

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

“THAT THY DAYS MAY BE PROLONGED”: ATTEMPTS ON THE LIFE OF JOSEPH SMITH

CRAIG K. MANSCILL AND DEREK R. MOCK

In March of 1829, in Harmony, Pennsylvania, the Lord spoke to Joseph Smith Jr. in revelation, saying, “There are many that lie in wait to destroy thee from off the face of the earth; and for this cause, that thy days may be prolonged, I have given unto thee these commandments” (D&C 5:33). Previous to this revelation, Joseph had experienced several instances in which his life was in danger; and from the point of this revelation to the end of his life in 1844, Joseph experienced escalating instances of brutality and potential harm. Indeed, the thirty-eight-year life of Joseph Smith Jr. provides a significant collection of attempts to end the Prophet’s life from a variety of different sources. The attempts on the life of the Prophet are not often sequentially considered within the context of Joseph’s life. A sample of attempts demonstrates that these provided an important catalyst for Joseph’s personal growth. Experiencing repeated attempts on his life from a very young age and through manhood taught Joseph that God would preserve him until his work was completed. This is not to say that Joseph knew when his life would be over any better than we know when ours will be over. At times, it seems that he did not see how he could be spared. However, he did know, as we

Craig K. Mancill is an associate professor of Church history and doctrine at Brigham Young University. Derek R. Mock is a graduate student in political science at Brigham Young University.

can come to know, that God would preserve, protect, and provide a way as he continued with faith.

A look at the plotted attempts against Joseph's life reveals plots ranging from solo schemes to coordinated group efforts. Along with the growing number of individuals and organizations trying to end the Prophet's life, the frequency and intensity of these attempts increased. As Joseph could handle more, he was tried with more. With his development into manhood, Joseph came to view the trials he endured as important catalysts to his personal process of becoming. Becoming often holds a high price. For Joseph, a man who loved his fellows, a painful part of being a prophet must have been that some of the conspirators against his life were his professed friends, suspecting neighbors, and past associates.

Although the plots eventually culminated in his death, Joseph's escape from a plethora of direct threats points to either uncanny good luck or the hand of a higher power actively preserving his life. Joseph often claimed the latter of these as his benefactor. His belief in his calling from God provided him with the strength and will to continue. His determination was bolstered by his faith. Regarding those who often opposed him, he simply reaffirmed that "it was nevertheless a fact that I had beheld a vision."¹

From the time he began to relate his heavenly visitation, Joseph's life was in near-constant danger. Joseph would be the first to profess the belief that divine protection had shielded him from what must have sometimes seemed to be unmitigated certainty of destruction. In many cases, Joseph's life was spared by some small change in circumstance: the timely arrival of a neighbor coming to help, the softened heart of a sheriff, or the blatant refusal of a military officer's order.

Representative segments of history are selected to show that the attempts against the Prophet's life became progressively better coordinated, more vehement, and more specifically intentioned as Joseph grew into his calling as a prophet of God.

ATTEMPTS ON THE LIFE OF THE PROPHET

Joseph experienced his first major multiperson organized attempt against his life as he went about moving the plates to his home. After four years of waiting and instruction, Joseph was allowed to take the

plates from their resting place in the Hill Cumorah on September 22, 1827.² As he received the plates, he received very strict instruction from the angel Moroni that he was to do all he could to protect the plates. Word that Joseph had the plates quickly spread. Joseph said: "I soon found out the reason why I had received such strict charges to keep them safe and why it was that the messenger had said that when I had done what was required at my hand, he would call for them, for no sooner was it known that I had them than the most strenuous exertions were used to get them from me. Every stratagem that could be invented was resorted to for that purpose."³

Hearing reports of a group of between ten and twelve men "clubbed together, with one Willard Chase, a Methodist class leader, at their head," Joseph Sr. went to the neighbors to discover what he could.⁴ Hearing of their strong desire to find the plates, Joseph Sr. subsequently sent Emma to inform Joseph.⁵ With news of collaborations to get the plates, Joseph set out to retrieve the plates from their temporary hiding place in an old birch log.⁶

When Joseph arrived at the log, he retrieved the plates and wrapped them in his linen frock. He then "placed them under his arm and started for home."⁷ After traveling for only a short distance, Joseph considered it safer to move from the road to the woods. Joseph traveled in the woods for some distance. Joseph's mother gives the following account of what happened next:

