



Type: Book Chapter

The Ram and the Lion: Lyman Wight and Brigham Young

Author(s): Davis Bitton

Source: *The Disciple as Witness: Essays on Latter-day Saint History and Doctrine in Honor of Richard Lloyd Anderson*

Editor(s): Stephen D. Ricks, Donald W. Parry, and Andrew H. Hedges

Published: Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2000

Page(s): 37-60



The Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS) existed as a California non-profit corporation from 1979 until about 2006, when it was allowed to go into involuntary liquidation, at which time copyrights held by FARMS and its authors and/or editors reverted or may have reverted back to their original author and/or editors. This chapter is archived by permission.

CHAPTER 2

THE RAM AND THE LION:
LYMAN WIGHT AND BRIGHAM YOUNG

Davis Bitton

At his death in 1877, Brigham Young was honored by more than 115,000 Latter-day Saints and was known as a great colonizer. Lyman Wight, leader of a rapidly diminishing group of less than a hundred followers, died in 1858 on the trail in Texas, having abandoned his last effort to establish a foothold there. Yet in the 1830s, soon after the church was organized, this ultimate wide discrepancy would not have been predicted. In fact, at first Lyman Wight seemed to have some preeminence. Among the earliest converts to Mormonism, he was baptized in Ohio in late 1830 and ordained an elder by Oliver Cowdery; he presided over the branch at Kirtland, was ordained a high priest in June 1831, and served on a council of high priests in Missouri in 1832. When Zion's Camp was organized in 1834, Wight was its general (second only to Commander in Chief Joseph Smith). He remained an important leader in Missouri, serving on the high council of the stake there, and traveled to Ohio for such special occasions as the dedication of the temple. When Joseph Smith fled Kirtland and moved to Missouri, he inevitably had a close relationship with Lyman Wight,

ordaining him a member of the stake presidency. Wight was also an indefatigable missionary.¹

What about Brigham Young during these years? To quickly trace the trajectory: Young joined the church in 1832, was a member of Zion's Camp in 1834, and then was called as one of the Twelve Apostles in 1835 and became president of the Twelve in 1840, a development extremely relevant to later events. Brigham too was a zealous missionary.²

From our present perspective, it might appear that his ordination to the Twelve immediately established the supremacy of Young over Wight. Perhaps so, but the importance of the Twelve Apostles, "the twelve traveling councilors" (D&C 107:23), was not as obvious at first as it became later on, as some saw their jurisdiction to be outside the established stakes."³

In the meantime, between 1835 and 1841, Lyman Wight was not ignored or relegated to the periphery. Squarely in the middle of the Missouri war, he led the Mormon militia and accompanied Joseph Smith to Liberty Jail. After the prisoners escaped, Wight was considered sufficiently courageous and faithful to be called to a stake presidency in Iowa. Then, in 1841, he too became an apostle. Both Wight and Young had demonstrated courage and faithfulness, and now they were colleagues as apostles of the Lord.

But through no fault of his own, Lyman Wight did not participate in two of the experiences that helped the Twelve to forge their unity and establish their leadership role. First was the migration from Missouri to Illinois. While Wight and his fellow prisoners languished in jail, Brigham Young and a few of the apostles directed a move and resettlement that called forth all their abilities of organization and leadership—a dress rehearsal, if you will, for the great organized exodus that Young would direct in 1846.⁴

Even more important was the mission of the Twelve to

England. Launching a gathering that would provide an infusion of fresh blood for the Saints at Nauvoo and later in Utah, this mission was also significant for the leadership experience it provided—in publishing books, pamphlets, and periodicals, organizing branches, judging disciplinary cases, raising funds, supervising emigration, and developing an esprit de corps among the apostles that would never leave them. In *Men with a Mission*, historians James B. Allen, Ronald K. Esplin, and David J. Whittaker have spelled out the details of this remarkable, shared apostolic experience in Great Britain.⁵

At April conference in 1841 at Nauvoo, when Lyman Wight was named one of the Twelve Apostles and ordained by Joseph Smith, the other apostles were still in England. Was Brigham Young consulted on this calling or did he find out about it after the fact? If the other apostles saw Lyman as an interloper, they gave no sign of it. Most of them returned to Nauvoo in the summer and fall, and Wight's name is included among the signatories of epistles of the Twelve in October, November, and December 1841, and March and April 1842. The church was small in those days. Wight and the other apostles had all known each other, and one likes to think that they worked harmoniously together. In time, as they accumulated shared experiences and as new apostles replaced those who died, Wight might have overcome his handicap in not having shared the Missouri exodus and British mission experiences.

