophet-president. The inspired words of the president are not to be trifled with. All men are entitled to inspiration, and various men are entitled to revelation for their particular assignment. But only one man stands as the Lord's spokesman to the Church and the world, and he is the president of the Church. The words of all other men should be weighed against his



"A good way to measure your standing with the Lord is to see

how you feel about, and act upon, the inspired words of his earthly representative, the prophet-president. The inspired words of the president are not to be trifled with."

*President Ezra Taft Benson*



The Prophet Joseph Smith received revelation from God.

inspired words" ("Jesus Christ—Gifts and Expectations," *New Era*, May 1975, 16).

### The Lord Leads the Church by Continuous Revelation to His Prophet

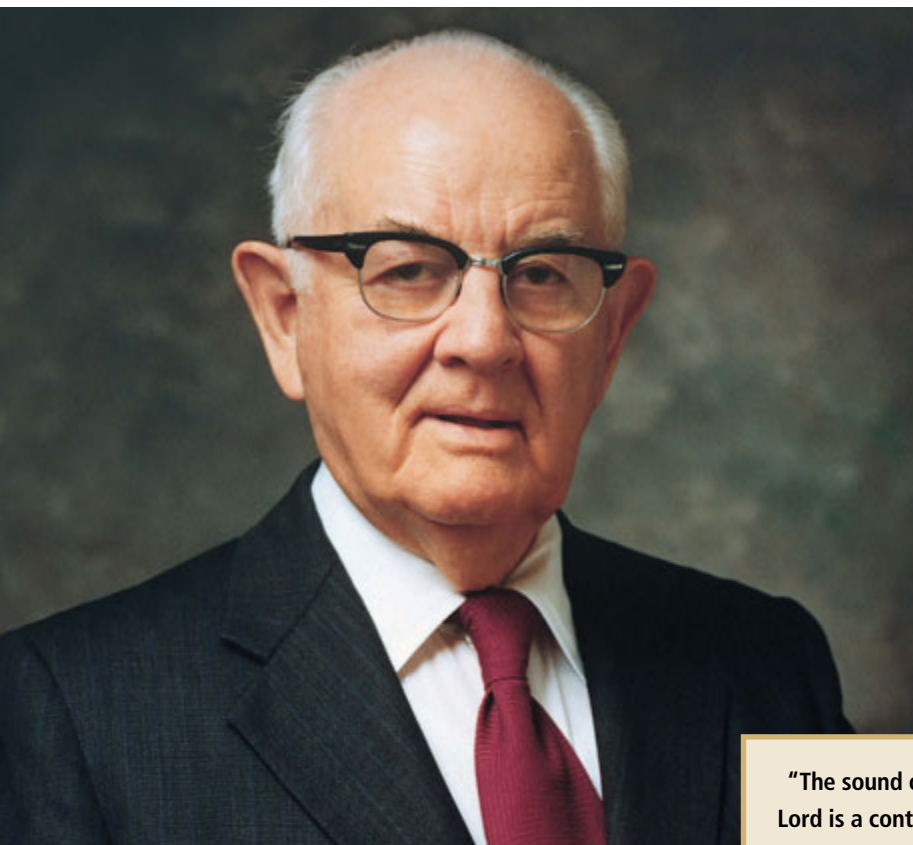
- The Lord reveals His mind and will to His prophet. President Spencer W. Kimball testified that the heavens are still open and that the Lord guides His Church from day to day:

"I bear witness to the world today that more than a century and a half ago the iron ceiling was shattered; the heavens were once again opened, and since that time revelations have been continuous. . . .

"Since that momentous day in 1820, additional scripture has continued to come, including the numerous and vital revelations flowing in a never-ending stream from God to his prophets on the earth. . . .

"... We testify to the world that revelation continues and that **the vaults and files of the Church contain these revelations which come month to month and day to day.** We testify also that there is, since 1830 when The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was organized, and will continue to be, so long as time shall last, a prophet, recognized of God and his people, who will continue to interpret the mind and will of the Lord.

"Now, a word of warning: Let us not make the error of the ancients.



**"The sound of the voice of the Lord is a continuous melody and a thunderous appeal. For nearly a century and a half there has been no interruption."**

*President Spencer W. Kimball*

Numerous modern sectarians believe in the Abrahams, the Moseses, and the Pauls, but resist believing in today's prophets. The ancients also could accept the prophets of an earlier day, but denounced and cursed the ones who were their contemporaries.

"In our day, as in times past, many people expect that if there be revelation it will come with awe-inspiring, earth-shaking display. For many it is hard to accept as revelation those numerous ones in Moses' time, in Joseph's time, and in our own year—those revelations which come to prophets as deep, unassailable impressions settling down on the prophet's mind and heart as dew from heaven or as the dawn dissipates the darkness of night.

"Expecting the spectacular, one may not be fully alerted to the constant flow of revealed communication. I say, in the deepest of humility, but also by the

power and force of a burning testimony in my soul, that from the prophet of the Restoration to the prophet of our own year, **the communication line is unbroken**, the authority is continuous, a light, brilliant and penetrating, continues to shine. The sound of the voice of the Lord is a continuous melody and a thunderous appeal. For nearly a century and a half there has been no interruption" (in Conference Report, Apr. 1977, 114–15; or *Ensign*, May 1977, 77–78; emphasis added).

### **The Word of the Lord to the Living Prophet Is Timely and of Utmost Importance to Us Now**

- The world is constantly changing. New and different problems and many variations of old problems continually challenge us. Our

wise and loving Heavenly Father knows all things before they happen, and He reveals answers and solutions through His prophet as needed. In addition to interpreting and reaffirming existing scripture, a prophet acts as the agent through

whom the Lord can give new scripture, according to the needs of the people. Speaking under the direction of the Holy Ghost, **the living prophet's words take precedence over other statements on the same issue.** His inspired counsel is in harmony with the eternal truths in the standard works and is focused upon the needs and conditions of his day.

Doctrines are eternal and do not change; however, the Lord, through His prophet, may change practices and programs, according to the needs of the people. The following examples illustrate this principle:

1. The law of Moses was given to the children of Israel as a "schoolmaster to bring [them] unto Christ" (Galatians 3:24; see also Galatians 3:24, footnote b; from Joseph Smith



Translation) but was fulfilled when the law of the gospel was given by Jesus Christ (see Galatians 3:23–25; Mosiah 13:27–35; 3 Nephi 9:15–20).

2. When Jesus was upon the earth, the gospel was generally taught only to the house of Israel (see Matthew 10:5–6; 15:24; Mark 7:25–27). After His Resurrection, the Savior commanded the Apostles to take the gospel to everyone (see Mark 16:15; Acts 10).
  3. In Moses's time the Melchizedek Priesthood was taken from the general population of Israel and the Aaronic Priesthood was given only to the Levites (see D&C 84:24–26; see also Numbers 8:10–22; Hebrews 7:5). In the time of Christ and His Apostles, the Melchizedek Priesthood was again made available and the Aaronic Priesthood was offered to men who were not Levites (see Luke 6:13–16; Philippians 1:1; Hebrews 7:11–12). Today "every faithful, worthy man in the Church may receive the holy priesthood, with power to exercise its divine authority" (Official Declaration 2).
- President John Taylor (1808–87) referred to prophets in the Old Testament to illustrate that new revelations are necessary for new generations: "We require a living tree—a living fountain—living intelligence, proceeding from the living priesthood in heaven, through the living priesthood on the earth. . . . And from the time that Adam first received a communication from God, to the time that John, on the Isle of Patmos, received his communication, or Joseph Smith had the heavens opened to him, it always required new revelations, adapted to the peculiar circumstances in which the churches or individuals were placed. Adam's revelation did not instruct Noah to build his ark; nor did Noah's revelation tell Lot to forsake Sodom; nor did either of these speak of the departure of the children of Israel from Egypt. These all had revelations for themselves, and so had Isaiah, Jeremiah,

Ezekiel, Jesus, Peter, Paul, John, and Joseph. And so must we" (*The Gospel Kingdom*, sel. G. Homer Durham [1987], 34; see also *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: John Taylor* [2001], 158).

- President Wilford Woodruff (1807–98) spoke of a meeting attended by the Prophet Joseph Smith and Brigham Young: "Brother Joseph turned to Brother Brigham Young and said, 'Brother Brigham I want you to take the stand and tell us your views with regard to the written oracles and the written word of God.' Brother Brigham took the stand, and he took the Bible, and laid it down; he took the Book of Mormon, and laid it down; and he took the Book of Doctrine and Covenants, and laid it down before him, and he said: 'There is the written word of God to us, concerning the work of God from the beginning of the world, almost, to our day.' 'And now,' said he, 'when compared with the living oracles [living prophets] those books are nothing to me; those books do not convey the word of God direct to us now, as do the words of a Prophet or a man bearing the Holy Priesthood in our day and generation. **I would rather have the living oracles than all the writing in the books.**' That was the course he pursued. When he was through, Brother Joseph said to the congregation: 'Brother Brigham has told you the word of the Lord, and he has told you the truth'" (in Conference Report, Oct. 1897, 22–23; emphasis added).



President Wilford Woodruff

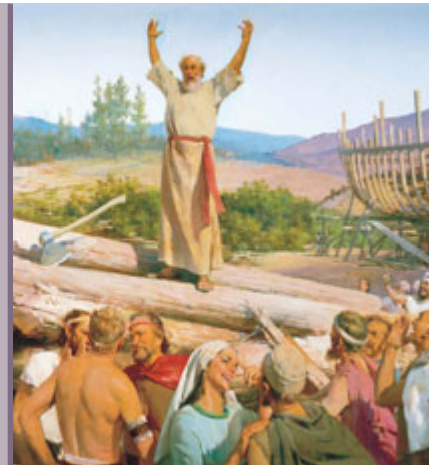


**"Adam's revelation did not instruct Noah to build his ark; nor did Noah's revelation tell Lot to forsake Sodom; nor did either of these speak of the departure of the children of Israel from Egypt. These all had revelations for themselves, and so had Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Jesus, Peter, Paul, John, and Joseph. And so must we."**

President John Taylor

Notes

As in Noah's day, prophets today provide a voice of warning.







**"The Church is true. Those who lead it have only**

**one desire, and that is to do the will of the Lord. They seek his direction in all things."**

*President Gordon B. Hinckley*

- President Boyd K. Packer taught that principles and doctrines of the gospel remain constant, even though Church practices must be adjusted occasionally: "Procedures, programs, the administrative policies, even some matters of organization are subject to change. We are quite free, indeed, quite obliged to alter them from time to time. But the *principles*, the *doctrines*, *never* change" ("Principles," *Ensign*, Mar. 1985, 8).

### The Lord Will Never Permit the Living Prophet to Lead the Church Astray

- President Wilford Woodruff declared that we can have full confidence in the direction the prophet is leading the Church: "**The Lord will never permit me or any other man who stands as President of this Church to lead you astray.** It is not in the programme. It is not in the mind of God. If I were to attempt that, the Lord would remove me out of my place, and so He will any other man who attempts to lead the children of men astray from the oracles of God and from their duty" (Official Declaration 1, "Excerpts from Three Addresses by President Wilford Woodruff Regarding the Manifesto"; emphasis added).
- President Harold B. Lee taught this same principle: "You keep your eye upon him whom the Lord called, and I say to you now, knowing that I stand in this

position, you don't need to worry about the President of the Church ever leading people astray, because the Lord would remove him out of his place before He would ever allow that to happen" (*The Teachings of Harold B. Lee*, ed. Clyde J. Williams [1996], 533).

- President Gordon B. Hinckley gave similar assurance to Church members: "The Church is true. Those who lead it have only one desire, and that is to do the will of the Lord. They seek his direction in all things. There is not a decision of significance affecting the Church and its people that is made without prayerful consideration, going to the fount of all wisdom for direction. **Follow the leadership of the Church. God will not let his work be led astray**" (in Conference Report, Oct. 1983, 68–69; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1983, 46; emphasis added).

### Some People Will Believe in Past Prophets but Reject the Living Prophets

- Many people revere the prophets of the past but refuse to accept the prophet the Lord has sent to guide them in their day (see Helaman 13:24–26). President Harold B. Lee shared an experience that illustrates this tendency:
 

"I have a banker friend in New York. Years ago when I met him in company with President Jacobson, who was then presiding over the Eastern States Mission, we had quite a discussion. President Jacobson had given him a copy of the Book of Mormon, which he had read, and he spoke very glowingly of what he called its 'tremendous philosophies.' Near the close of the business hour he invited us to ride to the mission home in his limousine, and we accepted. On the way, as he talked about the Book of Mormon and his reverence for its teachings, I said, 'Well, why don't you do something about it? If you accept the Book of Mormon, what is holding you back? Why don't you join

the Church? Why don't you accept Joseph Smith, then, as a prophet?'"

"And he said, very thoughtfully and carefully, 'Well, I suppose the whole reason is that Joseph Smith is too close to me. If he had lived two thousand years ago, I suppose I would believe. But because he is so close, I guess that is the reason I can't accept him as a prophet.'"

"Here was a young man saying, 'I believe in the dead prophets that lived a thousand-plus years ago, but I have great difficulty believing in a living prophet.' That attitude is also taken toward God. To say that the heavens are sealed and there is no revelation today is saying that we do not believe in a living Christ today, or a living God today—we believe in one long-since dead and gone. So this term *living prophet* has real significance" ("The Place of the Living Prophet, Seer, and Revelator," in *Charge to Religious Educators*, 2nd ed. [1982], 105).

- Claiming a belief in dead prophets while rejecting the living prophet is a very old problem. Some of the Pharisees of Jesus Christ's day rejected the living Christ but accepted the prophet Moses, who had led Israel over 1,000 years earlier. They reviled a man whom Jesus had healed, saying:

"Thou art his disciple; but we are Moses' disciples.

"We know that God spake unto Moses: as for this fellow [Jesus], we know not from whence he is" (John 9:28–29; see also Matthew 23:29–30, 34; Helaman 13:24–29).

- President Harold B. Lee taught that a belief in revelation must include the teachings of our current prophet:

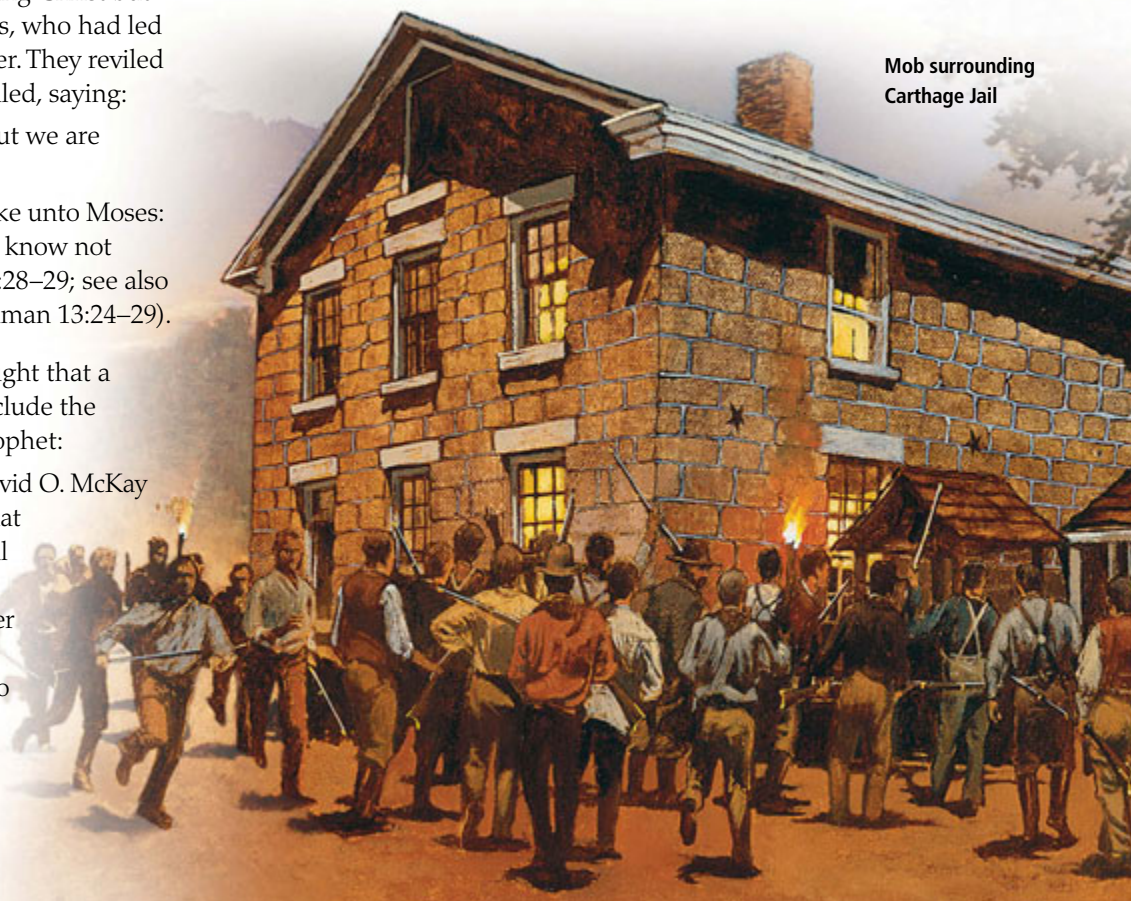
"Soon after President David O. McKay announced to the Church that members of the First Council of the Seventy were being ordained high priests in order to extend their usefulness and to give them authority to act when no other General

Authority could be present, a seventy I met . . . was very much disturbed. He said to me, 'Didn't the Prophet Joseph Smith say that this was contrary to the order of heaven to name high priests as presidents of the First Council of the Seventy?' And I said, 'Well, I have understood that he did, but have you ever thought that **what was contrary to the order of heaven in 1840 might not be contrary to the order of heaven in 1960?**' He had not thought of that. He again was following a dead prophet, and he was forgetting that there is a living prophet today. Hence the importance of our stressing that word *living*.

"Years ago as a young missionary I visited Nauvoo and Carthage with my mission president, and we were holding a missionary meeting in the jail room where Joseph and Hyrum had met their deaths. The mission president related the historical events that led up to the martyrdom and then he closed with this very significant statement: 'When the Prophet Joseph Smith was martyred, there were many saints who died spiritually with Joseph.' So it was when Brigham Young

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Mob surrounding  
Carthage Jail





died: so it was when John Taylor died. . . . Some Church members died spiritually with Wilford Woodruff, with Lorenzo Snow, with Joseph F. Smith, with Heber J. Grant, with George Albert Smith. **We have some today willing to believe someone who is dead and gone and to accept his words as having more authority than the words of a living authority today”** (*Stand Ye in Holy Places* [1974], 152–53; emphasis added).

### Points to Ponder

- Why is it important to understand that all of the priesthood keys are held and directed by one person on the earth at a time?
- What advantages come from the words of a living prophet if we already have the words of the ancient prophets?
- The Lord has promised He will never allow His prophet to lead the Church astray. How can this truth affect the way you hear, read, and follow the living prophet’s teachings?

### Suggested Assignments

- Prepare a short family home evening lesson using (1) what you learned from this chapter, (2) the scriptures cited in this chapter, and (3) the following statement from President Gordon B. Hinckley: “We either have a prophet or we have nothing; and having a prophet, we have everything” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1973, 161; or *Ensign*, Jan. 1974, 122).
- After reading the following scriptures, explain to a friend or family member how the living prophet is like Moses: Doctrine and Covenants 28:2; 107:91–92; Moses 1:3, 6.

### Enrichment Material

#### Fourteen Fundamentals in Following the Prophet

**President Ezra Taft Benson, 1980 Devotional Speeches of the Year (1981), 26–30; emphasis added.**



My beloved brothers and sisters, I am honored to be in your presence today. You students are a part of a choice young generation—a generation which might well witness the return of our Lord.

Not only is the Church growing in numbers today, it is growing in faithfulness and, even more important, our young generation, as a group, is even more faithful than the older generation. God has reserved you for the eleventh hour—the great and dreadful day of the Lord. It will be your responsibility not only to help bear off the kingdom of God triumphantly but to save your own soul and strive to save those of your family and to honor

the principles of our inspired constitution.

To help you pass the crucial tests which lie ahead I am going to give you today several facets of a grand key which, if you will honor them, will crown you with God’s glory and bring you out victorious in spite of Satan’s fury.

Soon we will be honoring our prophet [Spencer W. Kimball] on his eighty-fifth birthday. As a Church we sing the song, “We Thank Thee, O God, For a Prophet.” Here then is the grand key—follow the prophet—and here now are fourteen fundamentals in following the prophet, the President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

**First: The prophet is the only man who speaks for the Lord in everything.**

In section 132, verse 7, of the Doctrine and Covenants the Lord speaks of the Prophet—the President—and says: “There is never but one on the earth at a time on whom this power and the keys of this priesthood are conferred.”

Then in section 21, verses 4–6, the Lord states:

“Wherefore, meaning the church, thou shalt give heed unto all his words and commandments which he shall give unto you as he receiveth them, walking in all holiness before me;

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“For his word ye shall receive, as if from mine own mouth, in all patience and faith.

“For by doing these things the gates of hell shall not prevail against you.”

Did you hear what the Lord said about the words of the prophet? We are to “give heed unto all his words”—as if from the Lord’s “own mouth.”

**Second: *The living prophet is more vital to us than the standard works.***

President Wilford Woodruff tells of an interesting incident that occurred in the days of the Prophet Joseph Smith:

“I will refer to a certain meeting I attended in the town of Kirtland in my early days. At that meeting some remarks were made that have been made here today, with regard to the living oracles and with regard to the written word of God. The same principle was presented, although not as extensively as it has been here, when a leading man in the Church got up and talked upon the subject, and said: ‘You have got the word of God before you here in the Bible, Book of Mormon, and Doctrine and Covenants; you have the written word of God, and you who give revelations should give revelations according to those books, as what is written in those books is the word of God. We should confine ourselves to them.’

“When he concluded, Brother Joseph turned to Brother Brigham Young and said, ‘Brother Brigham, I want you to take the stand and tell us your views with regard to the living oracles and the written word of God.’ Brother Brigham took the stand, and he took the Bible, and laid it down; he took the Book of Mormon, and laid it down; and he took the Book of Doctrine and Covenants, and laid it down before him, and he said: ‘There is the written word of God to us, concerning the work of God from the beginning of the world, almost, to our day. And now,’ said he, ‘when compared with the living oracles those books are nothing to me; those books do not convey the word of God direct to us now, as do the words of a Prophet or a man bearing the Holy Priesthood in our day and generation. I would rather have the living oracles than all the writing in the books.’ That was the course he pursued. When he was through, Brother Joseph said to the congregation: ‘Brother Brigham has told you the word of the Lord, and he has told you the truth.’ ” [In Conference Report, October 1897, pp. 22–23]

**Third: *The living prophet is more important to us than a dead prophet.***

The living prophet has the power of TNT. By that I mean “Today’s News Today.” God’s revelations to

Adam did not instruct Noah how to build the ark. Noah needed his own revelation. Therefore, the most important prophet, so far as you and I are concerned, is the one living in our day and age to whom the Lord is currently revealing His will for us. Therefore, the most important reading we can do is any of the words of the prophet contained . . . each month in our Church magazines. Our marching orders for each six months are found in the general conference addresses, which are printed in the *Ensign* magazine.

I am so grateful that the current conference report is studied as part of one of your religion classes—the course entitled “Teachings of the Living Prophets,” number 333. May I commend that class to you and suggest that you get a copy of the class manual at your bookstore whether you’re able to take the class or not. . . .

Beware of those who would pit the dead prophets against the living prophets, for the living prophets always take precedence.

**Fourth: *The prophet will never lead the Church astray.***

President Wilford Woodruff stated: “I say to Israel, The Lord will never permit me or any other man who stands as president of the Church to lead you astray. It is not in the program. It is not in the mind of God.” (*The Discourses*

Notes


of Wilford Woodruff, selected by G. Homer Durham [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1946], pp. 212–213.)

President Marion G. Romney tells of this incident which happened to him:

“I remember years ago when I was a Bishop I had President [Heber J.] Grant talk to our ward. After the meeting I drove him home. . . . Standing by me, he put his arm over my shoulder and said: ‘My boy, you always keep your eye on the President of the Church, and if he ever tells you to do anything, and it is wrong, and you do it, the Lord will bless you for it.’ Then with a twinkle in his eye, he said, ‘But you don’t need to worry. The Lord will never let his mouthpiece lead the people astray.’ [In Conference Report, October 1960, p. 78]

**Fifth: *The prophet is not required to have any particular earthly training or credentials to speak on any subject or act on any matter at any time.***

Sometimes there are those who feel their earthly knowledge on a certain subject is superior to the heavenly knowledge which God gives to His prophet on the same subject. They feel the prophet must have the same earthly credentials or training which they have had before they will accept anything the prophet has to say that might contradict

their earthly schooling. How much earthly schooling did Joseph Smith have? Yet he gave revelations on all kinds of subjects. We haven’t yet had a prophet who earned a doctorate in any subject, but as someone said, “A prophet may not have his Ph.D. but he certainly has his LDS.” We encourage earthly knowledge in many areas, but remember, if there is ever a conflict between earthly knowledge and the words of the prophet, you stand with the prophet, and you’ll be blessed and time will vindicate you.

**Sixth: *The prophet does not have to say “Thus saith the Lord” to give us scripture.***

Sometimes there are those who haggle over words. They might say the prophet gave us counsel but that we are not obligated to follow it unless he says it is a commandment. But the Lord says of the Prophet Joseph, “Thou shalt give heed unto all his *words and commandments* which he shall give unto you” (D&C 21:4; italics added).

And speaking of taking counsel from the prophet, in D&C 108:1, the Lord states: “Verily thus saith the Lord unto you, my servant Lyman: Your sins are forgiven you, because you have obeyed my voice in coming up hither this morning to receive *counsel* of him whom I have appointed” (italics added).

Said Brigham Young, “I have never yet preached a sermon and sent it out to the children of men, that they may not call scripture” (*Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. [London: Latter-day Saints’ Book Depot], 13:95).

**Seventh: *The prophet tells us what we need to know, not always what we want to know.***

“Thou hast declared unto us hard things, more than we are able to bear,” complained Nephi’s brethren. But Nephi answered by saying, “The guilty taketh the truth to be hard, for it cutteth them to the very center” (1 Nephi 16:1, 3). Or, to put it in another prophet’s words, “Hit pigeons flutter.”

Said President Harold B. Lee:

“You may not like what comes from the authority of the Church. It may contradict your political views. It may contradict your social views. It may interfere with some of your social life. . . . Your safety and ours depends upon whether or not we follow. . . . Let’s keep our eye on the President of the Church.” [In Conference Report, October 1970, p. 152–153]

But it is the living prophet who really upsets the world. “Even in the Church,” said President Kimball, “many are prone to garnish the sepulchres of yesterday’s prophets and mentally stone the living ones” (*Instructor*, 95:257).

Notes


Why? Because the living prophet gets at what we need to know now, and the world prefers that prophets either be dead or mind their own business. Some so-called experts of political science want the prophet to keep still on politics. Some would-be authorities on evolution want the prophet to keep still on evolution. And so the list goes on and on.

How we respond to the words of a living prophet when he tells us what we need to know, but would rather not hear, is a test of our faithfulness.

Said President Marion G. Romney, “It is an easy thing to believe in the dead prophets.” And then he gives this illustration:

“One day when President Grant was living, I sat in my office across the street following a general conference. A man came over to see me, an elderly man. He was very upset about what had been said in this conference by some of the Brethren, including myself. I could tell from his speech that he came from a foreign land. After I had quieted him enough so he would listen, I said, ‘Why did you come to America?’ ‘I am here because a prophet of God told me to come.’ ‘Who was the prophet,’ I continued. ‘Wilford Woodruff.’ ‘Do you believe Wilford Woodruff was a prophet of God?’ ‘Yes, I do.’ ‘Do you believe that President

Joseph F. Smith was a prophet of God?’ ‘Yes, sir.’

“Then came the sixty-four dollar question. ‘Do you believe that Heber J. Grant is a prophet of God?’ His answer, ‘I think he ought to keep his mouth shut about old age assistance.’

“Now I tell you that a man in his position is on the way to apostasy. He is forfeiting his chances for eternal life. So is everyone who cannot follow the living Prophet of God.” [In Conference Report, April 1953, p. 125]

**Eighth: *The prophet is not limited by men’s reasoning.***

There will be times when you will have to choose between the revelations of God and the reasoning of men—between the prophet and the politician or professor. Said the Prophet Joseph Smith, “Whatever God requires is right, no matter what it is, although we may not see the *reason* thereof until long after the events transpire” (*Scrapbook of Mormon Literature*, vol. 2, p. 173).

