**Background, Section 90**

Because Joseph Smith gave no background information concerning Doctrine and Covenants 90 in *History of the Church,* a brief review of the leadership offices of the Church might be helpful at this point. The reader will recall that Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery received the Aaronic Priesthood from John the Baptist, and Peter, James and John conferred the Melchizedek Priesthood on Joseph and Oliver in the spring of 1829. At that time, they also received the apostleship and those keys of the priesthood necessary to restore and preside over the Church of Jesus Christ. From that time onward, regardless of how the Church might be organized administratively, the necessary keys and powers for preaching the first principles of the gospel and performing the ordinances thereof were present in its leaders (but see D&C 110), and their righteous actions in these functions were valid before God just as in the primitive Church.

In April 1830, the "Articles and Covenants of the Church" (see Background to D&C 20) affirmed that Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery were called of God and ordained apostles and elders of the Church. They were also designated first and second elders of the Church, respectively (see D&C 20:2–3). These callings and ordinations did not give Joseph and Oliver any additional priesthood authority that they did not already possess, but they did provide a temporary structure through which their authority was administered to the Church and by which the Church could sustain its leaders. This temporary administrative arrangement, with a first and second elder, remained in place until 25 January 1832, by which time a number of high priests had been ordained. At that time, at the Lord's direction, Joseph Smith was sustained and ordained President of the High Priesthood of the Church (see note to *History of the Church,* 1:243). Six weeks later, on 8 March 1832, Sidney Rigdon and Jesse Gause were also called and ordained as counselors to Joseph Smith in the Presidency of the High Priesthood (see D&C 107:9, 21–22, 65–67, 91–92). The Kirtland Revelation Book (10–11) contains the following brief statement of these events: "March 8, 1832: Chose this day and ordained brother Jesse Gause and Brother Sidney to be my counselors of the ministry of the presidency of the high Priesthood."

President Jesse Gause was excommunicated from the Church on 3 December 1832.1Consequently, on 5 January 1833, Frederick G. Williams, who had served as a clerk to the Presidency since 20 July 1832, was called to replace Brother Gause as a counselor.2However, it does not appear that the Presidency was officially reorganized in the modern sense at that time. Exactly one year after Joseph had chosen his original counselors in the Presidency of the High Priesthood, he received on 8 March 1833 at Kirtland Doctrine and Covenants 90,  which revelation confirmed the callings of Sidney Rigdon and Frederick G. Williams as counselors in the Presidency. Doctrine and Covenants 90 also further defined their duties as counselors to Joseph Smith and for the first time declared that the President's counselors were to be "accounted as equal with [him] in holding the keys of this last kingdom" (v. 6). Ten days later, on 18 March 1833, Sidney Rigdon and Frederick G. Williams were ordained counselors to Joseph Smith in the Presidency of the High Priesthood as defined in Doctrine and Covenants 90. Of this occasion, Joseph wrote, "Elder Rigdon expressed a desire that himself and Brother Frederick G. Williams should be ordained to the offices to which they had been called, viz., those of Presidents of the High Priesthood, and to be equal in holding the keys of the kingdom with Brother Joseph Smith, Jun., according to the revelation given on the 8th of March, 1833."3

This new Presidency of the High Priesthood, or First Presidency, as it later came to be known, was different from the previous Presidency in that it was organized as a quorum with Joseph's counselors "accounted as equal with [him] in holding the keys" (v. 6) while the President lived and while they were in harmony with him. Since 1833, the term "Presidency of the High Priesthood" has been used synonymously with the term "First Presidency of the Church."4

Similarly, though the apostleship had been restored and held by men upon the earth since the spring of 1829 (cf. Background to D&C 18, also D&C 20:2–3),the second leading quorum of the Church, the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, would not be officially organized as a quorum until 14 and 15 February 1835, also in a manner directed by the Lord (see D&C 18:26–38).5 As long as the keys were held by living leaders, it did not really matter at that time, when the Church was small, how the lines of administration were drawn. Brigham Young waited three years after the death of Joseph Smith to reorganize the First Presidency. However, since the administration of Lorenzo Snow, it has been the custom to reorganize the Quorum of the First Presidency soon after the funeral of the previous President.

**Commentary**

**1. Thy sins are forgiven thee.** Once again notice the human failures of Church leaders and the Lord's willingness to forgive them upon proper repentance.

