



The Saga of Revelation: The



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On February 8, 1835, Joseph Smith announced to Brigham and Joseph Young that he would organize the Twelve Apostles and the Seventy in accordance with a vision he had received (see D&C 107).

The Prophet then said: “I wish you to notify all the brethren living in the branches, within a reasonable distance from this place, to meet at a general conference on Saturday next. I shall then and there appoint twelve Special Witnesses, to open the door of the Gospel to foreign nations, and you,’ said he (speaking to Brother Brigham), ‘will be one of them.’ . . . He then turned to Elder Joseph Young with quite an earnestness, as though the vision of his mind was extended still further, and addressing him, said, ‘Brother Joseph, the Lord has made you President of the Seventies.’”

Although the Youngs knew of the existence of these priesthood offices in the Bible,

Top, from left: The first members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and the first Seventies were ordained in February 1835. The seven presidents of the 30th Quorum of the Seventy with their secretary, about 1890. Members of the 88th Quorum of the Seventy with their families, March 1897.

still the Prophet’s words “caused these brethren to marvel.”¹

On the following Saturday, February 14, members of the Twelve were appointed and ordained, and two weeks later members of the First Quorum of the Seventy were also appointed and ordained.

Two things that stand out in my mind as particularly important about the history of the Seventy are evident in this first calling of the Seventy in our dispensation: (1) the office of Seventy is doctrinally based in the scriptures and (2) the role of the Seventy is inextricably connected to the mission of the Twelve. As we study these two essential points, a third—equally if not more important point—becomes

Why is an understanding of the history of the Seventy important today? Because it provides a pattern for how the Lord reveals His will for His Church—and for our individual lives.



Unfolding Role of the Seventy

UNFOLDING EVENTS

February 1835: The Prophet Joseph Smith announced the establishment of the office of Seventy and organized the First Quorum of the Seventy.

March 1835: The Prophet Joseph Smith received instructions regarding the calling and role of the Seventy (see D&C 107).

January 1836: The Presidency of the Seventy received their anointings and blessings in the Kirtland Temple. Later the same month, members of the Seventy were anointed and blessed in the Kirtland Temple.

February 1836: Joseph Smith met with some of the Brethren to choose the Second Quorum of the Seventy.

April 1837: The Presidents of the Seventy were reorganized.

January 1841: Duties of the Seventy were outlined (see D&C 124:138–39).

December 1844: The Seventies' Hall was dedicated in Nauvoo.

1846: When the Saints left Nauvoo, the number of Seventies quorums had increased to approximately 30.

April 1883: The Lord told the First Presidency that He would reveal His will from “time to time” regarding the rolling forth of His kingdom.

evident: the Lord reveals His will line upon line, making the history of the latter-day Seventy a pattern of revelation for the Church and for individuals.

1. The Office of Seventy Is Doctrinally Based in the Scriptures

The first mention of the Seventy is the Old Testament instruction to Moses and “seventy of the elders of Israel” (Exodus 24:1).

The Lord told Moses to use the Seventy so that he need not bear his burdens alone: “Gather unto me seventy men of the elders of Israel . . . that they may stand there with thee” (Numbers 11:16).

To properly empower the Seventy, the Lord took the “spirit” that was upon Moses and gave it also to the Seventy. “When the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied, and did not cease” (Numbers 11:25).

The New Testament Church likewise included the office of Seventy. The Savior Himself called and instructed the Seventy (see Luke 10) in a manner similar to the

instructions He gave the Twelve (see Matthew 10). He sent out the Seventy, explaining that “he that heareth you heareth me” (Luke 10:16; see also verses 1–15).

The effectiveness of the Seventy was evident as they reported on their commission, “saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name” (Luke 10:17).

2. The Role of the Seventy Is Connected to the Mission of the Twelve

The Seventies’ role in relation to the Twelve becomes particularly evident following the Savior’s Resurrection. The Church had grown so that the Twelve alone were not able to meet all the needs of the people. When some began to murmur that the widows were being neglected in the daily ministration, the calling of Seventies answered the challenges of growth. The Seventy bore some burdens so the Twelve need not neglect the assignments they alone could fulfill:

“Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.

“But we [the Twelve] will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:3–4).