Would it seem reasonable to an eye doctor to be told to heal a blind man by spitting in the dirt, making clay, and applying it to the man’s eyes and then telling him to wash in a contaminated pool? Yet this is precisely the course that Jesus took with one man, and he was healed. (See John

9:6–7.) Does it seem reasonable to cure leprosy by telling a man to wash seven times in a particular river? Yet this is precisely what the prophet Elisha told a leper to do, and he was healed. (See 2 Kings 5.)

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.” [Isaiah 55:8, 9]

**Ninth: *The prophet can receive revelation on any matter—temporal or spiritual.***

Said Brigham Young:

“Some of the leading men in Kirtland were much opposed to Joseph the Prophet, meddling with temporal affairs. . . .

“In a public meeting of the Saints, I said, ‘Ye Elders of Israel, . . . will some of you draw the line of demarcation, between the spiritual and temporal in the Kingdom of God, so that I may understand it?’ Not one of them could do it. . . .

“I defy any man on earth to point out the path a Prophet of God should walk in, or point out his duty, and just how far he must go, in dictating temporal or spiritual things. Temporal and spiritual things are inseparably connected, and ever will be.” [Journal of Discourses, 10:363–364]

Notes




**Tenth: *The prophet may be involved in civic matters.***

When a people are righteous they want the best to lead them in government. Alma was the head of the Church and of the government in the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith was mayor of Nauvoo, and Brigham Young was governor of Utah. Isaiah was deeply involved in giving counsel on political matters and of his words the Lord Himself said, “Great are the words of Isaiah” (3 Nephi 23:1). Those who would remove prophets from politics would take God out of government.

**Eleventh: *The two groups who have the greatest difficulty in following the prophet are the proud who are learned and the proud who are rich.***

The learned may feel the prophet is only inspired when he agrees with them; otherwise, the prophet is just giving his opinion—speaking as a man. The rich may feel they have no need to take counsel of a lowly prophet.

In the Book of Mormon we read:

“O that cunning plan of the evil one! O the vainness, and the frailties, and the foolishness of men! When they are learned they think they are wise, and they hearken not unto the counsel of God, for they set it aside, supposing they know of themselves, wherefore, their

wisdom is foolishness and it profiteth them not. And they shall perish.

“But to be learned is good *if* they hearken unto the counsels of God.

“And whoso knocketh, to him will he open; and the wise, and the learned, and they that are rich, who are puffed up because of their learning, and their wisdom, and their riches—yea, they are they whom he despiseth; and save they shall cast these things away, and consider themselves fools before God, and come down in the depths of humility, he will not open unto them.” [2 Nephi 9:28, 29, 42; italics added]

**Twelfth: *The prophet will not necessarily be popular with the world or the worldly.***

As a prophet reveals the truth it divides the people. The honest in heart heed his words, but the unrighteous either ignore the prophet or fight him. When the prophet points out the sins of the world, the worldly either want to close the mouth of the prophet, or else act as if the prophet didn’t exist, rather than repent of their sins. Popularity is never a test of truth. Many a prophet has been killed or cast out. As we come closer to the Lord’s second coming, you can expect that as the people of the world become more wicked, the prophet will be less popular with them.

**Thirteenth: *The prophet and his counselors make up the First Presidency—the highest quorum in the Church.***

In the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord refers to the First Presidency as “the highest council of the Church” (107:80) and says, “whosoever receiveth me, receiveth those, the First Presidency, whom I have sent” (112:20).

**Fourteenth: *The prophet and the presidency—the living prophet and the First Presidency—follow them and be blessed; reject them and suffer.***

President Harold B. Lee relates this incident from Church history:

“The story is told in the early days of the Church—particularly, I think, at Kirtland—where some of the leading brethren in the presiding councils of the Church met secretly and tried to scheme as to how they could get rid of the Prophet Joseph’s leadership. They made the mistake of inviting Brigham Young to one of these secret meetings. He rebuked them, after he had heard the purpose of their meeting. This is part of what he said: ‘You cannot destroy the appointment of a prophet of God, but you can cut the thread that binds you to the prophet of God and sink yourselves to hell.’” [In Conference Report, April 1963, p. 81]

In a general conference of the Church President N. Eldon Tanner stated:

Notes


“The Prophet spoke out clearly on Friday morning, telling us what our responsibilities are. . . .

“A man said to me after that, *‘You know, there are people in our state who believe in following the Prophet in everything they think is right, but when it is something they think isn’t right, and it doesn’t appeal to them, then that’s different.’* He said, ‘Then they become their own prophet. They decide what the Lord wants and what the Lord doesn’t want.’

“I thought how true, and how serious when we begin to choose which of the covenants, which of the commandments we will keep and follow. When we decide that there are some of them that we will not keep or follow, we are taking the law of the Lord into our own hands and become our own prophets, and believe me, we will be led astray, *because we are false prophets to ourselves when we do not follow the Prophet of God.* No, we should never discriminate between these commandments, as to those we should and should not keep.” [In Conference Report, October 1966, p. 98; italics added]

“Look to the Presidency and receive instruction,” said the Prophet Joseph Smith (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, selected by Joseph Fielding Smith [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1938], p. 161). But Almon Babbitt didn’t, and in the Doctrine and

Covenants section 124, verse 84, the Lord states: “And with my servant Almon Babbitt, there are many things with which I am not pleased; behold, he aspireth to establish his counsel instead of the counsel which I have ordained, even that of the Presidency of my Church.”

In conclusion, let us summarize this grand key, these “Fourteen Fundamentals in Following the Prophet,” for our salvation hangs on them.

First: The prophet is the only man who speaks for the Lord in everything.

Second: The living prophet is more vital to us than the standard works.

Third: The living prophet is more important to us than a dead prophet.

Fourth: The prophet will never lead the Church astray.

Fifth: The prophet is not required to have any particular earthly training or credentials to speak on any subject or act on any matter at any time.

Sixth: The prophet does not have to say “Thus saith the Lord” to give us scripture.

Seventh: The prophet tells us what we need to know, not always what we want to know.

Eighth: The prophet is not limited by men’s reasoning.

Ninth: The prophet can receive revelation on any matter, temporal or spiritual.

Tenth: The prophet may be involved in civic matters.

Eleventh: The two groups who have the greatest difficulty in following the prophet are the proud who are learned and the proud who are rich.

Twelfth: The prophet will not necessarily be popular with the world or the worldly.

Thirteenth: The prophet and his counselors make up the First Presidency—the highest quorum in the Church.

Fourteenth: The prophet and the presidency—the living prophet and the First Presidency—follow them and be blessed; reject them and suffer.

I testify that these fourteen fundamentals in following the living prophet are true. If we want to know how well we stand with the Lord, then let us ask ourselves how well we stand with His mortal captain. How closely do our lives harmonize with the words of the Lord’s anointed—the living prophet, the President of the Church, and with the Quorum of the First Presidency?

May God bless us all to look to the prophet and the presidency in the critical and crucial days ahead is my prayer. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

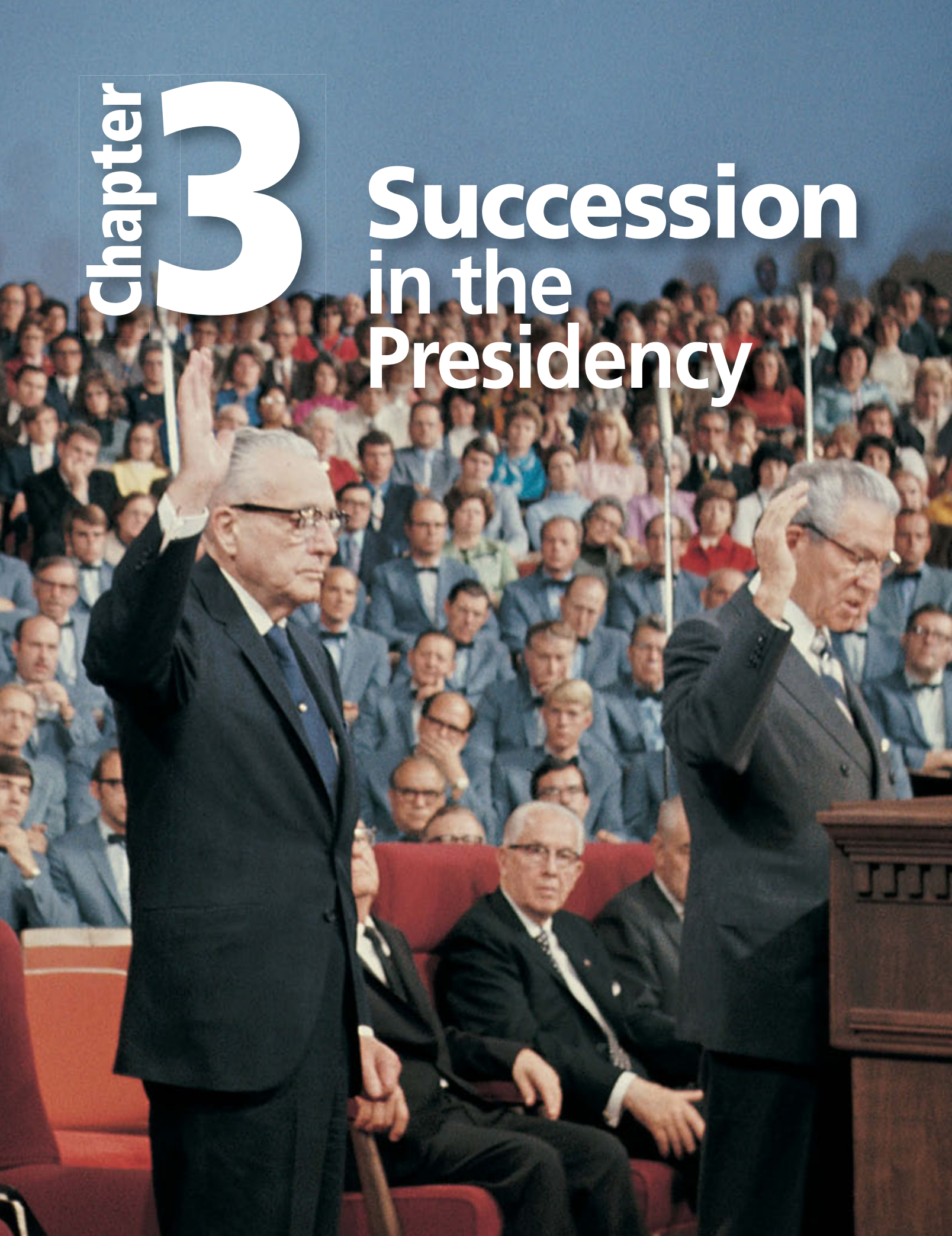
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Chapter

3

# Succession in the Presidency





## Introduction

Succession in the Presidency of the Church has been established by the Lord. The Church is never without inspired leadership, and there is no reason for speculation or controversy over who will become the next President of the Church. President Harold B. Lee (1899–1973) explained: “[The Lord] knows whom he wants to preside over this church, and he will make no mistake. The Lord doesn’t do things by accident. He has never done anything accidentally” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1970, 153; or *Improvement Era*, Dec. 1970, 127). President Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994) taught that “God knows all things, the end from the beginning, and no man becomes president of the church of Jesus Christ by accident, or remains there by chance, or is called home by happenstance” (“Jesus Christ—Gifts and Expectations,” *New Era*, May 1975, 16–17).

Through the Prophet Joseph Smith (1805–44), God declared that He “will give unto the faithful line upon line, precept upon precept” (D&C 98:12; see also D&C 42:61; 128:21). This process of gradually unfolding doctrine and procedure is seen in the inspired development of the principles for succession in the Presidency of the Church.

As you study this chapter, ponder how the process of calling a new Church President differs from the political process of selecting government officials. Understanding how the Lord chooses a new Church President will increase your trust and confidence in the current President of the Church.

## Commentary

### The Assistant President of the Church

- “On 5 December 1834 the Prophet Joseph Smith ordained Oliver Cowdery as Assistant President of the Church [see *History of the Church*, 2:176]. He had been with the Prophet when the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods were restored. When the Church of Jesus Christ was organized in 1830, Oliver as ‘second elder’ stood next to Joseph in authority [see D&C 20:2–3]. Thus, whenever priesthood authority or keys were restored, Oliver was with the Prophet Joseph. ‘It was necessary according to the divine law of witnesses for Joseph Smith to have a companion holding those keys’ [Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols. (1954–56), 1:211]. Oliver Cowdery was not only

to assist Joseph Smith in presiding over the Church, but **he was also to stand with the Prophet as a second witness of the Restoration** [see D&C 6:28; see also 2 Corinthians 13:1]. By 1838 Oliver Cowdery had lost his office of Assistant President through apostasy and excommunication, but in 1841 the Lord called Hyrum Smith to fill this office (see D&C 124:94–96). The President and the Assistant President, or the first and second witnesses, would seal their testimonies with their blood at the Carthage Jail” (*Church History in the Fulness of Times*, 2nd ed. [Church Educational System manual, 2003], 153; emphasis added).

◀ **President Harold B. Lee (left) and President N. Eldon Tanner, First Counselor in the First Presidency, sustaining the First Presidency during the solemn assembly on October 6, 1972.**

- President Joseph Fielding Smith (1876–1972) described how the law of witnesses (see 2 Corinthians 13:1) was fulfilled by

## Chapter 3 Overview

1. *The Assistant President of the Church*
2. *The Quorum of the Twelve Apostles*
3. *The Lord confirmed to the Saints that Brigham Young was Joseph Smith’s successor.*
4. *Important principles of succession*
5. *The Lord established the order of succession in the Presidency of the Church.*
6. *Seniority in the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles*
7. *Leadership by the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and the timing of the succession*
8. *Reorganizing the First Presidency*
9. *What is a solemn assembly?*
10. *How we sustain the President of the Church*



Joseph and Hyrum Smith



On January 19, 1841,  
because Oliver did  
not remain faithful,

“the Lord commanded  
Joseph Smith to ordain Hyrum Smith  
and confer upon him all the keys,  
authority, and privileges placed upon  
the head of Oliver Cowdery, and  
make him the ‘Second President’ of  
the Church.”

*President Joseph Fielding Smith*

Oliver Cowdery being present every time priesthood keys were restored: “The Lord called Oliver Cowdery as the second witness to stand at the head of this dispensation assisting the Prophet in holding the keys. The records inform us that every time the Prophet received authority and the keys of the priesthood from the heavens, Oliver Cowdery shared in the conferring of those powers with the Prophet. ***Had Oliver Cowdery remained faithful and had he survived the Prophet under those conditions, he would have succeeded as President of the Church by virtue of this divine calling***” (*Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols. [1954–56], 1:213; emphasis added). On January 19, 1841, because Oliver did not remain faithful, “the Lord commanded Joseph Smith to ordain Hyrum Smith and confer upon him all the keys, authority, and privileges placed upon the head of Oliver Cowdery, and make him the ‘Second President’ of the Church” (*Doctrines of Salvation*, 1:220).

President Brigham Young (1801–77) noted: “If Hyrum had lived he would not have stood between Joseph and the Twelve but he would have stood for Joseph.—Did Joseph ordain any man to take his place? He did. Who was it? It was Hyrum, but, Hyrum fell a martyr before Joseph did. If Hyrum had lived he would have acted for Joseph” (“Conference

Minutes,” *Times and Seasons*, Oct. 15, 1844, 683).

- President Joseph Fielding Smith explained why we no longer have an Assistant President in the Church:

“The question is sometimes asked: If Oliver Cowdery was ordained to hold the keys jointly with the Prophet, and after his loss by transgression, this authority was conferred on Hyrum Smith, then why do we not have today in the Church the same order of things, and an Assistant President as well as two counselors in the First Presidency?

“The answer to this is a simple one. It is because the peculiar condition requiring two witnesses to establish the work, is not required after the work is established. **Joseph and Hyrum Smith stand at the head of this dispensation, jointly holding the keys, as the two necessary witnesses fulfilling the law** as it is set down by our Lord in his answer to the Jews [see Matthew 18:16]. Since the gospel will never again be restored there will be no occasion for this condition to arise again. We all look back to the two special witnesses, called to bear witness in full accord with the divine law” (*Doctrines of Salvation*, 1:222; emphasis added).

## The Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

- “One of the most important events in the restoration of the Savior’s church was the formation of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Even before the Church was organized, the members had anticipated this significant step. . . . [In June 1829] a revelation directed Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer to search out the twelve who would be ‘called to go into all the world to preach my gospel unto every creature’ [see D&C 18:26–37]. Later Martin Harris was also called to assist in this selection. This meant that the three witnesses to the Book of Mormon, under the direction and consent of the First Presidency, would choose the

Twelve Apostles who were to serve as special witnesses of the Savior in this dispensation” (*Church History in the Fulness of Times*, 153–54). This selection was made during a special conference on February 14, 1835.

“For several years the Lord . . . carefully prepared the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles to assume the leadership of the Church. When the Twelve were first called in 1835, their duties were restricted to areas outside the organized stakes, but in time their responsibilities were broadened to include authority over all the members of the Church. . . .

“The mission of the Twelve to Great Britain welded them into a united quorum under the direction of Brigham Young. When they returned to America, the Prophet Joseph increased their responsibilities in both temporal and ecclesiastical affairs. . . . The Twelve were among the first to receive instruction from Joseph Smith on plural marriage and the temple ordinances. Members of the Twelve were given responsibility over Church publishing, they directed the calling, assigning, and instructing of missionaries, they presided over conferences both in the field and in Nauvoo, and they regulated the branches abroad.

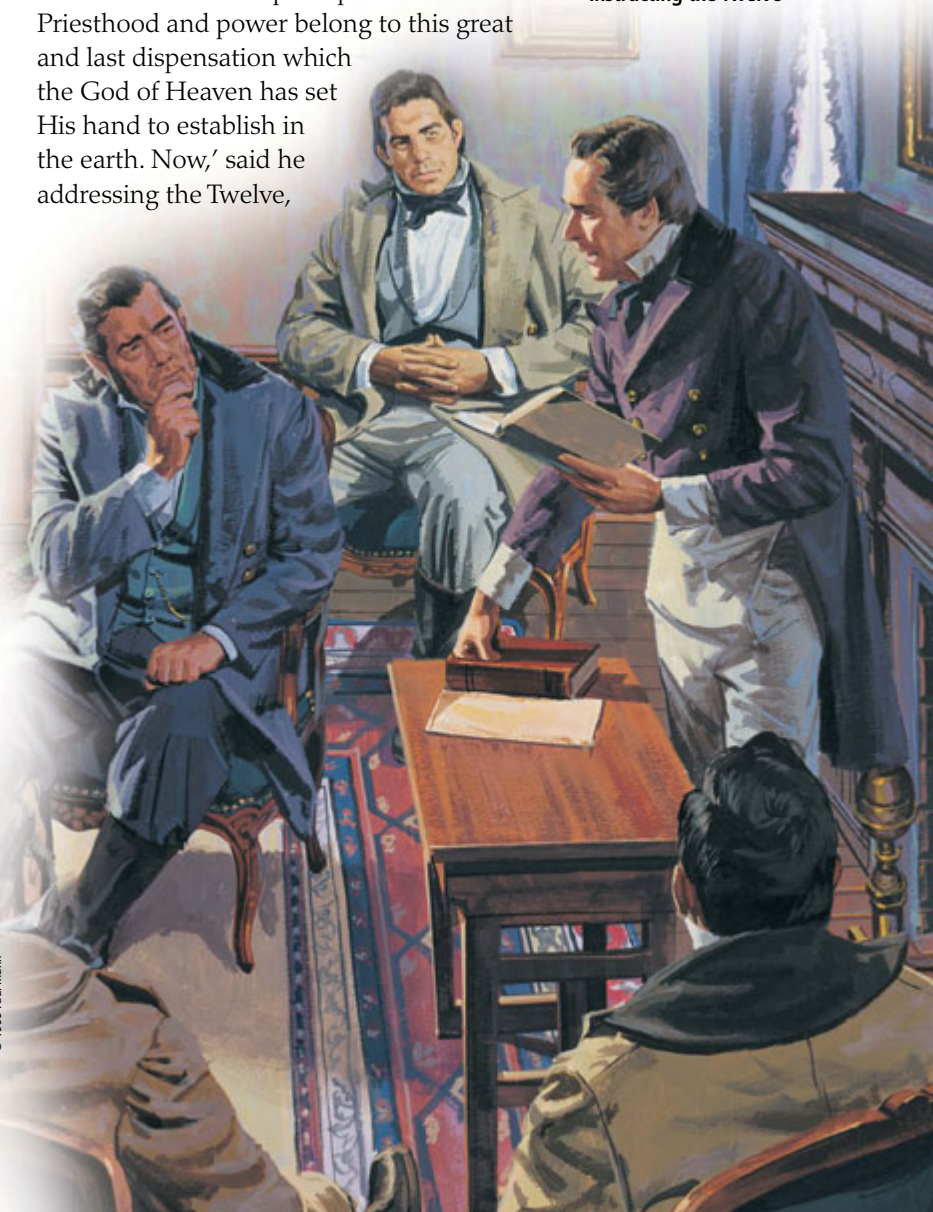
“Most importantly, Joseph Smith, feeling that he might soon die, took great care during the last seven months of his life to carefully prepare the Twelve. He met with the quorum almost every day to instruct them and give them additional responsibilities. In an extraordinary council meeting in late March 1844, he solemnly told the Twelve that he could now leave them because his work was done and the foundation was laid so the kingdom of God could be reared” (*Church History in the Fulness of Times*, 293–94).

President Wilford Woodruff (1807–98) was a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in 1844. He recalled Joseph Smith’s instructions to the Twelve Apostles at that time:

“I am a living witness to the testimony that [Joseph Smith] gave to the Twelve Apostles when all of us received our endowments from under his hands. I remember the last speech that he ever gave us before his death. It was before we started upon our mission to the East. He stood upon his feet some three hours. The room was filled as with consuming fire, his face was as clear as amber, and he was clothed upon by the power of God. He laid before us our duty. He laid before us the fullness of this great work of God; and in his remarks to us he said: ‘I have had sealed upon my head every key, every power, every principle of life and salvation that God has ever given to any man who ever lived upon the face of the earth. And these principles and this Priesthood and power belong to this great and last dispensation which the God of Heaven has set His hand to establish in the earth. Now,’ said he addressing the Twelve,

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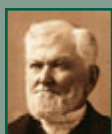
The Prophet Joseph Smith  
instructing the Twelve







Prior to his death, the Prophet Joseph Smith prepared the Apostles to lead the Church. This ensured that the work of the Lord would continue under the direction of those with authority.



“‘Now,’ said [Joseph Smith] addressing the Twelve, ‘I have sealed upon your heads every key, every power, and every principle which the Lord has sealed upon my head.’ . . .

“After addressing us in this manner he said: ‘I tell you, the burden of this kingdom now rests upon your shoulders; you have got to bear it off in all the world.’”

*President Wilford Woodruff*

‘I have sealed upon your heads every key, every power, and every principle which the Lord has sealed upon my head.’ . . .

“After addressing us in this manner he said: ‘I tell you, the burden of this kingdom now rests upon your shoulders; you have got to bear it off in all the world’” (*Deseret Weekly*, Mar. 19, 1892, 406; see also *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Wilford Woodruff* [2004], xxxii).

Elder Parley P. Pratt (1807–57), who was also a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles then, explained that at the same meeting the Prophet Joseph Smith “proceeded to confer on elder [Brigham] Young, the President of the Twelve, the keys of the sealing power. . . .

“This last key of the priesthood is the most sacred of all, and pertains exclusively to the first presidency of the church” (“Proclamation,” *Millennial Star*, Mar. 1845, 151).

- The Quorum of the Twelve Apostles holds all of the priesthood keys, power, and authority needed to guide the Church (see D&C 107:23–24; 112:14–15). Each member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles is given the keys of the priesthood at the time of his ordination as an Apostle and calling to the Quorum. Only the President of the Church has the authority to exercise all of the keys of the priesthood, but, as President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) explained, **each member of the Quorum**

of the Twelve “holds the keys of this dispensation in latent reserve. Inherent in that divine residual is the assured ongoing leadership of the Church” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1983, 4; or *Ensign*, May 1983, 6; emphasis added).

## The Lord Confirmed to the Saints That Brigham Young Was Joseph Smith’s Successor

- After the death of the Prophet Joseph Smith, there was some confusion as to who should lead the Church. Sidney Rigdon, a member of the First Presidency, was among those who claimed to be Joseph’s successor. On August 8, 1844, **the Lord publically manifested to the Saints that Brigham Young, President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, was chosen to be the new prophet of the Church.** President George Q. Cannon (1827–1901), who later served in the First Presidency, described this miraculous manifestation from the Lord:

“After the martyrdom of the Prophet the Twelve soon returned to Nauvoo, and learned of the aspirations of Sidney Rigdon. He had claimed that the Church needed a guardian, and that he was that guardian. He had appointed the day for the guardian to be selected, and of course,



Sidney Rigdon was a member of the First Presidency.

was present at the meeting, which was held in the open air. The wind was blowing toward the stand so strongly at the time that an improvised stand was made out of a wagon, which was drawn up at the back part of the congregation, and which he, [William] Marks, and some others occupied. He attempted to speak, but was much embarrassed. He had been the orator of the Church; but, on this occasion, his oratory failed him, and his talk fell very flat. In the meantime President Young and some of his brethren came and entered the stand. The wind by this time had ceased to blow. After Sidney Rigdon had spoken,

President Young arose and addressed the congregation, which faced around to see and hear him, turning their backs towards the wagon occupied by Sidney" (*Deseret News*, Feb. 21, 1883, 67).

"It was the first sound of his voice [Brigham's] which the people had heard since he had gone east on his mission, and the effect upon them was most wonderful. Who that was present on that occasion can ever forget the impression it made upon them! If Joseph had risen from the dead and again spoken in their hearing, the effect could not have been more startling than it was to many present at that meeting. It was the voice of Joseph himself; and not only was it the voice of Joseph which was heard; but it seemed in the eyes of the people as though it was the very person of Joseph which stood before them. A more wonderful and miraculous event than was wrought that day in the presence of that congregation we never heard of. The Lord gave His people a testimony that left no room for doubt as to who was the man He had chosen to lead them. They both saw and heard with their natural eyes and ears, and then the words which were uttered came, accompanied by the convincing power of God, to their hearts, and they were filled with the Spirit and with great joy. There had been gloom, and, in some hearts probably, doubt and uncertainty; but now it was plain to all that here was the man upon whom the Lord had bestowed the necessary authority to act in their midst in Joseph's stead" ("Joseph Smith, the Prophet," *Juvenile Instructor*, Oct. 29, 1870, 174–75).

- Hundreds of Church members witnessed the miracle that Zera Pulsipher (1789–



Zera Pulsipher was a member of the Presidency of the Seventy

1872) of the Presidency of the Seventy described having taken place at the meeting: "Brigham Young began to speak and at that time I sat with my back towards the stand as did many others. And **when**

**Brigham spoke he spoke with the voice of Joseph** and we turned around to see Brigham speaking in Joseph's voice and behold Joseph's mantle had fallen upon him. The people understood it in the same way. Brigham stood at the head of the Twelve therefore the church turned to him" (in Lynne Watkins Jorgensen and *BYU Studies* staff, "The Mantle of the Prophet Joseph Passes to Brother Brigham: A Collective Spiritual Witness," *BYU Studies*, vol. 36, no. 4 [1996–97], 173; emphasis added).

Drusilla Dorris Hendricks also recorded her experience: "Pres. Brigham Young began to speak. I jumped up to look and see if it was not Brother Joseph for surely it was his voice and gestures.

**Every Latter Day Saint could easily see upon whom the priesthood descended for Brigham Young held the keys**" (in Jorgensen and *BYU Studies* staff, "The Mantle of the Prophet Joseph," 163; emphasis added).

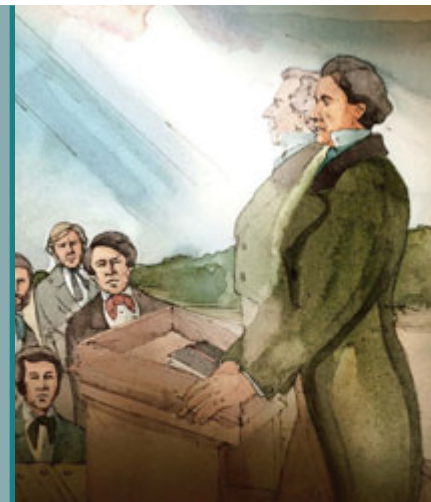
Nancy Naomi Alexander Tracy wrote: "I can testify that the mantle of Joseph fell upon Brigham that day as that of Elijah did fall upon Elisha [see 1 Kings 19:19; 2 Kings 2:11–15], for it seemed that his voice, his gestures, and all were Joseph. It seemed that we had him again with us. **He was sustained by the voice of the people to be the prophet, seer, and revelator**" (in Jorgensen and *BYU Studies* Staff, "The Mantle of the Prophet Joseph," 177; emphasis added).



