

Hard Questions in Church History

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Questions to Consider:

- Why did the Lord use the word “Lamanite” to refer to the Native Americans?
- Why did the missionaries assume their destination was Missouri?
- Why didn’t the Lord call them to Ohio?
- Why did the Lord require such a tremendous sacrifice?
- Why didn’t God temper the storms?
- Why are there changes to the Revelations?

Timeline 1830-1831

1830	
May 28	President Andrew Jackson and the US Congress passes the Indian Removal Act, beginning the “Trail of Tears” or forced relocation of Native Americans with the assistance of several state militias, including Missouri.
Aug 25	Joseph borrows money to pay the last \$86.00 due his father-in-law, Isaac Hale, to complete the \$200.00 total purchase price on his 13½ acre farm in Harmony, PA. Despite completing this transaction, Emma and Joseph move from Harmony to Fayette.
Sept 26-29	Second Church conference held at Peter Whitmer Sr.’s log home in Fayette where the Lord calls Oliver to teach the “Lamanites” and announces the upcoming general location for Zion (D&C 28:8-9)
Early Oct	Three missionary companions called to join Oliver’s mission to teach the Lamanites (D&C 30:5; 32:1-3)
Oct 17	These four Elders begin their journey to “the borders of the Lamanites” (Missouri)
Oct 29	Stop to preach in near Kirtland, Ohio; baptize 127 people, many of whom had belonged to a group of Disciples (also known as Campbellites)
Nov	Five missionaries continue on their journey to teach the “Lamanites.” In Ohio they teach the Wyandot Tribe before continuing southwest through Illinois and Missouri.
Dec	The Lord instructs Joseph and Emma to move the headquarters of the Church to Ohio (D&C 37:3)
1831	
Jan 2	Third Church Conference, held in Fayette, NY. Revelation directs Joseph and the Saints to Ohio (D&C 37:3)
Feb 1	Joseph Smith and Emma arrive in Kirtland (D&C 38:32).

Calling and Departure of Four Missionaries to the Lamanites

In September of 1830, the Lord called Oliver Cowdery to serve a mission to the “Lamanites” (D&C 28:8). Within a few weeks, in early October, three other missionaries were called to join Oliver: Peter Whitmer Jr., Parley Pratt, and Ziba Peterson (D&C 30:5; 32:1-3). They did not have much time to prepare. Just a few days later, on October 17, 1830, with help from people like Emma (who sewed extra clothing for the missionaries), the four men were able to leave for their arduous journey. It would be fifteen hundred miles to their destination through one of the harshest winters that century and would last from October 1830 to June 1831.

The Prophet Joseph and the four missionaries understood their call to “the Lamanites,” as a call to preach to the Native Americans. From their perspective a remnant of the Book of Mormon peoples

filled the land. We assume that over two thousand years of intermarriages between the descendants of Lehi, Ishmael, Mulek, and the Jaredite descendants probably ensured an amalgamation of some Israelite blood among some of the Native Americans. The Saints who shared this perspective placed the Native Americans in a position of honor. This endearing relationship caused strife with many local Missourians who saw the Native Americans as enemies.

The reference to “Lamanites” has little or nothing to do with specific genetic makeup of the four tribes the missionaries taught, nor the geographic location of the Book of Mormon. Rather they felt their call to the “Lamanites” was part of the general fulfillment of divine promises given to ancient prophets like Enos. Enos recorded that he “did cry unto God that he would preserve the records; and he covenanted with me that he would bring them forth unto the Lamanites in his own due time” (Enos 1:16; also see Moroni 1:4; 10:1 etc.). The missionaries understood that the Lamanites who passed on the “blood of Israel” should receive the message of the restoration first. They were filled with faith and hope that the Lord would lead them to those whom He had prepared. The four missionaries understood the location to be toward the western border of Missouri. Shortly before the missionaries’ call, on May 28, 1830 President Andrew Jackson and the US Congress signed the “Indian Removal Act.” It called for the relocation of all Native Americans in the country to the lands west of Missouri (Kansas and Oklahoma). As the government began implementation immediately, the missionaries assumed that their call was over a thousand miles away in the direction of Missouri (Kettley, “Mission to the Lamanites, 1830-1831,” *Mormon Throughfare*, 1-11).

