

Hard Questions in Church History

Lynne Hilton Wilson

Liberty Jail and Religious Refugees

Questions to Consider

- Why did Governor Boggs write an extermination order?
- Had God had forgotten them or broken His promises?
- Why did God not protect the Saints and His Prophet?
- Was all their sacrifice the past seven years in for Zion wasted?

Timeline: A Year of Healing and Learning

1838		
	Jan 12-Mar 14	Joseph flees enemies in Kirtland & moves to Far West, Caldwell Co., Missouri. He meets up with pregnant Emma and three children (under seven) with their belongings enroute.
	Apr 26	D&C 115 directs the building of a temple in Far West, Caldwell County.
	Jul 4	Sidney Rigdon gives patriotic “Independence Day” speech, including threats to Missourians.
	Jul 8	D&C 116, 117, 118, 119, 120 Apostles called to serve “over the great waters” (D&C 118:4).
	Jul-Oct	Kirtland Camp journeys about ~900 miles from Kirtland to Missouri.
	Aug 6	Election Day at Gallatin, Daviess County; Saints are restrained from voting; fight at the poles.
	Oct 21	Davies Co. survey complete—Purchase pre-emptive claims by Nov 12 for land used by squatters.
	Oct 27	Missouri Governor Lilburn W. Boggs issues the Extermination Order.
	Oct 29	LDS Cornel George Hinkle betrays Joseph & Sidney (+3) to Gen. Samuel Lucas from Jackson County.
	Oct 30	Mob raids Saints’ properties and massacres of 17 Saints at Hawn’s Mill, 15 wounded.
	Nov 1	Militia placed a siege around Far West, not allowing anyone to go come or go—or face death.
	Nov 4-8	57 LDS men held in Richmond Court House for weeks—(7 also chained including Joseph next door).
	Dec 1	Joseph and six other men taken to Liberty Jail to await trial set in March 1839.
	Dec	Emma visits Joseph three times.
1839		
	Mar 19	Joseph received letters from Emma, Don Carlos, and Bishop Partridge.
	Mar 20-25	Joseph writes a 29-page letter detailing abuses in Liberty Jail and giving instructions to the Saints. The letter included D&C 121, 122, and 123. “Do all things that lie in our power . . . then may we see the salvation of God.”
	Early April	Joseph and the other prisoners taken to Galtian; the prisoners’ attorney requested a change of venue. New guard helps the prisoners leave.
	Apr 22	Joseph reunites with his family in Quincy, Illinois.
	May 10	Joseph moves to Commerce (later renamed Nauvoo), Illinois. Involved in resettlement of Saints

Leading up to the November 1838 Missouri Incarceration of Church Leaders

During the summer of 1838, Missouri mob and militia raids against the Saints increased—including burning crops, robbing homes, raiding and robbing stores, harming women and children, killing some and threatening more. Even Caldwell County that the Legislature created to protect the Saints, with its six mile “no-man’s-land” safety zone around it, was not immune from vigilante attacks. In Sidney Rigdon’s patriotic, though explosive, Independence Day talk announced the First Presidency plans to defend the church members. Sidney threatened their enemies and they would defend themselves and if needed “exterminate” the mob. This word can be interpreted as “drive you off our property.” That is also the meaning used when Governor Lilburn Boggs used it three months later in his extermination order.

Historical Background on Property Rites

In the past few decades, historians have delved into the motives behind the Governor Boggs’ Order #44—the extermination order—and subsequent holding of 64 male Mormon hostages. It is not coincidental that the hostages were also the largest landowners in the state—it appears causal. Historical background on property ownership in the new states. Since the war of 1812, the national General Land Office had created a way for squatters to earn money to pay for the new lands made available through sales of the eight new states created from part of the Louisiana Purchase.

Starting in 1830 and for nearly every year that decade, President Jackson rewrote the laws governing squatters right to have a “pre-emptive” status to buy the land for \$1.25 an acre once it was surveyed. Jeffery Walker has a thorough discussion of this in his 2008 *BYU Studies* article.

First, a settler would go to the local district GLO and complete a short application that included an affidavit verifying that he was improving and occupying the land to which the preemption right was being claimed.

Second, the president would set the sale date . . . It was then the responsibility of the surveyor general over the subject area to have the land adequately surveyed . . . The local land office would then publish notice that the surveys were complete and the scheduled sale would take place. Such notice was required to be published within a reasonable time before the sale date.

Third, if a settler failed to pay for the preemptive land by the specified sale date, his preemptive right lapsed, and the land could be sold to any other interested party (Jeffery Walker, “Mormon Land Rights in Caldwell and Daviess Counties and the Mormon Conflict of 1838 New Findings and New Understandings,” *BYU Studies*, 47; no. 1, 14-17).

