

The History of the Restoration of the Church of Christ



Church of Christ
(Temple Lot)
Organized April 6, 1830
Independence, MO

Published by:
The Board of Publications
Church of Christ
(Temple Lot)
P.O. Box 472
Independence, MO 64051

<https://www.churchofchrist1830.org/>
E-mail: cofcho@sbcglobal.net

March 2020

THE HISTORY OF THE RESTORATION OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

An Introduction

The history of the restoration of the Church of Christ in 1830 is much like the history of the Bible. It shows how God used frail and weak men to accomplish His purposes and fulfill the prophecies He had caused to be written long ago.

To fully understand this history, one must understand the times and events leading up to the restoration of the Church. The world was at a point of immense change, brought about by the great plan of the Eternal God. Mankind was fighting against the ignorance brought about by the spiritual hunger of what is known as the Dark Ages from 500-1500 AD (Amos 8:11-12). True Christians were awaiting a spiritual rebirth, a restoration of the true church established by Jesus Christ. According to the prophecy of God, this restoration awaited the birth of a free nation as found in 2 Nephi 7:17-18 (2 Nephi 10:10-11 LDS) and 1 Nephi 7:15-18 (1 Nephi 22:7-8 LDS).

The world was changed forever by the birth of the United States. Among other things, for the first time in centuries citizens were free to worship according to their beliefs, not according to the established religion of the government. At that time there were only a few Christian denominations in the world. Now, with the birth of a free nation, the world was about to experience the Lord doing “a marvelous work and a wonder” (Isaiah 29:14).

The Beginning of the “Marvelous Work”

The beginning of the story of the restoration of the Church of Christ revolves around a young man named Joseph Smith, Jr. In the spring of 1820, Joseph was living on a farm in rural New York between the towns of Palmyra and Manchester. He was fourteen years old when the events began that would change his life and the world around him.

At this time, several members of Joseph's family were persuaded to join the Presbyterian faith and he was pressured to join as well. There were other churches in the area and he attended meetings with many of them. He was more attracted to the Methodist sect, but there was pressure from several different denominations to join their churches. Joseph wanted to join a church, but he felt very confused by the conflicting claims. He struggled to know which church was right and which church he should join.

As he was struggling with the burden of this decision he was reading the epistle of James and the words he read suddenly seemed to enter with great force into his heart. The words he read were, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth unto all men liberally and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him" (James 1:5).

Because of these words, Joseph decided to "ask of God" and went one morning into the woods near his home to make the attempt. He found an isolated place in the woods and knelt down. This was the first time in his life that he had prayed out loud. As he began to pray, he felt overcome by an unseen power that prevented him from speaking. Thick darkness gathered around him and he felt doomed to destruction by the power of an evil being. Using all his strength to call upon God to deliver him, he suddenly saw a pillar of light above his head. This light, which was brighter than the sun, descended gradually until it rested upon him and released him from the power of the spiritual being which had bound him. He then saw two persons standing in the air above him in the midst of this bright light. One of the figures called him by name, pointed to the other figure, and said "This is my beloved Son, hear Him."

Joseph's original intention had been to ask of the Lord which of the churches that he had attended was right in order to know which church to join. When he was able to regain his composure, he asked the being who stood in the light above him which church he should join. He was told not to join any of them because they were all wrong, for their creeds were an abomination in His sight. The personage continued, "They draw near to me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; they teach for doctrine the commandments of men, having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof." At the conclusion of this visitation, Joseph found himself lying on his back looking up into heaven.

The Persecution

Prior to his experience with this personage, Joseph had never considered the possibility that none of the churches were right. Shortly afterwards, he was having a religious discussion with one of the ministers in the area. He told this man of the vision he had recently seen. To Joseph's surprise this man treated the experience with contempt. He argued that it was from the devil because there were no such things as visions or revelations anymore. He said that those things had ceased since the time of the apostles, and that those gifts of the Spirit would never occur again.

This reaction would prove to be typical of all who heard of Joseph's experience. This fourteen-year-old boy was the subject of intense prejudice and persecution by grown men who were well respected in the community. These men used their influence to excite public opinion against him. They may have been divided by their denominations, but they were united in their persecution of this boy.

Despite the persecution, Joseph held on to the fact of what he had experienced. He knew he had actually seen a vision despite being hated and persecuted for saying what he had seen and heard. Joseph felt that to deny the truth would be an offense to God. He believed it was better to suffer the condemnation of the world than to suffer the condemnation of God.

Because of this experience, young Joseph Smith knew that he should not join any of the various churches. He decided to continue as he was until God gave him further direction. He had gained a valuable understanding of the promises of God. He knew, like the ancient Apostle James, that when a man lacked wisdom he could ask God and it would be given to him.

The Second Vision

Because Joseph would not deny that he had seen a vision, the persecution from all classes of people continued. During this time he worked at various occupations to help support his family while he waited for more instruction from the Lord. Three years after his first vision in the woods, Joseph had another experience.

On September 21, 1823, in the evening as Joseph was preparing to go to bed, he began to pray. He prayed for forgiveness of his sins and also for a manifestation to know his spiritual status before God. He had full confidence in receiving a divine manifestation, since he had already experienced one.

