
The Fruits of Apostasy

D&C 31

In speaking of this revelation in the Doctrine and Covenants, Heber C. Kimball said,

Thomas B. Marsh was once the President over the Quorum of the Twelve—over Brother Brigham, me, and others; and God saw fit to give him a revelation [D&C 31] to forewarn him of the course he would take; and still he took that course. We told him that if he would listen to that revelation he had received, he would be saved.¹

Thomas B. Marsh did not “listen to that revelation” and later said,

I can say, in reference to the Quorum of the Twelve, to which I belonged that I did not consider myself a whit behind any of them, and I suppose that others had the same opinion; but, let no one feel too secure; for, before you think of it, your steps will slide. You will not then think nor feel for a moment as you did before you lost the Spirit of Christ; for when men apostatize, they are left to grovel in the dark. . . . You don’t know what you are about; if you want to see the fruits of apostasy look on me.²

President Thomas S. Monson in his general conference address in 2009 spoke about “School Thy Feelings, O My Brother,” basing his remarks on the “sad account of Thomas B. Marsh”:

¹ Heber C. Kimball, “The Latter-day Kingdom,” *Journal of Discourses*, 5:29.

² Brigham Young, “Return of Thomas B. Marsh to the Church,” *Journal of Discourses*, 5:206.

I believe most of us are familiar with the sad account of Thomas B. Marsh and his wife, Elizabeth. Brother Marsh was one of the first modern-day Apostles called after the Church was restored to the earth. He eventually became President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

While the Saints were in Far West, Missouri, Elizabeth Marsh, Thomas's wife, and her friend Sister Harris decided they would exchange milk in order to make more cheese than they otherwise could. To be certain all was done fairly, they agreed that they should not save what were called the strippings, but that the milk and strippings should all go together. Strippings came at the end of the milking and were richer in cream.

Sister Harris was faithful to the agreement, but Sister Marsh, desiring to make some especially delicious cheese, saved a pint of strippings from each cow and sent Sister Harris the milk without the strippings. This caused the two women to quarrel. When they could not settle their differences, the matter was referred to the home teachers to settle. They found Elizabeth Marsh guilty of failure to keep her agreement. She and her husband were upset with the decision, and the matter was then referred to the bishop for a Church trial. The bishop's court decided that the strippings were wrongfully saved and that Sister Marsh had violated her covenant with Sister Harris.

Thomas B. Marsh appealed to the high council, and the men comprising this council confirmed the bishop's decision. He then appealed to the First Presidency of the Church. Joseph Smith and his counselors considered the case and upheld the decision of the high council.

Elder Thomas B. Marsh, who sided with his wife through all of this, became angrier with each successive decision—so angry, in fact, that he went before a magistrate and swore that the Mormons were hostile toward the state of Missouri. His affidavit led to—or at least was a factor in—Governor Lilburn Boggs's cruel extermination order, which resulted in over 15,000 Saints being driven from their homes, with all the terrible suffering and consequent death that followed. All of this occurred because of a disagreement over the exchange of milk and cream.³

³ George A. Smith, "Discourse, *Deseret News*, April 16, 1856, p. 44.

After 19 years of rancor and loss, Thomas B. Marsh made his way to the Salt Lake Valley and asked President Brigham Young for forgiveness. Brother Marsh also wrote to Heber C. Kimball, First Counselor in the First Presidency, of the lesson he had learned. Said Brother Marsh: "The Lord could get along very well without me and He . . . lost nothing by my falling out of the ranks; But O what have I lost! Riches, greater riches than all this world or many planets like this could afford."⁴

⁴ Letter of Thomas B. Marsh to Heber C. Kimball, May 5, 1857, Brigham Young Collection. Church History Library. As quoted in Thomas S. Monson, "School Thy Feelings, O My Brother," *Ensign*, November 2009.