

A brief investigation into the founding of The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints, its subsequent persecutions and migrations, and an analysis of the resulting misunderstandings of both the religion itself and the reasons for the persecution.

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Introduction

In the religious history of the United States no sect has such an extraordinary history as that of the Mormons or The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints. Their story has an Old Testament ring to it with revelations from God, a martyred prophet, a trek through the wilderness, and a promised land. This was not a story that unfolded in the Holy Land, however. It took place in North America. The revelations happened in New York, the Prophet was Joseph Smith, the pilgrimage went through the midwestern and western United States, and the promised land was Utah.¹

The Mormon story may be interesting, but their growth has been phenomenal. Mormonism has grown from a congregation of six into an international religion with 3,500,000 members in 1970.² The growth of The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints is even more astounding when we consider some of the things the church believes in. The Mormons believe the obvious myth that the Indians of North America somehow descended from the twelve tribes of Israel.³ They think that man was created in God's image and that God has the physical attributes and passions of man. They say the Holy Spirit is a spiritual substance diffused throughout the universe.⁴ The Mormons believe that Christian churches lost contact with God's will in the second or third century and only Joseph Smith was able to find God again.⁵ Mormonism

is a biblical religion and the saints take every word in the Bible literally. The Mormon religion has been seen as the result of what happens when an ignorant people are allowed to draw their own conclusions from the Bible.⁶

What made the Mormons special was their unity. It is the result of an unusual faith that sets its believers apart. Most Protestant splinter groups just reinterpret the King James Bible, but the Mormons claimed to have new revelations.⁷ The special unity of Mormonism was considered anti-American and led to its being called the religion that best represented what American life was not supposed to be. In 1889 John Wesley Hugh, a Methodist minister, stated that any Mormon was an enemy of the government, a traitor to the flag, and the foe of American civilization.⁸

The Mormon religion is best remembered for its prophet, Joseph Smith, a man who claimed direct revelation from God.⁹ It is known for the high emotion in its services that lead men to speak in tongues and claim special visions. The religion is known for its stress on community and its search for Zion. Mormonism is remembered for the practice of polygamy. Lastly, and maybe most importantly, Mormonism is known for the persecution that its people had to endure whenever they moved to a new area.¹⁰

Many have thought that the persecution was all caused by people resenting the religious practices of The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints. Polygamy, for example

was supposed to make men cold, dictatorial, brutal, and heartless. Mormon women were thought to be no better than slaves. The saints as a whole were no better than Catholics to the men of the frontier because both lived their religion emotionally.¹¹ The saints, however, were not just driven from place to place because of religious practices. More often than not politics, economics, and fear were involved in the colonies breaking up.

Mormon Church in New York

The early history of the Mormon Church revolved around one figure, Joseph Smith. By following the events of his life we can get almost all the details concerning Mormon colonies and their persecution in Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois. Joseph Smith, the prophet of the Mormon religion, has been called the most controversial person of nineteenth-century America. With the Mormon people his status was said to be that of a god. He had an overwhelming personality like so many other great historical figures. It was said by one of his bitter enemies, General Moses Wilson: "I carried him into my home in chains and in less than two hours my wife loved him better than me." Joseph Smith could move people's emotions and manipulate them which is why he was so successful as a religious leader.¹²

Joseph Smith was born in Sharon, Vermont on December 23, 1805 and was named after his father. His mother's name was Lucy. Joseph was born into an insecure family situation. By the time he was five years old his family had lived in three towns in Vermont and one in New Hampshire. Depression gripped all of New England, and Joseph Smith senior was involved in all kinds of money making projects that failed. He did every thing from selling ginseng to the Chinese to farming.¹³ All his farms failed until the time he settled Palmyra, New York. Joseph junior was ten at the time. The town was in an area near Lake Ontario that was called "the

burned over district" because of all the religious revivals that had taken place there.¹⁴

The Smith family seems to have been greatly concerned with religion. They had, as all settlers of the area did, a hope and fear that the millennium was approaching.¹⁵ Joseph's parents accepted the divinity of Christ and the truths of the Bible, but were slow to join any established religion. Finally some of the family joined the Presbyterian church and some joined the Methodist church.¹⁶ Lucy Mack Smith had a firm belief that one of her children was destined for religious greatness because of the history of her family and the religious dreams of her husband.¹⁷ Lucy's father Soloman Mack, had written a book called A Narrative of the Life of Soloman Mack (containing an account of the many severe accidents he met with during a long series of years, together with the extraordinary manner in which he was converted to the Christian Faith). To this book were added a number of hymns which Mack had written at the time some of his relatives had died. This text was read to Lucy's children every day. Lucy Smith never met a preacher she liked until the time her son declared himself a religious leader.¹⁸

Joseph Smith's youth is a source of great disagreement between Mormon and non-Mormon historians and a great deal of patience is needed to find out what he was really like. Most descriptions of the young Joseph Smith were made well after he had become famous. Therefore they are either colored by

prejudice or a great deal of sentiment.¹⁹ Two versions of Joseph Smith's early life are the most prominent. On the one hand there is Joseph Smith's own autobiography in which he says that he was a youth caught up in religious turmoil and hampered by a lack of education. On the other hand you have the book Mormonism Unveiled written by an ex-Mormon named Hurlbut. Hurlbut went around Smith's old neighborhood after he had become famous and interviewed people who had known the Mormon prophet. He got fifty-one people to sign a sworn affidavit that said Joseph was devoid of all moral character and that he had immoral habits.²⁰ The book called all the Smith's a shiftless whiskey drinking bunch whose main occupation was treasure hunting.²¹

Joseph Smith in reality was neither a vicious derelict nor a youthful mystic who could have been a saint. He was a product of the frontier. Like the people around him he was a victim of poverty and ignorance, but he was different in that he had a high native intelligence, a great imagination, and a desire to make something of himself. Joseph was not meant to be a shopkeeper or a farmer, and he hated the thought of it.²² Neighbors who were friendly with the Smiths describe Joseph as a Huckleberry Finn type figure who had an easy fun-loving air about him. Joseph loved to draw attention to himself as did a lot of his neighbors. The title "Biggest Liar in the County" was actively sought, and there were many people around who claimed to have the power to

find buried treasure. Joseph Smith was one of these treasure hunters and also claimed to be able to tell the future. He did both through the use of a peep stone. His talents were thought to be powerful throughout the neighborhood.²³ The earliest public record we have concerning the prophet deals with his treasure hunting. In March, 1826, when Joseph was twenty-one, he was tried for disorderly conduct in Bainbridge, New York. He was called an imposter in the charges brought against him. The court record includes Joseph Smith's admission that he was involved in treasure hunting. The judge ruled Joseph Smith guilty of disturbing the peace.²⁴