While he was in his room praying, he noticed a light appearing in the room which continued to grow until the room was brighter than daytime. Immediately a personage appeared at his bedside, standing in the air. Joseph described this personage as having a human form and wearing a robe that was brilliant in its whiteness. Not only was his robe white, it seemed that his whole being gave off a bright light which illuminated the whole room.

Joseph was initially afraid, but the fear soon left him. The personage called Joseph by name and said that he was a messenger sent from God. He told Joseph that God had a work for him to do. He also said that Joseph's name would be spoken of for good and evil among all people and nations of the world. The Bible foretold that another angel would fly through the heavens "having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth" (Revelation 14:6).

The messenger told Joseph about a book which was written on plates of gold, buried in a hill close to where he lived. This book was an account of the former inhabitants of the North American continent and contained the "fullness of the everlasting gospel". Joseph's task would be to translate the book. Buried with the book were two stones which God had prepared for the purpose of translating. They were called the Urim and Thummim. These stones were mounted in a breastplate. The Bible tells us of these instruments in Exodus 28:22-30 and Leviticus 8:8.

The messenger then quoted the eleventh chapter of Isaiah and said that it was about to be fulfilled. He also quoted Acts 3:22-23, and said that the prophet was Christ, but the day had not come yet when "they who would not hear His voice should be cut off from among the people," but the day would come soon. Then he quoted Joel 2:28-32, which he also said was not yet fulfilled, but would be soon and the fullness of the Gentiles would come soon as well. The messenger quoted many other passages of Scripture and offered explanations of them as well.

The messenger told him that it was not yet the time to obtain the book and interpreting stones, but when Joseph did obtain them he could only show them to those he was commanded to, or he would be destroyed. While the messenger was telling him about the book, Joseph had a vision where he clearly saw the place where the book was buried.

When the messenger finished speaking, the light in the room began to gather around him until it was dark everywhere but around him. Then there appeared to be an opening up to heaven and the messenger ascended up until he disappeared and the room was left as it was before the he had appeared.

The same vision was repeated two more times during that marvelous night. Each time Joseph received the same directions, and the angel repeated the same scriptures; however, in each visit Joseph received a little more instruction about his work. He also was told that the last days had arrived and the wrath of God would be poured out upon the inhabitants of the earth.

During the third visit the angel added a warning. Joseph was told that Satan would try to tempt him to use the book for the purpose of getting rich because his family was so poor. He was told that he must have no other purpose in obtaining the plates than glorifying God, and he must not be influenced by any other motive than the building of God's Kingdom or he could not obtain them.

On the following day, Joseph was working in the field with his father and was visibly tired. His father sent him back to the house to rest. On his way back to their home, Joseph collapsed from exhaustion. While lying on the ground the same angel appeared to him again and commanded him to tell his father about the whole experience of the night before. His father believed his experience without question and told him that he should do all that the messenger had commanded him. Joseph left the field and went to the place where he had been shown the book was buried. This place was near the top of a hill near his home.

Because of the clarity of his vision, Joseph was able to find and recognize the place where the ancient record was buried. Under a large flat stone, the book made of plates of gold lay in a stone box. Joseph removed the dirt that covered the edges of the stone, and with a lever he was able to lift it and to look inside the box. He saw the

plates, the Urim and Thummim and the breastplate, just as the divine messenger had told him.

It was young Joseph's intention to remove them, but the messenger appeared once more told him that the time had not yet arrived. He was told to return to the same place in exactly one year, and the messenger would meet him. Joseph was told to continue visiting the place each year on the same day until it was time for him to obtain the book.

Joseph did as he was commanded and visited the place each year on the anniversary of the first time he saw them. Each time he was met by the same heavenly messenger and was given further instruction about what the Lord was going to do.

During this time Joseph worked for a man in another town named Josiah Staal. While he was working for Mr. Staal, he rented a room from a family named Hale. It was here that he met a young woman named Emma Hale. Joseph told her family about his experiences, and although Emma's parents didn't believe him, she accepted it as the work of God. Joseph and Emma were later married and returned to Joseph's family home. Emma proved to be a helper and defender of him until the end.

Eventually the time came for Joseph to receive the plates of gold. On September 22, 1827, he went as he had been commanded to place where they were buried. This time, however, the messenger gave the plates to him, telling him that he was now responsible for them. Joseph was also given a warning and a promise. He was told that if he lost them through carelessness or neglect, he would be "cut off", but if he was diligent in keeping them safe they would be protected until it was time to give them back to the messenger.

Joseph soon found out why he had been given such strict instructions to keep the plates safe. As soon as people heard that he had the plates they used all means in attempting to get them from him by force or trickery. The persecution he suffered became more bitter and severe. However, with the help of God, they remained safe in his hands.

Because of the great persecution that Joseph received, he was unable to do anything about translating the plates. Therefore, in the month of December he and Emma moved back to Harmony,

Pennsylvania, to Emma's family's farm with the help of a friend named Martin Harris. While there Joseph used the Urim and Thummim to translate some of the characters from the plates. In February of 1828 he had written many characters on a paper, together with their translation. He sent his friend, Martin Harris, to New York City in search of some authorities in ancient languages in order to hear their testimonies about the accuracy of his efforts.

