

A Concise History of
Nauvoo

E. Keith Howick

Books by E. Keith Howick

A Concise History of Nauvoo

Prophets of the Old Testament

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the Church of Jesus Christ of
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P R O L O G U E



The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was officially organized in the home of Peter Whitmer, Sen., in Fayette, New York, on April 6, 1830. Joseph stated that the organization was “obtained” from the Lord “by the spirit of prophecy and revelation; which not only gave us much information, but also pointed out to us the precise day upon which, according to His will and commandment, we should proceed to organize His Church once more here upon the earth.”¹ The revelation spoken of is recorded in the Doctrine and Covenants as Section 20.

The following is a brief history of some of the more important events of the early restoration that led to the organization of the Church, and eventually to the establishment of Nauvoo, Illinois.



Peter Whitmer Sr. Farm House — Courtesy Tim Frodsham, Portland, OR

Spring 1820

A spirit of religious revival was flowing throughout upstate New York. Joseph Smith and his family lived near the city of Palmyra, New York, and had been peacefully farming in that location for about two years. Joseph was one of nine living children: six boys and three girls. But a tragedy struck the Smith family in 1823 when Joseph's older brother Alvin died "in the 26th year of his age."²

Joseph was born December 23, 1805, and was fourteen years old when the story of the restoration began. As a result of the religious enthusiasm in the area, four of Joseph's family members joined the Presbyterian faith: his mother Lucy, his brothers Hyrum and Samuel Harrison, and his sister Sophronia. Joseph favored the Methodists, but did not commit to that faith because, as he notes, "so great [was] the confusion and strife among the different denominations, that it was impossible . . . to come to any certain conclusion [as to] who was right and who was wrong."³

While reading in the New Testament, Joseph discovered James 1:5, which states:

If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.

From this scripture he decided that only through prayer could he resolve his questions about which church he should join. So on the morning of a "beautiful, clear day, early in the spring," he retired to a grove of trees near his home and prayed. The result of his prayer was a vision of both God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ. His reaction to this heavenly manifestation exemplified the simplicity of his faith and prayer. He asked which church he should join, and was told that he should join none of them.



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September 21, 1823

Joseph decided that he must once again humble himself in prayer to determine his status before the Lord. As a young man, he was subject to levity, “and sometimes associated with jovial company . . . not consistent with that character which ought to be maintained by one who was called of God as I had been.”⁴ Since the Lord had previously answered his prayers, he was confident that he would again receive a manifestation.

While he was in the act of calling upon God a light appeared in his room, so bright that it filled his room as if it were “noontday.” A personage dressed in brilliant white clothing appeared and said he had been sent from the presence of God. The angel’s name was Moroni, and he immediately proceeded to tell Joseph that God had work for him to do. He cautioned that as a result of this work, Joseph’s name would be had for “good and evil among all nations, kindreds, and tongues.”⁵ He then informed Joseph of a book, “written upon gold plates,” which gave an account of several civilizations that had lived on the American continent hundreds of years ago, and the “source from whence they sprang.”⁶ He told Joseph many other important things and quoted scriptures to him from Malachi, Isaiah, Joel, and several other Old Testament prophets who had testified of things that were going to happen in the last days.

Joseph received the vision of Moroni three times during that night and once more the next morning, with the angel repeating the same material each time until the message was seared into Joseph’s mind. After Moroni’s fourth visit, Joseph eagerly followed the angel’s directives to a hill, known anciently as Cumorah, where the sacred record was concealed. He was allowed to look at the plates and the other items that had been buried in a stone



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box on a slope of the hill centuries before, but he was not allowed to touch them. Moroni instructed him to repeat his pilgrimage to the site each year for the next four years, and then the plates would be given to him. During those visits, Joseph continued to receive instructions from Moroni.

January 18, 1827

Joseph eloped with Emma Hale on this date. They were married by Squire Tarbill in South Bainbridge, Chenango County, New York.



Joseph Smith, Jr.



Emma Hale

September 22, 1827

Joseph received the plates from the angel Moroni and thereafter translated the record that contained *The Book of Mormon*.

May 15, 1829

Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery received a vision of John the Baptist. John conferred the Aaronic Priesthood upon them and commanded them to be baptized. They baptized each other in the Susquehanna River and ordained each other to the Aaronic Priesthood.



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Late May or June of 1829

Peter, James, and John (the ancient Apostles of the Lord) restored the Melchizedek Priesthood.

Spring 1830

Egbert B. Grandin, printer, was contracted to print 5,000 copies of the completed manuscript of *The Book of Mormon*. The cost was \$3,000.

Joseph moved several times during the translation of the Book of Mormon because of persecution and poverty. During this period, he and his wife Emma lived in both the State of New York and the State of Pennsylvania.