Joseph Smith's transition from fortune teller to religious leader began when he wrote The Book of Mormon in the years 1827-1830. The 275,000 word book was written as a history of three ancient Indian tribes that lived in North America. These tribes of Indians were said to be the descendants of the twelve tribes of Israel. The book has prophets, battles and kings similar to the Old Testament and is written in a King James style.²⁵ The first prophet mentioned is Nephi who sailed to America with his father Lehi after the destruction of Jerusalem in 600 B.C. Nephi had two evil tempered older brothers named Lamien and Lemuel who God cursed with red skin and three good natured younger brothers who had white skin. These two races were called the Nephites and the Laminites. They built forts and had great epic battles. The bodies of the people were killed in these wars were

stacked up in mounds and covered with earth. These mounds can still be seen today. The biggest battle took place in New York where the Nephites were wiped out by the Lamanites and buried in a huge mound. Joseph Smith also wrote the story of a third tribe called the Jaredites who came to America after the dispersion at the Tower of Babel. This was approximately 2,500 B.C. They came across the ocean in eight barges with male and female animals. This explained how animals got to this continent and also the more ancient Indian civilizations that were unearthed in the nineteenth century.²⁶

Joseph Smith's Book of Mormon has been explained in many ways over the years. It has been said that Joseph was a dreamer who, because of inherited epilepsy, was able to have visions. Also it has been guessed that Joseph Smith was just a person overly excited by the religious revival going on around him and that emotional trances caused him to see things.²⁷ The most complex hypothesis is called the Spalding Theory. This theory stated that the Book of Mormon was nothing more than a plagiarism of an old manuscript which was composed by Solomon Spaulding. The text was somehow stolen from a printing house in Pittsburgh by Sidney Rigdon, a later convert of Joseph Smith. After adding religious principles to the story of the Indians he was determined to publish the book. After hearing of the supernatural powers of Joseph Smith, who lived three hundred miles away, he visited him secretly. The two men planned a new religion and nine months later Rigdon was supposedly converted. It is not possible

for these theories to be proven; however. Again it comes down to what Mormon history says and what non-Mormon history says.²⁸

According to the Mormon account of how the Book of Mormon came to be, Joseph Smith, troubled by the religious turmoil within him, turned to the Epistle of James. In the first chapter, fifth verse, it states: "If any of you is without wisdom, let him ask it from God who gives generously and ungrudgingly to all, and it will be given him." So in the spring of 1820 Joseph knelt in prayer and asked God what the true religion was. God the father and Christ supposedly appeared to him and told him not to join any religion. Christ also stated that all the established churches were using incorrect doctrine and that if Joseph kept the faith the truth would be revealed to him.²⁹

Three years later another heavenly personage appeared to Joseph Smith. This was the angel Moroni. The angel informed him that he was a prophet and that he had been chosen to translate some golden plates, located near his home. The next day, when Joseph was coming back from the fields, Moroni again appeared to him. He showed Joseph where the golden plates were, but would not let him take them until he had purified himself. This process took four years and each year Joseph revisited the stone box where the plates were and was instructed by Moroni.³⁰ These years were hardly a time of purification. This was when Joseph was doing some of his

most extensive treasure seeking. This is also the period in which Joseph met his wife. In 1827 Joseph went to Harmony, Pennsylvania with Joseph Stowel to look for buried treasure on his property. While there the prophet fell in love with Emma Hale, a neighbor girl, and secretly married her on January 18, 1827. Emma's father never cared for Joseph because he thought he was dishonest. This may have motivated Joseph to switch from the occult into religion.³¹

On September 22, 1827 the golden plates were delivered into the hands of Joseph Smith to translate.³² He was able to render the plates, written in Egyptian, into English through the use of Urim and Thummin. These were said to be diamond-like stones set in spectacle type frames. Smith's family, especially his mother Lucy, believed completely in what he was doing and helped him in any way possible. Shortly after he got the plates, Joseph had to move to Harmony, Pennsylvania for a while because of the stir his discovery caused. His father-in-law thought he was farming so he let him use one of his houses.³³

The prophet, looking through Urim and Thummin, dictated the book from behind a screen. He did this first to his wife who could not write very well, then to a farmer named Martin Harris, who financed the whole project. Finally he dictated it to a school teacher named Oliver Cowdery. Cowdery proved to be an excellent secretary, and his distinct style can be seen in the Book of Mormon. All three people completely be-

lieved the prophet.³⁴ When the book was finished Joseph Smith gave some legitimacy to it by getting a sworn statement from Oliver Cowdery, Martin Harris, and David Whitmer stating that they saw the angel, heard a voice from heaven, and saw the golden plates. Eight other men, Christian Whitmer, Jacob Whitmer, Perer Whitmer, John Whitmer, Hiram Page, Joseph Smith Sr., Hiram Smith, and Samuel Smith, all claimed to have handled the plates. Their statements were printed in the first Book of Mormon and none ever denied what they had stated.³⁵ The prophet probably played on the emotions of the men to get their statements. When the book was completed, Martin Harris supplied the money to have it printed. Five thousand copies were printed in Palmyra by the spring of 1830 at the cost of three thousand dollars.³⁶

We can only speculate where the Book of Mormon really came from. Some of it must have been the product of the imagination of Joseph Smith playing with three thousand years of history and local Indian legends. Part of the book was the dreams of Joseph Smith senior that had been written down. Part of the Book of Mormon was concerned with Joseph Smith junior's hatred of the Catholics. Finally there were 27,000 words in the book copied from the King James Bible. Joseph took great pains to make sure that his writing was chronologically correct and filled in predictions of things that had already happened. Joseph Smith's composition propelled him from a money digger to a religious giant.³⁷

