

# The source of the authority of Brigham Young and the apostles after Joseph's death<sup>[1]</sup>

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Snuffer writes of the apostolic succession:

In 1847, Brigham Young publicly explained his understanding of the keys he obtained in these words: “an apostle is the Highest office and authority that there is in the Church and Kingdom [of] God on the earth. From whom did Joseph receive his authority? From just such men as sit around me here (pointing to the Twelve Apostles that sat with him.) Peter, James and John were Apostles, and there was no noise about their being seers and revelators though those gifts were among them. Joseph Smith gave unto me and my brethren (the Twelve) all the Priesthood keys, power and authority which he had and those are the powers which belong to the Apostleship” (87).<sup>[2]</sup>

Snuffer then delivers his killing stroke: “This explanation is misleading because Brigham Young was not ordained an Apostle by Joseph Smith” (87). A few pages later, he writes that “Brigham Young’s claim to have received the sealing power when he was ordained an Apostle is completely dependent on the Three Witnesses’ ordination in 1835. That ordination came a year prior to the 1836 visit of Elijah” (91).

## An incomplete and misleading citation

Snuffer, though, is putting words into Brigham’s mouth. Brigham did not say “Joseph ordained me an apostle,” nor did he say, “I received all these keys when I was ordained an apostle.” He says, rather, that Joseph got his authority from apostles, and that “Joseph gave” all the power and keys “unto me and my brethren (the Twelve).” Here again, Snuffer is only giving us part of the story. In the very same talk, Brigham explained: “We do not recieve all at once but we recieve grace for grace. When Brother Joseph received the Preisthood He did not recieve all at once, but He was A prophet Seer & Revelator before He recieved the fulness of the Priesthood & keys of the kingdom.”<sup>[3]</sup> He goes on to

say that after receiving the Aaronic priesthood, Joseph

received the Patriarchal or Melchisedick Priesthood from under the Hands of Peter James & John who were of the Twelve Apostles & were the Presidency when the other Apostles were Absent. From those Apostles Joseph Smith received every key power, Blessing, & Privilege of the Highest Authority of the Melchizedick Priesthood ever committed to man on the earth which they held.<sup>[4]</sup>

But, this is not all. Brigham then says that

Elijah spoken of in the Bible that He should Come in the last days to turn the hearts of the fathers to the Children & the children to their fathers. The fulfillment of this scripture is manifest in establishing the kingdom of God & Priesthood on the earth in the last days & those who hold the keys of the priesthood & sealing power have the spirit & power of Elijah & it is necessary in order to redeem our dead & save our Children. There is much more importance attached to this than Parents are aware of.<sup>[5]</sup>

Brigham has thus argued for a progression from Aaronic, to all Melchizedek keys and authority held by Peter, James, and John, and finally to the mission of Elijah. This may hint that Brigham knew of the basics of the Elijah visitation five years before the account from Joseph's journal was published in 1852 (we will see below that Willard Richards had made a copy for the Manuscript History in 1843, and may well have informed Brigham of it, if Joseph did not do so during his instruction in the higher ordinances).<sup>[6]</sup>

This supposition is strengthened by Brigham's concluding remarks, for he again invokes both Elijah and the keys associated with redemption of the dead: "A man that has embraced the gospel must [be?] some one who has the Priesthood & keys & power of Elijah & must attend to ordinances" for their kindred dead.<sup>[7]</sup>

It is, then, misleading for *PTHG* to pretend that Brigham lays claim to all priesthood keys and power from Joseph via his ordination by the Three Witnesses to the office of apostle. Brigham clearly understands this authority as

something received in discrete steps, and one that ultimately encompasses Elijah's power. His claim is simply that he got this power from Joseph, and that all such power rests with the apostles.

*PTHG* claims that

Apparently all prior information, charges, ordinations, washings, endowments, sealings and instruction were not as clear to Brigham Young at the moment Joseph died as he would later make it appear. It was only as time went on that the accounts of Joseph passing keys to the Twelve grew to add detail and certainty" (70).

