

Fred E. Woods

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WILFORD WOODRUFF AND
THE GATHERING OF MODERN-
DAY ISRAEL, 1834–50

My mind is Deeply impressed with the necessity of urging the gathering of the Saints. This . . . seems to be the most important & almost the ownly subject that I feel to convers about.¹

So wrote Wilford Woodruff from the British Isles in 1841. He maintained his focus on the gathering of modern-day Israel throughout the duration of his varied missions from 1834 (soon after joining the Church) until he completed a term as president of the Eastern States Mission in 1850. After his missions, nearly all the remaining years of his life were lived in Utah.

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MEETINGS AND INSTRUCTION ON THE GATHERING OF ISRAEL BY JOSEPH SMITH

Obeying a call to join the expedition known as Zion's Camp, Woodruff describes meeting the Prophet Joseph Smith in the spring of 1834: "We continued To travel towards Kirtland. . . . There for the first time I had a view of our beloved Brother Joseph Smith the prophet & Seer which God hath raised up in these last days. . . . Here I became not ownly acquainted with him and his family but with many of the brethren both high priests, Elders, and private members those which were making it their home at Kirtland and also those which were gathering for the purpose of going up to Zion."² Two days later, Woodruff recorded a meeting he attended in which Joseph Smith prophesied concerning the destiny of the latter-day kingdom:

On Sunday night [April 27, 1834] the Prophet called on all who held the priesthood to gather into the little log school house they had there. It was a small house, perhaps 14 feet square. But it held the whole of the priesthood of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints who were then in the town of Kirtland, and who had gathered together to go off in Zion's Camp. . . . When we got together the Prophet called upon the elders of Israel with him to bear testimony of this work. . . . When they got through the Prophet said, "Brethren, . . . you know no more concerning the destinies of this Church and kingdom than a babe upon its mother's lap. You don't comprehend it." . . . He said, "It is only a little handful of priesthood you see here tonight, but this Church will fill North and South America—it will fill the world."³

This bold, global pronouncement was to be accomplished through what Joseph referred to as the gathering of Israel in the

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last days. Shortly after the Church was organized, Joseph revealed, “Ye are called to bring to pass the gathering of mine elect; for mine elect hear my voice and harden not their hearts; Wherefore the decree hath gone forth from the Father that they shall be gathered in unto one place upon the face of this land, to prepare their hearts and be prepared in all things against the day when tribulation and desolation are sent forth upon the wicked” (D&C 29:7–8). Joseph later proclaimed, “Don’t let a single corner of the earth go without a mission.”⁴

ZION’S CAMP AND A MISSION
TO THE SOUTH, 1834–36

Wilford’s first mission as a member of Zion’s Camp took him from the East to the western border of Missouri to restore his fellow Saints who had been cast out of Jackson County, Missouri, at the close of 1833. Woodruff likened the journey to God’s ancient covenant people: “Our march was similar to the ancient Israelites. Our horses, waggons and tents were in readiness and we were led by Joseph. . . . We made it a practice of pitching our tents on Saturday night and not remove them untill Monday morning. We had preaching on the Lords day.”⁵

The following year Woodruff went on a mission to the South, which took him into regions of Tennessee and Kentucky. He and his companions preached the doctrine of the gathering. For example, in August 1836, Woodruff wrote: “Preached at the meeting house [Weakly County, Tennessee]. Elder [David W.] Patten Preached two discourses upon the last dispensation & gathering from Ephe 1st 10.”⁶ Such preaching incited some Southerners. Woodruff recorded: “Elder [David W.] Patten informed us that [a] Benton County [Tennessee] mob had formed themselves into

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an independant company to beat & Kill the Elders of Latter Day Saints if they Came into that county. Will not God be avenged upon such a nation as this? O, God save thy Saints while Babylon falls beneath thine ire.”⁷

However, along with the opposition, Woodruff wrote of his joy in the harvest of Southern souls:

Is a day long to Be remembered by me & others in Consequence of the interesting scenes transpired with the Saints of God in the South. Isaiah & others of the Ancient Prophets testify to us of the great events of the last days especially of the literal gathering of Israel. They say the Saints Shall gather from the East & from the West & that the North shall give up & the South Keep not back. This interesting day had now arived. Yea the 19th of Sept 1836 When some of the Saints of God in the South began to take their families their Charriots Waggons their Oxen, their Horses their Tents their armour & moove towards Zion as the Children of Israel according to the Command of God.⁸

Two months later, Wilford Woodruff returned from the South to Kirtland with one of his missionary companions, Abraham O. Smoot. On November 25, 1836, Woodruff noted that he “set out in company with Elder Smoot on foot in a hard snowstorm for Kirtland. We Came in Sight of the Temple of the Lord . . . & I truly felt to rejoice at the Sight as it was the first time that mine eyes ever beheld the house of the Lord. . . . We soon entered the village & I spent one of the happiest days of my life at this time in visiting Kirtland & the House of the Lord.”⁹

As the new year dawned, the words of a New Year’s Day prayer reveal the heart of Wilford Woodruff as well as his covenant consciousness and desire to gather Israel in the last days:

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O Lord I ask thee in the name of Jesus Christ thy Son, to look upon thy servant Willford, Who now occupies a place in Kirtland, this first stake of Zion, which thou has appointed in this last Dispensation, & fulness of times for the gathering of thy Saints. O God of Israel, inspire the heart & pen of thy Servant at this time & hear & answer the Petition which he will put up unto thee at this time, & remember the Covenant which thy servant Willford will make with thee at this time, O mighty God of Jacob.¹⁰

A few months later, Woodruff received his patriarchal blessing, which may have deepened his sense of mission concerning the gathering. Among other things, he was told, “Thou mayest have riches to assist thee in gathering many orphan Children to Zion. Thou art one of the horns of Joseph to push the people together to the ends of the earth. . . . Thou shalt be deliverd out of the hands of thy enemies by the mighty power of God and by the prayer of faith.”¹¹