"It was the first sound of his voice [Brigham's] which the people had heard since he had gone east on his mission, and the effect upon them was most wonderful. . . . It was the voice of Joseph himself; and not only was it the voice of Joseph which was heard; but it seemed in the eyes of the people as though it was the very person of Joseph which stood before them."

President George Q. Cannon

Hundreds of Saints were present when Brigham Young appeared to be Joseph Smith. This manifestation clearly signaled that Brigham Young had the priesthood keys to lead the Church.



Notes

## Important Principles of Succession

- Important principles of succession from one President to the next were highlighted in a 1996 *Ensign* article:

“While specific procedures and protocol of various successions in the presidency since the death of the Prophet Joseph Smith differ slightly from one another, the fundamental principles are the same and are founded securely on revelation. Four foundational principles and practices were operative in 1844 and have been manifest in every succession since.

**“1. Keys of the kingdom given to the Twelve.** The first principle or step in succession is the conferral of the keys of the kingdom on every man who is ordained to the holy apostleship and set apart as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles (see D&C 27:12–13). . . .

**“2. Seniority: a governing principle of presidency.** The factor that determines who presides among the Twelve and who may actively exercise all the keys of the kingdom at the death of the President of the Church is the principle of seniority. In 1835, when the first Quorum of the Twelve was called, seniority was arranged by age. Since then, seniority has been determined by the date of ordination into the Quorum of the Twelve. . . .

**“3. At the President’s death there is no First Presidency over the Twelve.** Following the principles taught by the

Prophet Joseph Smith, when the President of the Church dies, the quorum of the First Presidency is automatically dissolved and the counselors, if they previously had been in the Quorum of the Twelve, return to their respective places of seniority in that quorum. The senior Apostle, as President of the Twelve, automatically, by virtue of that seniority, becomes the ‘Presiding High Priest’ of the Church and, as such, actively holds and exercises all the keys of the kingdom and ‘preside[s] over the whole church’ (see D&C 107:65–66, 91). ‘Equal in authority’ to the First Presidency, this presiding quorum of Twelve Apostles is as much a Presidency of the Church as the First Presidency is when it is fully organized and operative (see D&C 107:23–24). Likewise, the President of the Twelve at that time is as much the President of the Church in function and authority as when he becomes sustained as such in a newly organized First Presidency. . . .

**“4. Reorganization of the First Presidency.** As the presiding officer of the Church, the President of the Twelve has the prerogative to receive revelation regarding when to reorganize the First Presidency. This decision is made in consultation with and through the unanimous support of the Quorum of the Twelve. . . .

“On the day that President Howard W. Hunter [1907–95] was sustained as President of the Church, he testified:

“‘Each man who is ordained an Apostle and set apart as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve is sustained as a prophet, seer, and revelator. The First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, called and ordained to hold the keys of the priesthood, have the authority and responsibility to govern the Church, to administer its ordinances, to teach its doctrine, and to establish and maintain its practices.

“‘When a President of the Church is ill or not able to function fully in all of the duties of his office, his two Counselors, who, with him, comprise a Quorum of the

President Spencer W. Kimball, with President Gordon B. Hinckley holding his arm and President Ezra Taft Benson talking to him



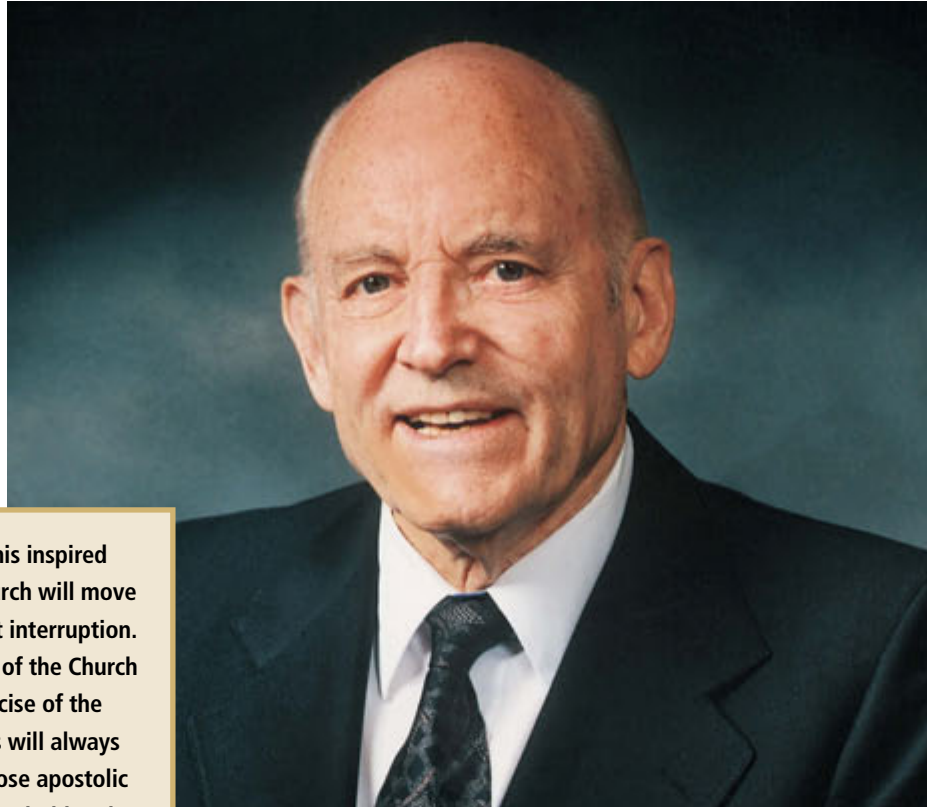


First Presidency, carry on the work of the Presidency. Any major questions, policies, programs, or doctrines are prayerfully considered in council by the Counselors in the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. No decision emanates from the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve without total unanimity among all concerned.

“Following this inspired pattern, the Church will move forward without interruption. The governance of the Church and the exercise of the prophetic gifts will always be vested in those apostolic authorities who hold and exercise all of the keys of the priesthood’ [in Conference Report, Oct. 1994, 6–7; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1994, 7]” (Brent L. Top and Lawrence R. Flake, “The Kingdom of God Will Roll On’: Succession in the Presidency,” *Ensign*, Aug. 1996, 29, 31–34).

**“Following this inspired pattern, the Church will move forward without interruption. The governance of the Church and the exercise of the prophetic gifts will always be vested in those apostolic authorities who hold and exercise all of the keys of the priesthood.”**

*President Howard W. Hunter*



1972, 28; or *Ensign*, Jan. 1973, 33; emphasis added).

- Soon after President Gordon B. Hinckley

became the President of the Church, he explained the sacred pattern instituted by the Lord:

“With President Hunter’s passing, the First Presidency was dissolved. Brother Monson and I, who had served as his counselors, took our places in the Quorum of the Twelve, which became the presiding authority of the Church.

“Three weeks ago today all of the living ordained Apostles gathered in a spirit of fasting and prayer in the upper room of the temple. Here we sang a sacred hymn and prayed together. We partook of the sacrament of the Lord’s supper, renewing in that sacred, symbolic testament our covenants and our relationship with Him who is our divine Redeemer. The Presidency was then reorganized, following a precedent well established through generations of

### The Lord Established the Order of Succession in the Presidency of the Church

- When Harold B. Lee was sustained as President of the Church after the death of President Joseph Fielding Smith, President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) noted God’s role in the appointment of a President of the Church:

“It is reassuring to know that President Lee was not elected through committees and conventions with all their conflicts, criticisms, and by the vote of men, but was called of God and then sustained by the people. . . .

**“The pattern divine allows for no errors, no conflicts, no ambitions, no ulterior motives.** The Lord has reserved for himself the calling of his leaders over his church” (in Conference Report, Oct.



**"Under [the Lord's] procedure a man is selected by the prophet to become a member of the Council of the Twelve Apostles. . . . He**

**is called, as were the Apostles in Jesus' time, to whom the Lord said, 'Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you' (John 15:16)."**

*President Gordon B. Hinckley*



The Savior calling His Apostles

the past. **There was no campaigning, no contest, no ambition for office. It was quiet, peaceful, simple, and sacred.** It was done after the pattern which the Lord Himself had put in place" (in Conference Report, Apr. 1995, 92; or *Ensign*, May 1995, 69; emphasis added).

- President Harold B. Lee suggested that speculating on the succession of the Presidency is "not pleasing in the sight of the Lord." He said that "those who try to guess ahead of time as to who is going to be the next President of the Church are just gambling as they might be on a horse race, because only the Lord has the time table" (in Conference Report, Oct. 1972, 129; or *Ensign*, Jan. 1973, 107).

### Seniority in the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

- The President of the Church is the Apostle with the most seniority. The Apostle who is next in seniority is the President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, unless he is serving in the First Presidency, in which case the Apostle next in seniority serves as the Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. **Seniority among the Apostles is determined not by age but by the date and order of their ordination as Apostles.** For example, Spencer W. Kimball and Ezra Taft Benson were both

ordained Apostles on October 7, 1943, with Spencer W. Kimball being ordained first. Because of this, President Kimball became President of the Church in 1973 when Harold B. Lee died.

President Spencer W. Kimball explained that because succession in the Presidency is based on seniority, the Lord alone controls the order of succession: "There have been some eighty apostles [by 1972] so endowed [with the keys of authority] since Joseph Smith, though only eleven have occupied the place of the President of the Church, death having intervened; and since the death of his servants is in the power and control of the Lord, **he permits to come to the first place only the one who is destined to take that leadership.** Death and life become the controlling factors. Each new apostle in turn is chosen by the Lord and revealed to the then living prophet who ordains him" (in Conference Report, Oct. 1972, 29; or *Ensign*, Jan. 1973, 34; emphasis added).

- President Gordon B. Hinckley described the process of seniority and succession that begins when a man is called to the Quorum of the Twelve: "This transition of authority, in which I have participated a number of times, is beautiful in its simplicity. It is indicative of the way the Lord does things. Under His procedure a man is selected by the prophet to become a member of the Council of the Twelve Apostles. He does not choose this as a career. He is called, as were the Apostles in Jesus' time, to whom the Lord said, 'Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you' (John 15:16). The years pass. He is schooled and disciplined in the duties of his office. He travels over the earth in fulfilling his apostolic calling. It is a long course of preparation, in which he comes to know the Latter-day Saints wherever they may be, and they come to know him. The Lord tests his heart and his substance. In the natural course of events, vacancies occur in that council and new appointments are made. Under

this process a particular man becomes the senior Apostle. Residing latent in him, and in his associate Brethren, given to each at the time of ordination, are all of the keys of the priesthood. But authority to exercise those keys is restricted to the President of the Church. At his passing, that authority becomes operative in the senior Apostle, who is then named, set apart, and ordained a prophet and President by his associates of the Council of the Twelve” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1986, 61–62; or *Ensign*, May 1986, 46–47).

- President Boyd K. Packer of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles spoke of the certainty of the senior Apostle becoming the President of the Church: “Shortly after the death of President Gordon B. Hinckley, the 14 men, Apostles, who had had conferred upon them the keys of the kingdom, gathered together in the upper room of the temple in order to reorganize the First Presidency of the Church. There was no question about what would be done, no hesitancy. **We knew that the senior Apostle was the President of the Church.** And in that sacred meeting, Thomas Spencer Monson was sustained by the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles as the President of the Church” (in Conference Report, Apr. 2008, 81; or *Ensign*, May 2008, 83; emphasis added).

### Leadership by the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and the Timing of the Succession

- President Spencer W. Kimball explained the transition of authority to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles after the death of the current prophet:  
 “The work of the Lord is endless. Even when a powerful leader dies, not for a single instant is the Church without leadership, thanks to the kind Providence who gave his kingdom continuity and perpetuity. . . .  
 “The moment life passes from a President of the Church, a body of men become the composite leader—these men already seasoned with experience

and training. The appointments have long been made, the authority given, the keys delivered. . . . The kingdom moves forward under this already authorized council. No ‘running’ for position, no electioneering, no stump speeches. What a divine plan! How wise our Lord, to organize so perfectly beyond the weakness of frail, grasping humans” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1970, 118; or *Improvement Era*, June 1970, 92).

- “As the presiding officer of the Church, **the President of the Twelve has the prerogative to receive revelation regarding when to reorganize the First Presidency.** This decision is made in consultation with and through the unanimous support of the Quorum of the Twelve” (Top and Flake, “The Kingdom of God,” 33). After the death of the Prophet Joseph Smith, the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles led the Church for three and one-half years before the First Presidency was reorganized. The Quorum of the Twelve led the Church for a little more than three years following the death of President Brigham Young and for nearly two years following the death of President John Taylor. More recently, the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has led the Church typically for only a few days before the First Presidency is reorganized and a new President is set apart.

On September 18, 1898, President George Q. Cannon spoke about the

Notes

Following the death of President Gordon B. Hinckley (right), Thomas S. Monson became the President of the Church.







The First Presidency (with a picture of the Prophet Joseph Smith) and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, 1870

organization of the First Presidency after the death of President Wilford Woodruff on September 2: "On September 13th, at a meeting of the Apostles, while discussing the necessity for the appointment of a trustee-in-trust for the Church, the necessity also of organizing the First Presidency appeared clear to the brethren, and one after another of the Twelve spoke in favor of such action being taken at that time. After hearing their views, President Snow then arose and stated to the brethren that he had, since the death of President Woodruff, felt led to present himself before the Lord, clothed in his priestly robes, in the Temple, and the Lord had revealed to him that the First Presidency should be organized, and also revealed to

him who his counselors should be. He did not give any expression to this, however, until after the Apostles had spoken on the subject. This statement of President Snow was evidence to them that the Spirit of God had inspired the remarks which they had made, and approved of the work which they had proposed to do, and it caused them to rejoice greatly. For myself it was very unexpected to me for action to be taken at that time, though I was heartily in favor of it, and have always felt that the First Presidency should be organized as quickly as possible or as soon as the Lord would inspire such action" (*Deseret News*, Oct. 8, 1898, 514).

### Reorganizing the First Presidency

- In 1974, President N. Eldon Tanner (1898–1982) of the First Presidency described the transition of authority and the procedure in which a new President of the Church is sustained by the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and the First Presidency is



President N. Eldon Tanner

reorganized by recounting events that preceded and followed the death of President Harold B. Lee:

"It is significant to note just what took place at the time of the passing of President Harold B. Lee. President Romney had been called to the hospital and as they talked, President Lee, realizing that he might be incapacitated for some time, said to President Romney: 'President Tanner is away, and I want you to take over and carry on the affairs of the Church.' President Kimball, who came in later, offered his services to President Romney. However, immediately upon the announcement of President Lee's passing, President Romney turned to President Kimball and said: 'You, as the president of the Quorum of the Twelve, are now in charge. I am at your disposal and prepared to do anything I can to help.'

"This was entirely in keeping with the order of the Church and is a great example of how the Church is never left without a presidency and how smoothly it passes from one to another. Immediately President Kimball, as president of the Twelve, became the presiding authority of the Church.

"I should like to outline the procedures followed at the time of his appointment and ordination as president of the Church. . . .

"... Four days after President Lee's death, President Kimball, the president of the Twelve, called the members of the Twelve together in the upper room of the temple for the purpose of discussing the reorganization of the First Presidency and to take whatever action was decided upon. Those who had been counselors to the President—that is, President Romney and myself—took their respective places in the Quorum of the Twelve.

"President Kimball, upon expressing his great sorrow at the passing of President Lee and his feeling of inadequacy, called upon the members of the Twelve in

order of seniority to express themselves individually as to how they felt about reorganizing the presidency of the Church.

“As each member of the Twelve spoke, he expressed himself as feeling that now was the time to reorganize the First Presidency and that President Spencer W. Kimball was the one whom the Lord wanted to preside at this time. The sweet Spirit of the Lord was present in rich abundance and there was complete unity and harmony in the minds and spoken words of the Brethren. The only purpose and desire was to do the will of the Lord, and there was no question in anyone’s mind but what the will of the Lord had been expressed.

“Elder Ezra Taft Benson then made the formal motion that the First Presidency of the Church be reorganized and that Spencer W. Kimball be sustained, ordained, and set apart as the president, prophet, seer, revelator, and as trustee-in-trust of the Church. This motion was seconded and unanimously approved.

“In all humility, President Kimball stepped forward and made his speech of acceptance, praying that the Spirit and blessings of the Lord would attend him that he might be made able to carry out the will of the Lord. He said he had always prayed for President Lee’s health and strength and vigor and for the blessings of the Lord to attend him as he carried on as the president of the Church. He emphasized the fact that he had prayed sincerely with his lovely wife, Camilla, that this position would never come to him and that he felt sure that President Lee would certainly outlive him. . . .

“He then chose and nominated as his first counselor N. Eldon Tanner and as his second counselor Marion G. Romney, each of whom expressed himself in all humility and pledged himself to support and sustain President Kimball as the president of the Church and to fill his office to the

best of his ability, and prayed for the blessings of the Lord to attend him.

“Following this, President Benson was sustained as president of the Council of the Twelve. President Kimball then took his seat in the middle of the room, and as all those present placed their hands upon his head, we felt the Spirit of the Lord was truly with us, and this sweet Spirit filled our hearts. Then, with President Benson being mouth, in a beautiful prayer and blessing, Spencer Woolley Kimball was ordained and set apart as prophet, seer, and revelator and president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1974, 121–23; or *Ensign*, May 1974, 84–85).

### What Is a Solemn Assembly?

- Though President Thomas S. Monson became President of the Church on February 3, 2008, after the death of President Gordon B. Hinckley, it was during the Saturday morning session of the April 2008 general conference, designated as a solemn assembly, that members of the Church, by quorums and groups throughout the world, sustained him as prophet, seer, and revelator and

Notes

Sustaining during a solemn assembly of the Church





One of the privileges of Church membership is the opportunity to sustain those called to preside over the Church.

President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (see Conference Report, Apr. 2008, 2–4; or *Ensign*, May 2008, 4–6).

During an earlier solemn assembly, Elder David B. Haight (1906–2004) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles talked about what a solemn assembly is and the sacredness of such a momentous gathering:

“Today we are witnesses to and participants in a most sacred occasion—a solemn assembly to act upon heavenly things. As in olden times, there has been much fasting and prayer offered by the Saints throughout the world that they may receive an outpouring of the Spirit of the Lord, which is so much in evidence here on this occasion this morning.

“A solemn assembly, as the name implies, denotes **a sacred, sober, and reverent occasion when the Saints assemble under the direction of the First Presidency**. Solemn assemblies are used for three purposes: the dedication of temples, special instruction to priesthood leaders, and sustaining a new President of the Church. This conference session today is a solemn assembly for the purpose of sustaining a newly called Church President and other officers of the Church.

“There is a pattern to solemn assemblies that distinguishes them from other general Church meetings where we sustain officers of the Church. That pattern, which was established by the Prophet Joseph Smith, is that the priesthood quorums, commencing with the First Presidency, stand and manifest by the uplifted right hand their willingness to sustain the President of the Church as a prophet, seer, and revelator, and uphold him by their confidence, faith, and prayers. The priesthood quorums of the Church so manifest by their vote. Then the general body of all the Saints stand and signify their willingness to do the same. The other leaders of the Church are similarly sustained in their offices and callings.

“When we sustain the President of the Church by our uplifted hand, it not only signifies that we acknowledge before God that he is the rightful possessor of all the priesthood keys; it also means that we covenant with God that we will abide by the direction and the counsel that come through His prophet. It is a solemn covenant.

“On the day the Church was organized, the Lord gave this commandment to the Church:

“‘For his [the Church president’s] word ye shall receive, as if from mine own mouth, in all patience and faith.

“‘For by doing these things the gates of hell shall not prevail against you; yea, and the Lord God will disperse the powers of darkness from before you, and cause the heavens to shake for your good, and his name’s glory.

“‘For thus saith the Lord God: Him have I inspired to move the cause of Zion in mighty power for good’ (D&C 21:5–7).

“The first solemn assembly was held in the Kirtland Temple on 27 March 1836. Following the voting procedure that I described, the Prophet Joseph Smith recorded, ‘I prophesied to all, that inasmuch as they would uphold these men



in their several stations, . . . the Lord would bless them; . . . in the name of [Jesus] Christ, the blessings of heaven should be theirs' (*History of the Church*, 2:418).

"Today, by exercising the principle of common consent, we have expressed our will. How sacred is this privilege and responsibility? So sacred that in the great priesthood revelation, the Lord said that these matters 'may be brought before a general assembly of the several quorums, which constitute the spiritual authorities of the church' (D&C 107:32; italics added)" (in Conference Report, Oct. 1994, 16–17; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1994, 14–15; emphasis added).

### How We Sustain the President of the Church

- At the conclusion of the solemn assembly during which Thomas S. Monson was sustained as the 16th President of the Church, President Henry B. Eyring of the First Presidency spoke of the great blessing we have and the promise we make when we raise our hand to sustain our leaders:

"God's people have not always been worthy of the marvelous experience we have shared today. The Apostles, after the Ascension of Christ, continued to exercise the keys He left with them. But because of disobedience and loss of faith by the members, the Apostles died without the keys being passed on to successors. We call that tragic episode 'the Apostasy.' Had the members of the Church in those days had the opportunity and the will to exercise faith as you have today, the Lord would not have taken the keys of the priesthood from the earth. So this is a day of historical significance and of eternal importance in the history of the world and to the children of our Heavenly Father.

"Now our obligation is to remain worthy of the faith necessary for us to fulfill our promise to sustain those who have been called. . . . **For us to sustain those who have been called today,**

**we must examine our lives, repent as necessary, pledge to keep the Lord's commandments, and follow His**

**servants.** The Lord warns us that if we do not do those things, the Holy Ghost will be withdrawn, we will lose the light which we have received, and we will not be able to keep the pledge we have made today to sustain the Lord's servants in His true Church" (in Conference Report, Apr. 2008, 20; or *Ensign*, May 2008, 21; emphasis added).

### Points to Ponder

- In what ways can understanding the divinely inspired procedure for succession in the Presidency increase our confidence in the President of the Church?
- How does the conferring of priesthood keys at the time a new Apostle is ordained begin the process of succession?
- What blessings come from supporting and sustaining the senior Apostle as the prophet and President of the Church?

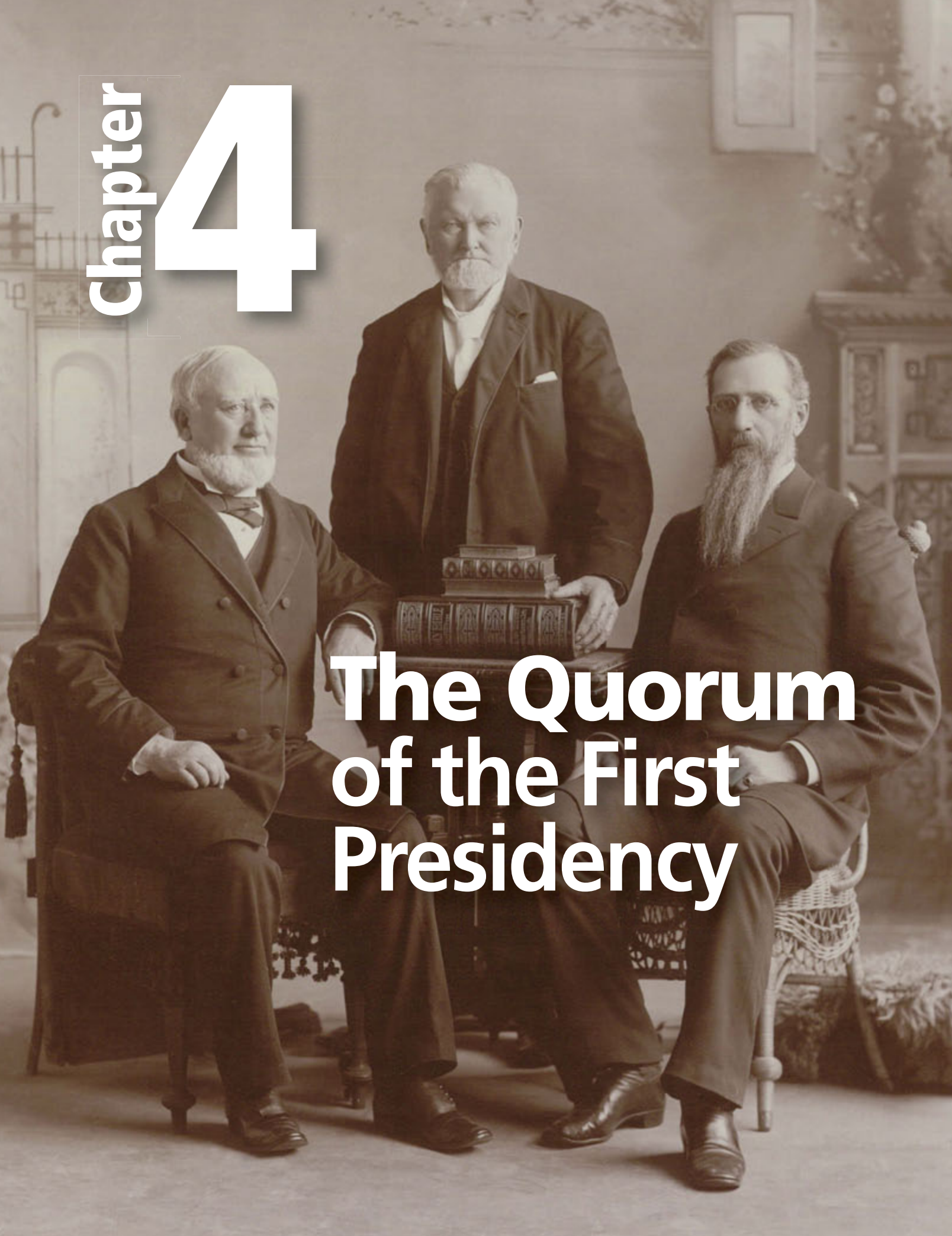
### Suggested Assignments

- Using this chapter as a guide, outline the steps the Lord has established in selecting a new President of the Church. How does this process begin with the selection of a new Apostle?
- Record your answers to the following questions: What is expected of us when we sustain a new Church President? How might this apply to our sustaining a bishop or other Church leader?
- Briefly explain to a friend or family member how the divinely inspired procedure for succession in the Presidency eliminates ambition for office, errors, and conflicts.
- Record your feelings about how understanding the principle of seniority in the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles can strengthen confidence that Church leadership is in the Lord's hands and that He knows and prepares each member of the Twelve.

Notes

# chapter 4

## The Quorum of the First Presidency



## Introduction

On March 18, 1833, the First Presidency was formally organized with the Prophet Joseph Smith as President and Sidney Rigdon and Frederick G. Williams as counselors (see *History of the Church*, 1:334; see also D&C 81; 90, including section headings). Subsequent revelations gave further information concerning the First Presidency, which today functions as the Church's highest priesthood quorum, with the "right to officiate in all the offices in the church" (D&C 107:9; see also D&C 124:126).

The Quorum of the First Presidency consists of the President and usually, but not always, two counselors. The counselors are most often, but not always, selected from the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. These "three Presiding High

Priests . . . form a quorum of the Presidency of the Church" (D&C 107:22). Upon them rests the responsibility of directing the kingdom of God on the earth (see D&C 90:12–16). The Lord emphasized the significance of the First Presidency when He declared, "Whosoever receiveth me, receiveth those, the First Presidency, whom I have sent, whom I have made counselors for my name's sake unto you" (D&C 112:20).

This chapter will help increase your knowledge of how the First Presidency presides over and directs the work of the Lord on the earth.

## Commentary

### A Forerunner of the First Presidency in the New Testament Church

- President Joseph Fielding Smith (1876–1972) taught that the forerunner for our latter-day Quorum of the First Presidency is found in the New Testament organization of the Church of Jesus Christ: "The fact that Peter, James, and John were separated from the other apostles and given special authority, was the forerunner of the quorum of the First Presidency in our day. It should be perfectly clear from what is written that **these three apostles formed such a presidency.** . . . It is very apparent to Latter-day Saints that these three were a Presidency due to the fact that all three came to the Prophet Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery and conferred upon them the Melchizedek Priesthood" (*Seek Ye Earnestly* [1970], 207–8; emphasis added).

