



# The Life and Ministry of Joseph Smith

“Joseph Smith, the Prophet and Seer of the Lord, has done more, save Jesus only, for the salvation of men in this world, than any other man that ever lived in it” (D&C 135:3). This astonishing declaration describes a man who was called of God at the age of 14 and lived only to the age of 38. Between Joseph Smith’s birth in Vermont in December 1805 and his tragic death in Illinois in June 1844, marvelous things occurred. God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, appeared to him, teaching him more about the nature of God than had been known for centuries. Ancient prophets and apostles bestowed sacred priesthood power upon Joseph, making him a new, authorized witness of God in this last dispensation. An incomparable outpouring of knowledge and doctrine was revealed through the Prophet, including the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price. Through him, the Lord’s true Church was organized once again upon the earth.

Today, the work that commenced with Joseph Smith moves forward throughout the world. Of the Prophet Joseph Smith, President Wilford Woodruff testified: “He was a prophet of God, and he laid the foundation of the greatest work and dispensation that has ever been established on the earth.”<sup>1</sup>

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## Ancestry and Childhood

Joseph Smith was a sixth-generation American, his ancestors having emigrated from England to America in the 1600s. The Prophet’s ancestors typified the characteristics often associated with the early generations of Americans: they believed in God’s directing care over them, they had a strong work ethic, and they diligently served their families and their country.

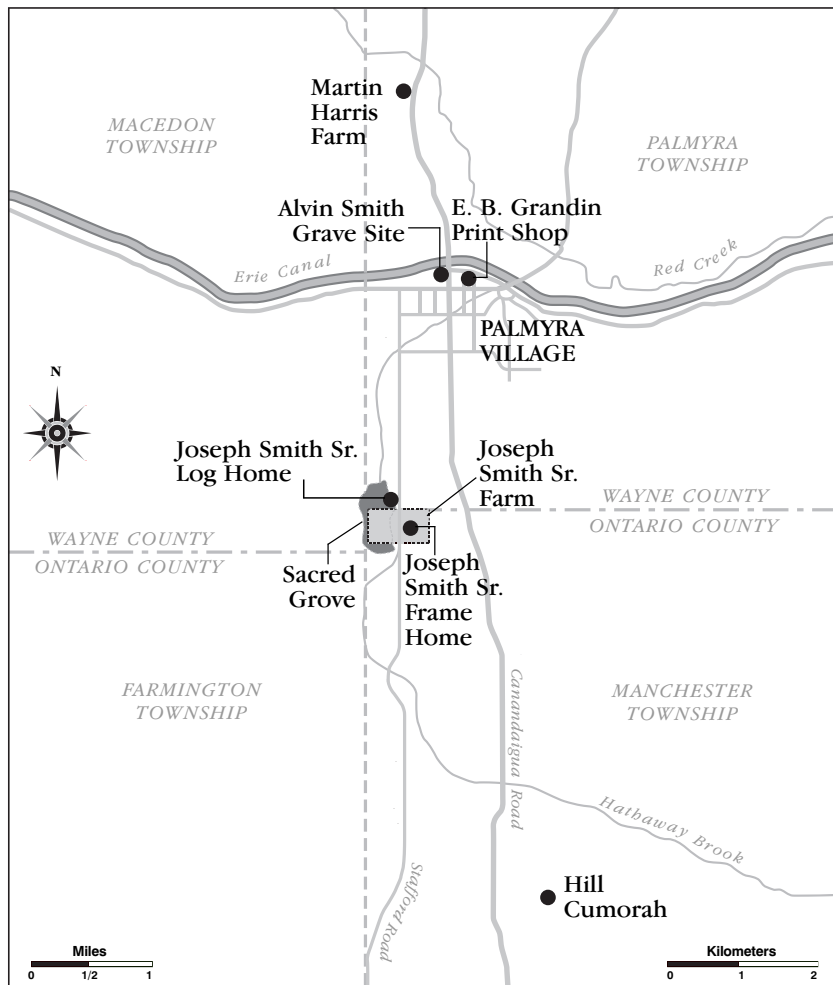
Joseph Smith’s parents, Joseph Smith Sr. and Lucy Mack Smith, married in 1796 in Tunbridge, Vermont. They were a

hardworking and God-fearing couple who started their married life under favorable financial circumstances. Unfortunately, Joseph Smith Sr. lost his first farming homestead and suffered a number of financial reverses in subsequent years. The Smith family was forced to move several times as their father tried to make a living by farming the wooded hills of New England, hiring out to work on other farms, operating a mercantile business, or teaching school.