**1. According to thy petitions.** It would appear that Doctrine and Covenants 90 may have been received in response to the prayers of the Prophet and his associated brethren for divine guidance.

**2. The keys of the kingdom.** See Commentary on Doctrine and Covenants 65:2.

**2. Which kingdom is coming forth for the last time.** The concept of "the last days" already contains the implication that this restoration of the gospel will be the last in the world's history, but see Commentary on Doctrine and Covenants 24:19; 27:13; 33:3; 88:84.

**3. Shall never be taken from you.** In Doctrine and Covenants 43:3, the Prophet was told that as long as he remained faithful he would hold the keys of the kingdom but that if he fell from faithfulness, those keys would be given to another. A similar promise to Joseph was repeated in Doctrine and Covenants 64:5. However, in this verse the Prophet was told, unconditionally, that he would never lose the keys of the kingdom and that they would remain with him not only in this world but in the world to come. This progression may indicate that sometime between September 1831 (see D&C 64) and March 1833 (see D&C 90), the nature of the Lord's promises to the Prophet Joseph Smith had changed—amounting to a much stronger assurance that his exaltation was secure (see, for example, D&C 132:49).

**3. Neither in the world to come.** Joseph Smith still holds the keys of this dispensation of the gospel, andhe still presides over the work of the Church in the spirit world. In eternity Joseph will continue to preside in the priesthood order over Brigham Young, John Taylor, and so forth, and ultimately over all others who have received their priesthood and keys through the Restoration in the latter days.

**4. Through you shall the oracles of God be given to another.** The "oracles," as the term is used here, mean the divine revelations (as in v. 5). The process of how Joseph's revelations will be disseminated through his counselors and others is further clarified in verses 6–11 (especially v. 9). The Prophet Joseph will receive the word of God and will then share it with his counselors in the Presidency. Through the First Presidency, the word will then be delivered to the Church (see v. 4) and through the Church to the world (see v. 9). "Whenever new doctrines are to be introduced, they are first presented by the President to his counselors and then to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in a meeting of the council of the first presidency and the quorum of the twelve apostles. If unanimously approved [D&C 107:27], they are then presented to the membership of the Church at a general conference for a sustaining vote."6 New doctrine (that is, new divine information as opposed merely to policy changes or to clarification of existing doctrine) comes to the Church *collectively* in no other way.

**5. Let them beware . . . condemnation.** Compare Doctrine and Covenants 84:54–59 and Commentary. The imagery of this verse recalls Matthew 7:24–27.

**6. They are accounted as equal with thee.** Compare Doctrine and Covenants 107:22. As long as the President of the Church is alive, and as long as his counselors are in harmony with his leadership, they share the keys of the kingdom with him and through him to a wide degree. However, there are some powers that are conferred upon only one man on the earth at one time, and these the prophet holds alone (see D&C 132:7). All other keys and powers are held jointly by the Presidency, who are accounted equal with him in these areas. Thus, the First Presidency does not consist merely of a single authorized individual plus his assistants, but is rather a quorum of three or more individuals who share jointly the vast majority of the powers of the kingdom. Naturally, the President *presides* over this quorum, and his counselors defer to his leadership (but see D&C 107:27). However, administratively, it would be correct to say that the Church is governed by quorums rather than by individuals. The Prophet Joseph Smith declared concerning the authority of the Twelve, "The Twelve are not subject to any other than the first Presidency . . . and where I am not, there is no First Presidency over the Twelve."7 Thus, when the prophet dies, the Quorum of the First Presidency is temporarily dissolved, and his counselors resume their former positions in the Church and its existing quorums. Until the Quorum of the First Presidency is reorganized, the presiding authority over the Church rests upon the second standing quorum of the Church, the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, led by its presiding officer, until such time as the First Presidency is reorganized (see D&C 107:23–24).

**7. The school of the prophets.** See Doctrine and Covenants 88:77–80, 118–41 and Commentary.

**8. That thereby they may be perfected in their ministry.** The antecedents of the pronouns "they" and "their" appear to be Joseph's new counselors in the First Presidency, who will in turn train the leadership of the Church to minister salvation to the Church and the world. The pronouns might also be taken here to apply to the School of the Prophets as a whole, who would serve the same function in their ministries throughout the Church in training leaders at intermediate and local levels.