## Chapter 4 Overview

1. A forerunner of the First Presidency in the New Testament Church.
2. Establishing the First Presidency.
3. The authority of the First Presidency.
4. The preeminence of the President of the Church.
5. The First Presidency presides over the Church.
6. The importance of the counselors in the First Presidency.
7. The counselors carry on the work of the First Presidency if the President is ill.
8. One example of the day-to-day activities of the First Presidency.
9. Doctrinal interpretation is the right and responsibility of the First Presidency.
10. What the First Presidency says is scripture.
11. Church members are to sustain the First Presidency.
12. Church members should look to the First Presidency for instruction.
13. Those who follow the First Presidency will never go astray and shall inherit eternal glory.

◀ President Wilford Woodruff (center) and his counselors, George Q. Cannon and Joseph F. Smith; the Quorum of the First Presidency in 1894



Notes

## Establishing the First Presidency

- The following chart identifies some of the events in the establishment of the First Presidency:



Sidney Rigdon,  
First Counselor



Joseph Smith,  
President



Frederick G. Williams,  
Second Counselor

Date	Event
April 6, 1830	The Church was organized, with Joseph Smith “called of God, and ordained an apostle of Jesus Christ, to be the first elder of this church”; Oliver Cowdery “was also called of God, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to be the second elder of this church” (D&C 20:2–3).
November 11, 1831	The Prophet Joseph Smith received the revelation found in verses 59–100 of Doctrine and Covenants 107; verses 64–66 discuss the “President of the High Priesthood of the Church” (see <i>Revelations and Translations: Manuscript Revelation Books</i> , facsimile ed., vol. 1 of the Revelations and Translations series of <i>The Joseph Smith Papers</i> , ed. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman [2009], 216–19).
January 25, 1832	“Joseph Smith was sustained and ordained President of the High Priesthood” at a conference of elders, high priests, and Church members at Amherst, Ohio (D&C 75 section heading; see also D&C 82 section heading; <i>History of the Church</i> , 1:243, footnote).
March 1832	The Prophet Joseph Smith received revelation about the future role of the First Presidency (see D&C 81:1–2). “The revelation . . . should be regarded as a step toward the formal organization of the First Presidency, specifically calling for the office of counselor in that body and explaining the dignity of the appointment” (D&C 81 section heading).
April 26, 1832	During a “general council of the Church” in Jackson County, Missouri, “Joseph Smith the Prophet was sustained as the President of the High Priesthood, to which office he had previously been ordained” (D&C 82 section heading).
March 8, 1833	The Prophet Joseph Smith received the revelation found in Doctrine and Covenants 90, “a continuing step in the establishment of the First Presidency” (section heading). In this revelation the Lord indicated that Sidney Rigdon and Frederick G. Williams were to serve as counselors in the First Presidency (see verse 6).
March 18, 1833	Sidney Rigdon and Frederick G. Williams were set apart as counselors in the First Presidency. The Prophet Joseph Smith recorded: “Elder Rigdon expressed a desire that himself and Brother Frederick G. Williams should be ordained to the offices to which they had been called, . . . according to the revelation given on the 8th of March, 1833. Accordingly I laid my hands on Brothers Sidney and Frederick, and ordained them to take part with me in holding the keys of this last kingdom, and to assist in the Presidency of the High Priesthood, as my Counselors” (in <i>History of the Church</i> , 1:334).
March 28, 1835	The Prophet Joseph Smith received the revelation found in Doctrine and Covenants 107:1–58, further defining the First Presidency as the presiding quorum of the Church: “Of the Melchizedek Priesthood, three Presiding High Priests, chosen by the body, appointed and ordained to that office, and upheld by the confidence, faith, and prayer of the church, form a quorum of the Presidency of the Church” (D&C 107:22).

## The Authority of the First Presidency

- The members of the First Presidency are the Presiding High Priests over the entire Church. As such, the First Presidency is the final mortal authority on all matters. The Lord indicated the extent of their authority when He declared:

“Again, verily, I say unto you, the most important business of the church, and the most difficult cases of the church, inasmuch as there is not satisfaction upon the decision of the bishop or judges, it shall be handed over and carried up unto the council of the church, before the Presidency of the High Priesthood.

“And the Presidency of the council of the High Priesthood shall have power to call other high priests, even twelve, to assist as counselors; and thus the Presidency of the High Priesthood and its counselors shall have power to decide upon testimony according to the laws of the church.

“And after this decision it shall be had in remembrance no more before the Lord; for **this is the highest council of the church of God**, and a final decision upon controversies in spiritual matters” (D&C 107:78–80; emphasis added).

- President Stephen L. Richards (1879–1959) of the First Presidency explained that the First Presidency has the authority to interpret doctrine:

“Who is entitled to interpret the doctrine of the Church . . . ? I am sure that upon serious reflection there is no real difference of opinion on this question among the members. It is so well established by the revelations which we have received and the practice of the Church that the President and his Counselors are invested with this authority that I cannot believe any member will seriously dispute it. In the language of the revelation they, the Presidency, are constituted ‘a quorum . . . to receive the oracles for the whole

Church” [D&C 124:126]. **They are the supreme court here on earth in the interpretation of God’s law.**

“In the exercise of their functions and delegated powers they are controlled by a constitution, a part of which is written and a part of which is not. The written part consists in authenticated scripture, ancient and modern, and in the recorded utterances of our latter-day prophets. The unwritten part is the spirit of revelation and divine inspiration which are appertinent to their calling” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1938, 115–16; emphasis added).

## The Preeminence of the President of the Church

- On March 8, 1833, the Lord told the Prophet Joseph Smith that the counselors in the First Presidency are “equal with [the President] in holding the keys of this last kingdom” (D&C 90:6). The President of the Church, however, presides over this priesthood quorum and directs the work of his counselors.
- Elder John A. Widtsoe (1872–1952) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles explained that the President of the Church directs the work of the First Presidency: “Joseph Smith was given two counselors, the

President Joseph F. Smith (center) and his counselors, John R. Winder and Anthon H. Lund





President Thomas S. Monson (seated) and his counselors, Henry B. Eyring and Dieter F. Uchtdorf, 2008



**"The First Presidency have the ultimate responsibility for the affairs of the kingdom of God on the**

**earth. Of them the Lord has said:**

**"'Of the Melchizedek Priesthood, three Presiding High Priests, chosen by the body, appointed and ordained to that office, and upheld by the confidence, faith, and prayer of the church, form a quorum of the Presidency of the Church.'"**

*President James E. Faust*

three forming the First Presidency of the Church. (March 18, 1833.) This was preceded in March 8, 1833 by a revelation declaring that 'Through you [Joseph Smith] shall the oracles be given to another, even unto the Church' [D&C 90:4]. The preeminence of the President of the Church was maintained. The question as to whether the Counselors held the same power as the President was soon debated among the people. What could the Counselors do without direct appointment from the President? These questions were answered in a meeting on January 16, 1836. The Prophet there said, 'The Twelve are not subject to any other than the First Presidency . . . and where I am not, there is no First Presidency over the Twelve' [in *History of the Church*, 2:374; italics added]. In other words were the President taken, the Counselors would have no authority. **The Counselors do not possess the power of the President and cannot act in Church matters without direction and consent of the President"** (*Joseph Smith: Seeker after Truth, Prophet of God* [1951], 303; emphasis added).

### The First Presidency Presides over the Church

- President Joseph Fielding Smith noted the governing position of the First

Presidency: "We have in the Church of Jesus Christ today the quorum of the First Presidency, separate from the Council of the Apostles. **It is under the direction of the First Presidency that the apostles act** in all matters in the priesthood and in the Church" (*Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols. [1954–56], 3:152; emphasis added).

- As "the highest council of the church of God" (D&C 107:80), the First Presidency leads the Church with inspired judgments regarding all matters, both spiritual and temporal. President Joseph Fielding Smith taught:

"By revelation the President of the Church has been provided with counselors [see D&C 107:78–80]. . . .

"The supreme governing power of the Church is vested in the President with his counselors. The First Presidency preside over all councils, all quorums, and all organizations of the Church, with supreme appointing power and power of nomination [see D&C 107:9]. These powers of appointment, nomination, and presiding may be delegated by the First Presidency to others whom they may choose and whom the people sustain to represent the presidency in the government of the Church.

"The First Presidency are the living oracles of God and the supreme adjudicators [decision makers] and interpreters of the law of the Church. They supervise the work of the entire Church in all matters of policy, organization, and administration. No part of the work of the Church is beyond their authority" ("The First Presidency and the Council of the Twelve," *Improvement Era*, Nov. 1966, 978).

- President James E. Faust (1920–2007) of the First Presidency said:

"The First Presidency have the ultimate responsibility for the affairs of the kingdom of God on the earth. Of them the Lord has said:



“Of the Melchizedek Priesthood, three Presiding High Priests, chosen by the body, appointed and ordained to that office, and upheld by the confidence, faith, and prayer of the church, form a quorum of the Presidency of the Church. . . .

“And the Presidency of the council of the High Priesthood shall have power to call other high priests, even twelve, to assist as counselors; and thus the Presidency of the High Priesthood and its counselors shall have power to decide upon testimony according to the laws of the church’ [D&C 107:22, 79]” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1995, 64; or *Ensign*, May 1995, 47).

### The Importance of Counselors in the First Presidency

- Elder William R. Walker of the Seventy taught that the First Presidency is the



Elder William R. Walker

model that other presidencies in the Church should follow:

“Every one of us who serve in presidencies anywhere in the Church should **look to the**

**First Presidency as our pattern and the example that we seek to follow** as we carry out our stewardships. We should strive to be like them and to work together in love and harmony as they do.

“President Gordon B. Hinckley often spoke of the importance of counselors. He said, ‘The Lord put [counselors] there for a purpose’ (*Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley*, 94).

“President Hinckley further instructed us: ‘Every morning except Monday, the First Presidency meets, when we are in town. I call on President [James E.] Faust to present his business and we discuss it and make a decision. Then I call on President [Thomas S.] Monson to present his business and we discuss it and make a decision. Then I present the items which I wish to present and we discuss them

and make a decision. We work together.

. . . You can’t be a one-man operation in a presidency. Counselors—what a wonderful thing are counselors. They save you from doing the wrong things, they help you to do the right things’ (*Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley*, 95; see also Conference Report, Oct. 1990, 63–67; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1990, 48–51).

“A counselor to President Joseph F. Smith once described how the First Presidency deliberated: ‘When a case came before [the President of the Church] to judge, he and his counselors would talk it over and give it their *careful consideration until they came to the same conclusion*’ (Anthon H. Lund, in Conference Report, June 1919, 19; italics added).

“That should be our pattern in presidencies.

“The revelations teach us to make our decisions in quorums and presidencies ‘in all righteousness, in holiness, and lowliness of heart, meekness and long suffering, and in faith, and virtue, and

Notes

President Gordon B. Hinckley (center) and his counselors, Thomas S. Monson and James E. Faust



Notes

knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness and charity' (D&C 107:30).

"The Lord has given us the pattern" (in Conference Report, Apr. 2008, 38; or *Ensign*, May 2008, 39; emphasis added).

### The Counselors Carry On the Work of the First Presidency If the President Is Ill

- President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) explained how the work of the First Presidency continues even when the President of the Church is ill or unable to perform his duties: "When the President is ill or not able to function fully in all of the duties of his office, his two Counselors **together comprise a Quorum of the First Presidency**. They carry on with the day-to-day work of the Presidency. In exceptional circumstances, when only one may be able to function, he may act in the authority of the office of the Presidency as set forth in the Doctrine and Covenants, section 102, verses 10–11" (in Conference Report,

Apr. 1994, 74; or *Ensign*, May 1994, 54; emphasis added).

Three and a half years earlier, President Hinckley shared his personal experience as a counselor to two Church Presidents who became ill for a prolonged period of time:

"During the time that President Kimball was ill, President Tanner's health failed and he passed away. President Romney was called as First Counselor, and I as Second Counselor to President Kimball. Then President Romney became ill, thus leaving to me an almost overwhelming burden of responsibility. I counseled frequently with my Brethren of the Twelve, and I cannot say enough of appreciation to them for their understanding and for the wisdom of their judgment. In matters where there was a well-established policy, we moved forward. But no new policy was announced or implemented, and no significant practice was altered without sitting down with President Kimball and laying the matter before him and receiving his full consent and full approval.

"In such circumstances when I would go to visit him, I always took a secretary who kept a detailed record of the conversation. I can assure you, my beloved brethren, that I never knowingly moved ahead of my file leader, that I never had any desire to move out ahead of him in Church policy or instruction. I knew that he was the appointed Prophet of the Lord in that day. Even though I, too, had been sustained as a prophet, seer, and revelator, along with my Brethren of the Twelve, I knew also that none of us was the President of the Church. I knew that the Lord prolonged the life of President Kimball for purposes known to the Lord, and I had perfect faith that this prolonging of life was for a reason under the wisdom of Him who has greater wisdom than any man.

"In November 1985, President Kimball passed away, and President

Because of President Spencer W. Kimball's and President Marion G. Romney's illness, President Gordon B. Hinckley sometimes sat alone at general conference.



Ezra Taft Benson, then President of the Council of the Twelve, was unanimously sustained as the President of the Church and prophet, seer, and revelator. He chose his counselors, and I give you the assurance that we have worked together harmoniously and well, and it has been a great and wonderfully rewarding experience.

“President Benson is now ninety-one years of age and does not have the strength or vitality he once possessed in abundance. Brother Monson and I, as his counselors, do as has been done before, and that is to move forward the work of the Church, while being very careful not to get ahead of the President nor to undertake any departure of any kind from long-established policy without his knowledge and full approval” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1990, 66; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1990, 50).

## One Example of the Day-to-Day Activities of the First Presidency

- In 1979, President N. Eldon Tanner (1898–1982), who served as a counselor to four Presidents of the Church, described in detail the day-to-day operations of the First Presidency at that time. Although schedules may vary with each administration, and some of the details have changed, his description gives a good understanding of the many responsibilities of the First Presidency.

**“All matters pertaining to the administration of the Church come under the direction of the First Presidency, and the affairs are generally divided into three categories:**

“First, those administered directly by the First Presidency; second, ecclesiastical matters administered by the Twelve under the direction of the First Presidency; and third, temporal affairs administered by the Presiding Bishopric, as assigned to them by the First Presidency.



“Let me list some of the things administered directly by the First Presidency: area conferences; solemn assemblies; budgeting, educational, historical, and personnel departments; temples; auditing; the Coordinating Council; and the welfare services. . . .

“ . . . In regularly scheduled meetings, the First Presidency meet every Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday at 8 A.M. with a secretary who makes a complete record of all procedures. These discussions include the correspondence which has been addressed to the First Presidency—which contains almost everything from questions about pierced ears to appeals from decisions of excommunication by the stake presidency and high council. There are questions about dress and grooming standards, hypnotism, Sabbath observance, scripture interpretation, sensitivity training, sealings, complaints against the local officers, reincarnation, donation of body parts to science or to others, cremation, transplants, legal matters, ad infinitum.

The offices of the members of the First Presidency are in the Church Administration Building.

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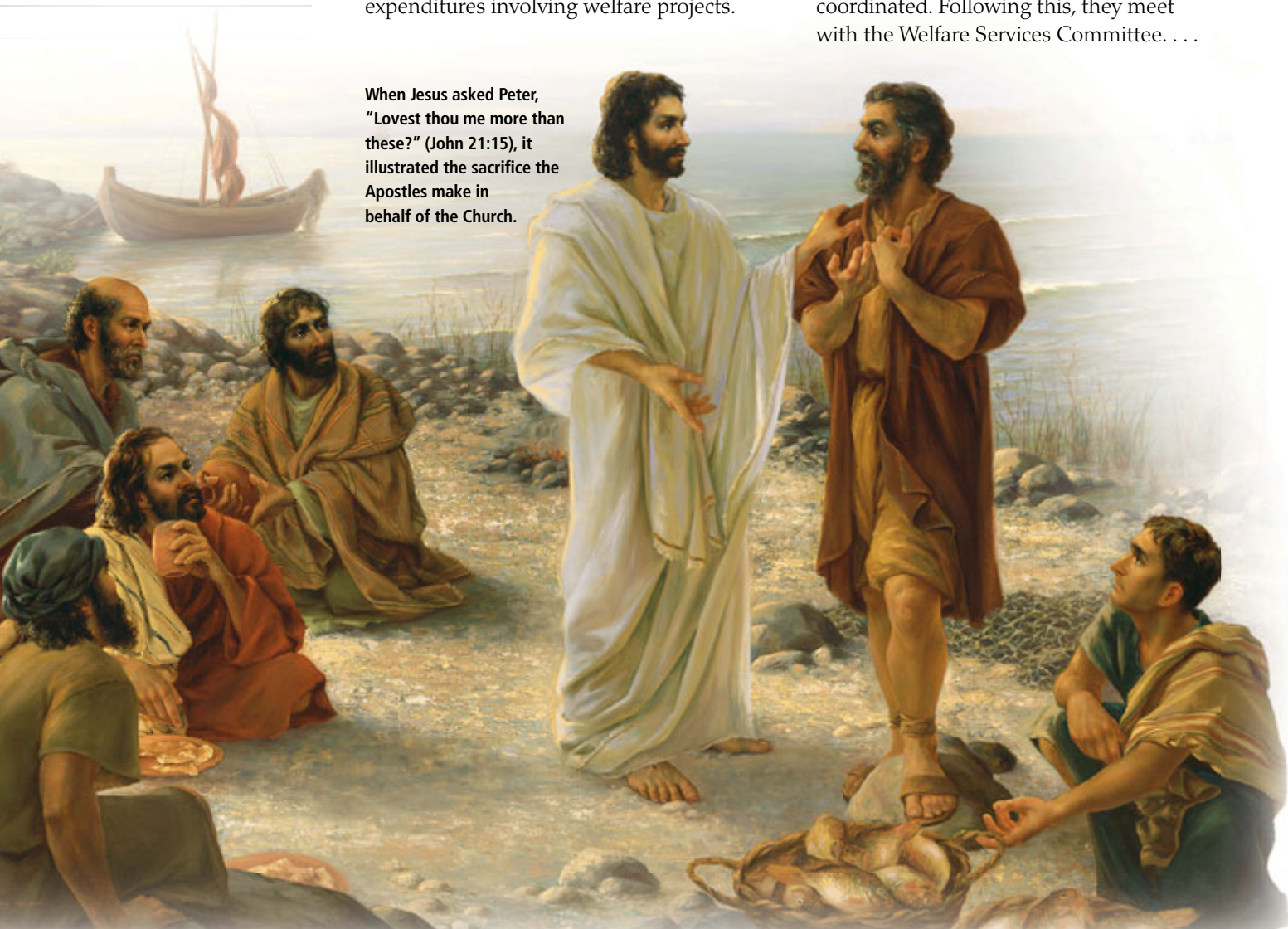
"Their decisions also involve the selection of new temple presidencies, when and where new temples should be built, and other matters to be discussed when meeting with the Council of the Twelve Apostles and with the Presiding Bishopric. They also plan solemn assemblies and area conferences throughout the world.

"Tuesday morning at 10 A.M. they meet with the Expenditures Committee. . . . This is where heads of different departments present their expenditure requirements for consideration, and allocations are made. Examples include requests by the Physical Facilities Department for acquisition of lands and of buildings such as stake or ward houses, mission homes, visitors centers, and so on, and discussions of the costs of maintenance. Also, the Presiding Bishopric presents requests for expenditures involving welfare projects.

"Wednesday First Presidency meetings are used for hearing reports from heads of different departments that come directly under the First Presidency, such as the Historical, Personnel, and Public Communications departments. Appointments for important visitors are also scheduled for Wednesday mornings where possible. . . .

"Once a month on Wednesdays the First Presidency meets with the Combined Church Board of Education and Board of Trustees to deal with all matters affecting universities and colleges, institutes and seminaries, and other Church schools. Also, on one Wednesday each month they meet with the Coordinating Council. . . . Here they discuss and decide on policies, procedures, and questions of administration to see that all divisions of responsibility are properly clarified and coordinated. Following this, they meet with the Welfare Services Committee. . . .

When Jesus asked Peter, "Lovest thou me more than these?" (John 21:15), it illustrated the sacrifice the Apostles make in behalf of the Church.



“On Thursday mornings at 10 A.M. they join with the Council of the Twelve in the upper room of the temple, where the Twelve have been convened since 8 A.M. It is in this room that the leadership of the Church has been directed by the Lord since the temple was completed. Here one experiences a special spiritual feeling, and at times senses the presence of some of these great leaders who have gone on before. Portraits of the twelve Presidents of the Church, and also of Hyrum, the Patriarch, hang on the walls. There are also paintings of the Savior at the Sea of Galilee where he called some of his apostles, and others portraying his crucifixion and his ascension. Here we are reminded of the many great leaders who have sat in this council room, and under the direction of the Lord great decisions were made.

“As the First Presidency enters this room at ten o’clock on Thursday mornings, we shake hands with all members of the Twelve, then change to our temple robes. We sing, kneel in prayer, and then join in a prayer circle at the altar, after which we change to our street clothes.

“After discussing the minutes of the previous meeting, we consider such matters as the following: approval of changes in bishoprics as recommended by stake presidents—previously discussed in the meeting of the Twelve . . . ; changes in stake, ward, mission, and temple organizations throughout the Church, including boundaries and officers; officers and administration of auxiliary organizations; matters brought in by the heads of different departments; and our reports of stake conferences and other activities during the week, such as funerals, speaking engagements, and so forth. It is in this body that any change in administration or policy is considered and approved, and it then becomes the official policy of the Church. . . .

“On the first Thursday of every month the First Presidency meets with all the General Authorities—the members



President George Albert Smith (center) and his counselors, J. Reuben Clark Jr. and David O. McKay

of the Twelve, the Seventy, and the Presiding Bishopric. In this meeting all are advised of any changes in programs or procedures and instructed in their duties or responsibilities. The President calls on members to bear their testimonies, after which we all dress in our temple clothes, partake of the sacrament, and have a prayer circle with all members present participating. At the conclusion of the prayer all, other than the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve, are dismissed, and those remaining change to their street clothes and carry on with the regular business of the Thursday meetings. A recording secretary makes a report of all that is said and done.

“ . . . Friday at 9 A.M. the Presiding Bishopric meets with the First Presidency to give reports and discuss matters affecting the administration” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1979, 64, 67–69; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1979, 45–48; emphasis added).

### Doctrinal Interpretation Is the Right and Responsibility of the First Presidency

- The First Presidency is the final authority for doctrinal interpretation in the Church. President Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994) explained: “**Doctrinal interpretation is the province [function] of the First**





President Joseph Fielding Smith (seated) with his counselors, N. Eldon Tanner and Harold B. Lee

**Presidency.** The Lord has given that stewardship to them by revelation. No teacher has the right to interpret doctrine for the members of the Church" ("The Gospel Teacher and His Message," in *Charge to Religious Educators*, 2nd ed. [1982], 51–52; emphasis added).

- Elder L. Tom Perry of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles explained that other General Authorities also look to the First Presidency for doctrinal interpretation:



Elder L. Tom Perry

"The Lord surely understood the need to keep His doctrines pure and to trust their interpretation to only one source. Of course, we are all admonished to study and gain as much

knowledge as we can possibly obtain in this life. We are encouraged to discuss and exchange ideas with one another to further our understanding. However, the Lord has only one source for the declaration of His basic fundamental doctrines. Even as General Authorities of the Church, we are instructed, 'In order to preserve the uniformity of doctrinal and policy interpretation, you are asked to refer to the Office of the First Presidency for consideration [of] any doctrinal or policy questions which are not clearly defined in the scriptures or in the *General Handbook of Instructions*.'

"In this way, conflict and confusion and differing opinions are eliminated" (in Conference Report, Oct. 1994, 22; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1994, 19).

- President James E. Faust declared: "Who is to declare the doctrine of the Church? It is well established by revelation and practice that the current President of the Church and his counselors have the keys to declare the doctrine of the Church. The investiture of this authority comes from revelation. The Presidency are constituted 'a quorum . . . to receive the oracles for the church' (D&C 124:126)" (in Conference Report, Oct. 1985, 9; or in *Ensign*, Nov. 1985, 9).

### What the First Presidency Says Is Scripture

- President Marion G. Romney (1897–1988) of the First Presidency taught that the First Presidency speaks the words Jesus Christ would declare if He were here in person:
 

"Today the Lord is revealing his will to all the inhabitants of the earth, and to members of the Church in particular, on the issues of this our day through the living prophets, with the First Presidency at the head. What they say as a presidency is what the Lord would say if he were here in person. This is the rock foundation of Mormonism. . . . When the Prophet Joseph Smith was asked what



the difference was between the Latter-day Saint Church and the sectarian churches of the world, he said, ‘We have the Holy Ghost,’ by which he meant that by the power of the Holy Ghost the will of our Father is revealed to the minds of the leaders of this Church. So I repeat again, **what the presidency say as a presidency is what the Lord would say if he were here, and it is scripture.** It should be studied, understood, and followed, even as the revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants and other scriptures. Those who follow this course will not interpret what they say as being inspired by political bias or selfishness; neither will they say that the brethren are uninformed as to the circumstances of those affected by their counsel; or that their counsels cannot be accepted because they are not prefaced by the quotation, ‘Thus saith the Lord.’

“Those . . . who will through mighty prayer and earnest study inform themselves as to what these living prophets say, and act upon it, will be visited by the spirit of the Lord and know by the spirit of revelation that they speak the mind and will of the Father” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1945, 90; emphasis added).

### Church Members Are to Sustain the First Presidency

- The scriptures teach that “the confidence, faith, and prayer of the church” uphold the First Presidency (D&C 107:22). We have a sacred obligation to sustain the First Presidency of the Church.
- While serving as a counselor to President Joseph Fielding Smith, President Harold B. Lee (1899–1973) spoke about how the counselors in the First Presidency

and all Church members sustain the President of the Church:

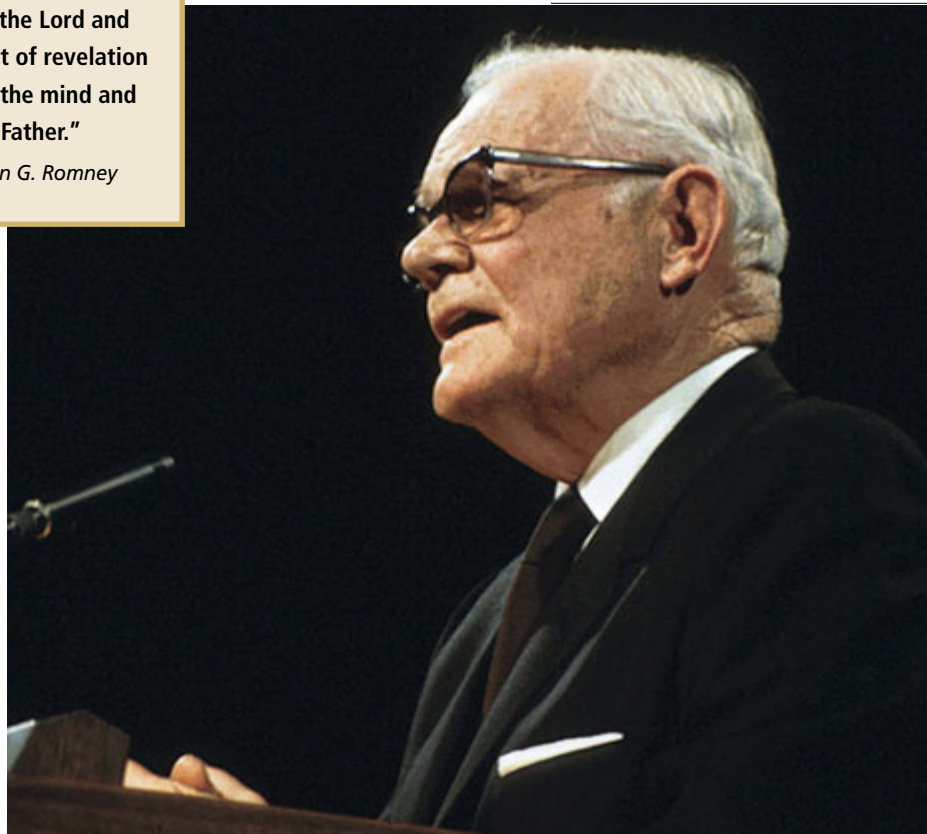
“As I thought of the role of President Tanner and myself as his counselors, I thought of a circumstance in the life of Moses, when the enemies of the church in that day were just as they are in this day. They were threatening to overcome and tear down and to stop the work of the church. As Moses sat upon a hill and raised the rod of his authority, or the keys of his priesthood, Israel prevailed over their enemies; but as the day wore on, his hands became heavy and began to droop at his side. And so they held up his hands so they would not be weakened and the rod would not be lowered. He would be sustained so that the enemies

of the church would not prevail over the saints of the Most High God. (See Exod. 17:8–12.)