On April 6, 1830 the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints began with six members. When it held its first conference, in June of 1830, there were thirty converts present.³⁸ The church just never seemed to get off the ground in New York. This seems to be because of Joseph Smith's money digging reputation in the area, his arrests for disorderly conduct, and the fact that the Smith's went bankrupt shortly after the church got started.³⁹ In any case, at the time of the second church conference, in September of 1830, there were only 62 members.⁴⁰

The church was heckled in New York, but no serious persecution took place. A dam that had been built for Baptism was destroyed by gentiles and mob violence was threatened against Joseph Smith. There was adverse publicity in the nearby newspapers, but the main thing holding the church back was Joseph Smith's bad name in the New York area. This reputation was what the prophet had to escape if he was ever going to be successful.⁴¹

These first month's were not a total loss, however. Church structures were set up like the Aaronic priesthood, the Melchizedek priesthood and the twelve apostles. The Aaronic priesthood provided for members in the church who could baptise. The Melchizedek priesthood took care of the administrative part of the church, while the twelve apostles supervised the missionary activity and the lower ministries of the church. Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowderly were the

the first two members of the church to become priests. Through a special revelation they saw Peter, James and John along with John the Baptist who ordained them. This happened on May 15, 1829. The church ministries established at this time can still be found in Mormonism today.⁴²

The Mormon Church in Ohio

In October of 1830 Joseph Smith sent four of the elders of his little church west to try and convert the Indians or Laminites as he called them. The men were Oliver Cowdery, Parley Pratt, Peter Whitmer, and Ziba Peterson.⁴³ Parley Pratt, who was a former Campbellite from Cleveland, Ohio, guided the party to Kirtland, Ohio. This was a little town on the shores of Lake Erie. There they managed to convert a Campbellite preacher named Sidney Rigdon.⁴⁴ The conversion was probably helped by the fact that Rigdon had recently had a quarrel with Campbell and set up his own communist society in Kirtland. Sidney Rigdon had always believed in the gathering of Israel and the new Book of Mormon confirmed his belief. Rigdon supposedly fasted and prayed for days until he saw an angel who told him to convert. Once he converted he managed to bring his whole congregation into the new religion in less than two hours. The people who converted reacted with tears of joy and fainting.⁴⁵

The conversion of Kirtland was the most important event in early Mormon history. At last Joseph Smith could preach to people who were sympathetic toward his religion. The idea of a golden Bible and revelations caught on with these people. Kirtland was the place where a large body of Mormons could gather for the first time. This was the place where important church leaders such as Brigham Young, the savior of the

church in later years, came to meet the prophet. Lastly, this was the center of the early missionary work of the church and the location of the first temple.⁴⁶ Three weeks after the saints came to Ohio there were 127 Mormons and by the next spring there were 1,000.⁴⁷

Shortly after his conversion Sidney Rigdon went to New York to meet the prophet. At the time Joseph was twenty-five and Rigdon was thirty-seven. Smith quickly signed up the older man and saw in him a great leader who could help to extend his religion. The prophet was not wrong. Joseph Smith today is called the creator of Mormonism, but Sidney Rigdon is called its evangelist.⁴⁸ Rigdon in turn was impressed with the young prophet and decided to overlook his colored past. He was satisfied with the fact that Joseph had been acquitted in his two recent disorderly conduct trials. Rigdon decided to encourage the prophet in his religious writings and in later years he gave Joseph Smith whatever formal religious knowledge he had. Shortly after Joseph met Rigdon he revealed the Book of Enoch which predicted a new Jerusalem. Sidney Rigdon immediately saw this Jerusalem as Kirtland, Ohio.⁴⁹

In the latter part of January, 1831 Joseph Smith, guided by Sidney Rigdon, moved to Kirtland. He arrived there on February 7, 1831 Joseph convinced sixty members of his New York congregation to go with him by telling them that Ohio was the east end of a promised land that stretched to the

Pacific Ocean. He also took with him his mother and father, along with four of his brothers who helped him build the Kirtland colony. The core of the Kirtland church, however, was the Rigdon congregation and the New York people never did fit in too well.

There were many disturbing elements in the Mormon church when Joseph Smith arrived in Ohio. Prayer meetings were characterized by fits and trances. Converts would roll on the ground in masochistic fits and go out to the woods to preach from tree stumps to imaginary congregations. Some people would speak in tongues and others would go to the fields and swear that they had copied down revelations. Joseph Smith told his church members that all this must stop and that he was one of the few who could claim revelation. He offered as proof of this his Book of Mormon, the Book of Enoch and the sworn statements of witnesses who had seen his revelations. The prophet denounced false spirits and claimed that many visions were caused by the devil. The false intellectualism of Mormonism, which gradually weakened it, at first gave it strength.⁵¹

It may seem that Joseph Smith sought to destroy all authority in the church save his own. This is far from the truth, however. He firmly believed in the universal priesthood of all believers. He appealed to the common man on the frontier who hated priestcraft, especially Roman. Joseph ordained every male convert to the priesthood, thus giving his

church a wide base of support. All men of faith had a feeling of worth which was satisfying to them.⁵² Every male had a title of bishop, priest, deacon, elder, or teacher. With the title came a certain rank and responsibility. The bishops were in charge of the administration of the church, ordaining the lesser ministers, and celebrating the sacraments. Priests could preach, teach, and administer communion. They also were able to ordain deacons, teachers and other priests. Teachers were told to mingle with the people and see that there was unity in the church. They were allowed to preach at certain times. Deacons were in charge of maintaining churches and seeing to the needs of the poor. The elders of the church could ordain other elders, administer baptism, conduct confirmation, and run church services. Joseph also reinstated the gift of tongues and gave it to certain elders and also appointed certain leaders in the church to be faith healers.⁵³

When Joseph Smith arrived in Kirtland he saw that the colony was also in the midst of a great deal of financial chaos. The town was set up by Sidney Rigdon according to the principles of communism.⁵⁴ Everything was held in common, but there was the problem of people taking other people's clothes and property without leave. Joseph Smith decided to proclaim the "Order of Enoch", a new type of economic structure for the colony. The order had five basic principles. First of all, production was kept on an individual basis.

