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“We believe in the literal gathering of Israel and in the restoration of the Ten Tribes.” (Articles of Faith 1:10)

## The Gathering Begins

In every dispensation God has revealed the gospel with the purpose to prepare the hearts and minds of his children that they might physically and spiritually gather unto holy places. Missionary efforts in the early days of the Church usually took place in informal settings among friends and family of Church members living in [Fayette](#), [Manchester](#), [Colesville](#) and [Harmony](#). Although missionary efforts were undertaken before the Church was organized in April of 1830 and continued throughout the summer of 1830, the first organized mission of the Church, the Indian mission, was not established until the Church conference of September 1830. Just prior to this conference the Lord prepared the hearts and minds of his elders to engage in spreading the truth when He revealed that he would “gather his people even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, even as many as will hearken to my voice and humble themselves before me, and call upon me in mighty prayer” (D&C 29:2).

The conference convened late in the month of September 1830. Joseph Smith records that during the conference

we had much of the power of God manifested amongst us; the Holy Ghost came upon us, and filled us with joy unspeakable; and peace, and faith, and hope, and charity abounded in our midst...During this conference, which continued three days, the utmost harmony prevailed, and all things were settled satisfactorily to all present, and a desire was manifested by all the Saints to go forward and labor with all their powers to spread the great and glorious principles of truth, which had been revealed by our Heavenly Father. A number were baptized during the conference, and the word of the Lord spread and prevailed. (*History of the Church* 1:115, 118.)

During the conference sections 30 and 31 of the Doctrine and Covenants were received. In these revelations the Lord commanded John Whitmer and Thomas Marsh to begin missionary labors “whithersoever I will, and it shall be given you by the Comforter what you shall do and whither you shall go” (D&C 31:11). The Lord promised them, “I will open the hearts of the people, and they will receive you. And I will establish a church by your hand” (D&C 31:7). Additionally, these revelations instructed Peter Whitmer and Oliver Cowdery “to build up my church among the Lamanites” (D&C 30:6). Joseph Smith explained

At this time a great desire was manifested by several of the Elders respecting the remnants of the house of Joseph, the Lamanites, residing in the west—knowing that the purposes of God were great respecting that people, and hoping that the time had come when the promises of the Almighty in regard to them were about to be accomplished, and that they would receive the Gospel, and enjoy its blessings. The desire being so great, it was agreed that we should inquire of the Lord respecting the propriety of sending some of the Elders among them. (*History of the Church* 1:118.)

In response, Joseph Smith received D&C 32 in which the Lord assigned Parley P. Pratt and Ziba Peterson to accompany Oliver Cowdery and Peter Whitmer “into the wilderness among the Lamanites” (D&C 32:2). These revelations mark the first sustained effort in the latter days to spread forth the truth throughout the earth, fulfilling the designs of the Lord when he declared

Even so will I gather mine elect from the four quarters of the earth, even as many as will believe in me, and hearken unto my voice. Yea, verily, verily, I say unto you, that the field is white already to harvest; wherefore, thrust in your sickles, and reap with all your might, mind, and strength. (D&C 33:6-7)

Lucy Mack Smith recorded the response of several women to this revelation:

As soon as this revelation was received, Emma Smith and several other sisters began to make arrangements to furnish those who were set apart for this mission with the necessary clothing, which was no easy task, as the most of it had to be manufactured out of the raw material. ((*The Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, edited by Scot Facer Proctor & Maurine Jensen Proctor (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1996), p. 248.))

