

Hard Questions in Church History

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Succession, and Splinter Groups

Questions to Consider:

- When Did Joseph Stop trusting Sidney?
- Why Did Sidney want to Raise up a Church to Joseph?
- Did the Prophet Joseph actually name his son or any group a successor to run the church?
- What did the different Splinter Groups claim?
- How many splinter groups lasted?
- Why did Emma and other Smiths stay behind?
- Had Joseph Smith III not read the Book of Mormon before accepting the call as President of the church?

Timeline

1844		
	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
1845		
	Dec 10	Endowments first given in Nauvoo Temple (Lucy Mack Smith present).
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.

Succession

Scriptural warnings against false leadership

In the early Christian church, the apostles took charge after Jesus’s death. Apostles Peter and Paul warned that false teachers would creep in among the Saints to destroy the church (Acts 20:29; 2 Peter 2:1, 12). It appears evident that Satan knows where to put his counterfeit energies. Similarly, in Liberty Jail, the Prophet Joseph learned from the Lord why “many are called, but few are chosen” (D&C 121:34-40):

³⁵Because their hearts are set so much upon the things of this world, and aspire to the honors of men, that they do not learn this one lesson—³⁶That the rights of the priesthood are

inseparably connected with the powers of heaven, and that the powers of heaven cannot be controlled nor handled only upon the principles of righteousness. ³⁷That they may be conferred upon us, it is true; but when we undertake to cover our sins, or to gratify our pride, our vain ambition, or to exercise control or dominion or compulsion upon the souls of the children of men, in any degree of unrighteousness, behold, the heavens withdraw themselves; the Spirit of the Lord is grieved; and when it is withdrawn, Amen to the priesthood or the authority of that man. ³⁸Behold, ere he is aware, he is left unto himself, to kick against the pricks, to persecute the saints, and to fight against God. ³⁹We have learned by sad experience that it is the nature and disposition of almost all men, as soon as they get a little authority, as they suppose, they will immediately begin to exercise unrighteous dominion. ⁴⁰Hence many are called, but few are chosen.

Unfortunately, as we look at the splinter groups, and to a lesser degree, even some of those who followed the apostolic leadership of Brigham Young, we see this pattern. (And actually, if I am honest, I see the same pattern in my own life even as a parent at times.)

Divine direction for the future church

We also find in modern revelation the Lord’s preparation for succession of His church. On March 28, 1835, Joseph received a revelation stating, “The twelve . . . Apostles . . . form a quorum equal in authority and power to the three presidents previously mentioned” (D&C 107:23-24; also D&C112:15). Then nine years later, members of the Council of Fifty heard the prophet Joseph’s explain a similar message at what became known as his, “Last Charge,” as discussed previously.

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] citing Benjamin Johnson).

Yet for most of the Saints, their witness of who the Lord had chosen to replace the Prophet Joseph came a personal revelation while in attendance at an August 8, 1844 Nauvoo gathering.

The Mantle of Joseph—August 8, 1844

Several apostles were serving missions when Joseph and Hiram were martyred. Brigham Young was serving in Massachusetts. When he learned of Joseph’s death, “the first thing which I thought of was, whether Joseph had taken the keys of the kingdom with him from the earth . . .” but then exclaimed, “The keys of the kingdom are right here with the Church” (Susan Easton Black, *Who’s Who in the D&C*, Brigham Young).

The last of June and July 1844, only two Apostles were in Nauvoo, and both had been in Carthage at the martyrdom, Willard Richards and John Taylor (the later had to stay in Carthage due to his being shot multiple times). Most of the Twelve were serving on campaigning missions or looking for a new gathering place further west (i.e. Lyman Wight in Texas). Sidney Rigdon was living in Pittsburg,

Pennsylvania, as he was running as Joseph's Vice President and had to live in another state. Messages were sent to all the leaders to return to Nauvoo as soon as possible.