“I think that is the role that President

**“Those . . . who will through mighty prayer and earnest study inform themselves as to what these living prophets say, and act upon it, will be visited by the spirit of the Lord and know by the spirit of revelation that they speak the mind and will of the Father.”**

*President Marion G. Romney*



Notes

Tanner and I have to fulfill. The hands of President Smith may grow weary. They may tend to droop at times because of his heavy responsibilities; but as we uphold his hands, and as we lead under his direction, by his side, the gates of hell will not prevail against you and against Israel. Your safety and ours depends upon whether or not we follow the ones whom the Lord has placed to preside over his church. . . .

“Let’s keep our eye on the President of the Church and uphold his hands as President Tanner and I will continue to do” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1970, 153; or *Improvement Era*, Dec. 1970, 126–27).

- President George Albert Smith (1870–1951), while serving as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, explained the obligation we have as we sustain the First Presidency: “I rejoice today in being permitted to meet with you in this general conference and in being permitted to raise my hand to sustain those whom our

heavenly Father has called to preside over us. It must be a source of strength to the President of this Church to look into the faces of thousands of honest men and women and observe them raise their hand in covenant with our Father in heaven, and sustain him in the office to which he has been called as president of this great Church. The obligation that we make when we raise our hands under such circumstances, is a most sacred one. It does not mean that we will go quietly on our way and be willing that the prophet of the Lord shall direct this work, but it means,—if I understand the obligation I assumed when I raised my hand—that we will stand behind him; we will pray for him; we will defend his good name, and we will strive to carry out his instructions as the Lord shall direct him to offer them to us while he remains in that position. So it is a power of strength that has been reared today to our beloved president . . . and his counselors, as we voted for them in this solemn assembly” (in Conference Report, June 1919, 40).

- President Boyd K. Packer of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles compared the members of the First Presidency to grand mountain peaks and encouraged Church members to sustain the First Presidency:

“North of [Salt Lake City] in the Wasatch Range stand three mountain peaks. The poet would describe them as mighty pyramids of stone. The center one, the highest of the three, the map would tell you is Willard Peak. But the pioneers called them ‘The Presidency.’ If you should go to Willard, look to the east, and up, way up, there stands ‘The Presidency.’

“Thank God for the presidency. Like those peaks, they stand with nothing above them but the heavens. They need our sustaining vote. It is sometimes lonely in those lofty callings of leadership—for their calling is not to please man, but to please the Lord. God bless these three

Like these peaks above Willard, Utah, the First Presidency are “as mighty pyramids of stone.”



great and good men" (in Conference Report, Apr. 1971, 123; or *Ensign*, June 1971, 87).

## Church Members Should Look to the First Presidency for Instruction

- The Prophet Joseph Smith (1805–44) taught that “the Presidents or Presidency are over the Church; and **revelations of the mind and will of God to the Church, are to come through the Presidency.** This is the order of heaven, and the power and privilege of this Priesthood” (in *History of the Church*, 2:477; emphasis added). He also admonished Church members to “make yourselves acquainted with those men. . . . Look to the Presidency and receive instruction” (in *History of the Church*, 3:391).
- Teachings of the First Presidency are readily available to Church members. Monthly Church magazines contain regular messages from members of the First Presidency. Similarly, messages from other General Authorities of the Church can be found through the Church website [LDS.org](http://LDS.org).

## Those Who Follow the First Presidency Will Never Go Astray and Shall Inherit Eternal Glory

- President Joseph Fielding Smith made the following promise to individuals who follow the counsel of the First Presidency: “I testify that if we shall look to the First Presidency and follow their counsel and direction, no power on earth can stay or change our course as a church, and as individuals we shall gain peace in this life and be inheritors of eternal glory in the world to come” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1972, 99; or *Ensign*, July 1972, 88).
- Elder Mark E. Petersen (1900–1984) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, after quoting this declaration by President Joseph Fielding Smith, pointed out that “other presidents before him also have



"I testify that  
if we shall look  
to the First  
Presidency and

follow their counsel and direction, no power on earth can stay or change our course as a church, and as individuals we shall gain peace in this life and be inheritors of eternal glory in the world to come."

*President Joseph Fielding Smith*



said that if we follow the leadership of the First Presidency we shall never go astray nor apostatize from the truth" (*The Salt and the Savor* [1976], 29).

**President Thomas S. Monson and members of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles leaving the stand at the conclusion of a session of general conference**

## Points to Ponder

- What are the blessings of the Church being organized with a First Presidency rather than a President serving alone?
- What does it mean to *receive* the First Presidency (see D&C 112:20)? As a Church member, what can you do to better uphold the First Presidency by “confidence, faith, and prayer” (D&C 107:22)?

## Suggested Assignments

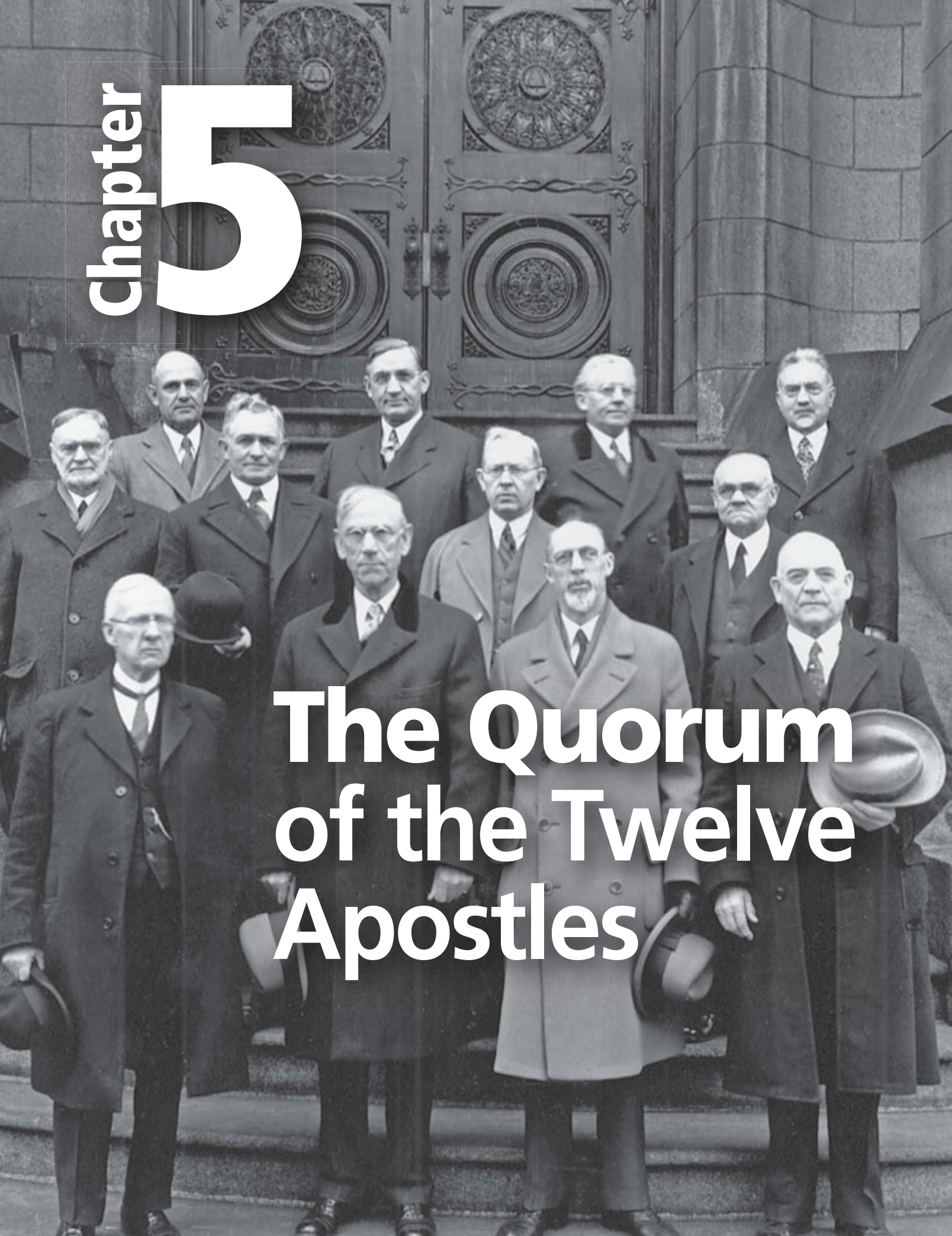
- List the responsibilities of the First Presidency as taught in the scriptures and commentary found in this chapter.
- List the blessings promised those who follow the First Presidency. Write a plan that will help you study the words of the First Presidency more frequently.
- From the most recent general conference issue of the *Ensign* or *Liahona*, read the talks given by the members of the First Presidency. Highlight what they have said that applies particularly in your life.

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# chapter 5

## The Quorum of the Twelve Apostles



## Introduction

Speaking of his fellow quorum members, President Boyd K. Packer of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said:

“The present Twelve are very ordinary people. They are not, as the original Twelve were not, spectacular individually, but collectively the Twelve are a power.

“We come from a variety of occupations. We are scientists, lawyers, teachers.

“Elder Nelson was a pioneer heart surgeon. He performed thousands of surgical operations. . . .

“Several in this quorum were military men—a sailor, marines, pilots.

“They have held various positions in the Church: home teachers, teachers, missionaries, quorum presidents, bishops, stake presidents, mission presidents, and of most importance, husbands and fathers.

“They all are students and teachers of the gospel of Jesus Christ. What unites us is our love of the Savior and His Father’s children and our witness that He stands at the head of the Church.

“Almost to a man, the Twelve come from humble beginnings, as it was when He was here. The living Twelve are welded together in the ministry of the gospel of Jesus Christ. When the call came, each has put down his nets, so to speak, and followed the Lord.

“President Kimball is remembered for his statement, ‘My life is like my shoes—to be worn out in service.’ That applies to all members of the Twelve. We also wear ourselves out in service of the Lord, and we do so willingly” (in Conference Report, Apr. 2008, 84; or *Ensign*, May 2008, 86; see also *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Spencer W. Kimball* [2006], xxxvi).

As you study this chapter, seek to strengthen your personal testimony of the Apostles by learning of their roles and responsibilities. They lead the Church with the authority of sacred priesthood keys that authorize them to carry the gospel to the world and to be special witnesses for Jesus Christ.

## Commentary

### Apostles Are Part of the Foundation of the Lord’s True Church

- The Apostle Paul taught that faithful Saints are “of the household of God; and are **built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets**, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone” (Ephesians 2:19–20; emphasis added).
- In an April 6, 1980, proclamation, the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles declared, “We solemnly affirm that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is in fact a restoration of the Church established by the Son of God, when in mortality he organized his work

upon the earth; that it carries his sacred name, even the name of Jesus Christ; [and] that it is built upon a foundation of Apostles and prophets, he being the chief cornerstone” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1980, 75; or *Ensign*, May 1980, 52).

### Apostles Know and Bear Special Witness That Jesus Is the Christ

- President Harold B. Lee (1899–1973) shared an experience he had while helping two missionaries understand the reality of an Apostle’s witness of Jesus Christ:  
“Some years ago two missionaries came to me with what seemed to them to be a very difficult question. A young

## Chapter 5 Overview

1. *Apostles are part of the foundation of the Lord’s true Church.*
2. *Apostles know and bear special witness that Jesus is the Christ.*
3. *Apostles hold all the priesthood keys of the kingdom of God.*
4. *Duties of the Twelve Apostles.*
5. *Apostles are sent to build God’s kingdom throughout the earth.*
6. *Apostles have the keys to open the preaching of the gospel to the nations.*
7. *The decisions of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles are unanimous.*

Notes

Methodist minister had laughed at them when they had said that apostles were necessary today in order for the true church to be upon the earth. They said that the minister said, 'Do you realize that when the apostles met to choose one to fill the vacancy caused by the death of Judas, they said it had to be one who



Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, 1979



**"These twelve disciples of Christ are supposed to be eye and ear witnesses of the divine mission of Jesus Christ. It is not permissible for them to say, I believe, simply; I have accepted it simply because I believe it. Read the revelation, the Lord informs us they must *know*, they must get the knowledge for themselves."**

*President Joseph F. Smith*

accompanied with them and had been a witness of all things pertaining to the mission and resurrection of the Lord? How can you say you have apostles, if that be the measure of an apostle?

"And so these young men said, 'What shall we answer?'

"I said to them, 'Go back and ask your minister friend two questions. First, how did the Apostle Paul gain what was necessary to be called an apostle? He didn't know the Lord, had no personal acquaintance. He hadn't accompanied the apostles. He hadn't been a witness of the ministry nor the resurrection of the Lord. How did he gain his testimony sufficient to be an apostle? And the second question you ask him is, How does he know that all who are today apostles have not likewise received that witness?'

"I bear witness to you that those who hold the apostolic calling may, and do, know of the reality of the mission of the Lord" (*Stand Ye in Holy Places* [1974], 64–65).

- Apostles know for certain by personal revelation that Jesus is the Christ and that He lives as a resurrected being. The scriptures explain that "with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 4:33). President Joseph F. Smith (1838–1918) explained the sacred nature of their calling: "These twelve disciples of Christ are supposed to be eye and ear witnesses of the divine mission of Jesus Christ. It is not permissible for them to say, I believe, simply; I have accepted it simply because I believe it. Read the revelation, the Lord informs us they must *know*, they must get the knowledge for themselves. It must be with them as though they had seen with their eyes and heard with their ears and they know the truth. That is their mission, to testify of Jesus Christ and Him crucified and risen from the dead and clothed now with almighty power at the right hand of God, the Savior of the world. That is their mission, and their duty, and that is the doctrine and the truth that it is their duty to preach to the world and see that it is preached to the world" (in Conference Report, Apr. 1916, 6).

- In Doctrine and Covenants 107:23 we read, "The twelve traveling councilors are called



President Boyd K. Packer

to be the Twelve Apostles, or special witnesses of the name of Christ in all the world." President Boyd K. Packer spoke of the sacred nature of an apostolic witness of Jesus Christ:

"Occasionally during the past year I have been asked a question. Usually it comes as a curious, almost an idle, question about the qualifications to stand as a witness for Christ. The question they ask is, 'Have you seen Him?'

"That is a question that I have never asked of another. I have not asked that question of my brethren in the Quorum, thinking that it would be so sacred and so personal that one would have to have



some special inspiration, indeed, some authorization, even to ask it.

“There are some things just too sacred to discuss. . . .

“There are those who hear testimonies borne in the Church, by those in high station and by members in the wards and branches, all using the same words—‘I know that God lives; I know that Jesus is the Christ,’ and come to question, ‘Why cannot it be said in plainer words? Why aren’t they more explicit and more descriptive? Cannot the apostles say more?’

“How like the sacred experience in the temple becomes our personal testimony. It is sacred, and when we are wont to put it into words, we say it in the same way—all using the same words. The apostles declare it in the same phrases with the little Primary or Sunday School youngster. ‘I know that God lives and I know that Jesus is the Christ.’ . . .

“I said there was a question that could not be taken lightly nor answered at all without the prompting of the Spirit. I have not asked that question of others, but I have heard them answer it—but not when they were asked. They have answered it under the prompting of the Spirit, on sacred occasions, when ‘the Spirit beareth record.’ (D&C 1:39.)

“I have heard one of my brethren declare: ‘I know from experiences, too sacred to relate, that Jesus is the Christ.’

“I have heard another testify: ‘I know that God lives; I know that the Lord lives. And more than that, I know the Lord.’

“It was not their words that held the meaning or the power. It was the Spirit. ‘. . . for when a man speaketh by the power of the Holy Ghost the power of the Holy Ghost carrieth it unto the hearts of the children of men.’ (2 Ne. 33:1.)

“I speak upon this subject in humility, with the constant feeling that I am the least in every way of those who are called to this holy office. . . .

“Now, I wonder with you why one such as I should be called to the holy apostleship. There are so many qualifications that I lack. There is so much in my effort to serve that is wanting. As I have pondered on it, I have come to only one single thing, one qualification in which there may be cause, and that is, I have *that* witness.

“I declare to you that I know that Jesus is the Christ. I know that he lives. He was born in the meridian of time. He taught his gospel, was tried, was crucified. He rose on the third day. He was the first fruits of the resurrection. He has a body of flesh and bone. Of this I bear testimony. Of him I am a witness” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1971, 123–25; or *Ensign*, June 1971, 87–88).

Notes

**Apostles know  
that Jesus is the Christ.**



Notes

- President Howard W. Hunter (1907–95) shared his apostolic witness:

“As an ordained Apostle and special witness of Christ, I give to you my solemn witness that Jesus Christ is in fact the Son of God. He is the Messiah prophetically anticipated by Old Testament prophets. He is the Hope of Israel, for whose coming the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had prayed during the long centuries of prescribed worship.

“Jesus is the Beloved Son who submitted to the will of his Father by being baptized by John in the river Jordan. He was tempted of the devil in the wilderness but did not yield to the temptations. He preached the gospel, which is the power of God unto salvation, and commanded all men everywhere to repent and be baptized. He forgave sins, speaking as one having authority, and he demonstrated his power to do so by healing the lame and the halt and by opening the eyes of the blind and unstopping the ears of the deaf. He changed water to wine, calmed the troubled waters of Galilee, and walked on that same water as if on solid ground. He confounded the wicked rulers who

sought his life and brought peace to troubled hearts.

“Finally, he suffered in the Garden of Gethsemane and died on the cross, giving his sinless life as a ransom for every soul who enters mortality. He did in very fact rise from the dead on the third day, becoming the firstfruits of the resurrection and overcoming death.

“The resurrected Lord has continued his ministry of salvation by appearing, from time to time, to mortal men chosen by God to be his witnesses, and by revealing his will through the Holy Ghost.

“It is by the power of the Holy Ghost that I bear my witness. I know of Christ’s reality as if I had seen with my eyes and heard with my ears. I know also that the Holy Spirit will confirm the truthfulness of my witness in the hearts of all those who listen with an ear of faith” (“An Apostle’s Witness of Christ,” *Ensign*, Jan. 1984, 70).

### Apostles Hold All the Priesthood Keys of the Kingdom of God

- President Henry B. Eyring of the First Presidency testified of the importance of the apostolic priesthood keys:

“Paul testified to the Ephesians that Christ was at the head of His Church. And he taught that the Savior built His Church on a foundation of apostles and prophets, who hold all the keys of the priesthood. . . .

“Paul looked forward to the ministry of the Prophet Joseph Smith, when the heavens would be opened again. It happened. John the Baptist came and conferred on mortals the priesthood of Aaron and the keys of the ministering of angels and of baptism by immersion for the remission of sins.

“Ancient apostles and prophets returned and conferred upon Joseph the keys they held in mortality. Mortal men were ordained to the holy apostleship in February of 1835. Priesthood keys were

Heavenly messengers restored essential priesthood keys. These keys are held by the members of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.



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given to the Twelve Apostles in the latter part of March 1844.

“The Prophet Joseph Smith knew that his death was imminent. He knew that the precious priesthood keys and the apostleship must not be and would not be lost again.

“One of the Apostles, Wilford Woodruff, left us this account of what happened in Nauvoo as the Prophet spoke to the Twelve:

“‘On that occasion the Prophet Joseph rose up and said to us: “Brethren, I have desired to live to see this temple built. I shall never live to see it, but you will. I have sealed upon your heads all the keys of the kingdom of God. I have sealed upon you every key, power, principle that the God of heaven has revealed to me. Now, no matter where I may go or what I may do, the kingdom rests upon you.”’

“Every prophet that followed Joseph, from Brigham Young to [the current President of the Church], has held and exercised those keys and has held the sacred apostleship” (in Conference Report, Oct. 2004, 28–29; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2004, 27–28).

- Elder Bruce R. McConkie (1915–85) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles explained that only the senior Apostle on the earth can fully exercise the apostolic priesthood keys:

“The keys of the kingdom of God—the right and power of eternal presidency by which the earthly kingdom is governed—these keys, having first been revealed from heaven, are given by the spirit of revelation to each man who is both ordained an Apostle and set apart as a member of the Council of the Twelve.

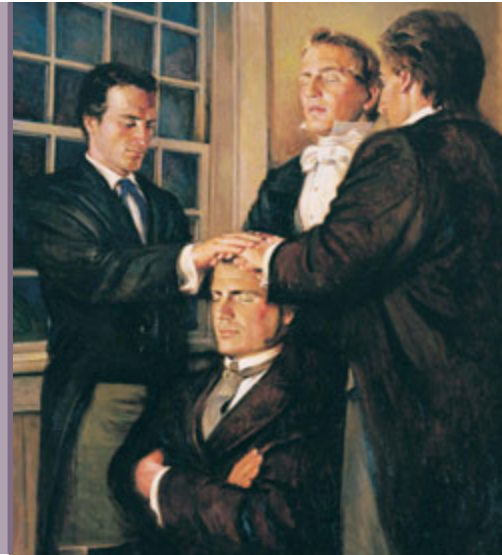
“But since keys are the right of presidency, they can only be exercised in their fulness by one man on earth at a time. He is always the senior Apostle, the presiding Apostle, the presiding high priest, the presiding elder. He alone can



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*President Wilford Woodruff*



The Prophet Joseph Smith ordaining Parley P. Pratt

give direction to all others, direction from which none is exempt.

“Thus, **the keys, though vested in all of the Twelve, are used by any one of them to a limited degree only, unless and until one of them attains that seniority** which makes him the Lord’s anointed on earth” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1983, 29; or *Ensign*, May 1983, 22–23; emphasis added).

- The keys held by the Twelve as prophets, seers, and revelators entitle them to



President Joseph Fielding Smith

perform the duties given them by the President of the Church. President Joseph Fielding Smith (1876–1972) explained: “The Twelve Apostles may receive revelation to guide them *in their labors* and to

assist them in setting in order the priesthood and organizations of the Church. When they are sent out into a stake by authority, they have all the power to receive revelation, to make changes, and to conduct the affairs according to the will of the Lord. But they do not receive revelations for the guidance of the whole Church, only wherein one of them may succeed to the Presidency. In other words **the right to receive revelation and guidance for the whole Church is vested in each one of the Twelve, which he**





Quorum of the Twelve Apostles,  
1997

could exercise should he succeed to the Presidency. But this power is *dormant while the President of the Church is living*" (*Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols. [1954–56], 3:157; emphasis added).

### Duties of the Twelve Apostles

- "The twelve traveling councilors are called to be the Twelve Apostles, or special witnesses of the name of Christ in all the world—thus differing from other officers in the church in the duties of their calling. . . .

"The Twelve are a Traveling Presiding High Council, to officiate in the name of the Lord, under the direction of the Presidency of the Church, agreeable to the institution of heaven; to build up the church, and regulate all the affairs of the same in all nations, first unto the Gentiles and secondly unto the Jews.

"The Seventy are to act in the name of the Lord, under the direction of the Twelve or the traveling high council, in building up the church and regulating all the affairs of the same in all nations, first unto the Gentiles and then to the Jews;

"The Twelve being sent out, holding the keys, to open the door by the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ,

and first unto the Gentiles and then unto the Jews. . . .

"It is the duty of the Twelve, also, to ordain and set in order all the other officers of the church, agreeable to the revelation" (D&C 107:23, 33–35, 58).

- Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles spoke about the duties of the Apostles:

"The Lord revealed why 'he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets.' It is 'for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

"'Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God' [Ephesians 4:11–13].

"Thus the ministry of the Apostles—the First Presidency and the Twelve—is to bring about that unity of the faith and to proclaim our knowledge of the Master. Our ministry is to bless the lives of all who will learn and follow the 'more excellent way' of the Lord [1 Corinthians 12:31; Ether 12:11]. And we are to help people prepare for their potential salvation and exaltation" (in Conference Report, Apr. 2008, 5–6; or *Ensign*, May 2008, 7–8).

- President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) outlined the basic duties of the Apostles in this way: "The First Presidency and the Council of the Twelve Apostles, called and ordained to hold the keys of the priesthood, have the authority and responsibility to govern the Church, to administer its ordinances, to expound its doctrine, and to establish and maintain its practices. **Each man who is ordained an Apostle and sustained a member of the Council of the Twelve is sustained as a prophet, seer, and revelator**" (in Conference Report, Apr. 1994, 74; or *Ensign*, May 1994, 54; emphasis added).
- After the members of the Quorum of the Twelve were chosen and ordained,

President Oliver Cowdery, then Assistant President of the Church, gave them the following charge:

“You have been ordained to this holy Priesthood, you have received it from those who have the power and authority from an angel; you are to preach the Gospel to every nation. Should you in the least degree come short of your duty, great will be your condemnation; for the greater the calling the greater the transgression. I therefore warn you to cultivate great humility; for I know the pride of the human heart. Beware, lest the flatterers of the world lift you up; beware, lest your affections be captivated by worldly objects. Let your ministry be first. Remember, the souls of men are committed to your charge; and if you mind your calling, you shall always prosper.

“... It is necessary that you receive a testimony from heaven for yourselves. . . .

“... Strengthen your faith; cast off your doubts, your sins, and all your unbelief; and nothing can prevent you from coming to God. Your ordination is not full and complete till God has laid His hand upon you. We require as much to qualify us as did those who have gone before us; God is the same. If the Savior in former days laid His hands on His disciples, why not in latter days?

“... You are as one; you are equal in bearing the keys of the Kingdom to all nations. You are called to preach the Gospel of the Son of God to the nations of the earth; it is the will of your heavenly Father, that you proclaim His Gospel to

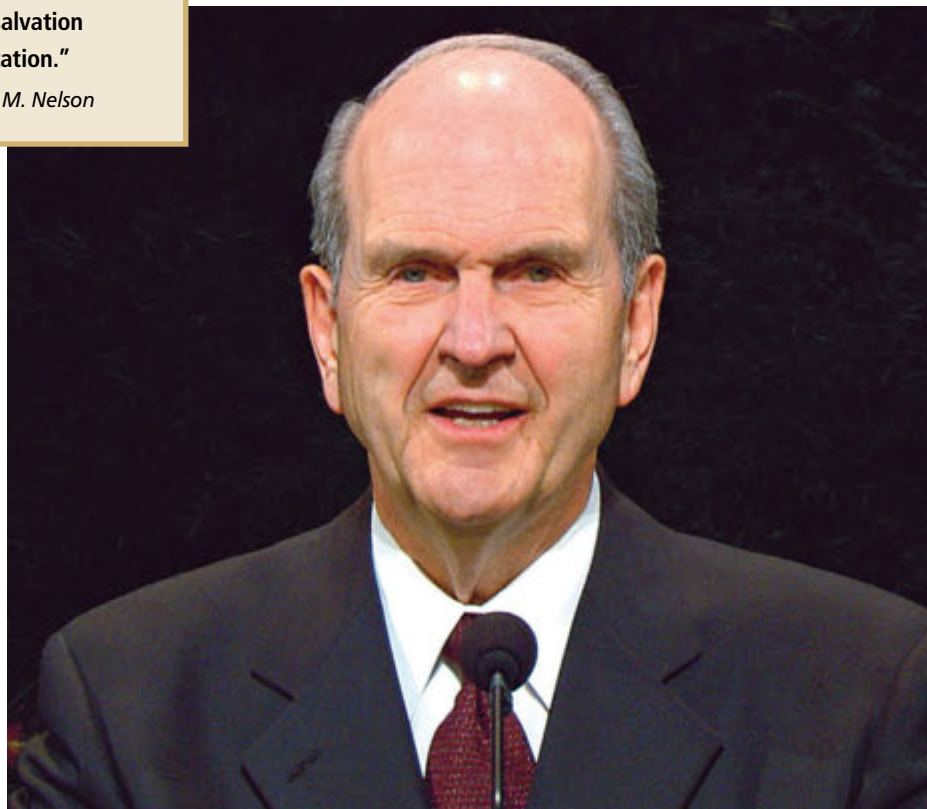
the ends of the earth and the islands of the sea.

“Be zealous to save souls. The soul of one man is as precious as the soul of another. . . . The adversary has always sought the life of the servants of God; you are therefore to be prepared at all times to make a sacrifice of your lives, should God require them in the advancement and building up of His cause. Murmur not at God. Be always prayerful; be always watchful. . . .

“... We now exhort you to be faithful to fulfil your calling; there must be no lack here; you must fulfil in all things; . . . all nations have a claim on you; you are bound together as the Three Witnesses were; notwithstanding you can part and meet, and meet and part again, till your heads are silvered over with age” (in *History of the Church*, 2:195–96, 198; emphasis added).