MISSION TO MAINE AND A CALL TO THE
QUORUM OF THE TWELVE, 1837–38

In addition, Woodruff was told he would preach “on the islands of the sea.” To fulfill this segment of his blessing, he and his companion chose the Fox Islands, located off the coast of Maine.¹² During this mission he continued to have a sense of the importance of gathering: “Elder Hale read the VXI ch. of Jeremiah that spake of the hunters and fishers that God should chuse in the last days to gather Israel. And of a truth here we were on an Island of the Sea . . . which was as full of rocks, holes, & caves. . . . But what had brought us here? Ah to search out the Blood of Ephraim & gather him from these Islands.”¹³

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This gathering of modern-day Israel to Zion would deliver the righteous from Babylon and be a symbol for the world. “We felt as though the powers of darkness was great among the gentiles upon every side of us both on the Islands & maine land & that the people were deluged in unbelief,” Woodruff recorded. “O how ignorant the gentiles are of the literal fulfillment of the word of God such as the gathering of Israel the fall of Babylon & the reign of Christ.”¹⁴ This same month, he noted, “I Preached to a large Congregation of Gentiles that were filled with unbelief. . . . In the afternoon we met with the church & Communed with them. May the Lord have mercy upon the Saints & deliver them from Babylon & her sins & plagues.”¹⁵

The doctrine of gathering also included the idea of collecting truth wherever it could be found. During his varied missions, Woodruff took time to gather such knowledge as he saw fit. For example, on May 11, 1838, he detoured from his missionary labors to view a few historic sites in Boston, which included the Navy Yard, Tremont House, and Bunker Hill. Concerning Bunker Hill he said, “We . . . walked upon the entrenchment that was flung up by our brave fathers during the night before that memorable battle. . . . But the roar of Cannon & clash of arms had long since ceased . . . while our fathers sleep in peace.”¹⁶

During this mission to the East, Woodruff visited his father’s home. On June 17, 1838, he wrote, “I appointed a meeting at My fathers house at Candlelight. The congregation came together & filled the house to overflowing. Many could not get in. I preached upon the scattering & gathering of Israel. . . . My father reproved me for reading my words. I Wilford need remember this and improve.”¹⁷ Though reproved by his father, Aphek, two weeks later Wilford rejoiced as he baptized him as well as his stepmother, Azuba, and his only sister, Eunice, in the Farmington River.¹⁸

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Nine weeks later, Woodruff's life took a decidedly serious turn as he received a call to serve in the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. On August 9, 1838, Woodruff received a letter from Thomas B. Marsh dated July 14, 1838: "You are appointed to fill the place of one of the twelve apostles; and that it is agreeable to the word of the LORD given vary lately that you should come spedily to far west, And on the 26 of April next to take your leave of the Saints here and depart for other climes across the mighty deep!"¹⁹

Wilford began making plans to conclude his eastern mission and gather with the Saints who had clustered in western Missouri. On October 4, 1838, he explained, "I made a commencement of leading this camp of the saints on their long journey. . . . This Camp consisted of 8 families the whole numbering 53 persons."²⁰ This same month, Governor Lilburn W. Boggs issued an extermination order calling for the removal of the Latter-day Saints from Missouri. By December, Wilford consequently decided to have his family stay temporarily in Rochester, Illinois.²¹ By spring his family was settled in Quincy, Illinois, and on April 18, 1839, Woodruff left with several members of the Twelve for Far West to fulfill the revelation Joseph Smith had received the previous year (see D&C 118:4–5). The Twelve then made plans to travel to England.

MISSION TO ENGLAND, 1839–41

Though ill with malaria, on August 8, 1839, Woodruff left Montrose, Iowa, with Elder John Taylor, another member of the Quorum of the Twelve. They eventually arrived in Liverpool on January 11, 1840. Upon reaching England, Woodruff found a large proportion of the population in the city of Preston suffering from dire poverty. Again his mind reflected on a biblical theme

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with echoes of the exodus: "I found the Saints in Preston poor but having warm hearts. Preston has a Population of about 60,000. The streets were crowded with the poor both male & female going to & from the factories with wooden or Clogg shoes on which makes a great rattling over the pavement. The poor are in as great Bondage as the children of Israel in Egypt."²²

Another biblical topic attested a number of times in Woodruff's journal is the signs of the times, also connected with the theme of the gathering and the Millennium. For instance, in January 1840, he noted, "The Distress of nations is at the door in fulfillment of the word of God. While confusion is through America great trouble is manifest throughout England, & beginning in all nations."²³ Six months later he wrote, "Their was a sign in the Moon. The people at Great Marlvern Hills in Herefordshire Eng took a view of it through their glasses. The appearance of the moon was as if it were painted red."²⁴

This same year, the missionaries launched a periodical, the *Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star*. The cover page of the periodical illustrated the thrust of the newspaper's subject matter: "The great work of God in these last days; with a faithful record of the signs and judgments which are beginning to be shown forth in the heavens and in the earth." Within its pages, the *Star* created the feeling that the Second Coming was nigh at hand. The first article in the opening issue dealt with the doctrinal topic of the Millennium and reviewed the teachings of ancient prophets regarding the restoration and gathering of Israel in the last days.²⁵

AID AND OPPOSITION TO THE GATHERING IN ENGLAND

During the summer of 1840, Woodruff experienced the joy of watching some of the British Saints assist each other in