### **Mission to the Lamanites (Fall 1830-Spring 1831)**

Oliver, Parley, Ziba and Peter commenced their 1000 mile journey towards “the borders of the Lamanites” on the western end of Missouri in October 1830. On their way they passed through Kirtland, Ohio where they shared the gospel message with Sidney Rigdon and his congregation. Parley P. Pratt and Sidney Rigdon had known each other prior to this missionary encounter. Sidney Rigdon had come to Parley’s neighborhood some 30 miles west of Cleveland, Ohio

preaching the doctrines of faith, repentance and baptism. As his doctrine more nearly conformed to the scriptures than any other [Parley] had heard, he accepted Sydney Rigdon’s teachings, joined the “Disciples,” and became a minister in that church. [Parley] determined to take up the ministry as his life’s labor, sold his possessions and started first of all to call upon his relatives in New York. En route, however, he was moved upon by the spirit to stop off at Newark, in New York, while his wife continued her journey to her father’s home. At Newark, [Parley] first heard of and saw the Book of Mormon, and, without delay, hastened to Palmyra to investigate the story of its coming forth. At the home of the Smiths, near Manchester, he met with Hyrum, brother of the Prophet, and from him learned the particulars of the work. In company with Hyrum Smith he went to Fayette, where he met with Oliver Cowdery; and about the first of September [1830] he was baptized by him in Seneca Lake, and straightway was ordained an Elder of the Church. After these events he continued his journey to the home of his kindred in Columbia county, New York, where he baptized his brother Orson, then a youth of nineteen years. He returned to Fayette in time to attend the conference, where he met the Prophet Joseph, and received the appointment to the Lamanite mission... ((*History of the Church* 1:119. See also *The Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt, Revised and Enhanced Edition*, edited by Scot Facer Proctor & Maurine Jensen Proctor (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000), chapters 5-7.))

While in Kirtland, Ohio the four missionaries presented Sidney Rigdon with a Book of Mormon. Sidney promised to read the book and allowed the elders to preach to his congregation. In his autobiography, Parley P. Pratt describes the effect of their preaching:

At length Mr. Rigdon and many others became convinced that they had no authority to minister in the ordinances of God; and that they had not been legally baptized and ordained. They, therefore, came forward and were baptized by us, and received the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands, and prayer in the name of Jesus Christ...In two or three weeks from our arrival in the neighborhood with the news, we had baptized one hundred and twenty-seven souls, and this number soon increased to one thousand. The disciples were filled with joy and gladness. (*The Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt, Revised and Enhanced Edition*, p. 52. (Parley’s reporting of the number of baptisms may be inflated.))

Joseph Smith sent John Whitmer to preside over the saints in Kirtland, allowing the four elders to continue their mission towards the west, taking their journey by foot and preaching by the way. During this time the Lord continued to call missionaries to be sent forth into the vineyard. In October 1830 Joseph Smith received D&C 33 in which the Lord assigned Ezra Thayre and Northrop Sweet to take the gospel to the east. Then in November 1830, Joseph Smith received D&C 34 which instructed Orson Pratt, the brother of Parley P. Pratt, to begin missionary labors as well. The pattern of calling and sending forth missionaries to gather in the people of the Lord had begun and has continued unabated to the present day.

Late in 1830 Sidney Rigdon and others from Ohio sought out the prophet Joseph Smith.

In December of the same year, Joseph appointed a meeting [in Waterloo, NY]. While he was preaching, Sidney Rigdon and Edward Partridge came in and seated themselves in the congregation. When Joseph had finished his discourse, he gave all who had any remarks to make the privilege of speaking. Upon this, Mr. Partridge arose, and stated that he had been to Manchester with the view of obtaining further information respecting the doctrine which we preached...having seen what we had sacrificed for the sake of our faith...he believed our testimony and was ready to be baptized, “if,” said he, “Brother Joseph will baptize me”...he was accordingly baptized the next day. (*The Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, pp. 249-250))

Later in December 1830, Joseph received two important revelations. The first revelation came in response to the saints’ desire to know more about lost books of scripture, specifically the “Prophecy of Enoch” mentioned in the New Testament Epistle to Jude. Joseph Smith records that to the saints delight he received “extracts from the Prophecy of Enoch,” which is now published in the Pearl of Great Price in chapter 7 of the Book of Moses. The concept of Zion, the building of the New Jerusalem and the gathering of the saints are some of the most important ideas expressed in Moses chapter 7. This influenced the Latter-day saints to inquire further concerning the location of Zion and the place of gathering. Joseph’s second revelation (D&C 37) in late December 1830 touched upon these inquiries, but it was not until July of 1831 that the Lord gave complete information as to the location of Zion, the New Jerusalem. That revelation is recorded in D&C 57 and will be discussed momentarily.