**9. Unto the Gentiles first.** By covenant and promise, when the fulness of the gospel was restored at the time of Christ, it was taken first to the physical and literal descendants of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In that same dispensation, in the meridian of time, the majority of the children of Israel rejected the gospel. As a result, in this last dispensation the gospel is by and large to be taken first to the Gentiles, that is, to every *other* nation, kindred, tongue, and people besides the Jews (see D&C 45:9, 25, 28–31 and Commentary). Collectively and as a people, the Jews will be the last to receive the gospel in this dispensation.

**10. The heathen nations, the house of Joseph.** In the Old Testament, the term "house of Joseph" is sometimes used to describe Ephraim and Manasseh specifically (for example, see Joshua 17:17), and sometimes to describe all ten tribes of the northern kingdom collectively (for example, see Zechariah 10:6). Since Ephraim, Manasseh, and the other ten tribes were eventually scattered among and grafted into every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, the house of Joseph now includes branches (see Genesis 50:22) among all the nations of the earth, including the "heathen," or non-Christian, nations of the world. The Nephites and Lamanites were "a remnant of the house of Joseph" (3 Nephi 15:12), but other remnants of Joseph can be found and are now being sought out by missionaries among all the nations of the earth.8 It is probably not a coincidence that the Prophet of the last dispensation—the dispensation of the times of the Gentiles when the house of Joseph will be reclaimed from all the world—was named Joseph (see D&C 113:4; Ezekiel 36:24; 37:21; 39:28; 2 Nephi 3).

**11. In that day.** This is the day referred to in verse 10 when the arm of the Lord shall be revealed in power. It is probably to be understood as the "day" of his coming to earth to establish his millennial kingdom. While the great missionary work of the present-day Church begins to fulfill this prophecy, only after the return of the Savior in power will the promise of everyone hearing the fulness of the gospel in his or her own language be entirely fulfilled. Until that time, many people will continue to die in ignorance of the gospel. According to Joseph Smith, however, after the Second Coming, all the heathen nations will be taught the gospel, and those who will not accept it "must eventually be destroyed from the earth."9

**13. The translation of the prophets.** The term "the prophets" is here used to mean the books of the Old Testament. Joseph Smith finished his translation of the New Testament (see D&C 45:60) on 2 February 1833, more than a month before Doctrine and Covenants 90 was received. Since Joseph had already spent considerable time on the Old Testament before beginning the New, the expectation seems to be that his translation of the Old Testament Prophets would also soon be completed.

**13. The church and the school.** That is, the Church of Jesus Christ and the School of the Prophets.

**15. And study and learn.** One purpose of the School of the Prophets was to teach the first elders of this dispensation what they would need to know in order to take the gospel to the peoples of the world, including their languages, literature, and cultures.

**16. In all your lives.** Absent cases of serious sin or unworthiness, members of the First Presidency are called to serve for life—even when they may be suffering from the effects of extreme age or poor health.

**19. Let a place be provided.** It will be remembered that Frederick G. Williams was a resident of Kirtland before joining the Church and that he owned a large farm there. However, when Brother Williams accompanied Oliver Cowdery and the Lamanite missionaries to Missouri, his farm of necessity was parceled out to other Latter-day Saint families moving into the Kirtland area from New York, including those of Joseph Smith Senior and Ezra Thayre.10 In accordance with these instructions in Doctrine and Covenants 90, other accommodations were now provided for the Williams family, and the following year Frederick G. Williams consecrated his entire farm to the Church without remuneration. The Williams farm eventually made up part of the parcel of land that provided grounds around the Kirtland Temple.11

**22–23. Let the bishop . . . obtain an agent.** Bishop Newel K. Whitney had previously been instructed (see D&C 84:113) to employ an agent to help him with the duties of administering the bishop's storehouse in Kirtland but had apparently not yet done so. These instructions made it clear that the prospective agent would not simply be an employee, but would consecrate his own time and wealth to the building up of Zion as was expected of other Church leaders. There is no historical evidence that Bishop Whitney ever did employ an agent to help him.

**24. The covenant with which ye have covenanted one with another.** This passage referred originally to the covenant entered into by the leaders of the Church and others who attended the School of the Prophets. It is described more fully in Doctrine and Covenants 88:130–36. However, by extension this would also apply to those who later made similar covenants in the Kirtland Temple or in any of its many successors.

