

Hard Questions in Church History

Lynne Hilton Wilson

1844: Joseph Smith Runs for President and Hyrum Smith's Martyrdom

Questions to Consider:

- Why did Joseph run for US President?
- Who were the Council of Fifty?
- What was the legal basis of destroying the Printing Press?
- Was the Carthage imprisonment legal?
- What did the different Splinter Groups?
- Why did Emma and other Smiths stay behind?

Timeline

1843		
	Dec	Joseph reached out to five USA Presidential nominees to ask if they would protect the Saints' and their losses.
		Seven-hundred-sixty-nine more British immigrate to USA—total 3,758 by the end of 1843.
		Temple walls approach 12' high, and a temporary floor was placed so the saints could gather out of the wind.
		Church membership reached roughly 25,000 (with half living in the area of Nauvoo).
	Dec 28	Acting as Mayor of Nauvoo, Joseph spoke on the need for protection, and prophesied: "We have a Judas in our midst" (josephsmithpapers.org). He had heard rumors of dissenters plotting his death. Robert Foster and Wilson Law excommunicated.
1844		
	Jan 8	William Law is removed from the First Presidency.
	Jan 29	Willard Richards nominates Joseph Smith as a candidate for US President.
	Feb 17	Anti-Mormon meetings held in Carthage and Warsaw.
	Feb 20	Joseph called a delegation look west for future options.
	Mar 11	Council of Fifty organized as a political adjunct to the Church.
	Mar 24	Joseph tells Latter-day Saints of a conspiracy to kill him.
	Mar 26	Joseph gives his "Last Charge"; the Twelve receive priesthood keys to lead the Church.
	Apr 7	Joseph gives King Follett Funeral Sermon at a general conference session in Nauvoo.
	Apr 9	Brigham Young announces elders will be called to preach the Gospel and electioneer.
	Apr 15	337 electioneer missionaries called to all 26 states and Wisconsin Territory; Editor Thomas Sharp of the <i>Warsaw Signal</i> launches anti-Mormon diatribe.
	Apr 18	William and Jane Law excommunicated for apostasy and conspiring to kill Joseph.
	May 1	Francis Higbee files a legal complaint; sues Joseph Smith for slander.
	May 10	Newspaper prospectus announces forthcoming <i>Nauvoo Expositor</i> .
	May 17	US presidential convention held in Nauvoo selects Joseph for US president and Sidney Rigdon for vice-president
	May 23	William Law obtains a grand jury indictment against Joseph Smith.
	Jun 7	First issue of <i>Nauvoo Expositor</i> published.
	Jun 8-10	Nauvoo City Council discusses the <i>Nauvoo Expositor</i> for 14 hours, finds it a public nuisance and destroys it.
	Jun 18	Joseph places Nauvoo under martial law to protect the Saints from their enemies.
	Jun 24	Joseph and Hyrum surrender to posse; taken to Carthage.
	Jun 25	Joseph meets with Governor Thomas Ford of Illinois in Carthage.
	Jun 27	Joseph and Hyrum Smith are murdered while incarcerated in Carthage Jail.

	Jul 8	Parley P. Pratt tells the Saints, “Continue to pursue daily duties and . . . make no movement in Church government to reorganize or alter anything until the return of the remainder of the Quorum of the Twelve.”
	Aug 3	Sidney Rigdon returns from Pittsburgh to Nauvoo.
	Aug 6	Brigham Young returns to Nauvoo.
	Aug 8	Mantle of Joseph falls on Brigham Young; Church members vote to sustain the Twelve.
	Dec	Nauvoo City Charter repealed by Illinois Senate (25 to 14) and House of Representatives (75 to 31).
1845		
	Dec 10	Endowments first given in Nauvoo Temple.
1846		
	Feb 4	Latter-day Saints begin exodus from Nauvoo across the frozen Mississippi River to the west
	May 1	Orson Hyde dedicates the Nauvoo Temple.
1848		
	Oct 9	Interior of the Nauvoo Temple burned by an arsonist.
1850		
	May 27	Exterior walls of Nauvoo Temple destroyed by wind.