Still, 1847 was not Brigham's or the apostles' first articulation of their claim to possess the authority and power vouchsafed them by Joseph. (And, if *PTHG* viewed Brigham with even a hint of charity, he might be forgiven if his initial reaction at Joseph's death was a sudden confusion—the New Testament apostles were much slower to grasp the implications of Jesus' pre-crucifixion teachings.)

## Earlier claims made by Brigham Young and the Twelve

In public discourse in 1843, Brigham Young made it clear that the government of the Church rested upon "the prophet" and "the Twelve":

Among other things said that a man or woman may ask of God & get a witness & testimony from God concerning any work or messenger that is sent unto them. But if a person asks for a thing that does not concern him, such as governing the Church what shall the prophet or the Twelve do &c? He will not get an answer. If he does it will not be from God.<sup>[8]</sup>

Joseph was still alive, and did not rebuke or correct Brigham's claim. Within less than two months of the martyrdom, members of the Twelve and other witnesses were reporting the same thing that Brigham claimed in *PTHG*'s truncated citation from 1847:

Elders O Hyde and P. P. Pratt testified that Joseph the Prophet and Seer had ordained, anointed, and appointed the Twelve to lead the Church. Had

given them the Keys of the Kingdom of God for that purpose.

W. W. Phelps and R. Cahoon bore testimony to the same thing, saying that Joseph said unto the Twelve upon your sholdiers the kingdom of God must rest in all the world. Now round up your sholdiers and bear it.<sup>[9]</sup>

Heber C. Kimball likewise said that "When Jesus was upon the earth his time was spent in endowing the twelve apostles that they might do the things he had left undone and carry out his measures, and upon the same principle we carry out Joseph's measures."<sup>[10]</sup> Wilford Woodruff wrote:

And when they [the apostles] received their endowment, and actually received the keys of the kingdom of God, and oracles of God, keys of revelation, and the pattern of heavenly things; and thus addressing the Twelve, exclaimed, "upon your shoulders the kingdom rests, elders, and bear it; for I have had to do it until now. But now the responsibility rests upon you. It mattereth not what becomes of me."...

[Brigham Young] has not only had much experience with President Smith, but he has proved himself true and faithful in all things committed to his charge, until he was called to hold the keys of the kingdom of God in all the world, in connection with the Twelve: was the first to receive his endowment, from under the hands of the Prophet and Patriarch, who have leaned upon him in connection with the Twelve, for years, to bear off this kingdom in all the world.<sup>[11]</sup>

Again, the claim is clear that Brigham was faithful, and he was eventually ordained to all the keys by Joseph in conjunction with his receipt of the higher temple ordinances in Nauvoo. Woodruff would elsewhere write:

The prophet called the quorum of the twelve together several months before his death, and informed them that the Lord had commanded him to hasten their endowments; that he did not expect to remain himself to see the temple completed, but wished to confer the keys of the kingdom of God upon other men, that they might build up the church and kingdom according to the pattern given. And the prophet stood before the twelve from day to day,

clothed with the spirit and power of God, and instructed them in the oracles of God, in the pattern of heavenly things, in the things of the kingdom, the power of the priesthood, and in the knowledge of the last dispensation in the fulness of times.

And as his last work and charge to the quorum of the twelve, that noble spirit rose up in all the majesty, strength, and dignity of his calling, as a prophet, seer, and revelator...and exhorted and commanded the brethren of the twelve to rise up, and go forth in the name of Israel's God, and bear off the keys of the kingdom of God in righteousness and honour in all the world....  
[12]

Orson Hyde said:

Before I went east on the 4th of April last, we were in council with Brother Joseph almost every day for weeks, says Brother Joseph in one of those councils there is something going to happen; I dont know what it is, but the Lord bids me to hasten and give you your endowment before the temple is finished. He conducted us through every ordinance of the holy priesthood, and when he had gone through with all the ordinances he rejoiced very much, and says, now if they kill me you have got all the keys, and all the ordinances and you can confer them upon others, and the hosts of Satan will not be able to tear down the kingdom, as fast as you will be able to build it up; and now says he on your shoulders will the responsibility of leading this people rest, for the Lord is going to let me rest a while.<sup>[13]</sup>

Still less than a year after Joseph's death, Parley P. Pratt would explain:

We [the apostles] hold the keys of the ministry and ordinances of salvation in this last kingdom; and if the people choose to be benefitted by them, it is their own blessing: if not, it is their own neglect....