The portion of the revelation known as D&C 28:9 initially recorded their mission call as follows: “I say unto you, it shall be among the Lamanites.” In the Joseph Smith Papers, *Manuscript Revelation Books, Vol. 1*, we can see that Sidney Rigdon rewrote in his own hand this phrase: “on the borders by the Lamanites” (D&C 28:9). The reason I mentioned this change is to help us appreciate the revelation and editing process. The Lord inspired Joseph sometimes with specific words—as we discussed in the Book of Mormon translation (i.e., Hilton, “On Verifying Wordprint Studies” *BYU Studies*, 30: 89-108). Other times, Joseph and his colleagues wrestled with different words in order to communicate their ideas in English (D&C 20; *Articles of Faith*, etc.). We believe the Lord’s words are sacred and not to be treated lightly—yet they are not infallible. Mistakes of hearing and recording happened regularly even in scripture. The JST studies show Joseph’s scribes recorded his inspired words (which we will discuss in the next session). Unlike some Protestants, Joseph felt inspired to change thousands of scriptural words to communicate more correctly and more applicably the Lord’s meanings to his listeners. This includes changes made to modern scripture, such as D&C 28:9. The goal was to express the correct meaning to a broad audience.

The missionaries traveled without purse or scrip (meaning money belt and knapsack or luggage), which insinuated no extra money, clothing, or supplies. Traveling in that manner was hard enough in developed communities, but it was even more daunting in the sparsely populated frontier. At that time, some Illinois counties claimed “less than four people per square mile” (Kettley, “Mission to the Lamanites, 1830-1831,” *Mormon Throughfare*, 1-11). Trying to find a homeowner willing to provide bed and board for a night or two was very difficult.

Another treacherous aspect of their trip was the “exceptionally severe” winter weather (Kettley, “Mission to the Lamanites, 1830-1831,” *Mormon Throughfare*, 1-11). Historians have found several reports of blizzards and record-breaking heavy snow fall across the Midwest during the winter of

1830-1831. The local *History of White County, Illinois*, explains: “It was definitely one of the hardest winters ever experienced here. Snow was deep, and a crust was formed upon its surface so strong a man could walk on it without breaking through” (referring to what?). The heavy snow did not hinder the Elders from carrying out their call to travel west across New York, Ohio, Illinois, south to Missouri, and then west again, crossing outside the nation into “Indian Territory.”

The missionaries’ journey began as they expected. Parley P. Pratt’s autobiography records that while still in New York, on the Cattaraugus Reservation, the missionaries met and taught Native Americans. They were friendly and the elders preached for “part of a day.” The tribesmen accepted two copies of the Book of Mormon before the missionaries moved westward (Pratt, *Autobiography*, 35).

The magnitude and dangers of this undertaking are hard for us to imagine to day. Less than a year from the time the Church was organized, why would God require such an extraordinary effort from these fledgling members? They may have set out on their journey with optimism and certain expectations, but what unfolded next and what came from this remarkable first missionary effort of the Church was very different from what they initially envisioned. As often happens when following God’s directions, the end result is not what was expected. In this situation, God’s plans for the journey were far more encompassing and significant than anyone expected.

Stopover Near Kirtland, Ohio

After the first three hundred miles, the missionaries arrived at the northeast corner of Ohio (also known as the “Connecticut Western Reserve” prior to the negotiations involved in Ohio’s statehood in 1803). Those missionaries unfamiliar with the area (namely, Oliver, Peter, and Ziba) may have looked forward to this stopover with Parley’s friends in Ohio as a place where they could find a roof over their heads and meal or two. But from God’s perspective, their layover carried great significance. The journey is also part of God’s plan (D&C 122:7).

One of the four missionaries, Parley P. Pratt (1807-1857), knew the area of northern Ohio well. In his late teens, his heart’s desire was to teach Jesus’s message to the Native Americans. He came to Ohio to live among them. Approximately thirty miles west of Cleveland, Parley built himself a wooden hut and spent a solitary winter studying his Bible. In the summer of 1827, he returned home to Canaan, New York, to marry his sweetheart, Thankful Halsey. She was a widow, ten years older than Parley, who loved him dearly. She agreed to move with him into the wilderness of Lorain County, Ohio, and share in his religious work of proselyting among the Native Americans. They had no idea what the Lord had in store for them. But it is by “small and simple things” that the Lord accomplishes His work (D&C 64:33).

In early 1829, the newlyweds attended a revival in the area where they listened to well known Sidney Rigdon (1793-1876) preach on the need for biblical Christianity. His message rang true with the Pratts. Sidney was affiliated with Barton Stone and Alexander Campbell, ministers who called themselves, “Reformed Baptists” at the time, and later, “Disciples.” The Pratts joined Sidney’s Ohio congregation for a time and felt a close bond with him. Parley felt called to share the ministry and the couple left so Parley could serve as an itinerant preacher. About a year later, in October 1830, Parley returned again to share more truth as a missionary for the Church of Jesus Christ with his former Campbellite friends.

