

Chapter 13

ATTEMPTING TO REDEEM ZION

Phelps took a leading role in late 1833 and early 1834 in seeking redress for the Saints, who by the spring were mostly in Clay County, Missouri. Meanwhile, Joseph Smith and his brethren in Ohio had rounded up a ragtag paramilitary unit from throughout the eastern states to march to Missouri. They called themselves the “Camp of Israel” and came to be known also as “Zion’s Camp.” The army had only 130 men by the first of May 1834 in Ohio, but by the time it reached its Missouri destination in early June, it had swelled to 205 with additions from Illinois and Michigan. The march of Zion’s Camp began on May 8 and averaged about forty miles per day in its twenty-five-day journey. It was exceptionally tedious for the inexperienced marchers.¹

The projected arrival of the Prophet and their brethren likely thrilled the hearts of Phelps and the Missouri Saints. Finally, they had support from somebody, this time from people they loved and trusted. They had hoped and prayed for this for a long time. Zion’s Camp was designed not only to “redeem Zion”—that is, hopefully get the Saints resituated in their homes in Jackson County—but also to demonstrate the Christlike love and sacrifice for their brothers and sisters in the faith who were still no more than wandering exiles. Missouri members realized that they were not forgotten and that their safety and prosperity were the concern of the whole church.

SEEKING COMPROMISE

Back on May 1, 1834, Phelps had written the Ohio brethren of circumstances in Missouri. The letter caught up with Zion’s Camp when they were marching through Indiana. Phelps reported that a wild rumor had spread quickly the previous weekend that the Mormons in Clay County were preparing to cross over the Missouri River from Clay to take over their property in Jackson. In response, the Jackson County men who had led the

expulsion of the Saints five months earlier quickly mobilized a force to fight. When no Mormons came as expected, the mob went throughout the county burning nearly every Mormon house they could identify. In the aftermath of this affair, these same Jackson County officials made a policy that they would force out of the county any person who would not side with them against the Mormons. "I understand some have left the county because they refused to fight an innocent people," wrote Phelps. "It is said the mob will hold a 'general muster' this week for the purpose of learning *who is who*. They begin to slip over the Missouri and commit small depredations upon our brethren settled near the river as we have reason to believe." Those most exposed would have included the Phelpses since they lived near Allen's Landing. Phelps ended his unhappy letter on a positive note: "Our brethren are very industrious in putting in spring crops; and they are generally in good health and the faithful in strong faith of a glorious hereafter."²

Phelps also wrote a letter to Governor Daniel Dunklin nearly a month later, on May 29, 1834. He asked for confirmation of rumors that Jackson County leaders were considering a proposal to divide Jackson County in two—one for the Mormons and the other for the original settlers. "We ask for our rights and no more," Phelps ended his letter.³

The Camp of Israel crossed the Mississippi River into the state of Missouri on June 5 and 6, nearly a month after the march began. Just a few days earlier, Jackson County citizens received confirmation that hundreds of armed Mormons were marching to their state. The postmaster in Chagrin, Ohio, wrote to his counterpart in Independence that "the Mormons in this region are organizing an army to restore zion, that is take it by force of arms."⁴ Believing that a Mormon invasion was imminent, Jackson County troops began to drill and posted sentries at all ferries along the Missouri River. They also called upon like-minded anti-Mormons from adjoining counties to come to their assistance.⁵

Knowing that their eastern brethren were probably already in Missouri, Zion church leaders, including Phelps, wrote to Governor Dunklin on June 5: "We think the time is just at hand when our society will be glad to avail themselves of the protection of a military guard, that they may return to Jackson county."⁶ Three days later Joseph Smith sent two emissaries, Orson Hyde and Parley P. Pratt, from Zion's Camp to Governor Dunklin in Jefferson City "to ascertain if he was ready to fulfill the proposition which he had previously made to the brethren to reinstate them on their lands in Jackson county."⁷ Obviously, both sets of Mormons still sincerely trusted that the governor would fulfill his end of the plan to reinstate the Saints to their lawful property and their constitutional rights.

For his part, Governor Dunklin desired to reinstate the Saints on their legal properties, but he realized that this would not be an easy process. To a state militia officer on June 6 he wrote, "A more clear and indisputable right does not exist, than that of the Mormon people, who were expelled from their homes in Jackson county, to return and live on their lands." He added that even though the Mormons were eccentric in their "religious opinions and practices" and that these were "at the bottom of the outrages committed against them," it was nevertheless their constitutional right "to worship Joe Smith as a man, an angel, or even as the only true and living God, and to call their habitation Zion, the Holy Land, or even heaven itself." But Dunklin thought it prudent to bring about a compromise solution to the standoff. He wanted

the Mormons to sell off their property in Jackson County or for the county to be divided. He definitely saw the possibility of a civil war if there was no compromise.⁸

