

*The Voice  
of the Lord is  
Unto all Men*

A REMARKABLE YEAR OF REVELATIONS IN THE  
JOHN AND ALICE JOHNSON HOME



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# CHRONOLOGICAL SUMMARY

- 1630: Charles II of England dedicates Northeast Ohio to the Connecticut Colony
- 1796: Several negotiations lead to 1.2 million acres sold to Connecticut Land Company
- 1798: Moses Cleveland leads initial survey of Connecticut Land Company acreage
- 1799: Turhand Kirtland given a portion of acreage, becoming Kirtland Township
- Early 1800s: Morleys, Whitneys among early Kirtland settlers, agriculture, mills, factories
- 1826: Sidney Rigdon pastor of Mentor, Ohio Reformed Baptist congregation
- Sept. 1830: Parley P. Pratt travels to New York, is converted
- Oct. 1830: Parley, Oliver Cowdery, Ziba Peterson, Peter Whitmer, Jr. Lamanite mission
- Nov. 1830: First missionaries in Kirtland area convert 127, including Sidney Rigdon
- Dec. 1830: Sidney Rigdon, Edward Partridge travel to New York
- Dec. 1830: Sidney and Edward Partridge in New York Jan. 1831
- Jan. 1831: Revelation "to the Ohio," John Whitmer to Kirtland
- Feb. 1831: Joseph and Emma Smith arrive in Kirtland
- Mar. 1831: Joseph and Emma move to Morley farm
- 12 Sept. 1831: Joseph and Emma move to the Johnson farm

## *Chapter 1*

# “Go to the Ohio”

## The Hand of the Lord in Gathering to Kirtland



**T**he intent of this, and the following chapter, is to place the events that characterized the ten months that the Prophet Joseph Smith and his wife, Emma, lived with the Johnsons in the larger circumstances in which they occurred. Therefore, the first chapter deals with the coming of the Saints to Kirtland and surrounding environs.

### THE LAND OF KIRTLAND

The “first commandment concerning a gathering in this dispensation” (Doctrine and Covenants 37, section heading) was revealed to Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon in December of 1830, eight months after the Church was formally organized. At that time the two hundred or more members of the Church located in the Palmyra, Fayette, and Colesville branches were experiencing intense opposition, but in Kirtland and the surrounding area Church membership was growing rapidly. Following a general call for the elect to “be gathered in unto place” (Doctrine and Covenants 29:8) in September, the Lord said three months later that it was “expedient in me that they should assemble together at the Ohio” (Doctrine and Covenants 37:3).

Years before Joseph Smith received the revelation in section 37, the Lord had begun orchestrating a chain of events to prepare Northeast Ohio as a gathering place for His Saints. Northeast Ohio is the northern edge of the Allegheny

Plateau, which in 1630 was part of four million acres of land dedicated by King Charles II of England to the Connecticut Colony. Following the American Revolution, the state of Connecticut exchanged acreage for federal assumption of its debt, and the remaining 3,366,921 acres became known as the Western Reserve. The Reserve set aside the westernmost 500,000 acres, known as the Firelands, to compensate its citizens whose property had been destroyed by the British during the war. In 1796 the remaining 1.2 million acres were sold to a group of private speculators known as the Connecticut Land Company.<sup>2</sup>

By 1798, expeditions sponsored by the Connecticut Land Company and led by Moses Cleveland began surveying this densely forested frontier. Turhand Kirtland, one of the surveyors, received a portion of the land as payment for his work, and by the fall of 1799 he was selling parcels to settlers in the area that would become known as Kirtland Township. Among these early settlers to Kirtland were Isaac and Lucy Morley and Newell and Elizabeth Ann Whitney, who would later join the Church and contribute significantly to its early history. Kirtland's economy was based primarily on agriculture, but there were also a number of water wheel-powered mills and factories on the east branch of the Chagrin River in an area referred to by the locals as Kirtland Mills.<sup>3</sup>

