



A HOUSE OF GOD

KIRTLAND TEMPLE STORIES AND REVELATIONS

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Paperback ISBN 13: 978-1-4621-4934-6

eBook ISBN 13: 978-1-4621-4935-3

Published by CFI, an imprint of Cedar Fort, Inc.

2373 W. 700 S., Suite 100, Springville, UT 84663

Distributed by Cedar Fort, Inc., www.cedarfort.com

Library of Congress Cataloging Number: 2025931941

Cover design by Shawnda Craig

Cover design © 2025 Cedar Fort, Inc.

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed on acid-free paper

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CHAPTER 1

“Go to the Ohio”

Doctrine and Covenants 37:1



Chronological Summary

1798	Moses Cleveland leads initial survey of Connecticut Land Company acreage
1799	Turhand Kirtland given portion of acreage, sells parcels; beginning of Kirtland Township
1826	Sidney Rigdon Campbellite pastor of Baptist Church in Mentor, Ohio
October 1830	Lamanite missionaries come to northeast Ohio
Sept. 1830	Rigdon follower and assistant, Parley P. Pratt, travels to New York and is converted
Nov. 1830	First missionaries in Kirtland area; 127 converts, including Sidney Rigdon
Dec. 1830	Sidney Rigdon, Edward Partridge travel to New York
Dec. 1830–	Three revelations call New York Saints to Ohio;
Jan. 1831	Sidney called to the work
Feb. 1831	Joseph and Emma Smith arrive in Kirtland

The Gathering of the Saints to the Land of Kirtland

The months following the formal organization of the Church on April 6, 1830, were joyous on the one hand and troublesome on the other. By the end of 1830, there were around two hundred Church members in three branches—Colesville, Fayette, and Manchester—who rejoiced in their membership in the restored Church but who also faced severe persecution, especially in Colesville. It was in this environment that the “first commandment concerning a gathering in this dispensation” (Doctrine and Covenants 37, heading) was revealed to Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon in December of 1830, eight months after the Church was formally organized. The Lord said, “And again, a commandment I give unto the church, that it is expedient in me that they should assemble

together at the Ohio” (Doctrine and Covenants 37:3). He repeated this commandment to the Saints in sections 38 and 39.

Northeast Ohio was prepared for the Saints as a gathering place. In 1630 King Charles II of England dedicated four million acres in that area to the Connecticut Colony. When Connecticut became a state after the American Revolution, it gave up a substantial acreage in its western holdings in order to obtain federal relief of its debts, but the remaining three million acres became known as the Western Reserve. About a million of those acres were sold to a group of private speculators known as the Connecticut Land Company, which employed surveying expeditions led by Moses Cleveland in 1798 to chart this densely forested frontier. One of Moses’s employees was Turhand Kirtland, who received some of the land he surveyed as payment, and he began selling off pieces in an area that was eventually known as Kirtland Township.

The Lord Prepares Ohio for the Gospel

The religious fervor that the Prophet Joseph Smith described in New York also affected northeast Ohio. A former Baptist minister with restorationist leanings, Sidney Rigdon led several Reformed Baptist congregations in the area, including his largest congregation in Mentor, just north of Kirtland. Sidney had an assistant named Parley Parker Pratt who lived in Amherst, Ohio, fifty miles west of Kirtland. In the summer of 1830, Parley sold his home following an impression to preach the gospel in New York. While on the Erie Canal, he felt another impression to leave the canal boat at Newark, New York, ten miles east of Palmyra, and leave his wife, Thankful, to travel on to their final destination alone. After just a few days, Parley was introduced to the Book of Mormon by a Baptist deacon named Hamblin. The book instantly attracted his attention, and 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.⁹

In Palmyra, Parley found Hyrum, the Prophet’s brother, who taught him the gospel. Parley was later baptized by Oliver Cowdery in September 1830. Parley’s thoughts eventually turned to sharing the gospel with his mentor, Sydney Rigdon.

Lamanite Missionaries Visit Kirtland Enroute to Missouri

In a revelation to Joseph in September 1830, the Lord called Oliver on a mission. “And now, behold, I say unto you that you shall go unto the Lamanites and preach my gospel unto them; and inasmuch as they receive thy teachings thou shalt cause my church to be established among them” (Doctrine and Covenants 28:8). The Lord further indicated his mission should occur “on the borders by the Lamanites” (Doctrine and Covenants 28:9), the area where the western border of the new state of Missouri met the unincorporated Indian territory that later became the state of Kansas.