He came to a large windfall, and as he was jumping over a log, a man sprang up from behind it and gave him a heavy blow with a gun. Joseph turned around and knocked him down, then ran at the top of his speed. About half a mile farther he was attacked again in the same manner as before; he knocked this man down in like manner as the former and ran on again; and before he reached home he was assaulted the third time. In striking the last one, he dislocated his thumb, which, however, he did not notice until he came within sight of the house, when he threw himself down in the corner of the fence in order to recover his breath. As soon as he was able, he arose and came to the house. He was still altogether speechless from fright and the fatigue of running.⁸

Of this time, Joseph recounts that "the persecution became more bitter and severe than before, and multitudes were on the alert

continually to get [the plates] from me if possible. But by the wisdom of God, they remained safe in my hands."⁹

As the Church grew in numbers in the New York area, the enemies of Joseph and the Church grew as well. In Colesville, New York, near the Knights' residence, on June 28 and 29, 1830, Joseph and the Saints performed several baptisms. As they were thus engaged, they were persecuted by a mob rallied by local religious leaders. Eventually, he was arrested by a constable for disorderly preaching of the Book of Mormon.¹⁰

Although the constable was required to enact his duty, he was not allowed to give Joseph into the hands of those who had plotted to take his life. A short distance from the Knights' residence, the wagon in which Joseph and the constable were traveling was surrounded by a group of men. Joseph sensed that they thought he had fallen into their hands, seeming "to await some signal from the constable" to take him.¹¹ However, as Joseph states, "to their great disappointment, [the constable] gave the horse the whip, and drove me out of their reach."¹²

The mob chased the wagon "in close pursuit."¹³ As Joseph and the constable fled, one of the wheels on the wagon became detached, which event "left [them] once more very nearly surrounded by [the mob]."¹⁴ Joseph writes that they "managed to replace the wheel and again left" the mobbers behind them.¹⁵

Once in the town of South Bainbridge, Chenango County, where Joseph's trial was to take place on the following day, the constable put Joseph up in the top-floor room of a tavern. And in order to protect Joseph through the night, the constable slept on the floor with his feet to the door and his firearm at his side, while Joseph slept in the bed provided with the room.¹⁶

It is amazing to think through the range of emotions that Joseph must have felt as he worked his way through the experience. His emotions must have ranged from the possible surprise of being surrounded in the constable's wagon to the adrenaline-filled moment of replacing the detached wagon wheel. The deepest moment of them all must have been when Joseph noted the constable asleep against the door. There must have been in Joseph's heart a realization that God would not leave him until he had finished his work.

Another instance in which Joseph saw the hand of the Lord

protecting and preserving his life came with his experiences at Far West and the resulting stay in Liberty Jail. On October 27, 1838, Governor Boggs ordered that the Saints be driven from the state. "The Mormons must be treated as enemies. . . . Their outrages are beyond all description," he wrote.¹⁷ With the Saints surrounded, Joseph and other leaders of the Church were betrayed into the hands of the militia led by General Lucas—a known enemy of the Church. Joseph describes the scene as follows: "The officers would not converse with us, and the soldiers, almost to a man, insulted us as much as they felt disposed, breathing out threats against me and my companions. I cannot begin to tell the scene which I there witnessed. The loud cries and yells of more than one thousand voices, which rent the air and could be heard for miles, and the horrid and blasphemous threats and curses which were poured upon us in torrents, were enough to appall the stoutest heart."¹⁸

On the stand of a friend to the Saints, General Doniphan, Joseph was spared death by firing squad. Not willing to release the prisoners, their captors sent Joseph, Hyrum, and others on to Liberty Jail. Their petitions for redress went unheeded. Poison was administered to them from time to time. The dosages were concentrated to the point that their bodies could not even absorb the poison. After vehemently vomiting, they "would lie some two or three days in a torpid, stupid state, not even caring or wishing for life."¹⁹

At times in this condition, Joseph cried out: "O God, where art thou? And where is the pavilion that covereth thy hiding place?" (D&C 121:1). He was cut off from the comfort that home and family provide. He was illegally held by the state because of fallacious reports. As anyone in this situation would, Joseph had a choice. He chose wisely and allowed himself to be schooled through these experiences. Realizing the inescapable need to be totally contrite, he chose to submit his will to God: "[And] when the heart is sufficiently contrite, then the voice of inspiration steals along and whispers, My son, peace be unto thy soul; thine adversity and thine afflictions shall be but a small moment."²⁰

