

Sidney Rigdon Portrait of a Forerunner
Compiled by Glen W. Chapman-Feb. 2002

Sidney Rigdon was a restorationist. He believed the old gospel of the New Testament and of the scriptures was to be brought back with all of the gifts of the spirit. He was associated with Alexander Campbell in growing restoration movement in Ohio.

Alexander Campbell had made the following statements:

"And while I write and labor as I do, he that knows the hearts of all flesh knows that I do it from the fullest conviction from his oracles that the Christianity of our day is a corrupt Christianity, and that the ancient order of things is lost sight of in all denominations of professing Christians." (Christian Baptist IV:285)

"But a restoration of the ancient order of things, it appears, is all that is contemplated by the wise disciples of the Lord. Many there were who, wearied with the denominational strife, and restive under ecclesiastical domination, awaited a prophet whose aim was spiritual emancipation and whose strong and fearless leadership they could trust (J.W. Grafton, Life of Alexander Campbell)

"Besides, do not the experience of all the religious observations of the intelligent, the practical, result of all creeds, reformations, and improvements, and the expectations and longings of society warrant the conclusion that either some new revelation, or some new development of the revelation of God must be made before the hopes and expectation of all true Christians can be realized or Christianity save and reform the nations of the world? We want the old gospel back, and sustained by the ancient order of things; and this alone by the blessings of the divine spirit, is all that we do want, or can expect, to reform and save the world. For a divine warrant has always been essential to any acceptable worship. The question, "who has required this at your hands?" must always be answered by a "Thus saith the Lord" before an offering of mortal may be can be acknowledged by the Lawgiver of the universe. "In vain" said the great teacher, "Do you worship God, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men."

"Still a regular and constant ministry was needed among the Jews, and is yet needed among the Christians - and both of these by divine authority." (Alexander Cambell, The Christian System p, 250)

"An era is just at the door which will be known as the regeneration for a thousand years to come...The Lord Jesus will soon rebuild Jerusalem, and raise up the tabernacle of David which has so long been in ruins. Let the Church prepare herself for the return of her Lord, and see that she makes herself ready for the coming of the Lord must be the result of the restoration of the ancient gospel and order of things." (Ibid p. 310)

Parley Pratt was also a restorationist preacher and a close friend to Sidney Rigdon in an area near Kirtland Ohio. While traveling on the Erie Canal with his wife on the way back to see his family he heard a voice telling him to get off the barge near Palmyra N.Y. He instructed his wife to continue on and he got followed the voice and got off. While walking along he met a man who asked if he had heard of the Golden Bible. He invited him to stay at his home and see this Gold Bible the Book of Mormon. He read all night and became convinced of its truthfulness and went looking for the Smith Family.

"The next evening I had another appointment, and the people came out in great numbers, and were filled with the spirit of interest and inquiry.

They urged me very much to continue my discourses among them; but I felt to minister no more till I had attended to some important duties for myself. I had now found men on earth commissioned to preach, baptize, ordain to the ministry, etc., and I determined to obey the fulness of :he gospel without delay. I should have done so at the first interview with Elder Hyrum Smith;

but these two appointments were already out, and thirty miles' travel required all the time I had.

I now returned immediately to Hyrum Smith's residence, and demanded baptism at his hands. I tarried with him one night, and the next day we walked some twenty-five miles to the residence of Mr. Whitmer, in Seneca County. Here we arrived in the evening, and found a most welcome reception.

This was the family, several of whose names were attached to the Book of Mormon as witnesses—Mr. Joseph Smith having translated much of the book in Whitmer's chamber.

I found the little branch of the church in this place full of joy, faith, humility and charity. We rested that night, and on the next day, being about the 1st of September, 1830, I was baptized by the hand of an Apostle of the Church of Jesus Christ, by the name of Oliver Cowdery. This took place in Seneca Lake, a beautiful and transparent sheet of water in Western New York.

A meeting was held the same evening, and after singing a hymn and prayer, Elder Cowdery and others proceeded to lay their hands upon my head in the name of Jesus, for the gift of the Holy Ghost. After which I was ordained to the office of an Elder in the Church, which included authority to preach, baptize, administer the sacrament, administer the Holy Spirit, by the laying on of hands in the name of Jesus Christ and to take the lead of meetings of worship.

I now felt that I had authority in the ministry.

.....Having lifted a warning voice to multitudes in all this region of country, I now took leave, and repaired again to the western part of New York, and to the body of the Church.

On our arrival, we found that brother Joseph Smith, the translator of the Book of Mormon, had returned from Pennsylvania to his father's residence in Manchester, near Palmyra, and here I had the pleasure of seeing him for the first time.

He received me with a hearty welcome, and with that frank and kind manner so universal with him in after years.

On Sunday we held meeting at his house; the two large rooms were filled with attentive listeners, and he invited me to preach. I did so, and afterwards listened with interest to a discourse from his own mouth, filled with intelligence and wisdom. We repaired from the meeting to the water's edge, and, at his request, I baptized several persons.

President Joseph Smith was in person tall and well built, strong and active; of a light complexion, light hair, blue eyes, very little beard, and of an expression peculiar to himself, on which the eye naturally rested with interest, and was never weary of beholding. His countenance was ever mild, affable, beaming with intelligence and benevolence; mingled with a look of interest and an unconscious smile, or cheerfulness, and entirely free from all restraint or affectation of gravity; and there was something connected with the serene and steady penetrating glance of his eye, as if he would penetrate the deepest abyss of the human heart, gaze into eternity, penetrate the heavens, and comprehend all worlds....

It was now October, 1830. A revelation had been given through the mouth of this Prophet,

Seer and Translator, in which Elders Oliver Cowdery, Peter Whitmer, Ziba Peterson and myself were appointed to go into the wilderness, through the western States, and to the Indian territory. Making arrangements for my wife in the family of the Whitmers, we took leave of our friends and the church late in October, and started on foot.

After travelling for some days we called on an Indian nation at or near Buffalo; and spent part of a day with them, instructing them in the knowledge of the record of their forefathers. We were kindly received, and much interest was manifested by them on hearing this news. We made a present of two copies of the Book of Mormon to certain of them who could read, and repaired to Buffalo. Thence we continued our journey, for about two hundred miles, and at length called on Mr. Rigdon, my former friend and instructor, in the Reformed Baptist Society. He received us cordially and entertained us with hospitality.

We soon presented him with a Book of Mormon, and related to him the history of the same. He was much interested, and promised a thorough perusal of the book.

We tarried in this region for some times and devoted our time to the ministry, and visiting from house to house.

At length Mr. Rigdon and many others became convinced that they had no authority to minister in the ordinances of God; and that they had not been legally baptized and ordained. They, therefore, came forward and were baptized by us, and received the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands, and prayer in the name of Jesus Christ.

The news of our coming was soon noised abroad, and the news of the discovery of the Book of Mormon and the marvelous events connected with it. The interest and excitement now became general in Kirtland, and in all the region I round about. The people thronged us night and day, insomuch that we had no time for rest and retirement. Meetings were convened in different neighborhoods, and multitudes. came together soliciting our attendance; while thousands flocked about us daily; some to be taught, some for curiosity, some to obey the gospel, and some to

dispute or resist it.

In two or three weeks from our arrival in the neighborhood with the news, we had baptized one hundred and twenty-seven souls, and this number soon increased to one thousand. The disciples were filled with joy and gladness; while rage and lying was abundantly manifested by gainsayers; faith was strong, joy was great, and persecution heavy.

We proceeded to ordain Sidney Rigdon, Isaac Morley, John Murdock, Lyman Wight, Edward Partridge and many others to the ministry; and, leaving them to take care of the churches and to minister the gospel, we took leave of the saints and continued our journey."

(Autobiography of Parly P. Pratt, Published by Deseret Book Company, 1976, Salt Lake City Utah)

A local News paper reports the following :

(Painesville Ohio Telegraph, Tuesday, November 16, 1830)

"The Golden Bible.—Some two or three years since, an account was given in the papers, of a book purporting to contain new revelations from Heaven, having been dug out of the ground, in Manchester, in Ontario Co. N. Y. The book, it seems, has made its appearance in this vicinity.—It contains about 500 octavo pages, which is said to be translated from Egyptian Hieroglyphics, on metal plates, by one Smith, who was enabled to read the characters by instruction from Angels. About two weeks since some persons came along here with the book, one of whom pretends to have seen Angels, and assisted in translating the plates. He proclaims destruction upon the world within a few years,—holds forth that the ordinances of the gospel, have not been regularly administered since the days of the Apostles, till the said Smith and himself commenced the work— and many other marvelous things too numerous to mention, In the neighboring township of Kirtland, we understand that twenty or thirty have been immersed into the new order of things; many of whom had been previously baptised.—The name of the person here, who pretends to have a divine mission, and to have seen and conversed with Angels, is Cowdray. We understand that he is bound for the regions beyond the Mississippi, where he contemplates founding a 'City of Refuge' for his followers, and converting the Indians, under his prophetic authority."

The second article, November 30, 1830,

"The Book of Mormon.—It being the business of an Editor to collect and lay before his readers, whatever seems to agitate the public mind, we took occasion two weeks ago to notice a pretended new revelation from God, which had recently visited this vicinity. To record the thousand tales which are in circulation respecting the book and its propogators, would be an endless task, and probably lead to the promulgation of a hundred times more than was founded in truth. In this way, we perceive that The Gazette last week, shot wide of the mark in many important particulars. There are rising of 100 in this and an adjoining county who have embraced the ideas and assertions of Joseph Smith, Jr. many of them respectable for intelligence and piety.

If the book of Mormon, as it is called, with the pretensions of its apostles, is a fabrication, it is one of the most infamous and blasphemous character; and we must confess, after having an opportunity to canvass some of its claims to a true revelation from God, we have not been able to discover testimony which ought to elicit faith in any prudent or intelligent mind. It may, perhaps, be useless to condemn the thing by positive and absolute assertions—time will discover in it either something of vast importance to man, or a deep laid plan to deceive many.

The four persons who were here, have proceeded on their mission to the Indians, (or Lamanites, as they term them) in the "far west," where they say a Prophet is to be raised up, in whom the tribes will believe.

"The book closes with the certificate of eleven persons, who have seen the plates and many other marvelous things; among whom are the father and other relatives of the author."
(Painewille Telegraph, Tuesday, November 30, 1830.)

December 7, 1830,
THE BOOK OF MORMON

For the *Telegraph*

"Those who are the friends and advocates of this wonderful book, state that Mr. Oliver Cowdry has his commission directly from the God of Heaven, and that he has his credentials, written and signed by the hand of Jesus Christ, with whom he has personally conversed, and as such, said Cowdry claims that he and his associates are the only persons on earth who are qualified to administer in his name. By this authority, they proclaim to the world, that all who do not believe their testimony, and be baptized by them for the remission of sins, and come under the imposition of their hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost, and stand in readiness to go to some unknown region, where God will provide a place of refuge for his people, called the "New Jerusalem," must be forever miserable, let their life have been what it may. If these things are true. God has certainly changed his order of commission."

Painesville Telegraph
January 18, 1831

Mormonism.—A young gentleman by the name of **Whitmer**, arrived here last week from Manchester, N. Y. the seat of wonders, with a new batch of revelations from God, as he pretended, which have just been communicated to Joseph Smith. As far as we have been able to learn their contents, they are a more particular description of the creation of the world, and a history of Adam and his family, and other sketches of the anti-deluvian world, which Moses neglected to record. But the more important part of the mission, was to inform the brethren that the boundaries of the promised land, or the New Jerusalem, had just been made known to Smith from God—the township of Kirtland, a few miles west of this, is the eastern line and the Pacific Ocean the western line; if the north and south lines have been described, we have not learned them. Orders were also brought to the brethren to sell no more land, but rather buy more. Joseph Smith and all his forces are to be on here soon to take possession of the promised land."