Joseph Smith Jr. was born on December 23, 1805, in Sharon, Vermont, the fifth of eleven children. He was named after his father. The children in the Smith family were, in order of birth: an unnamed son (who died shortly after birth), Alvin, Hyrum, Sophronia, Joseph, Samuel, Ephraim (who lived less than two weeks), William, Katharine, Don Carlos, and Lucy.<sup>2</sup>

Evidence of the Prophet's extraordinary character emerged early in his life. The Smiths were living in West Lebanon, New Hampshire, when a deadly epidemic of typhoid fever attacked many in the community, including all the Smith children. While the other children recovered without complication, Joseph, who was about seven years old, developed a serious infection in his left leg. Dr. Nathan Smith of Dartmouth Medical School at nearby Hanover, New Hampshire, agreed to perform a new surgical procedure to try to save the boy's leg. As Dr. Smith and his colleagues prepared to operate, Joseph asked his mother to leave the room so she would not have to witness his suffering. Refusing liquor to dull the pain and relying only on his father's reassuring embrace, Joseph bravely endured as the surgeon bored into and chipped away part of his leg bone. The surgery was successful, although Joseph walked the next several years with crutches and showed signs of a slight limp the rest of his life.

In 1816, after facing repeated crop failures, Joseph Smith Sr. moved his family from Norwich, Vermont, to Palmyra, New York, hoping to find a more prosperous situation. "Being in indigent circumstances," recalled the Prophet in later years, "[we] were obliged to labor hard for the support of a large family . . . , and as it required the exertions of all that were able to render any assistance for the support of the family, therefore we were deprived of



*The Palmyra, New York, area. Many important events in early Church history occurred here, including the First Vision and the visits of Moroni to Joseph Smith.*

the benefit of an education. Suffice it to say, I was merely instructed in reading, writing, and the ground rules of arithmetic.”<sup>3</sup>

### The First Vision

Joseph Smith wrote of his early training: “I was born . . . of goodly parents who spared no pains to instruct me in the Christian religion.”<sup>4</sup> But, like many other Christians, Joseph’s parents recognized that some of the gospel principles taught by



*The Sacred Grove about 1907. In the spring of 1820, young Joseph Smith went to this grove of trees near his home to pray to the Lord for guidance.*

Jesus and His Apostles were absent from contemporary churches. In the Palmyra area in 1820, several different Christian denominations were trying to win converts. Joseph's mother, two of his brothers, and his older sister joined the local Presbyterian church, but Joseph, along with his father and his brother Alvin, held back. Though only a boy, Joseph was deeply concerned about his own standing before God and about the confusion among the various religious groups.

During his study of the scriptures, 14-year-old Joseph became impressed by a passage from the book of James: “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” (James 1:5). Inspired by this promise from the Lord, Joseph went into the woods near his home to pray on a spring day in 1820. Kneeling down, he offered up the desires of his heart to God. Immediately he was seized upon by the powers of darkness, which entirely overcame him and made him fear that he would be destroyed. Then, in response to his fervent prayer, the heavens were opened and he was delivered from his unseen enemy. In a pillar of light brighter than the sun, he saw two Personages standing above him in the air. One spoke, calling the boy by name, and said, “This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!” (Joseph Smith—History 1:17).

In this glorious manifestation, God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, appeared in person to young Joseph. Joseph conversed with the Savior, who told him to join none of the churches of his day, for “they were all wrong” and “all their creeds were an abomination in his sight; . . . they teach for doctrines the commandments of men, having a form of godliness, but they deny the power thereof” (Joseph Smith—History 1:19). Joseph was also promised “that the fullness of the Gospel should at some future time be made known unto [him].”<sup>5</sup> After centuries of darkness, the word of God and the reality of God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, had been revealed to the world through this youthful and pure vessel.

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### **The Visits of Moroni**

Three years passed, during which Joseph Smith’s declaration that he had seen God was treated with scorn and derision by others in his community. The young Prophet, now 17 years of age, wondered what awaited him. On the evening of September 21, 1823, he prayed earnestly for direction and for forgiveness of his youthful “sins and follies” (Joseph Smith—History 1:29). In answer to his prayer, light filled his attic bedroom, and a heavenly messenger named Moroni appeared. “[He] proclaimed himself to be an angel of God,” Joseph recalled, “sent to bring the

joyful tidings that the covenant which God made with ancient Israel was at hand to be fulfilled, that the preparatory work for the second coming of the Messiah was speedily to commence; that the time was at hand for the Gospel in all its fullness to be preached in power, unto all nations that a people might be prepared for the Millennial reign. I was informed that I was chosen to be an instrument in the hands of God to bring about some of His purposes in this glorious dispensation.”<sup>6</sup>

Moroni also told Joseph that a compilation of ancient writings, engraved on gold plates by ancient prophets, was buried in a nearby hill. This sacred record described a people whom God had led from Jerusalem to the Western Hemisphere 600 years before Jesus’s birth. Moroni was the last prophet among these people and had buried the record, which God had promised to bring forth in the latter days. Joseph Smith was to translate this sacred work into English.

For the next four years, Joseph was to meet Moroni at the hill each September 22 to receive further knowledge and instructions. He would need these years of preparation and personal refinement in order to translate the ancient record. He had to be equal to the task of bringing forth a work whose purpose was to convince “Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God, manifesting himself unto all nations” (title page of the Book of Mormon).