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gathering to America. On July 26, he wrote, "I break Bread unto many of those Saints, as they are about to emigrate & gather with the Saints in Commerce & Montrose. A Company of about 50 is about to start for America from Herefordshire England about 40 of which will go by the free charity & Philanthropy of Elder John Benbow."²⁶ Here on the Benbow Farm, Woodruff baptized hundreds and reaped his greatest success as a missionary.²⁷ However, such success incited opposition. Just two months later he recorded, "Church ministers are vary much stired up in this region because the Saints are gathering together. Evry exertion is made against the work of God. The Clergy are fearing they will loose their flock. . . . They are holding Conventions & meetings to Contrive Schemes & plans to overthrow & stop the work of God." Yet he exclaimed with confidence, "Truth will prevail."²⁸

Although he reaped a great harvest in Staffordshire, London was a different story for both Woodruff and his companions. At the close of 1840, he wrote, "I never saw a harder Place than London to build up a Church."²⁹ Yet he and his fellow elders worked hard at their preaching and also passed out handbills inviting the citizens of London to attend lectures addressing such topics as "The Gathering of Israel—The Second Coming of the Savior—and the restitution of all things."³⁰ Notwithstanding their lack of success, such labor helped to bolster the elders. In addition, Woodruff and one of his companions had their hopes stirred by dreams: "We have had some good dreams of late about ketching fish . . . fowl, geese & Turkeys, in nets. . . . Elder Kimball also Dreamed of casting a net & ketching a good hall of fish. . . . So I think sumthing will be done soon."³¹

Such dreams brought optimism during his British mission as well as other periods of his life.³² Wilford was also rejuvenated by trips to historic sites (as was the case in Boston) and museum

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visits. Such excursions tied in with the idea of gathering all the good there was in the earth and bringing it to the Saints. Historian Thomas G. Alexander observed that Elder Woodruff and his companions “spent considerable time in acquainting themselves with the cultural and intellectual life of the places they visited.” Further, during his time in London, “Woodruff spent time visiting and noting in detail such places as the British Museum (where he became acquainted with the Keeper of Egyptian Antiquities), the College of Surgeons at Lincolns Inn Field, St. Paul’s Cathedral and other churches, the Tower of London, Buckingham Palace, the Queen’s Stables, and the National Gallery of Art.”³³

CHALLENGES FACING WILFORD AND THE BRITISH SAINTS IN THEIR EFFORTS TO GATHER TO AMERICA

One of the major challenges of gathering the foreign converts to America was the financial hardship of the trip. Many of the British Saints desired to immigrate to the United States but could not afford to make the journey. For example, on March 14, 1841, Woodruff wrote, “I Broke bread unto the Saints in the morning & spoke upon the gathering. In the afternoon I preached to a large Congregation upon the gathering. There seems to be many Saints desireous to gather that are poor & have not means. May the Lord deliver them.”³⁴

Just before his departure from the British Isles, Woodruff attended a Church conference held at the Gadfield Elm Chapel in which he needed wisdom to deal with a variety of challenges pertaining to the gathering. On March 15, 1841, he wrote, “I never saw a time when I needed more wisdom . . . than on this occasion. . . . For the Saints universally feel that the Judgments

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of God are near in this land & are anxious to gather with the Saints in Nauvoo as soon as possible.” Woodruff then explained the problem: “Many are vary poor & see no door open as yet, & some are placed in all the perplexing circumstances that possible can be, & are flocking around me by Scores at a time & asking council what to do.”³⁵

Peppered with questions from British Saints who were keenly aware of his imminent departure, he was pressed with serious concerns. He noted several examples:

I am turned out of Doors for my religion. What shall I do? I am all ready to go to Zion. My wife wont go with me. Shall I go & leave her? My Husband beats me & turns me out of Doors because I have been Baptized. I have got money enough to carry me & the children to Zion. Will you let me go without him? Br. Woodruff one word with you. My mother is over 80 years of age & has willed me £60 at her Death but will not emigrate with me. Now I want to go with the Saints. Must I stay for her to die or may I go & leave her?

Woodruff commented, “THESE and a thousand other questions were asked me in the term of an hour or more, & I needed as much wisdom as Solomon to be a councillor in the midst of such a scene.”³⁶

A week later, he again expressed concern for the Saints who lacked money to travel to Zion:

Nearly fifty Saints came to me & wished me to take them to Zion when I had not means to take myself. I however gave Sister Foxal £5 pounds to make up enough to help her & her husband & Children to the land of America. She had £30 pounds but not quite enough to help her family over, & she

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used evry exhertion for six months by puting faith & works together to try to gather with the Saints, & this was a donation from Elder Edward Ockey who is imparting of his Substance to help the poor Saints. . . . Many of the Saints have gathered to Zion . . . & the rest are anxious to go & ownly waiting for a door to be open for them.³⁷

A few weeks later, the Quorum of the Twelve made a key decision that aided the emigration process. On April 5, 1841, Wilford recorded that the Quorum of the Twelve “Resolved that Elder Amos Fielding be appointed to superintend fitting out the Saints from Liverpool to America under the instructions of Elder P. P. Pratt.”³⁸ The April issue of the *Millennial Star* explained the need for such an agent:

There are so many “pick pockets,” and so many that will take every possible advantage of strangers, in Liverpool, that we have appointed Elder Amos Fielding, . . . to superintend the fitting out of the Saints from Liverpool to America. . . . [Advantages] First, a company can charter a vessel, so as to make the passage much cheaper than otherwise. Secondly, provisions can be purchased at wholesale for a company much cheaper than otherwise. Thirdly, this will avoid bad company on the passage. Fourthly, when a company arrives in New Orleans they can charter a steam-boat so as to reduce the passage near one-half. . . . Fifthly, a man of experience can go as leader of each company, who will know how to avoid rogues and knaves.³⁹

Such an agent was most timely, for the Twelve had reaped a great harvest. During this same month and only a few days before his departure, Woodruff reflected on his and fellow laborers’ success during their year-long mission to Great Britain: “It hath truly