One of these was a Professor Charles Anthon of New York City. Martin tells us that when he presented the transcript with the translation to him, Professor Anthon pronounced the characters to be a combination of Egyptian, Chaldaic, Assyriac and Arabic, and that it was a correct translation. He told Martin that if he brought the manuscripts or plates to him that he would help in the translation, and he gave to Martin a certificate that certified the authenticity of the work he had been shown.

Professor Anthon asked Martin how Joseph Smith obtained the plates. Martin explained that it was a religious work and that a part of the plates were sealed. Professor Anthon then said that he could not read a "sealed book". These words fulfilled the prophecies of Isaiah 29:11-12. He then asked to see the certificate that he had given Martin. Martin took it out of his pocket and handed it to him. Professor Anthon then tore up the certificate and remarked that there was no such thing as the ministering of angels in these days.

The Book of Mormon

Joseph Smith, Jr., was finally able to begin translating the plates on April 15, 1828. Joseph translated with the Urim and Thummim while Martin Harris would write what he said. By June 1828 they had completed 116 handwritten pages. However, Martin was beginning to have problems within his family because of the work they were doing. His wife was opposed to him helping Joseph in any way, so to appease her, he asked Joseph to allow him to show what they had written so far to his wife and five friends. Joseph had been warned not to allow any part of the manuscript out of his hands until it was completed, but because of the strained relationship between Martin and his wife, he agreed. These pages were then stolen by the enemies of the work.

As the result of this disobedience on the part of Joseph by allowing the completed pages go out of his hands, the plates and the Urim and Thummim were taken from him and he was severely rebuked. He was so distressed over his error that he humbled himself through much fasting and prayer. The plates and Urim and Thummim were later returned to him in September, 1828.

There is no evidence that Joseph did any work in continuing the translation until April of 1829. At that time something very important for the work took place. On April 15, 1829, Oliver Cowdery arrived at the small farm Joseph had purchased from his father-in-law. He told Joseph that he had been teaching school near where his father lived. Oliver rented a room from Joseph's father and while he was there the family told him about Joseph receiving the plates. Oliver made it a subject of prayer and it was impressed on his mind that it was the will of the Lord that he should go and write for Joseph.

Two days after the arrival of Oliver Cowdery they began to translate the plates with Oliver writing for Joseph. Oliver described this as a time of great delight as he listened to the words being dictated by divine inspiration. Day after day he continued without interruption as Joseph translated with the Urim and Thummim the record called the Book of Mormon.

In May, 1829, Joseph and Oliver were continuing the work of translating the Book of Mormon when they came to a passage about the necessity of baptism for the remission of sins. They decided to go into the woods to pray and ask the Lord what they should do.

While they were praying, a messenger from heaven descended in a cloud of light. The messenger laid his hands on them, ordaining them to the holy priesthood in the name of Christ. They were given authority to baptize by immersion and to preach the gospel of repentance. The messenger also told them that this authority would never be taken again from the earth.

The messenger then said that this priesthood didn't have the authority of laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost, but that this should be given later. He commanded them to go and be baptized, and gave them directions to accomplish the task. He instructed Joseph to baptize Oliver, and afterwards that Oliver should baptize Joseph.

The two young men did as they were commanded. Joseph baptized Oliver and Oliver baptized Joseph. As soon as they were baptized the Holy Ghost came over them in great power and each prophesied many things which would shortly come to pass. After this, Joseph laid his hands on Oliver's head, ordaining him to the priesthood then Oliver laid his hands on Joseph's head ordaining him to the same priesthood as they had been commanded. This event gave them great joy in the God of their salvation as they were able to see the marvelous future of the work that was just beginning.

Joseph and Oliver felt it was their duty to share their experiences with their family as well as people they happened to meet. The responses of the people varied but the persecution continued to increase while they were living with Emma's family.

Regardless of the persecution, the Lord always blessed them with supportive individuals who were able to provide what was needed to allow the work of translation to continue. An example of this was the arrival in June of a young man named David Whitmer. He had been sent by his father, Peter Whitmer, with a wagon and an offer to come to his home where they could stay for free and complete the work of translation. The invitation was accepted and they accompanied David to his father's home in Fayette, New York, where they stayed until the translation was complete. David and his brothers John and Peter, Jr. became close friends with Joseph and Oliver and assisted the work.

The people who lived in the area near the Whitmer home were more tolerant of the work which was being done by Joseph and others. As Joseph and Oliver shared their experiences, many were converted to the truth of the gospel that they heard. Many were even baptized in a nearby lake during this time.

During the course of the work of translation, Joseph, David, Oliver and Martin (who had come to visit) were reading a prophecy that gave an account that the Lord would provide three special witnesses to assist in this work of God. It is found in 2nd Nephi 11:133 (2nd Nephi 27:12 LDS). The prophecy says that these witnesses "... shall behold it, by the power of God ... and they shall testify to the truth of the book and the things therein." When reading this prophecy it occurred to the three assistants that Joseph should ask the Lord if they could receive this privilege of being the three special witnesses. Therefore Joseph prayed unto God, and by revelation they understood that David, Oliver

and Martin would be those special witnesses who would view of the plates.