Who were the Campbellites? Thomas and Alexander Campbell (1788-1866)

In 1807, at the peak of sectarian and political violence in Ireland, Thomas Campbell left his homeland to prepare a place for his family in America. Thomas hoped to find a place where he could share the faith that burned in his heart. The whole family were devout biblical Christians and hoped to return to the “Ancient Order of Things.” Over time this led the Campbells to separate with existing faith traditions and established their own congregations in several states (Casey, *The Stone-Campbell Movement*, 355). The father and son team shared an anti-creed, anti-sectarian, pro-unity, and a Bible-only stance. Their main objective was to join “the true followers of Christ into one communion upon the Bible” (Richardson, *Memoirs*, 2.373).

In his youth, Alexander so passionately dove into his studies that by the age of seventeen he was competent enough to teach Greek, Latin, and the teachings of John Locke at a local academy (Boring, *Disciples*, 55-56). At the University of Glasgow, Scotland, Alexander furthered his studies in French, Latin, and advanced New Testament Greek. Alexander gleaned a love of the empirical approach to reality from Locke as well as an inherent opposition to superstition, enthusiastic religions, and fanaticism (Wilson, *Dissertation title of dissertation?*, 2010).

Different Opinions Among the Ohio Campbellite Congregations

A few years after Campbell formed an Ohio congregation, divisions splintered the group. The Pratts left and other dissenters expressed their dissatisfaction with Campbell’s limitations on the Spirit. One of them, Elizabeth Ann Whitney (1800-1882), recorded:

My husband, Newel K. Whitney, and myself were Campbellites. We had been baptized for the remission of our sins, And believed in the laying on of hands and the gifts of the spirit. But there was no one with Authority to confer the Holy Ghost upon us” (Tullidge, *The Women of Mormondom*, 41).

Another with similar feelings was John Murdock (1792-1871). He put it this way:

“Finding their principal leader, Alex Campbell, with many others, denying the gift and power of the Holy Ghost, I began to think of looking me a new home” (Casey, *Stone-Campbell*, 358).

Over the next few years more and more Ohio Campbellites became converted to the restored Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. These more cautious families took time to study and observe the new church before jumping ship. They included Eliza R. Snow and her family who left the Campbellites in 1835. Joseph Smith himself baptized Eliza in Kirtland.

One of Campbell’s greatest losses in his Ohio congregation was the 38-year-old Sidney Rigdon (1793-1876). Sidney was a charismatic preacher and diligent minister. In the mid-1820s, Alexander Campbell worked closely with Sidney and delegated much of the northeast Ohio ministry to Sidney, while Campbell established congregations in Bethany, Virginia, and elsewhere. While Campbell was a calm writer, “Sidney was ecstatically enthusiastic or totally depressed” (McKiernan, *Sidney Rigdon*, 26). Campbell relied on Sidney to keep the fire of their (whose?) faith burning in Ohio. But Sidney wanted more: he wanted to add every known New Testament teaching to Alexander Campbell’s foundation. Campbell was furious and the two separated in 1828-1829. Sidney was especially interested in the concept of the millennium. To that end, he was keen on forming a group willing to experiment with a communal lifestyle as described in Acts 2:44. In the fall of 1830, after Sidney joined The Church of

Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as restored through the Prophet Joseph Smith, “Campbell became an aggressive persecutor of Rigdon and his religious beliefs” (*ibid.*, 28).

Isaac Morley’s Farm—“The Family” 1829

A little over a year before the missionaries arrived, Sidney Rigdon led his followers who were at odds with the Campbellite disciples over issues of the workings of the Spirit and lifestyle. They wanted to live as the New Testament describes, with “all things in common” (Acts 2:44). They called their communal experiment “The Family.” They all moved into Isaac Morley’s farm and built a lovely home for Sidney. About eleven other homes were also built on Morley’s farm. Those involved claimed, “We truly began to feel as if the millennium was close at hand” (Anderson, *Joseph Smith’s Kirtland: Eyewitness*, 130).

Looking back through history, a few problems were apparent with the “Family” experiment. One example is the oft-repeated “watch story” from the diary of Levi Hancock:

Hermon [Heman] Bassett [Basset] came to me and took my watch out of my pocket and walked off as though it was his. I thought he would bring it back soon but was disappointed as he sold it. I asked him what he had meant by selling my watch. “Oh,” said he, “I thought it was all in the family.” I told him I did not like such family doings and I would not bear it.

Sidney’s role in this what? prepared him for an even great work in the Restoration of all things.

