

Bountiful Mission Center
LEADS "The Journey of a People"
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April 3-4, 2020
Camp Bountiful
Syllabus

This is the second class in a focused seminar on the Community of Christ journey from its earliest days to the present. We will follow my treatment in the first volume *Journey of a People* trilogy. In our 2019 weekend we began with a discussion of the historical discipline. From the thoughts, decisions, and actions of our predecessors we gained understanding of what it meant to be a member early in our faith tradition.

We discussed many good topics in our first session. Essentially, we covered the first ten chapters of Volume One. As you will find in the syllabus below in this weekend, as time constraints require selectivity, we will begin with Chapter Eleven and analyze the House of the Lord in the context of the times. Will conclude with the Epilogue and do a final assessment of the first era of three in our journey.

The Community of Christ story is a truly amazing one. In many ways first generation church members were not much different from us. They yearned for a faith they could practice in their daily lives. They wanted the divine relevance brought to them by prophetic revelation. An open scriptural canon best suited their needs. And they had a sense of community that carried their spiritual hopes and dreams. But of course, many differences were dramatic when compared to today. For example, their view of the afterlife was assured, well-defined, and incentivized allegiance. The community they sought was inward looking and exclusive, their scriptures were literal and inerrant, and their priesthood call carried authoritarian privilege. During our time together we will compare often which will inform us of how far we have evolved in our spiritual understanding.

No different from last year's gathering, our approach in this weekend will include forthrightness. There will be no desire to show institutional "dirty laundry," but neither will we be hesitant to tell the truth, as best as we can understand it. Only in this way can our church history communicate its lessons. To fully benefit from this seminar, it will be helpful for participants to bring their three standard scriptures.

Friday Evening, April 3rd (7:30-9:00) House of the Lord, the Latter Day Saint Pentecost, and Problems in Kirtland

Temple building was a pre-occupation with Old Testament Hebrew people. Their temple was their most sacred of spaces—the location of their "Holy of Holies" where only Temple Priests, in their sacred garb, was allowed entrance. Latter Day Saint followers with their identification also as "God's chosen people," not in the Old Jerusalem but rather in their American New Jerusalem, could do no less than be temple builders also. Their House of the Lord in Kirtland, Ohio, the first of several attempts, was their most successful expression. During the dedication services

between March and April 1836, the Latter Day Saints had a Pentecostal experience. With this epiphany they connected millennial expectations and missionary commission to their temple's ministry. But the House of the Lord served many other purposes as well. When the saints fled Zion in Independence, Missouri, the Kirtland House of the Lord became the religious movement's capitol building and physical expression of Joseph Smith Jr.'s desire to Americanize the Judeo-Christian tradition.

For its builders the sacred structure symbolized the spiritual connection between the human and the Divine. However, for its non-member neighbors the building represented an unwelcome presence of an undesirable religious sect. When Latter Day Saint leaders ignored Ohio state law, their detractors came at them with a vengeance. By summer 1838 all but a few fled the Kirtland community.

Focus Questions: Analyze the architectural design. What language does it still speak? In 1836, veiled institutional worship launched in Kirtland and concretized over the next decade, but it had its start here. How so? As a motivation, building construction often served as an institutional diversion in difficult times. Explain their problems, self-made and otherwise. What laws were broken and what were the reactions? What impact did fleeing from the law have upon Joseph Smith Jr.'s nuclear family? Was the disintegration of the Church in Kirtland inevitable? Using historical perspective what could have prevented it? What can we learn from this for today's church?

Readings: *Journey of a People I*, Chapters 11 and 12.

Saturday Morning (9:00-10:30) Hidden in the Shadows: Sanctuary, the Demand for Conformity, and the Fortress Mentality

The short three years between the Kirtland and Nauvoo periods forced the Far West, Missouri, experience into the shadows of the church story. Yet so many crucial lessons are found here. These were times of change. The State of Missouri offered a generous solution to the Mormon Question. At Far West, two churches with one prophet became unified under a new institutional identity. Reinterpretation of the financial law of tithing was a positive step forward.

Joseph Smith Jr. required conformity. To achieve this he took extreme measures to purge some of his earliest colleagues and most important from the church leadership. His actions to spread the gospel beyond the state sponsored geographic borders and his message to Missourians outside the movement left little doubt about his motives to create an exclusive Mormon Zion. Mutual distrust and intimidation created a climate that only invited conflict. When the two cultures collided, war erupted with both sides committing violence against each other. The Latter Day Saints, although resisting mightily, did not have the strength to stand against state-sponsored militias. In 1839, the Mormon diaspora led out of Missouri, across the Mississippi River, to western Illinois.

Focus Questions: Explain the pragmatism of the millennial expression of Adam-ondi-Ahman. What concerns did it address? What role did Sidney Rigdon's Salt Sermon and his Fourth of July Oration play in the milieu of the times? Was the Mormon's early morning raid at Crooked River justified? John Corrill is relatively unknown by most readers but his courageous actions revealed the fatal flaws that plagued the movement. Explain. Most importantly, in

retrospect, weigh the events of the Missouri Mormon experience in the context of today's desire to be a people of peace.

Readings: *Journey of a People I*, Chs. 13 and 14.

