



Ezra T. Benson

1811–1869

D&C 136:12

At age sixteen, Ezra was working as a hotel assistant in the town center of Uxbridge, Massachusetts. He left his employ to assist his grandmother with her farm. When his grandmother died, he sold the farm and purchased the hotel in Uxbridge. He prospered in the hotel business, but when an opportunity came to run a cotton factory, he sold the hotel. As time went on, he was lured by reports of land near the Mississippi River.

In 1838 Ezra and his family left Massachusetts and settled in Quincy, Illinois. In that community on the banks of the Mississippi, Ezra made the acquaintance of Latter-day Saints who had escaped from a government-sanctioned extermination order in Missouri. His first reaction to hearing the message of the Restoration was, “I thought the Mormons were a very peculiar people.”¹ His opinion changed when listening to a Dr. Nelson demean the Prophet Joseph Smith and the doctrines of Mormonism. Ezra wrote, “Dr.

¹ “Ezra Taft Benson Autobiography,” *Instructor* 8 (February 1945), 55.

Nelson had a fit, and had it not been for his friends, would have fallen on the platform.”² At another gathering, Ezra listened to the preaching of John E. Page. “[Never] heard the like before,” he wrote. When a collection was taken to assist Elder Page on his mission, “I threw in a half-dollar, being all I had. This was the first time I had ever helped any missionary.”³

On July 19, 1840, in front of “some three hundred curious onlookers,” Ezra and his wife were baptized in the Mississippi River by Daniel Stanton. Following their baptisms, someone in the crowd shouted, “The Mormons have got them!”⁴ Ezra served as second counselor in the Quincy stake presidency before moving his family upriver to Nauvoo.

Most of the years his family resided in Nauvoo, Ezra served missions in the eastern states. As a missionary, he often felt disheartened when his “most intimate acquaintances would not come to hear” him preach.⁵ By 1845 he had returned to Nauvoo and was helping his family prepare for the Latter-day Saint exodus to the West. On February 9, 1846, Ezra and his family crossed the frozen Mississippi to begin their trek to the Rocky Mountains.

At the Sugar Creek encampment, Ezra told Brigham Young that his oxen were unable to pull his heavy-laden wagon. Brigham relieved Ezra of six hundred pounds of wheat and other produce, leaving him fifty pounds of flour and a half bushel of meal. “After that, when others complained about their wagons sinking in mud to their axles, [Ezra] would respond, ‘Go to Brother Brigham and he will lighten your load.’”⁶

When he and his family were in the Latter-day Saint encampment of Mount Pisgah, Iowa, Ezra received word from Brigham Young, “informing him of his appointment to the Quorum of the Twelve.”⁷ On July 16, 1846, at age thirty-five, Ezra was ordained an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ by Brigham Young. He remained true to his calling throughout his life. He served in the provisional government of the State of Deseret and several terms in the Utah Territorial House of Representatives. He presided over the British Mission in the 1850s. In 1860 Ezra led the effort to colonize Cache Valley.

On September 3, 1869, while caring for a lame horse after a long journey from Logan to Ogden, Ezra died at age fifty-eight. His sudden death was caused by “overwork and the

² Donald Benson Alder and Elsie L. Alder, *The Benson Family* (Salt Lake City: The Ezra T. Benson Genealogical Society, 1979), 18.

³ Sheri L. Dew, *Ezra Taft Benson: A Biography* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1987), 3.

⁴ Dew, *Ezra Taft Benson: A Biography*, 4.

⁵ Dew, *Ezra Taft Benson: A Biography*, 4.

⁶ Dew, *Ezra Taft Benson: A Biography*, 6.

⁷ Alder and Alder. *Benson Family*, p. 20.

burden of worry had weakened his heart.”⁸ Approximately four thousand mourners attended his funeral, including all members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

⁸ Alder and Alder. *Benson Family*, p. 26.