

# Sweetwater Crossing

(NOVEMBER 4, 1856)

By Stephen E. Robinson

*So many miles, and such a shallow stream, but wet and  
Wide with sticky mud.<sup>1</sup> And this time there was snow and ice.  
Not ice enough to cross<sup>2</sup> on, like the miracle at Nauwoo.  
Another miracle was needed here; and perhaps a sacrifice.*

*With wagons, clothing, food,<sup>3</sup> and fire for loved ones yet unknown,  
Men and boys from Zion climbed their mountains through the frost  
To find the stranded pioneers, exhausted on the prairie and  
Dying in November's snows, with the Sweetwater still to cross.*

*Their clothes were rent; their strength was spent; they'd eaten belts and shoes.  
Hundreds there were winter-bound with no hope that they might rally;  
It would take a bridge of living flesh, willingly laid down,  
To save the souls at Devil's Gate and bring them to the Valley.*

*Then the Valley boys, some beardless, brave, saw no other way.  
The young men knew what they must do—saw what was required,  
And carried, ferried, the weak and sick across the freezing water,  
Crossed and recrossing, crossed again. Crossed, though chilled and tired.*

*And as the young men waded, bearing on their strong, warm backs  
Their loads of tired flesh, of fathers, mothers, children, wives,<sup>4</sup>  
Ignored the pain, the chills like nails in freezing hands and feet,  
They crossed for love—and Jesus' sake—and offered life for lives.<sup>5</sup>*

*And while from Devil's Gate all crossed to the shelter of the Cove,  
Like lambs born in too-early spring, the young men shivered and they froze,  
Bearing scores of pilgrim strangers, the least of all the pioneers,<sup>6</sup>  
Who had pushed their carts and their poor hearts till both broke<sup>7</sup> in winter's snows.*

*That cold and lonely river was once the crossroads of the world,  
Where works of faith met gifts of grace at the continent's divide.  
God there poured out his mercy on both the saviors and the saved,  
And those who crossed and washed<sup>8</sup> in that sweet Water never died.*

*The author lives in Utah, USA.*





#### NOTES

1. On the surface, this poem is about crossing the Sweetwater River. The symbolic subtext, however, is the Atonement of Jesus Christ and how He bore the weight of the whole human family on His shoulders, as symbolized by the young rescuers who carried pioneers across the freezing river.
2. The word *cross* is used 12 times in the title

and the text of the poem. The repetition is intentional. The willing sacrifice of the young men delivers the souls from “Devil’s” Gate across the water to their salvation.

3. See Matthew 25:37–40.
4. In relation to the first two lines of this stanza, see Isaiah 22:23–24, where it is prophesied that the Messiah, “as a nail in a sure place,”

will bear all the weight of His Father’s house.

5. Historical note: While the rescuers did *offer* their lives, no one actually perished in the Sweetwater crossing.
6. See Matthew 25:37–40.
7. See Luke 4:18 and Psalm 51:17; 147:2–3.
8. See John 4:10–14; 1 Corinthians 6:11; Titus 3:5; Revelation 1:5.