

# **Revelations of Joseph Smith III 1832-1914**



## Joseph Smith III

Born Nov. 6, 1832, Kirtland, Ohio

Died Dec. 10, 1914 Independence, Missouri (age 82)

Age 11 at father's death (June 27, 1844)

1852 he was asked to lead RLDS (age 19)

1860 he became prophet leader of RLDS (age 27)



Wives:

1856 (age 24) Emmeline (d. 1869) = 5 children (- 2)

1869 (age 37) Bertha (d. 1896) = 9 children (- 4)

1898 (age 65) Ada = 3 children

Three sons also became president of RLDS church

Frederick Madison (Bertha) (1874-1946) – President (1915-1946)

Israel A. Smith (Bertha) (1876-1958) – President (1946-1958)

Wallace Smith (Ada) (b 1900-d1989) – President (1958-1978)



## Joseph Smith III – Children

Emmaline Grisworld

Emma Josepha (1857-1940)

**Evelyn Rebecca** (1859-1859)

Carrie Lucinda Smith (1861-1944)

Zaide Viola (1863-1891)

**Joseph Arthur** (1865-1866)

Bertha Madison

**David Carlos** (1870-1886)

Mary Audentia (1872-1963)

**Frederick Madison** (1874-1946)

**Israel Alexander** (1876-1958)

**Kenneth** (1877-1877)

**Bertha Azuba** (1878-1884)

Hale Washington (1881-1956)

**Blossom** (1883-1883)

Lucy Yeteve (1884-1945)

Ada Rachel Clark

Richard Clark (1898-1969)

**William Wallace** (1900-1989)

Reginald Archer (1903-1974)

**Died young**

Frederick M. Smith



Israel A. Smith



W. Wallace Smith



Latter Day Saints repeatedly visited Joseph Smith III and asked him to take up his father's mantle, but his reply was that he would only assume the church presidency if he were inspired by God to do so. Finally, in 1860, Smith said that he had received this inspiration and at a conference in Amboy, Illinois on April 6, 1860, he was sustained as president of the RLDS Church.

“Smith received the final answer for which he had ‘hungered’ in the fall of 1859. In an 1880 Autobiography Joseph Smith reported that while praying for an explanation of his troubles he received a divine message—that **‘the Saints reorganized at Zarahemla and other places, is the only organized portion of the Church accepted by me.** I have given them my Spirit and will continue to do so while they remain humble and faithful.’” (Joseph Smith III, Pragmatic Prophet, p. 109)

Joseph Smith III stated at the 1860 conference:

I would say to you, brethren, as I hope you may be, and in faith I trust you are, as a people that God has promised his blessings upon, I came not here of myself, but by the influence of the Spirit. For some time past I have received manifestations pointing to the position which I am about to assume. I wish to say that I have come here not to be dictated by any men or set of men. I have come in obedience to a power not my own, and shall be dictated by the power that sent me. God works by means best known to himself, and I feel that for some time past he has been pointing out a work for me to do

## **Joseph Smith III has been called a “Pragmatic Prophet.”**

We need to be careful as we read from his biography by Roger D. Launius

“With problems of all types he carefully considered all ramifications and took actions that could be considered compromises in all too many instances. He was, in the best tradition of American philosophy, a pragmatist: he preferred to see changes come slowly, after due deliberation and with the consent of all affected groups. Almost instinctively, Smith inclined to a middle-of-the-road position on issues. Such a leader was critical to the continued success of what had begun as a loosely organized, extremely heterogeneous movement started by strikingly nonconformist dissenters of the early church.” (Joseph Smith III, Pragmatic Prophet, p. 119)

I believe we can acknowledge all the personal skills that Joseph Smith III had, but we must also realize that he was an actual prophet of God and that his success was through the process of listening to God. We have to acknowledge and recognize God’s influence in his life and that he was willing to “wait on the Lord” (Ps. 27:14) for guidance and direction.

In the 1850s the Reorganization had functioned under a very loose organizational structure, almost a confederacy of virtually independent congregations that could choose to accept the policies of the general church conference and the Quorum of Twelve Apostles or ignore them completely without fear of punishment. As a consequence, the church had been unable to sustain any extended missionary work or forceful policy because of the shifting nature of support from the members...