After Sidney heard of Joseph's martyrdom he set out for Nauvoo, returning on August 3rd, 1844. In the city beautiful he found Latter-day Saints concerned over who should lead the Church. He offered to become the guardian of the church and to build it up in memory of Joseph. Sidney wanted to quickly move ahead with his plan before the apostles could return. He called a meeting for August 6, to ratify his plans, but Nauvoo Stake President William Marks moved it two days later to August 8th. The Lord's hand was in the timing, as Brigham Young and four other apostles did not return to Nauvoo until August 6. We have detailed accounts of this time in B.H. Roberts, ed., *Joseph Smith, History of the Church*, and several good histories (i.e. Barrett, *Joseph Smith and the Restoration* [Provo, UT: BYU Press, 1975], *josephsmithpapers.org*, etc.).

August 7, 1844, John Taylor was still recuperating from his multiple gunshot wounds, so the Quorum met at his home. Nine apostles had returned to Nauvoo—President Brigham, Heber C. Kimball Parley and Orson Pratt, Willard Richards, Wilford Woodruff, George A. Smith, and Lyman Wight had all returned.

On August 8, 1844, thousands of Saints gathered in the morning near the temple walls and listened for over two hours as Sidney Rigdon put forth his claim to lead the church as a guardian. The meeting stopped for lunch and reconvened at 2:00 p.m. In the afternoon meeting Brigham said, "I say unto you that the Quorum of the Twelve have the keys of the kingdom of God in all the world." During his

short speech, many in the audience claimed that the visage and voice of Joseph fell upon Brigham. George Q. Cannon recorded:

No sooner did President Young arise than the power of God rested down upon him in the face of the people. It did not appear to be Brigham Young; it appeared to be Joseph Smith that spoke to the people—Joseph in his looks, in his manner, and in his voice; even his figure

Sidney Rigdon

- March 8, 1832—Joseph Smith appoints Sidney as a counselor.
- July 5, 1832—Four months after his call to the First Presidency, Sidney claims a revelation directing to him to take over the Church; disfellowshipped.
- 1839—Sidney tells the Saints in Quincy to scatter as the Church has come to an end, months prior to Joseph's release from Liberty Jail.
- 1841—Due to Sidney's illness, Joseph asks John C. Bennett to step in as an assistant for him in the First Presidency.
- August 13, 1843—Disfellowshipped for aiding anti-Mormons.
- Octo 7, 1843—Church membership "votes" to keep Sidney in the First Presidency; Joseph says, "I have thrown him off my shoulders, and you have again put him on me. You may carry him, but I will not"
- January 1844—Nominated as Vice President running mate to Joseph, must live in another state and moves to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; receives a revelation to take over the Church.
- August 3, 1844 Offers to lead the church as "guardian" after Joseph
- September 1844—Sidney is excommunicated.
- October 1844—Sidney starts a newspaper; denounces polygamy; claims Joseph fell in 1841.
- April 6, 1845—Sidney establishes "Church of Jesus Christ of the Children of Zion" in Pittsburgh with himself as a prophet, seer, and revelator; ordains Twelve Apostles; claims to receive prophecies.
- 1846—Sidney begins to practice polygamy. Followers leave as "his rash prophecies failed." Humiliated, Sidney left public leadership them to live alone with his family in Friendship, NY. In 2007 there were 12,136 members headquartered in Monongahela, PA.
- 1876—Sidney Rigdon dies.

was transformed so that it looked like that of Joseph, and everybody present, who had the Spirit of God, saw that he was the man whom God had chosen to hold the keys now that the Prophet Joseph had gone behind the veil (George G. Cannon, “The Power and Authority, etc.,” *Journal of Discourses* 26 vols. [London: Latter-Day Saints’ Bk Depot, 1883], 23:363-64).