## CONVERSIONS OF SIDNEY RIGDON AND PARLEY P. PRATT

In the early 1800s “an unusual excitement on the subject of religion” (Joseph Smith History 1:5) swept through Northern Ohio, along with western New York and northern Pennsylvania, led by Methodists, Presbyterians, and Baptists. Among those stirring up this “unusual excitement” was Sidney Rigdon,<sup>4</sup> a Baptist convert who had qualified himself to become a licensed preacher with the regular Baptists and began preaching in Trumbull County, Ohio. There he married Phebe Brooks, then moved to Pennsylvania in 1821, where he was appointed pastor of the First Baptist Church in Pittsburgh and became well known for his dynamic preaching. A year earlier he had associated himself with the Restorationist movement led by Walter Scott and Alexander Campbell, whose followers were known as Reform Baptists or Campbellites. In 1824 he ceased preaching for the Baptists over the doctrine of

infant damnation and worked as a tanner in Pennsylvania until 1826 when he moved his family to Ohio. Sidney began preaching as a Restorationist preacher in Mentor that same year, although he was no longer authorized by the regular Baptists. In 1830, due to differences over having “all things in common” (Acts 4:32) and receiving spiritual gifts, Sidney broke with Campbell and Scott to lead congregations designated as Rigdonites. One of Sidney’s proselytes was Parley P. Pratt.

While preaching of a future gospel restoration, Sydney was unaware that the Lord had already begun restoring His Church to the earth in western New York and northern Pennsylvania. Nor was he aware that the Lord was directing him as an instrument to help prepare the way for the fulness of the restored gospel to come to “the Ohio.” Through divine orchestration, Sidney’s and Parley’s friendship would be instrumental in fulfilling that preparatory work.

In the summer of 1830, Parley P. Pratt felt impressed to sell his home in Amherst, Ohio, and travel to New York to preach the gospel. Having only ten dollars, Parley and his wife, Thankful, traveled by boat from Cleveland to Buffalo and on the Erie Canal toward Albany.<sup>5</sup> Along the way, Parley felt prompted to leave the canal boat at Newark, New York, ten miles east of Palmyra, leaving Thankful to travel on to their final destination alone. “I informed my wife that, notwithstanding our passage being paid through the whole distance, yet I must leave the boat and her to pursue her passage to our friends; while I would stop awhile in the region. Why, I did not know; but so it was plainly manifest by the Spirit to me. I said to her, ‘we part for a season; go and visit our friends in our native place; I will come soon, but how soon I know not; for I have a work to do in this region of country, and what it is, or how long it will take to perform it, I know not; but I will come when it is performed.’”<sup>6</sup>

After just a few days, Parley was introduced to the Book of Mormon by a Baptist deacon named Hamblin, which dramatically changed the course of his life. He later wrote, “I read all day; eating was a burden, I had no desire for food; sleep was a burden when the night came, for I preferred reading to sleep. . . . I knew and comprehended that the book was true. . . . My joy was now full.”<sup>7</sup>

Parley then traveled to Palmyra, hoping to meet the Prophet, but instead found the Prophet's brother Hyrum, who taught him the gospel. Parley was baptized by Oliver Cowdery on 1 September 1830. Ultimately Parley's conversion led to the conversion of Sidney Rigdon and the subsequent gathering of the New York Saints to Kirtland.

## MISSIONARY SUCCESS IN KIRTLAND

During the month of Parley's baptism, a conflict arose regarding revelation and church governance. Hiram Page, who had become a member of the Whitmer family when he married Catherine Whitmer, claimed to be receiving revelation for the Church through a seer stone. Despite the fact that the Lord had directed on the day the Church was organized that the Saints should "give heed unto all [Joseph's] words and commandments which he shall give unto you as he receiveth them" (Doctrine and Covenants 21:4), Hiram influenced many Church members, including Oliver Cowdery.

The Page deception was no small matter for Joseph. As he sought divine help just prior to the September Church conference, the Lord spoke through Joseph to Oliver: "No one shall be appointed to receive commandments and revelations in this church excepting my servant Joseph Smith, Jun." (Doctrine and Covenants 28:2). The Lord then directed Oliver to tell Hiram "that those things which he hath written from that stone are not of me" (verses 11–12, 14). Perhaps expressing faith in Oliver despite his error, the Lord called Oliver on a mission to "go unto the Lamanites" (verse 8) to "the borders by the Lamanites" (verse 9), the area where the western border of the new state of Missouri met the unincorporated Indian territory that later became the state of Kansas. (He also revealed the general location of the city of Zion.)