Despite its foibles, “The Family” experiment became part of the Lord’s means to prepare a people for the truths of the restoration. It opened the doorway for believers to want to live as Christ taught. These early Ohio converts were able to distinguish between their attempts to recreate a biblical religion and the restoration of all things as revealed through the Prophet Joseph Smith. Their frame of mind also allowed them to receive the Law of Consecration the next year, in February 1830 (D&C 42).

Four Missionaries Arrive in Trumbull County, Ohio

About a year after Sidney formed “The Family,” Parley led his missionary companions to Ohio in order to introduce Sidney and his old friends to the teachings of the Restoration. The missionaries arrived October 29, 1830. Sidney was glad to see Parley, but Sidney was initially reticent to accept Parley’s beliefs. Sidney allowed Parley to preach and then agreed to read the Book of Mormon. Within days, hearts began and to soften and converts flocked in. Parley’s autobiography records what happened over the three weeks they were there:

The people thronged us night and day, insomuch that we had no time for rest and retirement. . . . Thousands flocked about us daily; some to be taught, some for curiosity, some to obey the gospel, and some to dispute or resist it (Pratt, *Autobiography*, 36).

The area near Kirtland was initially only a stopping point on the missionaries’ way to Missouri, but “suddenly Ohio’s Western Reserve became a more fruitful field than the Burned-over District in New York” (Allen and Leonard, *The Story of the Latter-day Saints*, 64). Since the beginning of the Restoration in the Burned-over District, fewer than two hundred people had joined the Church in New York. But in less than a month, these four missionaries baptized 127 converts, and soon hundreds more in Trumbull County, Ohio (Pratt, *Autobiography*, 36).

The missionaries wanted to continue on their mission, so they wrote Joseph to tell him of their success and request reinforcements. As soon as the Prophet heard the amazing news, he sent one of the eight witnesses of the Book of Mormon, 28-old John Whitmer, to preside over the Ohio Saints. One of the early Ohio converts, Dr. Fredrick G. Williams, wanted to join the missionaries, and he traveled with them for the remaining seven months of their mission.

Mission to the Lamanites Continues to Missouri

In late November 1830, the missionaries left the young converts in Ohio to blaze a new trail in the deep snow. Before they left the state, they met and taught members of the Wyandot tribe, continuing toward Missouri. For their next thousand miles they probably followed the mail route into the sparsely inhabited western borders of Illinois and Missouri. Since 1810, the government had created postal roads on the western border of the nation which the Elders may have followed. We assume they had a map of any small settlements settled along the mail route. If they followed the postal road, it would have made their trip 1,500 miles—one way. In addition to the heavy snow and bitter cold, the landscape was filled with obstacles that challenged the missionaries' journey (see Kettley, "Mission to the Lamanites, 1830-1831," 1-11).

By the end of January 1831, the five missionaries arrived in Jackson County. Parley's childhood dream was fulfilled in part as Oliver and Parley crossed into Missouri river and into "Indian Territory" to teach them the Gospel of Jesus Christ. There they were able to convince the Delaware tribe leaders to hear their message. Elder Oliver began: "Aged Chief and Venerable Council of the Delaware nation." Are we missing something here? Parley recorded what followed in his journal as follows:

We have traveled a long distance from towards the rising sun to bring you glad news; we have travelled the wilderness, crossed the deep and wide rivers, and waded in the deep snows , and in the face of the storms of winter, to communicate to you great knowledge which was lately come to our ears and hearts which will do the red man good as well as the pale face. . . .

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. This they wrote in a Book . . . written on plates of gold and handed down from father to son for many ages and generations. It was then that the people prospered and were strong and mighty; they cultivated the earth, built buildings and cities and abounded in all good things, as the pale faces now do . . . This Book, which contained these things was hid in the earth by Moroni, in a hill called by him Cumorah, which hill is now in the state of New York, near the village of Palmyra, in Ontario county . . . (Pratt, *Autobiography*, 42-44).

The Elders were well received and plans were made for them to teach the Delaware peoples—until a land agent and "sectarian missionaries" stopped their work and refused to give them a preaching license.

In February the missionaries returned to Missouri, and Parley was chosen to return to the Saints with a report on their mission while the rest remained to preach among the local Missourians. Parley summarized,

Thus ended our first Indian mission, in which we had preached the Gospel in its fullness and distributed the record of their forefathers among three, viz.: the Cattaraugus Indians, near Buffalo, N.Y., the Wyandots, of Ohio and the Delawares, west of Missouri (ibid., 44).

Throughout their mission we see the Lord’s multifaceted purposes to “bring to pass the immortality and eternal life” of humanity (Moses 1:39). In addition to actually delivering the Gospel to several tribes of Native Americans, this group of missionaries also became familiar first-hand with the lands around Independence, Missouri, a catalyst? in the growth and ambitions of the young Church of Jesus Christ.