Saturday Morning (10:45-12:15) The Nauvoo Community

Many perceive the flight out of Missouri in 1839-1839, meant the end of the Mormon movement while others strongly disagreed. Both viewpoints could be justified. Joseph Smith Jr.'s escape from his incarceration resolved matter, however. As a now-experienced community builder the prophet's Nauvoo achieved the pinnacle of his desire to prepare his people for the Second Coming. The Nauvoo Charter was the Mormon Magna Carta written to provide his needed legal protection. Implementation of this document created a city government that challenged republican government setting the stage for yet another existential conflict. The prophet knew this and prepared for opposition that was sure to come. His failed appeal to Washington DC was idealistic. His creation of the Nauvoo Legion acknowledged that his leadership decisions required physical protection of the Nauvoo Community as it evolved into his Kingdom on the Mississippi.

Focus Questions: If you had crossed the frozen Mississippi River over to the Illinois side would you have stuck around waiting for the prophet's return? What would be your impression when Joseph Smith Jr. picked Commerce, Illinois, an abandoned, malarial-infested swampland community, as your new home? In what ways did Smith successfully design his new community, especially when it became the second largest city in Illinois by 1844. Nauvoo was a river town. How did the Mississippi impact community development? Why do you suppose Joseph Smith Jr. chose placing his temple on a perch overlooking the river?

Readings: *Journey of a People I*, Ch. 15.

Saturday Afternoon (1:15-2:45) Evolution of Mormon Theology and the Need for Secrecy

The changes in Mormon theology during the opening fourteen years of church history are a fascinating study. During the Mormon diaspora, by the time the saints of Fayette, New York, reached Nauvoo, Illinois, the church, had both changed dramatically and stayed the same. This sounds paradoxical yet remains true as we study the course of their thoughts and decision making. Perhaps the theology is the best place to analyze this seeming contradiction. From a unitarian theological purview, then to a binitarian, and finally arriving at a tritheistic understanding moved Latter Day Saintism out of the Christian mainstream and into a polytheistic tributary. But this was only one reflection of Joseph Smith Jr.'s creative mind. He put his stamp on such issues as the nature of the godhead, works versus grace, and sacramental practices. He even claimed knowledge of the pure Adamic language used before the Fall in the Garden of Eden. The prophet's promise of the afterlife thrilled his believers and secured faithful loyalty for all but a few. But so much of this required absolute secrecy.

Focused Questions: Using the issues above compare the Nauvoo theology with your own. What appeals and what does not? Arrive at your conclusions and be prepared to share them with your classmates. Later RLDS historians intentionally ignored the King Follett Sermon. Why? One of the geniuses of Joseph Smith Jr. was his ability to meet the needs of his

followers. There is no better example of this than baptism for the dead. Explain. What evolutionary steps led to celestial marriage? No theological tenet required more secrecy than this one. Not until our current generation did our membership acknowledge the existence of polygamy in the church story. Why? Consider the hazard of canonizing historical interpretation.

Readings: *Journey of a People I*, Ch. 16 and 17.

Saturday Afternoon (3:00-4:30) The Union of Church and State

Few in the COC membership are aware that Joseph Smith Jr. threw his hat in the presidential ring during the Election of 1844. The church leadership endorsed and promoted his candidacy. Hundreds of missionary elders left Nauvoo to campaign in the twenty-six states. A nominating convention was planned for Baltimore, Maryland, in July 1844, because both the Whig and Democratic parties held their conventions there. Joseph Smith Jr.'s party platform was progressive on the issues but he infused his campaign rhetoric in "theo-democratic" terms where God and the American people were to govern. Of course, his prophetic interpretation of God's will would direct his national decision making. The result was an inseparable connection between church and state.

Focused Questions: How did political engagement reveal Joseph Smith Jr.'s views on the expansion of the Kingdom of God? Explain the decision-making process of the vice presidential selection. Who eventually got the nod? During this time, the prophet anointed himself "King, Priest, and Ruler over Israel on Earth." How did this sit with non-church members and the voting public when discovered? Consider the *Nauvoo Expositor*. What were its origins and which of its protests had the greatest impact leading to its destruction?

Readings: *Journey of a People I*, Ch. 18.

Saturday Afternoon (4:45-6:00) Assassination, the Death of a President, and the End of an Era.

It did not take long for resistance to emerge from within the religious movement regarding Joseph Smith Jr.'s presidential aspirations. Opposition came from those in the highest levels of church decision makers. Among many issues political engagement planted the seeds of a major rift in the church—one that became existential for Latter Day Saintism.

Joseph Smith Jr.'s hope of leaving the Nauvoo Mansion House for the White House, and making Emma Hale Smith the First Lady of the United States, were farfetched but his ability to be kingmaker by controlling the nine electoral votes of Illinois drew the attention of Whig and Democratic Party politicians. In a close race the prophet's role could be decisive. This was intolerable but possible. The remedy was to remove his absolute control of the Mormon voting bloc. Strong resistance came from outside the movement. Under the right circumstances, his decade-long, vicious critics were more than happy to accommodate. What followed was political assassination not religious martyrdom.

Focused Questions: What was your response when you discovered that Joseph Smith Jr. and friends escaped to the Iowa side of the Mississippi River with the law in hot pursuit, especially when he promised from the stand his undying commitment to fight to the death in defense of the church members? Was this a realistic act of self-defense or cowardice? Before

you are quick to condemn and knowing the inevitable outcome, what would you have done? From your perspective where is the pinnacle of Latter Day Saint achievement? Be willing to explain your decision to others.

Reflect back on Joseph Smith Jr.'s early childhood and move forward to the events at Carthage Jail. All this took place in less than three decades—less than one generation. Does it seem longer? What decisions gave the impression that Joseph Smith Jr. was “above the law?” What are your thoughts about the rejection of the orthodox martyrdom argument? Finally, how might the church story from 1820 to 1844 assist you in your public and private ministry?

Readings: *Journey of a People I*, Ch. 19 and Epilogue.