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been a miricle what God hath wrought by our hands in this land since we have been here & I am asstonished when I look at it for during our Stay here we have esstablished churches in all the most noted cities & towns in this Kingdom have Baptized more than 5,000 souls . . . & gatherd to the land of Joseph 1,000 Souls & esstablished a great influence among those that trade in ships at sea & lacked for nothing to eat drink or ware. Truly the Lord hath been good.”⁴⁰ A portion of those heading to the land of Joseph (America) boarded the same vessel (*Rochester*) that Woodruff and several members of the Twelve would take across the Atlantic: “I went on board of the ship Rochester in the morning with Elders B Young, H. C. Kimball, O Pratt, W. Richards, W. Woodruff J. Taylor & G. A. Smith of the Twelve . . . [with] 120 Saints, 160 of the world 20 of the crew, 2 mates . . . Making 307 souls in all. We took the parting hand with Elders P. P. Pratt & O Hide [Hyde] & a multitude of saints who stood upon the dock or quay to see us start.”⁴¹

NAUVOO PRINTING ASSIGNMENT, 1842–43

A few months later, Woodruff notes that he was living in Nauvoo with many he helped convert in the British Isles: “I am now in the midst of hundreds that I have Baptized throughout America, the Islands of the Sea England &c that have been gathered together to Nauvoo through the influence of the gospel. Joseph preached to a large congregation at the Temple.”⁴²

The following year, Woodruff, along with one of his fellow Apostles, John Taylor, received another assignment. On February 3, 1842, Woodruff recorded, “The quorum appointed Elders J. Taylor & W Woodruff of the Twelve to Edit the Times & Seasons & take charge of the whole establishment under the

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direction of Joseph the Seer. . . . I . . . commenced this day to labour for the church in the printing establishment.”⁴³ About two weeks later, Woodruff added that his primary responsibility was running the business part of the establishment, and he also assisted with setting type.⁴⁴

Coincidentally, the first article published by elders Taylor and Woodruff, as they assumed responsibility for the *Times and Seasons*, focused on the gathering of Israel and the Millennium:

Jeremiah speaking of the gathering of Israel, and the Millennium says: “I will make a new covenant with the House of Israel, and with the House of Judah; not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers, in the day that I took them by the hand, to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord; but this shall be the covenant that I will make with the House of Israel; after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.—Jer. xxxi, 31–34.”⁴⁵

GATHERING FUNDS FOR THE ERECTION OF THE NAUVOO TEMPLE AND THE NAUVOO HOUSE

During the Nauvoo period, Woodruff recorded many discourses by the Prophet Joseph Smith. One important sermon given on June 11, 1843, captured the core purpose of the gathering: “A large assembly of Saints met at the Temple & were addressed by president Joseph Smith. . . . He then asked what was the object of Gathering the Jews together or the people of God

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in any age of the world. The main object was to build unto the Lord an house whereby he Could reveal unto his people the ordinances of his house and glories of his kingdom & teach the people the ways of salvation.⁴⁶ This focus on the temple led to another eastern mission for him and several members of the Twelve commencing in summer 1843.⁴⁷ They collected not only needed funds for the completion of the Nauvoo Temple but also contributions for the construction of the Nauvoo House, where “the weary traveler [could] find health and safety while he contemplate[d] the word of the Lord” (D&C 124:23).⁴⁸

For example, on August 16, 1843, Woodruff penned, “In company with Elder Moore I rode to Br John Neff’s. . . . Found him strong in the faith & manifested a disposition to do the will of God to sell his property & go to Nauvoo to take stock in the Nauvoo House &c.”⁴⁹ During this brief mission, Woodruff and his companions took time to gather knowledge as had been done in Boston and London. On August 10–11, 1843, Wilford recorded their visit to Philadelphia: “Elders B Young O. Pratt G. A. Smith P Hesse & myself visited the State house in Philadephia. . . . We then went into the Independence Hall. Here we saw the place whare the Patriots signed the declaration of Independence. We set in the chairs that John Hancock sat in at the time he signed that instrument. We saw the statue of Washington, the painting of Lafeyette & others. . . . We spent the day in visiting various part of the city esspecially Peals Musium.”⁵⁰ Such a visit was in harmony with Brigham Young’s statement, “It is the business of the Elders of this church . . . to gather up all the truths in the world pertaining to life and salvation, to the Gospel we preach, to mechanisms of every kind, to the sciences, and to philosophy, wherever [they] may be found in every nation, . . . and bring it to Zion.”⁵¹

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Along with collecting donations, Woodruff and his companions preached the gospel. At a conference in New York, Woodruff prophesied of the gathering of the Jews and the destiny of God's kingdom: "The gathering of the Saints, the building of Zion, the gathering of the Jews the rebuilding of Jerrusalem, the esestablishing of the church & kingdom of God in the last days The preaching of the gospel to all the world was an event looked for by the latter day saints. . . . They will as truly be brought to pass and perfected as those things prophesied were in ancient days."⁵²

In Boston, Wilford documented each word Brigham Young spoke as he urged the eastern Saints to donate to the Nauvoo Temple fund. Brother Brigham fired off questions to stir the congregation to assist with the gathering and to reap the benefits of the temple endowment: "The Lord requires us to build a house unto his name. . . . Can you get an endowment in Boston? No & ownly in that place that God has pointed out. . . . Now will you help us to build the Nauvoo House & Temple? If so you will be blessed. If not we will build it alone."⁵³

Brother Brigham was not content with his morning sermon, saying, "I will make an apology for my remarks in the fore part of the day. . . . I want you to know to understand it, that he that gathereth not with us scattereth." Brigham then urged, "Wake up ye Elders. . . . Harken & hear me for I say unto you that if you do not help us build the Temple & Nauvoo House you shall not inherit the land of Zion. If you do not help build up Zion & the cause of God you shall not partake of their Blessings."⁵⁴