Three other brethren were called to serve as Oliver's companions—Peter Whitmer Jr., Ziba Peterson, and Parley Pratt—in revelations now numbered sections 30 and 32 in the Doctrine and Covenants. The revelation to Parley and Ziba reads:

And now concerning my servant Parley P. Pratt, behold, I say unto him that as I live I will that he shall declare my gospel and learn of me, and be meek and lowly of heart.

And that which I have appointed unto him is that he shall go with my servants, Oliver Cowdery and Peter Whitmer, Jun., into the wilderness among the Lamanites.

And Ziba Peterson also shall go with them; and I myself will go with them and be in their midst; and I am their advocate with the Father, and nothing shall prevail against them. (Doctrine and Covenants 32:1–3)

The four missionaries left New York on foot in early October and stopped in Ohio on their way to Missouri. One of their early preaching endeavors there involved paying a visit to Parley's former religious mentor, Sidney Rigdon. Initially these missionaries had very little success in the Kirtland area and amongst Sidney and his congregation, but soon, as characterized 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."¹⁰

After three weeks, 127 people were baptized, including Sydney Rigdon and about one hundred members of his congregation. Many of these converts had been Sidney Rigdon congregants and were taught restoration doctrine by him. Thus, Sidney's preaching had prepared the way for the four missionaries. Missionary work continued without those missionaries as the new converts preached the gospel in northern Ohio, some without formal mission calls. By January, about four hundred people joined the Church—double the size of Church membership in New York and Pennsylvania—and that number soon grew to more than a thousand.

Events Leading to the Command to Gather

In December of 1830, newly baptized Sidney Rigdon traveled to New York with his friend and congregant Edward Partridge to meet the Prophet. Edward was baptized after meeting Joseph, and both men received divine guidance through him. The revelation addressed to Sidney compared him to John the Baptist, who had prepared the way for the Lord's coming in the meridian of time.

Behold, verily, verily, I say unto my servant Sidney, I have looked upon thee and thy works. I have heard thy prayers, and prepared thee for a greater work.

Thou art blessed, for thou shalt do great things. 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)

Having met Sidney and Edward, Joseph may have been influenced by two factors to seek the revelations that led to the December command to gather to Ohio: (1) the intense

persecutions the Saints were experiencing in New York and Pennsylvania and (2) the news of the missionaries' success in Ohio. Joseph received the revelation that is now in Doctrine and Covenants 37: "And again, a commandment I give unto the church, that it is expedient in me that they should assemble together at the Ohio" (Doctrine and Covenants 37:3). In that same month, the Prophet read this revelation to the members who were participating in a conference of the Church in Fayette, New York. During that conference Joseph received a divine reiteration of that commandment: "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 you shall be endowed with power from on high" (Doctrine and Covenants 38:31–32). Three days later, the Lord restated His command to gather again along with a promised blessing. "And 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, and it shall be poured forth upon their heads" (Doctrine and Covenants 39:15).

John Whitmer was the first to move, arriving in mid-January. Joseph left for Kirtland by sleigh on January 24, accompanied by his wife, Emma, who was pregnant with twins; a young woman who assisted her but whose name is unknown; and Sidney Rigdon, Edward Partridge, Ezra Thayre, and Joseph Knight Sr., all of whom traveled in a wagon full of copies of the Book of Mormon.

Joseph's arrival in Kirtland in early February 1831 was accented by his entering the store of Newel K. Whitney, a recent convert, and extending the greeting, "Newell K. Whitney, thou art the man," to which Newel 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?"⁹ Joseph had seen in vision Newell praying on his knees for the Prophet to come.

Most of the estimated two hundred or more New York and Pennsylvania Saints followed the command and gathered to Ohio despite experiencing great financial losses as they tried to sell their homes. The two hundred or more New York Saints joined the four hundred Ohio converts, so by the time the Missouri migrations began in June 1831, there were well over one thousand members in Ohio.²⁵

In the five years that spanned Joseph's arrival in Kirtland and the Kirtland Temple dedication, nearly half of the Doctrine and Covenants was revealed, and most of the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible was completed. In addition, most of the priesthood offices and quorums were formalized and filled; missionaries were sent all over 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.²⁶

The Kirtland Temple was the crown jewel of Latter-day Saint efforts during the Kirtland period of Church history. Its construction, dedication, and subsequent usage marked a culmination of the "cascade" of revelations received by the Prophet in Kirtland, and its story provides a similar cascade of witnesses to the divine authenticity of the restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ through the instrumentality of Joseph Smith.

⁹ *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*, 3d ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1938), 36–37.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 38.

[11](#) Andrew Jenson, *LDS Biographical Encyclopedia*, 4 vols. (Salt Lake City: Andrew Jenson History Company, 1901), 1:224.

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