This pattern was restored through the Prophet Joseph Smith, and the office of Seventy in relation to the office of the Twelve became clearly defined in modern revelation:

- “The Seventy are also called to preach the gospel, and to be especial witnesses unto the Gentiles and in all the world” (D&C 107:25).
- “The Seventy are to act in the name of the Lord, under the direction of the Twelve or the traveling high council, in building up the church and regulating all the affairs of the same in all nations” (D&C 107:34).
- The Twelve are “to call upon the Seventy, when they need assistance, to fill the several calls for preaching

and administering the gospel, instead of any others” (D&C 107:38).

- The Seventy are “instituted for traveling elders to bear record of my name in all the world, wherever the traveling high council, mine apostles, shall send them to prepare a way before my face” (D&C 124:139).

I am confident that each Seventy today considers it a great privilege to support the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. And again Seventies help provide an

answer to the challenges of Church growth. While there will generally be only 3 members of the First Presidency and 12 members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, there is flexibility in the ranks and numbers of the Seventy.

3. The Lord Reveals His Will Line upon Line

When they arrived in the Salt Lake Valley, the early Saints, including Seventies, were dispersed to various settlements. The Seventies

had been organized into approximately 30 quorums. Lack of proximity made it difficult, if not impossible, for the members and leaders of the Seventy to meet in their original quorums.

As a result of this difficulty, in 1883 the First Presidency prayerfully prepared a written recommendation on how and in what manner the Seventy should be organized.

On April 14, 1883, the Lord accepted the recommendation and revealed: “What ye have written is my will, and is acceptable unto me: and furthermore . . . let not your hearts be troubled, neither be ye concerned about the management and organization of my Church and Priesthood and the accomplishment of my work. Fear me and observe my laws and I will reveal unto you, *from time to time*, through the channels that I have appointed, everything that shall be necessary for the future development and *perfection* of my Church, for the adjustment and rolling forth of my kingdom, and for the building up and the establishment of my Zion.”²



1899: Seventies began to participate in a missionary training program at Church schools.

1904: The number of Seventies quorums had increased to 146.

March 1936: Each stake began to have a stake mission, supervised by the First Council of the Seventy.

1953: Seventies quorums or units were organized in each stake.

June 1961: Four members of the First Council of the Seventy were ordained high priests, and members of the First Council of the Seventy were authorized to organize and reorganize stake presidencies.

January 1964: Members of the First Council of the Seventy were given the sealing power.

1967: Sixty-nine brethren were called as regional representatives of the Twelve.

March 1974: The First Presidency authorized stake presidents to ordain Seventies provided they had been approved by the First Council of the Seventy.

October 1974: Units of Seventies were discontinued, and each stake was authorized to have a quorum.

1975: Assistants to the Quorum of the Twelve were assigned outside North America as General Authority area supervisors.

October 1975: The First Quorum of the Seventy was reconstituted as a General Authority quorum.

April 1976: The First Presidency authorized that the Presidents of the First Quorum of the Seventy would be rotated from time to time.

October 1976: Assistants to the Twelve and members of the First Council of the Seventy were released, then called to the First Quorum of the Seventy.

October 1976: Authorization for ordination of stake Seventies no longer required approval from the First Quorum of the Seventy.

September 1978: Certain General Authorities would be given emeritus status.

February 1980: Seventies serving as Executive Directors of Church headquarters departments were called to the Presidency of the Seventy.

This “time to time” revelatory pattern is evident through a study of the history of the Seventy—a study that demonstrates how the calling, duties, and responsibilities of the Seventy have developed line upon line in accordance with the doctrinal foundation of the scriptures. President Boyd K. Packer, President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, has said that the unfolding events in the organization of the Seventy “will prove to have been a great Godsend and a pattern of revelation itself.”³

Let us review just a few of the significant developments in this history to illustrate this line-upon-line pattern.

Organization of the Seventy. In February 1835, when the Prophet Joseph called the first Seventies of this dispensation, all of them had been members of Zion’s Camp, the group that marched from Ohio to Missouri in 1834 to aid the Saints.

Elder B. H. Roberts (1842–1933) of the Seventy noted that this service indicates “that the character of men who attain unto this high station in the Priesthood of God should be men who have made sacrifices for the work of God, or who are perfectly willing to make such sacrifices, even to laying down their lives for the cause.”⁴

Growth in Nauvoo. While the Saints lived in Nauvoo, “the number of the Seventy was greatly increased. . . . By the first of January, 1845, the number of quorums had increased to fourteen.” A year later the number of quorums had increased to 30.⁵

Dispersion in Utah. The dispersion of Seventies after the Saints’ arrival in Utah led to the recommendation of the First Presidency in 1883, which provided that the members of the Seventy associate themselves with a quorum located in the area where they resided.