Instead, however, he began a pattern of long absences from Nauvoo by assignment, which prevented meeting with his brethren of the Twelve. One such absence was his long journey to Ohio and New York from September 1842 to June 1843. After his return, he had been home only slightly more than a month when, on 21 July 1843, he set out with his family for the Wisconsin pineries, the logging and sawmill

operation that provided needed material for Nauvoo construction.⁶ It was these absences that help to explain his exclusion from the sacred ceremonies and meetings of instruction that took place in the upper room of Joseph Smith's Red Brick Store. That Wight was not included in the initial endowment on 4 May 1842 is not surprising, as that momentous meeting was limited to only a few persons. When others of the Twelve received their endowments in late 1843, he was away. Finally on 14 May 1844, Wight received the initiatory washing and anointing ordinances, similar to the form of "endowment" he had received in the Kirtland Temple, but never, according to Andrew Ehat, received the fulness of the priesthood ordinances.⁷ His wife, Harriet Benton Wight, did not receive her endowments, and Lyman Wight is not among those apostles who took plural wives before the death of Joseph Smith.⁸ It was the historical accident of his absence, it seems, that kept Lyman Wight on the outside, something less than a full participant with the other apostles. Andrew Ehat has given the most thorough treatment of the inner "Quorum," of which Wight was not part, and has drawn a Venn diagram clearly illustrating who belonged to the inside group and who did not.⁹ Had Joseph Smith lived longer, that situation might well have changed. Wight's name was included among the membership of the Council of Fifty in early 1844 even though he was away and unable to attend its earliest meetings. It cannot be said that he really functioned in it. Having sounded out Joseph Smith on the advisability of leading a colony to Texas and receiving approval, Wight was in Nauvoo not more than three weeks when, on 21 May 1844, he left with about one hundred missionaries (including Brigham Young and most of the other apostles) to travel and promote Joseph Smith's presidential candidacy.

Wight participated conscientiously in this mission from late May until 9 July, when he heard of the Prophet's death. For all church members, and especially the traveling apostles, the news was crushing. Wight was certainly not affected any less than the others. Who had known Joseph Smith longer? Who had been closer to him than Wight was in Liberty Jail? It was decided that the itinerant apostles would gather in Boston, thence to return to Nauvoo. On 18 July they were all in Boston except Wight. After he arrived, they all departed on 24 July and in a journey of nearly two weeks made their way by steamboat, stagecoach, and riverboat back to Nauvoo, arriving on 6 August 1844.

What was said in the conversations among members of the Twelve from the time they first heard the news until their arrival in Nauvoo? One extremely important utterance had already been made when Brigham Young, in the presence of Orson Pratt, slapped his hand on his knee and proclaimed, "The keys of the kingdom are right here with the Church."¹⁰ If we can trust his later recollection, Wight was not impressed by such declarations. Wilford Woodruff tells of one conversation on the boat: "As to Elder Lyman Wight we were always on good terms. We had an interesting time together. We talked over old times and looked forward to new ones. He informed me that Joseph told him while they were in Joal [jail] that he should not live to see forty years but told him not to reveal it until he was dead. Br Wight as well as the rest of us feels his death deeply."¹¹ Speaking of being in Young's company during these weeks, Wight wrote: "I do not recollect of hearing him use the pronoun we when speaking of the twelve for the first time but got the pronoun I so completely to perfection that I considered myself out all together."¹² If Wight was indeed reacting in this way at the time, it is hard to believe that he could have

been completely successful in concealing his antipathy, and the other apostles did not seem to bridle at Young's collegial leadership. If Wight indicated his intention to continue with his preparations for the journey to Texas, it occasioned no great argument during the trip. It is more likely that they were all wondering what they would find when they reached Nauvoo.

Immediately after the apostles' arrival in Nauvoo, the leadership question came to a head. Sidney Rigdon had arrived five days earlier and advanced his claim. The three apostles who were there at the time had a preliminary meeting with him and arranged an appointment for the next day. Rigdon did not keep this appointment but did appear in the Sunday worship meeting on 4 August to address the Saints. Although he wanted to move quickly, the next meeting was deferred until Thursday, 8 August. Fortunately Brigham Young and his colleagues arrived on the evening of 6 August.¹³

Three important meetings were now held. On the morning of 7 August, the apostles gathered at the home of John Taylor. That afternoon, a larger meeting took place, consisting of "all the apostles that were in Nauvoo"—presumably including Lyman Wight—along with Nauvoo stake leaders and an unknown number of high priests. Rigdon and Young both presented their case. The next day, 8 August, Rigdon addressed the assembled Saints in the morning, and Brigham Young, in an address that profoundly affected those there, spoke in the afternoon, carrying the day, as the leadership of the Twelve was accepted by the congregation.¹⁴