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## Establishing God’s Kingdom on Earth

### *Translation of the Book of Mormon Begins*



*Emma Smith*

While he waited to receive the gold plates, Joseph Smith helped provide for his family’s temporal needs. In 1825 he went to Harmony, Pennsylvania, to work for Josiah Stowell. There he boarded with the family of Isaac and Elizabeth Hale and met their daughter Emma, a tall, dark-haired schoolteacher. On January 18, 1827, Joseph and Emma were married in South Bainbridge, New York.

Although their marriage would be tested by the deaths of children, financial difficulties, and Joseph's frequent absences from home in fulfillment of his duties, Joseph and Emma always loved one another deeply.

On September 22, 1827, four years after he first saw the plates, Joseph was at last entrusted with them. But once the plates were in his keeping, a local mob made repeated and strenuous efforts to steal them. To avoid this persecution, in December 1827 Joseph and Emma returned to Harmony, where Emma's parents lived. Once established there, Joseph began the translation of the plates.

In early 1828, Martin Harris, a prosperous farmer from Palmyra, received a testimony of the Lord's latter-day work and traveled to Harmony to help Joseph with the translation. By June of that year, Joseph's work on the translation had resulted in 116 pages of manuscript. Martin repeatedly asked the Prophet for permission to take the manuscript to his home in Palmyra to show to certain family members. The Prophet petitioned the Lord and was told no, but he asked the Lord two more times and finally Martin was allowed to take the manuscript. While the manuscript was in Palmyra, it was lost, never to be recovered. The Lord took the Urim and Thummim and the plates from the Prophet for a time, leaving him humbled and repentant. In a revelation from the Lord, Joseph learned that he must always fear God more than men (see D&C 3). Thereafter, though he was only 22 years old, his life was marked by complete dedication to following every command of the Lord.

On April 5, 1829, Oliver Cowdery, a schoolteacher a year younger than Joseph, arrived at Joseph's home in Harmony. In answer to prayer, he had received a testimony of the truthfulness of the Prophet's work. Two days later, the work of translation began again, with Joseph dictating and Oliver writing.

### *Restoration of the Priesthood of God*

As Joseph and Oliver worked on the translation of the Book of Mormon, they read the account of the Savior's visit to the ancient Nephites. As a result, they decided to seek guidance from the Lord about baptism. On May 15, 1829, they went to the banks of

the Susquehanna River, near Joseph's home in Harmony, to pray. To their amazement, a heavenly being visited them, announcing himself as John the Baptist. He conferred upon them the Aaronic Priesthood and instructed them to baptize and ordain each other. Later, as promised by John the Baptist, the ancient Apostles Peter, James, and John also appeared to Joseph and Oliver and bestowed upon them the Melchizedek Priesthood and ordained them Apostles.

Before these visitations, Joseph and Oliver had possessed knowledge and faith. But after the appearances of the heavenly messengers, they also had authority—the priesthood power and authority of God necessary to establish His Church and to perform the ordinances of salvation.

*Publication of the Book of Mormon and  
Organization of the Church*

During April and May of 1829, the Prophet's work of translation at his home in Harmony was increasingly interrupted by persecution. As a result, Joseph and Oliver moved temporarily to Fayette Township, New York, to finish the translation at the home of Peter Whitmer Sr. The translation was completed in June, less than three months after Oliver began serving as the Prophet's scribe. By August, Joseph had contracted with publisher Egbert B. Grandin of Palmyra to print the volume. Martin Harris mortgaged his farm to Mr. Grandin to ensure payment of the printing costs, and he later sold 151 acres of his farm to pay off the mortgage. The Book of Mormon was available for sale to the public in Grandin's bookstore on March 26, 1830.

On April 6, 1830, just eleven days after the Book of Mormon was advertised for sale, a group of about 60 people assembled in the log home of Peter Whitmer Sr. in Fayette, New York. There Joseph Smith formally organized the Church, later designated by revelation as The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (see D&C 115:4). It was a joyous occasion, with a great outpouring of the Spirit. The sacrament was administered, believers were baptized, the gift of the Holy Ghost was bestowed, and men were ordained to the priesthood. In a revelation received during the meeting, the Lord designated Joseph Smith as the leader of the



*Replica of the Peter Whitmer Sr. home in Fayette, New York. This reconstructed home stands on the site where the Prophet formally organized the Church on April 6, 1830.*

Church: “a seer, a translator, a prophet, an apostle of Jesus Christ, an elder of the church through the will of God the Father, and the grace of your Lord Jesus Christ” (D&C 21:1). The Church of Jesus Christ was once again established on the earth.

