

From June 3 to June 6, 1831 ((This conference had been convened based on revelation given to Joseph Smith in February 1831 and is now found in Section 44 of the Doctrine & Covenants.)) the fourth conference of the Church was held in a log school house on the property of Isaac Morely in Kirtland, Ohio. Right after this conference Joseph Smith received a revelation ((This revelation is found in Section 52 of the Doctrine & Covenants.)) to send forth missionaries throughout the Western States (what was then the states of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois and Missouri) preaching the gospel and building up congregations unto the Lord. The elders were assigned to labor in pairs as they journeyed to “the borders of the Lamanites” on the western end of Missouri. ((The land of Missouri marked the furthest western border of the United States at that time. What lay beyond was the Indian territory which had been the site of the first organized mission of the Church during the winter of 1831. Parley P. Pratt, Ziba Peterson, Oliver Cowdery and Peter Whitmer were the four missionaries so designated by revelation (D&C 30 & 32) to preach the gospel among the Lamanites. For a fascinating account of their journey and success see *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 6-8.)) By revelation, the Lord indicated that the elders were to hold a conference once they arrived in the land of Missouri.

In addition to the missionaries many members of the Church departed from Kirtland, Ohio to make the 800 mile journey because the Lord had promised them that “the land of Missouri...is the land of your inheritance” (D&C 52:42). The main body of these members consisted of saints who had recently immigrated from Colesville, New York ((Colesville is located in the south central region of New York State, not many miles from Harmony, Pennsylvania. [Click here for the Google Maps location of Colesville, NY.](#))) to the Kirtland area in February of 1831. These faithful saints had heeded the call to gather and build the kingdom of God as the prophet Joseph had directed. Joseph Smith together with Sidney Rigdon, a recent convert of seven months from the Campbellite faith, also took up missionary labors and went to the land of Missouri.

This missionary effort was important to the infant church and soon new members flocked to the standard of the gospel and became leaders in its cause. Because of the missionary labors during this period future apostle William McLellin was taught the restored gospel. Lucy Mack Smith relates the story:

Samuel H. Smith and Reynolds Cahoon were appointed to go in company together.

On their way to Missouri, they called at a town, and going into a large store, they inquired of the clerk, who was William E. McLellin, if they had any preaching evenings in the place. ‘Yes,’ answered Mr. McLellin, ‘we do, when any preacher comes along. What denomination do you belong to?’

‘We are Latter-day Saints,’ said Samuel.

‘Can you preach?’ said Mr. McLellin. ‘I would like to hear you, for that is a denomination that I have never heard of, and if you will preach, I will get a house and light it up and call the people together in good season.’

Samuel replied that he would be glad of the opportunity. Mr. McLellin went out, and in a short time he had a large congregation seated in a convenient room, well lit up at his expense. After the meeting was dismissed, Mr. McLellin urged them to stay in the place and preach again, but they refused, as their directions were to go forward without any further delay than to warn the people as they passed.

Soon after they left, which was the next morning, Mr. McLellin grew uneasy, and he afterwards told me the following story:

‘When night came I was unable to sleep, for I thought that I ought to have gone with them, as I had an excellent horse, and I could have assisted them much on their journey. This worked upon my mind, so that I determined to set out after them the next morning, cost what it might. I accordingly told my employer what I had concluded to do, and obtaining his consent, I set out in pursuit of my new acquaintances. I did not overtake them, but I pursued my route in the same direction, until I came to Jackson County, Missouri, where I was baptized.’ (*The Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, edited by Scot Facer Proctor & Maurine Jensen Proctor (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1996), pp. 279-280.)

Others missionaries found similar success. Parley P. Pratt, who was accompanied by his brother Orson Pratt, records both the sufferings and triumphs that always attend the work of the Lord:

Soon after the conference [in June 1831] my brother and myself commenced our journey without any means to bear our expenses. We travelled...in the midst of the heat of summer on foot, and faithfully preached the gospel in many parts...We suffered the hardships incident to a new and, in many places, unsettled country, such as hunger, thirst, fatigue, etc. We arrived in upper Missouri in September, having baptized many people and organized branches of the Church in several parts of Ohio, Illinois and Indiana. On our arrival we found a considerable settlement of the brethren from Ohio [the Colesville saints], who had immigrated during the summer and taken up their residence in Jackson County. President Smith, and many of the Elders, had been there and held a conference, and, having organized a Stake of Zion, pointed out and consecrated certain grounds for a city and temple, they had again returned to the East. With them, the brethren whom I had left there the previous winter [Ziba Peterson, Oliver Cowdery and Peter Whitmer], had also returned.

