

# The Next Prophet

By Vance Snively

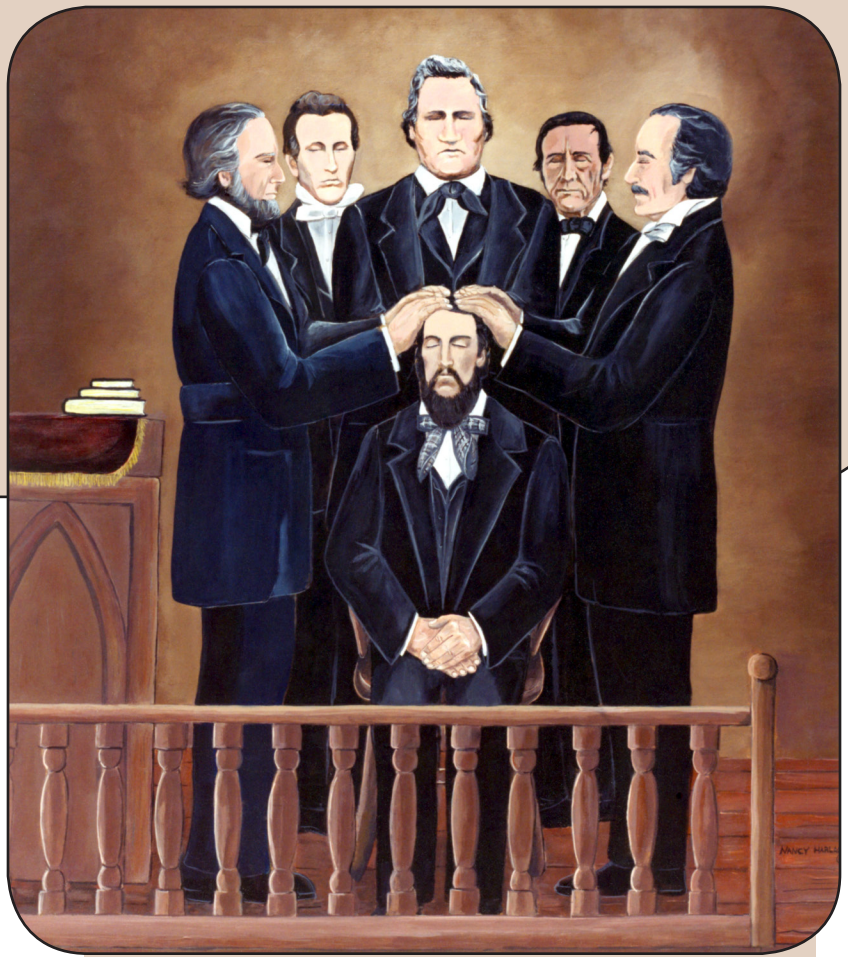
*“I am the Lord, I change not” (Malachi 3:6).*

*“I will give unto you a pattern in all things, that ye may not be deceived” (DC 52:4b).*

**W**e, in independent Restoration branches, consider ourselves members of the original or orthodox Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. However, our Church is not fully functional because it lacks the necessary organization above the branch level. As such we hold the belief that one day soon the Lord will set His Church in order as He did with the original Church when He established the Reorganization. He did this by calling the higher quorums—apostles, seventy, bishops—into order. In addition, He called forth the President of the High Priesthood and Church—the Prophet, Seer, and Revelator—as the successor to Joseph Smith Jr. Thus, we have full expectation that He will do the same again.

As a result, there is much speculation today as to who will be the next Prophet of the RLDS Church when the Lord sets it in order. I have heard some say that he will be the one mentioned in 2 Nephi 2:46–47, or one of the two prophets of Revelation 11:3, or the one mighty and strong of DC 100:3d–e. Indeed, these men will arise one day to fulfill the promises of these scriptures. Yet, there is no indication that any of these men will be chosen by the Lord as the next Prophet of the Church. Obviously, the individual that the Lord will choose for the Reorganization today is solely His decision, as it was for the Reorganization in 1860 when He chose Joseph Smith III for that office. Yet, because God is unchangeable and He gives us a “pattern in all things” so we are not deceived, I believe we should look to the early Reorganization and the Scriptures for the pattern He used then and will use again to choose the next Prophet for His Church.