A few days later, these men went into the woods near Peter Whitmer's house and began fervent, humble prayer for the fulfillment of these promises. Joseph prayed first and each man followed in succession. The answer to their prayers did not appear immediately, so they repeated their effort. While they were praying, there appeared a bright light above them and an angel stood before them. In his hands he held the record that was written on gold plates. The angel turned the leaves one by one so they could distinctly see the engravings upon them. He finished by telling them, "These plates have been revealed by the power of God, and they have been translated by the power of God; the translation of them which you have seen is correct, and I command you to bear record of what you now see and hear." Martin was in a different area of the woods, so Joseph went to him and prayed with him until he had the exact same experience.

These men had sought and obtained a vision from God and now had to fulfill the commandment to record what they had seen and heard. To fulfill this commandment, they wrote and signed a document which described what they had experienced. This testimony is now found on the first pages of the Book of Mormon. Each of these men maintained the truthfulness of their claim until the end of their lives, despite periods when they were not members of the Church because of other issues.

Later eight other men saw the plates and touched them, although they did not see the angelic messenger. The testimony of these men is also found in the first pages of the Book of Mormon.

During the years 1828 and 1829 several revelations had been received through the Holy Spirit. They were given with the intent to provide Divine direction in guiding these young men to accomplish the great work to which the Lord had called them. In the month of March, 1829 a revelation was received telling them of the purpose of God, stating, "...I will establish my church, like unto the church which was taught by my disciples in the days of old" (*Book of Commandments* 4:5). In June of 1829, another revelation was received which told them to "rely upon the things which are written, for in them are all things written concerning my church, my gospel, and my rock" (*Book of Commandments* 15:3). These revelations were recorded and would be of great value in the coming years.

Also, in June of 1829 while translating the record, Oliver and Joseph had been praying about the promise they had received from the messenger the previous month. They decided to make a greater effort in seeking the Lord regarding the promise to receive the power of laying on of hands for the Holy Ghost. Joseph and Oliver were in a room in Mr. Whitmer's home in fervent prayer about this promise when the word of the Lord commanded them that they should ordain each other as Elders, but not until they could assemble those who had been baptized and have them decide whether they were willing to accept them as spiritual teachers. At this time they also received a revelation which told them that there were others who were also called to declare the gospel, a total of twelve.

In July, 1829, the translation was completed and a copyright was obtained. Several publishers were contacted and Mr. E.B. Grandin of Palmyra, NY, agreed to print the book. A contract was drawn up and signed on August 25, 1829 for the printing and binding of 5000 copies. The printing began immediately and was completed on March 30, 1830. When the translation was finished, the angelic messenger returned for the plates and the Urim and Thummim. Joseph had accomplished what he had been appointed to do and gave them back to the messenger for his safe keeping.

The Church Organizes

While the Book of Mormon was being printed, Joseph and Oliver continued to witness to anyone who would listen about the miraculous events they had experienced. Visitors would come to the Whitmer home, some searching for the truth, others to attempt to confound them. In each case, the Holy Spirit gave them the words to say that would confound those who were attempting to destroy their faith while enabling them to convince the honest in heart.

With the completion of the printing of the Book of Mormon in late March, Joseph and Oliver told the brethren that they had received the commandment to organize the church. They met together for that purpose on Tuesday, April 6, 1830, in the home of Peter Whitmer in Fayette, New York. The civil law demanded the presence of a minimum of six people to begin a religious organization.

They began the meeting with solemn prayer, and asked the brethren whether they would accept Joseph and Oliver as their teachers and if they were willing to organize the church as they had been commanded. The vote was unanimous. Joseph then laid his hands on Oliver and ordained him to the office of Elder, after which Oliver ordained Joseph to the same office.

During this meeting, Joseph and Oliver laid their hands on each member to receive the Holy Ghost and to be confirmed members of the Church of Christ. The Holy Ghost was poured out on them and some prophesied while everyone praised the Lord and rejoiced exceedingly. They also took bread and wine and blessed it according to the commandment and partook of the sacrament for the first time.

At this meeting other men were also called by the Spirit and ordained to different offices of the priesthood. A happy time was spent witnessing and feeling the power and blessing of the Holy Ghost. As the meeting drew to a close, the members felt great joy as they realized that they were recognized by God as members of the 'Church of Christ', organized according to divine instruction and according to the order of the Church as recorded in the New Testament of the Bible. The following Sunday, April 11, Oliver Cowdery delivered the first sermon of the restored Church of Christ and many more people joined the Church through baptism.

In the month of June, 1830, the Church met for its first conference in Fayette, New York. Thirty baptized members were present, along with other believers. Those present testified that it was a very spiritual time and many gifts of the Holy Ghost were manifested. The work grew rapidly and many were baptized everywhere the ministry went. Some missionaries walked through Ohio, Missouri and Kansas. In three or four weeks 130 new members were baptized.

The elders of the Church of Christ learned quickly that the Book of Mormon was a history of some ancient Americans. From the time they understood that the indigenous people of North America were descendants of the ancient Lamanites of the Book of Mormon, their thoughts turned toward these people. Several ministers were sent on a mission among the indigenous people of the western borders of Missouri, which was then the western border of the United States.

On their way they stopped at the village of Kirtland, OH. Here, at this place, a number of people became members of the Church. Many

of these people would play a significant role in the history of the restoration of the Church of Christ.

