
The Route to Kirtland

D&C 60:5–6

Why was the route the elders took to return to Kirtland from Missouri significant enough to warrant a revelation from God? The answer is given in the introduction to Doctrine and Covenants 60: “The elders who had been appointed to return to the East desire to know how they should proceed, and by what route and manner they should travel.” In response to the elders’ desire, the Lord said, “It mattereth not unto me” (D&C 60:5). However, the Lord did not want the elders to delay their travels. He wanted them to go “speedily to the place which is called St. Louis” (v. 5).

From St. Louis, a small contingency made up of the Prophet Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, Oliver Cowdery, and a few others journeyed to Cincinnati, preaching along the way. When other elders reached St. Louis, they were to divide themselves into companionships and journey “two by two, and preach the word, not in haste” (D&C 60:8). This suggests that the Lord was aware of individuals and families who were waiting to hear the good news of the Restoration.

A day after receiving this revelation, Joseph Smith and his traveling party left Independence. The first day of their travels, the party paddled canoes down the Missouri River to Fort Osage. The second day, they journeyed farther downriver. It was not until the third day that turbulent waters forced the party to stop and camp at McIlwaine’s Bend. There, “in open vision by daylight,” one member of their party, William W. Phelps, “saw the destroyer in his most horrible power, ride upon the face of the waters; others heard the noise, but saw not the vision.”¹

The next morning, August 12, 1831, the Prophet Joseph told his traveling companions that he had received a revelation about the vision of William W. Phelps. Through revelation,

¹ History, 1838–1856, volume A-1 [23 December 1805–30 August 1834], 142. Joseph Smith Papers.

Joseph was informed that Satan has a degree of power over the natural elements; however, faithful Saints have the assurance of the Lord's power and protection (see D&C 61).

While some of the party continued by canoe down the Missouri River, Joseph Smith, Martin Harris, and a few others abandoned the canoes, preferring to journey overland to St. Louis. In obedience to the directive, in the hub city of St. Louis, Joseph Smith and a few in his party hired a stagecoach and driver to transport them to Cincinnati and from there to Kirtland. Eighteen days after leaving Independence, the Prophet Joseph and his associates arrived in Kirtland.² The other travelers were slower to arrive in the City of the Saints, as they went "two by two" and preached along their return route.

As weary travelers entered Kirtland, many spoke of New Jerusalem in Independence, Missouri, as Zion. Others were retrospective and quiet. After all, the Missouri experience had been profound. Some had been side by side with Joseph Smith for nearly nine weeks.

² Smith, *History of the Church*, 1:203–207.