Joseph Smith’s Bid for US President

By 1843 newspaper editors across the nation were asking, “Who shall be the next President?” From New York to Michigan, the Carolinas to Missouri, the question begged for an answer in the united, but too often divided states. Acting “in behalf of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,” Joseph sent letters to five leading presidential candidates—Martin Van Buren, Lewis Case, Henry Clay, John C. Calhoun, and Richard Johnson asking, “What will be your rule of action relative to us as a people, should fortune favor your ascension to the chief magistracy?” A letter from war hawk Henry Clay, a leading candidate of the Whig Party, stated, “Should I be a candidate, I can enter into no engagements, make no promises, give no pledge to any particular portion of the people of the United States. If I ever enter into that high office I must go into it free and unfettered, with no guarantees but such as are to be drawn from my whole life, character and conduct” (Smith, *History of the Church*, 6:376; “Correspondence between Gen. Joseph Smith and the Hon. Henry Clay,” *Times and Seasons* 5, no. 11 [June 1, 1844]: 544). Southerner John C. Calhoun wrote, “As you refer to the case of Missouri, candor compels me [to pen] . . . the case does not come within the jurisdiction of the Federal Government, which is one of limited and specific powers” (Smith, *History of the Church*, 6:156, 195; Matthew A. Fitzsimons, “Calhoun’s Bid for the Presidency, 1841-1844,” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 38, no 1 [June 1951], 39-60). Joseph wrote of his contempt for the unfettered stance of Clay and the narrow view of power vested in the presidential office of Calhoun.

On January 29, Joseph Smith invited John Taylor, his brother Hyrum, friend John P. Green, and other leading men in Nauvoo to counsel with him on “the proper course for this people to pursue in relation to the coming Presidential election” (Smith, *History of the Church*, 6:187). At this informal political caucus, it was moved by Willard Richards and unanimously accepted that “we will have an independent electoral ticket, and that Joseph Smith be a candidate for the next Presidency; and that we use all honorable means in our power to secure his election” (Smith, *History of the Church*, 6:188). Joseph accepted the nomination and allowed his name to be, as he said it “used by my friends on any wise as President of the United States or candidate for that office if I & my friends could have had the privilege of enjoying our religious & civil rights as American citizens” (Scott Kenney, *Wilford Woodruff Journals, 1833-1898* 9 vols [Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1984], 1:349; Smith, *History of the Church*, 6:210-211).

Ten days later, on February 7, 1844, with the help of William W. Phelps quill and skill, Joseph's presidential platform was formulated. The document was called, "General Smith's Views of the Powers and Policy of the Government of the United States." The contents included an itemized listing of solutions for the nation's ills.

- Abolish Slavery by "every [slave holding] man a reasonable price for his slaves out of the surplus revenue arising from the sale of public lands," other austerity action
- Reduce congressional pay (\$8 down to \$2 per day)
- Prison Reform through education and training
- Return of the National Bank (Pres. Jackson abolished a national level of finances)
- Reduce size of the House of Representatives to two representatives per million people
- Borders: Annex Oregon and Texas and if the Native Americans give their consent, extend the United States "from the east to the west sea"

Council of Fifty

The Council of Fifty, organized on March 11, 1844, provided a pattern of political government under priesthood and revelation. It was to its members the nucleus or focus of God's latter-day kingdom. The council had practical responsibilities for organizing Joseph Smith's presidential campaign in 1844. Joseph's election platform was carried in each of the 26 states and Wisconsin territory via church members who were called at April General Conference to serve as "electioneer missionaries" (See Kenneth R. Godfrey, "Council of Fifty," in Daniel H. Ludlow, *Mormon Encyclopedia* [NY: MacMillan, 1992], 1:326-327).

Elder Orson Whitney said at the 1917 October General Conference:

Joseph Smith made an earnest effort to ward off the very calamity that he had predicted. And how did he propose to do this? Early in 1844, a few months before his martyrdom, he became a candidate for President of the United States, and sent forth the Apostles and Elders of the Church to present his "views on Government" to the people of the States of the Union. Incorporated in the platform of political principles upon which he proposed to stand, was a provision for the liberation of the slaves of the South—not by violence, not by confiscation, thus despoiling their owners; for the slaves were their property, inherited from their fathers and grandfathers: The Prophet recognized this fact, and he said, let the Nation purchase the slaves and set them free: let the colored man owe his liberty to the Government as a gift; the money for the purchase to be realized from the sale of public lands long its line. To hold on earth the keys of power divine, To gather Israel, as **long** foretold

Unfortunately, the Prophet's policy was never adopted and nation endured the civil war and years of racial discrimination.