October 1830

Oliver Cowdery was called on the first mission to the Lamanites. The call came as the result of a revelation received by Joseph.⁷ The brethren traveling on this mission first visited members of the Catteraugus tribe near Buffalo, New York. They then continued westward until they came to Kirtland, Ohio, where they tarried for some time. It was here they met and converted a young minister named Sidney Rigdon, along with the members of his congregation.

December 1830

Joseph received a revelation commanding the Church to move to Ohio.⁸



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January 2, 1831

Joseph received a revelation instructing him to go to Ohio.⁹

July 20, 1831

Joseph received the revelation designating Jackson County, Missouri, as “the land of Promise, and the place for the city of Zion.” The revelation also revealed that the gathering of the Saints was to commence in that area.¹⁰

Upon arriving in Jackson County, Missouri, Joseph wrote the following description of the land of Zion:

The country is unlike the timbered states of the East. As far as the eye can reach the beautiful rolling prairies lie spread out like a sea of meadows; and are decorated with a growth of flowers so gorgeous and grand as to exceed description; and nothing is more fruitful, or a richer stockholder in the blooming prairie than the honey bee.

Joseph then noted the various trees that were included in the forests that grew along the rivers and streams and continued, “The soil is rich and fertile; from three to ten feet deep, and generally composed of a rich black mold, intermingled with clay and sand. It yields in abundance, wheat, corn, sweet potatoes, cotton and many other common agricultural products.”

Joseph then proceeded to record the various domestic and wild animals that he saw.¹¹ He also described the people that they encountered in the land of Zion:

The meeting of our brethren, who had long awaited our arrival, was a glorious one, and moistened with many tears. It seemed good and pleasant for brethren to meet together in unity. But our reflections were many, coming as we had from a highly cultivated state of society in the east,

and standing now upon the confines or western limits of the United States, and looking into the vast wilderness of those that sat in darkness; how natural it was to observe the degradation, leanness of intellect, ferocity, and jealousy of a people that were nearly a century behind the times, and to feel for those who roamed about without the benefit of civilization, refinement, or religion; yea, and exclaim in the language of the Prophets: “When will the wilderness blossom as the rose?”¹²

August 1, 1831

The Saints laid the first log designated for a house “as a foundation of Zion” in Kaw Township, twelve miles west of Independence, Jackson County, Missouri.

May 6, 1833

Joseph received a revelation from the Lord that directed the construction of the Kirtland Temple.

June 25, 1833

Joseph revealed the plat of the City of Zion. It included twenty-four temples, which he described and named.¹³

May 1834

Zion’s Camp was organized for the purpose of relieving the Saints in Missouri from mob persecution.¹⁴

February 14, 1835

The first Twelve Apostles of the latter days were selected.¹⁵

March 27, 1836

The Kirtland Temple was dedicated.¹⁶ The Saints initially gathered in Kirtland, Ohio, under the direction of the Lord. However, this gathering was preliminary and preparatory for the eventual gathering in Zion. Almost from the time they first gathered in Kirtland, the Saints were persecuted. They were finally forced to leave Kirtland. Heber C. Kimball wrote about the mob action in an article in the *Times and Seasons*: “. . . [O]ur enemies were raging and threatening destruction upon us, and we had to guard ourselves night after night, and for weeks were not permitted to take off our clothes, and were obliged to lay with our fire locks in our arms.”¹⁷



The Kirtland Temple

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C H A P T E R 1



The Arrest of the Prophet and Expulsion from Missouri

From August 1, 1831, forward, for a period of seven years, the Saints gathered in Zion. Again persecution commenced, almost as early as the settlements were established, and the Saints were forced to move from county to county as the mobs drove them from their homes and farms. They were finally forced to leave the State of Missouri under an “Extermination Order.” On October 27, 1838, Lilburn W. Boggs, Governor of the State of Missouri, issued the following:

HEADQUARTERS MILITIA
CITY OF JEFFERSON,
October 27, 1838

Sir:—Since the order of the morning to you, directing you to cause four hundred mounted men to be raised within your division, I have received by Amos Rees, Esq., and Wiley C. Williams, Esq., one of my aids, information of the most appalling character, which changes the whole face of things, and places the Mormons in the attitude of open and avowed defiance of the laws, and of having made open war upon the people of this state. Your orders are, therefore, to hasten

your operations and endeavor to reach Richmond, in Ray county, with all possible speed. **The Mormons must be treated as enemies and *must be exterminated* or driven from the state, if necessary for the public good.** Their outrages are beyond all description. If you can increase your force, you are authorized to do so, to any extent you may think necessary. I have just issued orders to Major-General Wallock, of Marion county, to raise five hundred men, and to march them to the northern part of Daviess and there to unite with General Doniphan, of Clay, who has been ordered with five hundred men to proceed to the same point for the purpose of intercepting the retreat of the Mormons to the north. They have been directed to communicate with you by express; and you can also communicate with them if you find it necessary. Instead, therefore, of proceeding as at first directed, to reinstate the citizens of Daviess in their homes, you will proceed immediately to Richmond, and there operate against the Mormons. Brigadier-General Parks, of Ray, has been ordered to have four hundred men of his brigade in readiness to join you at Richmond. The whole force will be placed under your command.