After Brigham’s short speech, Sidney Rigdon asked W. W. Phelps to speak on his behalf. Sidney must have been disappointed when W. W. Phelps spoke of a vision he had of Joseph shortly before—two days after Joseph and Hyrum were buried—and his support of apostolic leadership.

[Joseph] came the same as when he was alive, and in a moment appeared to me in his own house. He said tell the drivers to drive on. I asked if the building was on wheels? He said certainly. I spoke, and away it went. We drove all round the hills and valleys. He then told the drivers to drive on over the river into Iowa . . . and we did so— then I awoke. . . . Let us go ahead and build up the Temple, and then you will be endowed; when the Temple is completed all the honorable mothers in Israel will be endowed, as well as the Elders. . . . If you want to do right, uphold the Twelve (*JosephSmithPapers.org*; History, 1838–1856, volume F-1 [1 May 1844–8 August 1844], p. 301).

The congregation of Saints voted to sustain the Twelve Apostles.

Eight months later on April 7, 1845, Brigham Young was sustained at General Conference as president of the Quorum of the Twelve. Two years later on December 2, 1847 the First Presidency of the Church was reestablished with Brigham as president with two of his fellow apostles and British missionary companions as counselors, Heber C. Kimball and Willard Richards.

Widow Emma Smith

Emma did not retreat into the dark recesses of the Mansion House after the death of Joseph. She actively tried to clarify her role. Emma was not left without means. Before Joseph’s death, beginning on May 15, 1841 Joseph arranged that she would acquire farmland for \$2,700 in Hancock County from Ebenezer and Eleanor Wiggins. From that date until June 27, 1844 Emma’s name, and that of her children, appeared on multiple land transactions.

Questions arose as to whether the properties in Emma’s name and that of her children and properties in the name of Joseph Smith belonged to the family or to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. For example, Emma held title to the lot on which the unfinished Nauvoo House stood, but she did not hold title to the building. The fact that Joseph Smith did not leave a Last Will and Testament and made little distinction between property transactions to provide for his family and property transactions of Church holdings were real and decisive answers were not easy to come by.

Creditors were not willing to wait for property ownership issues to be resolved by legal means. They wanted to be paid immediately for Joseph’s debts and Emma became their prey. Emma expressed her frustrations in a letter to Thomas Gregg: “I have no documents or papers in my possession of a historical character whatever. All the records of Mr. Smiths of that nature were left with Willard Richards and Wm Clayton” (Letter of Emma Smith to Thomas Gregg, April 21, 1846 as quoted in Linda King Newell and Valeen Tippets Avery, *Mormon Enigma: Emma Smith* [New York City: Doubleday, 1984], 234).

On November 17, 1844 forty-year-old Emma gave birth to David Hyrum Smith in the Mansion House. A friend, Mrs. Durfee “‘intimated . . . that Joseph the prophet’ had named the baby before he left for Carthage.” According to Mrs. Durfee, the baby “was to be the David the Bible speaks of to rule over Israel forever.” Two of Joseph’s Smith’s plural wives, Eliza R. Snow and Emily Partridge independently visited Emma after David Hyrum’s birth, along with others. Eliza wrote Emma a poem. And Emily recorded, “She was very gracious . . . for there was no Joseph to be jealous of then” (Oliver Huntington Journal, p. 53, as cited in Newell and Avery, *Mormon Enigma*, 211).

Some stated that this Joseph had prophesied that baby David Hiram would follow his father is president of the of the church someday. One of those was Brigham Young. Just three years after Emma and Joseph III joined the Reorganized LDS church, Brigham said at the 1863 October conference:

Long before his death Joseph [the Prophet] had told said to me, all about this son he should I shall have a son born to him me, and his name should shall be called David; and on him, in some future time, will rest the responsibility that now rests upon me.” This is Joseph’s declaration to me and others, sometime before his death. I can produce plenty of witnesses to the truth of this, if necessary (citing, Manuscript minutes of sermon, 7 October 1863, recorded by George D. Watt, *Brigham Young Collection*, and Journal of Robert McQuarrie, 6 [sic] October 1863, both at Church Archives).