As mentioned, the Lord accepted the recommendation of the First Presidency and promised that from *time to time*, He would continue to reveal necessary adjustments. It seems the saga of revelation was only beginning!

Seventies Quorums in Stakes and Missions. In April 1953, when the number of quorums was approximately 500, the First Presidency, concerned about some Seventies not affiliated with a quorum, announced that a quorum of the Seventy, presided over by seven presidents, should be organized in *each* stake or mission where there were 36 or more Seventies.⁶

In each stake or mission having fewer than 36 Seventies, a unit, rather than a quorum, would be presided over by a president and two counselors. The units and quorums were then organized in consecutive numbers to avoid confusion. In 1974 Seventies units were discontinued, and each stake was to have a quorum. The presidencies of the stake quorums served as the stake mission presidency.⁷

Previously, in March 1936, missionary work had been organized with a mission in each stake. These stake missions were supervised by the First Council of the Seventy, working through stake presidents.⁸

Reestablishing the First Quorum of the Seventy. October 1975 general conference brought a major milestone in the continuing saga of revelation. President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) announced the reconstitution of the First Quorum of the Seventy.

This quorum of General Authorities would gradually be organized with 70 members and Seven Presidents.⁹

One year later, at the October 1976 general conference,

the First Quorum of the Seventy was expanded by the addition of the First Council of the Seventy and the Assistants to the Twelve. All members of the First Quorum were ordained to the office of high priest as well as to the office of Seventy.

President Kimball explained: “With this move, the three governing quorums of the Church defined by revelations—the First Presidency, the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, and the First Quorum of the Seventy—have been set in their places as revealed by the Lord. This will make it possible to handle efficiently the present heavy workload and to prepare for the increasing expansion and acceleration of the work, anticipating the day when the Lord will return to take direct charge of His church and kingdom.”¹⁰

Discontinuation of Stake Quorums. On October 4, 1986, all stake quorums of the Seventy were discontinued, and Seventies at the stake level became members of elders quorums or were ordained to the office of high priest. The office of Seventy was thus reserved for General Authorities of the Church.¹¹

Establishment of the Second

Quorum. On April 1, 1989, the Second Quorum of the Seventy was created.¹² This began to put in place two Quorums of the Seventy: the First as General Authorities who would become emeritus at age 70 and the Second as five-year General Authorities.



WHAT WAS THE FIRST COUNCIL OF THE SEVENTY?

The Prophet Joseph organized the First Council of the Seventy when he organized the First Quorum of the Seventy on February 28, 1835. The First Council was made up of the Seven Presidents of the First Quorum. This council existed in some form until 1976, when its members (front: Elders S. Dilworth Young, A. Theodore Tuttle, and Paul H. Dunn; back: Elders Hartman Rector Jr., Loren C. Dunn, Rex D. Pinegar, and Gene R. Cook) were called into the reconstituted First Quorum of the Seventy as General Authorities.

The roles and duties of the First Council changed over the years as revelation unfolded, but their unchanging responsibility was to preside over other Seventies and to administer the work presently given to the Seventies.

April 1984: Six new members of the First Quorum of the Seventy were called to serve for a period of three to five years, establishing a new precedent for General Authority tenure.

July 1984: Members of the First Quorum of the Seventy were called as Area Presidencies to administer areas under the direction of the Twelve.

October 1986: Seventies quorums in stakes were discontinued.

April 1989: The Second Quorum of the Seventy was organized, made up of men who would serve for five years.

November 1991: Policy was established for members of the First Quorum to serve until age 70 and members of the Second Quorum to be released after five years.

April 1995: President Gordon B. Hinckley announced the release of regional representatives and the calling of Area Authorities effective in August 1995.

April 1997: The Third, Fourth, and Fifth Quorums of the Seventy were organized, made up of Area Authority Seventies.

June 1997: Under the direction of Area Presidencies, Area Authority Seventies began to preside at member-missionary coordinating councils, consisting of stake and mission presidents.

May 2001 and September 2002: Member-missionary coordinating councils were expanded to include most Church programs and various multistake concerns.

April 2004: The Fifth Quorum of the Seventy was divided to create the Sixth Quorum of the Seventy.

August 2004: Under the direction of the Twelve, the Presidency of the Seventy began to be responsible for all Church areas. Members of the Presidency of the Seventy no longer served as Executive Directors of major headquarters departments. The Seven Presidents were assigned to supervise all 11 areas in North America.