I felt somewhat disappointed in not meeting with the brethren; but was consoled with the reflection that I had been diligent in preaching the gospel on my journey... (*The Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt, Revised and Enhanced Edition*, pp. 82-84. Lucy Mack Smith records that Samuel Smith and Reynolds Cahoon experienced similar circumstances during their missionary labors, “On their route, Samuel and Brother Cahoon suffered great privations, such as want of rest and food.” *The Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, p. 280.)

According to Brother Pratt many important things had transpired during the few weeks that Joseph Smith and the other missionaries convened in Missouri. We will discuss these in order.

Joseph Smith and a number of the travelling missionaries arrived in Missouri near the mid-point of July, 1831. Soon thereafter Joseph Smith described the land in these terms:

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. Only on the water courses is timber to be found. There in strips from one to three miles in width, and following faithfully the meanderings of the

streams, it grows in luxuriant forests. The forests are a mixture of oak, hickory, black walnut, elm, ash, cherry, honey locust, mulberry, coffee bean, hackberry, boxelder, and bass wood; with the addition of cottonwood, butterwood, pecan, and soft and hard maple upon the bottoms. The shrubbery is beautiful, and consists in part of plums, grapes, crab apple, and persimmons.

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. Horses, cattle and hogs, though of an inferior breed, are tolerably plentiful and seem nearly to raise themselves by grazing in the vast prairie range in summer, and feeding upon the bottoms in winter. The wild game is less plentiful of course where man has commenced the cultivation of the soil, than in the wild prairies. Buffalo, elk, deer, bear, wolves, beaver and many smaller animals here roam at pleasure. Turkeys, geese, swans, ducks, yea a variety of the feathered tribe, are among the rich abundance that grace the delightful regions of this goodly land—the heritage of the children of God.

The season is mild and delightful nearly three quarters of the year...the land of Zion...bids fair...to become one of the most blessed places on the globe. The winters are milder than the Atlantic states of the same parallel of latitude, and the weather is more agreeable; so that were the virtues of the inhabitants only equal to the blessings of the Lord which He permits to crown the industry of those inhabitants, there would be a measure of the good things of life for the benefit of the Saints, full, pressed down, and running over, even an hundred-fold. (*History of the Church* 1:197-198.)

On July 20, 1831 Joseph Smith received Doctrine and Covenants 57 where the Lord revealed, “this is the land of promise, and the place for the city of Zion” (D&C 57:2). This statement was in fulfillment of a declaration from the Lord made on February 9, 1831 promising to reveal the location of Zion (see D&C 42:9). God also directed his saints in D&C 57 to build a temple to his name. Accordingly, the foundation of the city of Zion was established on one day, the dedication for the temple in Zion took place on the next and the divinely appointed church conference ((Received on June 7, 1831 in Kirtland, Ohio D&C 52:2 records, “I, the Lord, will make known unto you what I will that ye shall do from this time until the next conference, which shall be held in Missouri, upon the land, which I will consecrate unto my people, which are a remnant of Jacob, and those who are heirs according to the covenant.”)) the day after that. Joseph Smith records:

On the second day of August [1831], I assisted the Colesville branch of the Church to lay the first log, for a house, as a foundation of Zion in Kaw township, twelve miles west of Independence [Missouri]. The log was carried and placed by twelve men, in honor of the twelve tribes of Israel...

On the third day of August, I proceeded to dedicate the spot for the Temple, a little west of Independence...

On the 4th I attended the first conference in the land of Zion. It was held at the house of Brother Joshua Lewis...in the presence of the Colesville branch of the Church. The Spirit of the Lord was there. (*History of the Church* 1:196, 199. Psalm 87 was read at the dedicatory services.)

Among the members of the Colesville branch of the Church was Polly Knight, wife of Joseph Knight, Sr. and mother of Newel Knight. ((Brother Joseph Knight, Sr. had assisted the Prophet with money and supplies when he was translating the Book of Mormon. After Brother J. Knight, Sr. was baptized he remained faithful and true until his death in February 1847. Newel Knight, his son, was also a stalwart member of the early church. Newel was appointed to lead the Colesville saints from Kirtland, Ohio to Missouri. Newel died faithful to the Lord in January 1847, about a month before his father passed away.)) During the journey to the land of Zion, Polly Knight had been very ill. Newel Knight said of these circumstances,

Yet she would not consent to stop traveling; her only, or her greatest desire was to set her feet upon the land of Zion, and to have her body interred in the land. I went on shore and bought lumber to make a coffin in case she would die before we arrived at our place of destination—so fast did she fail. But the Lord gave her the desire of her heart, and she lived to stand upon that land. ((*History of the Church*, footnote on 1:199.))

