
Prophets—Pioneer and Modern Day

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Both President Brigham Young and President Gordon B. Hinckley are prophets who have led the Church by inspiration and revelation.



My brothers and sisters, as I stand at the pulpit of this old but new Tabernacle, I am overwhelmed with the sense of history I feel at this moment. As one foot is planted in the past and the other in the future, I give thanks for pioneer and modern-day prophets and apostles who have had and still have the vision to construct and extend into the future this remarkable building.

I wish to speak of two such men of vision: Brigham Young and his successor today.

Brigham Young was the second prophet of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He led the Church

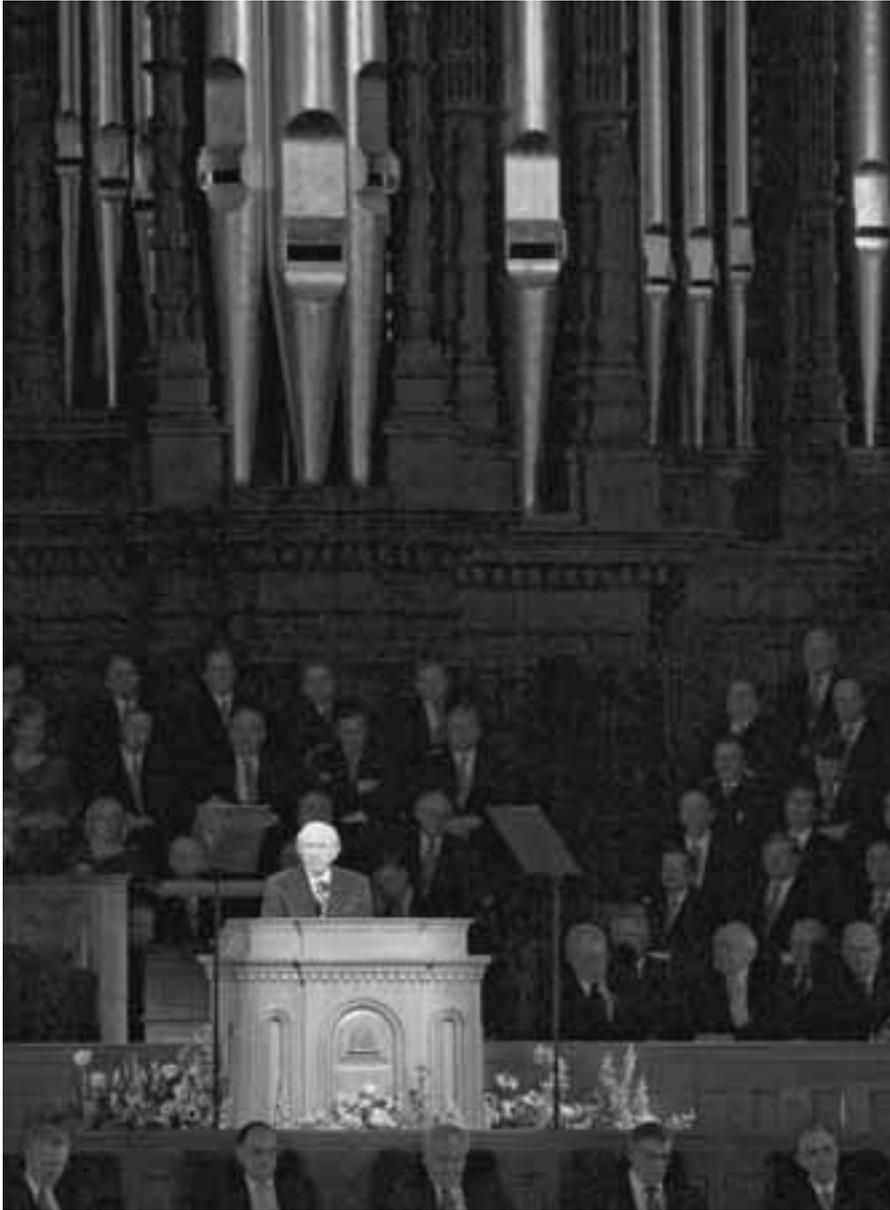
for 33 years. He built this Tabernacle and presided at its dedication during the October general conference in 1875, more than 131 years ago.

His other accomplishments were many, and I can refer to only a few.

He was a pioneer, meaning someone who opens or prepares the way for others to follow. One writer said of Brigham Young: “He led a ragged and impoverished band, stripped of virtually all their earthly goods, into an unknown territory. His critics and biographers note that the man was unique among the leaders of modern history, for he alone, without any political and financial backing, established from scratch in the desert an ordered and industrious society, having no other authority than the priesthood and the spiritual strength with which he delivered his teachings. By constant exhortations and instructions, he drew his people together and inspired them in carrying out the divine mandate to build up the kingdom of God on earth.”¹

When Brigham Young first entered the valley of the Great Salt Lake, he declared, “This is the right place.”² He later said:

“God has shown me, that this is the spot to locate his people, and here is where they will prosper; he



will temper the elements to the good of the Saints; he will rebuke the frost and the sterility of the soil, and the land shall become fruitful, . . . and we shall build a city and a temple to the most high God in this place.”³

Today, we can all attest to the truth of this prophecy. Truly, the desert land and the valleys of the Rocky Mountains are a fruitful and a productive land of promise and prophecy.