Problems arose when the squatters filed for their land but with government back log, they had to wait for months or years before the date for sale was given.

For example, there had been relative peace in Caldwell County (which was established as a county for the Saints to live unmolested) with the non-member neighbors during 1836 and 1838—until the time for the sales of their preemptive lands was announced. During that time nearly 5,000 Saints had moved into Caldwell County, and 100 non-Mormons.

The Far West area boasted “150 homes, four dry goods stores, three family groceries, several blacksmith shops, two hotels, a printing shop, and a large schoolhouse that doubled as a

church and a courthouse” (*Revelations in Context* (SLC, UT: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day-Saints, 2016; <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/revelations-in-context/far-west-and-adamondiahman?lang=eng>).

Similar statistics could be said for the area around Adam-ondi-Ahman in Davies County. Lyman Wight reported that in the short space of a year the town had “upwards of 200 houses . . . and forty families living in their wagons” (ibid). The Saints were robust in their house building, farming and city development. Davies County was even more inviting, because the property had not yet been surveyed it was open for squatters who at an unspecified later day would pay \$1.25/ acre.

Motivation of the Extermination Order

By a careful look at the records from the time, it appears that the Extermination Order was carefully orchestrated to deliberately take control of Missouri land preemption rights that was legally the Mormons. The Extermination Order was issued on October 27, 1838, just six days after the earliest publication of the notice of sale, and sixteen days before the preemptive land-sales had to be claimed.

In mid-September 1838, the surveyor general’s office in St. Louis, Missouri, completed the township surveys for Daviess County subject to sale on November 12, 1838. These plats were certified and sent to that office by the surveyor general, Daniel Dunklin (former Missouri governor). The plats were received by the local registrar, Finis Ewing, at the district office in Lexington, Missouri, on approximately September 24, but the public was not made aware of that receipt until it was published on October 21. This, therefore, was the first date the Saints could have learned they would definitely be required to pay for their preemption claims by November 12.

One of the first thing the Anti-Mormon did was to stop the mail delivery coming into Far West by that important date of October 24, 1838. This inhibited anyone from knowing that a date had been set for them to pay for their properties.

Sidney Rigdon recorded that one of the military leaders against the Saints in DeWitt, Adam-ondi-Ahman, and Far West, was also a Presbyterian minister, Mr. Sashel Woods. He organized a meeting to rally the mob and told them:

They must hasten to assist their friends in Daviess county. The land sales (he said) were coming on, and if they could get the Mormons driven out, they could get all the lands entitled to pre-emptions, and that they must hasten to Daviess in order to accomplish their object; that if they would join and drive them out they could get all the lands back again, as well as all the pay they had received for them. He assured the mob that they had nothing to fear from the authorities in so doing, for they had now full proof that the authorities would not assist the Mormons, and that they might as well take their property from them as not (Walker, “Mormon Land Rights” *BYU Studies*, 36).

The ensuing weeks evidenced the implementation of Woods’s strategy by the Missourians. The siege of De Witt, the Battle of Crooked River, and the Hawn’s Mill Massacre proved that any peace Mormons thought they had purchased had been lost. According to Hyrum Smith, some Missourians were “doing every thing they could to excite the indignation of the Mormon people to rescue them, in order that they might make that a pretext of an accusation for the breach of the law” (ibid.).

As we unravel what went wrong in 1838 north western Missouri, we find greed as a great motivator for ministers and mobs mingled with militia who all fought for the Mormons lands.

On the Defense

Through the summer of 1838, mob and militia raids increased against the Saints. On September 20, 1838, the Saints who had settled in De Witt, Carol County, were stormed by an armed mob of approximately one hundred men who demanded they should leave within ten days. Violence broke out in other areas where the Saints gathered. The Prophet Joseph called George Hinkle, a member of the Missouri High Council and a commissioned military colonel, to direct the Saints defense. Hinkle later betrayed Joseph and the other leaders who were imprisoned.

Oct 27, 1838—Missouri Executive Order 44

Governor Lilburn Boggs' team carefully crafted the "Missouri Executive Order 44," which became known as the Mormon Extermination Order. Governor Boggs, was a Jackson County boy, and did not look fondly on the Saints. He believed exaggerated reports about the earlier skirmishes in DeWitt and Crooked River without checking his sources and acted in a synchronized fashion with the military to remove all Mormon major land owners from being able to claim their property.

In the Extermination Order, Governor Boggs called General John B. Clark of the State Militia to action:

The Mormons must be treated as enemies, and must be exterminated or driven from the State if necessary for the public peace—their outrages are beyond all description.

The results were exactly what the mob wanted, a forced migration of all people who followed Joseph Smith as their prophet—exactly at the right time to take over their improved properties. Like a calf who is allowed to roam freely until the calf has grown to the right size to be slaughtered; so too with the Saints. The process and timing of driving the Saints out of Missouri speaks of their enemies' motives.