When Joseph Smith III assumed the presidency of the Reorganized Church in 1860, he was an inexperienced young man, not yet twenty-eight years old, who did not understand the intricacies of either the centralized operation of the church under his father or the rather loosely organized confederation within the Reorganization. He quickly realized... that the Reorganized Church had to reinstitute some form of central direction, come to some understanding of basic doctrine, and work toward the enforcement of orthodoxy if it were ever to grow into anything more than a small faction filled with individualists and cranks...

Centralization of the church's administration took several years of numerous small steps before Smith could begin to claim real authority over the movement (Joseph Smith III, Pragmatic Prophet, p. 140-141)

One of Joseph's first revelations was in 1861 when he was trying to decide if he should enlist to fight in the Civil War.

Other religious leaders in the North felt no hesitation about supporting the war effort both morally and materially, and Smith could easily have taken this approach. Unable to decide what he should do, Smith decided to pray for direction from God. He specifically asked about the propriety of serving in the military and, after weeks of contemplation, received an answer that he said was clear, definite, and unmistakable: "Do not enlist. Enlisting makes your military service an individual and voluntary action, whereby you might shed blood while in the service. Wait; if drafted, the responsibility is lifted. In such case do not hesitate to take your places in the ranks and to do your full duty as good soldiers and citizens, supporting the government to the best of your powers." (Joseph Smith III, Pragmatic Prophet, p. 135)

## Joseph Smith III Revelations - RLDS sections

In October 1860 a committee was organized to nominate four men to fill out the Quorum of the Twelve, but they only nominated three. Then, in April 1861 they changed the minutes of 1860 to read, “The Quorum of the Twelve should be filled *as far as practicable*.” – This was a little disappointing.

“The question as to the rights, privileges, and duties resting upon the church by virtue of what is known as the law of tithing had been brought into prominence and seriously and earnestly discussed... While pondering over the matter after an earnest engagement in such prayer, I became aware of a power being exercised over me such as I had never before experienced, and, vividly impressed upon my consciousness, came that which is embodied in the revelation mentioned... It will be noticed that the communication also includes a warning against self-aggrandizement, closing with the words ‘be he whomsoever he may be.’ There had grown up in the minds of those with whom the Reorganization movement began a strong and active repugnance to the idea of what was called a ‘one-man’ rule or power” (Memoirs, p. 464)

- SECTION 114 - October 7, 1861 (3 verses)
  - The Twelve are to work with the bishop in executing the law of tithing

*1b and let them before God see to it that the temporal means so obtained is truly used for the purposes of the church-and not as a weapon of power in the hands of one man for the oppression of others or for the purposes of self-aggrandizement by anyone, be he whosoever he may be.*

*2 As I live, saith the Lord, in the manner ye execute this matter, so shall ye be judged in the day of judgment.*



“as no revelation had been received by the Reorganized Church up to 1863 directing the filling of the first quorum [First Presidency] many questions arose... After the expiration of three years from the time I was chosen to preside it seemed a favorable and opportune time for the Lord to direct in the matter. Thus, at the Conference of 1863 a revelation was received directing the church to call and ordain William Marks to be a Counselor to the President of the church.” (Memoirs, p. 464)

- SECTION 115 - March, 1863 (5 verses)
  - William Marks is called to the First Presidency-Elders are to travel two by two to preach the gospel

*115:1b It is my will that you ordain and set apart my servant William Marks to be a counselor to my servant Joseph, even the President of my church, that the First Presidency of my church may be more perfectly filled.*

In elevating the appointment to the level of a formal revelation written for the church, Smith accomplished two purposes. As God’s prophet, he nominated the person to hold the office, and he virtually assured that his recommendation would be accepted by the church body. (Joseph Smith III, Pragmatic Prophet, p. 144)

“At the Conference of 1865, considerable discussion was had upon the proposition of ordaining Negroes... After much discussion it was ‘Resolved that we refer the above matter to the Lord and then come together fasting and praying to God that He will reveal his Will on this point unto his servant, Joseph Smith.’” (Memoirs, p. 465)

- SECTION 116 - May 4, 1865 – After Civil War (9 verses)
  - Men of every race may be ordained to the priesthood-  
Admonitions to the priesthood

*116:1b Lo, it is my will that my gospel shall be preached to all nations in every land and that men of every tongue shall minister before me;*

*116:1c therefore, it is expedient in me that you ordain priests unto me of every race who receive the teachings of my law and become heirs according to the promise...*

...