Introductory to the articles that follow, February 15, 1831, the editor writes.

"Mormonism.—Our readers will find in this paper several communications, touching a new sect which has recently sprung up in this vicinity.—In this, perhaps, we have departed from our general rule, relating to religious controversies.—But when any subject becomes a matter of general inquiry and conversation through the whole community, with but few exceptions, that community will call upon the Press to speak—and a free press will speak. We therefore declare our columns open, and free to the investigation of the divine pretensions of the "Book of Mormon," and its "Author and Proprietor," Joseph Smith, Junior, who has just planted himself in this community, as a Prophet of the Most High God, and one to whom, **he** says, the Lord reveals his will daily. The believers in his divine mission now number several hundred, and are still increasing.

Many people are running to see and hear from the distance of fifty and an hundred miles, so rapidly does anything spread which partakes so much of the marvelous. We say, therefore, let the thing be investigated; and, if found to be a base counterfeit, like freemasonry, let **it** be nailed to the counter, and ranked among the thousand impositions which have arisen in the world, under the authority of a dream or a vision, to deceive mankind.

Our columns shall be open to either party, for communications which may be thought to throw any light upon the subject, provided they shall not occupy more space than we can reasonably spare. We would also observe, that **it** is our earnest desire, that, whatever may be communicated, assuming to be facts."

Painesville Telegraph, February 15, 1831

"Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed and done among the Mormonites it seems good to me also (having had knowledge of many things from the beginning) to testify to my brethren of mankind that they may know something certainly concerning these wonderful people.

About the last of October, 1830, four men, daiming to be divinely inspired, came from Manchester and Palmyra, Ontario county, N. Y., bringing a pretended revelation, entitled the "Book of Mormon." They came to the brethren of the reformation in Mentor, saluted them as brethren and professed to rejoice at finding a people walking according to the scriptures of truth, and acknowledging no other guide. They professed to have no commands for them, nevertheless, they called upon them to receive their mission and book as from Heaven, which they said chiefly concerned the western Indians, as being an account of their origin, and a prophecy of their final conversion to christianity, and make them a white and delightful people, and be reinstated in the possession of their lands of which they have been despoiled by the whites.—When called upon for testimony, they appealed (like Mahomet) to the internal evidences of their book. The book was read and pronounced a silly fabrication. When farther pressed upon the subject, they required the brethren to humble themselves before God, and pray for a sign from heaven.

They took up their abode with the pastor of the congregation, (Sidney Rigdon,) who read their book and partly condemned it—but, two days afterwards, was heard to confess his conviction of its truth. Immediately the subtlety and duplicity of these men were manifest—as soon as they saw a number disposed to give heed to them, then it was they bethought themselves of making a party—then it was they declared that their book contained a new covenant, to come under which the disciple must be re-immersed. When called upon to answer concerning their pretended covenant, whether it was distinct from that mentioned in Heb. VIII, 10-13 they would equivocate, and would say, (to use their own words) "on the large scale, the covenant is the same, but in some things it is different." Immediately they made a party—seventeen persons were immersed by them in one night. At this Mr. Rigdon seemed much displeased, and when they came next day to his house, he withstood them to the face—showed them that what they had done was entirely without precedent in the holy scriptures—for they had immersed those persons that they might work miracles as well as come under the said covenant—showed them that the apostles baptized for the remission of sins—but miraculous gifts were conferred by the imposition of hands. But when pressed upon the point, they justified themselves by saying, it was on their part merely a compliance with the solicitations of those persons. Mr. Rigdon again called upon them for proof of the truth of their book and mission: they then related the manner in which they obtained faith, which was by praying for a sign, and an angel was shown unto them. Here Mr. Rigdon showed them from the scriptures the possibility of their being deceived: "For Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light"—but said Cowdrey, "Do you think if I should go to my Heavenly Father with all sincerity, and pray to him in the name of Jesus Christ, that he would not show me an angel—that he would suffer Satan to deceive me?" Mr. Rigdon replied, "if the Heavenly Father had ever promised to show you an angel,---to confirm anything, he would not suffer you to be deceived, for, says the apostle John, 'This is the confidence we have with him, if we ask things according to his will, he hearkens to us.' "But," he continued, "if you ask the Heavenly Father to show you an angel when he has never promised you such a thing, if the Devil never had an opportunity of deceiving you before, you give him one now.

However, about two days after, 'Mr. Rigdon was persuaded to tempt God by asking this sign, which he knew to be contrary to his revealed will; he received a sign, and was convinced that Mormonism was true and divine. Wherefore, to make use of his own reasoning, we presume the Devil appeared to him in the form of an angel of light. The Monday following he was baptised. On the morning of the preceding day he had an appointment to preach in the Methodist chapel at Kirtland. He arose to address the congregation apparently much affected and deeply impressed. He seemed exceedingly humble, confessed the sins of his former life, his great pride, ambition, vainglory, &c. &c. After he was baptised, he professed to be exceedingly joyful, and said he would not be where he was three days ago for the universe. When reminded of the scriptural objection which he had made against praying for that which was not promised, he imputed his reasoning to pride, carnality, and the influence of the evil one. In short, the whole man seemed changed, so much so that Mrs. Rigdon said that Mr. Rigdon's appearance was enough to convince any one of the truth of their religion. Mr. R. and, indeed the whole of that sect, seemed rather disposed to boast of their humility and piety. Mr. R. was formerly very irascible, but now thinks he cannot be ruffled, he was formerly haughty, but now affects great humility. The males among them wear a peculiar kind of hat, by which they distinguish themselves, and exhibit their humility; but while they are calling upon people, as it were, to come and see their humility, we cannot but call to mind an ancient anecdote: when Diogenes the Cynic, saw Plato with a richly embroidered cloak, he caught it from his shoulders, and cast it under his feet, saying "I trample upon the pride of Plato."

—“Yes,” said Plato, “but with a greater pride.”

About three weeks after Mr. Rigdon was baptised by Oliver Cowdery, he went to the state of New York, to see Joseph Smith, Jr. while Cowdery, with his three companions, proceeded on to the western Indians. Before they left us, however, they threw off their mask, and showed their cloven foot. They declared Joseph Smith to be that prophet predicted by Moses, Deut. xviii. 15, and applied to O. Cowdery prophetic declarations which are directly and particularly applied to John the Baptist, harbinger of the Messiah. When the apostle Peter and deacon Stephen were brought to confront them upon their application of Deut. xviii. 15, they would express wonder, saying, “Do you think Christ was like Moses?”

They say much about working miracles, and pretend to have that power.

Feb. 1.—Mr. Rigdon just returned from the state of New York. His irascible temper only left him for a little season. Two friends went from Mentor to see him—required of him a reason for his present hope, and for his belief in the Book of Mormon; he declined, saying he was weary, having just come off his journey; had lost much sleep,

I accompanied several friends to Mr. Rigdon’s residence, we found him in conversation with a Methodist presiding elder—that being soon broken off, one of my friends modestly approached Mr. Rigdon and solicited him to give some reason for his present faith. Mr. Rigdon with great show of good nature, commenced a long detail of his researches after the character of Joseph Smith; he declared that even his enemies had nothing to say against his character; he had brought a transcript from the docket of two magistrates, where Smith had been tried as a disturber of the peace, which testified that he was honorably acquitted. But this was no evidence to us that the Book of Mormon was divine. He then spoke of the supernatural gifts with which he said Smith was endowed; He said he could translate the scriptures from any language in which they were now extant, and could lay his finger on every interpolation in the sacred writings, adding, that he had proved him in all these things. But my friends knowing that Mr. Rigdon had no knowledge of any language but his own vernacular tongue, asked him how he knew these things, to which Mr. Rigdon made no direct reply.

Mr. Smith arrived at Kirtland the next day; and being examined concerning his supernatural gifts by a scholar, who was capable of testing his knowledge, he confessed he knew nothing of any language, save the king’s English.

Mr. Rigdon asserted that our revelation came to us upon human testimony—this we denied, and gave him reasons which he himself formerly urged against deists. He then said the old revelation was confirmed by miracles, but the Book of Mormon would never be; it was not designed to be thus confirmed. (And Mahomet said, nearly twelve centuries ago, “Moses and Jesus were empowered to work miracles, yet the people did not receive them; wherefore God had sent him without that attestation, to be the last and greatest prophet.”) But in this Mr. Rigdon contradicts his book, for that declares it is thus to be established.

We then asked Mr. Rigdon what object we could have in receiving the Book of Mormon—whether it enjoined a single virtue that the Bible did not, or whether it mentioned and prohibited a single additional vice, or whether it exhibited a new attribute of Deity? He said it did not. “The Book of Mormon,” said he, “is just calculated to form and govern the millennial church; the old revelation was never calculated for that, nor could it accomplish that object; and without receiving the Book of Mormon, there is no salvation for anyone into whose hands it shall come.” He said faith in the Book of Mormon was only to be obtained by asking the Lord concerning it. To this scriptural objections were made. He then said that if we had not familiarity enough with our Creator to ask of him a sign, we were no Christians; and, that if God would not condescend to his creatures, in this way, he was no better than Jaggernaut! ”

Painsville Telegraph, March 15, 1831.

“Martin Harris, another chief of the Mormon impostors, arrived here last Saturday from the bible quarry in New York. He immediately planted himself in the bar-room of the hotel, where he soon commenced reading and explaining the Mormon hoax, and all the dark passages from Genesis to Revelations. He told all about the gold plates, Angels, Spirits, and Jo Smith.—He had seen and handled them all, by the power of God! Curiosity soon drew around thirty or forty spectators, and all who presumed to question his blasphemous pretensions, were pronounced infidels. He was very flippant, talking fast and loud, in order that others could not interpose an opinion counter to his. Every idea that he advanced, he knew to be absolutely true, as he said, by the spirit and power of God. In fine, the bystanders had a fair specimen of the Mormon slang, in

this display of one of their head men. The meeting was closed, by a request of the landlord that the prophet should remove his quarters, which he did, after declaring, that all who believed the new bible would see Christ within fifteen years, and all who did not would absolutely be destroyed and damned."

(From The Book Sidney Rigdon, p.71 by Richard S. Van Wagoner)

"They arrived near Rigdon's Mentor home on Thursday, 28 October. After dividing into pairs, the young elders began to proselyte. Cowdery and Pratt, each carrying a carpetbag full of copies of the Book of Mormon, called on the Rigdon household first. Rigdon at first spurned them and "felt very much prejudiced at their assertions." "He had one Bible," he said, "which he believed was a revelation from God and with which he pretended to have some acquaintance; but with respect to the book they had presented him, he must say that he had considerable doubt."

"You brought truth to me," Pratt responded, "I now ask you as a friend to read this for my sake." Waving aside further argument, Rigdon replied, "No, young gentlemen, you must not argue with me on the subject; but I will read your book, and see what claim it has upon my faith, and will endeavor to ascertain whether it be a revelation from God or not."

His first reaction that night was unfavorable. Matthew Clapp, who replaced Rigdon as minister of the Mentor Disciple congregation, wrote in 1831 that when Rigdon first read the book he 'partly condemned it—but, two days afterwards, was heard to confess his conviction of its truth.' Rigdon's daughter Nancy, in an 1884 interview, recalled that when Pratt and Cowdery gave her father the book, he 'read it and examined it for about an hour and then threw it down, and said he did not believe a word of it.' Another account reported that he initially pronounced it a 'silly fabrication.' But he kept reading, apparently all night.