Secondly, a certain amount of property was given to each family to live on, depending on the number of members. Thirdly, the church received all the profits made off its land. Fourth, when the steward of a piece of land died he gave his property back to the church. Lastly, if any man wanted to improve his property he had to go to a bishop for permission. Joseph first tried his order out on his New York brethren and it worked pretty well.⁵⁵

Joseph Smith sent his missionaries all over New England and crowds poured into Kirtland during the fall and winter of 1832. Some of the people who came were converts to the faith sent by other Mormons and others were just curiosity seekers who wanted to see the prophet. They thought maybe he would perform a miracle or have a revelation. For people with little excitement in their lives this was a great event. Religious exuberance reigned.⁵⁶ Plans were laid out for a town of fifteen to twenty thousand people which would contain the first Mormon temple, thirty-two streets, and 225 blocks. Brigham Young would use the same plans fourteen years later to lay out Salt Lake City.⁵⁷

There was one act of persecution while the Mormons were in Ohio. On the night of March 24, 1832 a drunken mob, scared that Joseph Smith was going to take their land for his church, smashed into the John Johnson home in Hiram, Ohio. Joseph Smith was there making a translation of the Bible.⁵⁸ The mob dragged Smith from his bed, beat him, stripped him,

scratched him, tarred and feathered him. They also tried to force a glass of vile between his teeth. And if Eli Johnson, son of John, could have had his way, the mob would have castrated the prophet. Eli thought Smith was having relations with his sister. Rigdon, who was also living nearby, was beaten senseless. Despite all this the prophet lived up to a prior commitment and preached in church the next day. This was the first and last act of violence against the Mormons in Ohio. After this the Smiths returned to the safety of Kirtland.⁵⁹

The real problem for The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints in Ohio was a financial one. The temple that was built over-taxed the Mormon resources; and everything the saints tried in order to pay off the building, got them deeper into debt.⁶⁰ The structure was 55 feet wide, 65 feet long, three stories high and was built at a cost of \$70,000. The Mormons had only half the money raised by the time the imposing white structure was completed. Despite the great celebration of March 27, 1833, which lasted two days and nights, the Mormons were in deep trouble.⁶¹ First, a mercantile business and a saw mill were started to make money. Both business ventures failed, caused unrest among the Mormons, and led to a \$80,000 debt. Next, land speculation was tried. This idea worked for a while, but gradually led to greater financial problems.⁶²

In the late 1830's it looked as if Kirtland was in the

midst of an economic boom. Buildings and businesses were being started all over town. In reality the city was going through a giant inflationary trend. Along Lake Erie, from Buffalo to Cleveland, land speculators were predicting one giant city. Kirtland, Ohio was right in the middle. Land sold for twenty times its original value and the population of Ohio jumped 62% in ten years as compared to a national increase of 32%. Kirtland lots went from fifty dollars to two thousand and farm land jumped from ten dollars to one hundred fifty dollars an acre. The prophet played auctioneer buying and selling church property with big dividends. He borrowed money everywhere, ranging in sums from three hundred fifty to three thousand dollars. On July 11, 1836 disaster loomed on the horizon. On that date Andrew Jackson stated that all land purchases must be made in gold or silver.⁶³

Joseph Smith decided that he would start a bank to pay off his debt and get hard cash. He estimated his own worth at \$300,000 because of the land he had bought. The prophet was sure that his bank, with land to back it, would destroy all other banks. The Ohio state legislature denied the bank a charter, so Joseph made the enterprise an anti-bank company. The start of the Kirtland Anti-Bank Company began a period of prosperity that lasted less than a month. At first Joseph put Sidney Rigson in charge of the bank and later he gave the responsibility to Dr. F. B. Williams who had more business experience. Everyone in Kirtland had bills bulging in their

pockets, but nothing was going to stem the tide that saw 800 banks close.⁶⁴

The prophet claimed to have \$600,000 at his disposal, but in reality he had less than \$6,000 to back his bank. In the vault he had boxes that had fifty cent pieces on the top and lead or stone underneath. The Dansville Republican published its suspicion of fraud against the bank.⁶⁵ A run on the Kirtland Bank started. The bills that had been issued were worth twelve and one half cents on a dollar, and from the start the bank had been operating in an illegal manner. Joseph Smith faced a thousand dollar fine while Rigdon was charged with making illegal bills. Thirteen suits were brought against the prophet asking for damages of \$25,000 to \$35,000. His debt to non-Mormons probably amounted to \$150,000. Since any Mormon who brought suit against the church was automatically excommunicated, most did not.⁶⁶

After the collapse of the bank, Joseph Smith fled to his new Mormon colony in Missouri (founded in 1831) for a two month visit. He not only went on forced vacation, but he also sent the leaders of his church out to do missionary work around this country. He also sent them to England. Joseph hoped they would forget the bank disaster while converting gentiles. The prophet finally returned to Kirtland hoping to pick up the pieces, but he found his church divided into deserting groups and he himself was arrested seven times for debt. Each time he was arrested, faithful Mormons bailed him

out.⁶⁷ When it looked like he was going to be arrested for the eighth time, he fled to Far West, Missouri and never returned again. At Far West, the Mormons welcomed the prophet with open arms. They felt Kirtland's collapse was a sign from God that showed Joseph Smith belonged in Missouri.⁶⁸

Before the disaster at Kirtland the prophet's character was also attacked. The rumors of polygamy had already started. As early as August 1835 the church had to deny the doctrine of polygamy. At this time Joseph was accused of getting a Fannie Alger, a seventeen year old orphan girl, pregnant while she was living in his house. Oliver Cowdery brought this charge against the prophet, for which he was rewarded with excommunication. Smith truly needed the fresh start that far away Missouri provided. The shining image of Joseph Smith had been tarnished in Ohio. After the prophet left Kirtland, it returned to its original condition before the saints' arrival, a sleepy little village.⁶⁹

Mormon Church in Missouri

After Parley Pratt and Oliver Cowderly converted Sidney Rigdon's congregation in Kirtland, Ohio they went on west to convert the Laminites. They ended up in Missouri preaching to the Indians. The two missionaries failed to convert any Laminites, but Parley Pratt did come back to Kirtland in the spring of 1831 with glowing stories of the prosperity of Independence, Missouri. Independence was going through an explosion of prosperity because of the people pouring through it to go west. Oliver Cowderly had remained in Missouri, certain that he had found Zion. Joseph Smith hesitated about sending settlers to Independence, because the missionary work among the Indians had been a failure. Nor had any whites in the area been converted.