During the spring and summer of 1844, Elder Woodruff and several other Apostles campaigned for Joseph Smith as a presidential candidate for the United States. Although Joseph and Hyrum Smith were martyred on June 27, 1844, Woodruff did not know of it until July 9. The sad news cut this mission of the Twelve

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short, and they returned to Nauvoo to assist the Church in its reorganization of leadership.⁵⁵

SECOND MISSION TO THE BRITISH ISLES

At the end of August, the Twelve sent Elder Woodruff on a second mission to the British Isles. This mission lasted a year and a half. On August 28, 1844, Brigham Young wrote to the European Saints: "We send our beloved brother Wilford Woodruff to England to take Charge of all the business transactions pertaining to the Church. . . . We wish all the Saints in England to continue their gathering as usual to the land of America. . . . And further we would say unto all the Saints in all the world . . . that inasmuch as they will harken unto his Council they shall be blessed."⁵⁶

In December 1845, Elder Wilford Woodruff spoke at a special Manchester conference held prior to his departure from England. He was again teaching the gathering of Israel, a doctrine linked to the importance of building the Nauvoo Temple: "The British Saints have come forward nobly when called upon to assist the brethren in the building of the Temple. Some £220 has been donated since we called for the assistance for the bell and clock; this is well, and I feel convinced that you will continue your efforts."⁵⁷

Not only did the British Saints send needed contributions, but those who gathered to Nauvoo also played a major role in the construction of the temple.⁵⁸ One proselyte explained the value the temple held for Saints on the verge of the Nauvoo exodus:

The devil was mad, and the lives of many of our brethren were sought by the mob that had assassinated our brethren, Joseph and Hyrum. But many were the blessings we had received in the House of the Lord, which has caused joy and comfort in the midst of all our sorrows, and enabled us to have faith

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in God, knowing He would guide us and sustain us in the unknown journey that lay before us. For if it had not been for the faith and knowledge that was bestowed upon us in that temple by the influence and help of the Spirit of the Lord, our journey would have been like one taking a leap in the dark, to start out on such a journey in the winter as it was, and in our state of poverty, it would seem like walking into the jaws of death. But we had faith in our Heavenly Father, and we put our trust in Him, feeling that we were His chosen people and had embraced His gospel; and instead of sorrow we felt to rejoice that the day of our deliverance had come.⁵⁹

NAUVOO EXODUS TO THE WEST

When Woodruff returned to Nauvoo in spring 1846, the bulk of the Nauvoo Saints had already crossed the Mississippi. On April 13, he wrote, “Came in sight of the Splendid Temple built by the Latter Day Saints and also the city of Nauvoo. I immediately got my spy glass and examined the city. The Temple truly looked splendid.” But he soon joined other Saints who had departed west. In their minds, they were modern-day Israel. For instance, Helen Mar Whitney Kimball wrote, “Our experiences, I think comes nearest to that of the children of Israel after their departure from Egypt than any other people of whom we have record.”⁶⁰

Such a journey in the wet spring of 1846 created challenges for the camp of Israel. For example, on April 6, 1846, Hosea Stout wrote, “Of all mornings it was the most dismal dark and rainy. . . . The road was the worst I had yet witnessed. . . . The horses would sometimes sink to their bellies. . . . We worked and toiled more than half of the day and had at last to leave some of our wagons and double teams before we could get through.”⁶¹

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Two months later, the trail still proved to be most difficult for the Saints. Woodruff recorded, “The worst peace of road on the whole journey. My Carriage & family went through it. I got my waggons half through by dark. I attempted to go through & the wheels of my waggon cut to the hub in turf & mud & with 8 yoke of cattle I could not get through. Two of my waggons remained fast in the swamp all night.”⁶²

Biblical comparisons are also apparent in the name of one temporary way station, Mount Pisgah, erected in 1846 by the Saints in Iowa Territory. From here, Wilford described this inspiring scene: “I stopped my Carriage on the top of a rolling prairie And I had most A splendid view. I could stand And gaze to the east west North & South & behold the Saints pouring out & gathering like clouds from the Hills & dales grove & prairie with there teams, . . . untill it looked like the movements of A great Nation.”⁶³ Such names and descriptions further suggest that as the Saints moved west, they truly saw themselves as the modern-day children of Israel. Brigham was their modern-day Moses, and he would bring them to the promised land.

Upon reaching the Missouri River, the Saints established what they referred to as Winter Quarters. Here, on January 14, 1846, Wilford recorded that Brigham Young received a revelation concerning their forthcoming journey, a text again rich in biblical imagery: “The Word and Will of the Lord concerning the Camp of Israel in their journeyings to the West. . . . Let the companies be organized with captains of hundreds, captains of fifties, and captains of tens, with a president and his two counselors at their head under the direction of the Twelve Apostles.” The revelation further noted, “This shall be our covenant—that we will walk in all the ordinances of the Lord.” In addition, the Saints were told to “let every man use all his influence and

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property to remove this people to the place where the Lord shall locate a stake of Zion.”⁶⁴

As winter broke, Wilford and a vanguard company composed of 143 men, 3 women, and 2 children left Winter Quarters in early April 1847.⁶⁵ Woodruff wrote, “I took leave of my family & friends. Started with my company of Pioneer waggons 8 in all & left winter quarters for the Journey. When we were on the top of the ridge west of the city I took a view of the Place & looked at my wife & children through my glass.”⁶⁶ Wilford recorded many interesting events along the route, including a meeting on June 28, 1847, with the famed mountain man Jim Bridger:

Met Mr Bridger . . . with two other men going to fort Laramie. He was expecting us & was to have an interview with President Young & the Twelve And also we wished to have an interview with Him. . . . Spent some hours in conversations. We found him to have . . . great knowledge of nearly all Oregon & Calafornia . . . if what He told us was true. . . . He spoke . . . Highly of the great Salt Lake for a settlement. . . . There was but one thing that Could operate against it becoming A great grain country & that would be frost. He did not know but the frost would effect the corn. . . . He said he was Ashamed of the Maps of Freemont for He knew nothing about the country.⁶⁷

About a week later, the camp of Israel journeyed near Fort Bridger. Woodruff could not resist his desire to use a fly-fishing rod:

I rigned up my trout rod that I had brought with me from Liverpool, fixed my reel, line, & Artificial fly & went to one of the brooks close by Camp to try my luck catching trout. The man at the fort said there were but vary few trout in the streams,

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And a good many of the brethren were already at the creeks with their Rods & lines trying their skill baiting with fresh meat & grass hoppers, but no one seemed to ketch any. I went & flung my fly . . . it being the first time that I ever tried the Artificial fly in America, or ever saw it tried, I watched it as it floated upon the water with as much intens interest As Franklin did his kite when he tried to draw lightning from the skies. . . . I fished two or three hours including morning & evening & I cought twelve in all And About one half of them would weigh abought $\frac{3}{4}$ of a pound each while All the rest of the camp did not ketch during the day 3 lbs of trout in all which was proof positive to me that the Artificial fly is far the best thing now known to fish trout with.⁶⁸

On July 24, 1847, the vanguard company completed their journey. Woodruff recorded:

This is an important day in the History of my life and the History of the Church of JESUS CHRIST of Latter Day Saints . . . we came in full view of the great valley or Bason [of] the Salt Lake and land of promise held in reserve by the hand of GOD for a resting place for the Saints upon which A portion of the Zion of God will be built. . . . Our hearts were surely made glad after A Hard Journey from winter Quarters of 1,200 miles. . . . President Young expressed his full satisfaction in the Appearance of the valley as A resting place for the Saints & was Amply repayed for his Journey.⁶⁹

At the close of the year, Woodruff reflected on the blessings God had showered upon the camp of Israel as they found a new Zion, in contrast with the calamities poured out about Babylon or the world:

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The blessing of the Lord has been great upon us as A people during the past Year in all the various portions of the camp of Israel. We have now found A place to build A Stake of Zion where the people can gather to together & build up Zion. The past year has shown forth the fulfillment of Prophecy in the wars, rumours of wars, famins, Pestilence, distress of nations with perplexity And in many of the signs of the times. The United States in their wars with the feble Nation of Mexico. . . . The famine has raged in Ireland, the cholera through Europe. The breaking of Banks & merchants has distressed the people in England. . . . May the LORD hasten the gathering of Israel & the Building up of Zion.⁷⁰

MISSION TO PRESIDE OVER THE EASTERN SAINTS, JUNE 1848–OCTOBER 1850

This same theme echoed when Elder Woodruff served his final mission to the East. During this time, he continued to record journal entries about the gathering of Israel and signs of the times. He remained in Boston during the summer of 1848. The following extract again reveals his thoughts of the unsteady state of world affairs: “War & rumours of wars fires & Judgements on evry hand. During the last week one forth part of Albany is laid in ruins by fire. . . . The great out break in Ireland that was expected has closed . . . it seems that nearly every part of Europe is in war.”⁷¹ At the close of the year, he wrote:

The Jews are gathering home to rebuild Jerrusalem. Some 7,000 Latter Day Saints have gatherd into the valley of the Mountains of Israel by the Great Salt Lake. And the Saints of the valley of the Sacramento have discoverd vast quantites of

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Gold, silver, Coper Iron & other mettels the report of which has spread like Electricity through the world which is causing tens of thousands of the world to flock to that place. . . . The signs of the gathering of the Jews has been vary prominent during the past [year]. The governments of the world have in some measure been exherted to favor that people. And while I turn my eye towards Zion [America] I can see the Lord is favoring her.⁷²

As 1849 ended, he again summarized his feelings, as he customarily did annually, in a plea that manifests an intense desire that Zion blossom as a rose. It reveals his millennial mind in motion: "O Lord Hasten the gathering of Israel who are cast out And the dispersed of Judea. . . . May the Zion of God who has risen And gone up into the mountains be Clothed upon with wrighteousness and the power of God. May the Church become prepared like a bride prepared for the Coming of the Bridegroom. And may the People not ownly have cause to rejoice in the Holy One of Israel during the AD 1850 But through all time And All Eternity."⁷³

At the dawn of the new year, he wrote about a new migration plan launched to bring the poor to Zion: "They have laid the foundation for a Perpetual fund for the purpose of gathering all the poor Saints to Zion who Cannot gather themselves untill all the poor are gatherd from Council Bluffs, the United States and all the World."⁷⁴ By the spring of 1850, Woodruff was leading his own group of Eastern Saints determined to gather to the Salt Lake Valley. Concerning this journey, Elder Woodruff reflected on the divine intervention received: "When I arived in Pittsburgh I Chartered a Steemboat to take the Saints to St. Louis. As soon as I had done it the spirit said to me dont go aboard of that Boat. The Captain released me & I Chartered another. The steamer that

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I first Chartered started down the river soon took fire . . . & nearly all the passenger Either burned to death or drowned.”⁷⁵ Six months later, he wrote of his safe arrival in the Salt Lake Valley: “I drove into the city of the G[reat] S[alt Lake] C[ity] at the Head of the company. I was truly glad to gaze once more upon the City of the great Salt Lake & valley of the mountains.”⁷⁶