The Lord instructed Joseph Smith in D&C 37 to begin gathering the saints to one location. Kirtland, Ohio was the designated spot. In early January 1831 a church conference was convened in Fayette,

New York where the Lord gave further instructions and counsel concerning the gathering of the saints to Ohio. In D&C 38 the Lord states

And that ye might escape the power of the enemy, and be gathered unto me a righteous people, without spot and blameless—Wherefore, for this cause I gave unto you the commandment that ye should go to the Ohio; and there I will give unto you my law; and there you shall be endowed with power from on high...and when men are endowed with power from on high and sent forth, all these things shall be gathered unto the bosom of the church...And again, I say unto you, I give unto you a commandment, that every man, both elder, priest, teacher, and also member, go to with his might, with the labor of his hands, to prepare and accomplish the things which I have commanded. And let your preaching be the warning voice, every man to his neighbor, in mildness and in meekness. And go ye out from among the wicked. Save yourselves. Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord. (D&C 38:31-32, 38, 40-42)

Accordingly, the saints from the various branches of the church throughout New York state and northern Pennsylvania began the arduous journey to Ohio some 250-350 miles distant.

While the saints were gathering to Ohio, Parley P. Pratt, Ziba Peterson, Peter Whitmer and Oliver Cowdery were making progress towards the land of the Lamanites, but not without difficulty.

On December 20<sup>th</sup>, they took passage on the steam for St. Louis. Reaching the mouth of the Ohio, they found the Mississippi blocked with ice, and were compelled to walk the remaining two hundred miles to St. Louis. The weather was severe and the snow sometimes three feet deep. ((William Edwin Berrett, *The Restored Church: A Brief History of the Growth and Doctrines of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1944), p. 111.))

Parley P. Pratt describes the journey in the following way:

We halted for a few days in Illinois, about twenty miles from St. Louis, on account of a dreadful storm of rain and snow, which lasted for a week or more, during which the snow fell in some places near three feet deep...

In the beginning of 1831 [January] we renewed our journey; and, passing through St. Louis and St. Charles, we travelled on foot for three hundred miles through trackless wilds of snow—no beaten road; houses few and far between; and the bleak northwest wind always blowing in our faces with a keenness which would almost take the skin off the face. We travelled for whole days, from morning till night, without a house or fire, wading in snow to the knees at every step, and the cold so intense that the snow did not melt on the south side of the houses, even in the midday sun, for nearly six weeks. We carried on our back our changes of clothing, several books, and corn bread and raw pork. We often ate our frozen bread and pork by the way, when the bread would be so frozen that we could not bite or penetrate any part of it but the outside crust.

After much fatigue and some suffering we all arrived in Independence in the county of Jackson, on the extreme western frontiers of Missouri, and of the United States.

This was about fifteen hundred miles from where we started, and we had performed most of the journey on foot, through a wilderness country in the worst season of the year, occupying about four months, during which we had preached the gospel to tens of thousands of Gentiles and two nations of Indians; baptizing, confirming and organizing many hundreds of people into churches of Latter-day Saints.

This was the first mission performed by the Elders of the Church in any of the States west of New York, and we were the first members of the same where were ever on this frontier. ((The Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt, Revised and Enhanced Edition, p. 58.))

Parley and his companions preached unto the Lamanites, presented the Book of Mormon as a record of their forefathers and were received with overwhelming enthusiasm. However, the excitement that they caused also aroused the jealousy of other ministers from Missouri, who were able by threat of militia to order the elders off the Lamanite lands. Nevertheless, their missionary service was a success. Again we hear from Parley P. Pratt as he shares the Indian response to the Book of Mormon:

There was a pause in the council, and some conversation in their own tongue, after which the chief made the following reply:

“We feel truly thankful to our white friends who have come so far, and been at such pains to tell us good news, and especially this new news concerning the Book of our forefathers; it makes us glad in here”—placing his hand on his heart...we will build a council house, and meet together, and you shall read to us and teach us more concerning the Book of our fathers and the will of the Great Spirit.” ((*The Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt, Revised and Enhanced Edition*, pp. 64-65.))