The next morning the prominent Orris Clapp family was sitting at breakfast. Rigdon stopped to visit and in an excited manner said: 'Two men came to my house last night on a c-u-r-i-o-u-s mission,' prolonging the word in an histrionic manner. Everyone at the table then looked up while he further explained:

'some men in Palymra, N.Y., had found, by direction of an angel, certain plates inscribed with mysterious characters; that by the same heavenly visitant, a young man, ignorant of letters, had been led into the secret of deciphering the writing on the plates; that it made known the origin of the Indian tribes; with other matters of great interest to the world, and that the discovery would be of such importance as to open the way for the introduction of the Millennium.'

Cowdery and Pratt had asked to preach to Rigdon's Mentor congregation. The appointment was accordingly published, and a large congregation assembled. Cowdery and Pratt's message was eloquent in its simplicity. They 'professed to be special messengers of the Living God, sent to preach the gospel in its purity, as it was anciently preached by the Apostles.' They spoke of a young prophet with divine guidance to correct errors of the Christian churches by calling them to repentance and baptism into the primitive church of Jesus Christ. They propounded the doctrine of divine revelation and asserted that Joseph Smith was a prophet like those of old. They also preached that Christ's advent and the beginning of the millennial reign were imminent.

At the conclusion of his remarks Pratt asked Rigdon if he would like to comment. Sidney arose and stated to the congregation:

'the information they had that evening received, was of an extraordinary character, and certainly demanded their most serious consideration: and as the aposde [Paul] advised his brethren 'to prove all things, and hold fast that which is good,' so he would exhort his brethren to do likewise, and give the matter a careful investigation; and not turn against it, without being fully convinced of its being an imposition, lest they should, possibly, resist the truth.'

After the services ended, Pratt and Cowdery returned home with Rigdon and talked further. Rigdon promised he would finish reading the book, and after completing his investigation would 'frankly tell them his mind and feelings on the subject.'

Wickliffe Rigdon later remembered that his father 'got so engaged in [the book] that it was hard for him to quit long enough to eat his meals. He read it both day and night.' When Cowdery and Pratt returned to the Rigdon home after several days of missionary work, Rigdon had read a considerable portion of the book and held a long interview with Cowdery regarding Joseph Smith. Cowdery told him that his cousin was twenty-two years old and had 'hardly a common school education,' to which Rigdon replied, 'if that was all the education he had, he never wrote the book.'

Rigdon, in his own account of that conversation, added that he 'expressed the utmost amazement that such a man should write a book which seemed to shed a flood of light on all the old scriptures, open all their profoundest mysteries, and give them perfect consistency and complete system.... If God ever gave a revelation, surely this must be divine.' Earnestly reading, praying for direction, and meditating on the things he heard and read, Rigdon remained ambivalent about the book for some time. Pratt related that Rigdon 'had a great struggle of mind before he fully believed and embraced it.'

Much of Rigdon's concern lay in his Baptist upbringing that nothing should be accepted on faith alone. While the book affirmed his own beliefs in a literal gathering of Israel and an imminent Millennium, he wanted an omen, a burning bush. Cowdery explained that he, like Rigdon, had also desired a sign and that an angel appeared to him and showed him the gold plates. Rigdon was certainly aware of biblical accounts of angels, and as the Book of Mormon itself affirmed, 'neither have angels ceased to minister unto the children of men' (Moroni 7:29). So Rigdon asked for a sign. According to Disciple historian Amos S. Hayden, 'the sign appeared, and he was convinced that Mormonism was of God!' Alexander Campbell, always disrespectful to Rigdon after their 1830 affray in Austintown, later wrote that his colleague fasted and prayed for days, until, when 'one of his fits of swooning and sighing came upon him, he saw an angel and was converted.'

Rigdon left two known accounts of this personal vision. The first, published in 1834, proclaimed:

'to my astonishment I saw the different orders of professing Christians passing before my eyes, with their hearts, exposed to view, and they were as corrupt as corruption itself. That society to which I belonged [the Reformed Baptists] also passed before my eyes, and to my astonishment it was as corrupt as the others. Last of all that little man who brought me the Book of Mormon [Oliver Cowdery], passed before my eyes with his heart open, and it was as pure as an angel; and this was a testimony from God; that the Book of Mormon, was a Divine Revelation.'

The second account of this vision, published in 1843, simply reported that he was 'fully convinced of the truth of the work, by a revelation from Jesus Christ, which was made known to him in a remarkable manner, so that he could exclaim 'flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto me, but my father which is in heaven.'

Meanwhile Mormon success in the Kirtland area was astounding. News quickly spread throughout the region that an unusual religious message was expounded by prophetic emissaries from New York. On occasion the roads were crowded with people traveling to Kirtland to hear about the restoration. Inquirers exhausted the elders with their constant questions. 'The people thronged us night and day,' Pratt said, 'insomuch that we had not time for rest or retirement.' Some came 'for curiosity, some to obey the gospel, and some to dispute or resist it. In two or three weeks from our arrival in the neighborhood with the news, we had baptized one hundred and twenty-seven souls.'

When Rigdon ultimately became convinced of the new revelation, restored authority, and the 'necessity of obedience thereto,' he first informed his wife and asked her, 'My dear, you have followed me, once into poverty, are you again willing to do the same?' Recalling their similar experience in Pittsburgh Phebe answered, 'I have counted the cost, and I am perfectly satisfied to follow you; it is my desire to do the will of God, come life or come death.' Her conviction was based on the fact that her husband 'seemed to be altered in demeanor to such an extent that the religion must be of divine origin, else it could not have produced so wonderful an effect.'

One day in early to mid-November 1830 (probably the 7th) Rigdon called to assembly a large congregation of his friends and neighbors in the Methodist church at Kirtland. According to Parley Pratt, he addressed them very affectionately for near two hours, during most of which time both himself and nearly all the congregation were melted into tears. He asked forgiveness of everybody who might have had occasion to be offended with any part of his former life. He forgave all who had persecuted or injured him in any manner. And the next morning, himself and wife were baptized by Elder O. Cowdery. 'I was present—it was a solemn scene. Most of the people were greatly affected. They came out of the water overwhelmed in tears.'

After Rigdon's baptism, he immediately immersed himself into missionary efforts. John Barr, a one-time sheriff of Cuyahoga County and notable authority on the Western Reserve, later recalled listening to Rigdon's powerful preaching during a Sunday morning service at Mayfield. Taking Varnem J. Card along for company, Barr and his friend sat on a hill overlooking the Chagrin River where they could hear the proceedings. As Rigdon spoke, Barr wrote,

His voice and manner were...imposing. He was regarded as an eloquent man at all times, and now he seemed fully aroused. He said he had not been satisfied in his religious yearnings until now. At night he had often been unable to sleep, walking and praying for more light and comfort in his religion. While in the midst of this agony, he heard of the Book of Mormon. Under this 'his soul suddenly found peace. It filled all his aspirations.'

At the close of the meeting Rigdon asked if anyone wanted to come forward and be baptized, and one man stepped out of the crowd. While standing in the water of a deep pool 'Rigdon gave one of his most powerful exhortations,' and, Barr noted, 'the assembly became greatly affected. As he proceeded he called for the converts to step forward. They came through the crowd in rapid succession to the number of thirty and were immersed, with no intermission of the discourse on the part of Rigdon.' At that point Card took Barr's arm and demanded, 'Take me away.' Barr

turned and saw his friend so pale he thought he might faint. His frame trembled as they walked towards their horses. They rode for a mile towards Willoughby before either uttered a word. Card finally said, 'Mr. Barr, if you had not been there I certainly should have gone into the water...the impulse was irresistible.'

While Rigdon's Kirtland following joined the Mormon fold, his Mentor congregation resisted. They were furious at his defection, saying that he might [have] gone down to the grave as one of the great divines of the age, but now he had gone and thrown it all away and was a-going to follow a fool of a boy who claimed an angel had appeared to him....It was nonsense and a man of his knowledge ought to have known better than to have had anything to do with such impostures. He ought not to have let them preach in their church, should not have let them stay overnight in his house, and should have refused to have anything to do with them.

Rigdon replied that they could 'talk to him as they pleased,' but he was convinced in reading the Book of Mormon that the doctrine preached by the Mormons was true...let the consequences be what they may.' Rigdon added that at the time he had a 'family of small children to provide for but trusted them and himself to the mercy of God.... He also had... the glorious satisfaction of his wife, uniting with him.'

As a result of their conversion, the Rigdons lost their small, partially completed house owned by the Mentor congregation. 'The church which Sidney Rigdon left at Mentor,' remarked Wickliffe Rigdon, '*was perfectly horrified and surprised and indignant at his conduct in leaving them in the hasty manner he did but he had gone and the only course for them to pursue was to submit and procure another minister for their church.*' The new minister was M. S. Clapp, who was married to Alicia Campbell, sister of Alexander Campbell.

Before the missionaries left eastern Ohio they ordained Rigdon, Morley, Wight, John Murdock, and others to the ministry and left them to care for the new churches. They also sent a letter to Joseph Smith asking him to send a presiding elder to supervise the group. In the 16 November 1830 edition of the Painesville Telegraph, editor Eber D. Howe announced that the Mormon missionary team was 'bound for the regions beyond the Mississippi, where [Smith] contemplates founding a 'City of Refuge' for his followers, and converting the Indians under his prophetic authority.' On 22 November Cowdery, Pratt, Peter Whitmer, Jr., Ziba Peterson, and Kirtland physician Frederick G. Williams left for Independence, Missouri, the soon-to-be-declared Mormon Zion—the City of New Jerusalem.

After Sidney Rigdon's baptism into Mormonism and expulsion from his Mentor pastorate, he preached for a time without a parish, the head of a large household without a home. Soon, however, he obtained quarters in an old log cabin on John Johnson's property in Hiram, Ohio, thirty-five miles southeast of Mentor. Here, with some twenty other converts, Rigdon formed a congregation.¹ Wickliffe Rigdon later wrote that his father "*had now embraced a new religion, one on which he had always looked and hoped for and one which satisfied his mind and belief.*" *Although he had found in Mormonism a religion to match his manner, Sidney had not yet met the Mormon prophet. Possibly to satisfy some remaining doubts, particularly those of his wife, who "wished him to go to Palmyra to see Joseph Smith," he went to Manchester, New York, along with Edward Partridge, a Painesville hatter and one of Rigdon's Reformed Baptist followers.*

When Rigdon and Partridge arrived at the Smith home in mid-December, the prophet was not there but was visiting his parents, who had moved a few miles to the small community of Kingdon, near Waterloo. So the two Ohio travelers walked around the Smith farm and became convinced of the 'good order and industry' of the family. They also made inquiries in the neighborhood to gain 'further information respecting the doctrine which Smith preached.' Neighbors reportedly testified to the Smiths' integrity on all matters except religion, wherein young Joseph was said to have deceived his family about the Book of Mormon. Both Rigdon and Partridge waved the criticisms aside as prejudice.

When they arrived at Kingdon that evening, the prophet was conducting a religious service. Partridge, after listening to him, requested immediate baptism. Joseph Smith recommended the immersion be delayed until the fatigued Partridge had rested, and the next day, 11 December, Smith baptized him in nearby Seneca Lake. The prophet welcomed Rigdon and Partridge into the young Church of Christ, particularly pleased that a religious bellwether of Rigdon's stature, seemingly motivated by pure faith, would be heaven sent to further the work. As God's spokesman, Smith had a message from the Lord for the former Baptist minister:

'Behold, verily, verily I say unto my servant Sidney, I have looked upon thee and thy works. I have heard thy prayers, and prepared thee for a great work. Thou art blessed, for thou shalt do great things. Behold thou wast sent forth, even as John [the Baptist]—to prepare the way before me, and before Elijah, which should come, and thou knew it not...'