Last Charge

At one of the Council of Fifty last meetings (possibly March 26, 1844), we have an account of Joseph's "Last charge." Benjamin Johnson was in attendance and years later described Joseph "in the presence of the Quorum of the Twelve and others who were encircled around him." He recorded a summary of Joseph's remarks:

He arose, gave a review of his life and sufferings, and of the testimonies he had borne, and said that the Lord had now accepted his labors and sacrifices, and did not require him longer to carry the responsibilities and burden and bearing of this kingdom, and turning to those around him, including the 12, he said “And in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ I now place it upon you my brethren of this council and I shake my skirts clear of all responsibility from this time forth,” springing from the floor and shaking his skirt at the same time (Alexander L. Baugh and Susan Easton Black, ed., *Banner of the Gospel: Wilford Woodruff* (Provo, UT: BYU Church History Symposium, 2007), Wilford Woodruff’s 1897 Testimony.

The Prophet and William Clayton both recorded that they attended the meeting in their journals, but they did not include the “last charge.” Years later, several people recorded their memories, but no contemporary document is available from this time.

The Conspiracy

In 1844 once faithful members of the Church, now disaffected, organized a conspiracy to destroy the Prophet Joseph Smith. Among the conspirators were Wilson and William Law, Robert and Charles Foster, and Francis and Chauncy Higbee. Lucy Mack Smith wrote of a dimension to the conspiracy that is little known—

Joseph Jackson . . . asked Hyrum [Smith] for his daughter Lovina [Smith] for he wished to make a wif[e] of her[.] Hyrum not choosing to have his daughter marry a man who did not belong to the church refused for this and other reasons to give her to him this [illegible] Jackson then asked Joseph to [use] his influence with Hyrum to get the girl for him Joseph refusing to do so Jackson went to Law to get his assistance in stealing Lovina from her father Hyrum heard of this and wa asked me what he should do <came to me several times for advice> he said he was alarmed about her that he felt worse than he did when he was in prison . . . [T]he Higbees Laws and Fosters were all connected with Jackson in his operations [sic] this was proclaimed on the stand by Sydney Rigdon (Lucy Mack Smith, *History*, 1844-1845, p. 234. Joseph Smith Papers).

Even though Lucy Mack Smith’s record is the only one that tells of this incident, according to the minutes of the Nauvoo city council William Law offered Jackson \$500 to kill Joseph. Joseph was warned of the conspiracy and spoke of their plans publicly which detoured their efforts temporarily.

King Follett Discourse

The King Follett Discourse is the name given to the address the Prophet Joseph delivered on April 7, 1844 at a general conference of the Church. It was a commemorative oration for Brother King Follett who had died in an accident on March 9, 1844. The discourse may be one of the Prophet’s greatest sermons because of its comprehensive doctrinal teachings on the character of God, man’s potential to progress in God’s likeness, the Creation, and the tie between the living and their progenitors (See Donald Q. Cannon, “King Follett Discourse,” in Daniel H. Ludlow, *Mormon Encyclopedia* [NY: MacMillan, 1992], 2:791-792).

Nauvoo Expositor

The *Nauvoo Expositor* was the newspaper voice of apostates determined to destroy the Prophet Joseph and the Church. Claiming that Joseph was a fallen prophet, dissenters through the *Expositor* claimed

to expose the Prophet's supposed false teachings and abominations. On June 7, the first and only issue of the *Nauvoo Expositor* appeared and caused an immediate furor in the community (See Reed C. Durham Jr., "Nauvoo Expositor," in Daniel H. Ludlow, *Mormon Encyclopedia* [NY: MacMillan, 1992], 3:996-997).

Lucy Mack Smith wrote of the *Nauvoo Expositor*—

[The Apostates] gather strength untill finally they established a printing press in our midst through this organ the[y] belched forth one continued the most intolerable & the blackest lies that was ever palmed upon a community . . . The Apostates left the city in a great rage swearing vengeance upon Joseph the council and the city They <went before Esqr Smith at Carthage and> swore out writs for Joseph the council and the police and sent here after them but our they took advantage of the privilege [*sic*] of Habeous [*sic*] corpus which was granted them in the charter and were tried before Esqr Wells of Nauvoo. They then Complained to the Governor who came to <being in> Quincy on buisness [*sic*] at the time came immediately to Carthage where he found a mob collected of several hundred men— he took a vote from them to see if they would stand by him in such measures as he saw fit to adopt and they agreed to abide the law he then sent to Nauvoo for those men whom the mob Hyrum and Joseph and several others by virtue of the smith writ as he did not choose to recognize the Habeous [*sic*] — corpus privilege [*sic*] contained in our charter my sons knowing that the men by whom the Gov was surounded [*sic*] were sworn to take their lives at first fled to Iowa [Iowa] but as the pledged the faith of the state for their protection and Hyrum was inclined to come back for as he heard the Gov had threatened to burn the city if the prisoners were not given up many of the brethren thought they ought to give themselves up for trial— But Joseph if he went he should die however he was willing to die (Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1844–1845, bk. [19], p. 8, bk. *Joseph Smith Papers*).