Where was Lyman Wight? B. H. Roberts wrote in one place that "all the apostles that were in Nauvoo, excepting John Taylor," were in attendance at the 7 August afternoon

meeting. In describing the 8 August afternoon meeting, he lists seven apostles in attendance, omitting Lyman Wight.¹⁵ Writing later, Roberts accounts for absences as follows: “Of the absent ones, John Taylor was confined to his home, not yet recovered from his wounds. Orson Hyde, John E. Page, and Wm. Smith had not yet arrived in Nauvoo; and Lyman Wight was still in the east.”¹⁶ Wight was in Nauvoo, as Roberts himself stated two pages earlier, but, whether sick or sulking, apparently he did not attend the 8 August meetings. If he had been there and refused to raise his hand to sustain Brigham Young, it certainly would have been noticed, and if he did sustain Young he would later have been reminded of it. Whether he would have witnessed the “transfiguration” of Brigham Young later recalled by many at the meeting or had already acquired a negative attitude that precluded such a realization, we will never know.¹⁷

In any case, three days later Wight, apparently recovered from any fatigue and illness, was preaching about the company he was going to lead to Texas. This may have rankled Brigham. Yet when the Twelve met the next day, on 12 August, they agreed that Wight could go to Texas “if he desired.” The words signaled that a cooling had occurred—not “you must go” or “we encourage you to go,” but the somewhat reluctant concession “you may go if you desire.”¹⁸

Only six days later, on 18 August, Brigham Young again addressed the Saints. He wanted to make one thing clear: Only Lyman Wight and George Miller had permission (along with their families and the existing company at the pineries, one presumes) to leave. Young had no desire to see several hundred people leave Nauvoo. Moreover, he added, if Wight and Miller act “contrary to our counsel, and will not act in concert with us, they will be damned and go into

destruction.”¹⁹ Had Lyman Wight already made comments suggesting an unwillingness to “act in concert”?

On 24 August, at a meeting of the Twelve with the Temple and Nauvoo House committees, the signal was changed. Lyman was now “counseled” to go to the pine country “rather than” to Texas.²⁰ Why, then, did he persist? We can only guess at his rationalization. Did he stoutly assert, as he did later, that his orders were from the Prophet Joseph and could not be countermanded? Or did he simply consider Young’s “counsel” something short of an order? He had, after all, received official permission a few days earlier from the Twelve. Furthermore, he might have reasoned, he could go to both the pineries and Texas by preparing his group in Wisconsin and then leading them southward. The fact remains that he would have to have been deaf and blind to miss the strong desire of Brigham Young and the other apostles that he not persist in the Texas venture. Not to be deterred, Wight gathered his family and belongings and, still proclaiming Texas as the ultimate destination of his group, headed up the river to the pineries.

That Wight had not dutifully agreed to abandon the Texas venture is clear. On 8 September, at the trial of Sidney Rigdon, Brigham’s lead-off address mentioned Wight:

I have frequently thought lately of Paul’s words when he said “much every way,” “some for Paul, some for Appollos, some for Cephus and some for Christ;” and I believe there are a great many here for Christ. I will make the application of Paul’s words to us: “Much every way.” Some for Joseph and Hyrum, the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants, the Temple and Joseph’s measures; and some for Lyman Wight, some for James Emmett and some for Sidney Rigdon, and I suppose some for the Twelve.²¹

Of course the framing of the issue was all-important. In the process of setting off Rigdon's course against that of Brigham and the Twelve, Young and other speakers did some grouping. It was not simply Rigdon versus the Twelve but Rigdon versus Joseph Smith/Hyrum Smith/the Book of Mormon/the Doctrine and Covenants/the Temple/Joseph's measures. If you were true to the latter, taken as a package, you would of course have to reject Rigdon and his claims. Significantly, Lyman Wight, although an apostle, is not included with the Twelve. There is every suggestion that, in Brigham Young's mind, following Wight was tantamount to following Rigdon or Emmett, thus leading to schism. As Young's discourse continued, decrying Rigdon's erratic and secret course, he insisted that Joseph Smith had never embarked on such ventures as Rigdon's "without consulting his brethren, and especially the Twelve, if they were present."

Other speakers at Rigdon's trial emphasized Joseph Smith's last charge to the Twelve, the vote of the church—at the conference convened on 8 August—to sustain the Twelve, and especially the importance of completing the temple in Nauvoo. Although not in attendance at the trial of Sidney Rigdon, Wight could have benefited from reading a transcript and reflecting on the thinking of the speakers. He would have to tread very carefully to avoid finding himself in schism.

