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The Zion's Camp expedition led by the Prophet Joseph Smith in 1834 is a striking example of choosing to be on the Lord's side. Reviewing the history of Zion's Camp can help us learn valuable and timeless lessons from this significant episode in Church history that apply to our lives and circumstances today.

What Was Zion's Camp?

The Prophet Joseph Smith received a revelation in 1831 designating Independence, Jackson County, Missouri, as the site of Zion, the central gathering place for the Latter-day Saints and the location for the New Jerusalem identified in both the Bible and the Book of Mormon (see D&C 57:1–3; see also Revelation 21:1–2; Ether 13:4–6). By the summer of 1833, Mormon settlers accounted for approximately one-third of the population in Jackson County. The rapidly increasing numbers, the potential political influence, and the distinctive religious and political beliefs of these newcomers were causes of concern to the other settlers in the area, who consequently demanded that Church members vacate their homes and properties. When this ultimatum was not acted upon, the Missourians attacked the settlements in November 1833 and forced the Saints to leave.

The formation of Zion's Camp was commanded by revelation in February 1834 (see D&C 103). The primary

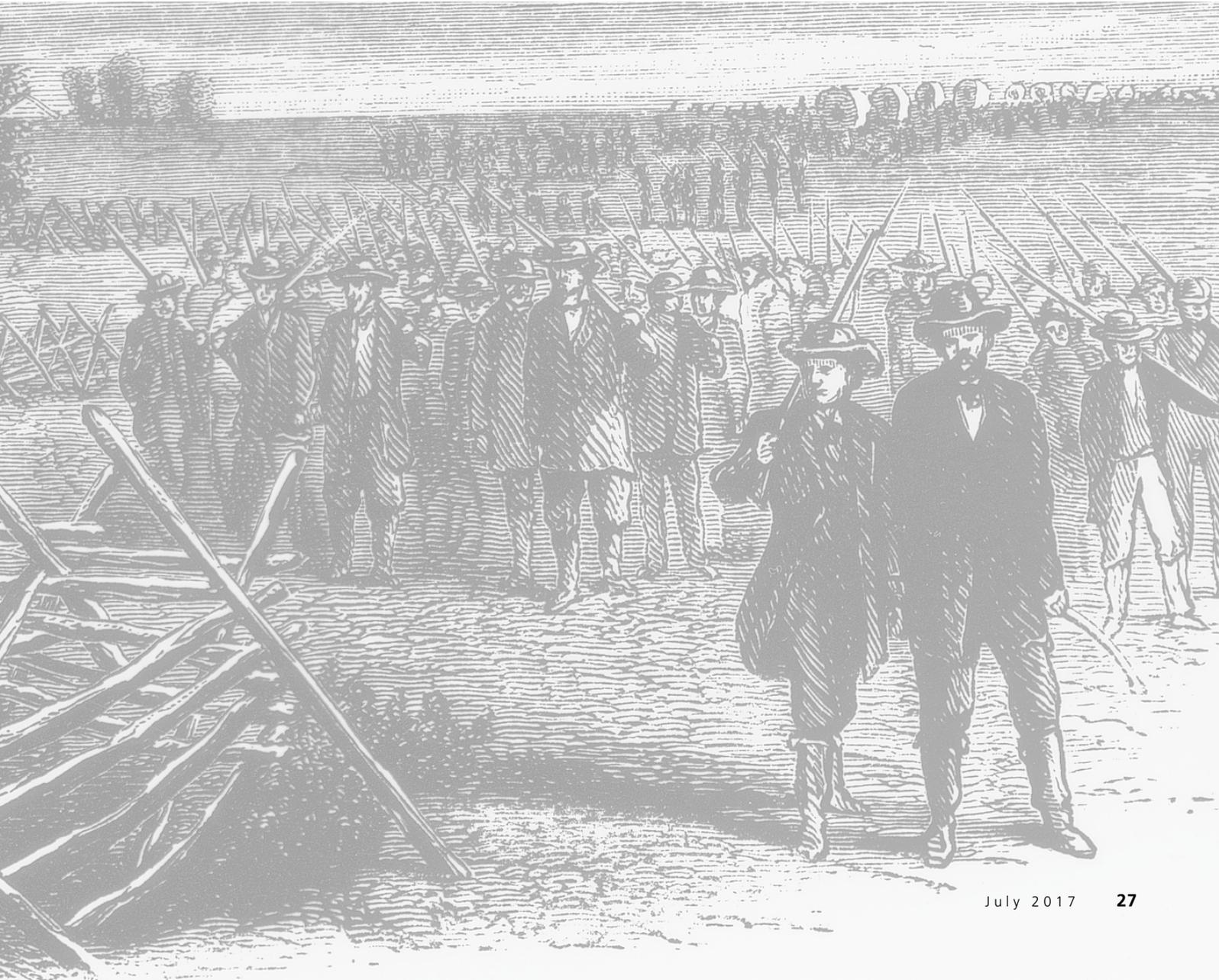


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LORD'S SIDE

Springfield
Indianapolis
Belleville Greenfield Dayton

Lessons from Zion's Camp



In November 1833, Missourians attacked Mormon settlements in Jackson County, Missouri, and forced the Saints to leave.



purpose for this army of the Lord was to protect the Mormons in Jackson County from additional assaults—after the Missouri militia fulfilled its obligation to escort the settlers safely back to their homes and lands. The camp also was to bring money, supplies, and moral support to the destitute Saints. Thus, during May and June 1834, a company of over 200 Latter-day Saint volunteers led by the Prophet Joseph Smith traveled approximately 900 miles (1,450 km) from Kirtland, Ohio, to Clay County, Missouri. Hyrum Smith and Lyman Wight also recruited a smaller group of volunteers from Michigan Territory and met up with the Prophet's group in Missouri. Participants in Zion's Camp included Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, Wilford Woodruff, Parley P. Pratt, Orson Hyde, and many other readily recognizable individuals from Church history.

My purpose is not to describe the details of this demanding journey or recount all of the spiritually significant episodes that took place. Let me simply summarize a few major events of the Zion's Camp expedition:

- Governor Daniel Dunklin of Missouri failed to provide the promised militia assistance necessary for the Mormon settlers to be reinstated on their lands.
- Negotiations undertaken among Church leaders, Missouri state officials, and the citizens of Jackson County to avoid armed conflict and to resolve property disputes failed to reach a satisfactory agreement.