Two things caused Joseph Smith to change his mind about a colony in Missouri. During a church prayer meeting the prophet, overcome with emotion, tried to cure a sick person and bring a dead child back to life. He failed at both causing many people to question their faith in him. After this happened, two men, Lemon Copley and Ezra Thaser, renigged on a generous gift of land. This land was to be used to settle the New York Mormons. Those that had already moved on the land were ordered off. The prophet had to save face somehow. Joseph Smith stated that miracles could not be performed in Ohio, but only farther west perhaps in Missouri. He also said that abundant land would be found for settlers in Mis-

souri. Immediately, the head of the Mormon church left for Independence and when he arrived there he declared it to be the new Jerusalem. Sidney Rigdon was appalled by the colony to be placed in Missouri. He firmly believed Zion was in Kirtland. From 1831 to 1837 there were two centers for The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints. One was in Ohio, the other in Missouri.⁷¹

Eight hundred miles of horrible roads separated the two Mormon colonies, so cooperation was unfeasible if not impossible. Joseph Smith set up a new "United Order" in Jackson County, Missouri, laid a new cornerstone for a temple, and made plans for Mormon villages. When he left to go back to Ohio in 1832, there were three hundred converts. By 1838 there would be twelve thousand Mormons in Missouri.⁷² It was requested by Mormon church officials that an orderly migration take place to Jackson County. This did not happen, however. Landless saints poured into Missouri and settled wherever they could without seed, cattle, or money. A store, to divide up community property was established shortly after Joseph left. A paper called the Evening and Morning Star was also started to keep the people in Ohio informed of the Missouri colony's progress. Joseph Smith made visits now and again to Jackson County, but did not take up residence there until after Kirtland collapsed.⁷³ He gradually appointed a nine man board to run the saints' business affairs in Jackson County. The board was led by Oliver Cowdery and Martin Har-

ris. the people of the Mormon faith that were in Missouri always were mad at the prophet because he chose to live in Kirtland rather than Independence.⁷⁴

Few things in history rival the barbarism shown the Mormons while they were in Missouri. The people of Missouri were irritated by the saints who settled in their state for several reasons. First of all, the way they settled an area caused anxiety and jealousy. The Mormons had come to stay until the millenium and they bought land and built settlements at a rapid rate. When they settled a place, they bragged that they would gradually buy out the gentile land. The saints all moved into the same district and the original settlers of an area found themselves a minority very quickly.⁷⁵ Secondly, the Mormons had an attitude toward the Indians and Blacks which the Missourians could not accept. The saints were northerners and abolitionists, while most Missouri people were from Kentucky and Tennessee. The Mormon people preached to the Indian and Negroe hoping that some day they would swell the Mormon ranks. In fact, a few recently freed slaves did try to move into Latter-day Saint settlements near Independence, but it was not allowed.⁷⁶ Thirdly, the cliquish nature of the Mormons offended the people of western Missouri. They had certain secret military organizations for police action within the colonies that scared gentiles. Also, wherever the saints went, they voted in a block as their church elders told them to. Missouri people did not like Mormon revelations,

faith healing, and other religious oddities, but they were more scared of the Mormon group mentality and this fear resulted in violence.⁷⁷

One event touched off the persecution in Jackson County against the Mormons. In the summer of 1834, W.W. Phelps ... wrote an article in the Evening and Morning Star in which he said: "Let slavery take its course towards its abolishment and prudence be our guide in the free slave question."⁷⁸ This small statement angered the old settlers and in a mob council on July 20, 1833 five hundred people drew up five declarations. These declarations included the demand that no more Mormons should be moved into Jackson County. The mob also wanted the saints already in Jackson County to move out as soon as possible. When the resolution was completed the mob immediately went and presented it to the leaders of the Mormon church in Independence. The Mormons pleaded for time to make a decision on the requests, but got only fifteen minutes. When no answer to the demands was forthcoming the gentiles went crazy. They burned the newspaper office and printing press of the Evening and Morning Star. Then the gentiles destroyed the Mormons' store and got assurances from the manager that he would leave. Then they tarred and feathered Bishop Edward Partridge and later they stoned some Mormons, burned barns, and took shots at church leaders.⁷⁹

The Mormons of Jackson County called out to Kirtland and the prophet for help, but no help came. The prophet felt that

his going to Jackson County could only make things worse and that the ill luck of the saints there was caused by their own sin. He appealed to the governor of Missouri for assistance. Governor Duncklin assured Joseph Smith that legal recourse could be sought. When the Latter-day Saints make known their intentions of fighting through the courts, the persecutions started again.⁸⁰

On the night of October 31, 1833 fifty Missourians attacked a Mormon settlement on the Blue River. They destroyed houses and barns and also beat several Mormon men. Then on November 1, 1833 the gentiles again gatered in Independence and destroyed Latter-day Saint property. One of them, Richard McCarthy, was caught and brought before judge Samuel Webster who refused to do a thing. The Mormons decided that it was time to fight back. On November 4, 1833 an open battle was fought near the Blue River between forty-nine Mormons and a group of gentiles. Two gentiles were killed and one Mormon. Governor Dunklin was informed that a whole group of Missouri citizens had been wiped out by the saints so he called out the militia. The Mormons were disarmed and forced to leave their homes and land. One thousand two hundred Mormons were driven into Clay County and had to seek shelter from the elements. Some died from exposure. They were greeted in Clay County with kindness and pleaded with the governor for relief. A hearing was held, but nothing ever came of it. There was no justice in Jackson County for the Mormons.⁸¹

In February of 1834, Parley Pratt and Lyman Wright arrived in Kirtland and demanded that Joseph Smith do something about the situation in Missouri. Finally on May 5, 1834 Joseph set out with two hundred men to try and recapture the Mormon land that had been lost. The little army was plagued by bad roads and foul weather. As they approached Independence the state militia formed to meet them. The prophet knew he would be slaughtered if he chose to fight so he backed down. Most of his men had the cholera and were in no condition to fight any way. Joseph went back to Kirtland leaving the Mormons in Missouri with nothing.⁸²

The Mormons who fled to Clay County gradually wore out their welcome. At first they tried to buy land on credit, but nobody would let them. Finally, the people of Clay County asked them to leave. The saints fled into a section of Ray County. There, in December of 1836, the Missouri legislature granted them the right to organize Caldwell County and there they established the city of Far West. With money sent to them from Kirtland, and with money they were finally able to borrow, the Mormons in Missouri started to build again.⁸³