Over the next half century, he rarely again crossed the borders of Utah Territory. He spent most of his time in Salt Lake City, where he helped govern the affairs of the Church. “Except for vacations, short excursions on Church, political, or business affairs, and a stint on the underground in northern Arizona in 1879–80 . . . he never again left Utah.”⁷⁷ Though he did not travel outside Utah to assist his fellow Saints in gathering to Zion, this theme never left him, nor did his understanding of the power that had brought thousands of converts to the Salt Lake Valley. For instance, in 1873 he stated, “We can see how fully the revelation, calling us to go to the western countries, has been fulfilled. In less than forty years, a standard has been lifted up, and people gathered here from France, England, Scotland, Wales, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and almost all the nations of Europe in fulfillment of that revelation. When it was given no man among us knew anything about Salt Lake or the Rocky Mountains; but it has been fulfilled before our eyes. We have come up here, and in so doing have fulfilled the revelations of God, so far.”⁷⁸ Eight years later, Woodruff rhetorically asked an assembly of Saints, “From whence has come this congregation; from whence have come the Saints gathered together throughout these mountains of Israel? They have been gathered from every nation as far as the Gospel has been preached. We have been gathered together by the power of the Gospel. Yet, as I have remarked many times in my public discourses, if we had preached until we were as old as Methuselah,

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we could never have got men and women to leave their homes if they had not been moved upon by the Holy Ghost.”⁷⁹

During the final year of his life, Wilford Woodruff, then President of the Church, again declared with fervor, “The Lord in His mercy and wisdom has led this people to these valleys of the mountains. It is ordained that Zion is to be established here. . . . All the revelations appertaining to this day are in favor of Zion, and of preparing the way for the coming of the Son of Man. And Zion will arise and shine.”⁸⁰ Less than five months later, he died at age ninety-one.⁸¹

CONCLUSION

Historian Thomas G. Alexander wrote that Wilford Woodruff was “arguably the third most important figure in all of church history after Joseph Smith, who began Mormonism, and Brigham Young, who led the Saints to Utah.”⁸² Among many notable accomplishments, Woodruff’s journal provides a marvelous glimpse into nineteenth-century Mormonism and the catalytic role he played in gathering Israel to Zion. The scriptural themes in his writings, his frequent mention of the imminent Second Coming, and his pleas to the God of Israel disclose a man whose heart and mind were firmly fixed on gathering and preparing a people to meet their Lord. His journal reveals that he was certainly a millennial man in motion.

NOTES

1. *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal, 1833–1898, Typescript*, ed. Scott G. Kenney, 9 vols. (Midvale, UT: Signature Books, 1983–85), 2:64, March 16, 1841.
2. *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal*, 1:8.

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3. Wilford Woodruff, in Conference Report, April 1898, 57, spelling modernized. See also *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 1:9.
4. Joseph Smith Jr., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2nd ed. rev., 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1971), 5:368.
5. *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 1:9.
6. *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 1:87, August 14, 1836. For more information concerning the use of the Bible by Latter-day Saints during this decade, see Gordon Irving, "The Mormons and the Bible in the 1830s," *BYU Studies* 13, no. 4 (Summer 1973): 473–88. On this topic in general, see Phillip L. Barlow, *The Mormons and the Bible: The Place of the Latter-day Saints in American Religion* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1991).
7. *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 1:86, August 12, 1836.
8. *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 1:96, September 19, 1836.
9. *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 1:106.
10. *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 1:117.
11. *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 1:143.
12. Thomas G. Alexander, *Things in Heaven and Earth: The Life and Times of Wilford Woodruff, a Mormon Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1991), 57; see also *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 1:169, August 19, 1837.
13. *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 1:175, September 5, 1837.
14. *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 1:242–43, April 26, 1838.
15. *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 1:241, April 22, 1838.
16. *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 1:246. Five years later, on another mission to the East, he again visited the Navy Yard and Bunker Hill Monument. See *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 2:311, September 22, 1843.
17. *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 1:260.
18. *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 1:263–64, July 1, 1838.
19. *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 1:277.
20. *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 1:294.
21. *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 1:312–13, December 20, 1838; see also *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 1:324–25, April 17, 1839.

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22. *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 1:405, January, 14, 1840.
23. *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 1:409, January 20, 1840.
24. *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 1:478. For a better understanding of the millennial mind of the Saints during the nineteenth century, see Grant Underwood, "Millenarianism and the Early Mormon Mind," *Journal of Mormon History* 9 (1982): 41–51; and Grant Underwood, "Seminal Versus Sesquicentennial Saints: A Look at Mormon Millennialism," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 14, no. 1 (Spring 1981): 32–44.
25. Alan K. Parrish, "Beginnings of the *Millennial Star*: Journal of the Mission to Great Britain," in *Regional Studies in LDS Church History: British Isles*, ed. Donald Q. Cannon (Provo, UT: Department of Church History and Doctrine, Brigham Young University, 1990), 135–39. Parrish also notes that the *Millennial Star* was "published as a monthly, biweekly or weekly publication for 130 years. . . . It is the longest continuous publication in the history of the Church, terminating in 1970, along with *The Improvement Era*, *The Instructor*, and *The Relief Society Magazine*." Parrish, "Beginnings of the *Millennial Star*," 133. It is of interest to note that the name of the periodical fits the scriptural theme of Doctrine and Covenants 29:8, wherein it is stated that one purpose of gathering the faithful to one place is "to prepare their hearts and be prepared in all things against the day when tribulation and desolation are sent forth upon the wicked."
26. *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 1:487.
27. See *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 1:423–28.
28. *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 1:521, September 24, 1840.
29. *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 1:584, October 24, 1840.
30. *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 1:540, December 20, 1840.
31. *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 1:580.
32. Woodruff did not just dream of fishing throughout his life; he often cast his line in the water. For an account of his life as a fisherman and a hunter, see Phil Murdock and Fred E. Woods, "I Dreamed of Ketching Fish: The Outdoor Life of Wilford Woodruff," *BYU Studies* 37, no. 4 (1997–98): 6–47.