**“The ministry of the Apostles—the First Presidency and the Twelve—is to bring about that unity of the faith and to proclaim our knowledge of the Master. Our ministry is to bless the lives of all who will learn and follow the ‘more excellent way’ of the Lord [1 Corinthians 12:31; Ether 12:11]. And we are to help people prepare for their potential salvation and exaltation.”**

*Elder Russell M. Nelson*



Notes

## Apostles Are Sent to Build God's Kingdom throughout the Earth

- President Gordon B. Hinckley explained the meaning of the word *apostle*: “**The word *apostle*, in its origin, literally means ‘one sent forth.’** If that definition were stated to say ‘one sent forth with certain authority and responsibility,’ it would properly describe the calling as it was given at the time our Lord walked the earth, and as it has been given in our time” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1984, 73; or *Ensign*, May 1984, 50; emphasis added).
- President Brigham Young (1801–77) explained that building up God’s kingdom throughout the world is an apostolic duty: “The calling of an Apostle is to build up the Kingdom of God in all the world; it is the Apostle that holds the keys of this power, and nobody else. **If an Apostle magnifies his calling, he is the word of the Lord to his people all the time**” (*Discourses of Brigham Young*, sel. John A. Widtsoe [1954], 139; emphasis added; see also *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young* [1997], 139).
- Elder L. Tom Perry of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles noted that the

responsibilities of the Apostles carry them throughout the world: “An Apostle today continues to be ‘one sent forth.’ The conditions we face are different from those of the early Brethren as we make our journeys to fulfill our assignment. Our manner of travel to all corners of the earth is very different from that of the early Brethren. However, our assignment remains the same as that which was given by the Savior as He instructed His called Twelve to ‘go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world’ (Matthew 28:19–20)” (in Conference Report, Oct. 2004, 25; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2004, 24).

- Elder Bruce C. Hafen of the Seventy related the worldwide travels of Elder Neal A. Maxwell (1926–2004) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in a single year: “Regardless of the rotating individual assignments in a given year, each Apostle in the worldwide Church has increasingly come to feel a worldwide ministry, embracing not only all Church programs but also all continents and all people. Consider, as an illustration, Elder Maxwell’s official list of conference and special meeting assignments for 1993: [See chart on page 65.]”

Elder Hafen continued: “This was quite an array of major assignments, all over the world in one year—including mainland China and Mongolia. Yet it was typical of the pattern followed by all of the Twelve” (*A Disciple’s Life: The Biography of Neal A. Maxwell* [2002], 458–59).

- The First Presidency sometimes assigns members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles to oversee the work of the Church in specific parts of the world for a time. Although developments in transportation and communication technology allow the Apostles to



“Our assignment remains the same as that which was given by the Savior as He instructed His called Twelve to ‘go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them

in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you . . .’ (Matthew 28:19–20).”

Elder L. Tom Perry





Notes

Elder Neal A. Maxwell's Conference and Special Meeting Assignments: 1993		
Date	Location	Assignment
January 30	Manti, Utah	Stake Conference
February 13	Provo, Utah	Regional Conference (BYU married stakes)
February 20	Salt Lake City	Dedication of Cathedral of the Madeleine
February 27	El Paso, Texas	Stake Conference
March 6	Hermosillo, Mexico	Regional Conference
March 13	Toronto, Canada	Stake Conference
April 9–19	Mongolia and Beijing, China	Dedicate Mongolia, visit Chinese officials
April 25–26	San Diego, California	San Diego Temple Dedication
May 1	Ogden, Utah	Regional Conference
May 22	Paris, France	Stake Conference
June 12	Twin Falls, Idaho	Regional Conference
June 19	Springville, Utah	Stake Reorganization
July 4	Provo, Utah	Freedom Festival
August 22	Salt Lake City	Training new Utah North Area stake presidents
August 28	Nyssa, Oregon	Stake Conference
September 11	Montreal, Canada	Regional Conference
October 16	Raleigh, North Carolina	Regional Conference
October 23	Hattiesburg, Mississippi	Regional Conference
November 6	Tokyo, Japan	Mission Presidents' Seminar, Area training
November 13	Seoul, Korea	Area training
November 17	Hong Kong	Area training
November 20	Manila, Philippines	Mission Presidents' Seminar, Area training
December 4	Chicago, Illinois	Chicago Temple workers' meeting

(Bruce C. Hafen, *A Disciple's Life: The Biography of Neal A. Maxwell* [2002], 459.)

supervise these regions from Church headquarters in the United States, they have, on occasion, resided in other countries. For example, Elder Dallin H. Oaks and Elder Jeffrey R. Holland served as Area Presidents and lived in the Philippines and Chile, respectively, from 2002 to 2004, and Elder L. Tom Perry served as Area President while living in central Europe from 2004 to 2005.

- President Gordon B. Hinckley taught about the Apostles' responsibility to minister to the inhabitants of the world: "Their one chief concern must be the advancement of the work of God in the earth. They must be concerned with the welfare of our Father's children, both those within the Church and those out of the Church. They must do all that they can to give comfort to those who mourn, to give strength to those who are weak, to



President Thomas S. Monson visiting the Tongan mission in 1965. Because of their extensive traveling, the Apostles are familiar with the needs of the worldwide Church.

give encouragement to those who falter, to befriend the friendless, to nurture the destitute, to bless the sick, to bear witness, not out of belief but out of a certain knowledge of the Son of God, their Friend and Master, whose servants they are" (in Conference Report, Apr. 1984, 73; or *Ensign*, May 1984, 49–50).

### Apostles Have the Keys to Open the Preaching of the Gospel to the Nations

- The Prophet Joseph Smith (1805–44) taught that the Twelve Apostles "are to hold the keys of this ministry, to unlock the door of the Kingdom of heaven unto all nations, and to preach the Gospel to every creature. This is the power, authority, and virtue of their apostleship" (in *History of the Church*, 2:200; see also *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* [2007], 141).
- The Twelve, under the direction of the First Presidency, "open the doors" to missionary work through negotiations with government officials and other national leaders. They also exercise priesthood power to dedicate and rededicate lands for the preaching of the gospel. President Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994) explained: **"Proselyting the gospel in nations of the world only occurs when a member**

### of the First Presidency or the Twelve dedicates the land for that purpose.

The Church works within the laws of each nation to ensure that Church practices do not conflict with the law or the customs of that nation. We do not proselyte where the laws of that country prohibit the practice" ("150th Year for Twelve: 'Witnesses to All the World,'" *Church News*, Jan. 27, 1985, 3; emphasis added).

- Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles shared the experience of his grandfather using apostolic keys to dedicate South America in 1925:

"Elder Parley P. Pratt visited South America in 1851. The work was attempted again in 1925. On Christmas Day of 1925, in the park of Tres de Febrero in Buenos Aires, Argentina, my grandfather, Elder Melvin J. Ballard, dedicated South America for the preaching of the gospel. I quote from the dedicatory prayer:

"Bless the presidents, governors, and the leading officials of these South



Elder Melvin J. Ballard

American countries, that they may kindly receive us and give us permission to open the doors of salvation to the people of these lands. . . .

"And now, oh, Father, by the authority of the blessing and appointment by the President of the Church, and *by the authority of the holy apostleship* which I have, I turn the key, unlock, and open the door for the preaching of the Gospel in all these South American nations, and do rebuke and command to be stayed every power that would oppose the preaching of the Gospel in these lands; and we do bless and dedicate these nations of this land for the preaching of thy Gospel. And we do all this that salvation may come to all men, and that thy name may be honored and glorified in this part of the land of Zion' (*Crusader for Righteousness* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966], p. 81; italics added)"

(in Conference Report, Apr. 1986, 14; or *Ensign*, May 1986, 12).

### The Decisions of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles Are Unanimous

- To teach how unanimity is achieved in the governing councils of the Church, President Boyd K. Packer of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles explained:

“I can best tell you how you are governed today . . . by explaining the principles and procedures we follow in the meetings of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. These procedures protect the work from the individual weaknesses apparent in all of us.

“When a matter comes before the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in a temple meeting, one thing that is determined very quickly is whether it is of serious consequence or not. One or another of us will see in an apparently innocent proposal issues of great and lasting consequence.

“It is clear from the revelations that the decisions of the presiding quorums **‘must be by the unanimous voice of the same.’** . . . Unless this is the case, their decisions are not entitled to the same blessings’ (D&C 107:27, 29). In order to ensure that to be the case, matters of consequence are seldom decided in the meeting where they are proposed. And, if the proposal is a part of a larger issue, sufficient time is taken to ‘bring us all along’ so that it is clear that each of us has either a clear *understanding* of the issue or, as is often the case, has a very clear *feeling* about it. . . .

“It would be unthinkable to deliberately present an issue in such a way that approval depended upon how it was maneuvered through channels, who was presenting it, or who was present or absent when it was presented.

“Often one or more of us is away during regular meetings. We all know that the work must proceed and will accept the judgment of our brethren.

However, if a matter has been studied by one of the Quorum in more detail than by the others or he is more familiar with it either by assignment, experience, or personal interest, the matter is very often delayed until he can be in on the discussion.

“And, always, if one of us cannot understand an issue or feels unsettled about it, it is held over for future discussion.

“I remember occasions when a delegation was sent to the hospital to discuss with a member of the Council who was ill some urgent matter that could not be delayed but which needed that ‘unanimous consent.’ There are occasions, as well, when one of us will leave the

Notes



meeting temporarily to call one of our number who is abroad to get his feelings on a matter under discussion.

“There is a rule we follow: A matter is not settled until there is a *minute entry* to evidence that all of the Brethren in council assembled (not just one of us, not just a committee) have come to a unity of feeling. Approval of a matter in principle is not considered authority to act until a minute entry records the action taken—usually when the minutes are approved in the next meeting.

Quorum of the  
Twelve Apostles, 2008



Notes

“Sometimes an afterthought keeps one of us restless over a decision. That is never dismissed lightly. It cannot be assumed that that restless spirit is not in fact the Spirit of Revelation.

“That is how we function—in council assembled. That provides safety for the Church and a high comfort level for each of us who is personally accountable. Under the plan, men of ordinary capacity may be guided through counsel and inspiration to accomplish extraordinary things” (“I Say unto You, Be One,” *Brigham Young University 1990–91 Devotional and Fireside Speeches* [1991], 83–84; emphasis added).

- President James E. Faust (1920–2007) of the First Presidency explained why unanimity is so important: **“This requirement of unanimity provides a check on bias and personal idiosyncrasies. It ensures that God rules through the Spirit,** not man through majority or compromise. It ensures that the best wisdom and experience is focused on an issue before the deep,

unassailable impressions of revealed direction are received. It guards against the foibles of man” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1989, 11; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1989, 10; emphasis added).

- The men who serve in the Quorum of the Twelve are men of strong opinions and differing backgrounds. Nonetheless, President Gordon B. Hinckley noted an absence of discord or feelings of enmity between the brethren:

“Any major questions of policy, procedures, programs, or doctrine are considered deliberately and prayerfully by the First Presidency and the Twelve together. These two quorums, the Quorum of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve, meeting together, with every man having total freedom to express himself, consider every major question. . . .

“And now I quote . . . from the word of the Lord: ‘And every decision made by either of these quorums must be by the unanimous voice of the same; that is, every member in each quorum must be

agreed to its decisions, in order to make their decisions of the same power or validity one with the other’ (D&C 107:27).

**“No decision emanates from the deliberations of the First Presidency and the Twelve without total unanimity among all concerned.** At the outset in considering matters, there may be differences of opinion. These are to be expected. These men come from different backgrounds. They are men who think for themselves. But before a final decision is reached,

Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, 1984



there comes a unanimity of mind and voice.

“This is to be expected if the revealed word of the Lord is followed. Again I quote from the revelation:

“The decisions of these quorums, or either of them, are to be made in all righteousness, in holiness, and lowliness of heart, meekness and long suffering, and in faith, and virtue, and knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness and charity;

“Because the promise is, if these things abound in them they shall not be unfruitful in the knowledge of the Lord’ (D&C 107:30–31).

“I add by way of personal testimony that during the twenty years I served as a member of the Council of the Twelve and during the nearly thirteen years that I have served in the First Presidency, there has never been a major action taken where this procedure was not observed. I have seen differences of opinion presented in these deliberations. Out of this very process of men speaking their minds has come a sifting and winnowing of ideas and concepts. But I have never observed serious discord or personal enmity among my Brethren. I have, rather, observed a beautiful and



**“I have never observed serious discord or personal enmity among my Brethren. I have, rather, observed a beautiful and remarkable thing—the coming together, under the**

**directing influence of the Holy Spirit and under the power of revelation, of divergent views until there is total harmony and full agreement. Only then is implementation made.”**

*President Gordon B. Hinckley*



remarkable thing—the coming together, under the directing influence of the Holy Spirit and under the power of revelation, of divergent views until there is total harmony and full agreement. Only then is implementation made. That, I testify, represents the spirit of revelation manifested again and again in directing this the Lord’s work” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1994, 74–75; or *Ensign*, May 1994, 54, 59; emphasis added).

**President Howard W. Hunter, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, and President James E. Faust enjoying a moment together**

## Points to Ponder

- In what ways are the responsibilities of an Apostle different from those of other Church authorities?
- What priesthood keys do members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles hold? How have those keys blessed you and your family?
- How do the Apostles keep us from being “tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness”? (see Ephesians 4:11–14).
- What responsibility do members of the Church have to be united behind the direction of the Twelve Apostles and

First Presidency? What obligations do we have if we find ourselves not completely in harmony with them?

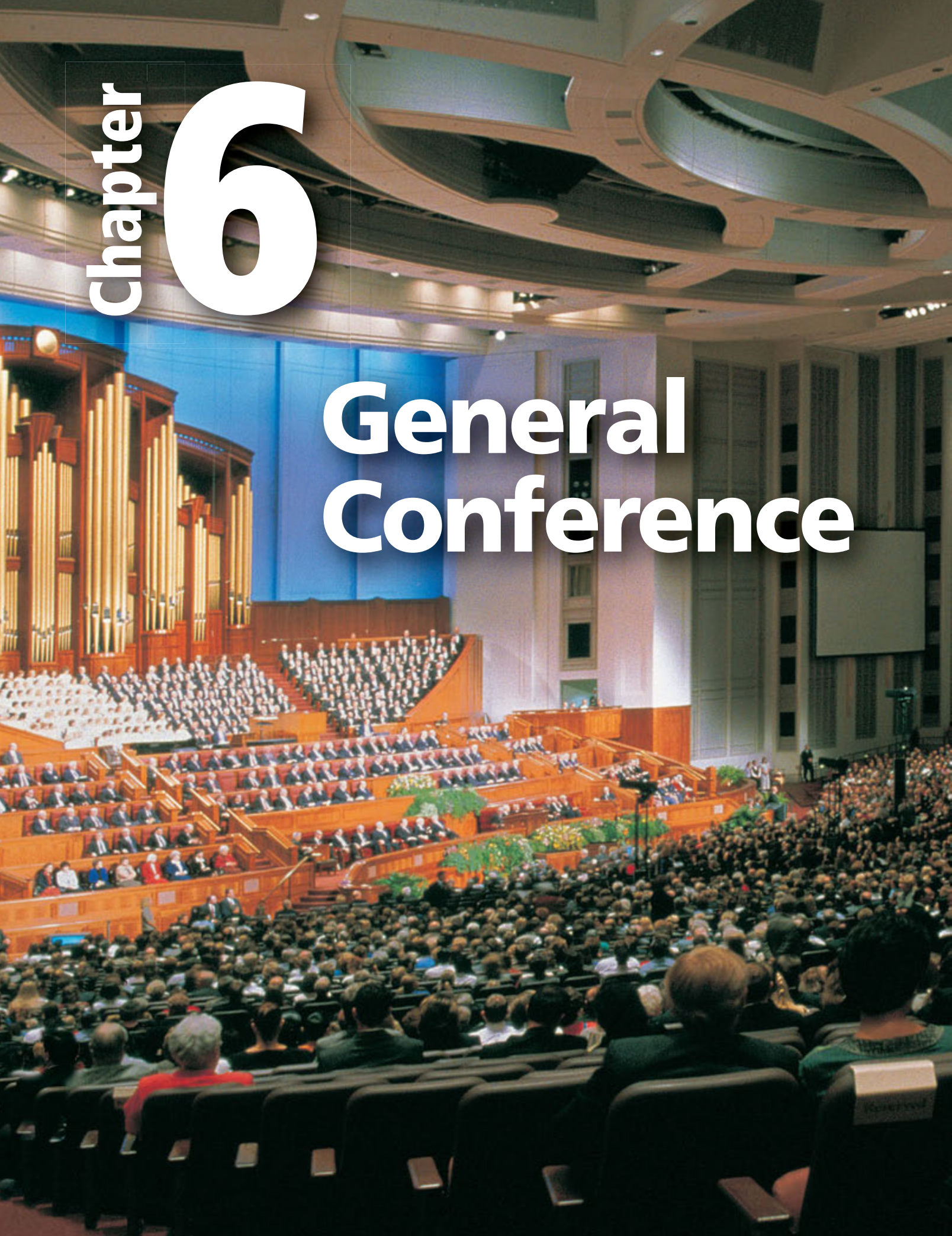
## Suggested Assignments

- On a piece of paper or in a journal, briefly outline the calling and responsibilities of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles as taught in this lesson.
- On a piece of paper or in a journal, record experiences you have had when the words of the Apostles have given you comfort, direction, or spiritual insight.
- In an upcoming family home evening or discussion, share what you have learned while studying this lesson.



# chapter 6

## General Conference





## Introduction

The Lord instructed the Prophet Joseph Smith (1805–44) that “the several elders composing this church of Christ are to meet in conference . . . from time to time” for the purpose of conducting “whatever church business is necessary to be done at the time” (D&C 20:61–62). About two months after the organization of the Church, the first conference was held on June 9, 1830. The Prophet Joseph Smith recorded the following concerning this first conference: “Our numbers were about thirty, besides whom many assembled with us, who were either believers or anxious to learn. Having opened by singing and prayer, we partook together of the emblems of the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. We then proceeded to confirm several who had lately been baptized, after which we called out and ordained several to the various offices of the Priesthood. Much exhortation and instruction was given, and the Holy Ghost was poured

out upon us in a miraculous manner—many of our number prophesied, whilst others had the heavens opened to their view” (in *History of the Church*, 1:84–85).

Just as in 1830, general conferences continue to provide “much exhortation and instruction,” and “the Holy Ghost [is] poured out” in these sacred gatherings. This chapter emphasizes the purposes of general conferences of the Church and underscores our role in accepting the counsel and warnings of the Lord’s servants. As you study this chapter, evaluate your current attitudes toward general conference and consider what you might do to receive greater spiritual renewal and personal instructions from the messages of Church leaders.

## Commentary

### The Purposes of General Conferences

- President David O. McKay (1873–1970) summarized the purposes of general conferences: “(1) To inform the membership of general conditions—whether the Church is progressing or retrogressing, economically, ecclesiastically, or spiritually. (2) To commend true merit. (3) To express gratitude for divine guidance. (4) To give instruction ‘in principles, in doctrine, in the law of the gospel.’ (5) To proclaim the restoration, with divine authority to administer in all the ordinances of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and to declare, quoting the Apostle Peter, that ‘there is none other name under heaven given among men’ than Jesus Christ ‘whereby we must be saved.’ (Acts 4:12.) (6) To admonish and

inspire to continue in greater activity” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1954, 7).

### General Conference Provides Opportunities for Spiritual Renewal

- President Howard W. Hunter (1907–95) taught that general conference is a time to strengthen our testimony and resolve to improve our lives: “**Conference time is a season of spiritual revival when knowledge and testimony are increased and solidified** that God lives and blesses those who are faithful. It is a time when an understanding that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, is burned into the hearts of those who have the determination to serve him and keep his commandments.

## Chapter 6 Overview

1. *The purposes of general conferences.*
2. *General conference provides opportunities for spiritual renewal.*
3. *The words of the prophets delivered through the Spirit during general conference are latter-day scripture.*
4. *The benefit and value of latter-day revelation.*
5. *We commit to heed and support those we sustain in general conference.*
6. *Our preparation affects what we gain from general conference.*
7. *General conference is a call to action.*
8. *Applying the teachings of general conference will improve our lives.*

Notes

Conference is the time when our leaders give us inspired direction in the conduct of our lives—a time when souls are stirred and resolutions are made to be better husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, more obedient sons and daughters, better friends and neighbors” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1981, 15; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1981, 12; emphasis added).

- During the concluding session of the October 2006 general conference, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles explained that hearing God’s voice through His servants is vital to spiritual survival in our day of dangers and difficulties: “Our times are turbulent and difficult. We see wars internationally and distress domestically. Neighbors all around us face personal heartaches and family sorrows. Legions know fear and troubles of a hundred kinds. This reminds us that when those mists of darkness enveloped the travelers in Lehi’s vision of the tree of life, it enveloped *all* of the participants—the righteous as well as the unrighteous, the young along with the elderly, the new convert and seasoned member alike. In that allegory all face opposition and travail, and **only the rod of iron—the declared word of God—can bring them safely through.** We *all* need that rod. We all need that word. No one is safe without

The iron rod—the word of God—brings us safely through the mists of darkness.



it, for in its absence any can ‘[fall] away into forbidden paths and [be] lost,’ as the record says [1 Nephi 8:28; see also vv. 23–24]. How grateful we are to have heard God’s voice and felt the strength of that iron rod in this conference these past two days” (in Conference Report, Oct. 2006, 111–12; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2006, 105; emphasis added).

### The Words of the Prophets Delivered through the Spirit during General Conference Are Latter-day Scripture

- Scripture is the mind and will of God revealed through His servants (see D&C 68:4). The Apostle Peter declared, “Prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Peter 1:21). Such scripture has been written and preserved in the standard works as priceless gems of eternal truth. However, the standard works are not the only source of scripture. Elder James E. Talmage (1862–1933) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles identified the connection between the standard works and the words of living prophets: “The Standard Works of the Church constitute the written authority of the Church in doctrine. Nevertheless, the Church holds itself in readiness to receive additional light and knowledge ‘pertaining to the Kingdom of God’ through divine revelation. We believe that God is as willing today as He ever has been to reveal His mind and will to man, and that He does so through His appointed servants—prophets, seers, and revelators—invested through ordination with the authority of the Holy Priesthood. **We rely therefore on the teachings of the living oracles of God as of equal validity with the doctrines of the written word**” (*Articles of Faith* [1968], 7; emphasis added).
- President Joseph Fielding Smith (1876–1972) taught about latter-day scripture:

"When one of the brethren stands before a congregation of the people today, and the inspiration of the Lord is upon him, he speaks that which the Lord would have him speak. It is just as much scripture as anything you will find written in any of these records, and yet we call these the standard works of the Church. We depend, of course, upon the guidance of the brethren who are entitled to inspiration.

"There is only one man in the Church at a time who has the right to give revelation for the Church, and that is the President of the Church. But that does not bar any other member in this Church from speaking the word of the Lord, as indicated here in this revelation, section 68 [see D&C 68:2–6], but a revelation that is to be given as these revelations are given in this book, to the Church, will come through the presiding officer of the Church; yet, the word of the Lord, as spoken by other servants at the general conferences and stake conferences, or wherever they may be when they speak that which the Lord has put into their mouths, is just as much the word of the Lord as the writings and the words of other prophets in other dispensations" (*Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols. [1954–56], 1:186).

- President J. Reuben Clark Jr. (1871–1961) explained that we must be worthy and receive inspiration from the Holy Ghost in order to know when the Brethren speak by the power of the Holy Ghost:

"The question is, how shall we know when the things they have spoken were said as they were 'moved upon by the Holy Ghost'? [D&C 68:3].

"I have given some thought to this question, and the answer thereto so far as I can determine, is: **We can tell when the speakers are 'moved upon by the Holy Ghost' only when we, ourselves, are 'moved upon by the Holy Ghost.'**



**"There is only one man in the Church at a time who has the right to give revelation for the Church, and that is the President of the Church. But that does not bar any other member in this Church from speaking the word of the Lord."**

*President Joseph Fielding Smith*



**President Thomas S. Monson**  
speaking in general conference

"In a way, this completely shifts the responsibility from them to us to determine when they so speak" ("When Are Church Leaders' Words Entitled to Claim of Scripture?" *Church News*, July 31, 1954, 9; emphasis added; see also 2 Peter 1:20–21).

- President Howard W. Hunter spoke about general conference addresses in relation to latter-day scripture: "Much inspired counsel by prophets, seers, revelators, and other General Authorities of the Church is given during general conference. Our modern-day prophets have encouraged us to make the reading of the conference editions of our Church magazines an important and regular part of our personal study. Thus, **general conference becomes, in a sense, a supplement to or an extension of the Doctrine and Covenants**. In addition to the conference issues of the Church magazines, the First Presidency writes monthly articles that contain inspired counsel for our welfare" (*The Teachings of Howard W. Hunter*, ed. Clyde J. Williams [1997], 212; emphasis added).

### The Benefit and Value of Latter-day Revelation

- President Harold B. Lee (1899–1973) observed the importance of accepting and heeding revelation:

"Some of the most profound thinkers in our generation, other than Church





General conference is like a modern Liahona and is deserving of our faith, heed, and diligence (see 1 Nephi 16:28).

members, have realized the need for revelations from the Lord in order to give vitality to the teachings of a church. It was Ralph Waldo Emerson who said:

“The Hebrew and Greek scriptures contain immortal sentences that have been the bread of life to millions, but they do not have epical integrity, are fragmentary and are not shown in their order to the intellect. . . . Nor can the Bible be closed until the last great man is born. . . . Men have come to speak of revelation as somewhat long ago given and done, as if God were dead. That injury to faith throttles the preachers and the goodliest of institutions become an uncertain and inarticulate voice. The need was never greater for revelation than it is today.’ [This contains statements from an address at the Harvard Divinity School, July 15, 1838, and *Representative Men*, “Uses of Great Men.”]

“ . . . There have been in this day, our day, men commissioned of the Lord with power and authority, and he has given them the inspiration to teach and proclaim these things to the world for the purpose the Lord has set forth . . . that the important things might be counseled by the elders of the Church to

this people according to the inspiration and revelation they receive from time to time. As the Latter-day Saints go home from this conference, it would be well if they consider seriously the importance . . . of this conference and let it be the guide to their walk and talk during the next six months. These are the important matters the Lord sees fit to reveal to this people in this day” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1946, 67–68).

- President Thomas S. Monson encouraged us to study the conference addresses found in the Church magazines: “We remind you that the messages we have heard during this conference will be printed in the . . . *Ensign* and *Liahona* magazines. **As we read and study them, we will be additionally taught and inspired.** May we incorporate into our daily lives the truths found therein” (in Conference Report, Oct. 2009, 109; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2009, 109; emphasis added).
- Elder Lowell M. Snow of the Seventy compared general conference to the Liahona, which the Lord provided to guide Lehi and his family (see 1 Nephi 16:10, 16, 29):

“The Lord provides guidance and direction to individuals and families today, just as He did with Lehi. This very general conference is a modern Liahona, a time and place to receive inspired guidance and direction that prospers us and helps us follow God’s path through the more fertile parts of mortality. Consider that we are gathered to hear counsel from prophets and apostles who have prayed mightily and prepared carefully to know what the Lord would have them say. We have prayed for them and for ourselves that the Comforter would teach us the mind and will of God. Surely there is no better time or place for the Lord to direct His people than in this conference.

**“The teachings of this conference are the compass of the Lord.** In the coming days you may, as Lehi did, walk out your

front door and find a *Liahona*, *Ensign*, or other Church publication in your mailbox, and it will contain the proceedings of this conference. As with the *Liahona* of old, this new writing will be plain and easy to read and will give you and your family understanding concerning the ways and paths of the Lord” (in Conference Report, Oct. 2005, 101; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2005, 97; emphasis added).

### We Commit to Heed and Support Those We Sustain in General Conference

- Sustaining Church officers has always been a part of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The scriptures teach that “no person is to be ordained to any office in this church, where there is a regularly organized branch of the same, without the vote of that church” (D&C 20:65). In the very first meeting of the Church, on April 6, 1830, “Joseph [Smith] asked those present if they were willing to accept him and Oliver [Cowdery] as their teachers and spiritual advisers. Everyone raised their hands in the affirmative” (*Church History in the Fulness of Times*, 2nd ed. [Church Educational System manual, 2003], 67–68; see also *History of the Church*, 1:77). The Lord later affirmed that “**all things shall be done by common consent in the church**, by much prayer and faith” (D&C 26:2; emphasis added). We have the opportunity in general conference to sustain the First Presidency, the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, members of the Quorums of Seventy, and other general officers of the Church by common consent.