- Ultimately, the Lord directed Joseph Smith to disband Zion's Camp and indicated why the army of the Lord had not achieved its perceived objective (see D&C 105:6–13, 19).
- The Lord directed the Saints to build goodwill in the area in preparation for the time when Zion would be recovered by legal rather than by military means (see D&C 105:23–26, 38–41).

Zion's army was broken into smaller groups in late June 1834, and final discharge papers were issued the first few days of July 1834. Most of the volunteers returned to Ohio.

What Lessons Can We Learn from Zion's Camp?

Because of the failure to reestablish the Saints on their lands in Jackson County, Zion's Camp was considered by some an unsuccessful and unprofitable endeavor. A brother in Kirtland—one who lacked the faith to volunteer to go with the camp—met Brigham Young on his return from Missouri and asked, “Well, what did you gain on this useless journey to Missouri with Joseph Smith?” ‘All we went for,’ promptly replied Brigham Young. ‘I would not exchange the experience I gained in that expedition for all the wealth of Geauga County,’ the county in which Kirtland was then located.¹

I invite you to seriously think about Brigham Young's answer: “All we went for.” What are the key learnings we can glean from an undertaking that did not accomplish its stated purpose but nonetheless provided for those early Saints, and can afford us, the blessings of a lifetime?

I believe at least two overarching lessons are to be found in Brother Brigham's answer to that taunting question: (1) the lesson of testing, sifting, and preparing, and (2) the lesson of observing, learning from, and following the Brethren. I emphasize that these lessons are as important, if not more important, for us to learn and apply today as they were just over 180 years ago for the volunteers in Zion's Camp.



The Lesson of Testing, Sifting, and Preparing

The stalwart Saints who marched in the army of the Lord were tested and tried. As the Lord declared, “I have heard their prayers, and will accept their offering; and it is expedient in me that they should be brought thus far for a trial of their faith” (D&C 105:19).

In a most literal way, the physical and spiritual challenges of Zion's Camp constituted a sifting of the wheat from the tares (see Matthew 13:25, 29–30; D&C 101:65), a dividing of the sheep from the goats (see Matthew 25:32–33), a separating of the spiritually strong from the weak. Thus, each man and woman who enlisted in the army of the Lord faced and answered the penetrating question of “Who's on the Lord's side?”²

As Wilford Woodruff was settling his business affairs and preparing to join Zion's Camp, his friends and neighbors warned him not to undertake such a hazardous journey. They counseled, “Do not go, if you do you will lose your life.” He replied, “If I know that I should have a ball put through my heart the first step I took in the state of Missouri I would go.”³ Wilford Woodruff knew he did not need to fear evil consequences as long as he was faithful and obedient. He clearly was on the Lord's side.

