



Titus Billings

1793–1866

D&C 63:39

In August 1831 the Lord revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith, “Let my servant Titus Billings . . . dispose of the land that he may be prepared in the coming spring to take his journey up unto the land of Zion, with those that dwell upon the face thereof” (D&C 63:39). In obedience to the revealed word of God, Titus sold his property in Kirtland and joined a company of Saints heading to Jackson County, Missouri, in the spring of 1832.

When he arrived in Missouri, Titus met with Bishop Edward Partridge and consecrated his property to the Church:

Be it known, that I, Titus Billings of Jackson county, . . . do, of my own free will and accord, having first paid my just debts, grant and hereby give unto Edward Partridge of Jackson county, and the state of Missouri, Bishop of said Church, the following described property, viz.:—sundry articles of furniture valued fifty-five dollars twenty seven cents, also two beds, bedding and extra clothing valued seventy three dollars twenty-five cents, also farming utensils valued forty-one dollars, also

one horse, two wagons, two cows and two calves, valued one hundred forty-seven dollars. For the purpose of purchasing lands in Jackson county, Mo., and building up the New Jerusalem, even Zion, and for relieving the wants of the poor and needy.¹

In exchange for his consecration goods, Titus was given (on a lease basis) a parcel of land known as his “land of inheritance”:

Be it known, that I, Edward Partridge, . . . do lease unto Titus Billings, of Jackson county . . . the following described piece of parcel of land, being a part of section No. Three, township No, forty-nine. And also have loaned the following described property, viz:—Sundry articles of furniture, valued fifty-five dollars twenty-five cents; also two beds, bedding and clothing, valued seventy-three dollars twenty-seven cents . . . also one horse, two cows, two calves, and two wagons.²

In a letter dated June 25, 1833, the First Presidency called Titus to serve in a bishopric: “Let Brother Edward Partridge choose as counselors . . . Brother Parley P. Pratt and Brother Titus Billings.”³ Five months after his call, Titus was driven from Jackson County to the banks of the Missouri River by an armed mob. At the river, Titus rendered timely service to other Latter-day Saints attempting to flee from a mob across the river to Clay County.

Believing his residence in Clay County was only temporary, in 1834 Titus rented a small farm. Planting corn and potatoes proved a slow process due to his health concerns. Titus had the “shakes.” He “would shake hard enough to shake himself to pieces.” Two years after renting the farm in Clay County, Titus helped draft a letter to the elected county officials promising that Latter-day Saints would move from their jurisdiction. The letter read in part: “We the Mormons are grateful for the kindness which has been shown to us by the citizens of Clay County. . . . For the sake of friendship, we covenant to be in peace. We will also move to a new location from the county.”⁴

¹ *Journal of History* 16, no. 1 (Independence, MO: Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, January 1923), 286.

² Joseph A. Geddes, “The United Order among the Mormons (Missouri Phase),” Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1922, 51.

³ Letter of Edward Partridge, 2 May 1833. Joseph Smith Papers.

⁴ Melvin Billings, ed., “Titus Billings, Early Mormon Pioneer,” (n.p.), 16–17. Church History Library.

The Latter-day Saints in Clay County moved north to Caldwell County in 1836. When violence broke out in the county and threatened the peace of the Saints, Titus fought in the Battle of Crooked River. His son wrote:

My father, Titus, said the bullets were flying all around him but he had no fear until he saw brother [David W.] Patten fall. Then he stepped behind a large tree until the firing was over. . . . When he came home he was completely worn out as he had no rest for four or five nights. He told mother he wanted to sleep two hours. . . . He had only slept one hour when a knock came on the door.⁵

The visitor was Hosea Stout, who had come to tell him that “all the brethren that were in the battle had to flee within two or three hours. Mother baked [Titus] as much bread as she could and he left the family without a spoonful of flour in the house.” His escape from the mob was fraught with extreme hardships. He experienced starvation and frostbite. “For three days and nights,” Titus and his companions “had only slippery elm bark for food. [His] feet were frozen so badly the flesh came off in pieces.”⁶ In his Missouri Redress Petition, Titus decried the atrocities he endured and declared, “Never have had a writ served upon me nor broken the law in one instance and now I say that these things have come upon us on account of the religion which we profess.”⁷

After Titus settled in Lima, Illinois, his family joined him in 1839. From 1839 to 1845, he was president of the Lima Branch. When mobs started burning houses and small shops in Lima, Titus and his family fled to the center of the Church—Nauvoo. By 1846 he and his family abandoned their home in Nauvoo due to religious persecution and crossed the Mississippi River, seeking safety in the Territory of Iowa.

Titus served as president of the Running Water Iowa Encampment until joining the Heber C. Kimball Company in 1848. After putting down roots in Salt Lake City, he was called to settle in the Sanpete Valley. In that valley, he helped build a fort and a house in Manti before moving to Provo in 1863. Titus died in 1866 at age seventy-two.

⁵ Billings, “Titus Billings,” 20–21.

⁶ Billings, “Titus Billings,” 21.

⁷ As cited in Clark V. Johnson, ed., *Mormon Redress Petitions Documents of the 1833–1838 Missouri Conflict* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1992), 140.