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# Ezra Booth

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1792–1873

**D&C 52:23; 64:15–16; 71: Introduction**

Before becoming a Methodist “preacher of much more than ordinary culture, and with strong natural abilities,” Ezra was a circuit rider.<sup>1</sup> His curiosity about Joseph Smith and the Restoration began in 1831 when reading the Book of Mormon with John Johnson. The two men “sat up all night reading it, and were very much exercised over it.”<sup>2</sup> In the company of John and Elsa Johnson, Ezra went to Kirtland to meet the Prophet Joseph Smith. Of their visit with the Prophet, Luke Johnson wrote, “My mother [Elsa Johnson] had been laboring under an attack of chronic rheumatism in the shoulder, so that she could not raise her hand to her head for about two years, the prophet laid hands upon her, and she was healed immediately.”<sup>3</sup>

After witnessing the miracle, Ezra forsook the Methodist faith and entered baptismal waters. At a conference of the Church held in early June 1831, his features became “distorted, and numbers of the brethren looked at him, and thought it was a wonderful manifestation of the power of God, but to their astonishment, Joseph [Smith] came forward and rebuked the foul spirit, and commanded it to depart, in consequence of which Booth was relieved.”<sup>4</sup>

On June 7, 1831, Ezra was called to journey to Missouri with Isaac Morley: “And again, let my servant Isaac Morley and my servant Ezra Booth take their journey, also preaching the word by the way unto this same land” (D&C 52:23). On their westward journey, Ezra

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<sup>1</sup> Smith, *History of the Church*, 1:215.

<sup>2</sup> Marinda Johnson Hyde quote, in Edward W. Tullidge, *The Women of Mormondom* (NY: Tullidge and Crandall, 1877), 403–404.

<sup>3</sup> Luke Johnson, “History of Luke Johnson,” *Millennial Star* 26 (December 31, 1864): 834.

<sup>4</sup> George A. Smith, “Historical Discourse,” *Journal of Discourses*, 11:4.

lost faith in the prophetic calling of Joseph Smith. President Joseph Fielding Smith explained: "Through the performance of a miracle he was baptized, and from that time he desired to make men believe by the performance of miracles, even by smiting them, or with forcible means."<sup>5</sup> Elder George A. Smith believed Ezra's lack of faith had more to do with money than with miracles: "He having formerly been a Methodist minister, commenced preaching the Gospel without purse or script, and he did so until he found, (using a common expression,) it did not pay."<sup>6</sup> Fellowship was withdrawn from Ezra Booth on September 6, 1831. The Lord revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith, "I, the Lord, was angry with him who was my servant Ezra Booth . . . for [he] kept not the law, neither the commandment" (D&C 64:15).

After becoming estranged from the Church, Ezra wrote nine letters vilifying Joseph Smith. The letters were printed in the *Ohio Star*. The Prophet Joseph described Ezra's letters as "vain calculations to overthrow the work of the Lord." Joseph viewed the letters as exposing the "weakness, wickedness and folly [of Ezra Booth], and left him a monument of his own shame, for the world to wonder at."<sup>7</sup> Yet his letters printed in the *Ohio Star* caused such a negative response that by December 1831 Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon "temporarily" stopped their work on the Bible translation to "go forth to preach in order to allay the unfriendly feelings that had developed against the Church" (D&C 71: Introduction). George A. Smith wrote, "[Ezra Booth's] apostasy culminated in collecting a mob who tarred and feathered Joseph Smith, and inflicted upon his family the loss of one of its number at Hiram, Portage County Ohio."<sup>8</sup>

Ezra resided in Ohio the remainder of his life. Most of his days were spent in Mantua. By 1870 he had moved to Cuyahoga Falls City, where he died on January 12, 1873, at age eighty-one.

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<sup>5</sup> Joseph Fielding Smith, *Essentials in Church History* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1979), 116.

<sup>6</sup> Smith, "Historical Discourse," 11:5.

<sup>7</sup> Smith, *History of the Church*, 1:217.

<sup>8</sup> Smith, "Historical Discourse," 11:5.