- When President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) was sustained as the President of the Church, he explained the commitment we make when we sustain our Church leaders:

“This morning we all participated in a solemn assembly. That is just what the name indicates. It is a gathering of the membership where every individual stands

equal with every other in exercising with soberness and in solemnity his or her right to sustain or not to sustain those who, under the procedures that arise out of the revelations, have been chosen to lead.

“The procedure of sustaining is much more than a ritualistic raising of the hand. **It is a commitment to uphold, to support, to assist those who have been selected.** . . .

“Your uplifted hands in the solemn assembly this morning became an expression of your willingness and desire to uphold us, your brethren and your servants, with your confidence, faith, and prayer” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1995, 70–71; or *Ensign*, May 1995, 51; emphasis added).

- Elder David B. Haight (1906–2004) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles spoke of the covenant we make with God when we sustain our Church leaders: “When we sustain the President of the Church by our uplifted hand, it not only signifies that we acknowledge before God that he is



“When we sustain the President of the Church by our uplifted hand, it not only signifies that we acknowledge before God that he is the rightful possessor of all the priesthood keys; it also means that we covenant with God that we will abide by the direction and the counsel that come through His prophet. It is a solemn covenant.”

Elder David B. Haight



the rightful possessor of all the priesthood keys; it also means that we covenant with God that we will abide by the direction and the counsel that come through His prophet. It is a solemn covenant” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1994, 17; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1994, 14–15).

Notes

The opportunity to sustain our Church leaders is accompanied by solemn obligations.

Notes

- Doctrine and Covenants 107:22 states that the members of the First Presidency are “upheld by the confidence, faith, and prayer of the church.” On the day Thomas S. Monson, Henry B. Eyring, and Dieter F. Uchtdorf were sustained in a solemn assembly as the First Presidency, President Eyring taught the following about what it means to sustain our leaders:

“For us to sustain those who have been called today, we must examine our lives, repent as necessary, pledge to keep the Lord’s commandments, and follow His servants. The Lord warns us that if we do not do those things, the Holy Ghost will be withdrawn, we will lose the light which we have received, and we will not be able to keep the pledge we have made today to sustain the Lord’s servants in His true Church. . . .

“On this day especially it would be wise to determine to sustain with our faith



President Henry B. Eyring

and our prayers all those who serve us in the kingdom. I am personally aware of the power of the faith of members of the Church to sustain those who have been called. In the last few weeks **I have felt in powerful ways the prayers and the faith of people whom I do not know and who know me**

**only as someone called to serve through the keys of the priesthood.** President Thomas S. Monson will be blessed by your sustaining faith. His family will likewise have blessings poured out upon them because of your faith and your prayers. All those who were sustained by you today will be sustained by God because of their faith and yours” (in Conference Report, Apr. 2008, 20; or *Ensign*, May 2008, 21; emphasis added).

- The following statement illustrates the commitment Joseph F. Smith (1838–1918) had to sustain those he recognized as the Lord’s servants: “I was called on a mission after I had served four years on a homestead and it was only necessary for me to remain one year more to prove up and get my title to the land; but President Young said he wanted me to go to Europe on a mission, to take charge of the mission there. I did not say to him, ‘Brother Brigham, I cannot go; I have got a homestead on my hands, and if I go I will forfeit it.’ I said to Brother Brigham, ‘All right, President Young; whenever you want me to go I will go; **I am on hand to obey the call of my file leader.**’ And I went. I lost the homestead, and yet I never complained about it; I never charged Brother Brigham with having robbed me because of this. I felt that I was engaged in a bigger work than securing 160 acres of land. I was sent to declare the message of salvation to the nations of the earth. I was called by the authority of God on the earth, and I did not stop to consider myself and my little personal rights and privileges; I went as I was called, and God sustained and blessed me in it” (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph F. Smith* [1998], 210; emphasis added).

### Our Preparation Affects What We Gain from General Conference

- Elder Paul V. Johnson of the Seventy described how he learned to make general conference a priority in his life:

Set aside time to study conference addresses.





“My mother loved general conference. She always tuned in the radio and TV and turned the volume loud enough that it was difficult to find a place in the house where conference couldn’t be heard. She wanted her children to listen to the talks and would ask us from time to time what we remembered. Once in a while I went outside with one of my brothers to play ball during a Saturday conference session. We would take a radio with us because we knew our mother might quiz us later. We would play ball and occasionally take a break to listen carefully so we could report to Mom. I doubt my mother was fooled when we both happened to remember the same thing from an entire session.

**“That is no way to listen to conference. I have since repented. I have grown to love general conference,** I’m sure partly because of my mother’s love for the words of the living prophets. I remember listening to the sessions of a particular conference all alone in an apartment while I was in college. The Holy Ghost witnessed to my soul that Harold B. Lee, the President of the Church at that time, was truly a prophet of God. This happened before I went into the mission field, and I was excited to testify of a living prophet because I had come to know for myself. I have had that same witness about each of the prophets since that time.

“When I was in the mission field, the Church didn’t have the satellite system, and the country where I served did not have broadcasts of general conference. My mother sent me audiotapes of the sessions, and I listened to them over and over again. I grew to love the voices and the words of the prophets and apostles. . . .

“Decide now to make general conference a priority in your life. Decide to listen carefully and follow the teachings that are given. Listen to or read the talks more than once to better understand and follow the counsel. As you do these



**"Decide now to make  
general conference a  
priority in your life."**

## Decide to listen carefully

and follow the teachings that are given. Listen to or read the talks more than once to better understand and follow the counsel. As you do these things, the gates of hell will not prevail against you, the powers of darkness will be dispersed from before you, and the heavens will shake for your good."

*Elder Paul V. Johnson*



things, the gates of hell will not prevail against you, the powers of darkness will be dispersed from before you, and the heavens will shake for your good" (in Conference Report, Oct. 2005, 53–55; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2005, 51–52; emphasis added).

**We can receive personal revelation as we study conference addresses. The Holy Ghost will help us make personal application of the messages.**

- President Boyd K. Packer of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles emphasized the importance of our preparation for general conference: “In a few days there opens another general conference of the Church. The servants of the Lord will counsel us. You may listen with anxious ears and hearts, or you may turn that counsel aside. . . . **What you shall gain will depend not so much upon their preparation of the messages as upon your preparation for them**” (*Follow the Brethren*, Brigham Young University Speeches of the Year [Mar. 23, 1965], 10; emphasis added).
- Consider the following ideas in your preparation:
  1. **Plan and set aside personal time to listen to and study the conference addresses.** This may require that you remove yourself from distractions or interruptions. Make the environment in which you view, listen to, or study the conference addresses acceptable to the Holy Ghost.

[illegible]

Notes

2. **Pray in faith** that you will receive messages of significance in your own life. Pray for the Church leaders as they prepare and deliver their addresses.
  3. Before listening to or studying the conference addresses, **list personal questions or concerns for which you are seeking answers.** By taking a spiritual inventory you may notice aspects of your life where you want to improve. In a journal or notebook, record the answers and impressions you receive during the conference.
  4. After listening to or studying the conference addresses, **recommit to improve your life** in those areas that impressed you.
- President Gordon B. Hinckley extended the following invitation at the beginning of a general conference:  
 “You have gathered to be encouraged, to be

inspired, to be lifted and directed as members of the Church. . . .

“You have gathered to be helped with your temporal concerns, your failures, and your victories. You have come to hear the word of the Lord taught by those who, not of their own choosing, have been called as teachers in this great work.

“You have prayed that you might hear things that will help you with your problems and add strength to your faith. . . .

“I invite you to listen, listen if you will by the power of the Spirit, to the speakers who will address you today and tomorrow as well as this evening. If you will do so, I do not hesitate to promise that you will be uplifted, your resolution to do what

is right will be stronger, you will find solutions to your problems and your needs, and you will be led to thank the Lord for what you have heard” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1996, 3–4; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1996, 4–5).

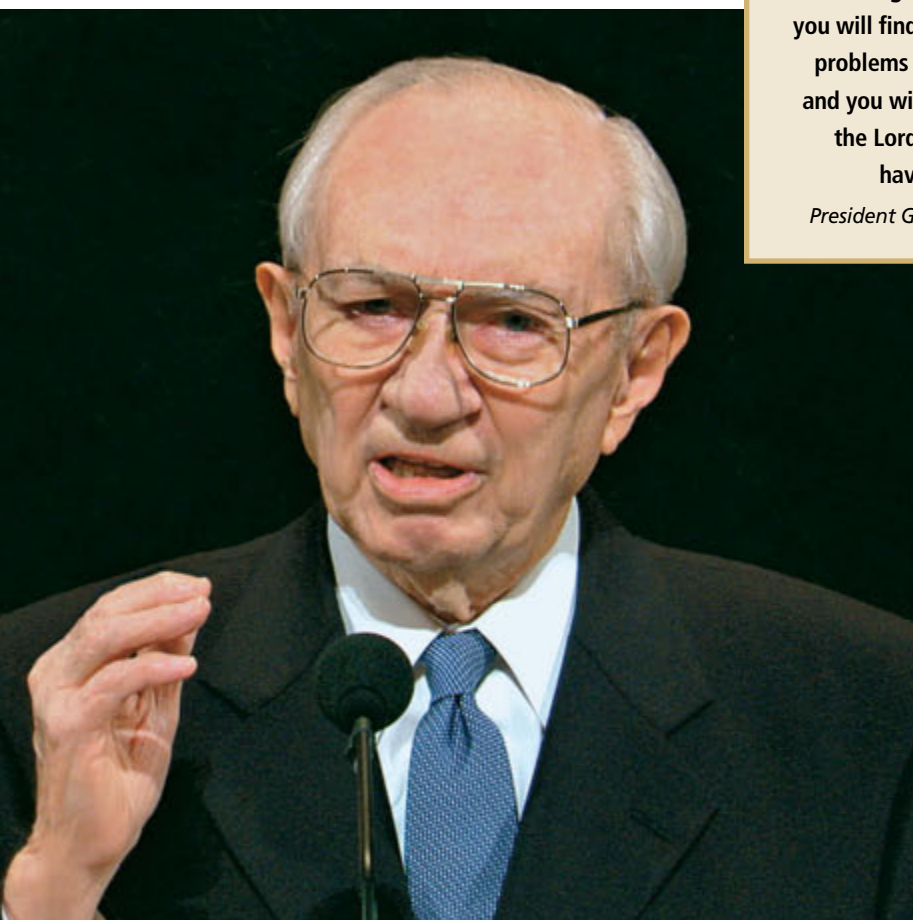
- President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) encouraged us to write down, remember, and act on the thoughts we

receive as we listen to the messages given during general conference:

“We hope that the leaders and the members of the Church who have attended and listened to the conference have been inspired and uplifted. **We hope you have made copious notes of the thoughts that have come to your mind** as the Brethren have addressed you. Many suggestions have been given that will help you as leaders in the perfection of your work. Many helpful thoughts have been given for the perfection of our own lives, and that, of course, is the basic reason for our coming.

**“I do not hesitate to promise that you will be uplifted, your resolution to do what is right will be stronger, you will find solutions to your problems and your needs, and you will be led to thank the Lord for what you have heard.”**

*President Gordon B. Hinckley*



“While sitting here, I have made up my mind that when I go home from this conference this night there are many, many areas in my life that I can perfect. I have made a mental list of them, and I expect to go to work as soon as we get through with conference” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1975, 164; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1975, 111; emphasis added).

## General Conference Is a Call to Action

- During a general conference in 1856, President Brigham Young called on the Saints to go and rescue stranded handcart companies. Using this as an analogy, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught that the spiritual renewal we gain from conference should engage us in service to others:

**“Each of these conferences marks a call to action** not only in our own lives but also on behalf of others around us, those who are of our own family and faith and those who are not. . . .

“As surely as the rescue of those in need [the stranded handcart companies coming west] was the general conference theme of October 1856, so too is it the theme of this conference and last conference and the one to come next spring. It may not be blizzards and frozen-earth burials that we face this conference, but the needy are still out there—the poor and the weary, the discouraged and downhearted, those ‘[falling] away into [the] forbidden paths’ [1 Nephi 8:28] we mentioned earlier, and multitudes who are ‘kept from the truth because they know not where to find it’ [D&C 123:12]. They are all out there with feeble knees, hands that hang down [see D&C 81:5], and bad weather setting in. They can be rescued only by those who have more and know more and can help more. And don’t worry about asking, ‘Where are they?’ They are everywhere, on our right hand and on our left, in our neighborhoods and in the workplace, in



every community and county and nation of this world. Take your team and wagon; load it with your love, your testimony, and a spiritual sack of flour; then drive in any direction. The Lord will lead you to those in need if you will but embrace the gospel of Jesus Christ that has been taught in this conference. Open your heart and your hand to those trapped in the 21st century's equivalent of Martin's Cove and Devil's Gate. In doing so we honor the Master's repeated plea on behalf of lost sheep and lost coins and lost souls [see Luke 15]" (in Conference Report, Oct. 2006, 112; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2006, 106; emphasis added).

## Applying the Teachings of General Conference Will Improve Our Lives

- President Spencer W. Kimball taught the following about the importance of applying what we learn in general conference:

“Sunday night, April 7, the great Tabernacle was closed, the lights turned out, the record[ing] machines stopped, the doors locked, and another historic

Record spiritual guidance received during general conference.

[illegible]





General conference is a time of spiritual renewal.



**"In the [several] two-hour sessions . . . , truths were taught, doctrines expounded, exhortations given, enough to save the whole world from all its ills—and I mean from ALL its ills. A rather complete education in eternal verities was given to millions with a great hope that there were 'ears a'hearing and eyes a'seeing and hearts a'throbing,' convinced of truth."**

*President Spencer W. Kimball*

conference became history. It will have been lost motion—a waste of time, energy, and money—if its messages are not heeded. In the [several] two-hour sessions . . . , truths were taught, doctrines expounded, exhortations given, enough to save the whole world from all its ills—and I mean from ALL its ills. A rather complete education in eternal verities was given to millions with a great hope that there were 'ears a'hearing and eyes a'seeing and hearts a'throbing,' convinced of truth. . . .

"Let no arrogant, self-assured, self-styled intellectual discard the truths there taught and the testimonies there borne, nor argue with the messages and instructions there given. . . .

"I hope you young people all heard the messages of the ages delivered [during general conference]. There will be other conferences every six months. I hope you will get your copy of the [*Ensign* or *Liahona*] and underline the pertinent thoughts and keep it with you for continual reference. No text or volume outside the standard works of the Church should have such a prominent place on your personal library shelves—not for their rhetorical excellence or eloquence of delivery, but for the concepts which point the way to eternal life" (*In the World but Not of It*, Brigham Young University Speeches of the Year [May 14, 1968], 2–3).

- President Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994) described how we could benefit more from general conference:

"My humble prayer is that all of us will follow the counsel and instruction we have received.

"As we have felt the Spirit and made new and sacred resolves, may we now have the courage and fortitude to carry out those resolves.

"For the next six months, your conference edition of the *Ensign* should stand next to your standard works and be referred to frequently. As my dear friend and brother [President] Harold B. Lee said, we should let these conference addresses 'be the guide to [our] walk and talk during the next six months. These are the important matters the Lord sees fit to reveal to this people in this day' (in Conference Report, Apr. 1946, p. 68).

"May we all go to our homes rededicated to the sacred mission of the Church as so beautifully set forth in these conference sessions—to 'invite all to come unto Christ' (D&C 20:59), 'yea, come unto Christ, and be perfected in him' (Moroni 10:32)" (in Conference Report, Apr. 1988, 97; or *Ensign*, May 1988, 84).

- President Gordon B. Hinckley expressed a desire that each Church member would become a better person by applying the teachings given at general conference:

"I hope that we shall ponder with subdued feelings the talks to which we have listened. I hope that we will quietly reflect on the wonderful things we have heard. I hope that we will feel a little more contrite and humble.

"All of us have been edified. **The test will come in the application of the teachings given.** If, hereafter, we are a little more kind, if we are a little more neighborly, if we have drawn nearer to the Savior, with a more firm resolution to follow His teachings and His example, then this conference will have been a

wonderful success. If, on the other hand, there is no improvement in our lives, then those who have spoken will have in large measure failed.

“Those changes may not be measurable in a day or a week or a month. Resolutions are quickly made and quickly forgotten. But, in a year from now, if we are doing better than we have done in the past, then the efforts of these days will not have been in vain.

“We will not remember all that has been said, but there will arise from all of this a spiritual uplift. It may be undefinable, but it will be real. As the Lord said to Nicodemus, ‘The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit’ (John 3:8).

“So it will be with the experience we have enjoyed. And perhaps out of all we have heard, there may be a phrase or a paragraph that will stand out and possess our attention. If this occurs, I hope we will write it down and reflect on it until we savor the depth of its meaning and have made it a part of our own lives.

“In our family home evenings I hope we will discuss with our children these

things and let them taste the sweetness of the truths we have enjoyed. And when the *Ensign* magazine comes out . . . with all of the conference messages, please don’t just throw it aside with the comment that you have heard it all, but read and ponder the various messages. You will find many things that you missed when you listened to the speakers. . . .

“Tomorrow morning we will be back at our jobs, back to our studies, back to whatever constitutes the busy regimen of our lives. But we can have the memories of this great occasion to sustain us” (in Conference Report, Oct. 2000, 114; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2000, 88–89; emphasis added).

Notes

We are encouraged to discuss general conference talks during family home evening lessons.





## Notes

- Elder Paul V. Johnson of the Seventy explained that we need to put into action the messages of general conference:

“In order for the messages of general conference to change our lives, we need to be willing to follow the counsel we hear. The Lord explained in a revelation to the Prophet Joseph Smith ‘that when ye are assembled together ye shall instruct and edify each other, that ye may know . . . how to act upon the points of my law and commandments’ [D&C 43:8]. But knowing ‘how to act’ isn’t enough. The Lord in the next verse said, ‘Ye shall bind yourselves to act in all holiness before me’ [D&C 43:9]. This willingness to take action on what we have learned opens the doors for marvelous blessings. . . .

**“Every time we are obedient to the words of the prophets and apostles we reap great blessings.** We receive more blessings than we can understand at the time, and we continue to receive blessings long after our initial decision to be obedient” (in Conference Report, Oct. 2005, 54; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2005, 52; emphasis added).

- At the closing of the April 1978 general conference, President Spencer W. Kimball said: “Now as we conclude this general

conference, let us all give heed to what was said to us. Let us assume the counsel given applies to *us*, to me. **Let us hearken to those we sustain as prophets and seers, as well as the other brethren, as if our eternal life depended upon it, because it does!”** (in Conference Report, Apr. 1978, 117; or *Ensign*, May 1978, 77; emphasis added).

- President Marion G. Romney (1897–1988) of the First Presidency emphasized how much truth is taught during general conferences: “We have heard enough truth and direction in this conference to bring us into the presence of God if we would follow it. We have been taken on to the spiritual mountain and shown visions of great glory” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1954, 132–33).
- As you commit to apply the teachings of general conference in your life, consider the following suggestions:
  1. **Discuss general conference** with family and friends. Share what you learned, and learn from what they tell you as well.
  2. While you are listening to general conference, when you feel the promptings of the Spirit to do something, **write it down**, and then do it.
  3. **Set goals** that specify how and when you will apply the counsel you receive during general conference. Write down your goals and refer to them often.
  4. **Study the talks** when they come out in the Church magazines or on the Internet so you can gain new insights and renew the spiritual feelings you had. (General conference talks are available to read or listen to on LDS.org; word and topic searches may also be done within the *Ensign* magazines online.)
  5. **Prepare family home evening lessons around conference talks.**

Ponder how the counsel applies to you personally.



**“We have heard enough truth and direction in this conference to bring**

**us into the presence of God if we would follow it. We have been taken on to the spiritual mountain and shown visions of great glory.”**

*President Marion G. Romney*



6. Purchase the DVDs or CDs of general conference, and **watch or listen to them often**, possibly while you commute or travel to help you use your time more wisely.

7. **Copy brief quotations** from conference talks and place them somewhere in your home or apartment where you will see them regularly. Try to memorize them.

Notes



### Points to Ponder

- Do you take notes as you listen to general conference? Are they a general summary of the speakers' comments, or do you record just the things that impress you? Do your notes include impressions from the Spirit that came to you while listening to the speaker? Do they include plans and goals you would like to make that will help you change your life? What instructions given in Doctrine and Covenants 43:8–10 could help you improve your note taking during general conference?
- Consider how you regard the messages of general conference and other talks and writings by General Authorities. How have you applied the exhortation and instruction of the speakers in the past? How will you apply them in the future?
- What blessings are promised those who follow the prophets of God?
- How will you improve your preparation for the next general conference?
- How can your study of the conference addresses influence your study of the scriptures?

### Suggested Assignments

- Using what you learned in this chapter, list specifically what you can do to prepare to receive and apply the Lord's word in general conference. Make a second list of the blessings you can expect to receive as you accomplish what you have written.
- Read Mosiah 5:1–7, and list the effects King Benjamin's address had on his people. What can you do to experience similar effects from general conference?
- Read Ephesians 4:11–14, and list the reasons the Apostle Paul gave for the Lord establishing His Church with prophets and apostles. How does Paul's teaching relate to general conference?
- As you study the conference issues of the *Ensign* or *Liahona* and other talks by the Brethren, highlight specific promises made by those who spoke. Also note what the speakers said we must do to receive promised blessings. Record what you will now do to obtain these blessings.

### The Conference Center



# Chapter 7

## Studying General Conference Addresses



## Introduction

President Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994) taught a principle that is fundamental to this course: “The living prophet has the power of TNT. By that I mean ‘Today’s News Today.’ . . . Therefore, the most important reading we can do is any of the words of the prophet . . . contained each month in our Church magazines. Our marching orders for each six months are found in the general conference addresses, which are printed in the *Ensign* [or *Liahona*] magazine” (“Fourteen Fundamentals in Following the Prophet,” in *1980 Devotional Speeches of the Year* [1981], 27).

President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) also encouraged Church members to obtain a copy of the conference issue of the Church magazines and to make it a part of their gospel library: “I hope you will get your copy of the [*Ensign* or *Liahona*] and underline the pertinent thoughts and keep it with you for continual reference. No text or volume outside the standard works of the Church should have such a prominent place on your personal library shelves—not for their rhetorical excellence or

eloquence of delivery, but for the concepts which point the way to eternal life” (*In the World but Not of It*, Brigham Young University Speeches of the Year [May 14, 1968], 2–3).

This chapter provides ideas and skills to help you study the general conference issues of the *Ensign* or *Liahona* and other talks and writings of the General Authorities more effectively. Most of this course is dedicated to studying and learning from the most recent general conference addresses. As you thoughtfully listen to and study addresses by living prophets, you can learn the will of the Lord for you at this time. Prayerfully determine how you can use these skills to increase your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and in the messages He inspires His appointed leaders to give us.

## Commentary

### Prepare Your Mind and Your Heart

Preparation is essential in receiving and understanding the will of the Lord. The Lord has promised, “I will tell you in your mind and in your heart, by the Holy Ghost, which shall come upon you and which shall dwell in your heart” (D&C 8:2). The word of the Lord will come to you more readily as you prepare your mind and your heart. Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught the importance of preparing and being an active learner:

“Nephi teaches us, ‘When a man speaketh by the power of the Holy Ghost the power of the Holy Ghost carrieth [the

message] unto the hearts of the children of men’ (2 Nephi 33:10). Please notice how the power of the Spirit carries the message *unto* but not necessarily *into* the heart. A teacher can explain, demonstrate, persuade, and testify, and do so with great spiritual power and effectiveness. Ultimately, however, the content of a message and the witness of the Holy Ghost penetrate into the heart only if a receiver allows them to enter.

“Brothers and sisters, learning by faith opens the pathway *into* the heart. . . .

“A learner exercising agency by acting in accordance

## Chapter 7 Overview

1. *Prepare your mind and your heart.*
2. *Practice good study skills when studying general conference addresses:*

- Identify doctrines and principles.
- Identify scriptural interpretations or clarifications.
- Make cross-references between the talks and the scriptures.
- Identify encouragements, invitations, or commandments.
- Look for promised blessings and what we must do to claim them.
- Identify repeated words and phrases.
- Make note of memorable phrases.
- Identify lists.
- Look for cause-and-effect and “if-then” statements.
- Pay attention to words and phrases that introduce a specific point or conclusion.
- Ask questions.
- Write down spiritual promptings.
- Look for the testimonies of the Lord’s special witnesses.
- Memorize meaningful statements.
- Study talks given on the same topic.
- Make a library of your notes and the *Ensign* or *Liahona* conference issues.
- Apply what you learn.

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◀ **The word of the Lord comes to us more readily when we prepare spiritually.**



## Notes

with correct principles opens his or her heart to the Holy Ghost—and invites His teaching, testifying power, and confirming witness. Learning by faith requires spiritual, mental, and physical exertion and not just passive reception. It is in the sincerity and consistency of our faith-inspired action that we indicate to our Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, our willingness to learn and receive instruction from the Holy Ghost. . . .

“... Experience has enabled me to understand that an answer given by another person usually is not remembered for very long, if remembered at all. But an answer we discover or obtain through the exercise of faith, typically, is retained for a lifetime. The most important learnings of life are caught—not taught” (“Seek Learning by Faith” [address to CES religious educators, Feb. 3, 2006], 1, 3, 5).

Consider the following ways to prepare yourself before a general conference:

- Set aside time to listen to the conference addresses without distractions. Create an environment in which you can receive promptings from the Holy Ghost.
- Seek the guidance of the Spirit through thoughtful prayer, fasting, and scripture study.
- List personal questions or concerns for which you are seeking answers. Then record the answers and impressions that you receive during the conference.
- Review your notes from the previous general conference.

### Practice Good Study Skills When Studying General Conference Addresses

When you study general conference addresses, you can use many of the same skills you use when studying the scriptures. The rest of this chapter describes some of those skills. Implementing the study suggestions in this chapter will not only influence your study of the living prophets, it will influence your power to make correct choices.

### Identify Doctrines and Principles

As you study the general conference addresses, **look for clear statements of gospel doctrines and principles.** Identify and mark them in a way that allows you to review and remember them. Reviewing and pondering statements of the doctrines and principles can strengthen your understanding of gospel truths and your commitment to live by them. The following are a few examples of doctrines and principles taught during general conferences:

- Elder Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles: “Seldom will you receive a complete response [to a prayer] all at once. It will come a piece at a time, in packets, so that you will grow in capacity. As each piece is followed in

General conference addresses can help us better understand the scriptures.

faith, you will be led to other portions until you have the whole answer. That pattern requires you to exercise faith in our Father's capacity to respond. While sometimes it's very hard, it results in significant personal growth" (in Conference Report, Apr. 2007, 6; or *Ensign*, May 2007, 9).

- President Henry B. Eyring of the First Presidency: "We know from prophecy that not only will the true and living Church not be taken from the earth again, but it will become better. . . . The scriptures contain promises that when the Lord comes again to His Church, He will find it spiritually prepared for Him. That should make us both determined and optimistic. We must do better. We can. And we will" (in Conference Report, Apr. 2008, 20; or *Ensign*, May 2008, 21).

- Elder Robert D. Hales of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles: "We prepare to receive personal revelation as the prophets do, by studying the scriptures, fasting, praying, and building faith. Faith is the key" (in Conference Report, Oct. 2007, 94; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2007, 88).

### Identify Scriptural Interpretations or Clarifications

Prophets play a key role in interpreting and clarifying scripture. The following are some examples:

- Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught how the scriptures show the separate nature of the three members of the Godhead (see Conference Report, Oct. 2007, 40–43; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2007, 40–42).
- President James E. Faust (1920–2007) of the First Presidency discussed the application of several scriptures as he taught about the principle of forgiving others (see Conference Report, Apr. 2007, 65–68; or *Ensign*, May 2007, 67–69).

- Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles spoke on "the tender mercies of the Lord," mentioned in 1 Nephi 1:20 (see Conference Report, Apr. 2005, 104–8; or *Ensign*, May 2005, 99–102).



**"We prepare to receive personal revelation as the prophets do, by studying the scriptures, fasting, praying, and building faith. Faith is the key."**

*Elder Robert D. Hales*



### Make Cross-References between the Talks and the Scriptures

As you identify scriptural interpretations or clarifications, **it can be helpful to write the reference of the conference address in the margin next to the scripture** that is taught or clarified. Following are some examples:

- Next to Revelation 22:18 you could write the citation: *Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, Ensign, May 2008, 91–94*. In this talk, Elder Holland referred to Revelation 22:18 and discussed the importance of continuing revelation.
- Next to Psalm 24:3–4 you could write: *Elder David A. Bednar, Ensign, Nov. 2007, 80–83*. Elder Bednar discussed what it means to have clean hands and a pure heart.
- Next to Nehemiah 6 you could write: *President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, Ensign, May 2009, 59–62*. President Uchtdorf discussed Nehemiah rebuilding the walls surrounding Jerusalem and the idea that "we are doing a great work and cannot come down."