After Governor Boggs' extermination order, George Hinkle tried to negotiate a truce with General Samuel D. Lucas for the Saints. In the process he decided to lie to Joseph in hopes of saving the rest of the Saints. This dishonesty led Hinkle to a downward slope, including his excommunication on March 17, 1839. The same day, John Corrill and W. W. Phelps were also excommunicated for their collaborated with Major General Lucas that led to the incarceration of the first presidency and their colleagues.

Here follows a chronological abbreviated view of events from the Missouri Mormon war. Most of the dates come from either "The Times and Seasons" Newspaper or other dates from the Joseph Smith Papers Project.

October 29-31, 1838—Arrests

On **October 29**, 1838, just after sunrise, a militia company of 1,800 to 2,200 men arrived within a half mile of Far West, Caldwell County. General Lucas and a team of five Mormon men, including George Hinkle, spent the next two days negotiating a peace treaty. None of the five were in good standing with the church, and ended up making compromises that led to disasters for the Saints.

On **October 31**, the state militia presented Bogg's Executive Order #44. Without being honest with Joseph or the church leadership, Hinkle agreed to turn over church leaders for a promise to stop the raids. What happened was the worst of both options—Lucas attempted to shoot the church leaders and the raids against the Saints escalated.

By 4:00 pm on October 31, George Hinkle called on the Prophet and told him that General Lucas “desired an interview” to talk things over with Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, Parley P. Pratt, Lyman Wight, and George Robinson. Without realizing Hinkle's duplicity, they followed. Joseph Smith Papers project reports that Hinkle then betrayed the prophet and his four companions. Lyman Wight's testimony recorded that Hinkle announced:

“Here Generals are the prisoners I agreed to deliver to you[.] Gen Lucas then brandished his sword with a most hideous look and said you are my prisoners” (*josephsmithpapers.org*). General Lucas planned to execute these men, but he still wanted more.

That night the prisoners were heavily guarded with ninety members of the state militia—thirty men on each shift during the night. The prisoners were left to sleep on the ground—even through the rain. One of them, Parley P. Pratt saw the correlation between their kidnapping or arrest and the eminent land sales in Davies County.

The Anti-Mormons were determined the Mormons should yield and abandon the country. Moreover the land sales were approaching, and it was expedient that they should be driven out before they could establish their rights of pre-emption. In this way their valuable improvements—the fruit of diligence and enterprise—would pass into the hands of men who would have the pleasure of enjoying without the toil of earning.

Siege of Far West

On **November 1**, the militia formed a siege around the Saint's capital city, Far West. No one was allowed in or out. This inhibited anyone going to the Lands Office to pay for their property during this small window of time. Hyrum Smith and Amasa Lyman were taken prisoners as well, making Joseph's group now seven hostages. Hyrum had been so sick that he was not able to get out of bed the previous day. Now with the entire first presidency were the militia's prisoners. General Lucas held an illegal court martial—not allowing the prisoners to attend. One of the key witnesses against Joseph was Sampson Avard, the leader of the Danites. He falsely testified that Joseph had directed all their illegal skirmishes. Lucas sentenced Joseph and the other six and wrote up an order for their execution.

On the morning of **November 2**, Brigadier General Alexander Doniphan received Lucas' orders to execute the seven prisoners. He refused to carry out Lucas' orders and wrote back:

It is cold-blooded murder. I will not obey your order. My brigade shall march for Liberty tomorrow morning, at 8 o'clock; and if you execute these men, I will hold you responsible before an earthly tribunal, so help me God.

Doniphan had defended Joseph before and would step in again in the future to help. As mentioned earlier, because of Doniphan's integrity and friendship, five months previous to this court martial hearing, Emma and Joseph had named their newborn son, Alexander.

Thanks to Doniphan's stance, General Lucas was forced to change his plans took his seven prisoners down to Independence Missouri as hostages until the state had cleared out the Saints. Before their 55-miles to Jackson County, the militia troops marched the prisoners through the town of Far West and Joseph and the other six men were allowed to stop off at their homes to say goodbye and gather a few provisions. Joseph's six-year-old son Joseph III, clung to his legs and begged him to stay as is described in D&C 122:6.

Joseph's Eternal Perspective of Hope: Be of Good Cheer

On the morning of **November 3**, after the third night of imprisonment, Elder Parley P. Pratt recorded that when Joseph awoke, he told the other prisoners that the Lord had given him hope during the night, "Be of good cheer, brethren, the word of the Lord came to me last night that our lives should be given us, and that whatever we may suffer during this captivity, not one of our lives should be taken" (*Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*, ed. Parley P. Pratt Jr. [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985], 164). This attitude blessed Joseph's perspective for the winter. We read in journals that he used it throughout his imprisonment in different situations—including to Heber C. Kimball.