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### **Kirtland, Ohio: Expansion of the Church**

As Church members enthusiastically shared the truth they had found, the infant Church grew rapidly. Soon branches were established in the New York towns of Fayette, Manchester, and Colesville. In September 1830, shortly after Joseph and Emma Smith moved from Harmony, Pennsylvania, to Fayette, the Lord revealed to the Prophet that missionaries should “go unto the Lamanites” living on the western edge of Missouri (D&C 28:8). The journey of the missionaries took them through the Kirtland, Ohio, area, where they met a religious group searching for the truth and converted some 130 of them, including Sidney Rigdon, who later became a member of the First Presidency. The group of Saints in Kirtland grew to several hundred as members shared the gospel with those around them.



*Important sites in early Church history and the life of the Prophet Joseph Smith.*

As the Church grew in New York, opposition to the Church grew as well. In December 1830, the Prophet received a revelation instructing Church members to “go to the Ohio” (D&C 37:1), more than 250 miles away. In the next few months, the great majority of the New York Saints sold their property, often at great loss, and made the sacrifices necessary to gather to Kirtland, Ohio. Joseph and Emma Smith were among the first to start for Ohio, arriving in Kirtland about February 1, 1831.

### *Two Gathering Places for the Saints*

In June of 1831, while the Church was growing strong in Kirtland, the Lord directed the Prophet and other Church leaders to travel to Missouri. There He would reveal to them “the land of [their] inheritance” (see D&C 52:3–5, 42–43). During June and July 1831, the Prophet and others traveled the nearly 900 miles from Kirtland to Jackson County, Missouri, which was on the western fringe of American settlement. Shortly after he arrived, the Prophet received a revelation from the Lord stating that “the land of Missouri . . . 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. . . . The place which is now called Independence is the center place; and a spot for the temple is lying westward” (D&C 57:1–3).

In fulfillment of prophecies made by ancient biblical prophets, 25-year-old Joseph Smith began to lay the foundation of the city of Zion in America. In August 1831, he presided over the dedication of the land as a gathering place and dedicated a temple site. A short time later, the Prophet returned to Ohio, where he encouraged some of the faithful to gather to Missouri. Hundreds of Saints endured the rigors of 19th-century travel on the American frontier and made their way to their new home in Missouri.

From 1831 to 1838, Church members lived in both Ohio and Missouri. The Prophet, members of the Quorum of the Twelve, and many Church members lived in Kirtland, while other members of the Church gathered to Missouri and were led by their priesthood leaders there, under the direction of the Prophet. Church leaders corresponded by letter and frequently traveled between Kirtland and Missouri.

### *Continuing Revelation*

While he lived in the Kirtland area, the Prophet received many revelations from the Lord concerning the latter-day restoration of the gospel. In November 1831, Church leaders decided to publish many of the revelations in a compilation to be known as the Book of Commandments. The book was to be printed in Independence, Missouri. But in July 1833, mobs destroyed the press and many of the printed sheets. Except for a few copies of the book that were saved, the Book of Commandments never became available to the membership of the Church. In 1835 the revelations intended for the Book of Commandments, as well as many other revelations, were published in Kirtland as the Doctrine and Covenants.

While living in the Kirtland area, the Prophet also continued his work on the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible, a work he had begun in 1830, as commanded by the Lord. Many plain and precious things had been lost from the Bible over the centuries, and the Prophet was guided by the Spirit to make corrections to the text of the King James Version of the Bible and to restore information that had been lost. This work led to the restoration of important gospel truths, including many revelations now included in the Doctrine and Covenants. Although the Prophet intended to publish his revision of the Bible, pressing matters, including persecution, kept him from publishing it in its entirety in his lifetime.

As part of his inspired revision of the Bible, Joseph Smith received the revelation that is now the book of Moses and an inspired translation of Matthew 24, which is now called Joseph Smith—Matthew. In 1835, the Prophet began translating the book of Abraham from ancient Egyptian papyri that the Church had purchased. All of these translations later became part of the Pearl of Great Price.

Among the revelations the Prophet received in Kirtland were those that established the general governance of the Church. Under the direction of the Lord, Joseph Smith organized the First Presidency in 1832.<sup>7</sup> He organized the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and a Quorum of the Seventy in 1835. A stake was



*The Kirtland Temple about 1900. This temple was built at great sacrifice by the Saints but had to be abandoned after persecution drove them from Kirtland.*

organized in Kirtland in 1834. During this period, he also established Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthood quorums to minister to the needs of local Church members.

#### *The First Temple in This Dispensation*

As one of the most important parts of the Restoration, the Lord revealed to Joseph Smith the need for holy temples. In December 1832, the Lord commanded the Saints to begin building a temple in Kirtland, Ohio. Although many Church members lacked adequate housing, employment, and food, they responded

enthusiastically to the Lord's command, the Prophet working alongside them.