*116:4a Be not hasty in ordaining men of the Negro race to offices in my church; for verily, I say unto you,*

*D&C 116:4b All are not acceptable unto me as servants; nevertheless, I will that all may be saved, but every man in his own order; and there are some who are chosen instruments to be ministers to their own race. Be ye content; I, the Lord, have spoken it.*

Just think of how much grief and heartache could have been avoided if this revelation from the Lord had been known to, or perhaps even been received by, the LDS Church! The Church could have been a leader in giving equality rather than having been one of the last holdouts. In fact, many observers both within the Church and outside believed that the LDS Church had finally simply caved into the pressure from demonstrations and the media. It was not good press for the Church!

Note also the difference between this revelation and that received by LDS leaders in 1978. LDS President Kimball held a meeting with the apostles where each presented his view on the subject. All agreed that the time had come for all worthy men to receive the priesthood. Then they all prayed for the confirmation of heaven of their decision. All testified that they felt a powerful witness from the Holy Ghost. A Declaration was later added to the LDS D&C stating that President Kimball had received a revelation, but the witness of the apostles only testified of a strong confirmation of their decision. In other words, no revelation was added to the D&C, but only a declaration that one had been received (John Pratt: [Revelations to Joseph Smith III](#))

By 1873, prompted by the decimation of general officers through death, infirmity, resignation, or defection, Smith had decided that the time had come to reorganize the leading quorums of the church. Smith was operating alone in the Presidency, Rogers was operating alone in the Presiding Bishopric, and less than half of the apostles were functioning. In addition, the Quorum of the Seventy had been virtually destroyed as an effective missionary tool. (Joseph Smith III, Pragmatic Prophet, p. 144)

“The spring of 1873 proved to be an eventful one. Through many periods of prayer—which characterized the entire year before the sitting of the Conference—the necessities of the church were presented to God, and in response He granted a revelation through which a more perfect organization was secured... I felt I could not continue to give revelations to the church unless there should be established a better organization of the Quorums under whose administration such revelations as should be presented should reach the body... In the days following its [the 1873 revelation] reception I was permitted to enjoy the presence of the Spirit in a remarkable degree...”

“There had developed among the brethren, as I have said, something in the nature of a strife over the question as to just who was authorized to formulate the doctrine and the theories of the church, and upon the part of a few there seemed to be a desire to be the ones to direct in this regard. The provisions of this revelation seemed to throw about us all a definite and much-desired safeguard.

“The specific mention in this revelation of Elders J. W. Briggs, Josiah Ells, and E. C. Briggs to remain as special witnesses indicated that, having been members of the old church, they were still to be recognized as standing in their proper callings, and by the Spirit of the Master regarded as strong, valiant, and useful men. The men newly chosen were wise young men who had approved themselves in the field as able and worthy expounders of the faith, well qualified to be called to succeed such men as those were who had been taken from the Quorum by death. Their choice seemed to prove conclusively that the Spirit of supervision which had been over the body from the first still continued...” (Memoirs, p. 465-466)

SECTION 117 - March 3, 1873 (24 verses)

- the First Presidency was filled for the first time since the church was reorganized in 1860. W. W. Blair and David H. Smith are called to the Presidency-Several are called to the Quorum of Twelve-The Bishop is to choose counselors and bishop's agents-Let contentions cease

*9a Until such time as the Quorum of the Twelve shall be filled, the decision of that quorum, a unanimous decision, shall be accounted final, as if such quorum were filled, according to my law as given in the Book of Doctrine and Covenants.*

*9b And until such time as the Quorum of the Seventy shall be filled, their decision, if unanimous and agreeing with that of the Quorum of the Twelve, shall be considered the same as if the quorum were filled.*

...