During this period of U. S. history, there had been many wars on the frontier between the native tribes and the white Americans. Into this sad situation the ministers of the Church arrived to teach that some of the native tribes in America were of the house of Israel and there were many promises of God to them. Such teachings caused a great deal of persecution toward the Church at that time.

As the persecution increased in New York, the leadership of the church moved to the area of Kirtland, Ohio. There the Church continued to grow rapidly, adding several hundred members within the first year of its organization.

With this rapid growth came new trials as new ideas and errors began to enter into the Church. An example of this occurred in June of 1831, during a conference in Kirtland, Ohio. Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery ordained each other to the office of high priest. Other elders were also ordained to this new and strange office. In contrast, the Holy Bible instructs us that Christ was the last high priest. (See Hebrews 5:1-3; 7:23-28 and 10:11-12.) With the introduction of this office and other new beliefs and practices, the Church of Christ began to be altered from what was originally restored in 1830.

One should always remember that Satan works to destroy the divine work of Jesus Christ. A big problem at that time was how quickly new people came into the Church. This allowed for the possibility some entered the Church without a complete conversion to its teachings. As a result some ministers were called and ordained without good preparation, contrary to the warning of the scriptures. In 1st Timothy 5:22 the Holy Spirit instructed us, "Lay hands suddenly on no man..." This warning refers to the ordination of men without sufficient preparation and without a true call.

On the 19th of June, 1831, Joseph Smith started for Missouri in the company of several other members of the ministry and their families. They arrived in Independence, Missouri, in the middle of July. While they were there a revelation was received identifying that city as the location of the New Jerusalem mentioned in 3 Nephi 10:2-3 (3 Nephi 21:23-24 LDS), and designating the spot for the temple. On the third day of August, 1831, in Independence, the place for the temple of the Lord was dedicated by eight elders in a solemn occasion. Shortly after this

event, Joseph Smith and others returned to Kirtland, Ohio. Other members stayed in Independence and began building the church there.

The Revelations

W.W. Phelps was one of the elders who travelled with Joseph Smith to Independence, and then decided to stay. This man was a printer by trade and was instructed by revelation to use his skill to serve the Church. While he traveled to Missouri, he stopped in Cincinnati, Ohio, in order to purchase a printing press. The press was then established in Independence for the purpose of printing all the official publications of the Church.

While the printing press was being established in Independence, a series of special and very important conferences took place in Hiram, Ohio, between the first and twelfth days of November, 1831. During these days of conference, the revelations which had been received by the church were arranged and prepared for printing in a book to be called *A Book of Commandments*. During the conferences, the preface of this book was given by revelation, and it is placed as the first chapter of the sixty-five revelations included in the book. This book was the first book to be published on the frontier of the United States. All the elders present gave testimony to the truthfulness of these revelations. This becomes a very important fact as we study what would take place several years in the future.

During the conference session of November 8, those present agreed that Joseph Smith, Jr. would arrange and prepare the revelations for publication and correct any errors or mistakes which he found. Then they named Oliver Cowdery and John Whitmer to carry the selected revelations to Independence, Missouri, where they would be printed.

Those attending the conference valued these revelations to be worth more to the Church than the wealth of the entire earth. They voted to print 10,000 copies of this first edition. Later this quantity was reduced to 3,000 copies.

A revelation was received on November 12 in which Joseph Smith, Jr., Martin Harris, Oliver Cowdery, John Whitmer, Sidney Rigdon, and William W. Phelps were named to be stewards over the revelations and commandments that had been given them, and to

maintain them as they had originally been received from the Lord. History shows that they later failed in fulfilling this responsibility.

While the printer, W. W. Phelps, was preparing for the publication of the *Book of Commandments* in Independence, he began another work of great value. In June of 1832 the first edition of *The Evening and The Morning Star* was printed by the Church. This was a monthly publication of articles of interest to the Church. In the first edition there also appeared the "Articles of Faith and Practice of the Church of Christ." Of even more importance, in this periodical were published many of the revelations received by the Church and sent to Independence to be printed in the *Book of Commandments*.

The Persecution in Missouri Grows

The members of the Church received much persecution during these years. Primarily there were three reasons for the persecution. First, we must remember that at this time the United States was divided over the question of the slavery of millions of people from Africa. Generally, the states to the north were against slavery and they wanted to make new laws to prohibit it. The prosperity of the southern states depended upon the continuation of the slave trade. The state of Missouri united with the southern states and many of the farmers used slaves. Thus the first reason for persecution against the Church was that they opposed slavery on the grounds that every person regardless of their race had a God given right to freedom.

The community of Independence was only a few miles from the western frontier of the United States at that time. A state of continuous warfare still existed among the American settlers to the east of this frontier and the indigenous peoples to the west. Members of the Church of Christ were arriving among them believing these indigenous peoples of America were of the house of Israel and that God had given them this land for an inheritance. This was the second reason for the hatred and persecution that was directed against them.