April 2005: The Seventh Quorum of the Seventy was created from the Fourth Quorum. The Third Quorum was divided to create the Eighth Quorum.

June 2008: The First Presidency announced an increase in the responsibilities of Area Presidencies.

Calling of Area Authorities. At the April 1995 general conference, all regional representatives of the Twelve were released effective in August of that year, and the office of Area Authority was announced. (Regional representative was a Church calling established in 1967 to train stake and ward leaders.)

President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) said of Area Authorities: “These will be high priests chosen from among past and present experienced Church leaders. They will continue with their current employment, reside in their own homes, and serve on a Church-service basis. The term of their call will be flexible, generally, for a period of approximately six years. They will be closely tied to the area presidencies.”¹³

Calling of Area Seventies. Two years later, in April 1997, President Hinckley announced that the Area Authorities would be ordained Seventies and would be known as Area Authority Seventies (now called Area Seventies). This was the beginning of a significant increase in the number of Seventies and in their responsibilities.

President Hinckley explained, “As Seventies they are called to preach the gospel and to be especial witnesses of the Lord Jesus Christ as set forth in the revelations.”¹⁴

President Hinckley explained that these Brethren would have a quorum relationship. He organized the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Quorums of the Seventy geographically.

Thereafter, Area Seventies began to preside at member-missionary coordinating councils (consisting of a mission president and all stake presidents in the mission). Later this meeting was renamed as a coordinating council meeting, and the agenda was



The First and Second Quorums of the Seventy, 2006.

expanded to include most Church programs and various multistake concerns.

Expanded Duties of the Presidency of the Seventy.

In April 2004 members of the Presidency of the Seventy were released as Executive Directors of major headquarters departments, and other Seventies were assigned to these positions. Several months later, in August 2004, the Presidency of the Seventy began to supervise all 11 Church areas in North America and to assist the Twelve in supervising all international areas.

The Presidency of the Seventy commenced meeting with the full Twelve each Tuesday. The Twelve are able to rely on the Presidency of the Seventy as the presidency is to “choose other seventy [and] to preside over them” (D&C 107:95).

The Seventy Today

The saga of revelation in the organization and duties of the Seventy continues today. The First Presidency has recently consolidated international Church areas and given more administrative responsibilities to Seventies serving in Area Presidencies.¹⁵

How could Joseph Smith have understood when he ordained the first Seventies that this office would grow to include, at this time, 315 Seventies in eight quorums throughout the world? I testify that Joseph didn’t have to know because the Lord knew and what Joseph established was a latter-day foundation based upon the doctrines

of the scriptures and a “vision showing the order of the Seventy” (D&C 107:93).

The Lord’s hand has been over the unfolding history of the Seventy from the beginning and in each subsequent development that moved the office of the Seventy to comply with its scriptural charter. Why study this unfolding history? As President Packer explained, it is “a pattern of revelation itself.” Line upon line, the Lord has revealed His will for the Seventy, and I know that He will continue to do so for the Seventy—and for you and me as individual members of His Church. ■

NOTES

1. Joseph Young, “History of the Organization of the Seventies” (1878), 1–2, as quoted in *History of the Church*, 2:181, note.
2. In James R. Clark, comp., *Messages of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 6 vols. (1965–75), 2:354; emphasis added.
3. Boyd K. Packer, “The Seventy Is an Especial Witness of Jesus Christ” (address given on Sept. 29, 1987), 10.
4. B. H. Roberts, *The Seventy’s Course in Theology, First Year* (1907), 6.
5. B. H. Roberts, *The Seventy’s Course in Theology*, 8–9.
6. See Conference Report, Apr. 1953, 51.
7. See First Presidency letter, Oct. 11, 1974.
8. See “A New Plan for Missionary Work in the Stakes of Zion,” *Improvement Era*, May 1936, 273.
9. See Spencer W. Kimball, “The Time to Labor Is Now,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1975, 4.
10. Spencer W. Kimball, “The Reconstitution of the First Quorum of the Seventy,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1976, 9.
11. See Ezra Taft Benson, “Godly Characteristics of the Master,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1986, 48.
12. See Thomas S. Monson, “The Sustaining of Church Officers,” *Ensign*, May 1989, 17.
13. Gordon B. Hinckley, “This Work Is Concerned with People,” *Ensign*, May 1995, 52.
14. Gordon B. Hinckley, “May We Be Faithful and True,” *Ensign*, May 1997, 6.
15. See First Presidency letter, June 19, 2008.