Alexander Campbell’s Reaction and Joseph’s Response

Between the missionaries’ arrival in Ohio in November 1830 and the relocation of the Church in 1831, more than half of the Ohio Campbellites felt God’s witness and joined The Church of Jesus Christ. In an attempt to stop the migration of his Ohio converts, Alexander Campbell viciously criticized the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith’s claims of a divine restoration. As Campbell describes it:

About one-half of the members of the church were soon led away into ? delusion and filled with the wildest fanaticism. Mormon “elders” and “apostles” were speedily sent forth, who traversed Northern Ohio and gained many proselytes among the ignorant and superstitious, and some even among persons of intelligence, who had been filled with vague expectations of a speedy millennium” (Richardson, *Memoirs*, 2. 346).

This later reference to an intelligent person probably referred to Sidney Rigdon. It also speaks of the Saints’ keen interest in building Zion in preparation for the Savior’s Second Coming.

For years Campbell would not relent, but raised a warning voice in his periodical, *Millennial Harbinger*:

No man, *not already duped*, who has half of five grains of common sense, can read this narrative of Mormonism without being converted to the belief that *Joseph Smith* and his colleagues in the plot are a band of the most unprincipled deceivers that ever disgraced any age or nation, and that his followers are a set of superlative fanatics.” Campbell, “Mormonism Unveiled,” *Millennial Harbinger*, 6 (Jan 1835), 44).

Campbell’s newspapers and books, such as *Delusions*, are filled with attacks against the Restoration, but for years Joseph ignored them and would not enter into his debate.

We assume that Joseph knew of Campbell’s attacks at some point because Oliver Cowdery wrote a very effectively measured rebuttal to *Delusions* (See John W. Welch, “Oliver Cowdery as Editor, Defender, and Justice of the Peace in Kirtland,” in Alexander Baugh ed., *Days Never to Be Forgotten*, Provo: Religious Studies Center, 2009, 267-270). Finally, four years later, Joseph acknowledged Alexander Campbell’s attacks:

I have never been blessed, (if it may be called such) with a personal acquaintance with Mr. Campbell, neither a personal interview, but the GREAT MAN, not unfrequently [*sic*] condescends to notice an individual of as obscure birth as myself. . . . I am satisfied, therefore he should continue his scurrility; indeed, I am more than gratified, because his cry of Joe Smith! Joe Smith! false prophet! false prophet! must manifest to all men the spirit he is of, and serves to open the eyes of the people” (Jesse, *Personal Writings of Smith*, 333-4).

The next time we find Joseph acknowledging Alexander Campbell is in a Sunday sermon, April 7, 1844, just two months before Joseph’s death. Joseph addressed the need for the Spirit in our lives. It was thirteen years after Campbell had written *Delusions*, and shortly before the Prophet’s martyrdom: “Alexander Campbell, how are you going to save people with water alone? For John said his baptism was good for nothing without the baptism of Jesus Christ” (Smith, *History*, 6.316–317).

Joseph and Emma Join the Saints in Ohio

Simultaneous with the missionaries’ departure from Ohio in late November 1830, Sidney Rigdon and Edward Partridge left in the opposite direction, traveling east to meet the Prophet Joseph and Emma Smith. Edward had not been baptized and wanted to use all reasonable means to assure that his feelings were not deceiving him. Sidney felt responsible for his flock and had a deep desire to help the Prophet, so the two made the 300-mile journey to Fayette, New York, to meet Joseph in person. Their prayers were answered beyond their expectations, and God revealed the following Joseph: “a commandment I give unto the church, that it is expedient in me that they should assemble together at the Ohio” (D&C 37:3).

At the Church conference held January 2, 1831, the Prophet learned another reason why God wanted them in Ohio:

And that ye might escape the power of the enemy and be gathered unto me a righteous people, without spot and blameless—Wherefore, for this cause I gave unto you the commandment that ye should go to the Ohio; and there I will give unto you my law; and there you shall be endowed with power from on high (D&C 38:31-32).

Within days, Sidney and Edward assisted Joseph and Emma (who was five to six months pregnant with twins) to pack their few belongings in their sleigh and to move to Ohio. The foursome arrived in Kirtland on February 1, 1831. By summertime, approximately one thousand people were affiliated with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the Western Reserve of Ohio.

When Joseph learned of whose? findings, he felt inspired to go (where?) himself. He had already learned that the city of Zion would be built in that region, and he was eager to follow through with that prompting. Six months after the five missionaries arrived in Jackson County Missouri, Joseph and another groups of Saints joined them with plans to establish the city of Zion.

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