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# Newel K. Whitney

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(1795–1850)

D&C 63:42–46; 64:26; 72:8; 84:112, 114; 93:50; 96:2; 104:39–42; 117:1, 4, 11

Newel was a merchant in Plattsburg, New York, and Green Bay, Michigan, before settling in Ohio on the shores of Lake Erie. He found employment as a clerk and bookkeeper in the Sidney Gilbert store in Kirtland, eventually becoming a partner with Gilbert in the N. K. Whitney & Company store. As to Newel’s business skills, his wife, Elizabeth, said, “We prospered in all our efforts to accumulate wealth, so much so, that among our friends it came to be remarked that nothing of Whitney’s ever got lost on the lake, and no product of his exportation was ever low in the market; always ready sales and fair prices.”<sup>1</sup>

About midnight one evening in Kirtland, as Newel and Elizabeth were praying to know how to receive the Holy Ghost, Elizabeth recalled,

The Spirit rested upon us and a cloud overshadowed the house. It was as though we were out of doors. The house passed away from our vision. . . . A solemn awe pervaded us. We saw the cloud and felt the

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<sup>1</sup> Edward W. Tullidge, *The Women of Mormondom* (NY: Tullidge and Crandall, 1877), 34.

Spirit of the Lord. Then we heard a voice out of the cloud saying,  
“Prepare to receive the word of the Lord for it is coming.”<sup>2</sup>

The word of the Lord was brought to the Whitneys by missionaries called to take the message of the Restoration to the borders of the Lamanites. In November 1830 Newel and Elizabeth were baptized.

On or about February 1, 1831, the Prophet Joseph Smith arrived at the N. K. Whitney & Company store and exclaimed upon seeing Newel, “Newel K. Whitney! Thou art the man!” Joseph then extended his hand as if they were old acquaintances. “You have the advantage of me,” Newel replied, “I could not call you by name, as you have me.” Joseph said, “I am Joseph Smith, the Prophet. You’ve prayed me here; now what do you want of me?” As Elizabeth recalled this scene, she wrote, “I remarked to my husband that this was the fulfillment of the vision we had seen of a cloud, as of glory, resting upon our house.”<sup>3</sup>

In the winter of 1831 the Prophet Joseph and his wife Emma lived in the Whitney home. During that winter, Newel was told by Joseph that he would soon be called to the office of a bishop: “Staggering under the weight of the responsibility that was about to be placed upon him,” Newel said to Joseph, “Brother Joseph, I can’t see a Bishop in myself.” The Prophet answered, “Go and ask the Lord about it.” Newel asked the Lord and heard a voice from heaven say, “Thy strength is in me.”<sup>4</sup>

On October 7, 1835, the Prophet Joseph received a revelation advising Newel to “deal with a liberal hand to the poor and the needy, the sick and afflicted, the widow and the fatherless.”<sup>5</sup> Perhaps in partial fulfillment of that revelation, Newel and Elizabeth hosted a three-day feast in January 1836 for the poor in the Kirtland vicinity. Joseph attended the feast and wrote, “This feast was after the order of the Son of God—the lame, the halt, and the blind were invited, according to the instructions of the Savior. We received a bountiful refreshment, furnished by the liberality of the Bishop. The company was large.”<sup>6</sup>

The Prophet Joseph also wrote in gratitude of his friend Newel K. Whitney:

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<sup>2</sup> Andrew Jenson, *LDS Biographical Encyclopedia* 4 vols. (Salt Lake City: Andrew Jenson History Company, 1901), 1:223.

<sup>3</sup> Jenson, *LDS Biographical Encyclopedia*, 1:224

<sup>4</sup> Roy W. Doxey, *Latter-day Prophets and the Doctrine and Covenants* 4 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978), 2:434.

<sup>5</sup> History, 1838–1856, volume B-1 [1 September 1834–2 November 1838]. Joseph Smith Papers.

<sup>6</sup> History, 1838–1856. Joseph Smith Papers.

Thou art a faithful friend in whom the afflicted sons of men can confide, with the most perfect safety. Let the blessings of the Eternal also be crowned upon his head. How warm that heart! how anxious that soul! for the welfare of one who has been cast out, and hated of almost all men. Brother Whitney, thou knowest not how strong those ties are that bind my soul and heart to thee.<sup>7</sup>

After the martyrdom of Joseph Smith, Newel was called to be the Presiding Bishop of the Church. He faithfully fulfilled the assignment. Newel died in September 1850. His obituary read, "Thus, in full strength, and mature years, has one of the oldest and most exemplary and useful members of the Church fallen suddenly, leaving a large family to mourn the loss of an affectionate husband, and a kind and generous father."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Reflections and Blessings, 16 and 23 August 1842, 164. Joseph Smith Papers.

<sup>8</sup> "Obituary of Newel K. Whitney," *Deseret News*, September 23, 1850.