About a month later at October conference Wight was sustained as one of the Twelve.²² But Brigham Young's displeasure again spilled out. Wight, he said, had gone away "because he [is] a coward, but he will come back and his company."²³ A report of Young's colorful language must somehow have reached Wight, for in 1857 he was still fuming as he wrote the following to Wilford Woodruff:

I started in all good faith, had but just got out of hearing before I was accused from the stand by who would be big of beging [*sic*] the mission of Br Joseph who to passify [*sic*] me gave his consent and that I run away from Nauvoo to get rid of fighting and that he could chase me all over Nauvoo with a plug of tobacco, I acknowledge I am afraid of tobacco but should have no fear of the person for I believe he was too lazy to have chased me all over Nauvoo, he pitched into me largely on many occasions [*sic*] but I care very little about the whole.²⁴

There was little love wasted between Brigham Young and Lyman Wight. *Who would be big*—such an expression was not complimentary. “Big shot” came to be a standard equivalent for one who strutted around and thought far too highly of his own importance. Young no doubt considered Wight’s mulish refusal to follow the counsel of his brethren of the Twelve in similar terms. Interestingly, when the first apostles were called in 1835, including Young but not Wight, humility was a prime requisite. At that time Young was surprised to be called to such an important leadership position until he concluded that the alternative to simple, humble men like himself were “Big Elders” who were unteachable.²⁵ In general, Young’s leadership style was not that of the authoritarian on the throne who simply gives orders.

It was in a December 1844 letter that W. W. Phelps assigned nicknames to the Twelve Apostles. Brigham Young was “the lion of the Lord,” while Lyman Wight was “the wild ram of the mountains.”²⁶ These fanciful labels are not, I think, uniformly felicitous, but perhaps Phelps had discerned something about the character of these two.

By early 1845 Lyman Wight was approaching age forty-eight. He had been a Latter-day Saint for fourteen years. His record of service was strong. Brigham Young was forty-three years old and had been in the church about thirteen

years; he had also accumulated an impressive record of achievement, had faced down the enemy, and was now ready to lead. Both men had sacrificed, both had been courageous, both were seasoned, both loyal to Joseph Smith. They should have been marching shoulder to shoulder. But by heading up the river Wight had embarked on a voyage that would lead them far apart. It was one of those “crucial cubic centimeter” decisions—a small difference at a key juncture leading to a huge divergence later on. Let us trace the sad devolution, or downward movement, as it now continued its fateful course.

As early as 4 February 1845 Wight was dropped as a member of the Council of Fifty.²⁷ Apparently he did not find out about this until sometime after 1848, all the while assuming that he had some kind of prerogative as a member of the Fifty, which actually fell under the control of the Twelve and, contrary to the grandiose expectations of some, devolved into little more than “a debating school.”²⁸

On 7 April 1845, Wight was replaced as a trustee for the Nauvoo House Association.²⁹ At the annual church conference held that day, during the sustaining of officers in the morning session, Heber C. Kimball, who was the presiding officer, recommended patience with Wight. “We should let him remain for the present, probably hereafter there may be a time that he will hearken to counsel, and do much good which he is capable of—for he is a noble-minded man.”³⁰ Unbeknownst to Kimball, Wight and a company of about 150 were already traveling southward from the pineries down the river toward Davenport, Iowa.

For about a month Wight and his company were at Davenport making preparations for their overland voyage to Texas. Then Brigham Young and the other apostles found out where he was.³¹ That there be no misunderstanding,

they sent Samuel Bent, senior member of the Council of Fifty, to read a letter aloud to Lyman. After a glowing description of activity and prosperity at Nauvoo, the letter explained:

And now, dear brethren, if you will hearken to our counsel you will give up all idea of journeying west at present. If you go westward before you have received your endowments in the Temple you will not prosper. And when you meet with trouble and difficulty let no one say that the counsel [*sic*] of the Twelve brought them into it, for we now in the name of the Lord counsel and advise you not to go west at present. We desire, dear brethren, that you should take hold with us and help us to accomplish the building of the Lord's houses. Come brethren, be one with us, and let us be agreed in all of our exertions to roll on the great wheel of the kingdom.³²

If Lyman Wight had misunderstood the desires of his colleagues and leaders before, or somehow rationalized his actions, this letter would seem to remove all doubt. But who knows? He may have said to himself, "I am going to the South, not the West," or "This is still only counsel, not an order." In any case, Samuel Bent had to return and report that Lyman Wight refused to rejoin his brethren of the Twelve in Nauvoo.

At conference on 6 October 1845, during the sustaining of officers, Almon Babbitt spoke against Lyman Wight as follows:

I cannot conscientiously give my vote in his favor. My reason is this: If there is a council in this church that ought to be united, and act in unison as one man, it is the Council of the Twelve. If the head is sick, the whole body is afflicted. If I am rightly informed concerning Brother Wight's conduct, for the past year, he has not acted in unison with the Twelve, nor according to their counsel.