Indeed, “the time to show”⁴ for those faithful men and women was the summer of 1834. But the decision to march with the Prophet Joseph to Missouri was not necessarily a one-time, all-inclusive, or immediate response to the question of “Who's on the Lord's side?” The time to show for those Saints arose frequently and repeatedly through mental and physical fatigue, through bloody blisters on their feet, through inadequate food and unclean water, through a multitude of disappointments, through dissensions and rebellions within the camp, and through external threats from vicious enemies.

The time to show came in the experiences and privations of every hour, of every day, and of every week. It was the grand combination of the many seemingly

A photograph showing two women in a professional or office environment. They are seated at a desk with a computer monitor and keyboard. The woman on the right, wearing glasses and a red top, is pointing at a document on the desk. The woman on the left, wearing a pink top, is looking towards the computer screen. The background shows a window with natural light.

“We have too many potential spiritual giants who should be more vigorously lifting their homes [and] the kingdom.”

small choices and actions in the lives of these devoted Saints that provided the conclusive answer to the question “Who’s on the Lord’s side?”

How did the testing and sifting that occurred in the lives of the Zion’s Camp participants serve as a preparation? Interestingly, eight of the brethren called into the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in 1835, as well as all of the Seventies called at that same time, were veterans of Zion’s Camp. At a meeting following the call of the Seventies, the Prophet Joseph Smith declared:

“Brethren, some of you are angry with me, because you did not fight in Missouri; but let me tell you, God did not want you to fight. He could not organize his kingdom with twelve men to open the gospel door to the nations of the earth, and with seventy men under their direction to follow in their tracks, unless he took them from a body of men who had offered their lives, and who had made as great a sacrifice as did Abraham.

“Now, the Lord has got his Twelve and his Seventy, and there will be other quorums of Seventies called.”⁵

Truly, Zion’s Camp was a refiner’s fire for all of the

volunteers in general and for many future leaders of the Lord’s Church in particular.

The experiences gained by the volunteers in the army of the Lord also were a preparation for larger, future migrations of Church members. More than 20 of the Zion’s Camp participants became captains and lieutenants in two great exoduses—the first but four years in the future, involving the removal of 8,000 to 10,000 people from Missouri to Illinois⁶; and the second, 12 years in the future, the great western movement of approximately 15,000 Latter-day Saints from Illinois to the Salt Lake and other Rocky Mountain valleys. As a preparatory training, Zion’s Camp was of immense value to the Church. The year 1834 was the time to show—and to prepare for 1838 and for 1846.

As individuals and families, we too will be tested, sifted, and prepared, as were the members of Zion’s Camp. The scriptures and the teachings of the Brethren are replete with promises that faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; the making, honoring, and remembering of sacred covenants; and obedience to God’s commandments will strengthen us to

prepare for, to face, to overcome, and to learn from the trials and tests of mortality.

The leaders of the Lord's Church clearly have identified some of the collective or generational tests we can expect to encounter in our day and generation. As the President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in 1977, President Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994) raised a prophetic voice of warning in a meeting of regional representatives. I now quote extensively from President Benson's message and invite your focused attention on his timely counsel:

“Every generation has its tests and its chance to stand and prove itself. Would you like to know of one of our toughest tests? Hear the warning words of Brigham Young, ‘The worst fear I have about this people is that they will get rich in this country, forget God and His people, wax fat, and kick themselves out of the Church and go to hell. This people will stand mobbing, robbing, poverty, and all manner of persecution and be true. But my greatest fear is that they cannot stand wealth.’”

President Benson continues: “Ours then seems to be the toughest test of all, for the evils are more subtle, more clever. It all seems less menacing and it is harder to detect. While every test of righteousness represents a struggle, this particular test seems like no test at all, no struggle and so could be the most deceiving of all tests.

“Do you know what peace and prosperity can do to a people—It can put them to sleep. The Book of Mormon warned us of how Satan, in the last days, would lead us away carefully down to hell. The Lord has on the earth some potential spiritual giants whom He saved for some six thousand years to help bear off the Kingdom triumphantly, and the devil is trying to put them to sleep. The adversary knows that he probably won't be too successful in getting them to commit many great and malignant sins of commission. So he puts them into a deep sleep, like Gulliver, while he strands them with little sins of omission. And what good is a sleepy, neutralized, lukewarm giant as a leader?