Three other brethren were called to serve as Oliver's companions in sections 30 and 32. Peter Whitmer Jr., a son of Peter Sr. and Mary Whitmer, the couple whose home was a residence for Joseph while he completed the Book of Mormon translation and the place where the Church was formally organized, was the first to be called. Oliver and Peter were joined by Parley P. Pratt and Ziba Peterson, who was privileged to be called on two missions with Oliver Cowdery but remained active in the Church only two or three years. Bolstered by the promise "I myself will go with them" (Doctrine and Covenants 32:3),

and carrying carpet bags full of copies of the Book of Mormon, the four missionary companions left New York in early October and traveled about 1,500 miles, mostly by foot, to Missouri, preaching to various Indian tribes along the way. Their arrival in Missouri was an important event in Church history, but their stop in Ohio on the way became a pivotal moment that would change the course of Church development.

While traveling through northern Ohio, Parley suggested they visit his former religious mentor, Sidney Rigdon. Initially the missionaries had very little success in the Kirtland area, including limited response from Sidney and his congregation, but as reported by Parley, “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.”<sup>8</sup> According to Parley, during the three weeks the missionaries were in the area, 127 people were baptized,<sup>2</sup> eventually including Sidney Rigdon and about one hundred members of his Mentor congregation.<sup>10</sup>

Sidney’s conversion meant sacrificing a popular, influential, and lucrative position for a second time. Referring to Sidney’s position and his conversion, Joseph’s history explained: “At present, the honors and applause of the world were showered down upon him, his wants were abundantly supplied, and were anticipated. . . . But if he should unite with the Church of Christ, his prospects of wealth and affluence would vanish; his family dependent upon him for support, must necessarily share his humiliation and poverty.”<sup>11</sup>

Sidney and his wife, Phebe, weighed carefully the risk and the reason. “My Dear, you have once followed me into poverty, are you again willing to do the same? She answered, ‘I have weighed the matter, I have contemplated the circumstances in which we may be placed, I have counted the cost, and I am perfectly satisfied to follow you. Yea, it is my desire to do the will of God, come life or come death.’”<sup>12</sup>

The missionaries continued their journey west, leaving the new converts to the leadership of four of their fellow converts who had been called to preside over branches in the area: Kirtland, Isaac Morley (later replaced by John Whitmer); Mentor, Sidney Rigdon; Warrensville, John Murdock; and perhaps a fourth branch in Mayfield, unknown in organization or leader.<sup>13</sup> Missionary

work also continued as the new converts preached the gospel in northern Ohio, some without formal mission calls. By 2 February, a total of about 400 people had joined the Church, including approximately seventy baptized by John Murdock.<sup>14</sup>

Desiring to meet Joseph Smith in December of 1830, Sidney Rigdon and an interested investigator and friend, Edward Partridge of nearby Painesville, traveled to New York. After meeting the Prophet, Edward was baptized, and subsequently Joseph received two revelations, one for each new convert. Addressing Sidney, the Lord compared him to John the Baptist and honored the work he had done before his conversion: “Behold thou wast sent forth, even as John, to prepare the way before me, and before Elijah which should come, and thou knewest it not” (Doctrine and Covenants 35:11). Although Sidney was unaware of his role, his congregation-building in Northeast Ohio had prepared the area for the gathering of the Church to Ohio, where the Lord continued to restore the fulness of the gospel. Many of the early Ohio converts had been followers of Sidney Rigdon, who had taught them “restoration doctrine,” thus preparing the way for the Lamanite missionaries’ success.

In December 1830, Joseph was struggling to deal with the constant and vicious persecution he and the Saints were facing in New York and northern Pennsylvania. After hearing that the gospel was rapidly gaining strength in Ohio, he petitioned the Lord in prayer and received the revelation discussed above that the Saints “should assemble together at the Ohio.” On 2 January 1831, the Prophet read this revelation to the members who were participating in a conference of the Church in Fayette, New York, and received two additional revelations wherein the Lord reiterated His command to “go to the Ohio” (Doctrine and Covenants 38:32), promising that “inasmuch as my people shall assemble themselves at the Ohio, I have kept in store a blessing such as is not known among the children of men” (Doctrine and Covenants 39:15).