5 Prisoners Grows to 64

On **November 4-8** With General Lucas' departure to Independence with the First Presidency and four other prisoners, another military leader, Major General John B. Clark took charge of the prisoners from Far West, Caldwell County. With the help of five Mormon dissidents like George Hinkle, General Clark was able to identify several men who had acted in defense of their properties and played a role in the skirmishes that summer against the Missouri militia. General Clark called for the arrest of forty-six men. Professor Alexander Baugh described the scene:

The beating of a drum summoned all of the men in Far West to the public square, where they assembled in military order. Once assembled, Clark and his officers called out the names of men who were placed under arrest. Those arrested were taken to a local tavern owned by John Burk, where Clark officially charged them with treason, murder, burglary, arson, robbery, and larceny ("Joseph Smith's Incarceration in Richmond, Missouri" *Mormon Historical Studies*, 139).

Before the forty-six prisoners left Far West, they were able to gather a few provisions, blankets, and say goodbye to their families. After a short goodbye, General Clark took charge of the forty-six prisoners and took them south about thirty miles from to Richmond for further investigation and potential trials.

Once in Richmond, Clark housed his forty-six prisoners in the unfinished brick court house where they all cooked for themselves, had devotionals every night and morning, and were unharmed for the next ten days that they were held hostage. Eleven more LDS men were added to the group of hostages bringing the total number to prisoners to sixty-four.

They were supposedly held for an investigation, but the timing overlapped with a very important timing for preemptive land sales in Davies County. Alex Baugh found reports that explain "the civil officials never had any intention to fully prosecute them. Within a short time after the Mormon surrender on 1 November 1838, Governor Boggs and Circuit Court Judge Austin King apparently became satisfied that once the Mormons left the state, the Mormon prisoners would be let go" ("Escape of Joseph Smith from Missouri" *Mormon Historical Studies*, 74).

Richmond Jail—Nov 9-29

On **November 9**, the seven prisoners in Independence, MO (Joseph, Sidney Rigdon, Hyrum Smith, Parley Pratt, Amasa Lyman, Lyman Wight, and George Robinson), were transferred from the authority of General Lucas to General Clark. Clark moved them northeast about thirty-five miles to Richmond. An empty log house became their ad-hock prison for twenty days. It was a block north of the court house where the other 56 hostages were kept. Without prison bars, to keep the prisoners in place, they were shackled. A blacksmith created a long chain and placed padlocks around each man's ankles as well as chaining their wrists together. The prisoners spoke of trying to sleep on their backs but the chains and movements of others made sleep nearly impossible for those three weeks.

Between **November 9 and 29**, the Richmond prison became a place of verbal and emotional abuse for those seven men and one woman. Athalia was the daughter of Sidney Rigdon, and wife of George Robinson. She was given permission to stay to care for her sick father. This became the setting where the guards' offensive language and stories caused Joseph to rebuke the guards verbal abuse. As an eye witness, Elder Parley P. Pratt recorded:

In one of those tedious nights we had lain as if in sleep till the hour of midnight had passed, and our ears and hearts had been pained, while we had listened for hours to the obscene jests, the horrid oaths, the dreadful blasphemies and filthy language of our guards. ...

I had listened till I became so disgusted, shocked, horrified, and so filled with the spirit of indignant justice that I could scarcely refrain from rising upon my feet and rebuking the guards; but had said nothing to Joseph, ... although I lay next to him and knew he was awake. On a sudden he arose to his feet, and spoke in a voice of thunder, or as the roaring lion, uttering, as near as I can recollect, the following words:

“SILENCE, ye fiends of the infernal pit. In the name of Jesus Christ I rebuke you, and command you to be still; I will not live another minute and hear such language. Cease such talk, or you or I die THIS INSTANT!”

He ceased to speak. He stood erect in terrible majesty. Chained, and without a weapon; calm, unruffled and dignified as an angel, he looked upon the quailing guards, whose knees smote together, and who, shrinking into a corner, or crouching at his feet, begged his pardon, and remained quiet till a change of guards.

I have seen the ministers of justice, clothed in magisterial robes, ... I have witnessed a Congress in solemn session to give laws to nations; I have tried to conceive of kings, of royal courts, of thrones and crowns; and of emperors assembled to decide the fate of kingdoms; but dignity and majesty have I seen but *once*, as it stood in chains, at midnight, in a dungeon in an obscure village of Missouri” (*Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*, ed. Parley P. Pratt Jr. [1938], 210–11).

Alexander Baugh noted that this experience may have been alluded to in Joseph's letter, now canonized in D&C 122:4:

And although their influence shall cast thee into trouble, and into bars and walls, thou shalt be had in honor; and but for a small moment and thy voice shall be more terrible in the midst

of thine enemies than the fierce lion, because of thy righteousness; and thy God shall stand by thee forever and ever.