However, in that she was not to raise her children with a knowledge of the Book of Mormon. Instead she returned to the Methodist Church, married a nonmember, and did stayed away from splinter groups until her son was asked to run the reorganize church in 1860.

After the birth of David Hyrum Smith, Emma was not seen rushing about Nauvoo like most in town. She was certainly aware that thousands of Latter-day Saints were moving about in what presented a most unusual dichotomy—an oddity of grand proportions. With dogged determination they worked to complete the temple, their homes, and their shops and to cultivate their farms. Yet those who built the city also scurried to build wagons to transport themselves and their families to regions unknown and uncharted in the Rocky Mountains.

As Latter-day Saints made their final preparations to leave Nauvoo, several tried to second guess the future plans of Emma. Believing that she would stay in Nauvoo, a few of the Saints gave Emma their properties for “\$1 and love and consideration.” Other Saints paid Emma a visit at the Mansion House to bid her farewell.

Emma’s immediate concern was for her own safety and that of her children. In the September 1846 Battle of Nauvoo, Emma was threatened that “if she did not move out of the house in three days it would be burned over her head” (Smith, *Joseph Smith III and the Restoration*, 88). On the third day of the battle, Emma discovered a pile of charred sticks and leaves had been placed against the north side of her house. Fearing that arsonists would burn her house to the ground, Emma placed care of the Mansion House in the hands of Abram Van Tuyl and boarded the steamer *Uncle Toby* with her children and housekeeper, Savilla Durfee. After a six-day voyage with Captain Grimes at the helm, Emma and her family disembarked at Fulton City, Illinois about 150 miles upstream from Nauvoo.

In Fulton, Emma rented a large two-story frame house at the corner of Base and Wall Streets. She and her family shared rooms with friends who had also fled Nauvoo. Emma and her children resided in Fulton City from September 1846 until February 1847. The reason Emma returned with her family to Nauvoo was news that Abram Van Tuyl having built a houseboat and intending to furnish his boat with furniture from the Mansion House. Any furniture he didn't use in the houseboat was to be sold downriver as Van Tuyl was on his way to Texas. Hoping to stop the robbery, Emma returned to Nauvoo.

A grandson, Elbert Aorial Smith, later recorded, “[Emma] reached Nauvoo in the afternoon of February 19, 1847, and so determinedly pushed her claims, that in three days she was again installed in her house as its mistress” (Inez A. Kennedy, *Recollections of the Pioneers of Lee County, Illinois*, 1893, in Ronald E. Romig, ed. *Emma's Family* [Independence, MO: John Whitmer Books, 2008], 11. The Nauvoo Emma returned to was much different than the Nauvoo she had left. Like Thomas L. Kane, Emma found “empty workshops, ropewalks, and smithies” (Thomas Kane, *The Mormons: A Discourse Delivered before The Historical Society of Pennsylvania: March 26, 1850* [Philadelphia: King & Baird, 1850], 4).

By summer of 1847 Lewis Crum Bidamon had moved to Nauvoo. By fall of 1847 he was courting Emma. Joseph III remembered Lewis calling upon his mother—

Catching sight of Mother sewing at an upper window, he made her a very polite and widely sweeping bow. Regaining his erect posture after this elaborate ceremony, he replaced his hat upon his head and stepped forward briskly, when suddenly a clothesline he had failed to observe caught him across the forehead, just under the brim of his hat! Off flew the hat, but alas, along with it flew a very fine toupee (Smith, *Joseph Smith and the Restoration*, 94-95).

Emma laughed as Lewis shouted, “Damn that wig!” According to Joseph III, “[The] embarrassing situation . . . proved no handicap to the gallant gentleman, for he was made of sterner stuff” (Smith, *Joseph Smith and the Restoration*, 95).

