

# DOCTRINE & COVENANTS

## & CHURCH HISTORY GOSPEL DOCTRINE CLASS

### Lesson 29: *Building the Kingdom of God in Nauvoo, Illinois, D&C 124:1-21, 87-90, 97-110; 126; Our Heritage, pp. 51-52, 55-58, 61-62.*

#### Introduction

- ☞ The doctrine of baptism for the dead was revealed.
- ☞ Temple endowments were first performed.
- ☞ The Relief Society was organized.

These things and many other important events occurred in Nauvoo, Illinois.

This lesson discusses how the early Nauvoo Saints worked to build the kingdom of God and how we can learn from their example as we strive to build the kingdom of God today.



Joseph & Hyrum: Harvest in Nauvoo - Eric Dowdle

#### The Saints sought refuge in Illinois.

While Joseph Smith was in jail at Liberty, Missouri, the main responsibility for directing the Saints' flight from Missouri fell upon Brigham Young, President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. In late 1838, during the prophet's imprisonment, over 8,000 Saints crossed from Missouri east into Illinois to escape the extermination order. They were forced to leave in the cold of winter, and although Brigham Young directed them and gave them every possible assistance, they suffered greatly.

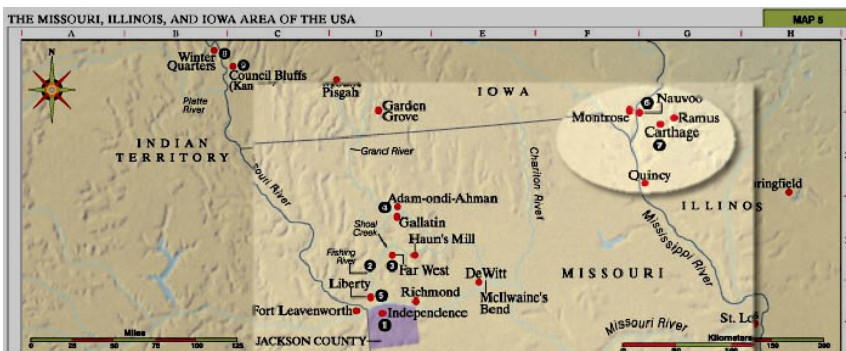
The John Hammer family was one of the many families who sought refuge. John recalled the difficult conditions:

*"Well do I remember the sufferings and cruelties of those days. ... Our family had one wagon, and one blind horse was all we possessed towards a team, and that one blind horse had to transport our effects to the State of Illinois. We traded our wagon with a brother who had two horses, for a light one horse wagon, this accommodating both parties. Into this small wagon we placed our clothes, bedding, some corn meal and what scanty provisions we*

#### Lesson Highlights

- The Saints sought refuge in Illinois.
- Missionaries sent from Nauvoo converted thousands of people.
- The examples of the Nauvoo Saints show the importance of enduring to the end in righteousness.
- The Relief Society was organized in Nauvoo.

**A study of this lesson will help us learn about how the early Saints worked to build the kingdom of God in Nauvoo and encourage us to follow their example.**



#### Next Week

#30 "The Prisoners Shall Go Free" (D&C 2; 124:25-55; 127; 128; JSH 1:36-39; Our Heritage, pp. 58-60)

could muster, and started out into the cold and frost to travel on foot, to eat and sleep by the wayside with the canopy of heaven for a covering. But the biting frosts of those nights and the piercing winds were less barbarous and pitiful than the demons in human form before whose fury we fled. ... Our family, as well as many others, were almost bare-footed, and some had to wrap their feet in cloths in order to keep them from freezing and protect them from the sharp points of the frozen ground. This, at best, was very imperfect protection, and often the blood from our feet marked the frozen earth. My mother and sister were the only members of our family who had shoes, and these became worn out and almost useless before we reached the then hospitable shores of Illinois." (Lyman Omer Littlefield, *Reminiscences of Latter-day Saints* (1888), 72–73.)

The Saints gathered first in Quincy, Illinois. After Joseph Smith returned from Liberty Jail, they moved about 35 miles up the Mississippi River to what was then the small village of Commerce. The Saints quickly

### **Missionaries sent from Nauvoo converted thousands of people.**

Hundreds of missionaries called by the Prophet left Nauvoo to proclaim the gospel, including the members of the Quorum of the Twelve.

As an example of their success in the mission field, **Wilford Woodruff** told of this experience: "I...met with a large assembly of Saints and strangers, and while singing the first hymn the spirit of the Lord rested upon me and the voice of God said to me, 'This is the last meeting that you will hold with this people for many days.' I was astonished at this, as I had many appointments out in that district. When I arose to speak to the people, I told them that it was the last meeting I should hold with them for many days. They were as much astonished as I was. At the close of the meeting four persons came forward for baptism; we went down into the water and baptized them. In the morning I went in secret before the Lord, and asked Him what was His will concerning me. The answer I received was that I should go to the south; for the Lord had a great work for me to perform there, as many souls were waiting for His word." For the next two days he traveled south until he came to the farm of John Benbow in Herefordshire. Mr. Benbow and his wife, Jane, received him gladly and said that there was a company of over 600 men and women who had formed their own congregation called the United Brethren. Elder Woodruff said: "This body of United Brethren were searching for light and truth, but had gone as far as they could, and were calling upon the Lord continually to open the way before them and send them light and

started draining the swampy land, planting crops, and building homes. During the summer of 1839, the Prophet renamed the place Nauvoo. He said, "*The name of our City (Nauvoo) is of Hebrew origin, and signifies a beautiful situation, or place, carrying with it, also, the idea of rest*" (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith [1976], 182).

