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William W. Phelps Is Welcomed Back into the Church/ "Brother William"

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William W. Phelps Is Welcomed Back into the Church

In 1831, after reading the Book of Mormon and talking with Sidney Rigdon, a man by the name of William W. Phelps went to Kirtland where he met Joseph, Jr. He joined the Church, established the *Evening and Morning Star*, served as one of the Prophet's scribes, and helped prepare the Church's first hymnal. Sadly, Brother Phelps was among those who, in the dark days of persecution, left the Church. In 1838, as the Saints were being driven from Far West, he turned against the Prophet. He was excommunicated in 1839, but in a letter dated 29 June 1840, he confessed to Joseph that he had not walked according to his holy anointing and asked forgiveness. "I have seen the folly of my way, and I tremble at the gulf I have passed I want to be saved if my friends will help me"⁴⁶

Orson Hyde and John E. Page wrote to Joseph and his counselors in Brother Phelps' behalf saying, "former experience teaches [us] that you are workmen in the art of saving souls; therefore with greater confidence do we recommend [Brother Phelps] to your clemency and favorable consideration"⁴⁷

Joseph's reply, written 22 July 1840, illustrates his Christlike love and compassion. Although he and others had suffered much because of William's false testimony, the Prophet freely forgave his repentant brother and magnanimously welcomed him back into the fold of God.

Our hearts were melted into tenderness and
compassion when we ascertained your resolves
I can assure you I feel a disposition to act on your

case in a manner that will meet the approbation of Jehovah, (whose servant I am), and agreeable to the principles of truth and righteousness which have been revealed; ... [T]he cup of gall, already full enough for mortals to drink, was indeed filled to overflowing when you turned against us— ... However, the cup has been drunk, the will of our Father has been done, and we are yet alive, ... [W]e say it is your privilege to be delivered from the powers of the adversary, be brought into the liberty of God's dear children, and again take your stand among the saints of the Most High, and by diligence, humility, and love unfeigned, commend yourself to our God, and your God, and to the church of Jesus Christ I shall be happy once again to give you the right hand of fellowship, and rejoice over the returning prodigal.—

“Come on, dear brother, since the war is past,
For friends at first, are friends again at last.”⁴⁸

William W. Phelps went west with the Saints and became one of the first regents of the University of Deseret and a representative in the Utah legislature. He was the author of many of the most beloved hymns of the Latter-day Saints. Fifteen songs penned by him appear in the current hymn book. Thirteen of these hymns were included in the first book of hymns compiled by Emma Smith. Among them were *The Spirit of God*, *Now Let Us Rejoice*, *Redeemer of Israel*, *Now We'll Sing with One Accord*, *Come All Ye Saints of Zion*, *Gently Raise the Sacred Strain*, and *O God, the Eternal Father*. Following the martyrdom, Brother Phelps wrote his stirring tribute to Joseph the Prophet, *Praise to the Man*.

Brother William

who sat in councils sweet and
knew the Spirit's burning fire,
but briefly strayed —

who saw visions and blessings,
yet betrayed the truth
and brewed a temporary cup
of tribulation —

who, understanding common
glories of Adam-ondi-Ahman,
still wandered as a stranger
in the wilderness of sin —

cry in the desert no more.

Repent. Return to Zion.
Stand again among the Saints.
In this redeeming hour
feel the Savior's grace.

May He generously restore
the loving light of His face,
lift you up once more
and faithful years increase.

Rejoice with us.
With one accord, praise
the goodness of our Lord.

*Come on, dear brother ...
the war is past,
For friends at first,
are friends again at last!*

*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins,
and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (I John 1:9).*