Lewis and Emma were married on Thursday, December 23, 1847 by Reverend William Hany, a Methodist minister in Nauvoo. Ironically, the wedding took place on Joseph Smith's forty-second birthday. We can read letters from Almon W Babbit, dated January 31, 1848, that claim, “Emma also joined the Methodist Episcopal church about two weeks ago . . . Emma has joined the Methodist church; they took her in on trial.” However, on September 10, 1848, another letter from John M Bernhisel stated, “she has not united with the Methodist Church” (Raymond T. Bailey, *Emma Hale: Wife the Prophet Joseph Smith, BYU Master's Thesis*, 1952; <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=5493&context=etd>). Emma set the question to rest at the end of her life, by saying, “I have been called apostate; but I have never apostatized, nor forsaken the faith I at first accepted” (Smith, “Last Testimony of Sister Emma,” *Saints' Herald* 26, no. 19 [October 1, 1879] 290).

In 1860, Emma joined the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, when her son was asked to step in as president, prophet, seer and revelator.

Widow Lucy Mack and William Smith

Complicating the rest of the Smith family's allegiance to the restoration, was the powerful influence of Lucy Mack Smith's only living son, William. Lucy defended him like a she bear would her cub. Yet William was volatile, aggressive, self-serving, unstable, and power-hungry. As the Church leadership try to meet Lucy's financial needs, William intervened and insisted on his way. His decisions impoverished his mother, and he was constantly using her as a pawn to seek for donations.

In addition to their financial needs, William complained that the Smith family was not held in higher honor and esteem in the community. He often sought more power. In 1845 William published a proclamation, complaining that the Smith family "should be deprived of all honor and station in the church, have no word of controlment in the affairs of the church, and that those who did seem to have a voice, should be now shut out" (W. Smith, "Proclamation," 1, 4; as quoted by (Lavina Fielding Anderson, ed., *Lucy's Book*, Epilogue, 784-5). William's complaint was not true, there were many efforts to take care of them with honor, but William's erratic behaviors made it difficult.

Brother William Smith (Mar 13, 1811–Nov 13, 1893)

- **Feb 15 1835**, the Prophet Joseph nominated his 24-year-old younger brother, William, as an apostle in lieu of Phineas Young, the proposal by the three witnesses. Oliver Cowdery later remembered, this decision was "contrary to our feelings and judgment, and to our deep mortification ever since" (*Oliver Cowdery's letter to Brigham Young, Feb 27, 1848*).
- **May 4, 1835** *suspended from the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles by Church vote*
- **May 25, 1835**, reinstated as an apostle
- **Oct 31, 1835**, William resigned his apostleship in anger at his brother Joseph
- **Dec 1835**, enraged to fist fighting against his brother Joseph
- **Jan 2, 1836**, restored to the fellowship of the Church and to his position in Apostles
- **1837**, Quorum President David W. Patten questions William's apostolic position
- **1838**, William temporarily disfellowshipped for denouncing the prophet and seeking his death
- **1839** suspended from apostleship
- **April to Dec 1842**, editor of *The Wasp* where his fiery temperament is evidence
- **Oct 1844**, Brigham Young acknowledged William as the Presiding Patriarch of the Church
- **May 24, 1845**, ordained as church patriarch under the hands of Brigham Young and other apostles
- **June 27, 1845**, claimed as the patriarch, he should be President of the Church. Lucy Mack Smith agreed and claimed three visions relating to William's call as President of the Church
- **Oct 19, 1845**, Excommunicated for apostasy against the authority of the apostles
- **1845**, Publishes a "Proclamation," in an attempt to collect money for his family, including his "poor old mother . . . the care worn visage of my poor old mother, broken down, as she is and almost worn out with the accumulated troubles of years . . . struggling hard in the midst of poverty"
- **1846-1847**, sought leadership positions in the Strangite movement in WI
- **June 1847**, asked Apostle Orson Hyde in SLC for rebaptized and restoration of apostleship
- **Oct 1847**, excommunicated by Pres. Strang for adultery
- **Nov 1849**, claims Patriarchal successor to Joseph with Lyman Wight as counselor in Texas
- **1854**, asked Brigham Young for re-baptism and return to apostleship
- **1855**, asked Brigham Young for re-baptism and return to apostleship
- **1856**, denounced Brigham Young
- **1860**, rebaptized LDS by Elder J. J. Butler and requests reinstatement into SLC hierarchy
- **1860**, expressed support of RLDS under Joseph Smith III if he can serve as patriarch/
- **Jan 12, 1878**, Joseph Smith III writes to William offering position of high priest with RLDS
- **Apr 9, 1878**, joins RLDS church seeking leadership opportunities in vain.
- **Nov 13, 1893**, died without receiving the leadership positions he sought from his nephew