The time of my coming...is nigh at hand...and I have sent forth the fulness of my gospel by the hand of my servant Joseph: and in weakness have I blessed him. ...Wherefore watch over him, that his faith fail not...and a commandment I give unto thee, that thou shalt write for him: and the

scriptures shall be given, even as they are in mine own bosom, to the salvation of mine own elect...

Tarry with him, and he shall journey with you—forsake him not, and surely these things shall be fulfilled. And inasmuch as ye do not write, behold it shall be given unto him to prophesy: and thou shalt preach my gospel, and call upon the holy prophets to prove his words, as they shall be given him.... Fear not, little flock—the kingdom is yours, until I come. —Behold I come quickly.'

Rigdon was deeply impressed by this prophetic augury. His destiny seemed assured by cosmic powers, and it was as though he had returned from Mount Sinai with his purpose fixed in stone. All zest and fire, he was anxious to federate with Smith and save the elect in a glorious crusade. The two elders were quick to accomplish a merger of their talents.

The first project they focused their joint energies on was a revision of the Bible on which Smith had been working intermittently since finishing the Book of Mormon. John Whitmer, historian of the new church, wrote that once the celestial edict was given to Rigdon 'he went to writing the things which the Lord showed unto his servant the Seer.' Although Mormon usage designates this Bible revision as the Joseph Smith Translation (JST), ancient manuscripts were not used, nor were Smith or Rigdon familiar with foreign languages. From Smith's description of the process the procedure was an 'inspired revision,' not a translation.

Joseph Smith believed in the Bible as it 'came from the pen of the original writers,' but that 'ignorant translators, careless transcribers, or designing and corrupt priests have committed many errors.' He added that 'many important points touching the salvation of men, had been taken from the Bible, or lost before it was compiled.' Thus Smith's version is viewed by Mormon faithful as 'a restoration of lost material—material once known to the ancient prophets but then lost, material now made known again in these last days through the Prophet Joseph Smith.'

Smith began his biblical innovations six months before he met Rigdon. But the former minister, often called a "walking Bible" by his peers in the Reformed Baptist Movement, made an immediate impact on the work. The material of the early manuscripts, which extended at least through the first seven chapters of Genesis in the handwriting of Oliver Cowdery and John Whitmer, was further revised and rewritten by Rigdon. Mormons believed that Rigdon had been sent to Smith for such projects. David Whitmer, a close friend of Smith and one of the Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon, wrote:

'Rigdon was a thorough Bible scholar, a man of fine education, and a powerful orator. He soon worked himself deep into Brother Joseph's affections, and had more influence over him than any other man living. He was Brother Joseph's private counselor, and his most intimate friend and brother for some time after they met. Brother Joseph rejoiced, believing that the Lord had sent to him this great and mighty man Sidney Rigdon, to help him in the work.'

That Rigdon could have been merely "Sidney the Scribe," a penman whose sole function was to take down dictation, is implausible. A biblical scholar with a reputation for erudition, he was more learned, better read, and more steeped in biblical interpretation than any other early Mormon, despite his common school education. Any number of Smith's followers could have served as clerk, but only Rigdon could have functioned as a scribe in the historical Jewish sense of the word: 'a man of learning; one who read and explained the law to the people.'

Smith's own description of Rigdon's fortuitous arrival in New York states for December 1830:

'It may be well to observe here, that the Lord greatly encouraged and strengthened the faith of His little flock, which had embraced the fulness of the everlasting Gospel, as revealed to them in the Book of Mormon, by giving some more extended information upon the Scriptures, a translation of which had already commenced.... To the joy of the little flock... did the Lord reveal the following doings of olden times, from the Prophecy of Enoch.'

Once the Enoch prophecy was received, Rigdon could not rest until Smith agreed to move church headquarters to the Western Reserve. He argued that while the founding church in New York was harassed and persecuted, the Mormon congregations in Ohio enjoyed considerable peace, missionary efforts were amazingly fruitful, and Ohio was much closer to native American nations on the frontier, making missionary efforts there more feasible. Finally, engaging his full powers of persuasion, Rigdon appealed to Smith's sense of futurity. Just as the young nation was manifestly destined ever westward, the newly-formed Church of Christ was similarly compelled. After all, the Book of Mormon prophesied America as the promised land, the nation to usher in the Millennium.

The Lord Revealed:

'Behold, I say unto you that it is not expedient in me that ye should translate any more until ye shall go to the Ohio, and this because of the enemy and for your sakes. And again, I say unto you that ye shall not go until ye have preached my gospel in those parts, and have strengthened up the church whithersoever it is found, and more especially in Colesville' (D&C 37:1).

After Smith and Rigdon returned to Fayette, New York, a general conference was held at the Whitmer farm on 2 January 1831. While conducting rudimentary business, Smith was requested by the audience to tell them more about the Ohio venture. He 'inquired of the Lord in the presence of the whole congregation,' wrote Whitmer. The seer then sat at a table dictating the Lord's words while Rigdon wrote them. In part the message said:

'But behold, verily, verily, verily I say unto you, that mine eyes are upon you; I am in your midst, and ye cannot see me, but the day soon cometh that ye shall see me and know that I am; for the vail of darkness shall soon be rent, and he that is not purified shall not abide the day; Wherefore gird up your loins and be prepared. Behold the kingdom is yours and the enemy shall not overcome.... And now I show unto you a mystery, a thing which is had in secret chambers.... And I hold forth and deign to give unto you greater riches, even a land of promise; a land flowing with milk and honey, upon which there shall be no curse when the Lord cometh, and I will give it unto you for the land of your inheritance, if you seek it with all your hearts: And this shall be my covenant with you, ye shall have it for the land of your inheritance, and for the inheritance of your children forever, while the earth shall stand, and ye shall possess it again in eternity, no more to pass away: But verily I say unto you, that in time ye shall have no king nor ruler, for I will be your King and watch over you. Wherefore, hear my voice and follow me, and you shall be a free people, and ye shall have no laws but my laws, when I come, for I am your Lawgiver, and what can stay my hand....

And again I say unto you, that the enemy in the secret chambers, seeketh your lives: Ye hear of wars in far countries, and you say in your hearts there will soon be great wars in far countries, but ye know not the hearts of them in your own land: And that ye might escape the power of the enemy, and be gathered unto me a righteous people, without spot and blameless: Wherefore, for this cause I gave unto you the commandment, that ye should go to the Ohio: and there I will give unto you my law, and there you shall be endowed with power from on high. And if ye seek the riches which it is the will of the Father to give unto you, ye shall be the richest of all people, for ye shall have the riches of eternity: And it must needs be that the riches of the earth is mine to give.'(D&C 38)

Whitmer was dispatched to Ohio to carry the commandments and revelations with him to 'comfort and strengthen my brethren in that land.' Rigdon sent a letter of introduction with Whitmer advising the Western Reserve Saints to 'receive him, for he is a brother greatly beloved, and an Apostle of this church.' He also wrote:

'With him we send all the revelations we have received; for the Lord has declared unto us that you pray unto Him that Joseph Smith and myself go speedily unto you.... The Lord has made known unto us some of his great things which he has laid up for them that love Him, among which the fact that you are living on the land of promise and that there at Kirtland is the place of gathering, and from that place to the Pacific Ocean, God has dedicated to himself, not only in time, but through eternity, and he has given it to us and our children, not only while time lasts, but we shall have it again in eternity, as you will see by one of the commandments, received day before yesterday.'

Rigdon followed Whitmer to the Western Reserve within a matter of weeks. The 26 January 1831 Palmyra Reflector printed his adieu from New York state:

'Elder S. Rigdon left this village on Monday morning last in the stage, for the "Holy Land" where all the "Gold Bible" converts, have recently received a written command from God, through J. Smith, junior, to repair with all convenient speed after selling off the property.— This command was at first resisted by such as had property, (the brethren from all the neighboring counties being all assembled by special summons,) but after a night of fasting, prayer and trial, they all consented to obey the holy messenger. Rigdon has for some time past been arranging matters with Smith for the final departure of the faithful for the "far west." This man of many CREEDS [Rigdon] appears to possess colloquial powers to a considerable degree, and before leaving this vicinity left us his blessing. He delivered a discourse at the Court House immediately preceding his departure; wherein he depicted in strong language, the want of "charity and brotherly love" among the prevailing sects and denominations of professing christians.... After denouncing dreadful vengeance on the whole State of New York, and this village in particular, and recommending to all such as wish to flee from "the wrath to come," to follow him beyond the "western waters," he took his leave. The Prophet, Spouse, and whole "holy family" as they style themselves, will follow Rigdon as soon as their...followers shall be able to dispose of what little real property they possess.'

Rigdon, who traveled by stage, arrived back in Ohio a week or so before Smith. On his first day in Hiram two former parishioners from Mentor visited and requested a "reason for his present hope, and for his belief in the Book of Mormon." Rigdon complained he was weary, exhausted from having lost so much sleep on the journey, but the men persisted, one avowing "he thought

there was no more evidence to confirm the Book of Mormon, than the Koran of Mohamet." Rankled, Rigdon replied, "Sir, you have insulted me in my own house—I command silence—if people come to see us and cannot treat us with civility, they may walk out of the door as soon as they please." Mumbling a reluctant apology, the men left.

Two days later the more respectful of the two men returned with several other Mentor acquaintances and pleaded with Rigdon to "give some reason for his present faith." Their former pastor then commenced a lengthy history of his investigations into Joseph Smith's background. "Even his enemies had nothing to say against his character," he reported. For evidence he showed them a transcript from the dockets of two New York magistrates, where Smith had been tried earlier that year for "being a disorderly person and setting the country in an uproar by preaching the Book of Mormon." Both documents testified that the young prophet had been acquitted.

Rigdon further spoke of the "supernatural gifts with which he said Smith was endowed; he said [Smith] could translate the scriptures from any language in which they were now extant, and could lay his finger upon every interpolation in the sacred writings, adding that he had proven him in all these things." When Rigdon was asked by his friends why they should receive the new scripture he replied, "The Book of Mormon, is to form and govern the Millennial Church; the old revelation was never calculated for that, nor would it accomplish that object; and without receiving the Book of Mormon there is no salvation for any one into whose hands it shall come." He avowed that faith in the book could only be obtained by asking for divine confirmation. When scriptural objections to sign seeking were made, Rigdon replied, "If we have not familiarity enough with our Creator to ask of him a sign, we were no Christians; and that, if God would not condescend to his creatures, in this way, he was no better than Juggernaut!!!"

Rigdon's belief in the Book of Mormon as the real millennial harbinger is evidenced in a 15 January 1831 letter from New York newspaper man W. W. Phelps to Painesville Telegraph editor Eber D. Howe: "*I had ten hours discourse [on Mormonism] with a man from your State named Sidney Rigdon, a convert to its doctrines and he declared it was true, and he knew it by the power of the Holy Ghost, which was again given to men in preparation for the Millennium; he appeared to be a man of talents and sincere in his profession.*"

Rigdon preached at Kirtland on Sunday, 30 January, and told his audience that Joseph Smith, their latter-day oracle, was en route to their little community. During his sermon he fulminated a challenge to the world to "refute the divine pretensions of the Book of Mormon." This caught the attention of his old associate, Alexander Campbell's father Thomas, who wrote him from nearby Mentor where he was visiting at the home of his daughter Alicia and her new husband, Reverend Matthew Clapp:

DEAR SIR:—It may seem strange, that instead of a confidential and friendly visit, after so long an absence, I should thus address, by letter, one whom for many years I have considered not only as a courteous and benevolent friend, but as a beloved brother and fellow-laborer in the gospel; but, alas! how changed, how fallen! Nevertheless, I should now have visited you, as formerly, could I conceive that my so doing would answer the important purpose, both to ourselves and to the public, to which we both stand pledged, from the conspicuous and important stations we occupy—you as the professed disciple and public teacher of the infernal book of Mormon, and I as a professed disciple and public teacher of the supernal book of the Old and New Testaments of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, which you now say is superceded by the book of Mormon.... To the disproof of this assertion, I understand you to defy the world.... This, I understand from your declaration on last Lord's day, you are abundantly prepared and ready to do. I, therefore, as in duty bound, accept the challenge, and shall hold myself in readiness, if the Lord permit, to meet you publicly, in any place, either in Mentor or Kirtland, or in any of the adjoining towns that may appear most eligible for the accommodation of the public. The sooner the investigation takes place the better for all concerned.