Circuit judge John F. Ryland, who had treated the Mormons fairly, also sought compromise. On June 10 he wrote to Mormon leaders that he wanted them to meet the next Monday, June 16, at Liberty with representatives of Jackson County. "I much fear and dread the consequences that are yet to ensue, unless I should succeed in my wishes to restore peace. It is the duty of all good men to use all proper and laudable means to establish peace."⁹ The leading Latter-day Saint brethren, including Phelps, responded with gratitude "for the laudable disposition manifested on [Ryland's] part to effect peace between our society and the inhabitants of Jackson county." But they warned that they did not have any intention to sell their Jackson County properties. They were still under covenant to build Zion at the Lord's appointed place and not to relinquish their properties. Thus, this avenue for a peaceful solution was out of the question. They added, "'Home is home,' and . . . we want possession of our homes—from which we have been wickedly expelled—and those rights which belong to us as native free-born citizens of the United States."¹⁰

The meeting called for by Judge Ryland took place as scheduled, on Monday evening, June 16, 1834, in the Clay County courthouse in Liberty. Justice of the Peace Joel Turnham, a fair-minded man, served as moderator between fifteen leading citizens of Jackson County and five Mormon leaders, Phelps at their head. More than eight hundred people from Clay County attended the meeting that promised to be a most exciting event.

The Jackson County committee read their proposition that the citizens of the county "will buy all the land that the said Mormons own in the county of Jackson, and also all the improvements which the said Mormons had on any of the public lands." Their alternative proposition was that "the people of Jackson will sell all their lands and improvements on public lands, in Jackson county, to the Mormons." Then speeches were made by two anti-Mormons, one from Jackson and the other from Clay, saying that the Mormons should be cleared out.¹¹ Jackson County representatives knew that the Mormons couldn't do either thing. They couldn't sell because of their belief in redeeming their Zion. And they certainly didn't have anywhere near enough money to buy all the property and improvements of roughly three thousand Jackson citizens at fair market value.¹²

At this point in the meeting, Judge Turnham cautioned, "Let us be republicans; let us honor our country, and not disgrace it like Jackson county. For God's sake don't disfranchise or drive away the Mormons. They are better citizens than many of the old inhabitants." He was seconded by Alexander Doniphan: "That's a fact, and as the Mormons have armed themselves, if they don't fight they are cowards. I love to hear that they have brethren coming to their assistance. Greater love can no man show, than he who lays down his life for his brethren."¹³

This pro-Mormon sentiment didn't sit well with some Clay County observers. A few pistols were cocked, and some swords were unsheathed. A fight nearly broke out, but it stopped as soon as it started because word of a stabbing just outside the courthouse reached the audience, and most rushed outside to see what had happened. The meeting providentially broke up. This gave Mormon leaders a chance to consult with each other and give a

response to the Jackson committee statement.¹⁴ Quickly, Phelps penned an answer. "We can say for ourselves," he wrote, "that peace is what we desire and what we are disposed to cultivate with all men." He promised in behalf of all Latter-day Saints that they would not start any hostilities toward any Jackson County or Clay County citizens. He added that they could not respond completely to the proposals until having a chance to confer with all other church leaders.¹⁵ He was undoubtedly thinking that the Zion brethren would have a parley with Joseph Smith as soon as possible.

Meanwhile, Orson Hyde and Parley P. Pratt returned to the march of Zion's Camp on June 15 with the report that Governor Dunklin had lost his nerve and reneged on his promise to send in militia to help the Saints recover their Jackson County properties. Dunklin obviously knew that if he did, he would be abetting civil war, and he did not want all that blood on his hands. He was unwilling to muster a sufficient militia from the entire state to overpower the Jackson County troops and their allies. Dunklin refused to request federal troops from President Andrew Jackson. No precedent existed in American history for either action. Instead, he advised the Mormon emissaries to avoid bloodshed by relinquishing their rights, selling their lands, and moving elsewhere. "That poor coward ought, in duty, to resign," remarked Orson and Parley to each other as they left the governor's office.¹⁶

CRISIS LEADS TO "FISHING RIVER REVELATION"

Zion's Camp continued its march toward their compatriots in Clay County. The army was as yet uninformed of the deadly threats made on the night of June 16, 1834, in Liberty. The camp arrived within a mile of Richmond, the seat of Ray County, on Wednesday, June 18. Most Richmond residents supported the angry anti-Mormons in Jackson. Richmond was fifteen miles east of Liberty, the Clay County seat. As the men encamped, Joseph Smith, having a premonition of danger, went into the woods and petitioned God for safety. The Prophet was assured that the Lord would protect them. He roused the soldiers early the next morning and sent them marching without breakfast. Because of broken wagon wheels, they did not reach Liberty but had to pitch camp three miles inside Clay County between two branches of Fishing River, a location vulnerable to an ambush. Smith knelt and prayed again for divine protection when he learned that mobs were preparing to attack. These fears were confirmed when five armed Missourians rode into camp cursing and swore that the Mormons would "see hell before morning." They boasted of four hundred men who would join forces from at least four counties to cross the Missouri River and rush to this Fishing River site. Their plan was utterly to destroy the Mormons. Sounds of gunfire were heard, and some of the Mormon men wanted to fight, but the Prophet promised that the Lord would protect them. "Stand still and see the salvation of God," he declared.¹⁷