In Liberty Jail, Joseph received Doctrine and Covenants sections 121 through 123. Verses from these sections have come to be a standard to those who suffer under the weight of affliction. After telling Joseph all the things that could happen, the Lord—as the master

instructor—points out that “the Son of Man hath descended below them all. Art thou greater than he?” (D&C 122:8). And with words of reassuring love, Joseph was given the knowledge that he would be guaranteed the time to finish his mission on the earth (see D&C 122:9). Remarkably, this faith is quickly transferred by way of exhortation to those who were afflicted along with Joseph: “Let us cheerfully do all things that lie in our power; and then may we stand still, with the utmost assurance, to see the salvation of God, and for his arm to be revealed,” he wrote (D&C 123:17).

Including his experiences in Far West, Joseph experienced many different types of attempts on his life: bands hunting him, mobs harassing him, the state sentencing him, among many other types of attempts (see appendix). In Nauvoo, Joseph experienced attempts on his life from within his circle of friends. On December 29, 1842, he said that his life was “more in danger from some little dough-head of a fool in this city than from any numerous and inveterate enemies abroad.”²¹ To protect himself, Joseph commissioned the city’s police force to protect him not only against enemies from the outside but from enemies on the inside as well. Along with the city’s police force Joseph also appointed bodyguards, which he named his “life guard.” Even with these protections, one may sense the surprise that Joseph had at learning that treachery was closer to home than he suspected: “Can it be possible that the traitor whom Porter Rockwell reports to me as being in correspondence with my Missouri enemies, is one of my quorum?”²²

On May 7, 1842, Joseph was to participate in a sham battle by the Nauvoo Legion. Dr. John C. Bennett was a man of considerable rank, holding the positions of mayor, chancellor of the university, and major general of the Nauvoo Legion. As such, Bennett requested that Joseph command one of the cohorts in the sham battle. When Joseph refused, Bennett further persisted that Joseph should “take a position in the rear of the cavalry without his staff during the engagement.”²³ To this request the chief of Joseph’s life guard, Captain A. P. Rockwood, objected.

Joseph and his staff chose their own position during the sham battle.²⁴ These events left Joseph with strong suspicions: “Why did [Bennett] request me to command one of the cohorts, and also to take my position without my staff, during the sham battle on the

seventh of May, 1842, where my life might have been forfeited and no man have known who did the deed?"²⁵

The threats from within the Church continued to grow. On one occasion Joseph said that "were it not for enemies within the city, there would be no danger from foes without,"²⁶ adding that "if it were not for a Brutus, I might have lived as long as Caesar would have lived."²⁷

In the final months of his life, Joseph worked diligently to preserve his life and to continue helping the Church accomplish its God-appointed agenda; that is, the building of the temple and the endowing of members with power, among others. However, as the Church grew in Nauvoo, so did the number of those who opposed the Church. Apostates from within mingled with anti-Mormon leagues without. During the later Nauvoo period, opinions gathered in the two opposing camps of opinion: Joseph was either a fallen prophet, needing to be replaced; or he remained a strong leader of the Saints, still receiving direct revelation from God. Outside Nauvoo, similar polarizations developed. Those who tried to remain neutral were branded jack Mormons by those who were against the Mormons, and they also received threats.

Although Joseph and the city council guarded their reactions against threats and persecutions in order to ward off a reason for an assault on the city, they had their limits. The Mormons had at their disposal two papers in which they circulated news and doctrinal commentary. These papers also played another important role. As the primary means of mass communication, the papers acted as the medium through which public opinion (in Nauvoo and the surrounding regions) was both informed and affected. In the midst of mounting political struggles between the lawless bands surrounding Nauvoo and the Saints, great efforts were made by those who violently opposed the Church to stop the circulation of these two papers outside of Nauvoo. In this they were somewhat successful.

Brigham Young states that their success emboldened them, becoming a type of impetus for setting up a press that intended to print slanderous comments.²⁸ The result of this effort was the *Nauvoo Expositor*, which printed "the most libelous, false, and infamous reports concerning citizens of Nauvoo, and especially the ladies."²⁹ Most of the Nauvoo populace were outraged. Sensing that some of

the public might take things into their own hands, Joseph, as mayor, convened the city council to discuss this matter. After some discussion, they realized that action against the press would be a powerful motivation for the mobs to take action against the Saints in Nauvoo.