Campbell forewarned that he intended to expose the claims of Mormonism "by examining the character of its author and his accomplices...expose their pretensions to miraculous gifts, and the gift of tongues; and... test them in three or four foreign languages." He planned to expose their assertion that the authority for administering baptism was lost for fourteen hundred years till restored by the new prophet, by showing it to be a contradiction to Matt. xvi:18... that the pretended duty of "common property" is anti-scriptural, and a fraud upon society, that re-baptizing believers is making void the law of Christ; and the pretension of imparting the Holy Spirit by imposition of hands, is an unscriptural intrusion on the exclusive prerogative of the primary apostles...that its pretentious visions, humility and spiritual perfection, are nowise superior to those of the first Shakers, Jememia Wilkson, the French prophets, etc.

Campbell concluded by declaring that "*in the last place we shall examine the internal evidence of the book of Mormon itself, pointing out its evident contradictions, foolish absurdities, shameless pretensions to antiquity, restore it to its rightful claimant as a production beneath*

contempt, and utterly unworthy the reception of a school-boy." The letter ends with Campbell declaring himself the champion "of all who do not wilfully and blindly submit to become the dupes of a shameless combination of unprincipled religious swindlers—whose unhallowed design is to rob the simple both of their salvation and their property."

Kirtland Reformers Nathan P. Goodall and Isaac Moore delivered Campbell's letter to Rigdon. Their testimony in the 15 February 1831 Painesville Telegraph reported that "when [Rigdon] had read about half a dozen lines he came to the epithet 'infernal,' which he found applied to his beloved book, he committed it to the flames." *Rigdon, perhaps out of fear, possibly out of disdain, never met the Reverend Campbell in open debate.*

Rigdon's one-time spiritual mentor and erstwhile nemesis, Alexander Campbell, followed his father's stinging criticism of Rigdon with his own rebuke in the Millennial Harbinger. "It was with mingled emotions of regret and surprise," he began, "that we have learned that Sidney Rigdon has renounced the ancient gospel, and declared that he was not sincere in his profession of it; and that he has fallen into the snare of the Devil in joining the Mormonites. He has led away a number of disciples with him." Campbell then disparaged his former lieutenant by referring to his eccentricity—the first public assessment of Rigdon's possible manic-depressive illness. "His instability," the Reverend Campbell wrote,

I was induced to ascribe to a peculiar mental and corporeal malady, to which he has been subject for some years. Fits of melancholy succeeded by fits of enthusiasm accompanied by some kind of nervous spasms and swoonings which he has, since his defection, interpreted into the agency of the Holy Spirit, or the recovery of spiritual gifts, produced a versatility in his genius and deportment which has been increasing for some time. I was willing to have ascribed his apostasy to this cause, and to a conceit which he cherished that within a few years, by some marvellous interposition, the long lost tribes of Israel were to be collected, had he not declared that he was hypocritical in his profession of the faith which he has for some time proclaimed.'

Campbell's insult was not soon forgotten by Rigdon. Prone to hold long-time grudges, Rigdon would later in the pages of Kirtland's Mormon newspapers attack Campbell and his followers on several occasions.

Rigdon welcomed the prophet and his wife to his Kirtland stronghold on 1 February 1831, where the Smiths established temporary residency with the family of local merchant Newel K. Whitney. The town then was a small farming community of 1,000 people. It boasted a few stores and shops, a grist mill, a post office, one hotel, and several other buildings and homes. Three days after his arrival in Kirtland Smith pronounced God's word that "it is meet that my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., should have a house built, in which to live and translate." The divine disclosure revealed financial benefits for Rigdon as well: "And again, it is meet that my servant Sidney Rigdon should live as seemeth him good, inasmuch as he keepeth my commandments" (D&C 41:7-8 [4 Feb. 1831]).

By spring 1831 the church in Kirtland and vicinity had increased to more than 1,000 members.

While awaiting good word from the "western countries" in the spring of 1831, Rigdon and Smith also returned to revising the Bible in the newly completed Smith cabin on Father Morley's property. From early February through 7 March they worked on Genesis 6-19. The original handwritten document shows that they turned their attention to the New Testament on 8 March 1831. The title of that page of the manuscript is "A Translation of the New Testament by the power of God." From 8 March until 3 April they devoted their energies to Matthew 1-9. The following day they returned to Genesis 19:30 and brought their work up to chapter 24:41. From 7 April until early June they focused on Matthew 9:2 and 26:71. Work then halted until the fall.

Their labors on the Bible were not continuous. Many interruptions arose, several related to Smith's and Rigdon's indigence. Contemporary and reminiscent accounts agree that the Mormons as a group were in an impoverished situation in Kirtland from 1831 to 1835. ...

As time drew near for the emigrating New York Saints to arrive in Kirtland, Smith had yet to hear from cousin Cowdery in Missouri, a fact which postponed the announcement of the precise location of the city of refuge. "The place is not yet to be revealed," spoke God's advocate, "but after your brethren come from the east, there are to be certain men appointed and to them it shall be given to know the place...and they shall be appointed to purchase the lands and to make a commencement to lay the foundations of the City.

Pratt returned from Missouri in May, enthusiastic about the prospects of the Saints settling in Jackson County. The need to declare the chosen land was pressing on Smith, but he wanted to reconnoiter the area personally. Meanwhile the New York Saints arrived in Kirtland. Eber Howe, editor of the nearby Painesville Telegraph, wrote on 17 May 1831 that "About two hundred men, women, and children, of the deluded followers of Jo Smith's Bible speculation, have arrived on our coast during the last week, from the state of New York, & are about seating themselves down

upon the 'promised land' in the county." Mormon historian John Whitmer recorded that "there was no preparation made for [them]." They were destitute, having followed the prophet's commandment to sell their property—at a loss if necessary—or abandon it.

While plans were underway for a Missouri expedition, Rigdon spent much time in missionary work. After failing to convert the Shakers, he proselyted in more receptive areas. Traveling with Luke Johnson in mid-May, Rigdon first went to New Portage, Ohio, and baptized "about fifty or sixty." The two then continued to Rigdon's old homestead near Pittsburgh, where they converted Sidney's mother, Nancy G., and his older brother Carvel, along with several others in the area.

In late May or early June, Rigdon arrived back in Kirtland and there encountered his former friend, Alexander Campbell, then conducting a tour of the Western Reserve to assess Mormonism's damage to his movement. Preaching throughout Ohio, the sage consistently referred to Mormonism as "*delusions and religious imposition.*" In a confrontation with "the far-famed Alexander Campbell," Rigdon's summary contended that *Campbell's "wonted shrewdness and presence of mind forsook him"* so that he was "*quite confused and silly.*" Rigdon claimed he told his former mentor, "*You have lied, Alexander... you are a child of the Devil, you are an enemy to all righteousness, and the spirit of the Devil is in you...and if you do not receive the Book of Mormon, you will be damned.*"

After Campbell departed for his home in Virginia, Joseph Smith's Church of Christ held its fourth general conference, the first in Ohio. During the three-day gathering (3-6 June 1831) a profound change was inaugurated in the church's organization.

On Sunday, 6 June, the final day of the conference, twenty-eight elders were appointed to travel through the west in pairs, preaching the gospel along the way. They were to meet in conference in western Missouri, "upon the land," said the revelation, "which I will consecrate unto my people, which are a remnant of Jacob [Native Americans], and those who are heirs according to the covenant [non-Indian Mormons]." Smith and Rigdon were among those called to "*take their journey as soon as preparations can be made to leave their homes.*" The two were told that if they remained faithful "*ye shall assemble yourselves together to rejoice upon the land of Missouri, which is the land of your inheritance, which is now the land of your enemies*" (D&C 53:2).

After leaving Cincinnati the travelers landed at Louisville, Kentucky, where they waited three days for a steamer to convey them upriver to St. Louis. Weary of waiting at that historic city, Smith, Harris, Phelps, Partridge, and Coe went on foot to Independence, where they arrived about mid-July. The rest of the company, including Rigdon, came by water a few days later.

Despite his outward optimism, Smith also harbored concerns about the Promised Land. After contemplating the degraded state of the Lamanites and the lack of civilization in general, the prophet asked in prayer, "*When will the wilderness blossom as the rose? When will Zion be built up in her glory, and where will Thy temple stand, unto which all nations shall come in the last days?*" In answer, God proclaimed that Missouri was "*the land which I have appointed and consecrated for the gathering of the Saints. Wherefore, this is the land of promise, and the place for the city of Zion.... Behold, the place which is now called Independence is the center place; and the spot for the temple is lying westward, upon a lot which is not far from the court-house*" (D&C 52:1-3). This [p.100] temple site was a sixty-four-acre tract one-half mile west of the Jackson County courthouse, located in the center of the village.

On 1 August 1831 Smith made known a revelation which stated in part: "*And I give unto my servant Sidney a commandment, that he shall write a description of the land of Zion, and a statement of the will of God, as it shall be made known by the Spirit, unto him: and an epistle and subscription, to be presented unto all the churches, to obtain moneys, to be put into the hands of the bishop, to purchase lands for an inheritance for the children of God*" (Book of Commandments LIX:63). Rigdon was further designated to "*concecrate and dedicate this land, and the spot of the temple, unto the Lord.*"

The next day, while Smith was helping the Colesville Saints lay the first log for a house of worship in Kaw Township, twelve miles west of Independence, Rigdon fulfilled his obligation to dedicate the glorious city of New Jerusalem. Ezra Booth, in attendance that day, later wrote that the event was "*attended with considerable parade and an ostentatious display of talents, both by Rigdon and Cowdery.*"

Historian John Whitmer, recounting Cowdery's description of the consecration ceremony, wrote that Rigdon addressed the dozen or so assembled Saints:

Do you receive this land for the land of your inheritance with thankful hearts from the Lord? answer from all we do, Do you pledge yourselves to keep the laws of God on this land which you have never kept in your own lands? We do. Do you pledge yourselves to see that others of your brethren who shall come hither do keep the laws of God? We do. After prayer he arose and said,

I now pronounce this land consecrated and dedicated for the Lord for a possession and inheritance for the Saints, (in the name of Jesus Christ, having authority from him.) And for all the faithful servants of the Lord to the remotest ages of time. Amen.

Next a specially prepared oak log, ten inches in diameter, was carried to the spot by twelve men using handspikes. Cowdery then selected a small rough stone, the best he could find, and carried it in one hand to the spot. He removed the surface of the earth, prepared a spot for the symbolic rock, and delivered an address suited to the occasion. The stone in place, one end of the oak log was laid on it, and thus was installed a symbolic claim on the splendid city of Zion. Joseph Smith's account of the event recorded: "*Through prayer, the land of Zion was consecrated and dedicated for the gathering of the Saints by Elder Rigdon; and it was a season of joy to those present, and afforded a glimpse of the future, which time will yet unfold to the satisfaction of the faithful.*"

The next day, 3 August, seven elders, including Smith, Cowdery, Peter Whitmer, Jr., Frederick G. Williams, William W. Phelps, Martin Harris, and Joseph Coe, assembled on the ten-acre temple site for Smith's dedication and reading of the 87th Psalm. The prophet laid a figurative cornerstone near a sapling distinguished from others by removal of the bark on the north and east sides. On the south side of the treelet was engraved the letter "T" for temple and on the east side "ZOM" for Zomas, which Smith said was the original word for Zion.