Without a doubt, the biggest reason for the hate and persecution was the religion of the Saints. These believers arrived in this established community with a new religion and many of their beliefs appeared strange to the citizens of Missouri. In June of 1832 the church began to publish its beliefs in its new periodical, *The Evening and The Morning Star*, thus making public the beliefs of the Church. In

response to this some members of the community began their own publication, the *Western Monitor*, which spoke out against the Church of Christ, claiming that these “Mormons” were poor and ignorant, and they existed in a level like slaves. In expressing such thoughts they showed their envy for the prosperity of the members of the Church.

Certainly the inhabitants of Missouri were affected by the belief of the Church that said Independence would become the center of “...the New Jerusalem, a land of peace, a city of refuge, a place of safety for the saints of the most high God; And the glory of the Lord shall be there, and the terror of the Lord also shall be there, insomuch that the wicked will not come into it” (*Book of Commandments* 48:59-60). It is also true that some members of the Church unwisely boasted of things they thought God was going to do for the Church in Missouri.

By early July, 1833, the *Book of Commandments* was being printed and bound and some copies were distributed within the Church. It contained the revelations as they were originally given to the Church of Christ, from July, 1828, to November 1, 1831. These revelations had been checked for accuracy and a few typographical errors were corrected by Joseph Smith Jr. on June 25, 1833. Many of these revelations had been previously published in the *The Evening and The Morning Star*. In letters written by the leaders of the Church, they referred to various pages of the *Book of Commandments* as authority for their beliefs.

Early in the year 1833, the citizens of Missouri had been encouraged by their leaders, some of them ministers of other churches, to organize violent mobs that demanded *The Evening and The Morning Star* cease its publication. At the end of July, the mob destroyed the printing press, the printing office and home of W. W. Phelps. The crowd also destroyed the stores and shops of some of the members of the Church of Christ.

Severe persecutions continued throughout the summer and fall. Many members of the Church were badly mistreated, and all were ordered to leave the city of Independence. They requested time to get ready for their trip and, though they had been told they had until the first day of January, they were quickly forced from the ruins of their homes. One thousand, two hundred men, women and children began their arduous trip in the dead of winter. Two hundred of their houses were burned, together with their furniture and belongings. Late in the month of November, leaving behind their animals, these refugees

camped in the forest beside the Missouri River. The harsh winter weather caused many to become ill and some died.

Most of the members of the Church moved to the northern part of the state of Missouri. Here they lived peacefully for a short time; however, as more and more members of the Church came from other states to join them, the people of the region became unhappy and the persecution began again. At this time a friend of the Church, a lawyer and General in the armed forces, began to help the Church which had suffered so much. This man, Alexander Doniphan, introduced a new petition in the legislative assembly of the state to make a county specifically for the members of the Church. Their petition was approved and the new county was called Caldwell County.

However, not much time passed until the problems began again, mainly in response to the rapid growth of the Church. In just a few years, thousands of people converted to the gospel and joined the Church. Many of these new members arrived in Missouri and colonized other counties near Caldwell County. The Governor of Missouri at that time was a man with a great hatred for the members of the Church. In October of 1838 he sent the state militia with orders to either remove the members of the Church from the state of Missouri or kill them. Under these conditions almost all the members of the Church left every region of Missouri and went to the state of Illinois.

Human errors

As noted before, over the years a number of errors had entered into the Church. Consequently the Lord addressed the Church in a revelation received in September of 1832. The Lord warned the Church that they were under condemnation because they had treated lightly the revelations they had already received. He also told them that the Church would remain under this condemnation until they repented and returned to the original beliefs which were found in the Book of Mormon and the earlier commandments they had received. Even with this warning from the Lord, the Church, under the direction of her leaders, continued on error's path.

The Lord had instructed them in several revelations giving them foundational truths to build up His church: in March of 1829, "I will establish my church, like unto the church which was taught by my disciples in the days of old" (*Book of Commandments* 4:5), and yet

again in June of the same year, "...I give unto you a commandment, that you rely upon the things which are written, for in them are all things written, concerning my church, my gospel, and my rock" (*Book of Commandments* 15:3).

Taking no heed of the strict instructions from the Lord, the Church introduced new priesthood offices, teachings and doctrines. For example, during a conference in January of 1832, Joseph Smith was ordained as the president of the high priesthood which provided for the introduction of yet another serious error. On March 8, 1833 the Church received a purported revelation in which a First Presidency consisting of three men was officially introduced into the Church. The First Presidency consisted of the president of the high priesthood and two counselors, making the president the highest office of the priesthood and the Head of the Church. On March 18, Joseph Smith ordained Sydney Rigdon and Frederick Williams to assist him as counselors. These offices were new and contrary to the teachings of the Holy Bible and the Book of Mormon.

During a conference in Ohio on May 3, 1834, even the name of the Church was changed. It was now to be known as the Church of Latter Day Saints. The name of Christ no longer appeared in the name of the Church; it had been left behind. It was another step down an incorrect road.

Since the organization of the Church was dramatically changed from Christ's original design that was restored in 1830, these new offices and practices needed to be added and explained in the official Church publications. When the Church's printing press in Independence, Missouri was demolished in July 1833, most of the copies of the original *Book of Commandments* were also destroyed. Since so few of the copies of the original revelations now remained, the way was provided to insert the new changes into the Church's publications.