On March 27, 1836, Joseph Smith dedicated the temple amid a pentecostal outpouring of the Spirit. A week later, on April 3, 1836, some of the most significant events in religious history occurred. The Lord Jesus Christ appeared to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery in the temple, declaring, "I have accepted this house, and my name shall be here; and I will manifest myself to my people in mercy in this house" (D&C 110:7). Three messengers from Old Testament dispensations—Moses, Elias, and Elijah—also appeared. They restored priesthood keys and authority long lost to the earth. The Prophet Joseph Smith now had the authority to gather Israel from the four parts of the earth and to seal families together for time and all eternity. (See D&C 110:11–16.) This restoration of priesthood keys followed the Lord's pattern of giving to the Prophet "line upon line, precept upon precept; here a little, and there a little" (D&C 128:21) until the fulness of Jesus Christ's gospel was restored to the earth.

### *Preaching the Everlasting Gospel*

Throughout the Prophet's ministry, the Lord directed him to send missionaries to "preach the gospel to every creature" (D&C 68:8). The Prophet himself felt the burden of this charge and left his home and family many times to proclaim the gospel. In the early years of the Church, missionaries were called to preach in various parts of the United States and Canada.

Then, in the summer of 1837, the Prophet was inspired to send elders to England. The Prophet directed Heber C. Kimball, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve, to lead a small group of missionaries in this great undertaking. Leaving his family almost destitute, Elder Kimball departed with faith that the Lord would guide him. Within a year, approximately 2,000 people had joined the Church in England. Joseph Smith subsequently sent members of the Twelve to Great Britain to serve from 1839 to 1841, and this mission was also remarkably successful. By 1841, more than 6,000 people had embraced the gospel. Many of these emigrated to America, revitalizing and fortifying the Church during very difficult times.

*Leaving Kirtland*

The Saints in Kirtland had suffered persecution almost from the time they arrived there, but opposition intensified in 1837 and 1838. “In relation to the kingdom of God,” the Prophet said, “the devil always sets up his kingdom at the very same time in opposition to God.”<sup>8</sup> The Prophet felt the brunt of the hostility, both from enemies outside the Church and from apostates who had turned against him. He was unjustly accused of many crimes, harassed in court in dozens of unfounded criminal and civil cases, and forced to hide from those who sought his life. But he stood faithful and courageous in the midst of almost constant trouble and opposition.

Finally, the persecution in the Kirtland area became intolerable. In January 1838, the Prophet and his family were forced to leave Kirtland and take refuge in Far West, Missouri. By the end of the year, most of the Saints in Kirtland had followed him, leaving behind their homes and their beloved temple.

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**The Saints in Missouri**
*Expulsion from Jackson County and the March of Zion’s Camp*

While the Saints in Kirtland were striving to strengthen the Church in their area, many other Church members were doing the same in Jackson County, Missouri. Latter-day Saints began settling in the county in the summer of 1831. Two years later, they numbered some 1,200 Saints, or about one-third of the population there.

The arrival of so many Saints troubled the longtime settlers in the area. The Missourians feared loss of political control to the newcomers, who were mostly from the northern part of the United States and did not support the southern practice of slavery. The Missourians were also suspicious of unique Latter-day Saint doctrines—such as belief in the Book of Mormon, new revelation, and the gathering to Zion—and they resented Latter-day Saints for trading primarily among themselves. Mobs and the local militia soon began harassing the Saints and, in November 1833, drove them from Jackson County. Most of the Saints fled north across the Missouri River into Clay County, Missouri.

Joseph Smith was deeply concerned about the plight of the Missouri Saints. In August 1833 he wrote from Kirtland to Church leaders in Missouri: “Brethren, if I were with you I should take an active part in your sufferings, and although nature shrinks, yet my spirit would not let me forsake you unto death, God helping me. Oh, be of good cheer, for our redemption draweth near. O God, save my brethren in Zion.”<sup>9</sup>

In February 1834, Joseph Smith received a revelation directing him to lead an expedition from Kirtland to Missouri to assist the suffering Saints and help restore them to their lands in Jackson County (see D&C 103). In response to the Lord’s command, the Prophet organized a group called Zion’s Camp for the march to Missouri. In May and June of 1834, the group, which eventually included more than 200 members, made its way westward across Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Missouri. They were beset by many difficulties, including an outbreak of cholera. On June 22, 1834, when the expedition neared Jackson County, the Prophet received a revelation disbanding the camp. However, the Lord promised that Zion would be redeemed in His own time. (See D&C 105:9–14.) After organizing a stake in Clay County with David Whitmer as president, the Prophet returned to Ohio.

Although Zion’s Camp did not recover the properties of the Saints, it provided invaluable training for future leaders of the Church, for the participants learned principles of righteous leadership from the example and teachings of the Prophet. In a meeting of the members of Zion’s Camp and other Church members held in Kirtland on February 14, 1835, the Prophet organized the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Two weeks later, he organized a Quorum of the Seventy. Nine of the members of the Quorum of the Twelve and all of the members of the Quorum of the Seventy had been part of Zion’s Camp.

