

Missouri Background: 1831-1838

From July 1831 to October 1838 the saints sought to build Zion in Missouri. In contrast to the glorious revelations that accompanied the Kirtland Temple dedication, establishing a Zion society in Missouri was difficult. The Lord had warned them in 1831, that Zion's glory would only come "after much tribulation" (D&C 58:4). During these seven years, the Prophet Joseph had the difficult task of overseeing two groups of the saints ~800 miles apart. Imagine communication challenges, young local leadership mistakes, as well as deliberate wolves attacking our young sheep. Many of the relationship problems with the Missourians could have been avoided if we had been more sensitive and been better neighbors. Both sides made mistakes.

The Lord repeatedly sent revelations calling the saints to repentance (i.e. D&C 105:2, 5 "were it not for the transgressions of my people, speaking concerning the church and not individuals, they might have been redeemed even now. . . . Zion cannot be built up unless it is by the principles of the law of the celestial kingdom; otherwise I cannot receive her unto myself;" also see 85:3, 5; 101:2, 6; *History of the Church*, 1:320, 376).

Secondary to this crucial problem, the saints tended to be an independent people, buying and selling and working as a group. This made the neighbors edgy. Worse still, the steady stream of abolitionist immigrants into a slave state stimulated riots, robbery, destruction of the printing office, and burning buildings. In response to these atrocities, in several revelations, the Lord told the saints to *not fight* back, but "lift a standard of peace" three or four times. The Lord has repeatedly taught His people across dispensations to trust the Lord and wait on Him:

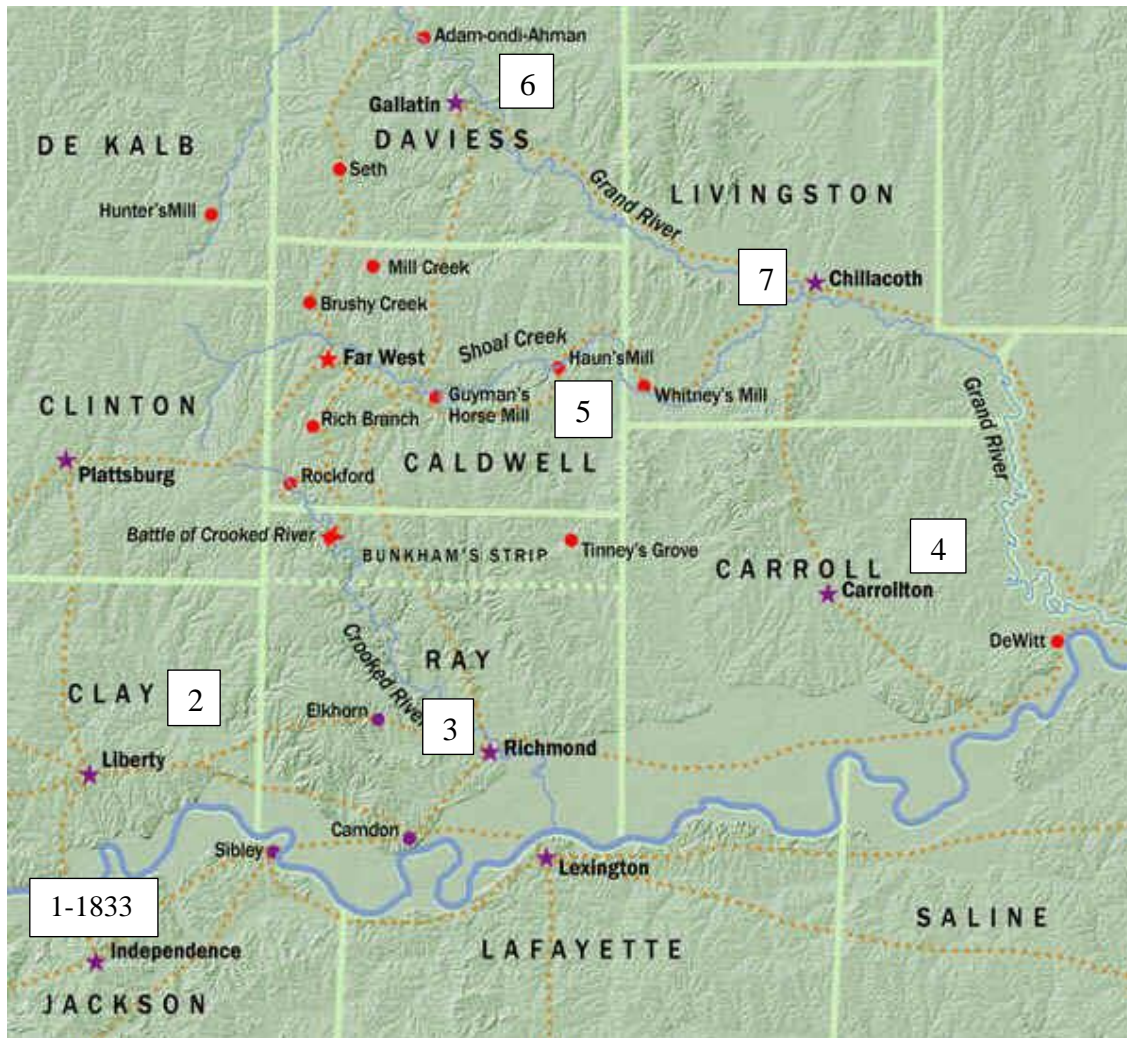
"—if men will smite you, or your families, once, and ye bear it patiently and revile not against them, neither seek revenge, ye shall be rewarded . . . the second time . . . third time . . . they should not go out unto battle against any nation, kindred, tongue, or people, save I, the Lord, commanded them . . . And I, the Lord, would fight their battles" (D&C 98:23-37; also 105:14).