L. W. Boggs, Governor and Commander-in-Chief
To General Clark.¹

As a result of the issuance of the above order, Joseph wrote the following in his journal:

LILBURN W. BOGGS had become so hardened by mobbing the Saints in Jackson county, and his conscience so “seared as with a hot iron,” that he was considered a fit subject for the gubernatorial chair; and it was probably his hatred to truth and the “Mormons,” and his blood-thirsty, murderous disposition, that raised him to the station he occupied. His *extermination order* of the twenty-seventh aroused every spirit in the state, of the like stamp of his own; and the Missouri mobocrats were flocking to the standard of General Clark from almost every quarter.²

It was only four days after the issuance of the Extermination Order that Joseph and several other brethren were arrested. This occurred as a result of the traitorous actions of Colonel George M. Hinkle who, at the time, was the highest ranking officer of the Saints' militia that had been assembled for the defense of Far West, Missouri. Early in the evening, Colonel Hinkle had formed a conspiracy with the leaders of the Missouri militia and agreed to the following:

- First:* To give up the leaders of the Church to be tried and punished.
- Second:* To make an appropriation of the property of all who had taken up arms, to pay the debts of the Missouri militia group, and to indemnify them for damage done by them.
- Third:* The Saints then remaining in Missouri would leave the State.
- Fourth:* The Saints would give up their arms "of every description," for which they would be given a receipt.⁵

General S. D. Lucas of the Missouri militia wrote a letter to Governor Boggs identifying the above conditions on November 2, 1838, and told him that Colonel Hinkle had agreed to the terms. He further informed the Governor that he (General Lucas) would require Joseph Smith, Jun., Sidney Rigdon, Lyman Wight, Parley P. Pratt, and George W. Robinson as hostages for Colonel Hinkle's "faithful performance" of the above conditions. Thus, Joseph and the others were betrayed into the hands of the militia mob. On November 10, 1838, General Clark wrote to Governor Boggs and informed him that the prisoners had "committed *treason, murder, arson, burglary, robbery, larceny, and perjury.*"

As a result of the Extermination Order and the legalization of the Missouri mob-militia, a committee was formed by the members of the Church to assist the Saints in leaving the State. It consisted of twelve men, all

of whom had to wear “white badges on their hats for protection” as they went about their duties in the various counties where the Saints lived.⁴

On November 1, 1838, Joseph and the other prisoners in the custody of the Missouri militia were brought before a military court martial. At the end of the hearing they were “sentenced . . . to be shot, on Friday morning, on the public square of Far West as a warning to the ‘Mormons.’” The order was issued by Samuel D. Lucas and was addressed to Brigadier-General Doniphan. It read as follows:

Brigadier-General Doniphan:

Sir:—You will take Joseph Smith and the other prisoners into the public square of Far West, and shoot them at 9 o’clock to-morrow [sic] morning.

Samuel D. Lucas,
Major-General Commanding.

After issuing the order, the militia, under the command of General Lucas, entered Far West and “plundered the houses, and abused the innocent and unoffending inhabitants.” They entered Joseph’s house, drove his family outside, and took most of his property.

General Doniphan, after receiving the order to execute the prisoners, replied as follows:

It is cold-blooded murder. I will not obey your order. My brigade shall march for Liberty to-morrow morning, at 8 o’clock; and if you execute these men, I will hold you responsible before an earthly tribunal, so help me God.