#### *Settlement in Northern Missouri*

Large numbers of Church members continued to live in Clay County, Missouri, until 1836, when the residents of that county said they could no longer provide a place of refuge. The Saints therefore began moving into northern Missouri, most of them settling in Caldwell County, a new county organized by the state

legislature to accommodate the displaced Latter-day Saints. In 1838 they were joined by a large body of Saints who had been forced to abandon Kirtland. The Prophet and his family arrived that March in Far West, the thriving Latter-day Saint settlement in Caldwell County, and established Church headquarters there. In April the Lord directed Joseph Smith to build a temple in Far West (see D&C 115:7–16).

Unfortunately, peace was short-lived for the Saints in northern Missouri. In the fall of 1838, mobs and militia again harassed and attacked Latter-day Saints. When Church members retaliated and defended themselves, Joseph Smith and other Church leaders were arrested on charges of treason. In November they were imprisoned in Independence and then in Richmond, Missouri; and on December 1, they were taken to the jail in Liberty, Missouri. That winter, the Prophet and his companions languished under inhumane conditions. They were confined to the jail's dungeon—a dark, cold, and unsanitary cellar—and given food so bad that they could not eat until driven to it by hunger. The Prophet described his condition and that of the Saints as “a trial of our faith equal to that of Abraham.”<sup>10</sup>



*Liberty Jail, where the Prophet Joseph Smith was imprisoned during the winter of 1838–39.*

While the Prophet was imprisoned, thousands of Latter-day Saints, including the Prophet's own family, were forced from their Missouri homes during the winter and spring of 1838–39. On March 7, 1839, Emma wrote to Joseph from Quincy, Illinois: "No one but God knows the reflections of my mind and the feelings of my heart when I left our house and home and almost all of everything that we possessed excepting our little children, and took my journey out of the state of Missouri, leaving you shut up in that lonesome prison."<sup>11</sup> Under the direction of Brigham Young and other Church leaders, the Saints were led eastward to Illinois.

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## The Nauvoo Years

### *Beloved Leader of His People*

In April 1839, the Prophet and his companions were transferred on a change of venue from Liberty Jail to Gallatin, Missouri. While the prisoners were being transferred yet again, from Gallatin to Columbia, Missouri, the guards allowed them to escape their unjust confinement. They made their way to Quincy, Illinois, where the main body of the Church had assembled after fleeing from Missouri. Soon, under the Prophet's direction, most of the Saints began to settle 50 miles north at Commerce, Illinois, a village on a bend of the Mississippi River. Joseph renamed the city Nauvoo, and in the following years members and new converts flocked to Nauvoo from the United States, Canada, and Great Britain, making it one of the most populated areas in Illinois.

Joseph and Emma settled near the river in a small log home, which served as the Prophet's office in the early days of Nauvoo. He farmed for a living and later ran a general store. But because his Church and civic duties demanded much of his time, the Prophet often found it difficult to provide for the temporal needs of his family. In October 1841 his personal possessions were listed as "old Charley (a horse) given him in Kirtland, two pet deer, two old turkeys and four young ones, the old cow given him by a brother in Missouri, his old Major (a dog), . . . and a little household furniture."<sup>12</sup>



*The Mansion House in Nauvoo. The Prophet Joseph Smith and his family moved into this home in August 1843.*

In late August 1843 the Prophet and his family moved across the street to a newly constructed two-story home called the Mansion House. Joseph and Emma now had four living children. They had buried six beloved children over the years, and one more child would be born after Joseph's death. The eleven children in the family of Joseph and Emma Smith were: Alvin, born in 1828, who died shortly after birth; twins Thadeus and Louisa, born in 1831, who died shortly after birth; adopted twins Joseph and Julia, born to John and Julia Murdock in 1831 and taken in by Joseph and Emma after Sister Murdock died in childbirth (11-month-old Joseph died in 1832)<sup>13</sup>; Joseph III, born in 1832; Frederick, born in 1836; Alexander, born in 1838; Don Carlos, born in 1840, who died at the age of 14 months; a son born in 1842, who died the same day he was born; and David, born in 1844, almost five months after his father was martyred.

Throughout his ministry, the Prophet loved to be among the Saints. Of the city of Nauvoo and its inhabitants he said, "This is the loveliest place and the best people under the heavens."<sup>14</sup> In return, the Saints loved him and felt that he was their friend, often

calling him “Brother Joseph.” One convert observed, “There was a personal magnetism about him which drew all people who became acquainted with him to him.”<sup>15</sup> “He does not pretend to be a man without failings and follies,” one Nauvoo resident wrote. “He is a man that you could not help liking; . . . neither is he puffed up with his greatness as many suppose, but on the contrary is familiar with any decent man.”<sup>16</sup> William Clayton, an English convert, wrote home from Nauvoo about the Prophet, saying, “Truly I wish I was such a man.”<sup>17</sup>

The Prophet delivered many discourses in Nauvoo, and Church members loved to hear him, for he taught the revealed truths of the gospel with power. Angus M. Cannon recalled: “I never heard him speak when it did not electrify my whole being and make my whole soul glorify the Lord.”<sup>18</sup> Brigham Young declared: “I never did let an opportunity pass of getting with the Prophet Joseph and of hearing him speak in public or in private, so that I might draw understanding from the fountain from which he spoke, that I might have it and bring it forth when it was needed. . . . Such moments were more precious to me than all the wealth of the world.”<sup>19</sup>