He built temples. He started the Salt Lake Temple, which took 40 years to complete. He also started the Manti and the Logan Temples. He dedicated the St. George Temple 4 1/2 months before he died.

He was one of America’s greatest colonizers. By the time of his death, nearly 400 colonies had been established.

He organized the Perpetual Emigrating Fund to reach out to those in need, assisting those of limited means in emigrating from countries in Europe.

He established universities. The University of Deseret is now known as the University of Utah. Latter-day Saints’ College is now known as LDS Business College. And, of course, he also established Brigham Young University.

He loved the Church and its members. Brigham Young had a

unique way in which he referred to the Church:

“God is at the helm. This is the mighty ship Zion. You stick to the ship and honor it, and see that you are in favor with the ship Zion and you need not worry about anything else. . . .

“ . . . He guides the ship, and will bring us safely into port. All we have to care about is to take care of ourselves and see that we do right. Let us man the ship manfully, everyone standing faithfully and firmly to his post, and she will outride every storm and safely bear us to the harbor of celestial bliss.”⁴

He loved the youth of the Church, as is evidenced by the experience of Heber J. Grant. Nine days after Heber’s birth, his father, Jedediah M. Grant, who was Second Counselor to President Brigham Young, died. For the next 21 years, Brigham Young took special interest in the boy Heber J. Grant.

Heber J. Grant wrote:

“I was almost as familiar in the homes of President Brigham Young as I was in the home of my own mother. In one home . . . if I was hungry I felt as free to go in and ask for something to eat there as in my own home. . . . I knelt down time and time again in his home in the Lion House at family prayers, as a child and as a young man.”⁵

He loved the Prophet Joseph Smith. Of this, he said:

“What I have received from the Lord, I have received by Joseph Smith.”⁶

“I love his doctrine. . . . I feel like shouting Hallelujah, all the time, when I think that I ever knew Joseph Smith.”⁷

How I love Brigham Young. His modern-day successor is President Gordon B. Hinckley, also a beloved and revered prophet.

A beautiful painting shows President Hinckley looking forward to

the future, a set of architectural drawings before him. In the background is a portrait of Brigham Young, making it appear that President Young looks over President Hinckley's shoulder.

The portrait of Brigham Young shown in this painting actually hangs in President Hinckley's office, and he has often spoken of it. In a recent general conference, he said:

"At the close of one particularly difficult day, I looked up at a portrait of Brigham Young that hangs on my wall. I asked, 'Brother Brigham, what should we do?' I thought I saw him smile a little, and then he seemed to say: 'In my day, I had problems enough of my own. Don't ask me what to do. This is your watch. Ask the Lord, whose work this really is.'"⁸

These two great prophets, President Brigham Young and President Gordon B. Hinckley, are linked together in their shared prophetic vision that comes from seeing the future and having the faith to bring that vision into present reality.

President Hinckley, like Brigham Young, is a pioneer and a builder. He has traveled the world, meeting kings, queens, and presidents. He has been interviewed by the world's media. He continues to bring the Church "out of obscurity."⁹ More than 75 temples have been built in the last 12 years. And he had the inspiration to build the majestic Conference Center.

President Hinckley, like Brigham Young, spreads the gospel and values education. Church membership now approaches 13 million in 176 nations, territories, and countries. More than 53,000 missionaries circle the globe. This conference is being translated into 90 languages. He continues to support Church universities and Church education. More than 26,000 members now enjoy the benefits of the Perpetual Education Fund.

President Hinckley, like Brigham Young, loves the youth and all members of the Church. The youth of the



Two members in São Paulo, Brazil, attend a general conference broadcast.

Church especially reach out to President Hinckley for prophetic counsel.

President Hinckley loves the Prophet Joseph Smith. Several years ago, he said:

"I worship the God of heaven who is my Eternal Father. I worship the Lord Jesus Christ who is my Savior and my Redeemer. I do not worship the Prophet Joseph Smith, but I reverence and love this great seer through whom the miracle of this gospel has been restored. I am now growing old, and I know that in the natural course of events before many years, I will step across the threshold to stand before my Maker and my Lord and give an accounting of my life. And I hope that I shall have the opportunity of embracing the Prophet Joseph Smith and of thanking him and of speaking of my love for him."¹⁰

I bear my humble witness that both President Brigham Young and President Gordon B. Hinckley are prophets who have led the Church by inspiration and revelation. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. Hugh W. Nibley, in Daniel H. Ludlow, ed., *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 5 vols. (1992), 4:1611.
2. Quoted by Wilford Woodruff, in *The Utah Pioneers* (1880), 23.
3. Quoted in James R. Clark, comp., *Messages of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 6 vols. (1965-75), 6:265.
4. Quoted in Preston Nibley, *Brigham Young: The Man and His Work* (1936), 293, 352.
5. *Gospel Standards*, comp. G. Homer Durham (1941), 223.
6. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young* (1997), 345.
7. *Discourses of Brigham Young*, sel. John A. Widtsoe (1954), 458.
8. "An Ensign to the Nations, a Light to the World," *Liabona* and *Ensign*, Nov. 2003, 82.
9. D&C 1:30.
10. *Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley* (1997), 509.