Basic to our belief in the truth of the Reorganization should be our fundamental belief that the right



This painting is the *Ordination of Joseph Smith III*, by Nancy Harlacher. On April 6, 1860, Joseph Smith III (seated) was ordained by (from left to right) High Priest George Morey, Apostle William W. Blair, Apostle Zenas H. Gurley Sr., High Priest William Marks, and Apostle Samuel Powers to be the Prophet-President of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (see *Vision 5* [Summer/Fall]: 24).

of priesthood is passed father-to-son, in particular regarding the Prophet of the Church. While there are several places in the Scriptures supporting this position, which we will discuss later, this tenet of belief is also a supporting pillar of the Reorganization.

On November 18, 1851, Jason Briggs offered his prayer to the Most High on the plains outside of Beloit, Wisconsin. He and his branch had been associated with several factions of the Church that had developed after Joseph’s death. They were searching for the true Church established by the Lord through Joseph Smith Jr. However, up until that point, they had only found churches built by men teaching doctrines that were not taught in the original Church. Jason Briggs, who was out of options as to where to find the Lord’s true Church, petitioned the Almighty as to what he and his branch should do.

The answer, which came as a revelation from the

Lord in power to Jason Briggs, became the catalyst for reorganizing the Church that the Lord had established through Joseph Smith Jr. While the revelation was directed to Briggs, it contained eternal principles upon which the Reorganization was eventually built. One of these principles is the right of father-to-son lineal descent of priesthood. This principle pertains to all priesthood in the Church in all dispensations of time, even the President of the High Priesthood, or Prophet of the Church. So that we are clear about what the Lord told Jason Briggs in the revelation about this principal, I quote it below for you:

**I, the Lord, have permitted him [William Smith] to represent the rightful heir to the presidency of the high priesthood of my church . . . to respect the law of lineage, by which the holy priesthood is transmitted, in all generations, when organized into quorums. . . .**

***In mine own due time will I call upon the seed of Joseph Smith, and will bring one forth, and he shall be mighty and strong, and he shall preside over the high priesthood of my church; and then shall the quorums assemble, and the pure in heart shall gather, and Zion shall be reinhabited.*** (RLDS *History of the Church* 3:200, 201, italics added)

In His words to Jason Briggs, the Lord plainly stated that He respects the law of lineage for the transmission of priesthood in every generation when the priesthood is organized into quorums. In other words, He calls men to the priesthood according to this law—which by inference is His law—making it a law of His Church. At the time this revelation was given, the priesthood was not organized into quorums, but existed only at the branch level—like today in independent Restoration branches. However, when Joseph III accepted his calling and was ordained to succeed his father as President of the High Priesthood and Church, the Lord (not man) had already organized His priesthood into quorums. Thus, the law of lineage applied to the successor of that office, which was Joseph Smith III. As the Lord said, “In mine own due time will I call upon the seed of Joseph Smith . . . and he shall preside over the high priesthood of my church.” The Lord indeed respected the law of lineage in the Reorganization and called Joseph III to succeed his father.

Interestingly, this law was not well known in the original Church, even though on four separate

occasions Joseph Smith Jr. had publicly designated Joseph Smith III to succeed him.<sup>1</sup> In addition, early on after Joseph’s death, William Smith told the Saints that Joseph III was to be his father’s successor. Nevertheless, most of the Saints did not understand the law of lineage as it related to the Prophet’s successor, as well as to other priesthood offices. For this reason, Brigham Young and other leaders such as Sidney Rigdon, James Strang, William Smith (later on), and others were able to convince many Saints to follow them as leaders of the Church after Joseph Smith Jr.’s death.

Zenos Gurley Sr., one of the key men the Lord used to bring about the Reorganization, indicates in Church history that when presented with Briggs’s revelation, he did not agree with the law of lineage regarding priesthood. He stated,

**There were some ideas in the revelation that I could not receive. I was entirely unacquainted with the order of the priesthood as it really is, nevertheless I knew that God would raise up a prophet, but who he was, or where he would come from, I did not know.** (ibid., 207)

However, within ten to fifteen days after reading the revelation, the Lord convinced him of the truth of the law of lineage. He stated that at a prayer service

