



The Kirtland Temple

Building the Kingdom in Kirtland, Ohio

The Prophet's Arrival in Ohio

On a cold day in February 1831, the Prophet Joseph Smith and his wife, Emma, then six months pregnant with twins, completed the 250-mile journey from New York to Kirtland, Ohio. They arrived in a sleigh at the Gilbert and Whitney store. The following excerpt records the meeting of Newel K. Whitney with the Prophet:

“One of the men [on the sleigh], a young and stalwart personage, alighted, and springing up the steps, walked into the store and to where the junior partner was standing.

“ ‘Newel K. Whitney! Thou art the man!’ he exclaimed, extending his hand cordially, as if to an old and familiar acquaintance.

“ ‘You have the advantage of me,’ replied the one addressed, as he mechanically took the proffered hand . . . —‘I could not call you by name, as you have me.’

“ ‘I am Joseph, the Prophet,’ said the stranger, smiling, ‘You’ve prayed me here; now what do you want of me?’ ”¹

Some time before, Newel and his wife, Elizabeth, had uttered a fervent prayer for guidance. In answer, the Holy Spirit descended upon them and a cloud overshadowed their house. From out of the cloud a voice proclaimed, “Prepare to receive the word of the Lord, for it is coming!”² Shortly thereafter, the missionaries who were called to teach the Indians came to Kirtland, and now the Prophet had arrived.

Orson F. Whitney, a grandson of Newel, later related his feelings about this event: “By what power did this remarkable man, Joseph Smith, recognize one whom he had never before

seen in the flesh? Why did not Newel K. Whitney recognize him? It was because Joseph Smith was a seer, a choice seer; he had actually seen Newel K. Whitney upon his knees, hundreds of miles away, praying for his coming to Kirtland. Marvelous—but true!”³

The Prophet’s coming brought the word of the Lord to Kirtland, where many essential elements of the Church were set in place. The basic organization of Church government was revealed, missionaries were sent abroad, the first temple was built, and many important revelations were received. The Saints were severely persecuted and tested to see whether they would demonstrate faith, courage, and willingness to follow the Lord’s anointed prophet.

Two Centers of Church Activity

At the same time the Saints were being called to gather to Ohio, they began to look forward to the time when they could establish Zion. In June of 1831, the Prophet Joseph Smith received a revelation directing him, Sidney Rigdon, and 28 other elders to go on a proselyting mission to Missouri and there hold the next conference of the Church (see D&C 52). Missouri was on the western frontier of what was then the United States of America, over 1,000 miles west of Kirtland. The Lord revealed to Joseph that in Jackson County, Missouri, the Saints would receive their inheritance and establish Zion.

Joseph, the other missionaries, and shortly afterward the entire group of Saints from Colesville, New York, traveled to Jackson County during the summer of 1831 and began to establish a settlement. While the Prophet and other leaders returned to Kirtland, many members of the Church settled in Missouri.

Between 1831 and 1838, the Church had two centers of population. Joseph Smith, members of the Council of the Twelve, and a large number of Saints lived in the Kirtland, Ohio, area, while many other Church members lived in Missouri, presided over by their appointed priesthood leaders. Important events

were happening in both places at the same time, and officers of the Church traveled from one location to the other as necessary. The events in Kirtland during this seven-year period will be discussed first, and then the events in Missouri during the same period will be discussed.

Sacrifices of Saints in Gathering to Ohio

Many of the Saints who came to Ohio made great sacrifices. Some were disowned by their families; others lost the companionship of former friends. Brigham Young described how he sacrificed to respond to the Prophet's call to gather:

"When we arrived in Kirtland [in September 1833], if any man that ever did gather with the Saints was any poorer than I was—it was because he had nothing. . . . I had two children to take care of—that was all. I was a widower. 'Brother Brigham, had you any shoes?' No; not a shoe to my foot, except a pair of borrowed boots. I had no winter clothing, except a homemade coat that I had had three or four years. 'Any pantaloons?' No. 'What did you do? Did you go without?' No; I borrowed a pair to wear till I could get another pair. I had travelled and preached and given away every dollar of my property. I was worth a little property when I started to preach. . . . I had traveled and preached until I had nothing left to gather with; but Joseph said: 'come up;' and I went up the best I could."⁴

Many other faithful Saints came to Kirtland, where the members already there welcomed them and willingly shared their meager substance. Such stalwart people formed the foundation for the Church's amazing growth and progress.