In December 1840 the state of Illinois granted Nauvoo a charter that allowed the city to establish a militia, a municipal court, and a university. Nauvoo became the second largest city in Illinois as the Church grew rapidly and new converts gathered there.

On 19 January 1841, the Prophet Joseph Smith received a revelation in which the Lord gave commandments to the Saints about their responsibilities in Nauvoo. This revelation is recorded in **D&C 124**. By studying D&C 124 and the examples of the early Nauvoo Saints, we can more clearly understand the vital role each of us plays in building the kingdom of God.

*knowledge, that they might know the true way to be saved. When I heard these things I could clearly see why the Lord had commanded me, while in the town of Hanley, to leave that place of labor and go to the south; for in Herefordshire there was a great harvest-field for gathering many saints into the Kingdom of God."* Elder Woodruff's efforts in England enabled him "to bring into the Church, through the blessings of God, over 1800 souls during 8 months, including all of the 600 United Brethren except one person" (*Wilford Woodruff: History of His Life and Labors*, ed. Matthew F. Cowley [1909], 116-19).

The Church was greatly strengthened by the sacrifices of the dedicated missionaries in England. **Elder Harold B. Lee** summarized what happened during this time in England when he said: "*In one year, 1840 to 1841—one year and fourteen days, to be exact—nine members of the twelve were called to labor in the British Mission. If you remember the history [in Nauvoo], those years marked the period of some of the severest persecution that the Church was to undergo in this dispensation. In that one year and 14 days the nine members of the Twelve, with their associates, established churches in every noted town and city in the kingdom of Great Britain. They baptized between 7000 and 8000 converts. They printed 5000 copies of the Book of Mormon, 3000 hymnbooks, and 50,000 tracts,...and [they] emigrated 1000 souls to America*" (*Conf. Rpt.* Apr. 1960, 108)

The temple was a central focus of Nauvoo religious life. The Saints supported its construction with tithes of time and means, and they longed to receive anticipated temple blessings. For those privileged to live in Nauvoo, the temple and its associated theology gave new and eternal meaning to birth, marriage, life and death.



## The examples of the Nauvoo Saints show the importance of enduring to the end in righteousness.

**D&C 124** includes many instructions and promises given to Nauvoo residents. As examples:

- **D&C 124:12-14** – to **Robert B. Thompson** – told to help write a solemn proclamation of the gospel to the president of the United States, the governors, and the rulers of all nations; “...he shall be great in mine eyes.”
- **D&C 124:16-17** – to **John C. Bennett** – do missionary work and be crowned with blessings and “great glory” **if** he continued to do good and **if** he would accept counsel.
- **D&C 124:18-19** – to **Lyman Wight** – continue in preaching...he would be borne “up as on eagles’ wings...”
- **D&C 124:87-90, 97-103** – to **William Law** – trust in the Lord and proclaim the gospel in specific areas...promised a “multiplicity of blessings” for himself and his family.
- **D&C 124:104-10** – to **Sidney Rigdon** – was to remain with the Lord’s people and be a spokesman and warn the inhabitants...and “if he will hearken” it would be well with him.

### The Relief Society was organized in Nauvoo.

While the Saints were living in Nauvoo, they were blessed with a new Church organization. By the authority of the priesthood, the Prophet Joseph Smith organized the Relief Society (See *Our Heritage*, pgs. 61-62).

#### Purposes of the Relief Society

The following declaration was presented in the 1999 general relief Society meeting: “We are beloved spirit daughters of God, and our lives have meaning, purpose, and direction. As a worldwide sisterhood, we are united in our devotion to Jesus Christ, our Savior and Exemplar. We are women of faith, virtue, vision, and charity who: Increase our testimonies of Jesus Christ through prayer and scripture study; Seek spiritual strength by following the promptings of the Holy Ghost; Dedicate ourselves to strengthening

### Conclusion

The early Saints in Nauvoo dedicated their lives to building up the kingdom of God through missionary work and through serving in many other ways. By following their examples, we can more faithfully help to build the kingdom of God today.

Most of the Saints were faithful during trials, endured to the end, and were blessed for their steadfastness. Some, however, such as Bros. Bennett, Law, Wight, and Rigdon became apostates and were unable to realize the blessings which could have been theirs.

**D&C 124:15** highlights the attributes of **Hyrum Smith** that the Lord loved—deep integrity and a love for “that which is right before me.” The Prophet Joseph Smith said of his brother, “I could pray in my heart that all my brethren were like unto my beloved brother Hyrum, who possesses the mildness of a lamb, and the integrity of a Job, and in short, the meekness and humility of Christ; and I love him with that love that is stronger than death, for I never had occasion to rebuke him, nor he me” (*History of the Church*, 2:338).

### Gospel Doctrine Notebook

Record your thoughts on the teachings discussed in this lesson.

- What have you learned from studying the lives of the early Nauvoo Saints?
- What has helped you most in your efforts to endure to the end in righteousness?
- What blessings have come into your life because of the Relief Society?