A few minutes after the Missourians' departure, a small black cloud appeared in the clear western horizon. Soon it filled the whole sky. As the first ferry load of mobbers crossed the Missouri River to the south, a sudden squall made it nearly impossible for the boat to return to pick up another load of men. The storm was so intense that Zion's Camp

soldiers abandoned their tents and found shelter in an old Baptist log meetinghouse nearby. The fury of the hail broke branches, soaked and rendered useless the Missourians' ammunition, frightened and scattered their horses, and raised the level of Fishing River, preventing them from crossing the streams to attack Zion's Camp.¹⁸ The mob dispersed the next day and the crisis was diffused, at least temporarily. While writing official history later in Nauvoo, Phelps noted that archenemy James Campbell, one of the leaders of the mob, suffered an ignominious death during the storm.¹⁹

On June 21 Joseph Smith and other Camp of Israel leaders held a peace conference with six representatives from Ray and Clay Counties. In writing, the Mormons promised not to invade Jackson County. They further proposed that twelve men, six chosen by Mormons and six by inhabitants of Jackson County, determine the worth of properties owned by Jackson citizens who refused to live with the Mormons. Then in a year, the Mormons would pay that amount.²⁰ Evidently, Phelps and other Clay County leaders met up with Zion's Camp either that day or the next. On June 23, Phelps penned a similar letter to Jackson County leaders, making the same proposition of twelve men to work out an equitable agreement. Phelps confirmed, "Our object is peace."²¹ Sadly, this noble idea never reached fulfillment in subsequent months and years.

Church leaders from Ohio and Missouri, now in tandem, had to decide what course of action to pursue next. The courts, the governor, the US Congress, and the US president would not back them up in their right to reclaim their properties and to live in Jackson County in peace. On Sunday, June 22, Joseph Smith sought the Lord in prayer four miles north of Fishing River to "learn [God's] will concerning the redemption of [his] afflicted people."²²

The subsequent revelation (now known as D&C 105) indicated that these afflictions were in part due to transgression and the need to learn obedience to God's laws. "Zion cannot be built up unless it is by the principles of the law of the celestial kingdom; otherwise I cannot receive her unto myself." Consequently, Zion would not be redeemed at that time. As a reward for those who had hearkened to the Lord's words, the revelation added, "I have prepared a blessing and an endowment for them, if they continue faithful." Instead of having the Saints wait for the House of the Lord to be built in Jackson County as originally planned, this revelation stated, "It is expedient in me that the first elders of my church should receive their endowment from on high in my house, which I have commanded to be built unto my name in the land of Kirtland." This endowment would have to be received before Zion could be redeemed. Finally, the revelation admonished the Saints to "sue for peace, not only to the people that have smitten you, but also to all people; and lift up an ensign of peace, and make a proclamation of peace unto the ends of the earth."²³

In harmony with the previous day's revelation, a council of high priests convened on June 23. This was the first time that so many members of the high priesthood from both Ohio and Missouri could meet together at the same time. "The following individuals were called and chosen," noted Joseph Smith, "as they were made manifest unto me by the voice of the Spirit and revelation, to receive their endowments." These would take

place in the House of the Lord in Kirtland (as the temple was known as at that time) upon its completion. In order of their mention, those designated for this honor were Edward Partridge, William W. Phelps, Isaac Morley, John Corrill, John Whitmer, David Whitmer, A. Sidney Gilbert, Peter Whitmer Jr., Simeon Carter, Newel Knight, Parley P. Pratt, Christian Whitmer, Solomon Hancock, Thomas B. Marsh, and Lyman Wight. According to minutes made that very day, each, specifically named, was “to receive his endowment with power from on high.” Phelps received this additional assignment from the Lord: “Help carry on the printing establishment in Kirtland till Zion is reedeamed.”²⁴

Editors of *The Joseph Smith Papers* explain the outcome and aftermath of the Zion’s Camp expedition: “In the wake of the failure to effect a return of Mormon refugees to Jackson County, the Latter-day Saints’ highest priorities became completing the construction of their temple in Kirtland and purchasing land in the vicinity of Jackson County. Both endeavors were understood to be prerequisites to returning to their Zion; both would impose great financial burdens.”²⁵

CHOLERA STRIKES AND CAMP OF ISRAEL DISPERSED

On June 24, Zion’s Camp resumed its march toward Liberty. Captain David Atchison of the Liberty Blues and friend of the Mormons met them and urged them not to go into Liberty itself because, as Heber C. Kimball later recalled, “the feelings of the people of that place was much enraged against us.” Instead they encamped by Rush Creek about five miles from town near A. Sidney Gilbert’s residence.²⁶

That evening the dreaded cholera burst on the Saints encamped at Rush Creek. This contagious disease was evidently caught from drinking impure water contaminated by germs of afflicted rats. It had caused severe trouble in Missouri and throughout the United States for the previous two years. Sixty-eight men were afflicted, including Joseph Smith. No mention is made of Phelps suffering from cholera. By the next day, death stalked the camp. Over four days the ravages of the disease continued. Fifteen died, including Sidney Gilbert—one of the most faithful of the Missouri Saints, the keeper of the Lord’s storehouse, and a dear friend of Phelps. Joseph Smith called together a group of leaders, including Phelps, at Lyman Wight’s residence near the Missouri River. According to Joseph Smith’s history, “I told them if they would humble themselves before the Lord and covenant to keep His commandments and obey my counsel, the plague should be stayed from that hour, and there should not be another case of the cholera among them. The brethren covenanted to that effect with uplifted hands, and the plague was stayed.”²⁷