Joseph Smith’s leadership extended beyond his religious responsibilities. In Nauvoo, the Prophet was involved in civil, legal, business, educational, and military service. He wanted the city of Nauvoo to offer all the advantages and opportunities of cultural and civic progress to its citizens. In January 1844, in large measure because he was disappointed that state and federal officials failed to provide redress for the rights and property taken from the Saints in Missouri, Joseph Smith announced his candidacy for the presidency of the United States of America. Although most observers recognized that he had little chance of being elected, his candidacy drew public attention to the widespread violation of the constitutionally guaranteed rights of the Saints. All people, the Prophet once declared, “have equal rights to partake of the fruits of the great tree of our national liberty.”<sup>20</sup>

#### *Holiness to the Lord: Building a Temple to God in Nauvoo*

When the Saints had been forced to leave Kirtland, they had left behind the temple they had worked so hard to build. But



*The Nauvoo Temple in the mid-1840s. The temple was burned in 1848 after the Saints were forced to leave Nauvoo, and some of the walls were later destroyed by a tornado, leaving the remaining walls so weakened that they had to be razed.*

they would once again have a holy temple in their midst, for the Lord commanded them to begin building a temple in Nauvoo. The work began in the fall of 1840, with the cornerstones being laid on April 6, 1841, in a ceremony presided over by the Prophet. The construction of the Nauvoo Temple was one of the most significant building projects in what was then western America. Building the temple required the Saints to make tremendous sacrifices, for with steady immigration into the developing city, Church members in general were poor.

The Prophet began teaching the doctrine of baptism for the dead as early as August 15, 1840. Since the temple was in the early stages of construction, the Saints initially performed baptisms for the dead in local rivers and streams. In January 1841, the Lord revealed that this practice could continue only until baptisms could be performed in the temple (see D&C 124:29–31). During the summer and fall of 1841, the Saints built a temporary wooden baptismal font in the newly excavated basement of the temple. Baptisms for the dead were first performed in this font on November 21, 1841.

In 1841 the first sealings of couples were performed, and in 1843 the Prophet dictated the revelation that describes the eternal nature of the marriage covenant (see D&C 132). The doctrines in this revelation had been known by the Prophet since 1831.<sup>21</sup> As commanded by God, he also taught the doctrine of plural marriage.

Because the temple would not be completed for some time, Joseph Smith chose to go forward with the temple endowment outside its sacred walls. On May 4, 1842, in the upper room of his Red Brick Store in Nauvoo, the Prophet administered the first endowments to a small group of brethren, including Brigham Young. The Prophet did not live to see the Nauvoo Temple completed. However, in 1845 and 1846, thousands of Saints received the temple endowment from Brigham Young and others who had received these blessings from the Prophet.

### *Joseph Smith's Ministry Draws to a Close*

While the Saints initially enjoyed relative peace in Nauvoo, clouds of persecution increasingly billowed around the Prophet, and he sensed that his earthly mission was drawing to its close. At a memorable meeting in March 1844, the Prophet charged the Twelve to govern the Church after his death, explaining that they now had all the keys and authority necessary to do so. Wilford Woodruff, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve at that time, later declared: "I bear my testimony that in the early spring of 1844, in Nauvoo, the Prophet Joseph Smith called the Apostles together and he delivered unto them the ordinances of the church and kingdom of God. And all the keys and powers that

God had bestowed upon him, he sealed upon our heads, and he told us we must round up our shoulders and bear off this kingdom, or we would be damned. . . . His face was as clear as amber, and he was covered with a power that I had never seen in any man in the flesh before.”<sup>22</sup> After the Prophet’s death, responsibility for the Church and kingdom of God upon the earth would rest with the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

In June 1844 a charge of riot was brought against the Prophet. Though he was acquitted of this charge in Nauvoo, the governor



*Carthage Jail, where the Prophet Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum were martyred on June 27, 1844.*

of Illinois, Thomas Ford, insisted that Joseph submit to trial for the same charge in Carthage, Illinois, the seat of Hancock County. When the Prophet and his brother Hyrum arrived in Carthage, they were freed on bail for the original charge but were then charged with treason against the state of Illinois and incarcerated in the local jail.