Events Leading to the Martyrdom

As mayor of Nauvoo, Joseph Smith summoned the city council on June 8, 1844. Following fourteen hours of deliberation in three different sessions, the council resolved on Monday, June 10, about 6:30 p.m. that the *Nauvoo Expositor* and its printing office were "a public nuisance" and instructed the mayor "to remove it . . . without delay." Joseph promptly ordered the city marshal to destroy the press and burn all copies of the paper. At 8:00 p.m. the marshal carried out the mayor's orders (Smith, *History of the Church*, 6:432-449). The action, justified or not, played into the hands of the opposition.

Joseph's enemies countered with criminal charges against him and his brother Hyrum for inciting a riot. The brothers soon gained release from arrest on a habeas corpus plea before a Latter-Day Saint tribunal. Then, following the advice of a state circuit court judge, they appeared before a non-Mormon justice in Nauvoo and were exonerated of the charges against them.

Not satisfied with the court decision, threats of mob violence increased. On June 18 Joseph mobilized the Nauvoo Legion to protect Nauvoo. When Illinois Governor Thomas Ford, who apparently sided with the opposition, ordered Church leaders to stand trial again on the same charges, this time in Carthage, Joseph and Hyrum crossed the Mississippi to Iowa. Joseph wrote to Emma that he hoped "to get to the city of Washington (Journal, December 1842–June 1844; Book 4, 1 March–22 June

1844, p. [170]. *Joseph Smith Papers*). Pressured by family and friends, Joseph returned to Nauvoo (Smith, *History of the Church* 6:555, 559).

Early in the morning of June 24 Joseph bid Emma farewell and asked her to write a blessing that he would later sign. In *Saints* volume 1, chapter 44 is written—

In the blessing she penned, Emma asked for wisdom from Heavenly Father and the gift of discernment. “I desire the Spirit of God to know and understand myself,” she wrote. “I desire a fruitful, active mind, that I may be able to comprehend the designs of God.”

She asked for wisdom to raise her children, including the baby she expected in November, and expressed hope in her eternal marriage covenant. “I desire with all my heart to honor and respect my husband,” she wrote, “ever to live in his confidence and by acting in unison with him retain the place which God has given me by his side.” Finally, Emma prayed for humility and hoped to rejoice in the blessings God prepared for the obedient. “I desire that whatever may be my lot through life,” she wrote, “I may be enabled to acknowledge the hand of God in all things.”

On June 24 Joseph and Hyrum accompanied by a group of friends left Nauvoo for Carthage, a distance of about 23 miles. Joseph told his friends, “Boys, if I don’t come back, take care of yourselves; I am going like a lamb to the slaughter, yet I have a conscience void of offense towards God and man” (Smith, *History of the Church*, 6:555, 559). Joseph and his group arrived in Carthage shortly before midnight.

For Joseph and Hyrum Smith, Carthage held little hope. Illegal court proceedings and incarceration on trumped up charges were their lot. During June 26 and the morning hours of June 27, 1844, Joseph and his brother Hyrum were visited by many friends. In the early afternoon their only visitors were two members of the Quorum of the Twelve—John Taylor and Willard Richards.

Around five o’clock in the afternoon “an armed mob—painted black—of from 150 to 200 persons” surrounded the jail. Despite early attempts to defend themselves from lawless violence, the four men could not stop the brutal assassins. Hyrum Smith was the first to fall from an assassin’s bullet. He fell to the ground exclaiming, “I am a dead man!” Upon seeing him fall, Joseph sobbed, “Oh dear, brother Hyrum!” Joseph then stepped toward the bedroom window. As he did so bullets shot from the doorway struck him and some find that two shots from outside. He fell from the window to the ground below after exclaiming, “O Lord, My God!” (D&C 135).