Even as cholera had been striking the men, Smith gave orders for the camp to be dispersed so as to prove to surrounding inhabitants that the Mormons did not intend to go to war. Smith and other Ohio leaders met with Cornelius Gillium, sheriff of Clay County, to affirm the Mormons’ peaceful intentions. “To take possession by conquest or the shedding of blood is entirely foreign to our feelings,” they wrote in a formal document. Missouri church leaders, including Phelps, wrote a letter to Governor Dunklin explaining that negotiations had brought an end to hostilities and that they had made a fair

proposition to the Jackson County committee. “Our right to our soil in Jackson county we shall for ever claim, but to obtain peaceful possession we are willing to make great sacrifices,” they pointed out.²⁸

PRESIDENCY AND HIGH COUNCIL CREATED IN MISSOURI

On Thursday, July 3, 1834, Smith conducted a council of high priests from Zion and organized a standing high council—a presidency and twelve other high priests—to both preside over the Missouri Saints and settle disputes. This was done according “to the revelation and pattern given at Kirtland” the previous February and now recorded in *Doctrine and Covenants* 102. David Whitmer, one of the “three witnesses” to the Book of Mormon, was designated as the president.²⁹ William W. Phelps and John Whitmer were called as “assistant presidents.” (Phelps’s calling to the Missouri presidency proved to be highly significant to him and to events over the next four years.) Twelve other men were added as members of the high council.³⁰ Most observers of LDS Church history have assumed that this was the formal establishment of a stake in Zion. This is not the case, but rather these groups were referred to as the Missouri presidency and high council. Not until February 1838, nearly four years later, was this ecclesiastical organization in Missouri referred to as a stake.³¹ However, this July 1834 meeting was the germination of what later would become a typical stake leadership organization. On that same day, July 3, the soldiers of Zion’s Camp were formally discharged and given leave to return to their homes.

On July 7, Joseph Smith conducted an ordination meeting for the presidency and high council. The Prophet ordained all fifteen men. Bishop Edward Partridge was confirmed in his appointment to conduct the temporal affairs of the Saints in Missouri.³² Thus, for the next three and a half years the church had two presidencies and two high councils—in Ohio and Missouri. The Ohio church presidency in July 1834 consisted of Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, and Frederick G. Williams; the Missouri church presidency, of David Whitmer, William W. Phelps, and John Whitmer. In all of this, though, Joseph Smith was sustained as the “First President of the Church.”

That same day the Missouri presidency and high council also began conducting church business. The first case was that of W. W. Phelps—whether he should take his family with him when he went to Kirtland to assist in the printing establishment. It was ruled that as soon as Phelps completed his business in Missouri he would go to Kirtland without his family and that his family would be cared for with the assistance of other Saints in Zion. It was further moved in the meeting that David Whitmer and Phelps go to Kirtland to “assist in promoting the cause of Christ.”³³

PHELPS’S LEADERSHIP IN CLAY COUNTY

Satisfied that he had done the best he could to care for his Missouri brothers and sisters, Joseph Smith left Liberty on July 9 in company with eighteen men. Other members of Zion’s Camp did one of three things: settled in Clay County, embarked on missionary

service, or made arrangements for their own return to the East. Phelps bade farewell to his friend and Prophet and started laying plans for his own departure for Kirtland. He continued to make certain that Sally and the children were appropriately provided for. Most Clay County Saints at that time were engaged in farming and in many instances selling their produce to the US Army at nearby Fort Leavenworth.

As events turned out, Phelps stayed considerably longer in Liberty than planned, another nine months until the next April. He was delayed by pressing church business during the summer and fall, and then the hazards and burden of winter travel stopped him. When David Whitmer left for Kirtland in September, Phelps and John Whitmer assumed leadership of the Missouri Saints.

Phelps's first major business in Missouri in July 1834 was to compose a lengthy treatise for publication that would catalog the atrocities against the Saints and appeal to the public conscience. It was entitled "Appeal" and was published in the reconstituted *Evening and the Morning Star* in Kirtland. Oliver Cowdery introduced Phelps's piece by saying, "We recommend the following APPEAL to the careful perusal of our patrons, and hope, that the actual truths therein attested will be considered in the light." The article was signed by every available Zion presidency and high council member. As the actual writer, Phelps was once again performing service to the church and the Lord for which he was well suited and prepared.

The "Appeal" was largely a religious essay outlining the revelatory nature of the doings and purposes of the "Latter Day Saints," as they were now styling themselves. They appealed to all humanity that their coreligionists "may have the privilege of enjoying our religious rights and immunities and worship God according to the dictates of our own consciences, as guaranteed to every citizen by the constitutions of the National and State governments." Phelps emphasized that ancient prophets in both the Bible and the Book of Mormon prophesied of the establishment of Zion in the latter days. "[Thus] we commenced the glorious work, that a holy city, a New Jerusalem, even Zion, might be built up and a temple reared in this generation, whereunto, as saith the Lord, all nations should be invited." He indicated that this should not alarm anyone. After all, "our forefathers came to the goodly land of America, to shun persecution and enjoy their religious opinions and rights, as they thought proper."³⁴ Clearly, Phelps and other leaders under Joseph Smith's direction still desired with all their hearts for the redemption of Zion within the foreseeable future.