The twenty-days of that the church leaders and land owners were incarcerated in the Richmond Jail and Court House, made it impossible for them to travel to the Davies County Land office and pay for their land at the discounted price of \$1.25. It also gave enough time for others to step in and secure the Saints' properties as their own. Once that window of time had closed, the Circuit Judge was willing to let most of hostages go—but many had no home to go back to.

Preliminary Ruling:

On **November 29**, After twenty plus days of incarceration, Circuit Court Judge Austin A. King announced:

- 29 Prisoners were released without enough evidence against them to warrant any charges
- 35 Prisoners kept as hostage for further trail sometime in the following spring
 - 24 Prisoners allowed to post bail and were released
 - 5 Prisoners charged with murder at the battle of Crooked River (Parley P. Pratt, Norman Shearer, Darwin Chase, Luman Gibbs, and Morris Phelps) and were imprisoned in Richmond without the chance of posting bail. These men were left there longer than anyone else. (Appropriately, Parley escaped on Independence Day, July 4, 1839.)
 - 6 Prisoners charged with treason (Joseph and Hyrum Smith, Sidney, Lyman Wight, Alexander McRae, and Caleb Baldwin).

After researching the Prophet Joseph's trial under the legal statutes of 1838 Missouri Law, George Madsen found that there was little to no evidence that Joseph committed treason. Joseph may have been guilty of a form of insurrection, and receiving stolen goods, but not treason.

One may ask, why did Judge King choose to charge Joseph Smith and four others with treason? It has to do with holding Joseph hostage. The charge of treason does not allow one to post bail. Judge King along with many others wanted to keep Joseph and the other leaders silenced and inaccessible to the Saints so that could carry out their plans to expel the Saints from Missouri. Their hearing was repeatedly delayed for this purpose. The due processes of law were not upheld. Madsen also noted, "One need not be reminded that the same nonbailable treason gambit would be used again at Carthage, Illinois" (BYU Studies Quarterly, Vol. 43, Iss. 4 [2004], 123).

Land Ownership

Shortly after the majority of the prisoners were released, either for lack of evidence or on bail, a neighboring newspaper saw through the Missourians motives to their greed for land. In St. Louis, "The Daily Missouri Republican," published this telling editorial on December 13, 1838:

We have many reports here in relation to the conduct of some of the citizens of Daviess and other counties, at the recent Land Sales at Lexington—It is reported, said to be on the authority of a gentleman direct from Lexington, that at the recent land sales the lands of Caldwell and Daviess were brought into market, and that some of the citizens who have been the most active in the excitement against the Mormons, purchased a number of the Mormon tracts of land. Where the Mormons had made settlements and improvements, it is

said, these citizens have purchased them for speculation. It is said, that the town of “Adamon Diamond,” a Mormon town in Daviess, in which there are several houses,—a very valuable site for a town—was purchased at these sales for a dollar and a quarter an acre. It is further said, that there is a company formed, embracing a number of persons, for the purpose of speculating in the lands of these people” (Walker, “Mormon Land Rights,” *BYU Studies*, 47; no 1, 43).

Non-Mormons and Saints alike reported the same outcome. It appears the major motivation for the extermination order and subsequent imprisonments were caused by coveting the Saints lands as much as anything religious or political.

Liberty Jail

On **December 1**, the six men charged with treason were taken thirty miles due west to a more protective location—Liberty Jail in Clay County. There Joseph Smith and the rest of the first presidency (Hyrum Smith and Sidney Rigdon), and three other leaders (Lyman Wight, Caleb Baldwin, and Alexander McRae) were imprisoned for four more months through the winter of 1838–1839 to await their trial.

The new Clay county prison was built in 1833 to be a threatening structure and escape proof. A dungeon underground and jailer’s quarters on the main floor were surrounded by four feet thick walls. It’s stone exterior and log interior had two feet of rubble filling the gap. There were two narrow slit open windows allowing a little light and air to reach the dungeon. Some have claimed the height of the dungeon was barely six feet, but in 1880 it was measured at 6 feet 6 inches at one end and 7 feet at another. One of the prisoners, Alexander McRae is said to be 6 feet 6 inches so it would have cramped his full stature at one end.

Living Conditions & Food:

The prisoners living conditions were awful, but some reports are exaggerated. The prisoners mentioned that they were always cold, laying on cold damp stone covered with a bit of straw in December that became very dirty as the weeks rolled on. Joseph mentioned his living conditions in a letter to Isaac Galland:

We are kept under a strong guard, night and day, in a prison of double walls and doors, proscribed in our liberty of conscience, our food is scant, uniform, and coarse; we have not the privilege of cooking for ourselves, we have been compelled to sleep on the floor with straw, and not blankets sufficient to keep us warm; and when we have a fire, we are obliged to have almost a constant smoke (Letter to Isaac Galland, Mar 22, 1839, in Dean C. Jessee, rev. ed., *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith* [SLC, UT: Deseret, 2002], 456).