The last year has been one of affliction, persecution and sorrow, when the adversary has continually sought to destroy and mutilate the church; and it has required all the faith, prayers, and perseverance of the leaders, to save this people from the grasp of the destroyer. If the counsel of Brother Wight had been followed, this Temple would not have been built, nor the baptismal font erected. He has sought to draw away a part of the force, which we ought to have had to build this Temple. His teachings have been contrary to the counsel of the church, and his conduct calculated to destroy it. Under circumstances of this kind, I cannot conscientiously vote to continue him in his standing, until he retracts, and makes satisfaction. Brother Wight's course has been calculated to divide the church, and prevent those things being accomplished which were commanded of God by the Prophet Joseph.³³

This was the blunt case against Lyman Wight. If there may have been some personal ambition behind it on the part of Babbitt, it is probably pretty close to the facts of the matter as seen from Nauvoo. Without a report of Wight's reaction, we can assume that he would take issue with two key words: *church* and *calculated*. "It is not the counsel of the *church* that I have rejected," we can hear him say, "but that of Brigham Young." And "I have not *calculated*, nor intended, to divide the church or destroy it but simply to carry out the mission assigned me by the Prophet Joseph Smith and later approved by the Twelve."

The remarkable thing, after all, is that Heber C. Kimball responded immediately to Babbitt by saying:

It is well known that Brother Wight's case was had before the conference last spring, and that he was dropt, and then again retained; that is, that we would let him be, and see what he would do, and what course he

would take. He has been away ever since; and is with a small company somewhere; we cannot tell what he is doing; he may in his own mind, be acting in concert with the rest, and he may be acting for the good of this people. It would be my mind, to let his case lay over for the present, until we can learn something from him.³⁴

Kimball so moved; the motion was seconded and voted for unanimously by the congregation. Kimball, the other apostles, and the Saints in conference assembled were willing to give Wight the benefit of the doubt, to grant that his motives might be pure, and even that his actions might be “for the good of this people.” Wait and see—this was the moderate decision, which continued through 1846, 1847, and most of 1848.

During these years, under the direction of the Twelve, the majority of Nauvoo Mormons were moving through Iowa, thence across the remaining plains to Utah, and getting established. Wight’s little group, in the meantime, pursued its tortuous search for a stable settlement in Texas, establishing itself successively near Austin, at Zodiac on the Perdenales, subsequently at Hamilton Springs, and finally near Bandera.³⁵

In October conference of 1848, Wight was sustained as usual, but less than two months later he was cut off. In early 1849 he was replaced as an apostle. Why had the climate changed during the closing months of 1848? Specifically, what occurred between 8 October and 3 December to change the continued formal acceptance of Wight as an apostle to rejection?

During 1847 Brigham Young made two efforts to gather precise information about Wight’s situation and his attitude. First, Young sent emissaries Peter Haws and Lucian Woodworth to Texas, who returned and reported not only

Wight's total disinclination to affiliate with Young and the rest of the church, but also his pathetic drunkenness.³⁶ The latter condition may have been misunderstood, or exaggerated, but the former seems emphatic. Once these reports reached headquarters and were discussed, it would have been quite possible to drop Wight on behavioral grounds.

At the end of 1847, something happened that, given his enmity toward Brigham Young, would have troubled Wight—the reorganization of the First Presidency, with Young becoming not merely president of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles but president of the church. After some initial opposition from individual apostles, the Twelve quickly fell into line, and the reorganized First Presidency received the unanimous sustaining vote of the conference in Council Bluffs, Iowa, and later in Utah. Wight had already made it abundantly clear that he would go his own way, that the apostles held no claim on him. The reorganization of the First Presidency might have served as a catalyst for an act that definitively cut the rope.

It was during 1848, probably in the late spring, that Wight published his pamphlet, *An Address by Way of an Abridged Account and Journal of My Life*.³⁷ In this work he made clear his rejection of Young's leadership. The Twelve, he said, were "consummately ignorant of all things pertaining to Time and Eternity." They had no power to replace him (Lyman Wight) with "a long eared Jack Ass to fill a place which has never been vacated." When copies of the pamphlet arrived at Kanesville, Iowa, in the fall of 1848, an outraged Orson Hyde wrote a harsh rejoinder. Wight, he said, "is not yet so high that the voice of the Council [of the Twelve] cannot reach him and bring him down, and even put another in his place if they deem it necessary."³⁸ The Pottawotamie High Council met to consider his case

on 7 October. Led by apostles George A. Smith, Ezra T. Benson, and president of the Seventy, Joseph Young, the council refused to fellowship Wight as an apostle.³⁹

The October conference held in Salt Lake City at the same time sustained Wight's continuation in office for the simple reason that they did not yet know of the pamphlet and were willing to continue the status quo. In fact, in early November Brigham Young sent another delegation—Preston Thomas and William Martindale—to Texas to call upon Wight. "We want you to learn his purposes and intentions," Young said, "and if he does not come up right soon, the spirit of the Lord will say, 'Clip the thread' and he will go down at once."⁴⁰ It would be many weeks before Thomas and Martindale could complete the trip and return with a highly negative report of Wight's recalcitrance.