At this important point of decision, the Prophet addressed the council. Brigham Young remembers the following about the Prophet's discourse: "He exhibited in glowing colors the meanness, corruption and ultimate designs of the anti-'Mormons'; their despicable characters and ungodly influences, especially of those who were in our midst. He told of the responsibility that rested upon us, as guardians of the public interest, to stand up in the defense of the injured and oppressed, to stem the current of corruption, and as men and saints, to put a stop to this flagrant outrage upon this people's rights."³⁰

Through entirely lawful means, the city council ordered that the press be destroyed. The press was destroyed and the type scattered. With the destruction of the press, the enemies of Joseph and the Church organized themselves to move Joseph from Nauvoo to Carthage. With an eventual mandate from the governor of Illinois, Governor Thomas Ford, Joseph went to Carthage to answer the warrants against himself.

On June 23, 1844, at 6:30 in the morning, Joseph and some colleagues, among whom was his brother Hyrum, set out for Carthage. On his way out of Nauvoo, as Joseph passed the temple, he hinted at his understanding that the coming events would culminate with his death: "This is the loveliest place and the best people under the heavens; little do they know the trials that await them."³¹ He also commented to Daniel H. Wells how he wished to be remembered, saying, "I wish you to cherish my memory, and not think me the worst man in the world either."³²

Once in Carthage, Joseph was harassed by the mobs. Statements from those in Carthage indicated that Governor Ford knew the plans of those whom he had adopted into the state militia. It was well understood that Joseph was being held on false charges. Rumors circulated that Joseph and his companions "should not go out of Carthage alive," and "that the law cannot touch them, but that powder and ball will."³³

At 5:16 P.M. on June 27, 1844, a mob rushed past the guards who

were charged to watch Joseph. The mob fired into the room through the window and through the door. A shot through the door hit Hyrum in the face, to the side of the nose. Another shot through the window hit him right after the first. A final two shots hit him as he fell to the floor. Seeing his brother falling, "Joseph exclaimed, 'Oh, dear brother Hyrum!'"³⁴ After firing his revolver down the hall, Joseph was hit by one or two shots. He ran to the window in an attempt to escape. He cried out, "O Lord, my God!" and either fell or jumped from the window. In the process, he was hit by more balls from beneath.³⁵

IN RETROSPECT: ATTEMPTS ON THE PROPHET'S LIFE EXAMINED

Perhaps the most extraordinary thing about Joseph's life is the way that he handled his trials. He viewed his trials as important catalysts to his personal process of becoming, even though he did not always understand how his life could be spared. Also, as Joseph gained experience, he felt that his life would be spared until his work was completed.

As is natural for anyone who repeatedly faces seemingly insurmountable challenges, Joseph was obliged to contemplate why he was repeatedly persecuted. From a very young age, Joseph illustrates his deep introspection on the matter. After the First Vision, he said, "While they were persecuting me, reviling me, and speaking all manner of evil against me falsely for so saying, I was led to say in my heart, Why persecute me for telling the truth?"³⁶ As time passed and Joseph matured, his perspective of the barrage of persecutions focused on his personal growth:

I am like a huge, rough stone rolling down from a high mountain; and the only polishing I get is when some corner gets rubbed off by coming in contact with something else, striking with accelerated force against religious bigotry, priestcraft, lawyer-craft, doctor-craft, lying editors, suborned judges and jurors, and the authority of perjured executives, backed by mobs, blasphemers, licentious and corrupt men and women—all hell knocking off a corner here and a corner there. Thus I will become a smooth and polished shaft in the quiver of the Almighty, who will give me dominion over all and every one of them, when their refuge of lies shall fail, and their hiding place shall be destroyed, while these

smooth-polished stones with which I come in contact become marred.³⁷

Given the burden some of the trials placed on him, Joseph's conclusion is impressive. Surely, Joseph's perspective of his trials must have resulted from an application of great humility, though at times such humility must have been very difficult to apply. This is well illustrated in the tarring and feathering of Joseph on March 24, 1832. On the following day, Sunday, he preached to a congregation among which were some of those who had attempted to take his life the night before.³⁸ Still, the more poignant trial came for Joseph when his infant son Joseph died of complications that likely resulted from exposure to the cold on the 24th. This trial required real application of humility. Joseph the man applied in his heart what Joseph the Prophet had taught, which, of course, is the real test of discipleship. Joseph had little choice but to learn from these refining experiences he constantly faced.