Far West was the place where Joseph Smith and Sidey Rigdon fled when the Kirtland colony went bankrupt. Despite all the bad things that had happened to the Mormons in Jackson County, and in spite of the failures of Joseph in Ohio, the people were over joyed to see the prophet. The whole city turned out to meet him and they also welcomed the six hundred

saints that followed Joseph Smith from Ohio. The prophet was revived by this friendly reception and he immediately got started on plans for the town's improvement.⁸⁴

There were ten thousand Mormons in Far West at the time of Joseph Smith's arrival. Without goods and almost without capital, the city had experienced a phenomenal growth. Within a year after the prophet's arrival there were twenty thousand people in the city. A new town was laid out by the Mormon leaders and a new temple was planned. A school was also started that taught such things as Greek and Hebrew, along with regular school subjects. At this time the Danites, a secret military force, was started to protect the Mormons from their Missouri neighbors and to keep order within the colony. It was a radical organization and its leader, Lyman Wright, wanted war with the people of Missouri. A revised "United Order" was set up also. All members of the church deeded their property to it and one-tenth of any money they made was given to the Mormon church.⁸⁵

Peace in Missouri was shattered again because of two separate events. On July 7, 1838 the Mormons gathered in Far West for the laying of the new temple cornerstone. There was a great parade with infantry leading the way and calvary bringing up the rear. The occasion was topped off with a speech by Sidney Rigdon. In the speech Rigdon stated that the saints would exterminate any group that tried violence against them. The gentiles who had come to watch in peace

were greatly alarmed and spread the word around the area. On August 6, 1838 election day was held in Missouri. For the first time in five years the Mormons decided to vote and thirty of them went to Gallatin to cast their ballots. When they were refused the right to vote, violence broke out and the Mormons beat the gentiles off with clubs.⁸⁶

Joseph Smith immediately led a small army to the cabin of Adam Black, a justice of the peace. He forced him to sign a peace agreement. A warrant was issued for Joseph's arrest. The prophet knew that if he gave himself up in Gallatin he would be killed, so he demanded that the hearing be moved closer to Far West. When it was, he stationed his army nearby. The prophet was freed by the judge on five hundred dollars bond. This angered the Missouri people even more. Armed bands of gentiles fired hay stacks, stole property and whipped Mormons. Two Mormon towns were openly attacked (DeWitt and Adam Ahman), and every county in Missouri drew up resolutions threatening the saints. Everyone in DeWitt was gradually forced to move into Far West, and Joseph Smith called every able bodied man to Far West. Numerous skirmishes took place on the edge of the city and it looked like civil war would break out.⁸⁷

On October 25, 1838 a small battle took place near Crooked River. One Gentile and three Mormons were killed. It was reported to Governor Boggs, who had been recently elected on an anti-Mormon ticket, that a whole company of

state militia had been wiped out. Boggs ordered the militia to drive the Mormons out of Missouri. The militia first came to the settlement of Haun's Mill where they killed seventeen Mormons and wounded fifteen. They next surrounded Far West. Joseph Smith knew that he was out numbered five to one and he reluctantly asked for peace. The terms of the peace said that Mormon leaders would be tried for treason, because of their private police force, that Mormon property would be taken to pay debts, that Mormons had to leave the state immediately, and that the Mormons must surrender all arms. Joseph Smith Sidney Rigdon, Lyman Wright, Parley Pratt, and George Robinson also gave themselves up as hostages.⁸⁸

The Mormons complied with the peace and were left completely defenseless. Six thousand men violently barged into Far West; when they left, there was nothing. All livestock in the city was shot for sport, as were some church elders. Women were raped and in some cases they were tied to school benches and violated by a number of men. The prophet, Sidney Rigdon, and a number of others were arrested and held for trial while the rest of the Mormons fled. Brigham Young emerged as the hero of the hour. He organized families into an orderly retreat to Illinois. An estimated eight thousand people fled across the Mississippi into Quincy where they were greeted with compassion.⁸⁹

Shortly after the Mormons left for Illinois, the Missouri press began to publish stories of the Haun's Mill massacres

and of the other atrocity committed against the saints. Having the prophet and other church leaders prisoner was an embarrassment for the people of Missouri. The gentile thirst for blood had been quenched and now they were ashamed. In a jail transfer Joseph Smith and his friends were allowed to escape. An eight hundred dollar fine and a drunken jailor helped in the successful escape. The prophet immediately went to Quincy, Illinois and took control of his church.⁹⁰

Mormon Church in Illinois

When Joseph Smith arrived in Illinois he knew that he must buy land as soon as possible. The prophet had to find shelter for his people before winter. He bought land from an agent named Isaac Galland. Galland sold the Mormons \$18,000 worth of land near Commerce, Illinois, about sixty miles north of Quincy, and he sold them \$80,000 worth of land in Iowa. The land was all bought in exchange for the Missouri land the Mormons owned. Joseph Smith found out too late that the land he purchased in Iowa was a swindle.⁹¹ The Mormons arrived poor and heavily in debt, but they escaped this by using the Bankruptcy Act of 1844.⁹²

Joseph Smith planned a new Mormon city beside Commerce based on the doctrine that the saints must be separate from their neighbors. Smith named his new city, Nauvoo, which he said meant beautiful resting place in ancient Hebrew.⁹³ The town experienced prosperity even greater than Far West. Two hundred houses were built in the first year. The cornerstone of a new temple was set, and neatly fenced farms fanned out from the city. Farmers did their work in the fields and then came into the city at night. Within two years there were two large steam saw mills, a steam flour mill, a tool factory, and a foundry. Plans were in the works for a chinaware factory too. Joseph Smith joined the principles of goodness of God and making money, and the Mormons bought it.⁹⁴

The prophet sent missionaries all over the United States

and England to bring people into Nauvoo. He wanted to make Nauvoo a political power, and his plan worked. By 1844 there were twelve thousand people in the city, which made Nauvoo the largest city in Illinois. It was even bigger than Chicago. Joseph Smith wanted a city big enough to attract good schools, doctors and culture, but not large enough to attract any corruption or vice.⁹⁵ The press sympathised greatly with the Mormons when they first came to Illinois, and this led Joseph Smith to ask Martin Van Buren for help in gaining damages from Missouri. The prophet wanted \$2,000,000. The president would not help the Mormon cause, however. He did not want to interfere in states' rights.⁹⁶