On April 19, 1834, Oliver Cowdery, a high priest, and Sidney Rigdon, now one of the presidency, were commissioned to assist each other in arranging the church revelations for publication. Then, in September of 1834, a meeting of the high council appointed a committee to arrange for the publishing of a book. The committee was composed of Joseph Smith, Jr., Oliver Cowdery, Sidney Rigdon and Frederick G. Williams. This new book was called the *Doctrine and Covenants* and was received by the Church of Latter Day Saints on August 17, 1835.

Unfortunately, this new book contained revelations which had been extensively changed from how they were originally given. An examination of only ten of the revelations as found in the Doctrine and Covenants (Sections 3,5,8,16,17,18,24,26,42, and 43) reveals 1667 changes from the original wording as contained in the *Book of Commandments* as well as *The Evening and The Morning Star*, the official periodical of the Church published in 1832.

The Church, throughout history, even with Jesus Christ as its head, has been made up of men and women who are susceptible to temptations and errors. Just as Satan was able to use fallible man to change the ancient Church of Christ from its original design and doctrine by slowly introducing new beliefs and practices, he was also able to alter the restored Church of Christ. Within a few short years, these and other human errors had profoundly changed the Church. As the Church would continue to grow, still more errors would be introduced, further altering the purity and simplicity of the Gospel of Christ.

The Church Grows and Changes

During a conference in Ohio in April of 1838 the name of the Church was changed once again. It was now to be known as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. During this period the Church was growing rapidly. Missionaries were sent out to all the United States and thousands of new members were baptized. Also, missionaries were sent to other nations, such as Canada, England, Israel, and many nations of the world and islands of the sea.

In the state of Illinois in the year 1839 was a small town of six or seven families known as Commerce. It was to this little community that many of the scattered members of the Church gathered. In less than one year the town had increased by more than three thousand inhabitants, with more arriving every day. During the next year Joseph Smith, accompanied by a group from the Church, went to the state capital to request permission of the legislature to organize a city with its own government. The assembly agreed, and the governor signed the letter on December 16, 1840.

The new city was called Nauvoo. Its city council was established and the mayor, a member of the church, was chosen. Two years later Joseph Smith would become the new mayor. They began a university

and established a militia, called the Nauvoo Legion. Joseph Smith was appointed as general and directed the legion. Many new members of the Church from all parts of the nation and from Europe arrived in the city and Nauvoo quickly became the largest city in the state, with more than 12,000 citizens.

During this period many new doctrines and practices continued to enter into the Church, further altering it from what the Lord had originally restored in 1830. These new errors included the doctrines of baptism for the dead, celestial (or eternal) marriage and endowment (secret rites and ordinances that are to be performed in a temple). In 1842 the Book of Abraham began to be published in the *Times And Seasons* which introduced, among other things, the false beliefs in a pre-mortal spiritual existence and the plurality of gods. Although not officially sanctioned by the Church, several members of the leadership of the Church even began to secretly practice polygamy.

The Death of Joseph Smith

A series of important events led to the death of Joseph Smith. First, in June of 1844 some former members of the church began publishing a magazine. It was called the *Nauvoo Expositor* and published articles and accusations against Joseph Smith and the Church. The publication of such accusations caused a lot of excitement in the community, and the city council advised the mayor to suppress it. The great problem was that the mayor of Nauvoo at that time was Joseph Smith, and it was against him that the charges were made. Joseph, however, sent the Marshall to carry out these orders. The Marshall and his deputies destroyed the office and all its materials. Because of this the editors of the *Nauvoo Expositor* went to the authorities and made accusations against Joseph and other leaders of the church.

On June 14, 1844 Joseph Smith sent the governor a complete account of what had taken place. The governor promised him the protection of a militia and, consequently, Joseph went voluntarily to the authorities in Carthage, Illinois, where he was lodged in the jail with other leaders of the church to await trial.

In the afternoon of June 27, 1844, a great crowd of Joseph's enemies overpowered the guards and stormed into the jail. Joseph Smith and his brother, Hyrum, died in a hail of bullets. Others of the

leadership who were present were seriously wounded. In this manner fell the man used by the Lord to restore the Church of Christ in the latter days and bring forth the Book of Mormon to the world, fulfilling ancient prophecies of the Holy Bible.

The Church Divides

After the death of Joseph, the Church entered into a time of great confusion. The Church divided into many groups, each group with its own leader, usually named as its president and prophet.

A large group went to the territory of Utah keeping the name, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. Their president and prophet was Brigham Young. There, on August 6th and 8th of 1847, all the members were re-baptized and their ministers were re-ordained, thus organizing a new church. Later in 1852, Brigham Young brought to this group a purported revelation endorsing polygamy, claiming Joseph Smith received this revelation from God eight years earlier. This purported revelation was never received nor accepted by the church during the lifetime of Joseph Smith. The doctrine of polygamy was openly practiced by this group until it was abolished by President Wilford Woodruff in 1890. This church is commonly known as the Mormon church to this day.

Another group went to the state of Pennsylvania at the direction of its president, Sidney Rigdon, who had been a member of the presidency when Joseph was assassinated. They took the name of the Church of Jesus Christ, and this church exists to this day.

