

Hard Questions in Church History

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Locating and Building Zion in Missouri (D&C 51-59)

Missouri Timeline

1830	
Aug 25	Joseph borrows money to pay the last \$86.00 he owed his father-in-law, Isaac Hale, to complete the \$200.00 total purchase price on his 13½ acre farm in Harmony, PA. Despite completing this transaction, Emma and Joseph move from Harmony to Fayette.
Sept (< 26th)	Oliver called on a mission to Missouri or “the borders by the Lamanites” (D&C 28:9).
Sept 26	Second conference of the Church is held in Fayette, New York.
Oct (< 17th)	Three missionaries called to go with Oliver to Missouri—Parley Pratt, Peter Whitmer Jr., and Ziba Peterson (D&C 32:1-3).
Oct 17	Four Missionaries leave for “Lamanite Mission” preaching to tribes of Native Americans on their way (Cattaraugus Reservation near Buffalo, Wyandot tribes in Ohio, etc.).
Dec 30	After strong church growth there, the Lord commanded Joseph to gather the Saints in Ohio (D&C 37:1, 3; and D&C 38:32).
1831	
Jan 2	Third conference of the Church is held in Fayette, New York.
Jan (early)	Joseph and Sidney journey from Fayette, New York to Kirtland, Ohio. Emma is pregnant with twins and leaves a few days later in a wagon with all her goods to make the move to Ohio.
Jan (late)	Five Missionaries (four from New York and Frederick G. Williams from Ohio), after traveling through intense snowstorms—“the winter of the deep snow”—arrive in Jackson County, Missouri (Ludlow, Encyclopedia of Mormonism, 802).
Feb 1	Joseph and Emma (pregnant with twins) arrive in Kirtland in a sleigh with Sidney Rigdon, Edward Partridge, and all their belongings.
Spring	Joseph again commences revision of the Bible (JST).
April 30	Joseph and Emma’s twins (Thaddeus and Louisa) born; live only three hours and pass on.
May 9	Joseph and Emma adopt Murdock twins, Joseph and Julia.
May 20	D&C 51 received. The Bishop oversees a storehouse for the Law of Consecration. Saints are told to gather in Ohio is “for a little season until I, the Lord, shall provide for them otherwise, and command them to go hence” (D&C 51:16). The land and goods are consecrated to the work of God.
June 3-6	D&C 52 received. Three-day Church Conference in Ohio; next conference announced in Missouri. Instructions given for missionary companionships to preach en route to Missouri.
June 8	D&C 53 revelation for Sidney Gilbert, who is told to forsake the world (D&C 53:2).
June 10	D&C 54 received. Newel Knight and a group of the Colesville saints had settled on Lemam Copley’s farm. Due to Copley’s apostacy, the Lord directs them to leave the farm and travel to Missouri (D&C 54:8).
June 14	D&C 55 received. William W. Phelps called to be baptized; becomes an elder and missionary to Missouri. There he is to become a printer (D&C 55:5).
June 15	D&C 56 received. Broken hearts and contrite spirits needed to build Zion.
July 20	D&C 57 received. Joseph Edward Partridge, W.W. Phelps, and others arrive in Missouri (fulfilling D&C 52). Zion identified as Independence. Land consecrated and temple lot identified.
July (Late)	The three groups of saints—Joseph, missionaries, and the Colesville Saints—arrive in Jackson County, Missouri. The Colesville Saints fulfill God’s direction in D&C 54.
Aug 1	D&C 58 received. Martin Harris is asked to be an example of donating property to purchase land to establish Zion (D&C 58:35).
Aug 2	Sidney Rigdon dedicates Missouri for the gathering of the Saints; Joseph Smith dedicates the temple site in Independence.

Aug 7	D&C 59 received. Polly Knight dies in Zion. Blessed are they who came to Zion and keep the Sabbath holy. Offer sacraments on the Lord's Day—a day of rest—a day of rest, confessing sins, rejoicing and praying. Sacrament and prayer is rejoicing and prayer.
Aug	Joseph returns to Kirtland.
1832	
Feb 16	D&C 76, received. Revelation of post-mortal state of mankind.
Mar 24	Tarred and feathered by mob at Hiram, Ohio.
Mar 29	Adopted son Joseph Murdock dies.
April 1	Joseph Smith starts on his second journey to Jackson County, Missouri
June	Arrives back at Kirtland after delay at Greenville, Indiana.
Oct	Travels to Albany, NYC, and Boston with Newel K. Whitney.
Nov 6	Returns to Kirtland. Son Joseph Smith III born.
Dec 25	D&C 87 received, Revelation prophesying Civil War.
Dec	Approximately 800 Latter-day Saints, divided into five branches, live in Jackson County.

Missouri 1830s: Brief Historical Sketch

In 1791, the United States opened the land west of the Appalachian Mountains, stimulating a fervor for western migration. By 1821, Missouri joined the nation as the twenty-four state. (That number did not change until 1836—fifteen years later.) These additional eleven states came from the land bought by the United States in the 1783 Northwest Territory agreement and the 1803 Louisiana Purchase. Eleven more states were: Alabama, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Mississippi, Missouri, Ohio, Tennessee, and Vermont. The frontier was rugged and—even a decade later—very sparsely populated.