Revelations Received in the Kirtland Area

While the Prophet Joseph was living in the Kirtland area, he received numerous revelations, 65 of which are included in the Doctrine and Covenants. The revelations taught the Lord's will in connection with welfare, sign seeking, moral conduct, dietary principles, tithing, priesthood authority, the role of a prophet, the

three degrees of glory, missionary work, the Second Coming, the law of consecration, and many other subjects.

Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible

In June 1830 Joseph Smith began his divinely commissioned work of making inspired corrections to the King James (English) Version of the Bible. This work is known as the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible. Between June of 1830 and July of 1833, the Prophet made numerous changes to this text of the Bible, including correcting biblical language, clarifying doctrines, and restoring historical and doctrinal material.

Joseph received many revelations during the course of this work, often in response to questions that arose as he pondered scriptural passages. One such revelation occurred on 16 February 1832 after Joseph and Sidney Rigdon had translated John 5:29. They meditated upon this passage, and “the Lord touched the eyes of [their] understandings and they were opened, and the glory of the Lord shone round about” (D&C 76:19). They received one of the great visions of all time, now recorded in section 76 of the Doctrine and Covenants. They saw the Father and the Son, learned about the divine destiny of God’s children, and received eternal truths about who will occupy the three kingdoms of glory.

Publishing the Revelations

At a special conference held in Hiram, Ohio, in November 1831, Church members voted to publish the Book of Commandments, containing approximately 70 revelations given to the Prophet. During this conference, the Lord gave Joseph Smith the revelations that were to be the preface and appendix to the Book of Commandments. (These later became sections 1 and 133 of the Doctrine and Covenants.)

The assignment to print the book was given to William W. Phelps, who had a printing establishment in Jackson County, Missouri. (For further information about the Book of Command-

ments, see page 41.) The revelations in the Book of Commandments, along with other revelations, were later printed in a volume titled the Doctrine and Covenants, which was published in Kirtland in 1835. A second edition of the Book of Mormon, with minor corrections made by the Prophet Joseph, was also printed in Kirtland.

Just a few months after the Church was organized, the Lord emphasized the important place of music in the Church by commanding the Prophet's wife, Emma, to begin making a selection of sacred hymns (see D&C 25:11). The hymnal she compiled was published in Kirtland, opening the way for the Saints to receive the Lord's promised blessing: "For my soul delighteth in the song of the heart; yea, the song of the righteous is a prayer unto me, and it shall be answered with a blessing upon their heads" (D&C 25:12).

School of the Prophets

In December 1832 and January 1833, the Prophet Joseph received the revelation that became section 88 of the Doctrine and Covenants. Among other things, this revelation directed that a "school of the prophets" (D&C 88:127) be formed to instruct the brethren in gospel doctrine and principles, the affairs of the Church, and other matters.

During the winter of 1833 the School of the Prophets met frequently, and Joseph and Emma Smith both became concerned about the brethren's customary use of tobacco, especially the cloud of tobacco smoke in meetings and lack of cleanliness caused by chewing tobacco. Joseph Smith inquired of the Lord about the matter and received the revelation that is known as the Word of Wisdom. This revelation gave the Lord's commandments for the care of the body and spirit, and promised that those who obeyed them would receive the spiritual blessings of "wisdom and great treasures of knowledge, even hidden treasures" (D&C 89:19). The Word of Wisdom also contained information about health that was not known to the medical or scientific world at the time but

has since been proven to be of great benefit, such as the counsel not to use tobacco or alcohol.

Law of Consecration

In 1831 the Lord began revealing aspects of the law of consecration, a spiritual and temporal system that, if followed in righteousness, would bless the lives of the impoverished Latter-day Saints. Under this law, members of the Church were asked to consecrate, or deed, all their property to the bishop of the Church. He then granted an inheritance, or stewardship, back to the members. Families administered their stewardships as well as they could. If at the year's end they had a surplus, this was given to the bishop to use in caring for those in need. Edward Partridge was called by the Lord to serve as the first bishop of the Church.