Ultimately, however, their mission had no impact on events. For on 30 November 1848, Captain Allen Compton and three other brethren arrived in Salt Lake bringing mail from Kanesville. In the same packet was a copy of Wight's pamphlet *An Address*. Three days later, on 3 December, the disfellowshipment action was taken.⁴¹ There should be no doubt of the cause-effect relationship in view of the following statement signed by Brigham Young and his two counselors: "Lyman Wight's manifesto was received at the same time [30 November], which clearly demonstrated to the Saints that he was not one with us, consequently [*sic*] the Church dis-fellowshipped him, and all who shall continue to follow him."⁴² The lion and the ram had come to a final, official parting of the ways.

Here I will not give a detailed analysis of Wight's authority claims and the response of Brigham Young and the apostles.⁴³ A summary would include Wight's claim to priority as a high priest; his assertion that the Council of Fifty superseded the Twelve; a vague claim to authority based

on the term *Baneemy* (my elders);⁴⁴ insistence that young Joseph (Joseph Smith III) had been designated by his father to lead the church; and private conversations in which Joseph Smith had instructed Wight what to do, including the establishment of a colony in Texas. These are not foundation stones of equal mass. Each was challenged. The claim to authority based on private conversations is, of course, calculated to open the gates of anarchy. This does not mean that Wight was insincere, although he may have been unduly influenced by a vindictive George Miller, who had rejected the leadership of the Twelve to go to Texas in 1848. For those with a predisposition to reject Utah Mormonism, Wight's claims may have had a certain plausibility for a while, but they were pregnant with trouble for any group who might take him in as an ally.

Most basic is the narrow understanding of *obedience* in the parlance of Wight. He took second place to no one in putting his life on the line, in responding to the different calls placed on him. But his obedience was to his prophet, Joseph Smith. He never saw his position in the Twelve as requiring the same obedience to Brigham Young. Others made the transfer rather easily, seeing obedience to Smith and then Young as quite compatible and unidirectional. After the martyrdom, they came to see Young as the heir, deserving of the same kind of allegiance earlier granted to Joseph Smith. But Lyman Wight, his own man now that the Prophet was dead, did not intend to be clay in the hand of any potter named Brigham Young.⁴⁵ From the beginning Mormon missionaries had chastised those who readily accepted dead prophets (the Bible) but showed no willingness to listen to a living prophet (Joseph Smith). Ironically, in a way he would not have recognized, Wight was facing the same challenge.

I do not wish to claim that Brigham Young handled everything perfectly. What if he had responded with even greater magnanimity? A letter to Wight might have been worded something like this: "Dear fellow apostle. We follow with great interest your company and your colony. Any success you have we know has the sanction of our beloved brother Joseph. As you know, he instructed us to move to the Rocky Mountains. Your brethren of the Twelve are all with us. We should work in concert. We know you will rejoice in our successes, as we rejoice in yours. Keep us informed. Perhaps we can be of assistance. We remember the old days as we preached the gospel and faced the bullets in Missouri. Let us carry on the work."

Or, when it became obvious that Wight, not realizing that he had been dropped, attached supreme importance to the Council of Fifty, one might imagine an addendum: "We are enclosing a brief letter from Uncle John Smith, president of the Fifty." Such a letter might well have instructed Wight to continue his efforts, to report on his activities to the church leadership in Salt Lake City, and perhaps, with the failures in Texas, to come to Utah.⁴⁶

But on the whole Brigham Young deserves high marks. Of course he was irritated at Wight's insistence on leading his colony to Texas, especially after sending a forthright appeal through Samuel Bent in 1845. But through the difficult years of 1845, 1846, 1847, and most of 1848 Young had patiently waited. He gave Wight the benefit of the doubt. Not knowing what was in Lyman's mind, Young sought information through messengers, allowing Lyman full opportunity to express goodwill or loyalty. No such expression was forthcoming. Only when Lyman threw down the gauntlet by publishing his pamphlet, did Brigham take decisive action.