The Latter-day Saints made it clear to the politicians of Illinois that they would vote in a block in return for services rendered. It was felt by all that Nauvoo's six thousand votes could swing a whole state election. The legislative session of 1840-41 saw both the Whigs and the Democrats stumbling over one another to do favors for the Mormons. A charter, passed for Nauvoo, allowed almost anything as long as it did not violate the constitution of the United States. The special treatment of the Mormons and their unique charter stirred the rumblings of persecution. What had happened to the Mormons in Missouri was repeated on a larger scale in Illinois. Relations between gentiles and Mormons just seemed to deteriorate after the passage of the city charter.⁹⁷

The winning of the Nauvoo charter was Joseph Smith's

first and greatest political success. Smith was so confident of his power in politics that he decided to run for president in 1844. The prophet claimed to have 500,000 votes at his disposal. Anybody who took the prophet seriously believed that he stood for the union of church and state. In reality Smith was just trying to influence the real candidates, but this did not work.⁹⁸

Since Dr. John C. Bennet helped push the city charter through the legislature, Joseph rewarded him with many important positions in the church. This proved to be a mistake. A year after his baptism, Bennet was made assistant president of the church, mayor of the city, chancellor of the University of Nauvoo, and brigadier general of the Nauvoo legion.⁹⁹ It turned out that all Bennet was interested in was the polygamy he suspected in Nauvoo. After making advances on Mormon women in the colony, he was told to leave by Joseph Smith. This excommunication caused a great stir because Bennet was such an important figure in the Mormon religion. After this, rumors of plural marriages and sexual orgies in Nauvoo were aired throughout the country in major newspapers. People were shocked and dismayed.¹⁰⁰

Joseph Smith took full advantage of his city charter and organized his own army for protection. There always was a threat that the prophet would be kidnapped and returned to Missouri for trial. In May of 1842, ex-Governor Boggs was almost killed in an assassination attempt. It was thought

that one of Joseph's body guards tried to kill him. The Quincy Whig on May 21 published this statement:

There are several rumors circulating in regard to the horrid affair. One of which throws the crime on the Mormons, from the fact, we suppose, that Mr. Boggs was governor at the time and in no small degree instrumental in driving them from the state. Smith too the Mormon Prophet, as we understand prophesized a year or so ago, his death by violent means. Hence there is plenty of foundation for the rumors. 101

As soon as he recovered, Boggs asked the Governor of Illinois to arrest Joseph Smith and send him to Missouri. The governor wanted to comply, but Smith refused to give himself up. He went into hiding for four months until a new governor named Thomas Ford was elected. Ford arrested Joseph, but tried him in Illinois. Because of states' rights and the lack of evidence the prophet was saved. Several other times attempts were made by Missouri people to grab the prophet, but always the Nauvoo legion protected him. Many people felt the prophet was above the law.¹⁰²

The military nature of Nauvoo also scared non-Mormons. Every able bodied man between the ages of eighteen and forty-five was told to join the Nauvoo legion or be fined. There eventually got to be 5,000 men in the militia of Nauvoo. It was divided into cohorts, one of calvary and one of infantry. There were uniforms, equipment and military discipline.¹⁰³

The prophet was able to secure three cannon and 250 small arms from the state arsenal. Gentile rumors said that there were thirty cannon and 6,000 small arms in the Mormon city. The

people of Illinois feared they would be attacked. The prophet looked like a religious fanatic that would go to any lengths to establish his power.¹⁰⁴

Nauvoo had a self righteous holiness about it that helped cause the resentment of nearby towns. They did not like the pious speaking city council. Things were very strict in Nauvoo. Anyone caught swearing on the street was subject to a fine. People suspected that this law and others was passed to deep gentiles out of the city.¹⁰⁵ They probably were right, because in the spring of 1841 polygamy was introduced in the colony. The prophet first introduced the doctrine to a chosen few and the twelve apostles. He believed polygamy must be introduced slowly and secretly lest the gentiles react violently. At this time it has been guessed that he himself had forty-nine wives. Emma did not approve, but there was nothing she could do. The prophet's plan to keep polygamy secret failed; and when it was exposed, violence resulted again. Smith had practiced polygamy as early as 1836, but he had just developed his doctrinal support of it. He believed that since the prophets of the Old Testament had more than one wife, God must approve of polygamy. Nauvoo was a city full of church widows whose husbands were out spreading the Mormon gospel. They converted easily to the new teaching of Joseph Smith.¹⁰⁶

It took three years, but polygamy was finally exposed in 1844. William Law, Second Councillor of the Church, got into

an argument with Joseph Smith over money and polygamy. The prophet ended up excommunicating Law, but the latter stayed in Nauvoo. Law and Sylvester Emmons started their own church and their own paper, The Nauvoo Expositor. The first issue that came out attacked the economics, politics, and polygamy of the church. That was the only issue of the paper ever to come out. Joseph Smith called his city council together and had his own trial for the Expositor. Joseph believed the paper was a public nuisance and thought it could bring violence if another edition was published. Therefore the prophet felt The Nauvoo Expositor was not entitled to federal guarantees of freedom of the press. The marshal of the city was told to close down the paper. On June 10, 1844 the Nauvoo Legion destroyed the presses of the anti-Mormon publication. Law and Emmons fled the city in fear of their own safety. This time the prophet had gone too far.¹⁰⁷

Law and Emmons decided to press charges against Joseph Smith, and as a result governor Thomas Ford called for the prophet's arrest. Joseph crossed the river into Iowa to flee, but his brother Hyrum convinced him to go back and face the charges. Both men were escorted to Carthage by six hundred mounted Mormon calvary. There they gave themselves up to authorities and were charged with treason because they had interfered with the freedom of the press. The Carthage jail was an impressive two story building. The prophet was allowed the run of the whole second floor and visitors were let in

and out at will. Five Mormons volunteered to stay and protect the prophet and two guns were even smuggled into Smith.¹⁰⁸ For two days Governor Ford and Joseph argued over freedom of the press. Joseph said calling out the legion to destroy the Expositor was in the interest of public safety. Ford would not agree with this and said the prophet had violated the constitution. The governor said he would go to Nauvoo with Joseph and talk to the people on June 27, 1844. When he left, however, he did not take the prophet with him. He went to Navoo and convinced the Mormons to disarm. This they did despite what had happened to them twice before.¹⁰⁹