The law of consecration consists of principles and practices that strengthen members spiritually and bring about relative economic equality, eliminating greed and poverty. Some Saints lived it well, to the blessing of themselves and others, but other members failed to rise above selfish desires, causing the eventual withdrawal of the law from the Church. In 1838 the Lord revealed the law of tithing (see D&C 119), which continues today as the financial law of the Church.

Strengthening of the Priesthood

Priesthood Offices Revealed

As the Church increased in membership, the Prophet continued to receive revelation about priesthood offices. As directed by the Lord, he organized the First Presidency, made up of himself as the President and Sidney Rigdon and Frederick G. Williams as Counselors. He also organized the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and the First Quorum of the Seventy. He called and ordained bishops and their counselors, high priests, patriarchs, high councils, seventies, and elders. He organized the Church's first stakes.

Inexperienced, newly baptized members were often overwhelmed by calls to serve. For example, Newel K. Whitney was

called as the Church's second bishop in December of 1831, to serve in Kirtland when Edward Partridge became bishop of the Saints in Missouri. Newel did not feel that he was able to carry out the requirements of the office, even though the Prophet told him that the Lord had called him by revelation. So the Prophet said to him, "Go and ask Father for yourself." Newel went and knelt in humble supplication and heard a voice from heaven that said, "Thy strength is in me."⁵ He accepted the call and served as a bishop for 18 years.

Training of Leaders in Zion's Camp

The Church was in great need of priesthood leaders who had been tried, given experience, and proven faithful, who would remain true to the Lord and his prophet under any circumstances. An opportunity to prove obedience in difficult circumstances and to be trained personally by the Prophet Joseph Smith was provided by the march of Zion's Camp.

Zion's Camp was organized to help the Saints in Missouri who were being severely persecuted because of their religious beliefs. Many had been driven from their homes. (See further information on pages 39–45.) On 24 February 1834, the Lord revealed to Joseph Smith that he should organize a group of men to march from Kirtland to Missouri and help restore the Saints to their lands (see D&C 103). The Lord promised that his presence would go with them and that "all victory and glory" would be brought to pass through their "diligence, faithfulness, and prayers of faith" (D&C 103:36). Most of the original members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and Quorum of the Seventy were prepared for their future responsibilities by this experience.

Zion's Camp was formally organized in New Portage, Ohio, on 6 May 1834. It eventually included 207 men, 11 women, and 11 children, whom the Prophet divided into companies of tens and fifties, instructing each group to elect a captain. One recruit, Joseph Holbrook, reported that the camp was organized "according to the ancient order of Israel."⁶ For 45 days they marched

together to Clay County, Missouri, a distance of over 1,000 miles. They traveled as quickly as possible and under harsh conditions. It was very difficult to get enough food. The men were often required to eat limited portions of coarse bread, rancid butter, cornmeal mush, strong honey, raw pork, rotten ham, and maggot-infested bacon and cheese. George A. Smith, who was later to become an Apostle, wrote that he was frequently hungry: "I was so weary, hungry and sleepy that I dreamed while walking along the road of seeing a beautiful stream of water by a pleasant shade tree and a nice loaf of bread and a bottle of milk laid out on a cloth by the side of the spring."⁷

The camp placed great emphasis on spirituality and obeying the commandments. On Sundays they held meetings and partook of the sacrament. The Prophet often taught the doctrines of the kingdom. He said: "God was with us, and His angels went before us, and the faith of our little band was unwavering. We know that angels were our companions, for we saw them."⁸

However, the difficulties of the camp began to take their toll on the participants. This refining process revealed the grumblers, who did not have the spirit of obedience and often faulted Joseph for their troubles. On 17 May the Prophet exhorted those who were possessed with a rebellious spirit "to humble themselves before the Lord and become united, that they might not be scourged."⁹

By 18 June the camp had reached Clay County, Missouri. However, the governor of Missouri, Daniel Dunklin, would not keep his promise to help the army of Saints reinstate the Church members who had been forced from their homes. For some in the camp, the failure of this military objective was the final test of their faith. Disappointed and angry, some openly rebelled. As a result, the Prophet warned them that the Lord would send upon them a devastating scourge. Soon a calamitous epidemic of cholera spread through the camp. Before it ended a third of the camp was afflicted, including Joseph Smith, and thereafter 14 members of the camp died. On 2 July, Joseph again warned the camp to humble themselves before the Lord and covenant to keep

his commandments and said that if they did so, the plague would be stayed from that hour. The covenant was made by uplifted hands, and the plague ended.