Instead of fighting, the saints were driven from county to county. Repeatedly, as soon as they would build their homes and plant their farms, they were run out of town. Starting with Jackson County, then Clay, Ray, Carroll, Caldwell, Daviess, and Livingston counties. But the saints felt strongly that this is where they were to be, so they continued to try again over and over. The church was defended by a magnificent attorney, Alexander Doniphan (1808-1887), who helped to establish a new county (Caldwell County) just for the saints. But even that great solution went sour. But the saints felt strongly that this is where they were to be, so they continued to try again over and over, hoping to return to Jackson County.

Alexander Doniphan Our Hero

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| 1. They were poor | 4. They opposed slavery |
| 2. Their religious differences stirred up prejudice | 5. They believed the Indians were God's chosen people destined to inherit the land of Missouri with them. |
| 3. Their Eastern customs and dialect were alien to the Missourians | |



Timeline:

1831

July—Colesville saints arrived as first group in Missouri

August—Joseph and Sidney visit Missouri for the first time. Dedicated land for gathering and future temple

1832

March—[*Kirtland*: Joseph tarred and feathered]

April—Joseph made second visit to Missouri

Dec—800 saints had gathered in Jackson County in five branches

1833 **July**—Jackson Co. citizens distributed a “secret constitution” [*Kirtland*: 7/2, Joseph finished the JST first draft].

July 20—Printing house destroyed in the process of publishing the Book of Commandments.

July 23—Six elders offered their lives for the safety of the saints

Nov-Dec—Saints expelled from Jackson County, after “Bloody day” Monday, Nov 4. The Missourians captured the saints Ferry on the Blue River. In the fighting which ensued, at least two saints returned fire which killed two Missourians and a few horses. Rumors and lies spread, saints died, others were miraculously healed. Houses were burned. After promises were made, the saints surrendered their weapons and moved onto Clay County.

1834 **Mar-June**—Zion’s Camp of 207 men journeyed from Kirtland to Missouri. Storm protected the group. The Lord commanded no fighting, and set forth conditions to redeem Zion (D&C 105). Cholera outbreak in the camp.