Their principal work accomplished, the Kirtland elders desired to "*return speedily to the land from whence they came*" (Book of Commandments LXI:1).

Rigdon, Smith, and Cowdery arrived in Ohio on 27 August. Rigdon quickly followed Smith's directive and by 31 August had a lengthy "*description of the land of Zion*" as it was "*made known by the Spirit unto him*":

I, Sidney, a servant of Jesus Christ by the will of God the Father and through the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ unto the Saints which are scattered abroad in these last days, may grace, mercy and peace, rest upon you from God the father and from our Lord Jesus Christ, who is greatly to be feared, among his saints and to be had in reverence of all them who obey him.

Beloved Brethren,—

It has pleased God even the Father to make known unto us in these last days the good pleasure of his will concerning his Saints; and to make known unto us, the things which he has decreed upon the nations even wasting and destruction until they are utterly destroyed,...so in these last days, he has commenced to gather together, into a place provided before of God and had in reserve in days of old being kept by the power and providence of God,... this land ["provided" by "our heavenly Father"] himself because it was the one which was best adapted for his children, where Jew and Gentile might dwell together...

This land being situated in the center of the continent on which we dwell with an exceeding fertile soil and cleared ready for the hand of the cultivator bespeaks the goodness of our God, in providing so goodly a heritage, and its climate suited to persons from every quarter of this continent, either East West North and South yea I think I may say, for all constitutions from any portion of the world, and its productions nearly all varieties of both grain and vegetables which are common in this country, together with all means, clothing: in addition to this it abounds with fountains of pure water the soil climate and surface all adapted, to health indeed I may say that the whole properties of the country invite the Saints to come, and partake of their blessings but what more need I say about a country, which our Heavenly Father holds in his own hands, for if it were unhealthy he could make it healthy and if barren he could make it fruitful. Such is the land which the Lord God has provided for us, in the last days for an inheritance, and truly it is a goodly land, and none other as well suited for all the saints as this and all those who have faith and confidence in God who has ever seen this land will bear the same testimony. In order that you may understand the will of God respecting this land and the way and means of possessing it, I can only refer you to commandments which the Lord had delivered by the mouth of his prophets which will be read, to you, by our brethren Oliver Cowdery and Newel K. Whitney whom the Lord has appointed, to visit the churches and obtain means for purchasing this land of our inheritance that we may escape in the day of tribulation which is coming on the earth. I conclude by exhorting you to hear the voice of the Lord your God, who is speaking to you in much mercy and who is sending forth his word and his revelation in these last days in order that we may escape impending vengeance; and the judgments which await this generation, and which will speedily overtake the—Brethren pray for me, that I may be counted worthy to obtain an inheritance in the land of Zion and to overcome, the World through faith, and dwell with the sanctified forever, and ever Amen

Rigdon wrote another tract.

Unlike the timbered States in the East, except upon the rivers and water courses, which were

verdantly dotted with trees from one to three miles wide, as far as the eye can glance, the beautiful rolling prairies lay spread around like a sea of meadows. The timber is a mixture of oak, hickory, black walnut, elm, cherry, honey locust, mulberry, coffee bean, hackberry, box elder, and basswood, together with the addition of cottonwood, buttonwood, pecan, soft and hard maple, upon the bottoms. The shrubbery was beautiful, and consisted in part of plums, grapes, crab apples, and persimmons. The prairies were decorated with a growth of flowers that seemed as gorgeous and grand as the brilliancy of stars in the heavens, and exceed description. The soil is rich and fertile, from three to ten feet deep, and generally composed of rich black mold, intermingled with clay and sand. It produces in abundance, wheat, corn, and many other commodities, together with sweet potatoes and cotton. Horses, [p.104] cattle, and hogs, though of an inferior breed, are tolerably plenty, and seem nearly to raise themselves by grazing in the vast prairie range in summer, and feeding upon the bottoms in winter. The wild game is less plenty where man has commenced the cultivation of the soil than it is a little distance farther in the wild prairies. Buffalo, elk, deer, bear, wolves, beaver, and many lesser animals roam at pleasure. Turkeys, geese, swans, ducks, yea, a variety of the feathered race are among the rich abundance that graces the delightful regions of this goodly land of the heritage of the children of God. Nothing is more fruitful, or a richer stockholder in the blooming prairies, than the honey bee; honey is but about twenty-five cents per gallon.

The season is mild and delightful nearly three quarters of the year, and as the land of Zion, situated at about equal distances from the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, as well as from the Allegheny and Rocky Mountains, in the thirty-ninth degree of north latitude, and between the tenth and seventeenth degrees of west longitude. It bids fair to become one of the most blessed places on the globe, when the curse is taken from the land, if not before. The winters are milder than in the Atlantic States, of the same parallel of latitude; and the weather is more agreeable, so that were the virtues of the inhabitants only equal to the blessings of the Lord, which he permits to crown the industry and efforts of those inhabitants, there would be a measure of the good things of life, for the benefit of the saints, full, pressed down and running over, even an hundredfold. The disadvantages here, like all new countries, are self-evident, lack of mills and schools, together with the natural privations and inconveniences, which the hand of industry and the refinement of society with the polish of science overcome. But all these impediments vanish when it is recollected that the prophets have said concerning Zion in the last days how the glory of Lebanon is to come upon her; the fir tree, the pine tree, and the box together, to beautify the place of his sanctuary, that he may make the place of his feet glorious; where for brass he will bring gold, and for iron he will bring silver, and for wood brass, and for stones iron; and where the feast of fat things will be given to the just; yea, when the splendor of the Lord is brought to one consideration, for the good of his people; the calculations of men and the vain glory of the world vanishes; and we exclaim: God will shine—the perfection of beauty out of Zion.

Smith and Rigdon were then called, remained in Kirtland only briefly that fall of 1831. Anxious to return to their Bible revision, they relocated to nearby Hiram, Ohio, in mid-September. Their board and room, while they engaged in their literary calling, was partly subsidized by new convert John Johnson, whom Rigdon had known for several years during his Baptist ministry in the Hiram area. But Johnson's contribution was insufficient to support the families. During an 11 October 1831 conference at Hiram, Oliver Cowdery made "known the [unfavorable financial] situation of brs Joseph Smith Jr and Sidney Rigdon." David Whitmer, Reynolds Cahoon, Simeon Carter, Orson Hyde, Hyrum Smith, and Emer Harris were appointed to look after their needs so they could continue translating the Bible.

The Rigdon family, now consisting of at least six and possibly seven children (a son George was born and died sometime in 1831), settled into the Johnson family's old log cabin where Sidney and Phebe had lived a year earlier. The Smith family—Joseph, Emma, and their newly adopted twins—moved into a spare room in the nearby Johnson farmhouse.

During the winter of 1831 Rigdon and Smith held a meeting in the south school house in Hiram.

On 15 December 1831 Rigdon addressed a "To The Public" letter to the Ohio Star announcing that he intended to deliver a "Lecture on the Christian Religion" on Christmas Day. He specifically requested that Ezra Booth be present as "*I shall review the letters written by him and published in the Ohio Star.*" Rigdon said the letters "*are unfair and false representation of the subject on which they treat,*" and also issued a special challenge to Simonds Ryder to debate him in the township of Hiram "*that if I am deluded in receiving this book as a revelation from God, I may be corrected, and the public relieved from anxiety.*"

Booth did not attend the 25 December lecture, and Rigdon, in a bad-tempered rhetorical assault, skewered his antagonist's character. He maintained that Booth's letters contained a "*bundle of falsehoods*" and asserted that the former Mormon "*dare not appear in their defense*

because he knew his letters were false, and would not bear the test of investigation." Booth was not a total milksop; he merely preferred the safer medium of the newspaper. But editor Lewis L. Rice, upon receiving Booth's next letter, announced his intention of discontinuing, although most certainly not diffusing, the controversy.

Symonds Ryder, described in one account as someone who "did not drift on the current, but rather one who sets currents in motion,"¹⁵ also avoided Rigdon in public. He wrote in the 29 December Ohio Star: "To undertake to correct [Rigdon] of his errors before the public, would be a most arduous task for me. His irascible temper, loquacious extravagance, impaired state of mind, and want of due respect to his superiors, I fear would render him in such a place, unmanageable, and I therefore fear of accomplishing the desired object."

Ryder further noted that since the elders had returned from Missouri most Mormons in Hiram had left the faith and the debate would only serve *"to save, if possible, a sinking cause."* Although Ryder and Rigdon, like Booth and Rigdon, never met face to face, they continued to spar in the Ohio Star. Rigdon wrote a letter, published 12 January 1832, misspelling Ryder's name "*Simons Rider,*" and taunting him to debate. *"He presented himself before the public as an accuser,"* Rigdon wrote. *"He had been called upon before the same public, to support his accusations; and does he come forward and do it? nay, but seeks to hide himself behind a battery of reproach, and abuse, and low insinuations."*

Meanwhile, by 10 January 1832 an overly-confident Rigdon and Smith thought they had won the day against their adversaries. A revelation of that date told them *"it is expedient to translate again"* (D&C 73:3), and they returned vigorously to their work in Hiram. In mid-January they momentarily halted their labors and traveled to Amherst, Lorain County, Ohio, to conduct a small conference of elders.

Back in Hiram on 16 February, while engaged in "translating St. John's Gospel," Rigdon and Smith, enraptured in heavenly ecstasy, jointly experienced "in spirit" an apparition they called "The Vision," or "vision of the Three Degrees of Glory," now published as Doctrine and Covenants 76. In 1892 Philo Dibble, an eye-witness to this important episode, wrote a description:

The vision which is recorded in the Book of Doctrine and Covenants was given at the house of "Father Johnson," in Hyrum, Ohio, and during the time that Joseph and Sidney were in the spirit and saw the heavens open, there were other men in the room, perhaps twelve, among whom I was one. During a part of the time-probably two-thirds of the time-I saw the glory and felt the power, but did not see the vision.

The events and conversation, while they were seeing what is written (and many things were seen and related that are not written,) I will relate as minutely as is necessary.

Joseph would, at intervals, say: "What do I see?" as one might say while looking out the window and beholding what all in the room could not see. Then he would relate what he had seen or what he was looking at. Then Sidney replied, "I see the same." Presently Sidney would say "what do I see?" and would repeat what he had seen or was seeing, and Joseph would reply, "I see the same."

This manner of conversation was repeated at short intervals to the end of the vision, and during the whole time not a word was spoken by an other person. Not a sound nor motion made by anyone but Joseph and Sidney, and it seemed to me that they never moved a joint or limb during the time I was there, which I think was over an hour, and to the end of the vision.

Joseph sat firmly and calmly all the time in the midst of a magnificent glory, but Sidney sat limp and pale, apparently as limber as a rag, observing which, Joseph remarked, smilingly, "Sidney is not used to it as I am."

In addition to seeing the Father and the Son and the creation of other worlds whose inhabitants are *"begotten sons and daughters unto God,"* Rigdon and Smith scanned the past and gazed into the future. They beheld the rebellion of Lucifer, his expulsion from heaven, and everlasting contention against the children of God. Then they witnessed an afterlife that shattered usual Christian beliefs. The published text of "The Vision" declared that God saves all men and women *"except those sons of perdition who deny the Son after the Father has revealed him"* (D&C 76:43-44) and described those who are saved as *"they whose bodies are celestial, whose glory is that of the sun"* (v. 70), as *"the terrestrial, whose glory differs...even as that of the moon differs from the son"* (v. 71), or as *"the glory of the telestial, which glory is that of the lesser, even as the glory of the stars"* (v. 81) While still enraptured in spirit, the two diviners wrote a description of their vision. Afterwards they sent the recorded revelation to Independence, Missouri, for publication, and in July 1832 the vision of the degrees of glory was printed in The Evening and the Morning Star.