Without a chimney, it sounds like the cave of smoke was worse than the cold, so they did not often have fires. They slept and lived for most hours a day in the damp dark cold basement-dungeon, but were allowed to come upstairs and even outside periodically for a meal, visit an attorney (including Brigadier General Alexander Doniphan), and a little exercise (Alex Baugh).

The food was scanty and often contaminated, but we do not have evidence that the jailer intentionally tried to poison them. The jailer denied feeding them human flesh as some reported. McRae, reported that the food was revolting, and they “could not eat it until [they] were driven to it by hunger” (B. H.

Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Century One*, 6 vols. [SLC, UT: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1930], 1:521). Others refer to times when they had nothing but corn bread. We also have record that at times Joseph's dog, Major, may have been with them in the dungeon.

Emotional and Spiritual Torture:

The prison experience was a severe physical trial, but harder still was the emotional torture of the prisoners' concern for their war-torn fellow Saints. Not being able to help their family and friends as they were attacked by mobs' and exposed to the freezing winter temperatures, hungry, and frightened, was far harder to bear than their own personal deprivations. In the last letter Joseph wrote to Emma we get a feel for his stretched emotions:

I would gladly go <walk> from here to you barefoot, and bareheaded, and half naked, to see you and think it great pleasure, and never count it toil, but do not think I am babyish, for I do not feel so, I bare with fortitude all my oppression, so does do those that are with me, not one of us have flinched yet, I want you <should> not let those little fellows, forgit [*sic*] me, tell them Father loves them with a perfect love, and he is doing all he can to git [*sic*] away from the mob to come to them.

Joseph did all he could to get out—including trying to escape multiple times.

Letters and visits from family members and friends was like a breath of fresh air for the prisoners. After receiving letters from his wife Emma, brother Don Carols, and Bishop Partridge, Joseph described the effect that had on the prisoners “all breathing a kind of consoling spirit” (*josephsmtihpapers.org*, Letter 20 Mar 1839, p. 7).

Another piece of this trial for both the prisoners and the religious refugees was spiritual. As we read in Joseph's letter from March 20, 1839, he wondered if God had forgotten them or broken His promises? Why did God not protect the Saints and His Prophet? Was all their sacrifice the past seven years in for Zion wasted? The Lord answers to Joseph's hard questions are recorded in what became known as D&C 121-123, including, “All these things shall give the experience and be for thy good” (D&C 122:7).

April 4-16, 1839—Encouraged to Escape

After five months of imprisonment, Joseph was on the brink of freedom, but he did not know that. On April 4, 1839 the Prophet confided to Emma while she and most of the Saints were religious refugees in Quincy, IL. He wrote tenderly by his own hand—without his usual scribe:

Dear— and affectionate—Wife.

Thursday night I sat down just as the sun is going down, as we peak throu [*sic*] the greats of this lonesome prision [*sic*], to write to you, that I may make known to you my situation. It is I believe <it is> now about five months and six days since I have bean [*sic*] under the grimace [*sic*], of a guard night and day, and within the walls grates and screeking of iron dors [*sic*], of a lonesome dark durty prison. With immotions[*sic*] known only to God . . . My Dear Emma, I think of you and the children continually [*sic*], if I could tell you my tale, I think you would say

it was altogether enough for once, to grattify [*sic*], the malice of hell I of hell (Jesse, *Personal Writings*, 463, 464).

This was their last night in this jail. The postponed trial date, from March 7 to April 7, 1839 was finally at hand.

On **April 5, 1839**, guards came to escort the prisoners for their hearing in Gallatin, Daviess County. Peter H. Burnett and Amos Rees had agreed to defend the prisoners' as their attorneys. After traveling nearing fifty miles, the guarded prisoners arrived in Gallatin in the evening of April 8, 1839. The next day their hearing began and lasted through April 11.

It was apparent they could not receive a fair trial. The judge assigned to the case, Judge Birch, had been the prosecuting attorney in Liberty, MO against Joseph in 1838. This disqualified him from hearing the case. The jury was made up of some people so drunk they had to be carried out of the court room. Other jurors had fought in the mobs against the Saints a few months earlier. Joseph's attorney, Burnett complained of the illegal setting and requested a change of venue. After rejecting the first requested, the second request was granted for Columbia, Boone County in the center of the state, over 150 miles southeast half way to where the Saints were gathered in Quincy IL.