In early July, the camp members were honorably discharged by the Prophet. The journey had revealed who was on the Lord's side and who was worthy to serve in positions of leadership. The Prophet later explained the outcome of the march: "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."¹⁰

Wilford Woodruff, a member of the camp who later became the fourth President of the Church, said: "We gained an experience that we never could have gained in any other way. We had the privilege of beholding the face of the prophet, and we had the privilege of traveling a thousand miles with him, 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."¹¹

In February of 1835, five months after the discharge of the camp, the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and the First Quorum of the Seventy were organized. Seventy-nine of the eighty-two positions filled in the two quorums were filled by men who had been proven in the march of Zion's Camp.

In Kirtland, Joseph Smith continued to train future leaders. Four future Presidents of the Church—Brigham Young, John Taylor, Wilford Woodruff, and Lorenzo Snow—were baptized during the Kirtland years and later led the Church in succession until 1901. In addition, the next three Presidents—Joseph F. Smith, Heber J. Grant, and George Albert Smith, whose administrations lasted until 1951—were direct descendants of stalwart Kirtland pioneers.

Missionary Work Goes Forward

While the Saints were living in Kirtland, many missionaries were called to preach the gospel far from home, most of them at

great personal sacrifice. Missionaries were sent to a number of American states, to parts of Canada, and across the Atlantic to England. Through these missionary efforts, many people received a witness of the truth of the gospel. They became valiant members who brought great strength to the young Church.

A number of revelations recorded in Kirtland included commandments to members to preach the gospel to the world. The Lord declared, "Ye shall go forth in the power of my Spirit, preaching my gospel, two by two, in my name, lifting up your voices as with the sound of a trump, declaring my word like unto angels of God" (D&C 42:6). In the following year the Lord commanded, "It becometh every man who hath been warned to warn his neighbor" (D&C 88:81).

Missions of Early Ohio Converts

Zera Pulsipher, a convert from Ohio, is an example of those who enthusiastically shared the message of the Restoration. He joined the Church in January 1832 and recorded that shortly afterward, he "was ordained to the office of an elder and went to preaching with considerable success at home and abroad."¹² He and another missionary, Elijah Cheney, traveled to the small town of Richland, New York, where they began preaching in the local school. One of the first converts baptized by Elder Pulsipher in Richland was a young farmer named Wilford Woodruff, who would one day become one of the most successful missionaries in the history of the Church and the fourth President of the Church. Within a month's time, the two missionaries had baptized a number of people and organized a branch of the Church in Richland.

Answering the call to warn their neighbors, missionaries came from all walks of life. Many of them were married and had family responsibilities. They departed in the midst of harvests and during the dead of winter, during periods of personal prosperity and at times of economic depression. A number of the elders were almost destitute when they entered the mission field. The Prophet



These four missionaries, called to take the gospel to the Indians of the Americas under very trying conditions, are examples of the sacrifices made by faithful missionaries throughout the early history of the Church.

himself traveled over 15,000 miles, serving 14 short-term missions from 1831 to 1838 in many states and in Canada.

When George A. Smith, cousin of the Prophet, received his call to the eastern United States, he was so poor that he did not own or have the means to purchase the clothes and books he needed. Consequently, the Prophet Joseph and his brother Hyrum gave him some gray cloth, and Eliza Brown made him a coat, vest, and trousers. Brigham Young gave him a pair of shoes, his father gave him a pocket Bible, and the Prophet provided a copy of the Book of Mormon.