When did Lucy stop affiliating with the mainstream of the church? We know that on November 15, 1845, Lucy attended a prayer circle meeting with Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, Willard Richards, George A. Smith, and Parley P. Pratt of the Twelve, along with George Miller, William W. Phelps, Orson Spencer, Lucien Woodworth, and Newel K. Whitney, “it was decided that Mother Lucy Smith should be furnished with food, clothing, and wood for the winter” (Quinn, *Origins*, 512).

A month later, on December 10, 1845, Lucy served in the Temple. But I do not know of other temple attendance. Lucy’s biographer noted, “On April 1846, the church deeded Lucy the Joseph Noble home where Lucy lived with the companionship and assistance of Mary Bailey Smith, the eight-year-old daughter of her son Samuel and her dead daughter-in-law Mary Bailey” (Anderson, ed., *Lucy’s Book*, Epilogue).

Succession

Between 1834 and 1844, there were several times when Joseph Smith had communicated someone could stand in his stead:

- 1) A counselor in the First Presidency
- 2) Special appointment
- 3) Through the office of Associate President
- 4) The Presiding Patriarch
- 5) The Council of Fifty
- 6) The Quorum of the Twelve Apostles
- 7) Three priesthood councils
- 8) A descendant of Joseph Smith

However, some of these options were only a short-term option, or not intended as a permanent solution to succeed as president of the church. Yet these options and personal pride muddled the churches first prophetic succession. At the time of the Prophet Joseph’s death, the Saints were confusion regarding future of the church leadership. For example, Sidney Rigdon held to D&C 90:6. On April 19, 1834, when the Prophet Joseph ordained Sidney as his counselor, when establishing the First Presidency, Sydney was asked to preside in Joseph’s absence. However, most do not interpret that verse to me the Lord named the church’s successor.

Splinter Groups

Sadly, some of those who sought leadership of the church following Joseph’s death were not trying to follow the Lord’s plan. Some may have been deceived while others, sought personal aggrandizement and were trying to manipulate restored doctrines to meet their personal preferences. By far the large majority of the Saints Felt that the Lord had prepared the apostolate leadership of Brigham Young. Others though, formed splinter which pulled some the Saints in different directions. Here is a list of the major six splinter groups (*BYU Studies* 16, no. 2):

1. **Sidney Rigdon** established the “Church of Jesus Christ of the Children of Zion” in Pittsburgh, on April 6, 1845
2. **James Jessee Strang** claimed a prophetic ordination, established a church in Voree, WI, and Beaver Island, MI
3. **Lyman Wight** sets up his church in Texas where he was serving a missionary; excommunicated on Dec 3, 1848

4. **Alpheus Culter** sets up his church in Iowa; excommunicated on April 20, 1851
5. **William Smith** excommunication Oct 1845, sets up his church in KY, joins the Strangites in 1846; unites with the RLDS in 1878
6. **Joseph Smith III** joined Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints in 1860 as president