Doctrine and Covenants 135

About 8 a.m. on Friday, June 28th, the remains of Joseph and Hyrum were placed in rough boxes, put into two wagons, and covered with prairie hay, buffalo robes, blankets, and bushes to protect them from the hot sun. The two wagons belonged to Artois Hamilton who drove the prophet’s body, and his son drove Hyrum’s body 23 miles to Nauvoo. The wagons were guarded by eight soldiers and led by the prophet’s younger brother, Samuel Harrison Smith (who had arrived in Nauvoo just hours after his brother’s martyrdom), and accompanied by Apostle Willard Richards. Between 2:30 and 3 p.m. the procession reached Nauvoo and was moving along Mulholland Street, where the assembled Nauvoo Legion, the city council and thousands of mourners vented their sorrow. The procession then moved slowly past the unfinished Nauvoo Temple, where additional crowds had gathered. Sarah

Leavitt observed, “Such mourning and lamentation was seldom ever heard on earth” (“History of Sarah Studevart Leavitt,” p. 13. L. Tom Perry Special Collections). Dan Jones descriptively wrote, “Oh, the sorrowful scene to be seen in Nauvoo that day! There has never been nor will there ever be anything like it; everyone sad along the streets, all the shops closed and every business forgotten” (Dan Jones, “The Martyrdom of Joseph Smith and His Brother Hyrum,” *Brigham Young University Studies* 24, no. 1 [Winter 1984]: 93).

The procession proceeded down Main Street to the Mansion House, where the bodies were taken into the dining room and the door closed to give time to the family to see the bodies first. Eight to ten thousand Saints gathered near the Mansion House and church leaders offered brief remarks. Most remembered were the words of the only apostle in Nauvoo at that time, Elder Willard Richards, who “pledged his honor, and his life for their good conduct.” The people “with one united voice resolved to trust to the law for a remedy of such a high-handed assassination, and when that failed, to call upon God to avenge them of their wrongs.” Richards concluded his remarks by saying, “O, Americans, weep, for the glory of freedom has departed!” (Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, 7:418). The assembled Saints were then admonished to go home quietly and promised that a viewing would begin at 8:00 in the morning, June 29, 1844, when the remains of the martyrs could be viewed by all.

Saturday morning, June 29, over ten thousand persons visited the remains from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., entering at the west door and exiting at the north door of the Mansion House. “As we came in at the door,” penned Mosiah Hancock, “we came to the feet of the Prophet Joseph, then we passed up by his left side and around his head and down by his right side. Next, we turned to the right and came to the feet of Hyrum, then up by his left side and around his head and down by his right side, then we filed out of the other door” (Mosiah Hancock Journal, 29-30. L. Tom Perry Special Collections). At 5 p.m. the mourners left the Mansion House for the family to pay their final farewells.

John Taylor penned a tribute to Joseph which was later canonized as Section 135 of the Doctrine and Covenants.

Joseph Smith, the Prophet and Seer of the Lord, has done more, save Jesus only, for the salvation of men in this world, than any other man that ever lived in it. In the short space of twenty years, he has brought forth the Book of Mormon, which he translated by the gift and power of God, and has been the means of publishing it on two continents; has sent the fulness of the everlasting gospel, which it contained, to the four quarters of the earth; has brought forth the revelations and commandments which compose this book of Doctrine and Covenants, and many other wise documents and instructions for the benefit of the children of men; gathered many thousands of the Latter-day Saints, founded a great city, and left a fame and name that cannot be slain. He lived great, and he died great in the eyes of God and his people; and like most of the Lord’s anointed in ancient time, has sealed his mission and his works with his own blood.

On June 27, 1844, Brigham Young was serving a mission with Elder Wilford Woodruff in Boston. Brigham wrote in his journal:

Spent the day in Boston with brother Woodruff . . . In the evening, while sitting in the depot waiting, I felt a heavy depression of Spirit, and so melancholy I could not converse with any degree of pleasure. I could not assign my reasons for my peculiar feelings.

It took twelve days to learn the reason for his depression. On July 9, 1844 Brigham learned of the Prophet's and Patriarch's death. He recorded at that point, "The first thing I thought of was whether Joseph had taken the keys of the kingdom with him from the earth. Bringing my hand down on my knee, I said, 'The keys of the kingdom are right here with the Church'" (Susan E. Black, *Who's Who in the Doctrine and Covenants*, "Brigham Young," 1997).

More Sources

Ludlow, *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*. Joseph Smith Papers Project. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, vol. 6. Smith, "Last Testimony of Sister Emma," *Saints' Herald* 26, no. 19 (October 1, 1879). Alexander L. Baugh and Susan Easton Black, ed., *Banner of the Gospel: Wilford Woodruff* (Provo, UT: BYU Church History Symposium, 2007). Dallin H. Oaks, Marvin S. Hill, *Carthage Conspiracy: The Trial of the Accused Assassins of Joseph Smith* (Urbana, IL: University Press, 1975).