On August 1, Phelps wrote a long report to Governor Dunklin stating that the Saints "had calculated to have returned to our own lands and property in Jackson County, in season to harvest our many wheat fields there, but the rage and strength of the mob of Jackson County and the fuss and excitement of many in the adjoining counties have caused a different issue." He explained that "when our emigrating brethren arrived from the east [Zion's Camp], the prospect of blood shed or civil war, was so apparent in Jackson County, that our people resolved to cease from the idea for a while, of returning to their land, and possessions."³⁵

Throughout the summer and into the fall of 1834, Phelps frequently met with the high council to conduct church business. On July 12, the Zion brethren decided to appoint four high priests to go throughout Clay County and other spots in northwestern Missouri where the Saints were scattered and pass on to them information on what had recently been transacted and to “teach them in the ways of truth and holiness.” Phelps cautioned that no public sacrament meetings be held, however, while there was still so much tension in relation to local citizens.³⁶

On July 31, the council discussed further how to cope with the continuing political tension in the vicinity. They definitely agreed that they should assiduously avoid all contention and at the same time cultivate favor with those who had respect for the Mormons. Phelps stated on this occasion that the time had come when they could start holding public preaching meetings. Phelps confirmed, however, that Mormons should not vote in the upcoming congressional election.³⁷

In subsequent council meetings, Phelps always played a major role. He counseled about proper priesthood ordination procedures, recognizing the appropriate use of gifts of the Spirit, how priesthood brethren should behave themselves in godlike decorum, and sending missionaries out to preach even as the Ohio church was doing.³⁸

On August 24, he sent a report to Joseph Smith and the Ohio high council of events in Zion. He explained the work of the brethren who had gone about through Clay County holding twelve separate public meetings. These brought “joy to the scattered brethren” and fortunately did not offend those “‘without’ the kingdom.” Phelps reported that there was a severe drought that summer in Missouri that together with other deprivations brought on a great deal of sickness. Showing his deeply religious nature, Phelps wrote, “We are looked upon as slaves, and in many instances, treated so. In fact, we are treated just as the Saints of God ever have been: despised, belied, slandered, whipped, mocked, buffeted, reproached, and considered, by other professors among the sects, as ‘the jest and riddle of the world,’ to be laughed at, and ‘rendered any thing by every body:’ and so be it, for Christ’s sake.”³⁹

Phelps concluded his missive to Ohio with the following poem (which he actually adapted from Isaac Watts) that reflected his optimism, hope, and faith in spite of the trials that he and the Saints were currently enduring.

There is a land the Lord will bless,
Where all the Saints shall come;
There is a day for righteousness
When Israel gathers home.

Before the word goes forth—*Destroy!*
And all the wicked burn,
With songs of everlasting joy,
The pure-in-heart return.

Their fields beyond Missouri’s flood,
Are in perspective seen,

As unto Israel "Canaan stood
While Jordan flow'd between."

Though wicked men and Satan strive,
To keep us from that land,
And from their homes the Saints they drive
To try the Lord's command:—

There all the springs of God will be;
And *there* an end of strife;
And *there* the righteous rising free
Shall have eternal life.

.....

How long our Father, O how long
Shall that pure time delay?
Come on, come on, ye holy throng,
And bring the glorious day.⁴⁰

In September, Phelps continued to preside over all high council meetings and spiritual affairs of the church in Zion. On September 10 he reported the contents of an August 16 letter sent by President Joseph Smith to Missouri church leaders. The Prophet reminded the brethren that "the first elders [from Missouri] are to receive their endowment in Kirtland before the redemption of Zion." And in their future journeys to Kirtland, the elders were urged to be "ambassadors of the most high" and "proclaim the everlasting gospel and to use every convincing proof and faculty with this generation." The Prophet's most startling announcement, however, was that "in two years from the Eleventh of September next [i.e., 1836] which is the appointed time for the redemption of Zion" the Saints would move into Jackson County! This declaration came with a caveat: "If Verely I say unto you If the church with one united effort perform their duties." He also told the Saints not to breathe a word of this plan to the Missourians. Joseph charged President Phelps to write a petition to Governor Daniel Dunklin "to solicit him to call on the President of the United States for a guard to protect our brethren in Jackson County upon their own Lands from the insults and abuse of the Mob." The Prophet desired that the Latter-day Saints be worthy of redeeming Zion when he charged, "Therefore be wise this once O ye children of Zion! and give heed to my council saith the Lord!" Obviously, the cause of Zion was still weighing heavily upon Joseph Smith's heart and spirit, and he felt true to his calling to redeem Zion.⁴¹

President Phelps also read the petition he had been assigned to compile and write to the governor. It was accepted. Copies of the petition were to be taken far and wide by missionaries to find out who might be friendly to the Mormons' cause.⁴²