**25–27. Let your families be small.** This commandment should not be construed as applying to the number of children Saints ought to have. Rather, it applied initially to the extended social obligations of the Saints. In the spirit of Christian charity, it was the practice of the Prophet and other Church leaders to open up their homes and share their resources with those Saints and others who came to Kirtland in need. At other times, members like Newel Whitney or John Johnson were in turn called upon to share their resources with the Prophet in his need.

Eventually, as Church leaders, particularly Father and Mother Smith, continued to open their homes to the Saints who were moving into the Kirtland area from the East, certain problems arose. Some members took advantage of the kindness of their hosts. Other members who were unworthy avoided the responsibilities of consecration but still received its blessings by attaching themselves to more faithful families. In addition, the sheer burden of housing so many individuals in their comparatively small homes became very taxing on them, but it was hard to say no to anyone who claimed to be in need. Thus, the Lord here counsels his leaders, and particularly Father and Mother Smith, who were generous to a fault, to use wisdom and where possible to reduce the number of their dependents who were not actually blood relatives or who were not personally worthy of receiving the blessings of consecration on their own.

**28. Vienna Jaques.** Forty-five-year-old Sister Vienna Jaques had joined the Church sometime in 1832. Though she lived in Boston, and apparently supported herself there as a nurse, she was converted by the Book of Mormon and visited Joseph Smith in Kirtland, being baptized while she was there. After returning briefly to Boston, Sister Jaques moved to Kirtland sometime before March 1833 and was instructed to consecrate her wealth, including fourteen hundred dollars cash, to the Lord. This she did without hesitation. Doctrine and Covenants 90 here directs that her expenses of moving to Missouri be paid by the Church and that she receive an inheritance in Zion. Sister Jaques arrived in Independence in the summer of 1833 but lost her temporal inheritance when the Saints were driven from Jackson County. However, she remained faithful and steadfast for more than fifty years thereafter, moving with the Saints in all their wanderings, and finally dying in Salt Lake City in 1884, at the age of ninety-six.12

**32–35. I have called you also to preside over Zion.** In the early days of the Church there were sometimes administrative questions of exactly who presided over whom and in what circumstances. Despite such revelations as Doctrine and Covenants 43:3–5 or 64:5, some in Missouri believed that they presided there independently of the Prophet Joseph Smith. Doctrine and Covenants 90 settles this argument and clarifies the administrative situation (see vv. 2–5). Though Bishop Partridge was the bishop in Missouri and really the presiding bishop in the Church, he was subordinate to Joseph and the other members of the First Presidency (see vv. 6, 13, 16). Among other faults, Partridge's resistance to Joseph's leadership, as well as the resistance of others in Missouri, did not please the Lord (see v. 35).13

**35. William E. McLellin.** See Background to Doctrine and Covenants 66; Commentary on Doctrine and Covenants 75:6–7. Brother McLellin was out of favor at this time for at least two reasons. First, he had returned prematurely from two missions in a row, one to the East and one south of Kirtland. Second, he had organized a party of emigrants and led them to Missouri in direct violation of the rules and procedures established by the Lord through the Prophet Joseph Smith, thereby adding to the difficulties of the Saints there.14

**36. I, the Lord, will contend with Zion.** The Lord announces his intention of chastening the Saints in Missouri for their sins and their rebellion. He will not shirk the unpleasant duty of disciplining his own people when necessary (see D&C 97:25–26; 100:13; 101:2–10).

**37. For [Zion] shall not be removed.** At first, this declaration might seem to contradict the historical facts, since the Saints were forcibly removed not only from Jackson County but eventually from all of Missouri. However, the meaning here is that Jackson County, Missouri, is and always will be the location of the center place of Zion (see D&C 57:3). All the prophecies about the physical Zion will be literally fulfilled, though not in the time frame the early Saints envisioned. According to Doctrine and Covenants 101:17–20, "Zion shall not be moved out of her place, notwithstanding her children are scattered. . . . And, behold, there is none other place appointed than that which I have appointed; neither shall there be any other place appointed than that which I have appointed, for the work of the gathering of my saints." In the Lord's own due time, Zion will be redeemed and established where and how he has declared it.