By April 12, a new team of escorts was made up of only six men to guard the five prisoners. All of the new guards were friendly with Joseph and the other prisoners. One guard had entered into a friendly wrestling match with Joseph and the Prophet took down the strongest man in the county even after five months of a starvation diet. Sheriffs Morgan and Bowman allowed the prisoners to ride in a wagon.

On Sunday, April 14, Hyrum wrote in his journal about the friendly guards. By the 16th of April, Sherriff Morgan confessed that his orders were to let the prisoners' escape. Many Missourians realized the futility of the trial, and now that they were away from the problematic counties, the prisoners could get out of the state easily.

On **Tuesday, April 16**, they were allowed to escape. Alex Baugh described their Davies County guards behaviors:

Earlier, the Mormon prisoners had purchased a jug of whiskey, which they gave that night to the five Daviess men. "Three . . . of the guard drank pretty freely of the whiskey," Hyrum Smith reported. "They also went to bed, and were soon asleep." Shortly afterwards, Sheriff Morgan then told them, "I shall take a good drink of grog and go to bed, and you may do as you have a mind to." He and another guard provided them with two horses and then helped them load the animals with their belongings. Joseph Smith wrote that "the guard got intoxicated, [and] we thought it a favorable opportunity to make our escape. . . . We took the advantage of the situation . . . and took our departure." In recounting the event four years later, Hyrum stated, perhaps in jest, "We took our change of venue to the state of Illinois" (Alexander L. Baugh, "Escape of Joseph Smith from Missouri," 66-67).

Joseph gave the Sheriff a promissory note to repay him for his horse. A few years later, the Sheriff came to Nauvoo and Joseph paid him what he owed for his horse.

Prisoners Arrive in Quincy April 22, 1839

On **April 22** the five escaping prisoners made it outside of Missouri by crossing the Mississippi River on a ferry into Quincy. An old friend, Dimick Huntington recognized Joseph even though he was ragged, unshaven, thinner, and pale. Joseph requested his help and Dimick led Joseph four miles east to Judge Cleveland's home where Dimick had arranged a room for Emma and their four children to stay. Dimick recorded in his journal, "Emma knew him as he was dismounting from his horse[.] She met him halfway to the gate" (Dimick B. Huntington statement, *josephsmithpapers.org*).

Saints Escape from Missouri

Historical Memories from February to April 1839 by Lucy Mack Smith's (1844 Dictation)

The year 1839 was filled with some the most difficult trials the Saints had faced, and yet it was filled with tender mercies. Lucy Mack Smith remembered, while her sons Joseph and Hyrum, and other Church leaders were unjustly imprisoned in Liberty Jail, her son Samuel fled from Missouri with the other Saints:

He was compelled to fly with a company of others and leave his family behind he said that they suffered very much on their rout with hunger as there was several of them and they were pursued by their enemies for which cause they did not consider it safe to expose themselves ~~th~~ being seen by the inhabitants upon one occasion they became so faint that they were almost in despair after counseling together a short time they concluded to appoint samuel to receive the word of the Lord and then unite in prayer ~~for~~ that the Lord would communicate <to> them his will concerning what he would have them to do after continueing in prayer for sometime it was signified to samuel that in the course of ~~2~~ <1/2> ~~or 3~~ hours they might obtain some refreshment by travelling in a certain direction he made this known to the company and he set out with 2 others in quest of the promised food and after travelling several miles they came to an indians wigwam They told them by signs that they were hungry and the squaw made some cakes with all possible speed and baked them in a pan over the fire and gave each one of them 2 they then told her that there was more of their friends in woods far off and in a trice She made a quantity more of her wheat cakes and gave them to the brethren on a piece of birch bark She also gave them to understand by signs that she would send but she had but little and her papooses would be hungry if she let them have any more (Lavina Fielding Anderson, *Lucy's Book: Critical Edition of Lucy Mack Smith's Memoirs* [Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2001], 691).

The Quincyans acted as good Samaritans to the suffering Saints. They provided food, clothing, blankets and in some cases, shelter for the Latter-day Saint exiles. Lucy Mack Smith wrote of her experience in Quincy:

We had not been in Quincy, one week when Lucy my youngest daughter [*sic*] was taken very sick with a pain in her head and dreadful distress in her limbs ~~su~~ occasioned by her exposure in coming from [Mis\[s\]ouri](#) she utterly refused from the first [to] take any nourishment whatever I took care of her myself several days untill [*sic*] I was taken in a similar manner myself the day on which I was taken [Mr Miliken \[Arthur Millikin\]](#) a young man to whom she was engaged to be married came to see her and ~~he was obliged~~ to watched with her <all> that day for I my disease proved to be a very severe case of Cholera and although I suffered dreadfully with cramp which usually attends that complaint yet that was nothing in comparison to another

pain which operated [*sic*] upon the marrow of my bones and sometimes seemed to me to be almost bursting the bones themselves assunder[*sic*] . . . During our sickness the ladies of [Quincy](#) were sent us every delicacy which could be obtained with the hopes of pleasing our appetites particularly [Lucy's](#) as she was not inclined to take any kind of food into her stomach (Anderson, *Lucy's Book*, 693-695).