In 1821, the southeastern portion of the Missouri territory was admitted as the newest State in the Union by the Act known as the Missouri Compromise. Six years later, in 1827, Jackson County was organized with Independence as the county seat. Three years later, five missionaries arrived to find a very serene, beautiful and fertile land. They were not interested in the land, though, as they had an assignment to preach to the “Lamanites,” a word used in early church vernacular to identify Native Americans.

While the “Western Reserve” in Ohio and the Burned-over District in upstate New York were inhabited with devoted God-fearing, Bible readers from New England, Missouri attracted a different citizenry. The fertile valleys were populated with southerners in search of their own land. Those Southerners were neither land nor plantation owners but were attracted to the frontier's primitive lifestyle. They were less civilized and more will to take risks yet they still were bred with the southern social hierarchy.

Southerners maintained a more aristocratic mentality, as plantation owners were their upper class. Land ownership was power. The early immigrants who came to Missouri were those who did not have land, but wanted it. They supported slavery, despised the Native Americans—many of whom also asserted that it was their land—and were willing to fight for their property (both the human and land kind). The mentality of “might is right” filled Missouri.

Missouri became the “wild west” of its day. Missourians went to church less, drank more, and were less educated than New Englanders (Duane Meyer, *The Heritage of Missouri* [3 ed. 1982], 138-42). By way of background, the early “blue laws” in Connecticut and Massachusetts required church attendance twice a month, while the southern states were more lax, stipulating church attendance only once every two months. Those who study Missouri's migration find that those who settled in Jackson

County on the western border were even more lawless, rugged, and wild. If Missouri was like the later “wild west,” then Jackson County was the Tombstone, Arizona.

Mission to the Lamanites (Oct 1830 to June 1831)

On October 17, 1830, Missouri history became important to the restoration. The four missionaries, Oliver Cowdery, Parley Pratt, Peter Whitmer Jr., and Ziba Peterson left for Missouri to preach “among the Lamanites” (original draft of D&C 28:8-9; also see 32:1-3). The four men knew that it was over a thousand miles away, but not what lay ahead for them. They walked by faith.

That winter was known for its heavy snow, but that did not hinder the elders from carrying out their call to preach to the Native Americans. They saw the need for the “blood of Israel” to receive the message of the restoration first. They also preached to old friends along the way with great success—130 were baptized near Kirtland Township, and thousands of seeds were planted for future converts. One of the early Ohio converts was Dr. Fredrick G. Williams, who joined the missionaries in Kirtland as a companion.

From start to finish, they traveled over 1,500 miles and arrived in Jackson County by the end of January 1831. The elders crossed the nation’s border to teach to different Native American tribes until a land agent stopped their work and refused to give them a preaching license. Four of the missionaries stayed to continue to preach the Gospel to the other Missourians while Parley Pratt was assigned to return and report to Joseph on the mission. Six months after they arrived, Joseph and other groups of saints joined them with plans to establish the city of Zion.

June 6, 1831—D&C 52

On June 6, 1831, the Lord taught the Prophet Joseph that Zion would be in Missouri (D&C 52:2 and 42). Joseph and two other groups of saints—the Colesville branch and missionaries—then traveled 900 miles toward the western frontier of the nation, to Missouri, the newest state.

July 20—D&C 57

When Joseph arrived in Missouri on July 20, he asked the Lord, “When will Zion be built up in her glory, and where will Thy temple stand, unto which all nations shall come in the last days?” (History of the Church 1.189). The Lord’s reply is found in D&C 57:

“This land, which is the land of Missouri ... is the land which I have appointed and consecrated for the gathering of the saints. ... Behold, the place which is now called Independence is the center place; and a spot for the temple is lying westward, upon a lot which is not far from the courthouse” (57:1, 3).

D&C 57:6 calls store clerk Sidney Gilbert as a treasurer, or “an agent unto the Church,” to receive contributions to buy property in Missouri. In D&C 57:7, the Lord asks newly called first Bishop Edward Partridge to divide the purchased lands among the gathering Saints as “their inheritance.”

Identifying the Land of Zion: July 1831

In the summer of 1831, the first group of Kirtland Saints arrives in Missouri to find a land filled with beautiful grazing lands and fruit and nut trees. The Saints begin buying the land at \$1.25/acre (which is also the reduced price for a copy of the Book of Mormon, on sale in Fayette, 1830). By December

1831, Bishop Partridge is able to buy 63 acres of “seminary land.” As it could be used for schools, it was more expensive at \$2 an acre. The Lord directs the Saints to gather in this consecrated land, to build a temple, printing house, storehouse, and city of Zion (D&C 57:1-5, 58:37).