1835—**Feb**—Quorums of the Twelve and Seventy organized

- 1836**— Caldwell Co created for the saints, begin settling in Far West. [*Kirtland*: Temple Dedicated.]
- 1837**—Banks failed across the nation, including the Kirtland Safety Society. Apostasy of those who blamed Joseph (200-300 or ~10% of the Kirtland saints). Joseph visited Missouri
June: Missionaries go to Great Britain. They returned after great success. Joseph said: “Some of the old prophets travelled and dedicated that land [England], and their blessings fell up you” (*Life of Heber C. Kimball*, 105).
- 1838 Jan 12-Mar**—Prophet Joseph fled enemies in Kirtland to Far West, MO; Emma and children met up en route.
June 19 and July 4—Sidney Rigdon gave “Salt Sermon” and “Independence Day speech” flaming the fire.
July-Oct—“Kirtland Camp” of ~800-mile journey to Missouri chased by persecution to arrive with even more.
Aug 6—Election day in Gallatin, Daviess Co., where unarmed saints were restrained from voting by fighting.
Oct-Nov—Battle of DeWitt, Guerilla warfare in Daviess Co., Battle of Crooked River, Boggs’ Extermination order. Mob raided homes for arms, raped women, burned, plundered, and imprisoned the leaders in Richmond.
Dec 1-Apr 15—Joseph, Hyrum, and at least three others imprisoned in Liberty Jail

1838—Danites

The increased migration of thousands of saints triggered more animosity by the Missourians. This instigated increased raids, rapes, and burnings to the saints’ homes. A community organization of men formed to help. They named themselves after the OT tribe, Dan or Danites. Some were assigned to help defend the saint’s neighborhoods, others to secure provisions, and others to build homes. It was not a secret organization. The saints had received divine instructions to only defend themselves, not attack.

One leader in the organization (a captain?) Sampson Avard, overstepped his bounds and led his group to defend themselves even to criminal actions. Avard was not alone in feeling the need to fight. Avard held secret meetings—and claimed they were directed by “the presidency.” There are other documents from this time where “the presidency” was used when the Prophet was not involved. But Joseph Smith found out about it. Joseph removed Avard from his position and denounced the secret plans. It was a short-lived, unauthorized organization.

Sadly, this group has been blown out of perspective and history often portrays it as a prophetic sanctioned organization of armed men bound to hurt or kill “non-Mormon neighbors” (*Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1.356).

Liberty Jail (Dec 1-Apr 15)

During the winter of 1838-39, for four months, Liberty Jail was the home of Lyman Wight, Caleb Baldwin, Alexander McRae, Hyrum and Joseph Smith (and for a shorter time Sidney Rigdon and others). On March 20 Joseph dictated a 29-page epistle, part of which became the words found in D&C 121-123. All three sections describe the terrible situation that the saints faced, but the Lord zooms out periodically and gives the saints his bigger picture, which can provide a helpful perspective in trouble times.

The conditions in Liberty Jail, Clay Co. were awful. They were often fed filthy food, that only abject hunger led them to eat. Lucy recorded Hyrum describing being fed human flesh and water for days—so he preferred to fast. Other weeks he said:

Our food was any thing but good and decent— poison was administered to us three or four times, the effect it had upon our systems was, that it vomited us almost to death, and then we would lay in a torpid stupid state, not even caring or wishing for life. The poison being administered in too large doses, or it would inevitably have proved fatal, had not the power of Jehovah interposed in our behalf, to save us from their wicked purposes” (Lucy Mack Smith, *History*, 1845, 272-3).

While imprisoned, Hyrum asked his wife to come and visit him. So on Feb 1, 1839, Mary Fielding and her sister, Mercy Thomson, and their two nursing babies (one 8 months, one 11 weeks) made the freezing cold 40 mile trip, in a wagon bed. It was the first time Hyrum had seen his son Joseph F. Smith, not yet 3 months old. Mercy describes the bitter coldness, sickness, and what they all suffered, and then concludes:

“A night never to be forgotten. A sleepless night. I nursed the darling babes and in the morning prepared to start for home with my afflicted sister, and as long as memory lasts will remain in my recollection the squeaking hinges of that door which closed upon the noblest men on earth. Who can imagine our feelings as we traveled homeward, but would I sell the honor bestowed upon me by being locked up in jail with such characters for gold? No! No!” (Don Corbett, *Mary Fielding Smith: Daughter of Britain*, 86).