During the hot and sultry afternoon of June 27, 1844, a mob with blackened faces stormed the jail and murdered Joseph and Hyrum Smith. About three hours later, Willard Richards and John Taylor, who had been in the jail with the martyrs, sent a melancholy message to Nauvoo: “Carthage Jail, 8:05 o’clock, p.m., June 27th, 1844. Joseph and Hyrum are dead. . . . The job was done in an instant.”<sup>23</sup> At the age of 38, the Prophet Joseph Smith had sealed his testimony with his blood. His work in mortality completed, the Church and kingdom of God set in place for the last time on earth, Joseph Smith fell to the bullets of assassins. Of the Prophet Joseph Smith, the Lord Himself testified: “I did call upon [Joseph Smith] by mine angels, my ministering servants, and by mine own voice out of the heavens, to bring forth my work; which foundation he did lay, and was faithful; and I took him to myself. Many have marveled because of his death; but it was needful that he should seal his testimony with his blood, that he might be honored and the wicked might be condemned” (D&C 136:37–39).

Joseph Smith, the great prophet, seer, and revelator of the latter days, was a valiant and obedient servant of the Most High. President Brigham Young attested: “I do not think that a man lives on the earth that knew him any better than I did; and I am bold to say that, Jesus Christ excepted, no better man ever lived or does live upon this earth. I am his witness.”<sup>24</sup>

## Notes

1. Wilford Woodruff, *Deseret News: Semi-Weekly*, Nov. 25, 1873, p. 1.
2. Because only nine of the eleven children of Joseph Smith Sr. and Lucy Mack Smith lived past infancy, family members generally referred to their family as consisting of nine children. Also, the name of Joseph’s sister Katharine was spelled several ways during her lifetime, including Catherine.
3. Joseph Smith, History 1832, p. 1; Letter Book 1, 1829–35, Joseph Smith, Collection, Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

4. Joseph Smith, History 1832, p. 1; Letter Book 1, 1829–35, Joseph Smith, Collection, Church Archives.
5. *History of the Church*, 4:536; from a letter from Joseph Smith written at the request of John Wentworth and George Barstow, Nauvoo, Illinois, published in *Times and Seasons*, Mar. 1, 1842, p. 707.
6. *History of the Church*, 4:536–37; from a letter from Joseph Smith written at the request of John Wentworth and George Barstow, Nauvoo, Illinois, published in *Times and Seasons*, Mar. 1, 1842, p. 707.
7. The original First Presidency was composed of Joseph Smith as President and Sidney Rigdon and Jesse Gause as counselors. Some months after Jesse Gause became a member of the First Presidency, he left the Church. On March 18, 1833, Frederick G. Williams was set apart as a counselor in the First Presidency.
8. *History of the Church*, 6:364; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on May 12, 1844, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Thomas Bullock.
9. Postscript written by Joseph Smith on a letter from Oliver Cowdrey to Church leaders in Jackson County, Missouri, Aug. 10, 1833, Kirtland, Ohio, Church Archives.
10. *History of the Church*, 3:294; from a letter from Joseph Smith and others to Edward Partridge and the Church, Mar. 20, 1839, Liberty Jail, Liberty, Missouri.
11. Letter from Emma Smith to Joseph Smith, Mar. 7, 1839, Quincy, Illinois; in Letter Book 2, 1837–43, p. 37, Joseph Smith, Collection, Church Archives.
12. *History of the Church*, 4:437–38; punctuation modernized; from a letter from the Twelve Apostles to the “Brethren Scattered Abroad on the Continent of America,” Oct. 12, 1841, Nauvoo, Illinois, published in *Times and Seasons*, Oct. 15, 1841, p. 569.
13. In May 1831, shortly after the deaths of their own newborn twins, Joseph and Emma Smith adopted the newborn twins of Church members John and Julia Murdock. The Murdock twins were named Joseph and Julia. Sister Murdock had died in childbirth, and Brother Murdock, who now had five motherless children, asked the Smiths to care for the twins.
14. *History of the Church*, 6:554; statement made by Joseph Smith on June 24, 1844, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Dan Jones.
15. Mary Isabella Horne, “Testimony of Sister M. Isabella Horne,” *Woman’s Exponent*, June 1910, p. 6.
16. Letter from George W. Taggart to his brothers in New Hampshire, Sept. 10, 1843, Nauvoo, Illinois; in Albert Taggart, Correspondence, 1842–48 and 1860, Church Archives.
17. Letter from William Clayton to Church members in Manchester, England, Dec. 10, 1840, Nauvoo, Illinois, Church Archives.
18. Angus M. Cannon, in “Joseph, the Prophet,” *Salt Lake Herald Church and Farm Supplement*, Jan. 12, 1895, p. 212.
19. Brigham Young, *Deseret News: Semi-Weekly*, Sept. 15, 1868, p. 2.
20. *History of the Church*, 3:304; from a letter from Joseph Smith and others to Edward Partridge and the Church, Mar. 20, 1839, Liberty Jail, Liberty, Missouri.
21. See Doctrine and Covenants 132, section heading.
22. Wilford Woodruff, statement made on Mar. 12, 1897, in Salt Lake City, Utah; in Journal History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Mar. 12, 1897, p. 2.
23. *History of the Church*, 6:621–22; from a directive from Willard Richards and John Taylor, June 27, 1844, Carthage, Illinois.
24. Brigham Young, *Deseret News*, Aug. 27, 1862, p. 65.