Aug 1, 1831—D&C 58

Fewer than two weeks later, on August 1st, the Lord gives Joseph a powerful revelation on the cost of building up Zion. It will require tribulations (note that this it is mentioned three times in verses 2-4). The parable of the wedding feast foreshadows the Second Coming. Bishop Partridge is told to be humble and acknowledge God while he acts as a judge and distributor of land and means. The Lord appoints Sidney Rigdon to “write a description of the land of Zion” (D&C 58:50) for circulation to eastern members to gather funds to buy property. The saints are very motivated to move ahead in this direction, but Lord also cautions them: “Let all these things be done in order. . . . And let the work of the gathering be not in haste, nor by flight” (D&C 58:55-56).

August 2, 1831: Dedication of the Land of Zion and Its Temple Site

On August 2, 1831 a group of saints gathers twelve miles west of Independence in Kaw township. Twelve men, representing the Twelve Tribes of Israel, laid a log as a “foundation in Zion.” Before Sidney Rigdon offers the dedicatory prayer, he asks the saints gathered there:

Do you pledge yourselves to keep the laws of God on this land, which you never have kept in your own lands? [The audience responded,] “we do.” Do you pledge yourselves to see that others of your brethren who shall come hither do keep the laws of God? [Those present again said,] we do. After [the dedicatory] prayer [Elder Rigdon] arose and said, I now pronounce this land consecrated and dedicated to the Lord for a possession and inheritance for the Saints (in the name of Jesus Christ having authority from him). And for all the faithful servants of the Lord to the remotest ages of time. Amen” (Institute Manual, Church History, 107)

From that time until October 1838, the Saints sought to build Zion in Missouri. Establishing a Zion society proved difficult. The Lord warned them in 1831 that Zion’s glory would only come “after much tribulation” (D&C 58:4).

Church in Missouri and Kirtland Background 1831-1838

During the saints’ seven years in Missouri, the Prophet Joseph has the difficult task of overseeing two church headquarters approximately 900 miles apart. The communication challenges combined with young local leadership mistakes—as well as deliberate wolves attacking the young sheep of the church—inhibits the work of building a Zion society. Both the saints and Missourians make mistakes. Many of the relationship problems with the Missourians could have been avoided if the Saints had been more sensitive and been better neighbors. The Lord gives revelations to the Prophet Joseph Smith to circumvent these problems, but the Saints do not follow them. Repeatedly God calls them to repent:

Were it not for the transgressions of my people, speaking concerning the church and not individuals, they might have been redeemed even now. . . . Zion cannot be built up unless it is by the principles of the law of the celestial kingdom; otherwise I cannot receive her unto

myself” (D&C 105:2, 5; also D&C 85:3, 5; D&C 101:2, 6; Smith, *History of the Church*, 1:320, 376).

Materialism, greed, and animosity destroy the hope for Zion at that time. The Lord had taught that Zion could only be built by following His Law. In 1831, God also prophesied: “After much tribulation come the blessing. Wherefore the day cometh that ye shall be crowned with much glory; the hour is not yet, but is nigh at hand” (D&C 58:4).

A few years after the Saints arrived in Missouri, the rougher citizens of Clay County would write five reasons why the Saints were driven again and again from their homes:

- 1) They were poor,
- 2) Their religious differences stirred up prejudice,
- 3) Their eastern customs and dialects were alien to the Missourians,
- 4) They opposed slavery, and
- 5) They believed the Indians were God’s chosen people destined to inherit the land of Missouri (see *Church History in the Fulness of Times*, 182).

In addition to these crucial differences, the Saints tended to be an independent people, buying and selling and working as an isolated group. This offended their neighbors who hoped to buy and sell with them to grow their economy. Worst of all, the steady stream of northern immigrants with their abolitionist and pro-Native American feelings threatened the political swing of their slave state. These cultural differences led to riots, robbery, destruction of the printing office, and the burning of buildings.

In response to these atrocities, the Lord warns the Saints not to fight back. Just as He does in the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord repeatedly teaches the Latter-day Saints to “lift a standard of peace”:

If men will smite you, or your families, once, and ye bear it patiently and revile not against them, neither seek revenge, ye shall be rewarded . . . the second time . . . third time . . . they should not go out unto battle against any nation, kindred, tongue, or people, save I, the Lord, commanded them . . . And I, the Lord, would fight their battles (D&C 98:23-37; also D&C 105:14).

As a result, the Latter-day Saints are driven from county to county in Missouri. It seemed as soon as they had built their homes and planted their farms, they were forced out. Whether they reside in Jackson, Clay, Ray, Carroll, Caldwell, Daviess, or Livingston counties, their lot is the same.

Adding to the difficulties, the saints felt they had a religious call to be there. They felt strongly that this was where God wanted them to be, as shown in D&C 52:42: “And thus, even as I have said, if ye are faithful ye shall assemble yourselves together to rejoice upon the land of Missouri, which is the land of your inheritance, which is now the land of your enemies.” They did not understand that their hearts first needed to be pure and their monies consecrated to ensure there be no poor among them. The challenge to become a Zion people would pass to a future generation.

Sources

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