
Missionaries to the Lamanites

D&C 32

In October 1830 the Lord told the Prophet Joseph Smith that he was aware of the “great interest and desires . . . [of] the elders respecting the Lamanites” and their desire to know “whether elders should be sent at that time to the Indian tribes in the West” (D&C 32: Introduction). The Lord named Oliver Cowdery, Peter Whitmer Jr., Ziba Peterson, and Parley P. Pratt to take the message of the Restoration to the borders of the Lamanites—the western line between the United States and the Indian Territory.

Lucy Mack Smith recalled that “as soon as this revelation was received, Emma Smith, and several other sisters, began to make arrangements to furnish those who were set apart for this mission, with the necessary clothing.”¹ As the missionaries prepared to depart from Fayette, New York, they bound themselves in an oath to heed the advice of Oliver Cowdery and preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the Indians.

On October 18, 1830, the four missionaries began a fifteen-hundred-mile journey to the west. They traveled to Buffalo, New York, where they met with the Cattaraugus Indians. “We were kindly received, and much interest was manifested by them on hearing this news,” Pratt penned. They continued their journey to Mentor, Ohio, where they met with Sidney Rigdon, who said, “I will read your book, and see what claims it has upon my faith.”² After serious consideration, Sidney entered baptismal waters. He was not alone. Pratt wrote,

¹ Lucy Mack Smith, *History*, 1845, 189. Joseph Smith Papers.

² Parley P. Pratt, ed., *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt, Classics in Mormon Literature Series* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 35.

The news [we] brought about the Book of Mormon caused such excitement in Ohio that people thronged us night and day, insomuch that we had no time for rest and retirement. Meetings were convened in different neighborhoods, and multitudes came together soliciting our attendance; while thousands flocked about us daily; some to be taught, some for curiosity, some to obey the gospel, and some to dispute or resist it.³

The missionaries bid an affectionate farewell to about 127 converts in Ohio and continued their journey to the borders of the Lamanites in company with Frederick G. Williams. As they passed through small settlements along their route, “some wished to learn and obey the fulness of the gospel. Others were filled with envy, rage and lying.”⁴ Stopping at Sandusky, Ohio, the missionaries met with the Wyandot Indians. Pratt wrote, “They rejoiced in the tidings, bid us God speed, and desired us to write to them in relation to our success among tribes further west.”⁵

Leaving Sandusky, the missionaries faced “bitter cold, a blinding, swirling blur of snow,” but they kept moving west until arriving in January 1831 in Independence, Missouri. They waited in this outpost settlement for the weather to change. Before long, however, Oliver Cowdery, Parley P. Pratt, and Frederick G. Williams were able to cross over the US border to meet with the Delaware Indians. Oliver Cowdery preached to about forty tribal leaders, saying, “Thousands of moons ago, when the red men’s forefathers dwelt in peace and possessed this whole land, the Great Spirit talked with them, and revealed His law and His will, and much knowledge to their wise men and prophets.”⁶

Although the preaching of the missionaries to the Lamanites was well received by the Delaware Indians, when US federal Indian agents discovered the missionaries did not have a permit to preach in the Indian Territory, the missionaries were forced to abandon their efforts. Parley P. Pratt saw the issue as more than failure to obtain a permit. He believed their success with the Indians “stirred up the jealousy and envy of the Indian agents and sectarian missionaries to that degree that we were soon ordered out of the Indian country as disturbers of the peace; and even threatened with the military in case of non-compliance.”⁷

³ Parley P. Pratt, *Autobiography of Parley Parker Pratt* 5th ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1961), 48.

⁴ Pratt, *Autobiography of Parley Parker Pratt*, 51.

⁵ Pratt, *Autobiography of Parley Parker Pratt*, 54.

⁶ Pratt, *Autobiography of Parley Parker Pratt*, 58.

⁷ Pratt, *Autobiography of Parley Parker Pratt*, 60.