This great and good man [Joseph] was led, before his death, to call the Twelve together, from time to time, and to instruct them in all things pertaining to the kingdom, ordinances, and government of God. He often observed that he was laying the foundation, but it would remain for the

Twelve to complete the building. Said he,

"I know not why; but for some reason I am constrained to hasten my preparations, and to confer upon the Twelve all the ordinances, keys, covenants, endowments, and sealing ordinances of the priesthood, and so set before them a pattern in all things pertaining to the sanctuary and the endowment therein."

Having done this, he rejoiced exceedingly; for, said he, the Lord is about to lay the burden on your shoulders and let me rest awhile; and if they kill me, continued he, the kingdom of God will roll on, as I have now finished the work which was laid upon me, by committing to you all things for the building up of the kingdom according to the heavenly vision, and the pattern shown me from heaven. With many conversations like this, he comforted the minds of the Twelve, and prepared them for what was soon to follow.

He proceeded to confer on elder Young, the President of the Twelve, the keys of the sealing power, as conferred in the last days by the spirit and power of Elijah, in order to seal the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to the fathers, lest the whole earth should be smitten with a curse.

This last key of the priesthood is the most sacred of all, and pertains exclusively to the first presidency of the church, without whose sanction and approval or authority, no sealing blessing shall be administered pertaining to things of the resurrection and the life to come.<sup>[14]</sup>

Pratt clearly appeals to repeated meetings with Joseph in Nauvoo (i.e., well after their ordination to the apostleship) and to a deliberate bestowal of keys when Brigham was President of the Twelve (which he was not when first made an apostle).

Snuffer also ignores a vital document, which was likely prepared by the Twelve to articulate their leadership claim. (Snuffer relies heavily on D. Michael Quinn, and some have suggested that Quinn was unaware of this document —this may explain Snuffer's silence concerning it.<sup>[15]</sup> ) The document was published in

2005,<sup>[16]</sup> and was written between September 1844 and March 1845, likely in the fall of 1844.<sup>[17]</sup>

...we were present at a Council in the latter part of the month of March last [1844]...and the greater part of the Twelve Apostles were present....

In this Council, Joseph Smith seemed somewhat depressed in spirit and [said]....

Brethren, the Lord bids me hasten the work in which we are engaged. He will not suffer that you should wait for your endowment until the Temple is done. Some important scene is near to take place. It may be that my enemies will kill me, and in case they should, and the keys and power which rest on me not be imparted to you, they will be lost from the Earth....

Upon the shoulders of the Twelve must the responsibility of leading this church hence forth rest until you shall appoint others to succeed you....

After this appointment was made, and The Twelve received confirmed by the holy anointing under the hands of Joseph and Hyrum, Joseph continued his speech unto them, saying, while he walked the floor and threw back the collar of his coat upon his shoulders, "I roll the burthen and responsibility of leading this church off from my shoulders on to yours. Now round up your shoulders and stand under it like men; for the Lord is going to let me rest a while."...