Elders Erastus Snow and John E. Page were also poor when they left for the mission field in the spring of 1836. Describing his status at the time of his departure for a mission in western Pennsylvania, Elder Snow wrote, "I left Kirtland on foot and alone with a small suitcase containing a few Church works and a pair of socks, with five cents in my pocket, being all my worldly wealth." Elder Page told the Prophet that he could not accept a call to preach because he was destitute of clothing. He didn't even have a coat to wear. The Prophet responded by removing his coat and giving it to Elder Page. He told Elder Page to go on his mission

and the Lord would bless him abundantly.¹³ On this mission, Elder Page was blessed to share the gospel with hundreds of people who joined the Church.

Mission of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

In 1835 members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles were called on a mission to the eastern United States and Canada. This is the only time in the history of the Church when all 12 members of the Quorum undertook a mission at the same time. When they returned, Heber C. Kimball testified that they had felt God's power and were able to heal the sick and cast out devils.

Mission to England

In the latter part of the Kirtland period, a crisis arose within the Church. Some members, including some leaders, apostatized because they could not bear trials and persecutions and because they began to find fault with the Prophet Joseph and other Church leaders. The Lord revealed to Joseph Smith that something new must be done for the salvation of his Church. That something was an infusion of converts into the Church from England. On Sunday, 4 June 1837, the Prophet approached Elder Heber C. Kimball in the Kirtland Temple and said to him, "Brother Heber, the Spirit of the Lord has whispered to me: 'Let my servant Heber go to England and proclaim my Gospel, and open the door of salvation to that nation.'"¹⁴

While Heber C. Kimball was being set apart for his mission, Elder Orson Hyde entered the room. When he heard what was taking place, Orson was moved upon to repent, as he had been one of those involved in finding fault with the Prophet. He offered to serve as a missionary and was also set apart to go to England.

So eager was Heber C. Kimball to preach the gospel on foreign soil that as the boat approached the landing at Liverpool, England, he leaped from the boat to the dock before it was moored, proclaiming that he was the first to reach a land overseas with the message of the Restoration. By 23 July the missionaries were

preaching to congregations of overflow crowds and the first baptisms were scheduled for 30 July. George D. Watt won a foot-race to the River Ribble in Preston, which determined the honor of being the first to be baptized in Britain.

Within eight months, hundreds of converts had joined the Church and many branches had been organized. Reflecting on this great harvest of souls, Heber recalled that the Prophet and his Counselors “laid their hands on me and . . . said that God would make me mighty in that nation in winning souls unto Him: angels should accompany me and bear me up, that my feet should never slip; that I should be mightily blessed and prove a source of salvation to thousands.”¹⁵

Because many early missionaries obediently accepted mission calls despite personal sacrifice, thousands of British converts enjoyed the blessings of the restored gospel. They gathered to Zion and greatly strengthened the Church for the crucial periods that lay ahead.

The Kirtland Temple

Sacrifices of the Saints

On 27 December 1832, the Saints first learned of the Lord’s command to build a temple (see D&C 88:119). Construction of the temple became the main priority of the Church in Kirtland between 1833 and 1836. This presented great challenges to the Saints, who lacked both the necessary laborers and money. According to Eliza R. Snow, “At that time, . . . the Saints were few in number, and most of them very poor; and, had it not been for the assurance that God had spoken, and had commanded that a house should be built to his name, of which he not only revealed the form, but also designated the dimensions, an attempt towards building that Temple, under the then existing circumstances, would have been, by all concerned, pronounced preposterous.”¹⁶

With faith that God would provide the necessary help and means, the Prophet Joseph Smith and the Saints began making the necessary sacrifices. John Tanner was one whom the Lord prepared

to help provide the means for building the temple. John, a recent convert from Bolton, New York, in December of 1834 “received an impression by dream or vision of the night, that he was needed and must go immediately to the Church in the West. . . .

“On his arrival in Kirtland, he learned that at the time he received the impression that he must move immediately to the Church, the Prophet Joseph and some of the brethren had met in prayer-meeting and asked the Lord to send them a brother or some brethren with means to assist them to lift the mortgage on the farm upon which the temple was being built.