**I requested them all to join with me in asking the Lord to tell us who the successor of Joseph Smith was. . . . We spent a few moments in prayer, when the Holy Spirit declared, “The successor of Joseph Smith is Joseph Smith, the son of Joseph Smith the Prophet. *It is his right by lineage, saith the Lord your God.*”** (ibid., 208; italics added)

From what the Lord told both Briggs and Gurley, He selected Joseph Smith III to be the next Prophet because he met the criteria required by the law of lineage. I am sure, knowing how thorough God is, that the law of lineage was not the only criteria He used, but it is obviously very important to Him. It

<sup>1</sup> While Joseph III was not ordained by his father to succeed him, he was designated to do so in the blessings he received under his father’s hands and witnessed by others. Joseph III received these blessings four times in his young life—once in Liberty Jail, once in his father’s brick store in Nauvoo, once at a public meeting in the grove near the temple in Nauvoo, and once in the Mansion House the day his father left for Carthage, never to return alive. (See “Joseph Smith’s Successor” by Richard and Pamela Price, *Restoration Voice* 17 [May/June 1981]: 5–7.)

is scriptural, unarguable, and a predictable pattern for future Prophets, so His people would not be deceived.

The father-to-son lineal descent of priesthood, particularly in the highest office of the Church, became so important to those believing in Briggs’s revelation that at their first conference in 1852 they agreed upon a resolution containing the following:

**Resolved, that the successor of Joseph Smith, Junior, as the Presiding High Priest in the Melchisedec Priesthood, must of necessity be the seed of Joseph Smith, Junior, in fulfillment of the law and promises of God.** (ibid., 209; italics added)

In addition, the Lord’s use of the law of lineage in choosing a Prophet is so important to Him that the four Prophets succeeding Joseph Smith III in the Reorganization also have been the father-to-son lineal descendants of Joseph Smith Jr. This law has only been broken in recent years by Church leaders who have not valued the truth of the Restored Gospel nor honored the law of father-to-son lineage for priesthood.

Interestingly, many of the early Saints were unaware of the law of lineage for priesthood. However, the Lord had already provided for this principle through revelations to His servant Joseph Smith Jr.

**And the sons of Moses, according to the holy priesthood, which he received under the hand of his father-in-law, Jethro; and Jethro received it under the hand of Caleb; and Caleb received it under the hand of Elihu; and Elihu under the hand of Jeremy; and Jeremy under the hand of Gad; and Gad under the hand of Esaias; and Esaias received it under the hand of God; Esaias also lived in the days of Abraham and was blessed of him, which Abraham received the priesthood from Melchisedec; who received it through the lineage of his fathers, even till Noah; and from Noah till Enoch, through the lineage of their fathers; and from Enoch to Abel, who was slain by the conspiracy of his brother; who received the priesthood by the commandments of God, by the hand of his father Adam, who was the first man; which priesthood continueth in the church of God in all generations, and is without beginning of days or end of years.** (DC 83:2c–g, italics added)

**The order of this priesthood was confirmed to be handed down from father to son, and rightly belongs to the literal descendants of the chosen**

**seed, to whom the promises were made. This order was instituted in the days of Adam, and came down by lineage.** (DC 104:18, italics added)

**Therefore, thus saith the Lord unto you, with whom the priesthood hath continued through the lineage of your fathers, for ye are lawful heirs, according to the flesh, and have been hid from the world with Christ in God: therefore your life and the priesthood hath remained, and must needs remain, through you and your lineage, until the restoration of all things spoken by the mouths of all the holy prophets since the world began.** (DC 84:3, italics added)

These revelations received early in the Church (1832–1835) definitely indicate that the priesthood started with Adam, continuing in the Church in all generations. And it will remain “until the restoration of all things”—or as we know it, the millennial reign of Christ.<sup>2</sup> In addition, the right of this priesthood has been, and is intended to be, handed down from father to son from the beginning until Christ returns in His Glory. This includes the President of the High Priesthood and Church—the Prophet, Seer, and Revelator. It is important to remember that it is the *right* of priesthood that is handed down from father to son. If the son has not prepared himself for this responsibility, the Lord will not call him. If the son’s father-to-son progenitors have never been in the priesthood and the Lord needs the son to do His work, the Lord will call the son to whatever office He needs him to occupy. Remember that Esaias received the priesthood “under the hand of God,” not from his earthly father. In addition, the *right* of priesthood can jump several father-to-son generations to uphold this law of lineage.