At his lowest times, a very human side of Joseph can be seen. Joseph knew that God could preserve his life. He had seen God the Father and the Son—he knew of their reality and transcendent power. Still, as we all are, Joseph's knowledge was tested. Could he repeatedly transform his knowledge into action, into choice? On one occasion, Joseph Smith Sr. gave the Prophet a patriarchal blessing in which he promised Joseph that he would accomplish all the work the Lord had for him to do. At this time enemies surrounded Joseph from within the Church and from without. Joseph cried out: "Oh! my father, shall I?" "Yes," said his father, "you shall live to lay out the plan of all the work which God has given you to do."³⁹ Within the context of his life at the time, Joseph's interrogatory shows great faith.

Although Joseph at times searched for faith to deal with situations, in every struggle we see a hero emerging from the trials. He stood ever strong in his faith, fortitude, and courage to do what he knew to be right. This is perhaps best seen in the case of the *Nauvoo Expositor*.

The men of the Nauvoo City Council knew that the press was a way to strike at the Saints as a whole and at Joseph individually where it was the most damaging—next to heart and home. Writing especially scandalous reports about the women of the Church, the

press sought to bring an act against itself, which would provide the impetus to drive the Saints from the area. Knowing this, the council was very cautious. Driven from Far West, they had rebuilt their homes; indeed, they wanted to stay. Joseph acutely understood this. Repeatedly he had pled with the Lord over the Saints as he sat in Liberty Jail. Furthermore, he understood his position among the Saints well enough to know that his life would be directly affected by the decision of the council.

Setting all this aside, he stood up for the right. Brigham Young recalls that at this important time Joseph swayed the vote. He did not always see how his life could be spared. Yet with faith he moved forward, declaring the truth, even when his own health, comfort, and life were at stake.

Joseph did not know exactly what the whole of his earthly ministry entailed. Although he knew that God could preserve his life, he also understood that such promises were forfeit once his mission was complete. His understanding of the scope and specifics of his mission often took on new meaning as he might have thought, and as others certainly thought, his life was over. It was in the confines of Liberty Jail that he came to understand that much more was still required of him.⁴⁰ An understanding of exactly what God wanted him to do became increasingly clear to the Prophet as the momentum of the work increased.⁴¹ With time, it became evident to him that his life's mission was coming to a close—the window of time in which he had to complete his mission was shrinking. He pled with the Saints to lend him the power that came through their prayers for him that he might “be enabled to escape every stratagem of Satan, surmount every difficulty, and bring this people to the enjoyment of those blessings which are reserved for the righteous.”⁴² Indeed, Joseph felt an urgency to finish the work he had to do.

Joseph Smith came to understand his mission “line upon line, precept upon precept” (D&C 98:12). This understanding was conditional and depended upon his faithfulness. Performance of duty one day was a prerequisite for more complete understanding the next. The mission of Joseph Smith was a great and marvelous work that included bringing forth the Book of Mormon, restoring the priesthood and priesthood keys, revealing precious gospel truths, organizing the true Church, and establishing temple work. The nearer

Joseph Smith came to fulfilling his mission the more intense the attempts on his life became.

An integral part of his finishing his work was passing on the keys of the kingdom to the Twelve so that if he was taken, the Church would remain intact. Joseph worked diligently to ready the Twelve to hold those keys. Publicly he gave the Saints a vision of the place the Twelve would hold in the kingdom of God: in a conference he said that the time had come “for the Twelve ‘to stand in their place next to the First Presidency.’”⁴³

After adequate preparation, Joseph conferred the keys of the kingdom on the Twelve—“every key and every power that he ever held himself before God.”⁴⁴ This done, a major part of his work was completed; one might say this was the step before his final testimony. Joseph said, “Some have supposed that Brother Joseph could not die; but this is a mistake: it is true there have been times when I have had the promise of my life to accomplish such and such things, but, having now accomplished those things, I have not at present any lease of my life, I am as liable to die as other men.”⁴⁵

Joseph’s faith in God’s power to deliver was repeatedly tried over the course of his life as attempts on his life increased in both number and intensity. At the beginning of his ministry, Joseph was shot at and chased by a few men. Later, he was tarred and feathered by an organized group of men whose intent was to seriously harm and even kill him. Eventually, armies gathered against him. Each of these assaults he survived. However, the final days of his life revealed organized and desperate groups of adversaries from within the Church and without who attempted to take his life. These were men close to him, men whom he took to be his friends.