**We must do more than listen to the messages—we must act upon them. In this manner we demonstrate our faith.**



Go to [LDS.org](https://www.LDS.org) to study current and past general conference addresses. Use the interactive activities and search engines to make your study time more effective.

You could also use the space in the margins in your copy of the *Ensign* or *Liahona* to write scripture references that support the ideas taught in the talk.

### Identify Encouragements, Invitations, or Commandments

As you look for encouragements, invitations, and commandments, you will learn specific things you should do to be in harmony with the Lord's will. It may be helpful to underline these statements in your copy of the *Ensign* or *Liahona* to help you find them later. The following are examples of such statements:

- Elder L. Tom Perry of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles: "We issue the call again for all spiritually, physically, and emotionally qualified young men to come forth prepared to become missionaries in the Church of Jesus Christ. Be certain that you easily clear the minimum standards for service as a missionary and that you are continually raising the bar. Prepare yourself to be more effective in this great

calling" (in Conference Report, Oct. 2007, 51–52; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2007, 49).

- Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles:

"As we consider various choices, we should remember that it is not enough that something is good. Other choices are better, and still others are best. . . .

"Consider how we use our time in the choices we make in viewing television, playing video games, surfing the Internet, or reading books or magazines. Of course it is good to view wholesome entertainment or to obtain interesting information. But not everything of that sort is worth that portion of our life we give to obtain it. Some things are better, and others are best" (in Conference Report, Oct. 2007, 111; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2007, 104–5).

- President Thomas S. Monson: "To you who are able to attend the temple, I would counsel you to go often" (in Conference Report, Apr. 2008, 113; or *Ensign*, May 2008, 112).

### Look for Promised Blessings and What We Must Do to Claim Them

**The prophets often make promises to those who follow the principles they teach.** Seeking promised blessings can help inspire us to live righteously. The following are two examples of such promises:

- President Henry B. Eyring of the First Presidency: "If you ponder the scriptures and begin to do what you covenanted with God to do, I can promise you that you will feel more love for God and more of His love for you. And with that, your prayers will come from the heart, full of thanks and of pleading. You will feel a greater dependence on God. You will find the courage and the determination to act in His service, without fear and with peace in your heart. You will pray always. And you will not forget Him, no matter what the future brings" (in Conference Report, Oct. 2001, 18; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2001, 17).



- Elder L. Tom Perry of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles: “I promise great blessings—social, physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual blessings—to every young man who pays for a significant part of his mission” (in Conference Report, Oct. 2007, 51; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2007, 49).

### Identify Repeated Words and Phrases

Repeated words and phrases can **draw attention to the central message of the speaker**. For example, President Dieter F. Uchtdorf of the First Presidency repeatedly used the phrase “a few degrees” throughout one conference address to emphasize that “the difference between happiness and misery in individuals, in marriages, and families often comes down to an error of only a few degrees” (see Conference Report, Apr. 2008, 57–61; or *Ensign*, May 2008, 57–60). President Uchtdorf similarly repeated the phrase “faith of our fathers” in an address later that same general conference as he counseled us to remember the faith of those who prepared the way before us (see Conference Report, Apr. 2008, 69–73; or *Ensign*, May 2008, 68–70, 75).

Repeated words and phrases can also link together the messages of more than one speaker. For example, you may notice phrases such as “tender mercies” and “raising the bar” being used in several addresses in the same general conference or in more than one conference. Connecting the teachings from multiple addresses can give you a broader understanding of the important gospel principles they teach.

### Make Note of Memorable Phrases



President Thomas S. Monson

Look for phrases and sentences that, though short and easy to remember, carry a depth of meaning. When pondered, they can enlarge your understanding of important principles. The following are some examples:

- Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin (1917–2008) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles: “When we love the Lord, obedience ceases to be a burden” (in Conference Report, Oct. 2007, 30; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2007, 30).
- President Thomas S. Monson: “There is no friendship more valuable than your own clear conscience” (in Conference Report, Apr. 2008, 66; or *Ensign*, May 2008, 65).

### Identify Lists

Speakers may use lists to describe a process, such as repentance, or parts of a principle. For example, President Thomas S. Monson listed “marks of a true holder of the priesthood of God.” His list included “the mark of vision,” “the mark of effort,” “the mark of faith,” “the mark of virtue,” and “the mark of prayer” (see Conference Report, Oct. 2007, 63–66; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2007, 59–61). Identifying lists as you study conference addresses can help you outline and organize the information in them. This will help you understand and remember the teachings and apply them in your life.

### Look for Cause-and-Effect and “If-Then” Statements

Look for statements that clarify the effects of specific actions. They identify consequences and blessings. The following are some examples:

- President Henry B. Eyring of the First Presidency: “If we become casual in our study of the scriptures, we will become casual in our prayers. We may not cease to pray, but our prayers will become more

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As you ponder the counsel given in general conference, you can receive insights and promptings from the Holy Ghost tailored to your needs and your level of spiritual maturity. Writing down insights in a journal or notebook can help to cement them into your mind and heart.

Notes

Look for phrases and sentences that, though short and easy to remember, carry a depth of meaning. When pondered, they can enlarge your understanding of important principles.

repetitive, more mechanical, lacking real intent” (in Conference Report, Oct. 2001, 18; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2001, 17).

- President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008): “If you will do this [control your temper], your lives will be without regret. Your marriages and family relationships will be preserved. You will be much happier. You will do greater good. You will feel a sense of peace that will be wonderful” (in Conference Report, Oct. 2007, 68; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2007, 66).
- President Thomas S. Monson: “If we are on the Lord’s errand, . . . we are entitled to the Lord’s help” (in Conference Report, Apr. 2008, 65; or *Ensign*, May 2008, 65).

### Pay Attention to Words and Phrases That Introduce a Specific Point or Conclusion

Words such as “therefore,” “finally,” “remember,” and “thus” and phrases such as “in conclusion” and “in summary” **introduce main points or conclusions.** The following are some examples:

- Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles quoted Ephesians 2:19–20 and 4:11–13 and then said, “Thus the ministry of the Apostles—the First Presidency and the Twelve—is to bring about that unity of the faith and to proclaim our knowledge of the Master” (in Conference Report, Apr. 2008, 5; or *Ensign*, May 2008, 7).
- Elder L. Tom Perry of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles emphasized the unity that should exist in marriage when he concluded speaking about the father being the head of the family: “Remember, brethren, that in your role as leader in the family, your wife is your companion. . . . Since the beginning, God has instructed mankind that marriage should unite husband and wife together in unity. Therefore, there is not a president or a vice president in a family. The couple works together eternally for the good of the family. They are united together in word, in deed, and in action as they lead, guide, and direct their family unit. They are on equal footing. They plan and organize the affairs of the family jointly and unanimously as they move forward” (in Conference Report, Apr. 2004, 72; or *Ensign*, May 2004, 71).

### Ask Questions

**Asking good questions promotes learning and allows the Holy Ghost to teach you** beyond the spoken word. As you study conference addresses, learn to ask questions such as the following:

- Why did the speaker use this word or this phrase?
- What is the message for me, for my family, or for the Church?



- How can I apply this in my life?
- What does this teach me about Jesus Christ or the plan of salvation?
- Is there a major theme in this conference?

## Write Down Spiritual Promptings

As you ponder the counsel given in general conference, you can receive insights and promptings from the Holy Ghost tailored to your needs and your level of spiritual maturity. Writing down insights in a journal or notebook can help to cement them into your mind and heart. You may also want to write down some goals for personal improvement. Periodically review your notes and goals and evaluate your progress.

- Elder Richard G. Scott explained an added blessing of recording our thoughts: “It is through the repeated process of feeling impressions, recording them, and obeying them that one learns to depend on the direction of the Spirit more than on communication through the five senses” (“Helping Others to Be Spiritually Led” [address to CES religious educators, Aug. 11, 1998], 3).
- President Gordon B. Hinckley also encouraged us to do this: “Perhaps out of all we have heard, there may be a phrase or a paragraph that will stand out and possess our attention. If this occurs, I hope we will write it down and reflect on it until we savor the depth of its meaning and have made it a part of our own lives” (in Conference Report, Oct. 2000, 114; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2000, 88).

## Look for the Testimonies of the Lord's Special Witnesses

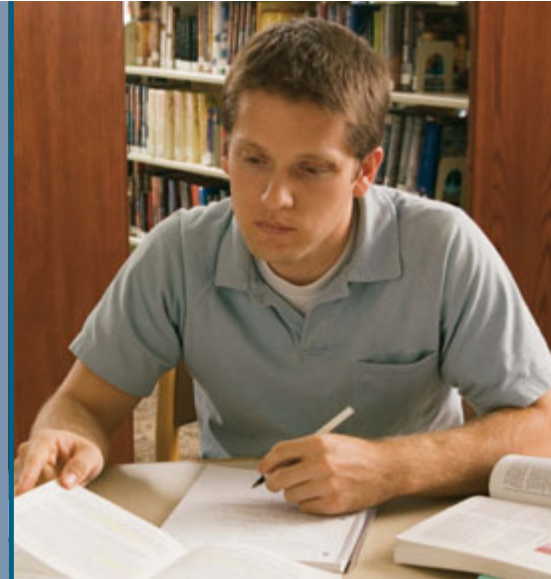
Powerful, faith-building testimonies are great sources of strength to our own testimonies. Seldom is the Spirit so strong as when testimonies are shared. Following are two examples of this:

- President Gordon B. Hinckley bore this testimony of the Savior: *“Be strong in your testimony of Jesus Christ, the Son*



"Perhaps out of all we have heard, there may be a phrase or a word that will stand out to our attention. So, I hope we will listen and reflect on it for the depth of its meaning and have made it a part of our own lives."

*President Gordon B. Hinckley*



of God. He is the chief cornerstone of this great work. Of His divinity and reality I bear solemn witness. He is the Lamb without blemish, who was offered for the sins of the world. Through His pain and because of His suffering I find reconciliation and eternal life. He is my Teacher, my Exemplar, my Friend, and my Savior whom I love and worship as the Redeemer of the world" (in Conference Report, Oct. 1992, 75; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1992, 52).

- In his final general conference address before his death, Elder Bruce R. McConkie (1915–85) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles testified:



Elder Bruce R. McConkie

“And now, as pertaining  
to this perfect atonement,  
wrought by the shedding  
of the blood of God—I

testify that it took place in Gethsemane and at Golgotha, and as pertaining to Jesus Christ, I testify that he is the Son of the Living God and was crucified for the sins of the world. He is our Lord, our God, and our King. This I know of myself independent of any other person.

"I am one of his witnesses, and in a coming day I shall feel the nail marks in his hands and in his feet and shall wet his feet with my tears.

**Write down spiritual promptings, and then act upon them. This is one way to show the Lord that spiritual impressions are important to you.**

[illegible]



Notes

“But I shall not know any better than I know now that he is God’s Almighty Son, that he is our Savior and Redeemer, and that salvation comes in and through his atoning blood and in no other way.

“God grant that all of us may walk in the light as God our Father is in the light so that, according to the promises, the blood of Jesus Christ his Son will cleanse us from all sin” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1985, 12; or *Ensign*, May 1985, 11).

### Memorize Meaningful Statements

The Lord said that what His servants say “when moved upon by the Holy Ghost shall be scripture” (D&C 68:4). In this light, counsel that Elder Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles gave for accurately quoting and memorizing scriptures might also be applied to the words of the living prophets:

- “There is a power that can change lives in the specific words recorded in the standard works. That power is weakened when we paraphrase or alter the actual wording. I therefore suggest that you encourage students to cite scripture content with precision. All you do to

encourage students to memorize selected scriptures accurately will bring to bear in their lives the power of their content” (“Four Fundamentals for Those Who Teach and Inspire Youth,” in *Old Testament Symposium Speeches*, 1987 [1988], 5).

- “I suggest that you memorize scriptures that touch your heart and fill your soul with understanding. When scriptures are used as the Lord has caused them to be recorded, they have intrinsic power that is not communicated when paraphrased. Sometimes when there is a significant need in my life, I review mentally scriptures that have given me strength. There is great solace, direction, and power that flow from the scriptures, especially the words of the Lord” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1999, 112; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1999, 87–88).

Memorizing meaningful statements from messages of the living prophets will provide us with a reserve of inspiration and guidance we can call on when we need it.

### Study Talks Given on the Same Topic

Studying more than one talk given on the same topic will often highlight areas of emphasis and provide additional insights. For example, in the October 2007 general conference Elder Robert D. Hales of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles spoke on personal revelation, and Elder Richard G. Scott, also of the Quorum of the Twelve, spoke about using revelation to guide our choices (see “Personal Revelation: The Teachings and Examples of the Prophets” and “Truth: The Foundation of Correct Decisions,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2007, 86–92). In the April 2006 general conference Elders M. Russell Ballard and Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles spoke on sharing the gospel. Elder Ballard spoke on inviting friends and neighbors into our homes as a way to share the gospel with them, and after that address Elder Scott discussed the preparation of missionaries in the home and in the Church (see “Creating

Studying general conference addresses together with the scriptures will increase your understanding of both.



a Gospel-Sharing Home" and "Now Is the Time to Serve a Mission!" *Ensign*, May 2006, 84–90).

## Make a Library of Your Notes and the *Ensign* or *Liahona* Conference Issues

Keep the conference issues of the Church magazines, along with the notes you took while listening to or studying the addresses, so you can refer back to them later. This will enable you to compare those past messages and thoughts with those received later. You will also be able to see how certain principles and doctrines are repeated in many conferences and begin to cross-reference them. And it will improve your ability to draw upon the words of the prophets during teaching opportunities, such as on a mission, in a sacrament meeting talk, in Church classes, or in family home evening.

## Apply What You Learn

The goal of your gospel study should be to live the gospel better. It is not just what you know but what you do with what you know that brings the greatest happiness in your life. We are to be “doers of the word, and not hearers only” (James 1:22). As you apply what you learn, you will develop greater understanding of the plan of salvation and a stronger desire to share it with others. Happiness is assured when we accept and live according to the counsel of the Lord and His prophets.

Contemplating the following questions as you study general conference can help you apply what you learn:

- How would the Lord have me apply this in my life?
- How can I use this to strengthen my faith?
- When have I experienced something like what is being taught?
- What difference would it make in my life to follow this teaching?
- How can I use this to teach others about a gospel principle?



## Points to Ponder

- Consider a specific challenge or decision you are facing. How do the messages in the most recent general conference of the Church help address this issue?

## Suggested Assignments

- Select study skills described in this chapter that you wish to practice in your personal study. Begin a personal study of the most recent general conference addresses using those study skills.
- List the counsel given in the most recent general conference that you feel a need to work on. Write down goals and make commitments as the Spirit of the Lord directs you.
- Read the Church magazines. Pay particular attention to the messages written by the members of the First Presidency and other General Authorities.

As you apply what you learn, you will develop greater understanding of the plan of salvation and a stronger desire to share it with others. Happiness is assured when we accept and live according to the counsel of the Lord and His prophets.

[illegible]





# Index

## B

- Ballard, Melvin J.  
dedication of South America, 66–67
- Ballard, M. Russell  
grandfather used apostolic keys to dedicate South America, 66  
safety found in following words of living prophet, 11–12  
spoke on sharing the gospel, 92–93
- Bednar, David A.  
discussed having clean hands and a pure heart, 87  
importance of preparing and being an active learner, 85–86  
spoke on tender mercies of the Lord, 87
- Benson, Ezra Taft  
Apostles have power to dedicate lands for preaching, 66  
conference edition of *Ensign* should be next to standard works, 80  
doctrinal interpretation is function of First Presidency, 51–52  
“Fourteen Fundamentals in Following the Prophet,” 22–27  
six months’ “marching orders” received at conference, 85  
value words of prophet more than those of others, 17
- Brown, Hugh B.  
conversation with member of British House of Commons, 6

## C

- Cannon, George Q.  
Lord’s manifestation that Brigham Young was successor of Joseph Smith, 32–33  
need for living prophets and revelation, 1  
never been one hour without revelation, 8  
organization of First Presidency after death of Wilford Woodruff, 37–38
- Clark, J. Reuben Jr.  
Apostles have authority to declare mind and will of God to His people, 9  
when speakers are moved upon by Holy Ghost, 73
- Common consent  
*see* Sustaining Church leaders
- Cook, Quentin L.  
prophetic priorities protect us from dangers, 11
- Copenhagen, Denmark  
story about priesthood keys, 15–16

- Cowdery, Oliver  
Assistant President of the Church, 29–30  
charge to the Twelve Apostles, 63

## D

- Dispensations, 5

## E

- Elisha, 12
- Eyring, Henry B.  
casual in study of scriptures, casual in prayer, 89–90  
importance of apostolic priesthood keys, 60–61  
ponder the scriptures, 88  
sustaining those who are called, 41  
we must do better at being spiritually prepared, 87  
what it means to sustain our leaders, 76

## F

- Faith  
comes by hearing God’s word through His servants, 10
- Faust, James E.  
First Presidency declares doctrine of Church, 52  
First Presidency have ultimate responsibility for kingdom of God on earth, 46–47  
necessity for constant revelation, 5  
principle of forgiving others, 87  
prophets receive the word of God, 1  
requirement of unanimity, 68  
safety in heeding and following counsel, 11
- First Presidency  
authority of, 45  
establishment of, 44  
compared to mountain peaks, 54–55  
continues even when President is ill, 48  
counselors equal with President in holding keys, 45  
day-to-day operations, 49–51  
declares doctrine of Church, 52  
doctrinal interpretation is province of, 51  
importance of counselors, 47  
in New Testament organization, 43  
interpret doctrine, 45  
members should look to for instruction, 55  
members sustain the President, 53  
obligation of members to sustain President, 54  
preeminence of President of Church, 45  
presides over the Church, 46

## First Presidency (*continued*)

- promise to those who follow the counsel of, 55  
reorganization of, 34  
revelations come through, 55  
speaks words of Jesus Christ as if He were present, 52–53  
ultimate responsibility on the earth, 46

## G

- General conference  
all things done by common consent, 75  
call to action, 79  
heed words and support leaders, 75  
preparation affects what we gain, 76–78  
purposes, 71  
season of spiritual revival, 71  
sustain leaders, 75  
use good study skills to study addresses, 86–93  
words of prophets revealed, 72
- Grant, Heber J.  
emphasized adherence to Word of Wisdom, 11  
keep your eye on the President, 24

## H

- Hafen, Bruce C.  
described worldwide travels of Elder Neal A. Maxwell, 64, 65
- Haight, David B.  
covenant made when we sustain Church leaders, 75  
what a solemn assembly is, 40–41
- Hales, Robert D.  
following prophetic counsel frees us from unnecessary pain, 13  
prepare to receive personal revelation, 87  
spoke on revelation, 92
- Harris, Martin, 30
- Hendricks, Drusilla Dorris  
Brigham Young seemed to be Joseph Smith, 33
- Hinckley, Gordon B.  
Apostles’ chief concern is advancement of work of God, 65–66  
apply teachings of general conference, 80–81  
basic duties of the Apostles, 62  
commitment made when we sustain Church leaders, 75  
control temper, 90  
each member of Quorum of the Twelve holds keys of this dispensation, 32

Hinckley, Gordon B. (*continued*)

First Presidency reorganized following well-established precedent, 35–36  
 foundation of apostles and prophets, 8  
 General Authorities have no selfish desires in serving, 10–11  
 God will not let His work be led astray, 20  
 importance of counselors, 47  
 meaning of the word *apostle*, 64  
 no decision in presiding quorums without total unanimity, 68–69  
 priesthood keys continue from Joseph Smith to current prophet, 16  
 seniority begins when called to the Twelve, 36  
 solutions to problems and needs found at conference, 78  
 testimony of Savior, 8  
 work of First Presidency continues even if President is ill, 48–49  
 write impressions and reflect on them, 91

Holland, Jeffrey R.

foundation of apostles and prophets, 8  
 general conference like the iron rod, 72  
 general conference marks a “call to action,” 79  
 how scriptures teach nature of the three members of Godhead, 87  
 referred to Revelation 22:18, 87

Hunter, Howard W.

apostolic witness of Jesus Christ, 60  
 conference time is season of spiritual revival, 71–72  
 general conference in relation to latter-day scripture, 73  
 inspired pattern of Church government, 34–35

## J

Jesus Christ

Apostles know that Jesus is the Christ, 57–60  
 be strong in your testimony of, 91  
 chief cornerstone, 57  
 Christ statue, 15  
 gospel of, 71  
 has manifested Himself, 8  
 law of gospel given by, 19  
 listening to and following prophets strengthen our faith in, 10  
 salvation in no other name, 71

Johnson, Paul V.

follow counsel heard in general conference, 82  
 how to make general conference a priority, 76–77

## K

Keys of the priesthood

*see* Priesthood keys

Kimball, Spencer W.

apply what we learn in general conference, 79–80  
 assume counsel of conference applies to us, 82

Kimball, Spencer W. (*continued*)

even some Church members revere the dead prophets more than a live prophet, 24  
 God’s role in appointment of new President, 35  
 “I hold the keys,” 15–16  
 make conference issues of Church magazines part of gospel library, 85  
 make notes of thoughts of conference, 78–79  
 “my life is like my shoes,” 57  
 Presidency is based on seniority, 36  
 revelation continues, 17–18  
 revelation is constant in our dispensation, 7  
 transition of authority to Twelve Apostles, 37

## L

Law of witnesses

fulfilled by Oliver Cowdery, 29–30

Lee, Harold B.

blessed by following the living prophet, 26  
 counselors in First Presidency sustain President, 53–54  
 don’t speculate on next Church President, 36  
 don’t worry about President of Church leading people astray, 20  
 experience with friend who believed in past but not living prophets, 20–21  
 importance of accepting and heeding revelation, 73–74  
 is a true seer, 10  
 Lord established unmistakable channel of instruction, 16–17  
 missionaries ask about apostolic witness, 57–58  
 obligation to gain testimony for ourselves, 2  
 safety in doing exactly what Lord tells His Church, 13  
 sustaining the Twelve Apostles as prophets, seers, and revelators, 8  
 transition of authority after his death, 38  
 what was contrary to order of heaven earlier might not be contrary later, 21–22

Lund, Anthon H.

how First Presidency deliberates, 47

## M

Maxwell, Neal A.

worldwide travels in 1993, 64–65

McConkie, Bruce R.

only senior Apostle can fully exercise priesthood keys, 61  
 responsibilities of President of the Church, 16  
 testimony of Savior, 91–92

McKay, David O.

purposes of general conferences, 71

Monson, Thomas S.

attend the temple often, 88  
 became President of Church, 39  
 “clear conscience,” 89  
 marks of a true holder of the priesthood of God, 89

Monson, Thomas S. (*continued*)

read and study conference addresses in Church magazines, 74  
 sustained in solemn assembly, 39–40  
 when you are on the Lord’s errand, 90

## N

Naaman, 12

Nelson, Russell M.

commentary on Ephesians 2:19–20 and 4:11–13, 90  
 divine powers restored through Joseph Smith, 5  
 duties of the Apostles, 62  
 ponder and pray about doctrinal principles, 2

## O

Oaks, Dallin H.

choices—good, better, best, 88

## P

Packer, Boyd K.

changes dictated by revelation, 7  
 First Presidency compared to mountain peaks, 54–55  
 importance of personal preparation for conference, 77  
 prophet holds keys of the priesthood, 15–16  
 sacred nature of apostolic witness of Jesus Christ, 58–59  
 senior Apostle becoming President of Church, 37  
 some matters of organization subject to change, 20  
 Twelve Apostles come from humble beginnings, 57  
 unanimity in governing councils of Church, 67–68

Petersen, Mark E.

never go astray if follow First Presidency, 55

Perry, L. Tom

Apostle is “one sent forth,” 64  
 blessings to youth who help pay for missions, 89  
 call again for prepared missionaries, 88  
 General Authorities look to First Presidency for doctrinal interpretation, 52  
 unity in marriage, 90

Pratt, Parley P.

last key of the priesthood, 32  
 visit to South America, 66

Priesthood keys

Apostles hold all, 32, 34, 60–62  
 continue from Joseph Smith to current President, 16  
 President Kimball said, “I hold the keys!,” 5–16  
 senior Apostle can fully exercise all, 61  
 to preaching gospel, 66–67

Principles of succession, 34–35

Prophet, definition of, 9

Pulsipher, Zera

Brigham Young spoke in Joseph Smith's voice, 33

## Q

Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

build God's kingdom on earth, 64  
chief concern is advancement of God's work, 65

come from humble beginnings, 57

decisions are unanimous, 67

duties of, 62–63

formation of, 30

hold all the keys of this ministry, 66

Joseph Smith prepared the Twelve Apostles, 31

keys given to, 34

keys to open missionary work to all nations, 66

know and bear witness of Jesus Christ, 57

leads the Church after death of Church President, 37

part of foundation of true church, 57

power to dedicate and rededicate lands, 66

sacred nature of calling, 58

seniority, 34

special witnesses, 62

subject only to First Presidency, 46

transition of authority to, 37

## R

Revelator, definition of, 10

Richards, Stephen L.

First Presidency has authority to interpret doctrine, 45

Rigdon, Sidney

claimed he was guardian of the Church, 32

first counselor in the first First Presidency, 44

Romney, Marion G.

easy to believe in the dead prophets, 25

First Presidency speaks the words Jesus Christ would declare, 52

heard enough truth in conference to bring us to God, 82

prophet will never lead the Church astray, 24

## S

Scott, Richard G.

answers to prayers come a piece at a time, 86–87

memorize scriptures and words of living prophets, 92

record impressions, 3, 91

spoke on revelation, 92

spoke on sharing the gospel, 92

Seer, definition of, 9

Seniority, 34, 36

Smith, George Albert

obligation we have as we sustain President, 54

Smith, Hyrum

Assistant President, 29–30

Smith, Joseph Jr.

after his death, 32

Apostles hold keys to preaching the gospel, 66

faith comes by hearing the word of God through His servants, 10

First President, 44

look to the Presidency for instruction, 27

need for continuing revelation, 6

prepared the Twelve Apostles, 31

revelations come through First Presidency, 55

whatever God requires is right, 25

Smith, Joseph F.

commitment to sustain Lord's servants, 76

sacred nature of calling of Twelve Apostles, 58

Smith, Joseph Fielding

Apostles act under direction of First Presidency, 46

First Presidency in New Testament, 43

full power vested in Apostles dormant while President is living, 61–62

Harold B. Lee is example of true seer, 10

law of witnesses fulfilled by Oliver Cowdery, 29–30

only one at a time has right to give

revelation for the Church, 72–73

promise to those who follow counsel of First Presidency, 55

why we no longer have an Assistant

President, 30

Snow, Lowell M.

conference teachings are compass of the Lord, 74–75

Solemn assembly, 39–41, 75

Special witnesses, 62

Study skills for general conference addresses, 86–93

Sustaining Church leaders, 41, 75–76

## T

Talmage, James E.

connection between standard works and words of living prophets, 72

Tanner, N. Eldon

blessed by following the living prophet, 26–27

day-to-day operations of First Presidency, 49–51

transition of authority after death of Harold B. Lee, 38–39

Taylor, John

Lord reveals through appointed channels, 7  
passed away, 48  
revelation is the foundation of our religion, 7  
we require new revelations, 19

Testimony of God's servants, 10

Three witnesses to the Book of Mormon, 30–31

Tracy, Nancy Naomi Alexander

mantle of Joseph fell upon Brigham Young, 33

## U

Uchtdorf, Dieter F.

blessings come when we act on inspired answers by prophets, 12–13

discussed Nehemiah, 87

repeated phrase "a few degrees" in conference talk, 89

repeated phrase "faith of our fathers" in conference talk, 89

## W

Walker, William R.

First Presidency as our pattern, 47

Widtsoe, John A.

President directs work of First Presidency, 45–46

revelator makes known the unknown, 10  
seer sees with spiritual eyes, 9

Williams, Frederick G.

second counselor in the first First Presidency, 44

Wirthlin, Joseph B.

obedience not a burden when you love the Lord, 89

Woodruff, Wilford

after his death, 38

importance of living prophets, 19, 23

Joseph Smith's last speech to the Twelve Apostles, 31–32

Lord will never permit the prophet to lead people astray, 20, 23

Word of Wisdom, 11

## Y

Young, Brigham

appeared to be Joseph Smith, 32–33  
calling of Apostle to build kingdom of God, 64

if Hyrum Smith had lived, 30

prophet can receive revelation on any matter, 25



THE CHURCH OF  
JESUS CHRIST  
OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