*13 Let contentions and quarrelings among you cease. Sustain each other in peace; and ye shall be blessed with my Spirit, in comforting and strengthening you for my work.*

“Some nine years elapsed [1882] before the next revelation was received, during which time some uneasiness concerning the still uncompleted Quorums had again developed. There arose also the question as to whether or not the Reorganized Church was authorized or expected to occupy the grounds of foreign missionary work which had been opened during the days of Joseph and Hyrum Smith... The Fall Conference in 1882 was held in Lamoni, and it was at that time I had, in the exercise of my presiding authority, to pass through the most severe trial I had yet encountered. Indeed, it was the most serious situation in which I had been called to act, for I stood face to face against two of the most prominent and leading members of the ministry, as they openly defied me and my decisions... I commend the reading of the revelation of 1882 for the spirit it breathes as well as for the law it expounds. It established more securely the grounds of our contention against evil.” (Memoirs, p. 467)

- SECTION 118 - September 28, 1882 (8 verses)
  - Need for further organization and unity-Heed the counsel of the traveling ministry

*3 It is my will that ye more fully honor and pay heed to the voice and counsel of the traveling ministry in spiritual things-which if ye do not, the office which they hold is not honored in my service, and the good they should do is made void.*

*4a If they approve themselves as righteous ministers, they shall be blessed; if they be found transgressors or idle servants, ye shall not uphold them.*

*4b But be not hasty in withdrawing your support from them, peradventure ye shall injure my work.*

*4c Even now I am not well pleased with some, but space is granted for repentance and a renewal of diligence. Let no one deceive himself that he shall not account for his stewardship unto me.*

“Some more or less agitated questions were decided by the revelation— which particular officers of the church were qualified by their calling to administer the bread and the wine; the time for the observance of the Sacrament; the fixing of the first day of the week, commonly called the Lord’s Day, as the Sabbath; the admonition to the official members of the church calling for a greater degree of sobriety and diligence on their part; and the endorsement of the song service with a general change to the whole membership to cultivate music... The Voice of the Spirit came to me in such plain and unmistakable terms that it was no wonder the revelation was promptly and unanimously accepted for the government and guidance of the church. (Memoirs, p. 468)

- SECTION 119 - April 11, 1887 (33 verses)
  - Elders are to be of sober mind, studious, humble, sincere, and set a good example-Instructions concerning the sacrament, service of song, keeping the Sabbath, prosecuting the missionary work, and care of the mind and body

*3c Men of God, who bear the vessels of the Lord, be ye **clean in your bodies and in your clothing**; let your garments be of a sober character and **free from excess of ornamentation**.*

*3d **Avoid the use of tobacco, and be not addicted to strong drink** in any form, that your counsel to be temperate may be made effectual by your example.*

*5a And the Spirit saith further: **Contention is unseemly**; therefore, cease to contend respecting the sacrament and the time of administering it;*

*5b for whether it be upon the first Lord's day of every month or upon the Lord's day of every week, if it be administered by the officers of the church with sincerity of heart and in purity of purpose, and be partaken of in remembrance of Jesus Christ and in willingness to take upon them his name by them who partake, it is acceptable to God.*

Here are some of the salient items covered in Section 119 (John Pratt):

- As late as 1887, 27 years after the founding of the Church, the Quorum of Twelve Apostles was not complete, but each member had been named in a revelation (v. 1).
- Elders should have godly speech, sober clothing, and be a good example to win souls (v. 2-3).
- Don't be eager to court apostates to return; they might well bring heresies. Some who have left the Church will return if not hindered by elders (v. 4).
- The sacrament on the Lord's Day can be weekly or monthly (v. 5).
- The emblems of the sacrament are referred to as bread and wine (v. 5).
- The breaking of bread and pouring of wine can be before or after the prayers, early in the meeting (v. 5).
- Church hymns should not sound like funeral dirges (v. 6).
- Reed, string, and brass instruments are allowed with wisdom in sacrament meetings, but not during prayers or testimonies. Hymn books should be provided (v. 6).
- The Church should meet on the Lord's Day, considered to be the first day of the week, as the day of worship and rest until further revelation be given (v. 7).[9]
- The Lord's Day should be kept with wisdom, not wasting anything or judging those doing necessary work (v. 7).
- All are called to missionary work using their particular gifts (v. 8).
- Sleep at night as designed by God which can prevent suffering in mind and body (v. 9).
- Be cheerful, even with bodily suffering which is not relieved by blessings or wisdom.