The opposition against Joseph that motivated these attempts stemmed from the political ambitions of his adversaries, general misconceptions held by the residents of neighboring areas, and differences in political aims between the Saints and a group of residents in the area. In a closer and more personal sense, the opposition came from those who Joseph had once thought were his friends. At the beginning of his ministry, Joseph’s life was in danger for the sake of money when three, possibly of a much larger group, tried to take the plates from Joseph as he moved them from an old birch log to his parents’ residence. Later in his life, Joseph’s life was nearly

extinguished because of religious bigotry in New York, when he was tarred, feathered, and nearly poisoned. Eventually, in Carthage, Joseph's life was taken because of internal enemies motivated by jealousy and the desire for power. Joseph was subjected to the blunt end of jealousies, the deleterious effects of lies and false stories, the misinformed opinions of those around him that it was time for new leadership, and the outright hatred of those whom he had bested at one thing or another.

The attempts on Joseph's life reinforced his belief that God was the master architect of his life. Ranging in emotions from total confidence that he would escape from the hands of his enemies to heartfelt concern that the way was too narrow to traverse, Joseph moved forward, one step at a time. Orson Hyde reported that when Joseph's work was completed, the Prophet said it was "but little matter what becomest of me." Orson Hyde added, "From many things which he said and did it is evident that he [k]new an eventful period had arrived, that his exit was at hand, for he said, 'I will die for this people' and he has gone."⁴⁶

As Joseph's life is viewed in retrospect, a great man emerges from the fires of trial. Having his life threatened through every major phase of his life, the Prophet did not falter in his declaration of truth. One need not wonder if his mission was completed. Joseph's life was not cut short. Joseph "lived great, and," when his mission was completed and God called him home, "he died great." Indeed, "in the eyes of God and his people," Joseph was a prophet preserved by the hand of the Lord (D&C 135:3).

NOTES

1. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2nd ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1951), 1:7–8.
2. Joseph Smith, *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, comp. and ed. Dean C. Jessee (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1984), 207–8.
3. Smith, *Personal Writings*, 208.
4. Lucy Mack Smith, *History of Joseph Smith by His Mother* (Salt Lake City: Stevens & Wallis, 1945), 107.
5. Smith, *History of Joseph Smith*, 107.
6. Smith, *History of Joseph Smith*, 107.
7. Smith, *History of Joseph Smith*, 107.

8. Smith, *History of Joseph Smith*, 108.
9. Smith, *History of the Church*, 1:18–19.
10. Donna Hill, *Joseph Smith: The First Mormon* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1977), 111.
11. Smith, *History of the Church*, 1:88–89.
12. Smith, *History of the Church*, 89.
13. Smith, *History of the Church*, 89.
14. Smith, *History of the Church*, 89.
15. Smith, *History of the Church*, 89.
16. Smith, *History of the Church*, 89. Joseph's scribe uses the language "in order that all might be right with himself and with me also, he slept during the night with his feet against the door," indicating that the constable was also worried for his own safety in consideration of the mob that must have reached the town that night.
17. Smith, *History of the Church*, 3:175.
18. Smith, *History of the Church*, 2:239.
19. Smith, *History of the Church*, 3:420.
20. Smith, *History of the Church*, 3:293.
21. Hill, *First Mormon*, 388.
22. Hill, *First Mormon*, 389 n. 6.
23. B. H. Roberts, *The Rise and Fall of Nauvoo* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965), 135.
24. Roberts, *Rise and Fall*, 135.
25. Roberts, *Rise and Fall*, 135.
26. Quoted in Smith, *History of Joseph Smith*, 320.
27. Quoted in Smith, *History of Joseph Smith*, 320.
28. Smith, *History of the Church*, 7:61–62.
29. Smith, *History of the Church*, 7:61–62.
30. Smith, *History of the Church*, 7:61–62.
31. Smith, *History of the Church*, 6:554.
32. Smith, *History of the Church*, 6:554.
33. Smith, *History of the Church*, 6:566–68.
34. Smith, *History of the Church*, 6:616–22.
35. Smith, *History of the Church*, 6:616–22.
36. Smith, *History of the Church*, 1:7–8.
37. Smith, *History of the Church*, 6:401.
38. Smith, *History of Joseph Smith*, 221; see also Smith, *History of the Church*, vol. 1.
39. Smith, *History of Joseph Smith*, 309–10.