Even then efforts to win Lyman Wight back did not cease. He must have had visits from different Mormon missionaries and letters from his nephews in Utah. In 1855, he received and responded to a long letter from Sanford Porter.⁴⁷ In 1857–58 he exchanged letters with Wilford Woodruff.⁴⁸ Before he had received Woodruff's second letter, he died.

If Brigham Young's patience can be attributed to the advice of those close to him, he deserves credit for listening to them. It was especially Heber C. Kimball, Young's close friend and counselor, who defended Wight as "noble hearted" and counseled patience. We do not have all the comments made about Lyman Wight, but thanks to the faithfulness of Wilford Woodruff in keeping a detailed journal we can eavesdrop on one conversation held in 1859. Wight had died the previous year, but the word may or may not have yet reached Utah. In any case, here is what Heber C. Kimball said: "I always believed Lyman Wight would be saved. I never had any but good feelings about him."⁴⁹

The parallel lives of Lyman Wight and Brigham Young are instructive in many ways. That their respective authority claims were ultimately incompatible seems clear enough, but just how early Wight locked himself into immovable opposition is more questionable. Some would define the problem as largely one of communication. Others would emphasize the personalities—the two strong egos that could not play on the same stage. I see tragedy in the blasted hopes of the wild ram. I also see a profound truth in Young's succinct warning: "All that want to draw away a party from the church after them, let them do it if they can, but they will not prosper."⁵⁰

Notes

1. See Jermy Benton Wight, *The Wild Ram of the Mountain: The Story of Lyman Wight* (Bedford, Wyo.: privately printed, 1996).
2. See Leonard J. Arrington, *Brigham Young: American Moses* (New York: Knopf, 1985).
3. On magnifying of the role of the Twelve, see R. Kent Fielding, "The Growth of the Mormon Church in Kirtland, Ohio" (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1957), and especially Ronald K. Esplin, "The Emergence of Brigham Young and the Twelve to Mormon Leadership, 1830–1841" (Ph.D. diss., Brigham Young University, 1981).
 4. See Esplin, "Emergence of Brigham Young," chaps. 7–9.
 5. See James B. Allen, Ronald K. Esplin, and David J. Whitaker, *Men with a Mission, 1837–1841: The Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in the British Isles* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992).
 6. See Dennis Rowley, "The Mormon Experience in the Wisconsin Pineries, 1841–1845," *BYU Studies* 32/1–2 (1992): 119–48.
 7. See Andrew F. Ehat, "Joseph Smith's Introduction of Temple Ordinances and the 1844 Mormon Succession Question" (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1982), 102–3.
 8. See Danel W. Bachman, "Plural Marriage before the Death of Joseph Smith" (master's thesis, Purdue University, 1975).
 9. See Ehat, "Joseph Smith's Introduction of Temple Ordinances," 194.
 10. Arrington, *Brigham Young: American Moses*, 111.
 11. *Wilford Woodruff's Journal, 1833–1898*, typescript edition, ed. Scott G. Kenney (Midvale, Utah: Signature Books, 1983), 2:432 (28 July 1844).
 12. Lyman Wight to Wilford Woodruff, 24 August 1857, as published in Ronald G. Watt, "A Dialogue between Wilford Woodruff and Lyman Wight," *BYU Studies* 17/1 (1976): 108.
 13. See *Comprehensive History of the Church*, 2:414.
 14. See *History of the Church*, 7:228–42.
 15. See *Comprehensive History of the Church*, 2:414–16.
 16. *History of the Church*, 7:231n.

17. See Reid L. Harper, "The Mantle of Joseph: Creation of a Mormon Miracle," *Journal of Mormon History* 22/2 (1996): 35–71. This sets forth some of the questions about the historicity of the event but, to my mind, presents the alternatives too starkly. The most comprehensive analysis is found in Lynne Watkins Jorgensen and *BYU Studies* staff, "The Mantle of the Prophet Joseph Passes to Brother Brigham: A Collective Spiritual Witness," *BYU Studies* 36/4 (1996–97): 125–204.

18. *History of the Church*, 7:249.

19. *Journal History*, 18 August 1844. The *Journal History* is a compilation of primary sources maintained by the Historical Department, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

20. *Journal History*, 24 August 1844. See also *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 2:452 (24 August 1844): "It was thought best for Br Wight to go north with his company and not south."

21. *Times and Seasons* 5 (15 September 1844): 647.

22. See *History of the Church*, 7:295–96.

23. *Ibid.*, 301–2.

24. Watt, "A Dialogue," 110.

25. *Journal of Discourses*, 8:173.