Parley and his companions continued their missionary labors for some time among the residents of Independence and met with some success. In February 1831 it was decided that Parley should return to the east to report to Joseph Smith and the various churches regarding the success that they had found in their labors. Parley arrived in Kirtland near the end of March 1831 and discovered that the Church headquarters had moved from New York to Ohio.

About a month prior to Parley returning from the first Lamanite mission, Joseph Smith had received instructions from the Lord to hold a Church conference in June 1831 (see D&C 44). Accordingly, a three day conference was convened early in the month of June 1831 and one day later section 52 was received. This revelation assigned fourteen pairs of missionaries to take their journey to Independence, Missouri preaching and baptizing along the way. The members became excited about the land of Missouri because the Lord had designated it as a land of gathering:

I will consecrate [the land of Missouri] unto my people, which are a remnant of Jacob, and those who are heirs according to the covenant...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...behold, I, the Lord, will hasten the city in its time, and will crown the faithful with joy and rejoicing. (D&C 52:2, 42-43).

The saints' excitement was further fueled by the promise that the Lord would reveal the location of Zion, the New Jerusalem, at the conference that was to be convened in Missouri when the

missionaries arrived. ((Lyndon W. Cook, *The Revelations of the Prophet Joseph Smith: A Historical and Biographical Commentary of the Doctrine and Covenants*, (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1985), p. 72.)) Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon accompanied the travelling missionaries, arriving in Independence, Missouri in mid-July 1831. Joseph Smith records:

The meeting of our brethren [Ziba Peterson, Oliver Cowdery, Peter Whitmer and Frederick Williams], 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? 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.))

In response to this plea, the Lord revealed unto Joseph Smith where Zion, the New Jerusalem was to be established. This revelation is recorded in D&C 57:

Hearken, O ye elders of my church, saith the Lord your God, who have assembled yourselves together, according to my commandments, in this land, which is the land of Missouri, which is the land which I have appointed and consecrated for the gathering of the Saints. Wherefore, this is the land of promise, and the place for the city of Zion. And thus saith the Lord your God, if you will receive wisdom here is wisdom. Behold, the place which is now called Independence is the center place; and the spot for the temple is lying westward, upon a lot which is not far from the courthouse. (D&C 57:1-3)

Several years later in 1836 Joseph Smith was with a large group of saints in Kirtland, Ohio. The Kirtland temple had just been completed and dedicatory services were underway. Joseph had just retired behind the veil to pray with Oliver Cowdery. Suddenly a marvelous vision burst upon them. They were visited by Elijah, Elias and Moses who possessed the ancient keys of priesthood authority necessary to gathering the saints of God and performing saving ordinances. Joseph Smith describe his encounter with Moses as follows:

The heavens were again opened unto us; and Moses appeared before us, and committed unto us the keys of the gathering of Israel from the four parts of the earth, and the leading of the ten tribes from the land of the north. (D&C 110:11)

The great gathering of the last dispensation began nearly two centuries ago and that gathering continues today as a swelling number of missionaries go forth throughout the earth sharing the gospel message with every nation, kindred, tongue and people in each of the four quarters of the earth.

Our missionaries are going forth to different nations...the standard of truth has been

erected: no unhallowed hand can stop the work from progressing, persecutions may rage, mobs may combine, armies may assemble, calumny may defame, but the truth of God will go forth boldly, nobly, and independent till has penetrated every continent, swept every country, and sounded in every ear, till the purposes of God shall be accomplished and the great Jehovah shall say the work is done. (Joseph Smith—“The Wentworth Letter”) (*The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, Compiled and Edited by Dean C. Jesse (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1984), pp. 218-219.)