40. Ronald K. Esplin, "Joseph Smith's Mission and Timetable: 'God Will Protect Me until My Work Is Done,'" in *The Prophet Joseph: Essays on the Life and Mission of Joseph Smith*, ed. Larry C. Porter and Susan Easton Black (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988), 299.
41. See Esplin, "Joseph's Mission and Timetable," 280–319.
42. Smith, *History of the Church*, 4:230.
43. Esplin, "Joseph's Mission and Timetable," 302.
44. Esplin, "Joseph's Mission and Timetable," 309.
45. Smith, *History of the Church*, 4:587.
46. Orson Hyde, in Esplin, "Joseph's Mission and Timetable," 310.

APPENDIX

BRIEF DESCRIPTIONS OF SELECTED ATTEMPTS ON THE LIFE OF THE PROPHET

ATTEMPT BY THREE MEN TO GET THE PLATES AS JOSEPH MOVED THEM

Date: September 1827

Place: Palmyra, New York, en route from retrieving the plates from an old birch log to his parents' home.¹

Brief description: After Joseph received the plates from the angel Moroni, he hid them in an old birch log at a distance about three miles from his parents' home. Later he went to retrieve the plates from the log. Going home under cover of a forest trail, he was attacked at three different points by different men.

SEVERAL SHOOTING ATTEMPTS

Date: September 1827–April 1830²

Place: In and around the area between Palmyra and Fayette, New York.³

Brief description: Shortly after Joseph received the plates at the hands of the angel Moroni, many attempts were made to get the plates from him and to take his life. Joseph stated that as part of these attempts he was shot at on several occasions.

AFTERMATH OF RETRIEVING THE PLATES: ARMED MEN ON THE SMITH FARM

Date: Sometime shortly after September 22, 1827

Place: Smith family farm, Palmyra, New York

Brief description: Joseph brought home the Urim and Thummim. He set about working on his father's farm in order to be near the plates—to watch over and protect them. His mother recounted that one day in the afternoon Joseph rushed into the house asking if a mob had come in search of the plates. When she said no, he informed her that a mob would be there that night to find the plates. With this, and in consultation with one Mr. Braman, the Smiths decided to place the plates under one of the hearthstones. They finished their work of secluding the plates as an armed mob rode up to the house.⁴

FORTY MEN SEEK TO WAYLAY THE PROPHET JOSEPH SMITH⁵

Date: The day that the contract for the printing of the Book of Mormon was signed.

Place: Between Manchester and Palmyra, New York.

Brief description: A mob gathered and lay in wait for Joseph as he was en route from Manchester to Palmyra. These forty intended to do Joseph some harm as he took his journey.

A KIND CONSTABLE

Date: June 28–29, 1830

Place: Colesville and South Bainbridge, New York.

Brief description: A writ of arrest was served to Joseph on spurious charges. A plan to ambush Joseph on his way to trial was thwarted by a kind-hearted constable.

PASSING BY HIS BITTEREST ENEMIES UNHARMED

Date: August 1830

Place: A short distance from the home of Mr. Knight in Colesville, New York.

Brief description: Joseph and a group of elders went to visit the Saints in Colesville. Praying for divine intervention, they passed by their enemies unseen.

TARRING AND FEATHERING IN HIRAM, OHIO

Date: March 24, 1832

Place: Hiram, Ohio

Brief description: Joseph was up late caring for one of his adopted twins, Joseph, who had the measles. A mob of men broke into his

home and pulled him outside. They tarred and feathered his body to such an extent that when Emma, his wife, saw him later that night she fainted thinking that he was covered with blood. As his attackers tried to pour poison down his throat, Joseph resisted and had his tooth broken as a consequence.

MR. PORTER'S INN—GREENVILLE POISONING

Date: Between May 6 and June 1832

Place: Greenville, Indiana

Brief description: Joseph Smith Jr., Newel K. Whitney, and Sidney Rigdon traveled from Independence, Missouri, on their way back to Kirtland. Up to the point of Greenville, Indiana, they traveled by stage. For an unmentioned reason, the horses bolted and Newel K. Whitney broke his leg. Joseph stayed with him at an inn. An attempt was made to poison the two. They were miraculously preserved and left as soon as Whitney could travel.