“We have too many potential spiritual giants who should be more vigorously lifting their homes, the kingdom, and the country. We have many who feel they are good men and women, but they need to be good for something—strong patriarchs, courageous missionaries, valiant family history and temple workers, dedicated patriots, devoted quorum members. In short, we must be shaken and awakened from a spiritual snooze.”⁷

Consider that affluence, prosperity, and ease can be tests in our day equal to or greater in intensity than the persecution and physical hardships endured by the Saints who volunteered to march in Zion's Camp. As the prophet Mormon described in his magnificent summary of the pride cycle contained in Helaman 12:

“And thus we can behold how false, and also the unsteadiness of the hearts of the children of men; yea, we can see that the Lord in his great infinite goodness doth bless and prosper those who put their trust in him.

“Yea, and we may see at the very time when he doth prosper his people, yea, in the increase of their fields, their flocks and their herds, and in gold, and in silver, and in all manner of precious things of every kind and art; sparing their lives, and delivering them out of the hands of their enemies; softening the hearts of their enemies that they should not declare wars against them; yea, and in fine, doing all things for the welfare and happiness of his people; yea, then is the time that they do harden their hearts, and do forget the Lord their God, and do trample under their feet the Holy One—yea, and this because of their ease, and their exceedingly great prosperity” (Helaman 12:1–2).

I invite you specifically to note the final phrase in the last verse: “and this because of their ease, and their exceedingly great prosperity.”



President Harold B. Lee (1899–1973) likewise taught about the collective test of ease that we face in our day: “We are tested, we are tried, we are going through some of the severest tests today and we don’t realize perhaps the severity of the tests we are going through. In those days there were murderings, there were mobbings, there were drivings. They were driven out into the desert, they were starving and they were unclad, and they were cold. They came here to this favored land. We are the inheritors of what they gave to us. But what are we doing with it? Today we are basking in the lap of luxury, the like of which we’ve never seen before in the history of the world. It would seem that probably this is the most severe test of any test that we’ve ever had in the history of this Church.”⁸

These teachings from modern and ancient prophets about latter-day tests and trials are sobering and solemn. But they should not be discouraging, and we should not be afraid. For those with eyes to see and ears to hear, spiritual warnings lead to increasingly vigilant watching. You and I live in “a day of warning” (D&C 63:58). And because we have been and will be warned, we need to be, as the Apostle Paul admonished, “watching . . . with all perseverance” (Ephesians 6:18). As we watch and prepare, truly we have no need to fear (see D&C 38:30).

Who’s on the Lord’s side? Now is the time to show that we have minds and hearts that accept and will be responsive to these inspired warnings. Now is the time to show that we are watching and preparing to withstand the latter-day trials of prosperity and pride, of affluence and ease, and of hard hearts and forgetting the Lord our God. Now is the time to show that we will be true at all times in whatsoever things we are entrusted by our Heavenly Father and His Beloved Son—and that we will keep the commandments of God and walk uprightly before Him (see Alma 53:20–21).

The Lesson of Observing, Learning from, and Following the Brethren

The stalwart Saints in the army of the Lord were blessed to observe, to learn from, and to follow the Brethren. And we today can benefit greatly from the example and faithfulness of the devout members of Zion’s Camp.

In response to counsel from Parley P. Pratt, Wilford Woodruff traveled to Kirtland, Ohio, in April 1834 to join Zion’s Camp. Brother Woodruff’s account of his first meeting with the Prophet Joseph Smith is instructive for all of us:

“Here for the first time in my life I met and had an interview with our beloved Prophet Joseph Smith, the man whom God had chosen to bring forth His revelations in these last days. My first introduction was not of a kind to satisfy the preconceived notions of the sectarian mind as to what a prophet ought to be, and how he should appear. It might have shocked the faith of some men. I found him and his brother Hyrum out shooting at a mark with a brace of pistols. When they stopped shooting, I was introduced to Brother Joseph, and he shook hands with me most heartily. He invited me to make his habitation my home while I tarried in Kirtland. This invitation I most eagerly accepted, and was greatly edified and blest during my stay with him.”⁹

I find it noteworthy that Brother Woodruff, who lived for a time in the Prophet’s home and undoubtedly had a most remarkable opportunity to observe him in the routine of daily living, was blessed with eyes to see beyond “the preconceived notions of the sectarian mind as to what a prophet ought to be, and how he should appear.” Such false notions cloud the vision of many in the world today, both inside and outside the Lord’s restored Church.