These hardships became school lessons for the saints then and **now**.

Temple Prison

More important than the sound of hinges, Elders Roberts, Maxwell, and Holland referred to Liberty Jail as a “Temple-prison,” because of its revelatory sacred nature. The title of temple suggests that faith filled struggles can become sacred times. You can have sacred, revelatory, profoundly instructive experiences during your hardest times in life. Whether our difficulties come from persecution, heart ache, or any experience, they can become a redemptive experience. Our hardship is God’s opportunity to speak to us if we are humble and prayerful. If we join Joseph in crying, “where art thou?” we should adopt Joseph’s faith and not think he is not there—God never abandons us. Even if we feel we are not heard, He is always there!

D&C 121:26-46

The letter hints at problems that caused the fall of Zion. Pride tops the list. For example, preceding the canonized verses, of D&C 121:26, we find a several pages of Joseph’s letter, including:

“We would suggest the propriety of being aware of an aspiring Spirit which Spirit has oftentimes urged men forwards, to make foul speeches and influence the Church to reject milder Councils, and has eventually been the means of bringing much death and sorrow upon the Church, we would say be aware of pride also, for well and truly hath the wise man said, that pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall, and again outward appearance is not always a criterion for us to judge our fellow man”

(<https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-c-1-2-november-1838-31-july-1842/85>)

The reference to “foul speeches” may hint at two of Sidney’s speeches (his Salt and Independence day Sermon), that stirred up ill feelings and did far more harm than good. The latter included this encouragement of mob violence: “It shall be between us and them a war of extermination, for we will follow then, till the last drop of their blood is spilled, or else they will have to exterminate us” (Institute Manual, *Church History in the Fullness of Times*, 192). Sidney and the saints had learned exactly what that threat meant to others.

The Lord taught Joseph that He is ALWAYS aware. Then, a portion of the section before verse 33, reads:

“. . . but I beg leave to say unto you Brethren that ignorance supe[r]stition and bigotry placing itself where it ought not is often times in the way of the prosperity of this church like the torant of rain from the mountains that floods the most pure and christle stream with mire and dirt and filthyness and obscures evry thing that was clear before and all hurls along in one general deluge but time tethers <wethers>tide and notwithstanding we are roled in for the time being by the mire of the flood the next surge peradventure as time roles on may bring us to the fountain as clear as cristal and as pure as snow while all the filthiness flood wood and rubbish is left is left and purged out by the way. How long can rowling watters remain impure what power shall stay the heavens as well might man” <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/letter-to-the-church-and-edward-partridge-20-march-1839/14>

Then right before Joseph ends the first letter he adds:

“God is the author of it he is our shield it is by him we received our birth it was by his voice that we were called to a dispensation of his gospel in the begining of the fullness of times it was by him we received the book of mormon and it was by him that we remain unto this day and by him we shall remain if it shall be for our glory and in his almighty name we are determined to indure end tribulation as good soldiers unto the end” (ibid. p. 16)

The letter starts up again a day or two later with specific messages for the upcoming Church Conference. He includes this little gem shortly before verse 34. “. . . intersesions of the holy spirit which maketh intersesion for us day and knight with gronings that cannot be uttered.” Then follows D&C 121:34-122:9 without interruption. Joseph remains forgiving and disciplined his feelings.

D&C 121:34-46 *Many Called, but Few Chosen*

These are some of the most beautiful scripture and wisdom ever recorded. They apply not only to male priesthood holders but to all authority figures: from a parent to a sophomore class president, older siblings to zoo keepers, police to CEO. The challenge is to honor everyone’s agency. Unrighteous dominion is not gender or age related. 121:34-35 Joseph explains that God has called all of us to serve him. But only those who *choose to be chosen* by following the **principles of righteousness** rather than “worldliness” and “honors of men.” These powers of heaven are in **verses 41-46**. When we apply these, without pity, we will have the Spirit as our companion.