Not many sources exist for events in Missouri from September 1834 to April 1835. In the official history that he helped write in the 1840s, Phelps simply inserted: "The excitement of the people began to subside and the Saints, both in Missouri and Ohio, began to enjoy a

little peace. The elders began to go forth, two and two, preaching the word to all that would hear, and many were added to the Church daily.⁴³

Phelps kept in contact with Missouri elected officials. State Senator J. T. V. Thompson voiced the Mormon concerns in the legislature. He indicated such in correspondence about deliberations on Jackson County difficulties in Jefferson City. Governor Dunklin sadly acknowledged that with existing Missouri laws and practices “conviction for any violence committed against a Mormon cannot be had in Jackson county” and that the majority of the Mormons at that time were “living in an adjoining county [Clay], in a great measure upon the charity of its citizens.” In the November–December legislative session, the governor suggested that the legislature come up with some possible solutions.⁴⁴

In December, Phelps wrote back to Senator Thompson expressing gratitude for his help and also for that of the governor. However, even though Thompson and Dunklin brought up the issue appropriately to the legislature, nothing came of it. Dunklin wrote to Phelps that a lack of constitutional power to pass a law specifically in favor of the Mormons prevented any action.⁴⁵

Meanwhile, in his domestic pursuits, Phelps continued to provide care for his family. He built a modest house on rented property near Allen’s Landing.⁴⁶ He spent time farming and beekeeping. He reported to the Saints in Kirtland that “grain is raised so easy, that a man may live as well on three day’s work in a week, here, as on six in some other distant places.” Regarding honey production, he said, “The honey bee is a large stockholder in the flowers of the variegated prairies; so much so, that when they have not been used up by the swarms of bee hunters, they yet form one great staple of the inland commerce of the west. Honey is frequently sold at 25 cents per whole sale, & 37 cents at retail, a gallon.”⁴⁷ As often as it was plausible, Phelps continued his practice of having morning and evening devotionals of hymn singing and scripture reading in his home. The Phelpses were a singing family. Many people, including the Phelpses, enjoyed playing musical instruments.⁴⁸

As colder weather began in the late fall of 1834, Phelps occupied his time writing letters to Oliver Cowdery to be published in the church’s new newspaper, *Latter Day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate*. He wrote these official letters in order to lay out a more complete history of all his experiences, labors, and personal observations within the church over the previous three and a half years. These letters give an outstanding glimpse into the soul and personality of the man William W. Phelps.

In his first letter, dated October 20, he gave an extended review of the climate, topography, flora, and fauna in Missouri for the eastern Latter-day Saints in hopes of encouraging some to immigrate. Regarding the difficult circumstances then being endured by the Saints, he mused, “Here the saints suffer trials and tribulations, while the wicked enjoy the world and rejoice, and so it has been since Cain built a city for the ungodly to revel in. But it is all right, and I thank God that it is so. The wicked enjoy this world and the saints the next.”⁴⁹

In his second letter, dated November 6, Phelps wrote considerably about the state of Native Americans who had been resettled on Indian lands only a few miles to the west.

He reminded his readers that the Indians were “a remnant of the seed of Joseph” and that one day, according to prophecy, their circumstances would become much better. In this, Phelps’s views contrasted completely with most other Americans. Phelps even went to visit Fort Leavenworth and Indian lands. The visit must have made a huge impression on him. He sent along with his article a moving poem, later made into a hymn, called “The Red Man” that extolled the eternal opportunities for these presently benighted peoples. Phelps ended this letter with the millennial fervor that characterized him and most other Saints at that time: “Away with crowns and kingdoms; away with grandeur and gold; away with fame and fashions—all are vanity; seek first the kingdom of heaven and its righteousness, and when the Lord comes, the riches of eternity will be given to the saints; and the curse will be taken off of the earth, and the land will yield its increase, and the whole world will become the garden of God and his people.”⁵⁰

In his third letter, dated November 13, Phelps continued his discussion about Fort Leavenworth and the Indian nations. His description of the Missouri River is extravagant: “Again, as you look around [from the fort], the Missouri, old muddy-face, in power, in might, and in dominion, not only, as I said in my last, the President of rivers, but the Emperor of many waters, upon which steam-boats, may navigate two thousand miles, parts of the great west into two countries, and passes into the gulf of Mexico, as speedily as time flies into eternity.” Regarding the Indians, whose cause he forever championed, he wrote, “I pray God, that as the knowledge of the Savior has come into the world, that his work may go forth until the knowledge of his people, the Nephites, and the Jacobites, and the Josephites, and the Zoramites, shall come to the knowledge of the Lamanites, and the Lemuelites, and the Ishmaelites, that the earth may know, and the heavens rejoice, that the mouths of the prophets shall not fail.”⁵¹