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33. Alexander, *Things in Heaven and Earth*, 97–98. See also *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 1:511, September 8, 1840; 1:533–36, October 19, 1840; 1:555–67, December 3, 1840; 2:37–39, February 5, 1841.
34. *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 2:61.
35. *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 2:62–63.
36. *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 2:63–64.
37. *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 2:69, March 21, 1841.
38. *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 2:79.
39. "Epistle of the Twelve," *Millennial Star*, April 1841, 311.
40. *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 2:90, April 16, 1841. About this same time, Wilford lent a hand in launching another aspect of gathering. Orson Hyde was then in England on his way to Palestine, as the Prophet Joseph had commissioned him, to dedicate that land for the return of the Jews. Woodruff noted, "The Twelve lade hands upon the head of Elder . . . Orson Hyde & Blessed him. . . , as he had ben set apart by the First Presidency to take a mission to the Holy land, the City of Jerrusalem whare Jesus Dwelt, for the purpose of laying the foundation of a great work in that land." *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 2:86, April 7, 1841.
41. *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 2:92, April 20, 1841. They landed in New York on May 20, 1841, after a month at sea. *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 2:102–03.
42. *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 2:137, November 14, 1841.
43. *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 2:153.
44. *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 2:155, February 19, 1842. The *Times and Seasons* was published in Nauvoo from 1839 to 1846.
45. "The Millennium," *Times and Seasons*, February 15, 1842. This article was the second part of an article dealing with the same topic which was published in the previous issue.
46. *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 2:240.
47. This brief fund-raising mission began on July 7, 1843, and ended four months later on November 4, 1843.

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48. Due to the pressing constraints to complete the temple before the Nauvoo exodus, the Nauvoo House was never completed. Its remains are now in the possession of the Community of Christ.
49. *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 2:275. A discussion of stock for the Nauvoo House is noted in D&C 124:63–72.
50. *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 2:273.
51. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses* (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1855–1886), 7:283–84. Brigham also stated, “All science and art belong to the Saints.” See *Journal of Discourses*, 10:224.
52. *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 2:281, August 27, 1843.
53. *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 2:288–90, September 9, 1843.
54. *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 2:295, September 9, 1843.
55. This mission lasted from May 9 to August 6, 1843. See *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 2:394, 419, 433–434.
56. *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 2:459–60. Wilford's wife, Phebe Carter, went with him on this mission.
57. Wilford Woodruff, *Millennial Star*, January 1, 1846, 5.
58. For example, British convert William Player came to Nauvoo wholly determined to participate in the temple construction. Player was an expert stone-cutter, who immigrated to Nauvoo by June 1842. He was immediately appointed a principal stone setter and worked diligently until the last stone was laid. Noted for his dedication, he continued to labor on the temple walls in spite of harsh winter weather and sickness, in which he nearly lost the use of his limbs. See *Journal History*, 11 October 1842, Church History Library. Another British proselyte skilled in stonemasonry was Charles Lambert. He had immigrated to Nauvoo in 1844 from Yorkshire, England, in his twenty-eighth year. See Andrew Jenson, “Charles Lambert,” *Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia: A Compilation of Biographical Sketches of Prominent Men and Women in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Andrew Jenson Company, 1914), 2:779.

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59. Sarah [Pea] Rich, autobiography, typescript, 42–43, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.
60. Helen Mar Whitney [Kimball], “Travels Beyond the Mississippi,” *Woman’s Exponent*, May 1, 1884, 182.
61. Juanita Brooks, ed., *On the Mormon Frontier: The Diary of Hosea Stout, 1844–1861*, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1964), 1:149.
62. *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal*, 3:51, June 7, 1846.
63. *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal*, 3:55, June 30, 1846.
64. *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal*, 3:116–17, 120–123; see also D&C 136:1, 3–4, 10.
65. Originally, the company was to be composed of 144 men, but one returned. This pattern signified the idea that twelve men represent each of the twelve tribes of Israel.
66. *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal*, 3:146, April 7, 1847.
67. *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal*, 3:219–20.
68. *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal*, 3:225, July 8, 1847.
69. *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal*, 3:233–34.
70. *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal*, 3:303 December 31, 1847.
71. *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal*, 3:363, August 21, 1848.
72. *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal*, 3:395, 397.
73. *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal*, 3:522.
74. *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal*, 3:526, January 7, 1850. The Perpetual Emigrating Fund (PEF) was a revolving fund that assisted about 30,000, or one-third, of the foreign Saints who gathered to Zion in the nineteenth century. See Fred E. Woods, “Perpetual Emigrating Fund,” in *Latter-day Saint Church History Encyclopedia*, ed. Arnold K. Garr, Richard O. Cowan, and Donald Q. Cannon (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000), 910.
75. *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal*, 7:57, January 20, 1872; see also *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal*, 3:545, April 18, 1850.
76. *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal*, 3:577, October 14, 1850.
77. Alexander, *Things in Heaven and Earth*, 161.

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78. Wilford Woodruff, in *Journal of Discourses*, 15:282, cited in Wilford Woodruff, *The Discourses of Wilford Woodruff*, ed. G. Homer Durham (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1946), 115.
79. Wilford Woodruff, in *Journal of Discourses*, 22:344, cited in Woodruff, *Discourses of Wilford Woodruff*, 113.
80. Wilford Woodruff, in Conference Report, April 1898, 33.
81. Wilford Woodruff died in San Francisco, California, September 2, 1898, having spent the last decade of his life as President of the Church. See Alexander, *Things in Heaven and Earth*, 330.
82. Alexander, *Things in Heaven and Earth*, 331.