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# Zion's Camp

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D&C 103:22–34

On February 22, 1834, Parley P. Pratt and Lyman Wight brought detailed affirmation to the Prophet Joseph Smith of Latter-day Saints being forced by relentless mobs to abandon their homes in Jackson County. Joseph cried, “Oh my brethren my brethren. . . . Oh! That I had been with you to have shared with you your trouble—My God My God what shall we [do] in such a case of trial.”<sup>1</sup>

Two days later, the Kirtland High Council listened to the graphic commentary of Pratt and Wight on the lamentable circumstances of the exiled Saints of Jackson County, after which the Prophet Joseph declared that he was going to Missouri to redeem Zion and would ask for volunteers to go with him. He called upon the high council to sanction his decision, “which was given without a dissenting voice.”<sup>2</sup> The Prophet was then nominated and seconded by the high council as the Commander-in-Chief of the Armies of Israel—Zion's Camp.

Later that same day, Joseph Smith received this confirming revelation in support of his plan to redeem Zion:

Let my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., say unto the strength of my house, my young men and the middle aged—Gather yourselves together unto the land of Zion, upon the land which I have bought with money that has been consecrated unto me. . . . Let no man be afraid to lay down his life for my sake; for whoso layeth down his life for my sake shall find it again. (D&C 103:22, 27)

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<sup>1</sup> Lucy Mack Smith, *History, 1844–1845*, Document Transcript, Bk. 13, 8–9.

<sup>2</sup> Kirtland Council Minute Book, 35. Joseph Smith Papers.

Volunteers for Zion's Camp were drawn from the greater Kirtland area and from Church branches throughout the middle and eastern states. It took two months of recruiting before a sufficient number of volunteers and enough money had been gathered for the camp to begin to take shape. On May 5, 1834, forty volunteers began the march to Zion, with the main division led by the Prophet Joseph Smith and a smaller division of twenty men from Pontiac, Michigan, and northern Illinois led by Hyrum Smith and Lyman Wight.

As the camp traveled from Ohio to Missouri, the purpose of the camp was withheld from observers. Yet there was nothing that could stop the curious from wondering why dozens of men were journeying together. For example, speculative reports of Zion's Camp reached Dayton, Ohio, before the men even entered the town. Not knowing the destination of what some called the "Christian soldiers," anxiety ran high. About a dozen town leaders approached the camp to question the men. When asked where they were from, Brigham replied, "From every place but this, and we will soon be from this." When an inquirer asked, "Where are you going?" he answered, "To the West."<sup>3</sup>

On June 7, 1834, the Joseph Smith division of Zion's Camp arrived at the Allred Settlement. The Hyrum Smith and Lyman Wight contingent arrived the following day. At this point, Zion's Camp had a composition of 205 men under arms and a few women and children. They had not reached the requisite number of volunteers needed for victory:

It is my will that my servant Parley P. Pratt and my servant Lyman Wight should not return to the land of their brethren, until they have obtained companies to go up unto the land of Zion, by tens, or by twenties, or by fifties, or by an hundred until they have obtained to the number of five hundred of the strength of my house. (D&C 103:30)

As days of marching extended to weeks, an attack of infectious cholera spread from man to man. "The brethren were so violently attacked that it seemed impossible to render them any assistance," wrote the Prophet Joseph. "The Heavens seemed sealed against us and every power that could render us any assistance shut within its gates."<sup>4</sup> When Joseph tried to halt the spreading plague, he "learned by painful experience that when the Great

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<sup>3</sup> History, 1838–1856, volume A-1 [23 December 1805–30 August 1834], 7.

<sup>4</sup> Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1844–1845, Document Transcript, Bk. 13, 12.

Jehovah decrees destruction upon any people, and makes known His determination, man must not attempt to stay his hand.”<sup>5</sup>

Sixty-eight men in the camp contracted cholera and thirteen died. Following the cholera epidemic, on July 3, 1834, the men of Zion’s Camp were officially discharged by Lyman Wight as authorized by Joseph Smith.

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<sup>5</sup> History, 1838–1856, volume A-1 [23 December 1805–30 August 1834], 505.