As a result of my call in 2004 to serve in the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, I have a decidedly distinctive perspective about what it means to observe, to learn from, and to follow the Brethren. I now see on a daily basis the individual personalities, the various preferences, and the noble characters of the leaders of this Church. Some people find the human



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limitations and shortcomings of the Brethren troubling and faith diminishing. For me, those weaknesses are faith promoting. The Lord's revealed pattern of governance in His Church provides for and attenuates the impact of human frailty. It is truly miraculous to me to witness the Lord accomplishing His will through His servants despite the flaws and failings of His chosen leaders. These men never have claimed to be and are not perfect; they certainly are, however, called of God.

A priest when he walked to Missouri with the army of the Lord, Wilford Woodruff later declared while serving as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles: "We gained an experience that we never could have gained in any other way. We had the privilege of . . . traveling a thousand miles with [the Prophet], and seeing the workings of the Spirit of God with him, and the revelations of Jesus Christ unto him and the fulfilment of those revelations. . . . Had I not gone up with Zion's Camp I should not have been here today."¹⁰

On the last Sunday in April 1834, Joseph Smith invited a number of the leaders of the Church to address Zion's Camp volunteers gathered in a schoolhouse. After the

brethren had concluded their messages, the Prophet arose and indicated that he had been edified by the instruction. He then prophesied:

"I want to say to you before the Lord, that you know no more concerning the destinies of this Church and kingdom than a babe upon its mother's lap. You don't comprehend it. . . . It is only a little handful of Priesthood you see here tonight, but this Church will fill North and South America—it will fill the world."¹¹

Men such as Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, Orson Pratt, and Wilford Woodruff listened to and learned much from the Prophet that night—and years later helped to fulfill his prophetic pronouncement. What glorious opportunities these men had to observe, to learn from, and to follow the Prophet.

It is important for all of us to remember that we can learn both from the teachings of the Brethren and from the examples of their lives. Given the majestic vision of the future growth of the Church articulated by the Prophet Joseph Smith, please now consider the power of his personal example in the performance of routine and mundane



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but necessary tasks. George A. Smith described in his journal the reaction of the Prophet to the daily challenges of the march to Missouri.

“The Prophet Joseph took a full share of the fatigues of the entire journey. In addition to the care of providing for the Camp and presiding over it, he walked most of the time and had a full proportion of blistered, bloody and sore feet. . . . But during the entire trip he never uttered a murmur or complaint, while most of the men in the Camp complained to him of sore toes, blistered feet, long drives, scanty supply of provisions, poor quality of bread, bad corn dodger, frouzy butter, strong honey, maggoty bacon and cheese, etc., even a dog could not bark at some men without their murmuring at Joseph. If they had to camp with bad water it would nearly cause rebellion, yet we were the Camp of Zion, and many of us were prayerless, thoughtless, careless, heedless, foolish or devilish, and yet we did not know it. Joseph had to bear with us and tutor us, like children.”¹²

Joseph was a strong example of the principle taught by Alma: “For the preacher was no better than the hearer,

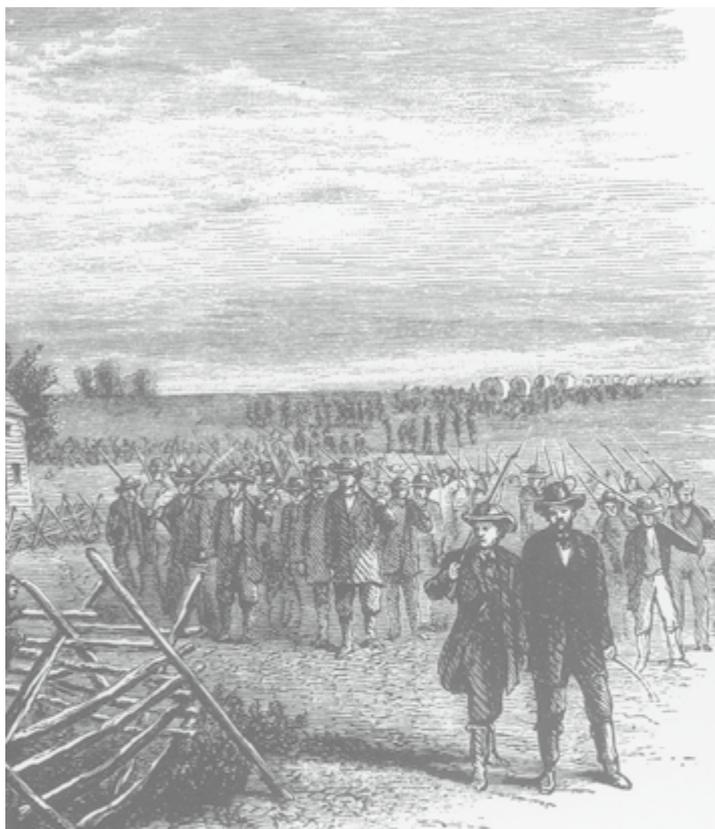
neither was the teacher any better than the learner; . . . and they did all labor, every man according to his strength” (Alma 1:26).

