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The Prophet is Tarred and Feathered/"Feathers Flying"

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The Prophet Is Tared and Feathered



Following the organization of the Church, persecution in New York increased. In December 1830, the Lord directed the members of the Church to assemble in Ohio. Early in 1831 Joseph and Emma Smith arrived in the Kirtland area. In September they and their adopted Murdock twins were invited to move into the John Johnson home. Here Joseph and Sidney Rigdon continued work on the translation of the Bible. They received the extraordinary vision recorded as Section 76 of the Doctrine and Covenants in February 1832. Sections 77 to 81 were given the following month. As the Lord continued to restore the truths of the gospel, evil men, hoping to keep God's work from moving forward, made plans to tar and feather the Prophet.

On the night of 24 March 1832 a mob broke into the room where Joseph was sleeping next to his infant son, Joseph Murdock, who was ill with the measles. They dragged the Prophet from the house and tried to pour acid into his mouth. In the struggle one of Joseph's teeth was chipped which caused him to speak with a slight lisp thereafter. The spilled acid killed the grass. Stripping Joseph, they tarred and feathered his naked body and then scattered, leaving him alone and unconscious.²² When Joseph returned to the house hours later, Emma mistook the tar for blood and fainted.²³ The assault left scars on Joseph's face which he covered by combing his hair forward. Exposed to the cold night air, eleven-month-old Joseph Murdock became the first martyr of the Restoration when he died a few days later.

It is interesting that feathers, historically, have had special symbolic significance. Feathers have been used as a sign of royalty, truth, angelic power, and the presence of the Holy Ghost. Although Joseph's experience was painful and degrading, it seems that the malefactors, much like those who placed a crown of plaited thorns upon the Savior's head, unwittingly and symbolically alluded to his divine calling.

Feathers Flying

In odious hours
of this violated night a mob,
cursing, thirsting for violence,
bursts through the door.
Evil burning in their eyes,
they drag the father
from his child's side,
strangle cries for mercy.

Poison spilling from
venomous vial
sears March grass.
Blood-dark tar, dredged
from the pit of death,
heated in the caldron of hate,
besmeared exposed skin.
Disdainful perpetrators
shake out feathers,
leave the man as dead,
cloaked in black and white
in chill of night.

God's word will henceforth
hiss from the Prophet's mouth.
Hair combed forward
will half conceal scars,

but what can cover
unrepented deeds of devilry?
Brute cruelty remains below,
while the one it seeks
to silence will soar aloft
on wings of truth
in feathered flight.

... they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; ... (Isaiah 40:31).