Joseph Smith did declare that he had conferred upon the Twelve every key and every power that he ever held himself before God....<sup>[18]</sup>

Snuffer distorts the apostles' claim and creates a straw man by writing that "if information in the endowment alone is sufficient to pass keys, then Mormon dissidents Jerald and Sandra Tanner, who have published the various endowment ordinances and versions would hold the keys" (111). This is extraordinarily obtuse—the Twelve did not claim that merely having received the endowment conferred keys. Rather, they claimed that they had received the endowment and all the higher ordinances and explicitly been given keys under the hands of Joseph and Hyrum. As one attendee later described the meeting,

“‘the keys of power committed’ to the Twelve consisted of ‘Keys of Endowments to the Last Anointing & Sealing[,] Together with keys of Salvation for the Dead. with the eternity of the Marriage Covenant and the Powr of Endless Lives.’”<sup>[19]</sup>Brigham Young and the apostles’ claims to possess all the keys via ordination from Joseph appeared very early, and never wavered.*PTHG*’s hypothesis of a gradual evolution and solidification of claims about keys from Joseph simply does not match the accounts which predate Snuffer’s incomplete 1847 citation.

## Notes

1. ↑Portions of this wiki response are based upon Gregory L. Smith, "Passing Up The Heavenly GiftPart 1 Part 2 ," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture*7 (2103), 181–341. The text here may have been expanded, reworded, or corrected given the nature of a wiki project. References in brackets like this: (xx) refer to page numbers in Denver C. Snuffer, Jr.,*Passing the Heavenly Gift*(Salt Lake City: Mill Creek Press, 2011).
2. ↑Snuffer cites Richard S. VanWagoner, editor, *The Complete Discourses of Brigham Young* (Salt Lake City: Utah, Signature Books, 2009), 1:241. The original is in the Woodruff diaries; see Scott G. Kenney, ed., *Wilford Woodruff's Journal, 1833–1898*, 9 vols. (Midvale, Utah: Signature Books, 1983–85), 3:257 (15 August 1857).
3. ↑WWJ, 3:257 (15 August 1847), emphasis added.
4. ↑WWJ, 3:257 (15 August 1847).
5. ↑WWJ, 3:258 (15 August 1847).
6. ↑See note 155 herein.
7. ↑WWJ, 3:259 (15 August 1847).
8. ↑WWJ, 2:271 (6 August 1843).
9. ↑WWJ, 2:455 (25 August 1844).
10. ↑Heber C. Kimball, cited in "Conference Minutes, October Conference

Minutes," *Times and Seasons* 5/20 (2 November 1844): 693–694 (from 7 October 1844).

11. ↑Wilford Woodruff, "To the church of Jesus Christ of Latter day Saints, Greeting," *Times and Seasons* 5/20 (2 November 1844): 698–700 (from 11 October 1844), italics added. Snuffer quotes this statement (110), but acts as if this is a change in the apostles' stance—even though this statement predates the 1847 statement by Brigham Young upon the misrepresentation of which Snuffer hangs so much (87–88).
12. ↑Wilford Woodruff, "To the officers and members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the British isles," *Millennial Star* 5/9 (February 1845): 136.
13. ↑"Trial of Elder Rigdon," *Times and Seasons* 5/17 (15 September 1844): 651
14. ↑Parley P. Pratt, "Proclamation to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: Greeting," *Millennial Star* 5/10 (March 1845): 151; dated New York, 1 January 1845.
15. ↑Alexander L. Baugh and Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, "I Roll the Burthen and Responsibility of Leading This Church Off from My Shoulders on to Yours': The 1844/1845 Declaration of the Quorum of the Twelve Regarding Apostolic Succession," *Brigham Young University Studies* 49/3 (2010):6–7 and 7 n. 4.
16. ↑Baugh and Holzapfel, 9.
17. ↑Baugh and Holzapfel, 11, 12 n. 18.
18. ↑Declaration of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, Brigham Young Papers, LDS Church archives, cited in Baugh and Holzapfel, 13–19.
19. ↑Ehat thesis, 163; citing Dean R. Zimmerman, *I Knew the Prophets -- An Analysis of the Letter of Benjamin F. Johnson to George F. Gibbs, Reporting Doctrinal Views of Joseph Smith and Brigham Young* (Bountiful, Utah: Horizon Publishers, 1976), 35.