## GATHERING

Many of the New York Saints began preparations to move to Ohio in response to the command to gather. Acting on directions from Joseph to assess the condition of the Saints there and to do what he could to strengthen them,

John Whitmer was the first to move, arriving in mid-January. Joseph left for Kirtland by sleigh on 24 January with his wife, Emma, who was pregnant with twins, and a young woman who assisted her, whose name is unknown. They arrived sometime between 1 and 4 February, accompanied by Sidney Rigdon, Edward Partridge, Ezra Thayre, and Joseph Knight Sr., all traveling in a wagon full of copies of the Book of Mormon. As the wagon moved slowly, Sidney Rigdon went on ahead of the group, arriving in Kirtland on 30 January.<sup>15</sup>

When Joseph's group arrived, they parked outside Newell K. Whitney's store, where Joseph entered and greeted Newell: "Newell K. Whitney, thou art the man,"<sup>16</sup> to which Newell replied, "I could not call you by name as you have me." Joseph answered, "I am Joseph the Prophet; you have prayed me here, now what do you want of me?"<sup>17</sup> Joseph had seen in vision Newell on his knees praying for the Prophet to come.

Most of the estimated 200 or more New York and Pennsylvania Saints followed the command and gathered to Ohio, despite, as Newell Knight wrote, that they "were obliged to make great sacrifices of our property."<sup>18</sup> They traveled with members of one of the three local branches: the Palmyra branch led by Martin Harris,<sup>19</sup> the Fayette branch by Thomas B. Marsh<sup>20</sup> and Lucy Mack Smith,<sup>21</sup> and the Colesville branch by Newell Knight.<sup>22</sup> These 200 Saints joined the 400 Ohio converts, and by the time the Missouri migrations began in June 1831, well over 1,000 members were living in Ohio.<sup>23</sup>

As the population of Saints in Kirtland continued to increase during the first three months following the Prophet's arrival, the Lord revealed that He would "retain a strong hold in the land of Kirtland, for the space of five years" (Doctrine and Covenants 64:21). In that five-year period nearly half of the current Doctrine and Covenants was revealed, and most of the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible was completed. Most of the priesthood offices and quorums were formalized and filled; missionaries were sent into the eastern United States, Canada, and England, bringing thousands into the kingdom; and a temple was built wherein priesthood keys were restored and the initiatory portion of the endowment was administered. Evidence suggests there may have been as many as sixty-one Church branches in the area surrounding Kirtland by the time the Saints left.<sup>24</sup>

During the Kirtland period, Joseph and Emma lived first in the home of Newell and Elizabeth Whitney, then on the Isaac and Lucy Morley farm, followed by the John and Elsa Johnson farm in Hiram. After a year there they moved back to Kirtland to live in the Whitney Store, and eventually in their own home just north of the temple.<sup>25</sup> Although the Kirtland period was characterized by a revelatory outpouring, the year the Johnsons' home was their "official" residence provided an especially significant contribution to the magnificent events of the restoration that characterized the Kirtland period of the history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

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  4. "History of Joseph Smith," *Times and Seasons*, 4(12), 177.
  5. Parley Parker Pratt, *The Autobiography of Parley Parker Pratt, One of the Twelve Apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: Embracing His Life, Ministry and Travels, With Extracts, in Prose and Verse, From His Miscellaneous Writings*, ed. Parley P. Pratt (Chicago, IL: Law, King & Law, 1888), 31–32.
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24. Karl Ricks Anderson, “The Western Reserve,” *Mapping Mormonism*, eds. Brandon S. Plewe, S. Kent Brown, Donald Q. Cannon, & Richard H. Jackson (Provo, UT: BYU Press, 2012), 28–29.
25. A summary of Church events in Kirtland in “bookmark” form is included in the appendix of this book.

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