When God revealed to Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon that there was a place prepared for all, according to the light they had received and their rejection of evil and practice of good, it was

a great trial to many, and some apostatized because God was not going to send to everlasting punishment heathens and infants, but had a place of salvation, in due time, for all, and would bless the honest and virtuous and truthful, whether they ever belonged to any church or not. It was a new doctrine to this generation and many stumbled at it.

The History of the Church makes no mention of the concerns of rank and file over the new doctrine. *"Nothing could be more pleasing to the Saint, than the light which burst upon the world, through the foregoing vision. Every law, every commandment, every promise, every truth, and every point, touching the destiny of man, from Genesis to Revelation, where the purity of the scriptures remains unsullied by the folly of men, go to show the perfection of the theory and witnesses the fact that the document is a transcript from the records of the eternal world. The sublimity of the ideas; the purity of the language; the scope for action; the continued duration for completion, in order that the heirs of salvation may confess the Lord and bow the knee; the rewards for faithfulness, and the punishments for sins, are so much beyond the narrow-mindedness of men, that every honest man is constrained to exclaim: "It came from God."*

During the darkest hour of Saturday, 24 March, infuriated Campbellites—some accounts say fortified by a keg of whiskey—stepped up their intimidation. A company from Shalersville, Garrettsville, and Hiram assembled outside Rigdon's cabin. One account reported that when the door was forced, Rigdon, to no avail, tried to reason with the intruders, presuming "they were gentlemen." But Rigdon recalled that *"they broke into my house[,] drag[ged] me out of my bed—out of the door my head beating on the floor. They dragged me over the wood pile, and on they went my head thumping on the frozen ground, after which they threw tar and feathers on me—and endeavored to throw aqua fortes [nitric acid] in my face but I turned my face and it missed me."*

Wickliffe Rigdon's account noted that by the time his 225-pound father was dragged by his heels to the place where he was tarred and feathered "he was insensible," yet his assailants "pounded him till they thought he was dead and then went to get Joseph Smith." Smith, then only twenty-seven, was more inclined to fight than Rigdon. But he was quickly overpowered and carried to the spot where Rigdon lay unconscious, stretched out naked on the ground. "I supposed he was dead," Smith later wrote, and "I began to plead with them, saying, 'You will have mercy and spare my life, I hope.'" They did, but not before stripping him, threatening castration, and smearing him with tar and feathers.

Smith was not permanently injured. He was bruised around the head and suffered a chipped tooth but was able to carry out his normal Sunday duties the following day. Rigdon, on the other hand, was badly hurt and lay on the ground for some time before he regained consciousness. *"At last he got up in a dazed condition,"* Wickliffe wrote, *"and did not know where he was nor where to go. ...He went reeling along the road not knowing where he was; he would have passed his house but my mother was out the door watching for him and went out as he came along and got him in the house. She got the tar and feathers off from him as best she could and got him to bed."*

Mormon accounts imply that the Hiram mob intended to kill Rigdon and Smith. Had this been their intent they would have brought weapons and succeeded. But the fact that they came prepared with a bucket of hot tar (they got feathers from Rigdon's pillow) suggests they were proffering a warning. Symonds Ryder wrote, "This had the desired effect, which was to get rid of them. They soon left for Kirtland." No one was ever brought to trial. Such action, particularly against curious religious beliefs, was tolerated in America during Rigdon's lifetime. For example, despite the fact that a 17 April 1832 letter to the editor in the Geauga Gazette (Painesville) called the events of 24 March *"a base transaction, an unlawful act, a work of darkness, a diabolical trick,"* one writer noted that *vigilantism proved "one important truth which every wise man knew before, that is, that Satan hath more power than the pretended prophets.*

Rigdon was slow to recover. Smith recalled that when he visited his injured friend on Monday morning he found him crazy, and his head highly inflamed, for they had dragged him by his heels, and those, too, so high from the ground that he could not raise his head from the rough, frozen surface, which lacerated it exceedingly; and when he saw me he called to his wife to bring him his razor. She asked him what he wanted of it; and he replied, to kill me. Sister Rigdon left the room, and he asked me to bring his razor; I asked him what he wanted of it, and he replied he wanted to kill his wife; and he continued delirious some days.

Despite the severity of the 24 March 1832 injury, Rigdon recovered well enough to move to Kirtland the following Wednesday, 28 March, with his family. All his children had the measles and were transported the thirty miles in an open wagon. On 1 April, again accosted by a mob, he left his family with friends and escaped to Chardon. The following day he arrived at Warren where he, Smith, Whitney, and Gause fled to the relative safety of Zion, the land of their promised inheritance. They arrived in Independence, Missouri, on 24 April 1832.

Before returning to Ohio Rigdon preached, according to the prophet's account,

"two...powerful discourses, which, so far as outward appearance is concerned, gave great satisfaction to the people."

On 6 May 1832, Rigdon, Smith, and Whitney left Independence by stage for Kirtland. En route a runaway occurred and the agile prophet jumped from the coach. Whitney tried to follow suit but became entangled in a wheel, seriously mangling his leg and foot. Rigdon, who remained inside the conveyance, was unharmed. Smith and Whitney spent four weeks in a public house in Greenville, Indiana, while Rigdon proceeded home to Kirtland where his nine-year-old daughter, Nancy, was seriously ill.

During his absence, Rigdon's large family had been shuffled from home to home, relying on the generosity of neighbors, and were boarding at Reynolds Cahoon's place when Sidney arrived. These quarters were apparently unsatisfactory. Cahoon noted in his 26 May 1832 diary, "Br. Sidney arrived hear with much intilgence from Zion. Thursday Br. Sidney moved to the flats."

Apparent worry over his daughter's illness and despair over living quarters precipitated another virulent mood swing in Rigdon. Joseph Smith's mother, writing of the 5 July incident years later, said that a group had gathered in Joseph Smith Sr.'s barn for a Thursday evening prayer meeting, anticipating a sermon from Rigdon. "We waited a long time before he made his appearance," Lucy wrote, then at last he came in, seemingly much agitated. He did not go to the stand, but began to pace back and forth through the house. My husband said, "Brother Sidney, we would like to hear a discourse from you today." Brother Rigdon replied, in a tone of excitement, "The keys of the kingdom are rent from the Church, and there shall not be a prayer put up in this house this day." "Oh! no," said Mr. Smith, "I hope not." "I tell you they are," rejoined Elder Rigdon, "and no man or woman shall put up a prayer in this place today."

This greatly disturbed the minds of many sisters, and some brethren. The brethren stared and turned pale, and the sisters cried. Sister Howe, in particular, was very much terrified: "Oh dear me!" she said, "what shall we do? what shall we do? The keys of the kingdom are taken from us, and what shall we do?" "I tell you again," said Sidney, with much feeling, *"the keys of the kingdom are taken from you, and you never will have them again until you build me a new house."*

Joseph Smith's older brother Hyrum, also present on the occasion, said he did not believe Rigdon's assertion and borrowed a horse to ride to the town of Hiram, where the prophet was again living at John Johnson's, possibly in the Rigdon family's former quarters. On Saturday evening the brothers rode back into Kirtland. Charles C. Rich wrote that on Sunday morning, *"everybody turned out to meeting."* Joseph preached, *"denouncing the doctrine of Rigdon as being false."* Rich wrote that Smith "took [Rigdon's] licence from him and said, 'The Devil would handle him as one man handles another-the less authority he had the better.'"

Lucy Smith's account, which like Rich's was retrospective, added that "Joseph went upon the stand, and informed the brethren that they were under a great mistake, that the Church had not transgressed; and, as for the keys of the kingdom," he said, "I, myself, hold the keys of this Last Dispensation, and will for ever hold them, both in time and eternity; so set your hearts at rest upon that point, all is right." She added that after her son preached a comforting discourse, he appointed a council to try Sidney for "having lied in the name of the Lord":

In this council Joseph told him, he must suffer for what he had done, that he should be delivered over to the buffetings of Satan, who would handle him as one man handleth another, that the less Priesthood he had, the better it would be for him and that it would be well for him to give up his license.

This counsel Sidney complied with, yet he had to suffer for his folly. After he had sufficiently humbled himself, he received another license.

Bystanders were convinced of his sentence. Rich reported that "the devil did handle him by pulling him out of bed and other rough methods." Philo Dibble writing in 1882 noted that towards the end of July, Sidney was lying on his bed alone. An unseen power lifted him from his bed, threw him across the room, and tossed him from one side of the room to the other. The noise being heard in the adjoining room, his family went in to see what was the matter, and found him going from one side of the room to the other, from the effects of which Sidney was laid up for five or six weeks. 2

Oliver Huntington recorded in a similar account in an 1883 journal entry that "the folks heard a noise...in Sidneys room, went in and found him thrown down and about the room from one place to another as a strong man could throw a very weak one; and no visible hand by which he was thrown. He was handled by the devil as one man handles another and was as sore and bruised as if it had been by the hand of man."

Rigdon's disfavor lasted less than three weeks. In a relatively unknown contemporary account of Rigdon's breakdown, Joseph Smith is more sympathetic. Writing to W. W. Phelps in a 31 July 1832 letter, the prophet said that when Bro Sidney learned the feelings of the Brethren in

whom he had placed so much confidence for whom he had endured so much fateague & suffering & whom he loved with so much love his heart was grieved his spirits failed & for a moment he became frantick & the advisory taking the advantage, he spake unadvisedly with his lips. after receiving a severe chastisement he resigned his commission and became a private member in the church, but has since repented like Peter of old and after a little suffering by the buffiting of Satan has been restored to his high standing in the church of God.

The Rigdon family did receive a church-provided home after this incident, and, despite the transitory loss of his senses, Sidney's stock rose again. On 8 March 1833, Smith pronounced in revelation: "*I say unto thy brethren Sidney Rigdon, and Frederick G. Williams, their sins are forgiven them also, and they are accounted as equal with thee in holding the keys of this last kingdom.... And this shall be your business and mission in all your lives to preside in counsel and set in order all the affairs of this church and kingdom*" (D&C 90:6, 16).

In addition to influencing publication of early Mormon scriptures, Rigdon, drawing on a lifetime of Baptist experience, advocated an educated lay ministry. Many if not most of those attracted to Mormonism early on, including Joseph Smith and Brigham Young, had limited education. So, following instructions in Doctrine and Covenants 88 (given 27 December 1832), an institution subsequently known as the School of the Elders or School of the Prophets was established with Rigdon as principal instructor. The school's mission was to teach the ministry—not only fundamental subjects such as reading and writing but also advanced studies in theology, ancient languages, and Christian history.

Students were expected to acquire knowledge through serious study and also through revelation. Zebedee Coltrin, a student in the school, stated: "The School of the Prophets began in Kirtland, January 24, 1833, much instruction received by the gift of tongues and the interpretation thereof." He added, "The science we engaged in for the winter was English grammar, of which we obtained a general knowledge."

The concept of the school ultimately expanded into a broader educational effort, the "Kirtland School," established in December 1834 to foster spiritual and secular knowledge among all Saints, including children. Trustees of the organization, which sponsored a number of programs over several years, were Joseph Smith, Jr., Frederick G. Williams, Sidney Rigdon, and Oliver Cowdery. Subjects emphasized in the Kirtland School, mostly by Rigdon and his associate William McLellin, included grammar, reading and writing, geography and history, politics and philosophy, and foreign languages. The main emphasis, however, particularly for adult male priesthood holders, was religious studies. Perhaps the most significant aspect of this instruction was Rigdon's preparation and delivery of a seven-part series of theological lectures to a group of prospective missionaries, "the first laborers of the Kingdom," during the 1834-35 winter term of the School of Elders.

