

Remaining Strong in Times of Opposition

Apostasy in Kirtland: The Need to Faithfully Follow Church Leaders

In 1837, the Saints in Kirtland, Ohio, experienced some financial problems. To help the Saints be more self-sufficient in their finances, Joseph Smith and other Church leaders established a company similar to a bank and called it the Kirtland Safety Society. Because of a widespread economic depression during this time, many banks failed throughout the United States. The Kirtland Safety Society also failed in the fall of 1837. Two hundred investors in the bank lost almost everything, with Joseph Smith sustaining the greatest losses. Even though the Kirtland Safety Society was not funded by the Church, some of the Saints considered it a Church bank or the Prophet's bank and blamed Joseph Smith for their financial problems. Some even began calling him a fallen prophet. But despite the bank's failure, many others who lost money continued in the faith and stayed true to the Prophet.

A spirit of apostasy and faultfinding began to spread among many of the Saints. By June 1838, approximately 200 or 300 apostates had left the Church, including four Apostles, the Three Witnesses of the Book of Mormon, and a member of the First Presidency. However, most of the Saints responded to this period of testing with faith, much like Brigham Young did. They were strengthened by the Lord, and they remained true to their testimonies. Several of those who left the Church during this period of apostasy later returned and requested that they be united again with the Lord's Church. Among them were Oliver Cowdery, Martin Harris, Luke Johnson, and Frederick G. Williams.

In the midst of these struggles in Kirtland, a few apostates sought to kill Joseph Smith. Warned by the Spirit, he and Sidney Rigdon left during the night on January 12, 1838. Their enemies pursued them for days, but the Lord protected them. They arrived with their families in Far West, Missouri, on March 14, 1838.

Discuss the following questions as a group:

- What principles can we learn from these events about how to respond to opposition in our lives? What can we learn from these events about how to respond to opposition against the Church?
- What can we do to remain faithful to Church leaders even though we may hear other people criticize them?
- In what ways have you been blessed because you have followed the prophet?

Conflict in Northern Missouri: Learning to Endure Opposition Well

In 1837 and 1838, some disaffected and excommunicated members of the Church living among the Saints in Far West began to bring lawsuits against the Church and its leaders and to harass the Church. In June 1838, Sidney Rigdon spoke heatedly in what has become known as the "Salt Sermon." He referenced Matthew 5:13 and said that if the salt loses its savor, it is good for nothing and should be cast out, implying that those who had left the Church should be cast out from among the Saints. Two weeks later, on July 4, Sidney Rigdon gave a speech in which he promised that the Saints would defend themselves even if it came to a "war of extermination." Though both of these speeches seemed to contradict the Lord's instruction to "sue for peace" (D&C 105:38), both speeches were published and caused great alarm among non-Latter-day Saints.

During this time, a convert named Sampson Avard administered secret oaths to those who would join him in forming a band of marauders called the Danites. Avard instructed them to rob and plunder the Missourians, saying that this would help build up the kingdom of God. Avard convinced his followers that his directions were coming from the First Presidency. The truth was later discovered, and Avard was excommunicated. Avard's actions caused significant damage to the image of the Church and helped lead to the Prophet's imprisonment in Liberty Jail.

In October 1838, a battle between some Church members and Missouri militiamen left a few men dead on each side. Exaggerated reports of the battle reached Governor Lilburn W. Boggs, governor of the state of Missouri, who then issued what has become known as the extermination order: "The Mormons must be treated as enemies and *must be exterminated or driven from the state, if necessary for the public good*" (quoted in *History of the Church*, 3:175). Soon, the city of Far West was surrounded by a militia that outnumbered the Saints' forces five to one. Joseph Smith and other Church leaders were imprisoned in Liberty Jail, where they remained all winter. The rest of the Saints were forced to leave the state.

Discuss the following questions as a group:

- What principles can we learn from these events to help us better endure opposition?
- Why is it important for each of us to follow the Savior's example at times of crisis or opposition? What happened in northern Missouri because some of the Saints did not do this?
- When have you seen another person's words or actions influence someone else to have a positive view of the Church?