26. Phelps to William Smith, 25 December 1844, in *Times and Seasons* 5 (1 January 1845): 761.

27. See D. Michael Quinn, "The Council of Fifty and Its Members, 1844 to 1945," *BYU Studies* 20/2 (1980): 196.

28. *Ibid.*

29. See *History of the Church*, 7:394.

30. *Ibid.*, 392.

31. Thus begins the letter of the Twelve to Lyman Wight: "We the Council of the Twelve being assembled and having learned your present circumstances and situation and also your future calculations with regard to your journey west, cannot feel justified without giving you a word of counsel and advice together with some information relative to our present prospects." *Ibid.*, 400.

32. *Ibid.*, 400–401.

33. *Ibid.*, 459–60; *Times and Seasons* 6 (1 November 1845): 1009.

34. *History of the Church*, 7:460.

35. The successive settlements are traced in Wight, *The Wild Ram of the Mountains*, and, more concisely, in Davis Bitton, “Mormons in Texas: The Ill-fated Lyman Wight Colony, 1844–1858,” *Arizona and the West* 11/1 (1969): 5–26.

36. See George A. Smith to Parley P. Pratt, 31 October 1848, *Millennial Star* 11 (1 January 1849): 14; Bitton, “Mormons in Texas,” 5–26. Wight’s son later said that his father had an addiction to opium. It could have been both. See also Davis Bitton, ed., *The Reminiscences and Civil War Letters of Levi Lamoni Wight* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1970), 85–86.

37. Lyman Wight, *An Address by Way of an Abridged Account and Journal of My Life from February 1844 up to April 1848 with an Appeal to the Latter Day Saints* (Austin, Texas: privately published, 1848), LDS Church Archives.

38. Orson Hyde, *To the Saints Scattered Abroad* [1 August 1848], LDS Church Archives.

39. See Pottawotomie High Council Conference Minutes, 7 October 1848, LDS Church Archives. See also *History of the Church*, 7:528.

40. Daniel H. Thomas, *Preston Thomas: His Life and Travels*, BYU Special Collections, 32.

41. This may be a good place to sort out the technicalities. Three actions involving Wight are potentially involved. Disfellowshipment is a discipline that allows one to retain church membership while being deprived of some of its privileges. Excommunication is severance from church membership. Third was depriving him of the apostleship, which could be done while leaving him a member of the church.

Against that backdrop of possibilities, then, what did occur? At the October 1848 conference in Iowa, Lyman Wight was not sustained as an apostle, but this was a local reaction, inasmuch as Salt Lake City was the site of general conference. On 3 December 1848 in Salt Lake City he was “disfellowshipped,” but the term may not

have been used with precision. Brigham Young's manuscript history reads: "I attended public meeting in Great Salt Lake City on the 3rd when the hand of fellowship was withdrawn from Elders Lyman Wight and George Miller." B. H. Roberts's footnote states: "For his insubordination Lyman Wight was excommunicated from the church, the action being taken at Salt Lake City in 1848." *Comprehensive History of the Church*, 2:436. In a later letter Wight wrote: "I soon learnt that I was cut off from the church but never learnt what it was for." Wight to Wilford Woodruff, 24 August 1857, LDS Church Archives. In effect, then, the 3 December 1848 action was excommunication and was so understood by all concerned, including Wight when he heard about it. When a replacement apostle was installed and sustained on 12 February 1849, no separate defrocking action was required. Wight's position in the Twelve had been vacated on 3 December 1848.

42. James R. Clark, ed., *Messages of the First Presidency* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965), 1:351. Compare the following: "You was cut off from the Church in the latter part of 1848, the subject was brought up on the receipt of a pamphlet which you published against the Authorities of the Church." Wilford Woodruff to Lyman Wight, 30 June 1858, Historical Department Letterbooks, LDS Church Archives.

43. I have done this in preliminary fashion in Bitton, "Mormons in Texas," and more extensively in an unpublished paper.

44. *History of the Church*, 2:110.

45. For a contrast, see Davis Bitton, "Heber C. Kimball's Authoritarian Imagery," in *Conference on the Language of the Mormons* (Provo, Utah: BYU Language Research Center, 1974), 2–5.

46. If such words seem unlikely in the real world of egocentric human beings, let us remember the beautiful balancing act performed by Joseph Smith in 1839. While effectively reprimanding Wight for his political statements published in the *Quincy Whig*, he carefully avoided wounding Lyman's self-esteem. See Clark, *Messages of the First Presidency*, 1:106–7.

47. See Lyman Wight to Sanford Porter, 7 December 1855, LDS Church Archives.

48. See Wilford Woodruff to Lyman Wight, 1 July 1857 and 30 June 1858, LDS Church Archives. See also Watt, "A Dialogue," 108–13.

49. *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 5:298 (23 February 1859).

50. *History of the Church*, 7:232.