In the state of Michigan there was a group led by two leaders, Jason W. Briggs and Zenos H. Gurley Sr. They believed the church should have for its prophet and president a direct descendant of Joseph Smith. In the year 1852, they held the first conference of a group called the New Organization. Later the son of Joseph Smith, Jr. assumed the direction of this group as its president and in the year 1860 the group was established as the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, or the Reorganized Church. In the year 2001 they changed their name once again. Today their church is known as the Community of Christ.

In addition to these three major organizations other groups followed leaders such as James Strang, Alpheus Cuttler, and Lyman White, creating their respective churches.

The Church of Christ

Although a majority of members of the church relocated under these various leaders, several congregations in central Illinois and western Indiana continued to function as they had originally prior to Joseph's death. These congregations were concerned by the unscriptural practices found in some of the divisions of the church. In the spring of the year 1853, these congregations joined in a conference and declared themselves, "...free from all wicked factions." These congregations vowed to continue in the teachings of the Holy Bible, the Book of Mormon and the *Doctrine and Covenants* (1835 edition). Many of the members of these congregations were baptized during the first days of the Restoration and the ministers had received their authority from Joseph Smith and the first ministers of the church.

In the conferences conducted during the years 1857, 1858, and 1859, these congregations spoke out strongly against many of the errors that had previously entered into the church. They were adamantly opposed to polygamy, baptism for the dead, lineal priesthood, celestial marriage and other false doctrines. In the conference of 1860 this group once again took the original name of the Church of Christ. In 1864 the church printed a publication called the *Truth Teller*, in which it was declared that the Church of Christ would be organized the same as it was when it was restored in 1830.

During the conference of May 17, 1863, four men were called and ordained to the office of apostle through Apostle John E. Page. Page was one of the apostles of the original church prior to Joseph's death and had united with the Church of Christ. In August of 1863, one of those men, Apostle Granville Hedrick, received a revelation from God. This revelation told the church they had been evicted from Missouri because of their iniquity but would begin to be gathered back again.

In the year 1864 the Church of Christ received a revelation from God instructing them that they should prepare to return again to Missouri. The revelation told them they would be able to return to Missouri in 1867 at which time the Lord would prepare a way before them. With this instruction they took the next two years preparing, and in the winter of

1866 they formed a caravan consisting of several covered wagons and began their journey toward the state of Missouri. After traveling many weeks they arrived on the banks of the Missouri River. They found the river frozen over from one side to the other and covered with several inches of snow. Elder George Frisbey admonished the group that they should remember the promise of the Lord that He would prepare a way for them to return. He drove his team of horses and wagon onto the ice and crossed the river safely. One by one the others followed in Brother Frisbey's tracks until they had all safely crossed the river. They arrived in Independence, Missouri in February of 1867, and purchased again the land which had been dedicated for the temple of the Lord.

Although having been violently forced to leave Independence and the state of Missouri three decades before, the Church of Christ returned to Independence and found that the town had grown and its citizens were no longer hostile to the Church. Years later other groups that formed after the death of Joseph Smith also began to return to Missouri and settle in Independence. (Interestingly, none of these had received a direct revelation from God directing their return.) On August 6, 1891, one of these groups, the Reorganized Church (now known as the Community of Christ), filed suit against the Church of Christ for possession of the land designated as the Temple Lot. This lawsuit lasted for years as the courts considered the case. The members of the Church sacrificed greatly because of the severe financial burden it placed on this small group. Eventually the court ruled that the Church of Christ was the rightful owner of the property. The Temple Lot remains in the possession of the Church of Christ to this day and is the location of the headquarters of the world wide church.

In 1900 the Church of Christ began to print a publication called the Evening and Morning Star which continued to be published until 1916. They used this publication to reprint some of the early revelations given to the church which were published in 1832. During this effort it was discovered that the first revelations printed in *The Evening And The Morning Star* and the *Book of Commandments* had been changed in the 1835 edition of the *Doctrine and Covenants*. Those changes had been made in order to allow for beliefs and practices that were inconsistent with the original revelations of God. Subsequently, in 1925 the Church of Christ affirmed this position by conference action: "This Church of Christ accepts nothing purporting to be a revelation of God, past, present, or future, as a revelation from God, save that which is in harmony with both the Bible and the Book of Mormon."

The remainder of the twentieth century saw the growth of the Church in the United States and throughout the world as the Lord opened doors and prepared the hearts of people to begin His work in different areas. By divine direction the Lord sent His servants to Canada, Mexico, Honduras, Africa, India and the Philippines and established the Church of Christ in these countries according to His will. As the Lord continues to expand the Church of Christ to distant lands one can witness the unfolding of the fulfillment of Christ's prophecy as written in Matthew 24:14, "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come."

The history of the restoration of the Church of Christ is the history of God's working with imperfect human beings to accomplish His purposes. During the first years after the church was restored, many doctrines and false beliefs entered in and after Joseph's death the Church was divided among many factions, each with its own beliefs. Throughout the years the Church of Christ, through much fasting, prayer, and study has sought the guidance of the Lord to return to the beliefs and design of the Church originally established by Christ and later restored by God in 1830. For this reason the Church of Christ is not considered a faction of the restored Church but rather the true remnant of Christ's Church. The Lord has used the Church of Christ to preserve and preach His Gospel as it was received according to prophecy, "And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters." Revelation 14:6-7.