I will look at the three most significant splinter groups

1. Sidney Rigdon establishes “Church of Jesus Christ of the Children of Zion”

Many in Nauvoo, knew of the animosity between Joseph and Sydney—especially when his mental illness flared—like in Liberty Jail where he claimed his one month of incarceration was worse than all the suffering that the Savior had ever endured. On August 13, 1843, Sidney was temporarily disfellowshipped, but less than two years later, at the following general conference on October 7, the Saints opposed the action, and voted against the prophet’s decision. It is recorded that Joseph said in response, “I have thrown him off my shoulders, and you have again put him on me. You may carry him, but I will not.” (*JosephSmithPapers.org*, History, 1838–1856, volume E-1 [1 July 1843–30 April 1844], Page 1749)

A year later, on October 12, 1844, Sydney gathered his supporters to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and announced he was the first president of the new church. The following year on April 6, 1845 he established a “Church of Christ” called 12 apostles, 70s, and claimed Joseph had been a fallen Prophet. Sidney’s small following included people like the well-known church enemy John C. Bennett (our wolf in sheep’s clothing in Nauvoo from July 1840 to May 1842).

His followers left Nauvoo for Pennsylvania where he cobbled it together for two years. By 1846, Sidney’s Church members began deserting him. His rash prophecies had failed and he had introduced polygamy at the encouragement of John C. Bennett (BYU Studies 16.2). Sydney went into a life of seclusion in Friendship, New York. He continued to claim revelations while there for twenty years until he died in 1876. The last remnants of Rigdon’s church petered out by the mid-1880s.

James Jesse Strang (March 21, 1813 – July 9, 1856)

On February 25, 1844, in Nauvoo, the Prophet Joseph baptized a promising new convert, James Strang. Four months later, at the moment of Joseph Smith’s martyrdom, Strang claimed to receive a vision and ordination to become the next prophet. Two weeks after Joseph’s assassination Strang publicized himself as the rightful successor. As his evidence, he produced a letter from the Prophet Joseph dated June 18, 1844, just 10 days before the prophet’s death. The letter commissioned Strang as the Prophet’s successor. The lack of resemblance between the handwriting, style of writing, vocabulary, and content all suggest the letter as fraudulent. The penmanship does not match any known Nauvoo scribe or leader. After the majority of the Apostles returned to Nauvoo, on August 26, 1844, Strang was excommunicated.

Membership. Several enemies of the Nauvoo leadership followed James Strang—including: Martin Harris, William McLellin, John C. Bennett, John E Page, George Miller, and John and David Whitmer. Oddly for a brief period of time, Strang’s followers included some of the Smith family. Joseph’s younger brother William is well known for his checkered past. After his older three brothers’ deaths, he was thirsty for another important leadership opportunity. He corresponded with Strang and was told that if he, William, could bring his mother Lucy Mack Smith the Egyptian mummies and bodies

of Joseph and Hyrum, then William would be offered a position as an apostle and patriarch in the new organization.

This pull on the family ties was difficult for Lucy at a time when William was her only living son. Her loss was mingled with poverty leaves many questions. In William's correspondence to Strang, dated March 11, 1846, he dramatically emphasizes their needs:

... falsehoods, ... the confiscation of their goods; their rights of church property taken from them, until the bleeding heart of an aged mother wrung with anxiety & disgust sinks with anguish... Hear it, O ye Latter Day Saints: your Mother in Israel, who oftentimes has nursed you at her side, and with her motherly care and teaching comforted your hearts, must now be driven from your midst, penniless—robbed of her inheritance in the city of Joseph by the cruelty of your rulers. ... would be glad to attend your conference had I the means of doing so" (Lavina Fielding Anderson, ed., *Lucy's Book*, Epilogue, 788-9).

It appears that for a short period of time in 1846/47, William, his mother Lucy, and his sisters, flirted with the Strangites. However, some reports were exaggerated as, Lucy's middle daughter, Catherine Smith, claimed she never signed the agreement letter with her name on it.