“The day after his arrival in Kirtland, . . . [he was] informed that the mortgage of the before mentioned farm was about to be foreclosed. Whereupon he loaned the prophet two thousand dollars and took his note on interest, with which amount the farm was redeemed.”¹⁷

The remarkable efforts put forth by the Kirtland Saints are examples of sacrifice and consecration of time, talents, and means. For three years they labored on the building. Besides the construction skill and effort provided by the men, the women spun and knit in order to clothe those who were working. Later they made the curtains that partitioned the rooms. Construction was made more difficult by mob threats to destroy the temple, and those who worked by day guarded the temple by night. But after the Saints’ immense sacrifices of time and resources, the temple was finally completed in the spring of 1836.

Dedication of the Temple

With the completion of the temple, the Lord poured out powerful spiritual blessings upon the Saints in Kirtland, including visions and the ministering of angels. Joseph Smith called this period “a year of jubilee to us, and a time of rejoicing.”¹⁸ Daniel Tyler testified, “All felt that they had a foretaste of heaven. . . . We wondered whether the millennium had commenced.”¹⁹

The pinnacle of this outpouring of the Spirit was the dedication of the temple. An estimated 1,000 people gathered at the

temple on 27 March 1836 in a spirit of rejoicing. Dedicatory anthems were sung, including “The Spirit of God Like a Fire Is Burning,” which was written for the occasion by William W. Phelps. The sacrament was administered, and sermons were delivered by Sidney Rigdon, Joseph Smith, and others.

Joseph Smith read the dedicatory prayer, now recorded as Doctrine and Covenants section 109, which was given to him by revelation. In it he pleaded with the Lord that he would bless the people as he had on the day of Pentecost: “And let thy house be filled, as with a rushing mighty wind, with thy glory” (D&C 109:37). Many recorded that this prayer was fulfilled that evening when the Prophet met in the temple with members of the priesthood quorums.

Eliza R. Snow wrote: “The ceremonies of that dedication may be rehearsed, but no mortal language can describe the heavenly manifestations of that memorable day. Angels appeared to some, while a sense of divine presence was realized by all present, and each heart was filled with ‘joy inexpressible and full of glory.’”²⁰ After the dedicatory prayer, the entire congregation rose and, with uplifted hands, shouted hosannas.

One week later, on 3 April 1836, some of the most significant events in latter-day history occurred. In the temple on that day, the Savior himself appeared to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery and said, “Behold, I have accepted this house, and my name shall be here; and I will manifest myself to my people in mercy in this house” (D&C 110:7). Other great and glorious visions followed as Moses, Elias, and Elijah appeared to restore additional keys of the priesthood. Moses bestowed the keys of the gathering of Israel, Elias committed to Joseph and Oliver the dispensation of the gospel of Abraham, and Elijah restored the keys of sealing (see D&C 110:11–16). All these additional keys were necessary for the progress of the Lord’s kingdom in the final dispensation of time.

The full priesthood blessings administered in the temple were not revealed or administered during the Kirtland period. These

blessings were revealed to the Church through the Prophet Joseph several years later while the Nauvoo Temple was being built.

Exodus from Kirtland

The building of the temple brought many blessings, but in 1837 and 1838, faithful Saints also faced problems caused by apostasy and persecution, which hastened the end of the Church era in Kirtland.

The United States was suffering a financial depression, and the Church felt the effects. Some members became caught up in rampant speculation and debt and did not spiritually survive a dark time of economic collapse, including the collapse of the Kirtland Safety Society. This banking institution had been established by Church members in Kirtland, and some members incorrectly blamed Joseph Smith for the problems associated with it.

Organized persecution and violent mob action came from residents of the local community and from bitter members who had been excommunicated or had apostatized from the Church.

As the violence against the Saints and their leaders escalated, it became unsafe for them to remain in Kirtland. The Prophet, whose life was in grave danger, fled Kirtland in January of 1838 for Far West, Missouri. During 1838 most of the faithful Saints were also forced to leave. They left behind a monument of faith, consecration, and sacrifice in the temple built to God. In the example of their lives, they also left a permanent heritage of faithful obedience to the Lord's anointed leaders and personal sacrifice in the work of the Lord.