In his fourth letter, written on Christmas Day 1834, Phelps wrote items of “history of the saints” as he saw them. He felt this was a good idea given his belief that the restoration of the Lord’s true church was “so near the great Sabbath of creation.” In this letter we find rare tidbits about Phelps’s spiritual experiences in the 1820s that we do not have from any other source. We can also see some of the personal strivings for righteousness that he endured: “After the fall [of Adam] man inherited three desires, which, if indulged beyond a given latitude, vitally destroys his pleasure, his prosperity and his peace.—*They are a lust to generate his species; a love for money, and a thirst for greatness.* To check these passions, so that one can overcome the world, requires fortitude and faith sufficient, like Moses, to choose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.”⁵²

In his fifth letter, dated February 6, 1835, Phelps bemoaned the great and terrible influence exercised by Satan over the millennia. “The evil one is a great counterfeiter,” he observed. “He imitates almost every thing but perfection. Having once been in heaven, he knows nearly all, but telling the truth.” The evil influence of Satan, Phelps contended, could be found in the family fireside, in sectarian religious meetings, in government councils, in courts of law, in the lover’s chamber, in the ballroom, in the dramshop, and in funeral parlors.⁵³ Phelps considered these letters to be significant doctrinal treatises. He

frequently demonstrated his facility with the scriptures, not only with the Bible but also with the Book of Mormon and latter-day revelations to Joseph Smith.

In his sixth letter (the last written from Missouri), dated February 24, Phelps reviewed some of the early sufferings he endured for the truth's sake when he left Anti-Masonry and embraced the restored gospel. But it is all worth the effort, he contended. "Our tribulation, our suffering for the truth's sake, and our blood (shed in defence of holiness) are testimony that says: your religion is true—and hold out faithful to the end and you will earn a crown, and a fulness of joy where the wicked cannot come."⁵⁴

Phelps continued to participate in church affairs in Clay County and oversaw the creation of twelve ecclesiastical branches, or neighborhood congregations, in Clay County. He also supervised the resolution of disputes that arose among members.⁵⁵ The Colesville Branch retained its own identity and even constructed a modest meetinghouse. Occasionally, "gentiles" attended the Sabbath services that were held publicly starting in August 1834. The Phelps family went to sacrament meeting at Brother John Burk's home near their own residence.⁵⁶

Brother Phelps labored diligently in the early months of 1835 to put in order both his family and church affairs so that he could depart for his new assignments in Kirtland. He looked forward with great anticipation to his "endowment of power from on high."

NOTES

1. For information on the Camp of Israel, see Matthew C. Godfrey, "'The Redemption of Zion Must Needs Come by Power': Insights into the Camp of Israel Expedition, 1834," *BYU Studies* 53, no. 4 (2014): 125–46.
2. *JSP*, D4:41–42; emphasis in original. See also MHC, vol. A-1, 474–75; W. W. Phelps, "The Outrage in Jackson County, Missouri," *EMS* 2, no. 20 (May 1834): 160; *HC*, 2:61–62.
3. MHC, vol. A-1, 481–82; *HC*, 2:75–76.
4. "Henderson to Independence Postmaster," *Missouri Intelligencer and Boon's Lick Advertiser* (Columbia, MO), June 7, 1834, as quoted in Pearl Wilcox, *The Latter Day Saints on the Missouri Frontier* (Independence, MO: n.p., 1972), 121.
5. "The Book of John Whitmer," in *JSP*, H2:75.
6. MHC, vol. A-1, 484; *HC*, 2:84.
7. MHC, vol. A-1, "Addenda, Note 11, 6–7 June 1834"; *HC*, 2:88–89.
8. MHC, vol. A-1, 485–88; *HC*, 2:84–86.
9. MHC, vol. A-1, 489–90; *HC*, 2:89–90.
10. MHC, vol. A-1, 490–91; *HC*, 2:91–92.
11. MHC, vol. A-1, 491–93; *HC*, 2:96–97; *JSP*, D4:63, 63nn287–88.
12. "Book of John Whitmer," 75.
13. MHC, vol. A-1, 493; *HC*, 2:97–98; "Newel Knight's Journal," in *Scraps of Biography: Tenth Book of the Faith-Promoting Series* (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1883), 91–92.
14. MHC, vol. A-1, 493; *HC*, 2:98–99; "Newel Knight's Journal," 92.
15. MHC, vol. A-1, 493–94; *HC*, 2:98–99.
16. *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*, 6th ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1964), 115.