A.W. Doniphan
Brigadier-General.⁵

Various members of the Church were arrested and held for hearings. Joseph and some of the brethren were put into jail in Richmond, Missouri. After hearings were held on the charges (wherein the witnesses for the Saints were prevented from testifying), all the men were released or granted bail except Joseph Smith, Lyman Wight, Caleb Baldwin, Hyrum Smith, Alexander McRae, and Sidney Rigdon. Joseph wrote that their treason “consisted of having whipped the mob out of Daviess county, and taking their cannon from them.” The murder charge stemmed from “killing [a] man in the Bogart battle.”⁶

It was during the time the brethren were incarcerated in the Richmond jail that Parley P. Pratt recorded the following incident:

In one of those tedious nights we had lain as if in sleep till the hour of midnight had passed, and our ears and hearts had been pained, while we had listened for hours to the obscene jests, the horrid oaths, the dreadful blasphemies and filthy language of our guards, Colonel Price at their head, as they recounted to each other their deeds of rapine, murder, robbery, etc., which they had committed among the “Mormons” while at Far West and vicinity. They even boasted of defiling by force wives, daughters and virgins, and of shooting or dashing out the brains of men, women and children. I had listened till I became so disgusted, shocked, horrified, and so filled with the spirit of indignant justice that I could scarcely refrain from rising upon my feet and rebuking the guards; but had said nothing to Joseph, or anyone else, although I lay next to him and knew he was awake. On a sudden he arose to his feet, and spoke in a voice of thunder, or as the roaring lion, uttering, as nearly as I can recollect, the following words:

“*Silence, ye fiends of the infernal pit! In the name of Jesus Christ I rebuke you, and command you to be still; I will not live another minute and hear such language. Cease such talk, or you or I die this instant!*”

He ceased to speak. He stood erect in terrible majesty. Chained, and without a weapon;

calm, unruffled and dignified as an angel, he looked upon the quailing guards, whose weapons were lowered or dropped to the ground; whose knees smote together, and who, shrinking into a corner, or crouching at his feet, begged his pardon, and remained quiet till a change of guards.

I have seen the ministers of justice, clothed in magisterial robes, and criminals arraigned before them, while life was suspended on a breath, in the courts of England; I have witnessed a Congress in solemn session give laws to nations; I have tried to conceive of kings, of royal courts, of thrones and crowns; and of emperors assembled to decide the fate of kingdoms; but dignity and majesty have I seen but once, as it stood in chains, at midnight in a dungeon, in an obscure village in Missouri.⁷

Judge Austin A. King was the presiding judge at the preliminary hearings of Joseph and the other brethren. Joseph reported that his attorney said of Judge King: “. . . if a cohort of angels were to come down, and declare we were innocent, it would all be the same; for he (King) had determined from the beginning to cast us into prison.”⁸

The brethren were taken from the Richmond jail to Liberty jail to await trial for treason and murder. They were incarcerated from November 20, 1838, to April 9, 1839. On April 9, the trial of Joseph and the other brethren commenced “before a drunken grand jury, Austin A. King, presiding judge, as drunk as the jury.”⁹ On April 11, Joseph recorded that “during this night the visions of the future were opened to my understanding; when I saw the ways and means and near approach of my escape from imprisonment.”¹⁰ Shortly thereafter they procured a change of venue for the trial and on April 15, they left Liberty jail for Boone County under a strong guard. On the evening of April 16, Joseph recorded that their guards became intoxicated, and they “took advantage of the situation . . . and departed.”¹¹ They traveled both day and night, “suffering much fatigue and hunger,” and arrived in Quincy, Illinois, on April 22, 1839.¹²

While he was imprisoned in Missouri, Joseph wrote multiple letters to his family and to the Saints. Three of those letters became sections in the Doctrine and Covenants (Sections 121, 122, and 123). As you will see from the following paragraphs, the three letters contained exceptional material that revealed Joseph's personality and disposition, and clarified his relationship with God.

After being imprisoned for several months under miserable conditions, Joseph cried unto the Lord from Liberty jail: "O GOD, where art thou?" He continued his plea for and in behalf of the persecuted and driven Saints, to which God responded: "My son, peace be unto thy soul; thine adversity and thine afflictions shall be but a small moment." Thereafter, God revealed instructions to Joseph, as recorded in the balance of Section 121.

Section 122 can best be described as the Lord giving comfort to Joseph as a result of his plea in Section 121. It concludes by telling Joseph that, "all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good. The Son of Man hath descended below them all. Art thou greater than he?" The Section closes with this extraordinary information: "Thy days are known, and thy years shall not be numbered less; therefore, fear not what man can do, for God shall be with you forever and ever."

Section 123 was a letter of instruction from Joseph to the Saints outlining their duty with regard to their persecutors.

With their leaders unjustly jailed, the Saints left Missouri under the harshest of conditions. Lyman Wight, in an affidavit sworn before the municipal court of Nauvoo on July 1, 1843, testified that he followed one group of one hundred and ninety women and children (with only three "decrepit" men in their company) that had been driven across the prairie in the month of November, "the ground thinly crusted with sleet." He stated that he could easily follow their trail by "the *blood that flowed from their lacerated feet* on the stubble of the burnt prairie!"¹³

Once again, the Saints were forced to leave their homes and property.¹⁴