As members of the Reorganization today who face the same dilemma about a future Prophet as did the Church in the early 1850s, let us remember what was quoted earlier:

**I am the Lord, I change not.** (Malachi 3:6)

**I will give unto you a pattern in all things, that ye may not be deceived.** (DC 52:4b)

Considering this counsel from the Lord and the precedent set by Him in the reorganization of our Church, as well as in the above scriptures (DC 83:2c–g, 104:18,

<sup>2</sup> See 1 Nephi 4:16–19, 28–33; 2 Nephi 12:79–99; DC 26:2a–b; DC 108:5–6; DC 85:6a–b; DC 28:2; Genesis 7:67–73.

and 84:3), it is my firm belief that the next Prophet of the Reorganization will be a father-to-son lineal descendant of Joseph Smith Jr.

It is important to remember that while the line of father-to-son descendants of Joseph Smith Jr. might seem to be almost extinct, such is not really the case. Dale Volskay wrote in the August 2005 *Vision* that he was then aware of five living father-to-son descendants of Joseph Smith III.<sup>3</sup> In addition, Carrie A. Moore's 2007 interview of Michael Kennedy (a third great-grandson of Joseph and Emma), described his many years of research conducted with Gracia N. Jones (also a descendant of Joseph and Emma). They "found almost 1,500 living descendants" of Joseph and Emma—about one-third of them living in Australia.<sup>4</sup> Now, ten years later, that number could be substantially higher, with many of them being father-to-son descendants!

It is certainly unknown as to the position of the current-day religious beliefs of those from the father-to-son lineage of Joseph Smith Jr. Yet Moses, one of the greatest Prophets ever, was raised up by God from Pharaoh's courts of unbelief to miraculously deliver Israel out of bondage and lead them to the promised land. With God, all things are possible.

Another point to remember is the fact that being a father-to-son lineal descendant of Joseph Smith Jr. does not automatically make an individual the next Prophet. According to Brother Volskay in the same article mentioned above, the Prophet must also "be chosen of God; . . . accepted by the people at a [Church] Conference; . . . be properly ordained (see DC 17:17); and . . . teach and uphold the previously given revelations (see DC 43:2–4)."<sup>5</sup>

May we look forward to that day when the Lord chooses His next Prophet. May we spiritually prepare ourselves now that when He does, we will recognize His hand in so doing. And may we be spiritually prepared that when He sets His Church in order, we will be able to assist Him in the great work of taking His Gospel in power to all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people.

3 Dale Volskay, "The Choosing of the Next True Prophet," *Vision* 50:13–14.

4 "Smiths' descendant on family quest" by Carrie A. Moore, *Deseret News*: October 5, 2007; <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/695215934/Smiths-descendant-on-family-quest.html>.

5 Dale Volskay, "The Choosing of the Next True Prophet," *Vision* 50:13–14.

# The Thorn in the Flesh

By Evan A. Fry

*"And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then am I strong. I am become a fool in glorying; ye have compelled me; for I ought to have been commended of you; for in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing. Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds"* (2 Corinthians 12:7–12).

A certain newspaper columnist, whom I often read with much interest, recently based his daily column on a list of the world's richest and most influential men—a list compiled sometime during the late 1920s as I remember. The story of the column had to do with what has happened to them since. Not one is still rich. One was mercifully paroled from prison just in time to die at home. One died impoverished and in debt to his friends. Some were touched by scandal and died in disgrace. Several died by their own hands. Not one is now a prominent or influential figure; not one died rich. I refer to this story only because it illustrates a point we very often fail or refuse to recognize—that it is usually in those who seem to be the strongest that we find the most abject manifestations of weakness. If I were to ask you to name a list of the world's most powerful men, selecting them from any and all ages of history, your mind would revert to the great military men such as Caesar, Alexander the Great, Napoleon, and Hitler. . . . Where are they? All dead, their power gone, their ambitions frustrated before they died as weak, pitiful men.

On the other hand, the demonstrations of strength in those who are looked upon by the world as hopelessly handicapped and weak are so numerous and so unremarkable that we regard them almost as commonplace. [Thomas] Edison was deaf; [Charles] Steinmetz [who helped develop alternating current],