17. MHC, vol. A-1, 495–96; *HC*, 2:101–4; Joseph Holbrook autobiography and journal, circa 1860–1871, MS 5004, 19, CHL; Max H Parkin, “A History of the Latter-day Saints in Clay County, Missouri, from 1833 to 1837” (PhD diss., Brigham Young University, 1976), 143, 146–47.
18. MHC, vol. A-1, 496–97; *HC*, 2:104–5; “Book of John Whitmer,” 76; “Newel Knight’s Journal,” 92–93; Parkin, “History of the Latter-day Saints in Clay County,” 150–58; *JSP*, D4:63, 63n289.
19. As recorded in Matthew C. Godfrey, “We Believe the Hand of the Lord Is in It’: Memories of Divine Intervention in the Zion’s Camp Expedition,” *BYU Studies* 56, no. 4 (2017): 124–25.
20. *JSP*, D4:65–68. See also MHC, vol. A-1, 497–98, 504–5; *HC*, 2:106–7, 113–14; Parkin, “History of the Latter-day Saints in Clay County,” 159–60.
21. William W. Phelps et al., Clay Co., MO, to Samuel Owens et al., June 23, 1834, William W. Phelps, Collection of Missouri Documents, CHL.
22. D&C 105:1. The official transcript of this revelation (D&C 105) in the hand of John Whitmer in “Revelation Book 1” is published in *JSP*, MRB:374–79. The revelation and its historical setting are discussed in *JSP*, D4:69–77. Phelps himself made a personal copy of the revelation. *JSP*, D4:72, 72n337.
23. Those verses specifically cited are D&C 105:5, 18, 33, 38–39. John Whitmer interpreted the revelation to mean that Zion could be redeemed after the brethren received the endowment. See “Book of John Whitmer,” 77. This was not the Lord’s first promise of an endowment of power, since it had been promised in June 1833 in D&C 95:8.
24. *HC*, 2:112–13; *JSP*, D4:80–84; MHC, vol. A-1, 503–4; MB2, 41–42; *FWR*, 68–69.
25. *JSP*, J1:44; emphasis added.
26. *JSP*, D4:85; MHC, vol. A-1, 505; *HC*, 2:112.
27. MHC, vol. A-1, 505–9; *HC*, 2:114–20; “Newel Knight’s Journal,” 93; Parkin, “History of the Latter-day Saints in Clay County,” 167–72.
28. MHC, vol. A-1, 505–11; *HC*, 2:114–22; *JSP*, D4:86, 86n412.
29. Later in Kirtland (November 12, 1835) and then in Far West (March 15, 1838), Joseph Smith acknowledged that choosing David Whitmer as president of the Missouri high council in 1834 was to make him his successor as leader of the church if he (Joseph) were for some reason to die at that time. See *JSP*, J1:97, 97n127; *FWR*, 151.
30. *JSP*, D4:88–90; MHC, vol. A-1, 511–12; MB2, 43; *FWR*, 70–71; *HC*, 2:122–23.
31. *FWR*, 142, 144n4.
32. *JSP*, D4:90–96; MHC, vol. A-1, 512; MB2, 43–44; *FWR*, 71–74; *HC*, 2:124–25.
33. MHC, vol. A-1, 513; MB2, 45; *FWR*, 71–74; *HC*, 2:125.
34. W. W. Phelps, “An Appeal,” *EMS* 2, no. 23 (August 1834): 183–84; MHC, vol. A-1, 514–25; *HC*, 2:126–34.
35. W. W. Phelps to Daniel Dunklin, August 1, 1834, “William W. Phelps, Collection of Missouri Documents,” CHL.
36. MHC, vol. A-1, 525–26; MB2, 46–47; *FWR*, 74–77; *HC*, 2:136.
37. MHC, vol. A-1, 526–28; MB2, 48–49; *FWR*, 77–78; *HC*, 2:137–38.
38. MHC, vol. A-1, 528–30; MB2, 50–64; *FWR*, 87–97; *HC*, 2:139–41.
39. *JSP*, D4:114–19; W. W. Phelps, “Dear Brethren,” *EMS* 2, no. 24 (September 1834): 191; see also “Newel Knight’s Journal,” 93–94.
40. *JSP*, D4:118–19; emphasis in original.
41. *JSP*, D4:102–8, emphasis in original; MHC, vol. A-1, 553–56; *HC*, 2:144–46, 164; MB2, 65.
42. *JSP*, D4:103; MHC, vol. B-1, 556; MB2, 65; *FWR*, 97–99; *HC*, 2:164.

43. MHC, vol. A-1, 553; *HC*, 2:161.
44. MHC, vol. B-1, 559; *HC*, 2:171–72.
45. MHC, vol. B-1, 563; *HC*, 2:177–79.
46. W. W. Phelps Diary, January 1, 2, 5, 6, and 18, 1835, MS 21921, CHL.
47. W. W. Phelps, “Letter No. 1,” *M&A* 1 (November 1834): 23.
48. Parkin, “History of the Latter-day Saints in Clay County,” 215–16.
49. Phelps, “Letter No. 1,” 22–24.
50. W. W. Phelps, “Letter No. 2,” *M&A* 1 (December 1834): 33–34. In the same issue is the article “The Millennium,” pp. 39–40. In the next issue is the continuation of that article (January 1835, pp. 53–54) as well as a letter from Edward Partridge that avidly preached that Christ’s second coming was near: “Dear Friends and Neighbors,” pp. 56–61.
51. W. W. Phelps, “Letter No. 3,” *M&A* 1 (January 1835): 49–51.
52. W. W. Phelps, “Letter No. 4,” *M&A* 1 (February 1835): 65–67; emphasis added.
53. W. W. Phelps, “Letter No. 5,” *M&A* 1 (March 1835): 81–82.
54. W. W. Phelps, “Letter No. 6,” *M&A* 1 (April 1835): 97.
55. *JSP*, D4:117; Phelps, “Dear Brethren,” 191.
56. W. W. Phelps Diary, January 18 and April 12, 1835; Parkin, “History of the Latter-day Saints in Clay County,” 218–22.