Since my call as a General Authority, I have tried to observe and learn as some of my Brethren have faced the effects of aging or the relentless demands of physical limitations and constant pain. You cannot and will never know the private and silent suffering some of these men live through as they serve publicly with all of their heart, might, mind, and strength. Serving with and watching President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008), President James E. Faust (1920–2007), Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin (1917–2008), President Boyd K. Packer (1924–2015), Elder L. Tom Perry (1922–2015), Elder Richard G. Scott (1928–2015), and my other apostolic associates empower me to declare clearly and authoritatively that the Brethren with whom I serve are warriors—noble and great spiritual warriors—in the truest and most admirable sense of that word! Their patience, persistence, and courage enable them to “press forward with a steadfastness in Christ” (2 Nephi 31:20) that is worthy of our emulation.

President Lee warned of an additional collective test that is growing ever more pervasive in this generation: “We are now going through another test—a period of what we might call sophistication. This is a time when there are many clever people who are not willing to listen to the humble prophets of the Lord. . . . It is rather a severe test.”¹³

The test of sophistication is the companion to the test of prosperity and ease. How important it is for each of us to observe, learn from, and follow the Brethren.

“Who’s on the Lord’s side?” Now is the time to show by hearing and heeding the counsel of the living apostles and prophets called of God in these latter days to oversee and direct His work on the earth. Now is the time to show we believe that God’s “word shall not pass away, but shall all be fulfilled, whether by [His] own voice or by the voice of [His] servants, it is the same” (D&C 1:38). Now is the time to show. The time is now!



Our Own Zion’s Camp

At some point in each of our lives, we will be invited to march in our own Zion’s Camp. The timing of the invitations will vary, and the particular obstacles we may encounter on the journey will be different. But our ongoing and consistent response to this inevitable call ultimately will provide the answer to the question “Who’s on the Lord’s side?”

The times to show are now, today, tomorrow, and forever. May we ever remember the related lessons of testing, sifting, and preparing and of observing, learning from, and following the Brethren. ■

From an Education Week devotional address, “Who’s on the Lord’s Side? Now Is the Time to Show,” delivered at Brigham Young University–Idaho on July 30, 2010.

NOTES

1. Brigham Young, in B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of the Church*, 1:370–71.
2. “Who’s on the Lord’s Side?” *Hymns*, no. 260.
3. *The Discourses of Wilford Woodruff*, ed. G. Homer Durham (1946), 306.
4. “Who’s on the Lord’s Side?” *Hymns*, no. 260.
5. Joseph Smith, in Joseph Young Sr., *History of the Organization of the Seventies* (1878), 14; see also *History of the Church*, 2:182.
6. See Alexander L. Baugh, “From High Hopes to Despair: The Missouri Period, 1831–39,” *Ensign*, July 2001, 44.
7. Ezra Taft Benson, “Our Obligation and Challenge,” regional representatives’ seminar, Sept. 30, 1977, 2–3; unpublished typescript.
8. Harold B. Lee, Christmas address to Church employees, Dec. 13, 1973, 4–5; unpublished transcript.
9. Wilford Woodruff, in Matthias F. Cowley, *Wilford Woodruff: History of His Life and Labors* (1909), 39.
10. *The Discourses of Wilford Woodruff*, 305.
11. Joseph Smith, in *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Wilford Woodruff* (2004), 25–26; see also Joseph Smith, quoted by Wilford Woodruff, in Conference Report, Apr. 1898, 57.
12. George A. Smith, “My Journal,” *Instructor*, May 1946, 217.
13. Harold B. Lee, “Sweet Are the Uses of Adversity,” *Instructor*, June 1965, 217.