D&C 122

There is not even a punctuation mark or capitalization from the last words of section 121 and the first words of 122. But Orson Pratt still split the section into two different sections here. Perhaps the change comes because we now read more of the Lord's words than Joseph's inspiring message (those words were probably the Lord's too).

122:1 This was true throughout Joseph's life and nearly 200 years later.

122:2 This is us! I for one, have tried to study every word recorded by Joseph for decades. The "Joseph Smith Papers" project that is available at our fingertips.

122:4 The Lord admits to Joseph that his life will continue to be hard, but at some time, Joseph will be honored. Even though many came and went, all of his family stood by him. The Lord warns he prophet that more misery is coming. The idea that the Lord blesses the "chosen" or "righteous" is repeatedly proven false (even though many Jews at the time of New Testament, and Christians at the time of Joseph Smith, believed and taught it). Yet He promises blessings to those who obey His commandments. How do you work through this dichotomy?

The Lord's describing Liberty Jail with "bars and walls." The Historical Dept of Church rebuilt Liberty Jail. They replaced all the wood, but the stones and the squeaky hinges on the door are original. The walls were initially 4 feet thick. Joseph and others mentioned those creaky hinges repeatedly (spelling original).

. . . You may learn it that walls and <iron> doors <and screaming hinges> is only calcu and half scard to death Guards and jailors grining like some damned spirit lest an inocent man should make his escape to bring to light the damnable deeds of a murderous mob is cal[c]ulated in its verry nature to make the sole of an honist man feel stronger than the powers of hell. (<https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/letter-to-the-church-and-edward-partridge-20-march-1839/16>).

122:7 The perspective that we are to learn and grow through all our hard times so that we can use that extra strength in the future is comforting and motivating. I have found that my tailor-made trials are especially helpful for learning and growth.

122:8 Our Savior is a perfect Comforter and Judge because He walked in our moccasins, *and descended below all things*. In this incident, there is even a literal overlap in Caiaphas' palace, Jesus too was "dragged" to a "pit" of a prison to be scourged, and his enemies taunted Him like wolves.

122:9 This comforting message and puts everything into perspective. Remembering God is at the helm builds faith!

D&C 123 "Concatenation diabolical rascality and nefarious and murderous impositions"

This section gives lots of specific guidance for the saints gathered and gathering to Quincy, Il. 18,000 saints had gathered on the western frontier of the nation (though not all in one place).

123:1-6 Early in the spring of 1839, the leaders organized a Conference there in their temporary settlement. Several were called to gather details of the Missouri injustices, including names of both victims and mob members. Mercy Thomson's husband, Robert, was one of those who worked to fulfill this list of atrocities made against the saints. The Lord told Joseph to take these affidavits for this formal appeal to Pres. Martin Van Buren. Br. Clark Johnson has collected over 900 pages of these formal petitions from the saints who suffered in MO. Many of their petitions referenced their membership in the church. The saints' personal accounts of what they suffered at the hands of the mob are heartwrenching. For example, Br. Blackman wrote: *for damage and losses of property by burnin and being driven from the state, 150 dollars. For damage by loss of son, there is no earthly value.*" Joseph took some of these petitions to Washington DC that fall.

123:10 This is the most dramatic statement. Perhaps God is closest to us during our times of trouble.

123:12 God's truths are hard to see by those blinded by "subtle craftiness" We must always be willing to speak up.

In the same epistle, after section 123, Joseph once again praises the constitution of our nation: "...we say that the constitution of the of united states is a glorious standard it is founded in the wisdom of god it is a heavenly banner it is to all those who are priviledged with the sweats of its liberty like the cooling shades and refreshing watters of a greate rock in a thirsty..."