Polly Knight was the first member of the Church to die in the land of Zion. Her funeral took place on August 7, 1831. At this time Joseph Smith received section 59 that spoke both about Polly Knight and all those who would yet come to the land of Zion.

Behold, blessed, saith the Lord, are they who have come up unto this land with an eye single to my glory, according to my commandments.

For those that live shall inherit the earth, and those that die shall rest from all their labors, and their works shall follow them; and they shall receive a crown in the mansions of my Father, which I have prepared for them.

Yea, blessed are they whose feet stand upon the land of Zion, who have obeyed my gospel; for they shall receive for their reward the good things of the earth, and it shall bring forth in its strength.

And they shall also be crowned with blessings from above, yea, and with commandments not a few, and with revelations in their time—they that are faithful and diligent before me. (D&C 59:1-4)

D&C 59 continues by reviewing the commandments that God desires his saints to keep including keeping the Sabbath day holy and participating in his holy sacraments. This ancient pattern is found throughout the scriptures. ((Consider a few examples such as Moses unto the children of Israel in Deut. 4-5 or Lehi unto his posterity in 2 Nephi 1. See also Nehemiah 13:15-22, who, around 500 BC, sought to purify the children of Israel after their return to the land of promise from exile in Babylon.))

Keeping the Sabbath day holy is one of the foundation stones of worshipping God. The word “Sabbath” comes from the Hebrew term *shabbat*, which gives the idea of cessation or resting from activity. The pattern for this act of worship was instituted by the Lord when he

saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good...Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the hosts of them. And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which

he had made. (Genesis 1:31-2:2)

Accordingly, the Lord designated the seventh day as the Sabbath, the day to rest from all worldly labors and cares. In the book of Exodus, Moses reminded the children of Israel of this important aspect of worship:

But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates. (Exodus 19:10)

While instructing the children of Israel at Mount Sinai Moses explained the purpose for keeping the Sabbath day holy:

For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it. (Exodus 19:11)

It is interesting to note that the purpose for keeping the Sabbath day holy changed over time or took on new meaning. For example, after Moses had successfully led the children of Israel through the wilderness he reviewed the command to keep the Sabbath day holy using the same terminology as he did when at Mt. Sinai. However, note the difference reasons (highlighted in italics) for remembering the Sabbath day that Moses shared with them.

Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work.

But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates.

For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it. (Exodus 19:9-11)

Six days thou shalt labor, and do all thy work:

But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thine ox, nor thine ass, nor any of thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates; that thy manservant and thy maidservant may rest as well as thou.

And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: therefore the Lord thy God commanded thee to keep the Sabbath day. (Deut. 5:13-15).

Centuries after the time of Moses, Jesus gathered with his disciples in an upper room that they might celebrate the Passover, the Jewish holy day commemorating God’s mighty salvation of the children of Israel from Egyptian bondage. During the course of this Passover service Jesus instituted the sacred meal we call the sacrament:

And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me.

Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you. (Luke 22:19-20)

The very next day Christ suffered the agonies of atoning for the sins of all mankind. His sacrifice was complete, his promises were sure. After three days in the tomb Christ rose triumphant from the grave breaking the bands of death for all those who wear a mortal tabernacle. This miraculous and unprecedented event took place on the first day of the week in the Jewish calendar, which corresponds to our Sunday. From that day onward the disciples commemorated the Lord’s resurrection by partaking of the sacred meal called sacrament on the first day of each week (see Acts 20:7). And over time the divine injunction to keep the Sabbath day holy by resting from all worldly labors was applied to the Lord’s day. We see this in Paul’s words to the Corinthians:

Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come. (1 Corinthians 16:2)

In our time we continue to have sacred celebrations on the Lord’s day, which is now called the Sabbath. We come together each week to remember God’s great goodness in creating all things for us. We come together to remember God’s mighty hand in delivering us from bondage. We come together to remember that Christ rose triumphant from the grave that we might live. And we remember these things gather on the Lord’s day to partake of the sacred sacrament, the token of our mutual love and covenants with the Lord.

His blessings unto us are without parallel. We are promised that if we keep the Sabbath day holy “the fulness of the earth is yours” (D&C 59:16). We are also promised that as long as we remember Christ we shall have his Holy Spirit to be with us. Without the Holy Spirit we cannot partake of the effects of the atonement. But when the Holy Spirit is with us we are purified by its holy presence. Therefore, the sacrament covenant reminds and teaches us that if we always remember Christ we will *always* have the Spirit to be with us. If we always have the Spirit to be with us we will *always* have a remission of our sins and thus be pure, white and spotless as is Christ.

May we be pure, white and spotless as is Christ by becoming one with him through the marvelous miracle of the atonement.