On the very night that the governor left Carthage, a mob of men with their faces smeared with lamp black forced their way into the jail. No resistance was put up by Carthage militia men who guarded the jail. Two shots were fired into Joseph's cell. One struck Hyrum full in the face killing him instantly. Joseph fired three shots into the mob using the pistol he had, but this did not stop them. The prophet and John Taylor, another Mormon, tried to leap from the window. Both men were shot as they were trying to escape. The prophet fell to his death beside the jail. Joseph Smith's prophecies had been sealed in blood. He had become a martyr. This body was taken to Nauvoo where the entire population met it and passed by it as it lay in state. The bodies of Joseph and Hyrum were buried secretly in the basement of a Nauvoo house. It was thought that even in death the prophet was not

safe from persecution. A trial was held for the suspected murderers, but it was a farce. No one was ever convicted of the obvious murders of the three Mormons.¹¹⁰

The death of the prophet did not even end the persecution. Brigham Young, who seized control of the church at this time, had to face the fact that his people must move westward for their own safety.¹¹¹ An uneasy peace lasted from the time of the prophet's death until the fall of 1845. All during this time anti-Mormon societies still met and letters were still written asking the governor to drive the Mormons from the state. Mormons were accused during the summer of 1845 of everything from cattle rustling to counterfeiting.¹¹² People still believed that the saints controlled the politics of Hancock County and the whole state of Illinois.¹¹³ Towards fall, anti-Mormons began to burn barns and haystacks. In September, the Mormon settlement of Lima was burned to the ground. Brigham Young called for all Mormons to gather in the safety of Nauvoo. The new leader began to make plans for an orderly exodus to Utah. On February 12, 1846 Brigham Young was forced to leave for the west when it was learned there were plans for his arrest on harbouring vice and corruption in Nauvoo. So despite the twelve degree weather Young set out across the frozen Mississippi for Utah, leading a party of two thousand.¹¹⁴

By the time a year had passed most of the other saints left Nauvoo in small well disciplined parties.¹¹⁵ In Utah

they at last found the privacy they needed, but the persecution still went on. The men they elected to Congress were refused seats, and the Mormons were forced by the government to give up their doctrine of polygamy. In 1857 there was even a brief war. The Mormons were accused by the Eastern press of trying to set up a separate country in Utah. President James Buchanan decided to send out a military force against the supposed rebels. The army ran into little opposition, but also accomplished very little. All that resulted was a military occupation of Utah and the appointment of a territorial governor. For the most part Utah proved to be a haven of peace for the Mormons and what they accomplished in the state can still be seen today.

Conclusion

Two things are especially impressive about the early Mormons as a religious people. They had the will to work hard to make colonies successful in the most improbable of circumstances and they had the faith to come back from adversity. Before the Mormons moved into Kirtland it was a sleepy little town. The Mormons living there made Kirtland important. The spot the Mormons picked to live in Illinois was a swamp, but by the time they were forced to leave it was the prosperous city of Nauvoo. The saints had four colonies destroyed between 1831 and 1845. Three of them were destroyed violently. Their leader, Joseph Smith, proved that he had human weaknesses time and again. The Mormons for the most part, however, never lost faith in him or their religion.

The gentiles who lived around Mormons resented their prosperity. The saints seemed to have a fellowship and a comfortable existence that the typical pioneer could not achieve. Jealousy was probably the thing that drove people to commit acts of violence against the Mormons more than anything else. Anti-Mormons do not appear to have been motivated by religious self-righteousness. No church ever officially declared war on the Latter-day Saints. The only thing that people who disliked Mormons are known to have had in common was their hatred of the saints.

We cannot go by first appearances when we look at the Mormon persecutions then. Religious differences is not the

only answer to the Mormon's problems with gentiles. Non-Mormons disliked the fact that the saints took things that they thought belonged to them. They took political power, land and economic influence from people who already lived in an area where they moved. Mormons proved to be too successful in their colonies. That was their ironic down-fall as they treked across our continent.

Footnotes

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³Joseph Smith, History of the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints, Volume II (Salt Lake City: Desert News., 1965), p. 79.

⁴Marvin S. Hill and James B. Allen, Mormonism and American Culture (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1972), p. 22.

⁵Thomas F. O'Dea, The Mormons, (Chicago Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 133.

⁶Marvin S. Hill and James B. Allen, p. 21.

⁷Rodman W. Paul, p. 76.

⁸Marvin S. Hill and James B. Allen, p. 2.

⁹Steven Murdock, "Mormon Trails in the Midwest," Travel (January 1972), p. 59.

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¹²Robert B. Day, They Made Mormon History, (Salt Lake City: Desert Book Co., 1968), p. 1.

¹³Fawn M. Brodie, No Man Knows My History, (New York: Alfred Knopf Inc., 1945), p. 7.

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¹⁵Ray B. West, Kingdom of the Saints, (New York: The Viking Press., 1957), p. 15.

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- ¹⁹Fawn M. Brodie, p. 16.
- ²⁰Ibid., p. 17.
- ²¹William Alexander Linn, p. 15.
- ²²Fawn M. Brodie, p. 18.
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- ²⁴Fawn M. Brodie, p. 16.
- ²⁵Rodman W. Paul, p. 76.
- ²⁶Stuart Martin, Mystery of Mormonism (London: Odlim's Press Limited, 1930), p. 38.
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- ²⁹Milton V. Blackman Jr., p. 311.
- ³⁰Joseph Fielding Smith, Essentials in Church History (Salt Lake City: Desert Book Co., 1969). pp. 42-47
- ³¹Fawn M. Brodie, pp. 28-32.
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- ³⁶Fawn M. Brodie, p. 53.
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- ⁴⁰Milton V. Blackman Jr., p. 317.

⁴¹James H. Snowden, The Truth About Mormonism (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1926), p. 143.

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- ⁶⁴Ibid., p. 195.
- ⁶⁵Ibid.
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- ⁶⁷William Alexander Linn, p. 157.
- ⁶⁸Fawn M. Brodie, p. 204.
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- ⁷⁰William Alexander Linn, p. 131.
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- ⁸³Ibid., p. 190.
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