MAN FEIGNING SICKNESS

Date: April 18, 1834

Place: In between Newburg and New Portage, Ohio (heading toward New Portage)

Brief description: Joseph Smith, in company with a few other elders of the Church, was traveling to a conference in New Portage. Midcourse, the small group was approached by someone who said he was sick and wanted a ride. They refused him the ride as directed by the Spirit and continued on their journey. The man was joined by two others, who chased Joseph and his party.

GALLATIN ELECTIONS

Date: After August 6 and probably before October 1838.

Place: Home of Lucy Mack Smith in Far West, Missouri

Brief description: Rumors resulting from a previous struggle between the Mormons and the standing voting body brought an armed body of militia to the home of Lucy Mack Smith. This group's stated intention was to "kill Joseph Smith and all the 'Mormons.'"⁶ After meeting the Prophet, the men chose not only to leave him alone but also some went so far as to guard him on his way home.⁷

EXTRADITION FROM FAR WEST (I of III)*Date:* November 1, 1838*Place:* Far West, Missouri

Brief description: Subsequent to the horrific scenes that unfolded at Far West, the governor called out a militia that eventually numbered as many as 2,500 men. The Saints in Far West had six hundred armed men.⁸ Joseph and several other Church leaders were taken captive as they went to speak with the commanding officer under a flag of truce. After being mocked and ridiculed, the prisoners were made to sleep on the bare ground.⁹ After a night-long court martial, the prisoners were sentenced to be shot. Defying the orders of his commander, General Alexander Doniphan removed his brigade and marched from Far West.¹⁰

EXTRADITION FROM FAR WEST (II of III)*Date:* November 2, 1838*Place:* Far West, Missouri

Brief description: As Joseph and his companions climbed into a wagon with the purpose of moving to Jackson County, five men stepped forward and fired on them. Luckily, not one of the weapons fully discharged.

FAILED HEARINGS—A SECRET PLOT*Date:* April 16, 1839*Place:* En route from Daviess County to Boon County, Missouri

Brief description: Joseph and his fellows were moved from Daviess County to Boon County. The guards who moved them were given instructions not to let the prisoners arrive in Boon County. After the guards became purposefully intoxicated, Joseph and company made their escape.

CATAclysmic Events at Carthage*Date:* Thursday, June 27, 1844 (5:16 P.M.)*Place:* Carthage Jail, Carthage, Illinois

Brief description: After being given a mandate by Governor Thomas Ford to come to Carthage, Joseph, Hyrum, and a few others went to have an interview with the governor and to await their trial. Unruly mobs had been integrated into the state-collected militia; among these were the Carthage Greys—sworn enemies of Joseph and

the Church. Having exerted considerable energy to get Joseph into their hands, this mob gathered in the guise of state authority and waited for an opportunity to kill Joseph. On the evening of June 27, an assault took place, which left the Prophet and his brother Hyrum dead.

NOTES

1. Lucy Mack Smith, *History of Joseph Smith by His Mother* (Salt Lake City: Stevens & Wallis, 1945), 109.
2. Between September 1827, when Joseph got the plates, and April 6, 1830, when the Church was officially organized and “several began to believe” (Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2nd ed. rev. [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1951], 4:53). We are here assuming that Joseph is associating several believing on his name with the official organization of the Church. Note that there were many that started to really believe on his word from the beginning. For example, see Doctrine and Covenants sections 14–18 for some of those who began to believe in Joseph’s word and calling.
3. Specific locations are not documented for these shootings. This projected area is extrapolated from the location of the events that Joseph indicates as surrounding the shootings.
4. Smith, *History of Joseph Smith*, 14.
5. Lucy seems to be the only one that references this specific attempt. Because of the details that she gives concerning the attempt, the historical setting in which she places the attempt, and the people that she names in regards to the attempt, it seems that she places the attempt accurately in the context of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. Why major writers on the life of Joseph have not made reference to this attempt in detail is unknown.
6. Smith, *History of Joseph Smith*, 238.
7. See Smith, *History of Joseph Smith*, 237–38.
8. Donna Hill, *Joseph Smith: The First Mormon* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1977), 242.
9. This exposure to the weather caused some of them to be sick for some time.
10. See Smith, *History of the Church*, 4:19–38.