In May 1846, the Strangite newspaper, *The Voree Herald*, reported that Lucy Smith said: "I am satisfied that Joseph appointed J.J. Strang. It is verily so." I question this claim, or at least its intentions, as a year and a half later, none of the Smiths besides William had felt compelled to physically gather or meet with the Strangites.

In June 1846, William went to Voree, WI, and was ordained as patriarch by President Strang. (This followed on the heels of William's ordination by Brigham Young and the Quorum of the Twelve as patriarch of the church May 24, 1845).

Whatever Lucy and her daughters' involvement from Nauvoo, it was brief—as envisioned by Brigham Young in Winter's Quarters in early January 1847:

I dreamed of seeing Joseph the prophet last night and conversing with him, that Mother Smith was present and very deeply engaged reading a pamphlet, when Joseph with a great deal of dignity turned his head towards his mother partly looking over his shoulder, said, "Have you got the word of God there?" Mother Smith replied, "There is truth here." Joseph replied, "That may be, but I think you will be sick of that pretty soon" (*Manuscript*, 11; cited in Anderson, ed., *Lucy's Book*, Epilogue, 790).

Putting an end to the brief Smith-Strang courtship, on Oct 7, 1847, Strang excommunicated William "for adultery and apostasy" and the Smith family's interactions with Strangites ceased (*ibid.*).

Teachings. In 1845 Strang claimed to find an ancient record and translate it with a Urim and Thummim. He referenced several visions and revelations, and taught some of the same doctrines that the Prophet Joseph had restored—like baptism for the dead—as well as those he did not—like animal sacrifice and seventh day Sabbath worship. After Strang introduced polygamy in 1849, many followers deserted him. As his numbers diminished, on July 8, 1850, he elevated himself to be their king and had himself crowned in the forest of Beaver Island in northern Michigan on a makeshift throne made from a wooden stump. He was shot by several dissident followers and died in 1856.

D. Michael Quinn's research shows only approximately 2,000 members at the height of the Strangite movement, however, other sources claim six times that size ("Mormon Succession Crisis of 1844," *BYU Studies* 16, no. 2; compared to https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Strang#cite_note-11May46-31).

Joseph Smith III & Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (1860)

As we look at the founding of the Reorganized church, we need to start with Brother Jason W. Briggs. He left Salt Lake City, possibly over polygamy, and joined the Strangites. When they also started practicing polygamy he left. On November 8, 1851, Briggs claimed to receive a revelation to start a new church with Joseph Smith III as president. Zenos Gurley claimed similar revelation and the two began working together. He held a conference in 1852 in Beloit WI and called initially called their church, "New Organization." Their group consisted of many people who had previously followed Sidney Rigdon, James Strang, and other splinter groups. It wasn't until eight years later, in 1860, when they convinced Joseph Smith III to step up as President and prophet that the church was organized.

A conference was convened for April 6, 1860 in Amboy, Illinois. Emma and Joseph Smith III walked in arm in arm. Joseph III stated: "May God grant in his infinite mercy that I may never do anything to forfeit the high trust confided to me I pray that he may grant to us power to recall the scattered ones of Israel and I ask your prayers" (Bailey, *Emma Hale*, 159).

The newly called prophet was then set apart by Zenos H Gurley, William Marks, Samuel Powers, and William Blair.

At the time of his father's martyrdom, Joseph Smith III was 11 ½ years old. By 1860, he was a 27-years-old man who had never read the Book of Mormon. After his father's death in 1844, Emma did not raise her children with much knowledge of the restoration nor the historical background of the church his father had started. However he gained a love of the Book of Mormon and received revelations that are sacred to his followers. The RLDS church changed its name and theological focus in 2001 when it became more in line with Protestant thinking as the Community of Christ. As of 2018, Wikipedia reported 250,000 members scattered across 59 countries.

More Sources:

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