By mid-April, 1839, the families of the prisoners longed for communication. The Lord answered the prayers of Mother Lucy Smith a vision that they would soon be free—

. . . that night upon lying down upon my bed to go to sleep I saw my sons in vision on the prairie in [Missouri](#) they appeared to be very tired and hungry they had but one horse and I saw them stop and tie the horse to the burnt Stub of a sappling after which they laid down on the ground to rest themselves and as they lay there oh how pale and faint they looked I sprang up in bed oh [Father](#) <I> said † I see Joseph[h] and [Hyrum](#) and they are so weak they can scarcely stand and now they are lying on the cold ground asleep Oh! how I want to give them something to eat [Mr Smith](#) begged me to be quiet saying I was nervous but it was impossible for they were still before my eyes and I saw them until they had lain there near 2 hours then one of them went away to try to get something to eat ~~and~~ but did not succeed and they traveled on [Hyrum](#) rode at this time and Joseph walked by his side holding himself up by the stirrup leather I could see him almost reel with ~~fa~~ weakness and yet I could not help him My soul was grieved and I could not sleep so I arose from my bed and spent the night walking the floor the next day I commenced making preparations for their reception as confidently as though I had received word that they would be there to supper but ~~oh~~ the day was so long so tedious I ~~though~~ in the afternoon near sunset . . . [Hyrum](#) and Joseph landed soon after and went immediately to see their families they with their wives and the rest of ~~the~~ our connections spent the next day with us when the news went abroad that they Smiths had been liberated and were now at home (Anderson, *Lucy's Book*, 698-699).

The prophet Joseph did not take long to recover and within a couple of days he began to look for a relocation for the saints.

Looking Back on Liberty Jail

Elder Jeffery R. Holland has looked back at the time spent in Liberty Jail and shared some lessons he learned from Joseph's experience in Liberty Jail. He and Elder Neal A. Maxwell, both quote Brigham HI Robert's phrase that the Jail became a "Prison Temple." The revelation and perspective Joseph received during those five horrific months changed the rest of his life. He became more bold, meek, and trusting of God.

One of the Lord's messages in this trial is that hard times have to happen. They can either make us stronger as they did for Joseph, or they can break us—we can choose. A short summary of Elder Holland's Lessons learned at Liberty follows:

1. *Everyone Faces Trying Times*

You can have sacred, revelatory, profoundly instructive experiences with the Lord *in the most miserable experiences of your life*—in the worst settings, while enduring the most painful injustices, when facing the most insurmountable odds and opposition you have ever faced.

2. *Even the Worthy Will Suffer*

The point is this: if you are having a bad day, you've got a lot of company—very, very good company. The best company that has ever lived. Now, don't misunderstand. We don't have to look for sorrow.

3. *Remain Calm, Patient, Charitable, and Forgiving*

“No power or influence *can* or *ought* to be maintained ... [except] by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned; ... without hypocrisy, and without guile” (D&C 121:41–42; emphasis added).

Even when we face such distressing circumstances in our life and there is something in us that wants to strike out at God or man or friend or foe, we must remember that “no power or influence *can* or *ought* to be maintained ... [except] by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned; ... without hypocrisy, and without guile” (D&C 121:41–42; emphasis added). . . .

Yet in these cold, lonely hours, Joseph says let us do all we can *and do it cheerfully*. And then we can justifiably turn to the Lord, wait upon His mercy, and see His arm revealed in our behalf.

What a magnificent attitude to maintain in good times or bad, in sorrow or in joy!

Further Reading

For a complete presentation of Joseph's letter from Liberty Jail, including the identification of which portions of the letter were included in the Doctrine and Covenants, Sections 121, 122, and 123, and which sections were not included, see Dean C. Jessee and John W. Welch, “Revelations in Context: Joseph Smith's Letter from Liberty Jail, March 20, 1839,” *BYU Studies* 39 no. 3 (125-145). <https://byustudies.byu.edu/article/revelations-in-context-joseph-smiths-letter-from-liberty-jail-march-20-1839/>. Brent Top and Alexander Baugh on the Mormon Channel podcast: <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/inspiration/latter-day-saints-channel/listen/series/past-impressions-audio/liberty-jail-episode-34-1?lang=eng>. Alexander Baugh, “We Took Our Change of Venue to the State of Illinois”: The Gallatin Hearing and the Escape of Joseph Smith and the Mormon Prisoners from Missouri, April 1839,” *Mormon Historical Studies*, 59-82.