The purpose of the lectures, as noted in the first lesson, was "to unfold to the understanding the doctrine of Jesus Christ." These discourses, systematically arranged with accompanying script designed for missionaries to memorize and teach, developed fully the Mormon position on faith, miracles, sacrifice, the gift of the Holy Spirit, as well as the character and attributes of the Godhead. Relatively unknown to modern Mormons, Rigdon's theological discourses, later called the Lectures on Faith, were removed from the Doctrine and Covenants in 1921 by LDS church

Publication of the Doctrine and Covenants was initiated on 24 September 1834 when the Kirtland High Council nominated a committee composed of Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, Oliver Cowdery, and Frederick G. Williams, principles in the Literary Firm, to "arrange the items of doctrine" for publication. Although this new scripture had not yet been returned from the bindery on 17 August 1835, a general church assembly was convened to introduce the publishing committee's labors. After a hymn, Cowdery arose and introduced the "Book of doctrine and covenants of the church of the Latter Day Saints" on behalf of the committee. Rigdon then spoke briefly, after which Elder John Smith, leader of the Kirtland high council, "bore record that the revelations in said book were true, and that the lectures on faith were judiciously arranged and compiled, and were profitable for doctrine." The entire work was then canonized by common consent.

In addition to Rigdon's profound influence on educational programs, he was still the church's principal advocate with the masses. He authored most of the consequential essays published in the Messenger and Advocate, the Mormon newspaper at Kirtland; preached at religious services, funerals, weddings, and other public functions; and bestowed personal blessings on grateful Saints. On 13 January 1835, for example, all newly-elected members of the Kirtland High Council were ordained by Rigdon, Joseph Smith, and Hyrum Smith. Joseph Smith's personal diary records that "Many great and glorious blessings were pronounced upon the heads of these councilors by President Sidney Rigdon who was spokesman of the occasion."

But Rigdon, who had difficulty containing his fervency, could also easily become belligerent,

particularly when challenged. Joseph Smith, who did not immediately gain the upper hand, recognized early on that his prickly and arrogant spokesman could quickly erupt. The prophet's 19 November 1833 diary entry, written in his own hand, depicts his thoughts on Rigdon's disposition after the two returned from a lengthy mission to New York and Canada:

Brother Sidney is a man whom I love but he is not capable of that pure and steadfast love for those who are his benefactors as should possess the breast of a man a President of the Church of Christ. This with some other little things such as a selfish and independence of mind which are too often manifest, destroys the confidence of those who would lay down their lives for him. But notwithstanding these things he is a very great and good man. A man of great power of words and he can gain the friendship of his hearers very quickly. He is a man whom God will uphold if he will continue faithful to his calling. O God grant that he may for the Lord's sake.

Continuing in Oliver Cowdery's handwriting, the journal entry reads:

...And again, blessed be Brother Sidney, also notwithstanding he shall be high and lifted up, yet he shall bow down under the yoke like unto an ass that coucheth beneath his burden, that learneth his master's will by the stroke of the rod, Thus saith the Lord. Yet the Lord will have mercy on him and he shall bring forth much fruit.... Blessed are his generations. Nevertheless, one shall hunt after them as a man hunteth after an ass that hath strayed in the wilderness, and straitway findeth him and bringeth him into the fold. Thus shall the Lord watch over his generation that they may be saved.

In June 1833, six months after the Saints were commanded to build a temple, they had purchased the land but not yet begun construction. On 1 June they were chastised in a revelation for delaying the project. "Ye have sinned against me a very grievous sin," the disclosure began, "in that ye have not considered the great commandment in all things, that I have given unto you concerning the building of mine house." Church members were admonished to keep the commandments, whereby they would find the means necessary to build the temple. "Let the house be built," the revelation continued, "not after the manner of the world," but "after the manner which I shall show unto three of you [Smith, Rigdon, Williams], whom ye shall appoint and ordain unto this power." The revelation then gave a general description of the edifice (D&C 95:3, 11-17).

Truman O. Angell, later to become official church architect in Salt Lake City, stated:

I did not go to Kirtland until the fall of 1835. At this time I went to work upon the Kirtland Temple.... F. G. Williams came into the Temple about the time the main hall first floor was ready for dedication. He was asked, how does the house look to you. He answered that it looked to him like the model he had seen.

He said President Joseph, Sidney Rigdon, and himself were called to come before the Lord and the model was shown to them. He said the vision of the Temple was thus shown them and he could not see the difference between it and the House as built.

Orson Pratt added this important confirmation:

When the Lord commanded this people to build a house in the land of Kirtland... he gave them the pattern by vision from heaven, and commanded them to build that house according to that pattern and order; to have the architecture, not in accordance with architecture devised by men, but to have everything constructed in that house according to the heavenly pattern that he by his voice had inspired to his servants.

Construction did not get underway until the summer of 1833. Thereafter, nearly every able-bodied man and woman in Kirtland contributed to the massive public works project. During the Zion's Camp march, when most men were absent from town between 5 May and mid-August 1834, work continued under the supervision of Rigdon and Joseph Smith, Sr., but little was accomplished until the labor force returned. Rigdon's role in exhorting the Saints to complete the edifice was pivotal. Mormon apostle Heber C. Kimball, speaking of Rigdon's involvement with the temple project, later said that "he frequently used to go upon the walls of the building both by night and day frequently wetting the walls with his tears, crying aloud to the Almighty to send means whereby we might accomplish the building."

Even before completion, the Kirtland temple hosted educational classes, priesthood meetings, and church councils, as well as other activities. The rather traditional appearance of the structure is an accurate reflection of the relatively uncomplicated Mormon behavioral and theological tenets of the 1830s. For all practical purposes the temple functioned as a meetinghouse. The prophet in his diary often called it a chapel. Very little uniquely Mormon ritual existed when the building was begun, despite frequent hints from the prophet about a "glorious endowment that God has in store for the faithful." Smith promised followers bountiful blessings upon completion as a palliative to those who objected to committing meager resources to such a vast enterprise. But the eventual conferring of specific endowments in Illinois in a prescribed ritual and the development of the sealing ceremony were not yet contemplated and did not impact the planning

of the temple.

In preparation for the more general endowment of the Holy Spirit, Smith and Rigdon presided over a series of ceremonies involving washings and anointings designed to purify priesthood holders. The first ordinance conducted in the partially completed temple was a foot-washing ceremony.

The first ordinance administered in the temple was on 21 January 1836. "*At about three o'clock P.M.,*" Oliver Cowdery wrote, *we "assembled in our office garret in the temple, having all things prepared for the occasion, with presidents Joseph Smith, Jr., F. G. Williams, Sidney Rigdon, Hyrum Smith, David Whitmer, John Whitmer, and Elder John Corrill, and washed our bodies with pure water before the Lord, preparatory to the anointing with the holy oil."* He added that *"after we were washed, our bodies were perfumed with a sweet smelling ousherous wash."* At early candlelight Rigdon and the other members of the First Presidency met in the temple's west room to *"attend to the ordinance of anointing our heads with holy oil."* The Kirtland and Zion high councils met in two adjoining rooms in prayer while the ordinance was performed.

Joseph Smith's diary records that visions were opened, allowing some to see *"the face of the Saviour"* while others were *"ministered unto by holy angels."* In a rare first-hand account of his own ability as a seer, the prophet described the glories of the Celestial Kingdom of God, where he saw, in addition to his deceased brother Alvin, all children who died before arriving at the age of accountability.

On the following day, after the remarkable visions and manifestations had waned, the participants regrouped and spent their entire study hour *"rehearsing to each other the glorious scenes that occurred on the preceding evening, while attending to the ordinance of holy anointing."* Later that evening, the same blessing and anointing was administered for the Quorum of the Twelve and the presidency of the Seventy. Rigdon then concluded the services by *"invoking the benediction of heaven upon the Lord's anointed which he did in an eloquent manner."* Afterwards the congregation shouted a loud hosannah and *"the gift of tongues fell upon us in mighty power, angels mingled their voices with ours, while their presence was in our midst and unceasing praises swelled our bosoms for the space of half an hour."*

Such spiritual manifestations attended most meetings conducted during this period. It was a time of rejoicing, long to be remembered by those in attendance. The pentecostal manifestations enjoyed during these temple services would shortly thereafter be imparted to the general Saints during the building's dedicatory services. On 27 March 1836, Rigdon, who had prayed so fervently for the Lord to send means for the temple's completion, co-presided with Joseph Smith during the dedicatory exercises and appears to have been in charge of the proceedings. The newspaper account published in the Messenger and Advocate noted that the congregation began to assemble before 8:00 a.m. The first floor sanctuary filled within minutes of the doors opening. The vestibule then filled, after which more of the faithful gathered around open windows. The rest were urged to hold services of their own in a schoolhouse west of the temple. So many were unable to attend the first service that church leaders promised to repeat the agenda the following Sunday.

"One thousand persons were now silently and solemnly waiting to hear the word of the Lord from the mouth of his servants in the sacred desk," the newspaper noted. Rigdon began by reading the 96th and 24th Psalms. The choir then rendered "Ere Long The Vail," after which Rigdon, *"in an able, devout and appropriate manner, addressed the throne of Grace."* After the prayer the choir sang "O Happy Souls." Rigdon, ever a cornucopia of biblical interpretation, then took the stand and delivered a two-and-one-half-hour dedicatory sermon, his text Matthew 8:18-20

During his dedicatory sermon, a newspaper reporter noted, Rigdon *"drew tears from many eyes"* by rehearsing the toils, privations, and anxieties of those who had labored on the building. Waxing poetic he recalled the travail of *"those who had wet [the walls] with their tears, in the silent shades of night, while they were praying to the God of Heaven, to protect them, and stay the unhallowed hands of ruthless spoilers, who had uttered a prophecy when the foundation was laid, that the walls would never be reared."*⁴¹ When Rigdon referred to the Savior's lament that he *"hath nowhere to lay his head,"* the reporter noted, *"his whole soul appeared to be fired with his subject."* By the time he reached his conclusion, *"we can truly say,"* added the reporter *no one unacquainted with the manner of delivery and style of our speaker can, from reading form any adequate idea of the powerful effect he is capable of producing in the minds of his hearers: And to say on this occasion he showed himself master of his subject and did well, would be doing him*

injustice; to say he acquitted himself with honor or did very well, would be detracting from his real merit; and to say that he did exceeding well; would be only halting praise.

After bringing the audience to this pinnacle, Rigdon introduced Joseph Smith, Jr., and presented him to the church as a prophet and seer. After the various quorums voted to sustain Smith, the congregation sang "Hosanna—Now Let Us Rejoice." Following a twenty-minute intermission the service reconvened and the prophet read the dedicatory prayer. He thanked God for the means to complete the temple, for the Saints' dedication, and for the gospel of Jesus. He prayed for the welfare of the church, for the members of the presiding bodies, for the leaders of nations, for the children of Israel, and for all humankind.

Following his prayer, the choir sang W. W. Phelps's "The Spirit of God Like a Fire Is Burning," after which the Saints partook of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. The hymn and sacred ritual thrilled the congregation. At this point in the services, many later attested, an extraordinary outpouring of spiritual power was bestowed on the faithful. Eliza R. Snow wrote, "*The ceremonies of that dedication may be rehearsed, but no mortal language can describe the heavenly manifestations on that memorable day. Angels appeared to some, while a sense of divine presence was realized by all present, and each heart was filled with joy inexpressible and full of glory.*"

Others testified to divine manifestations during various portions of the dedicatory program. During Rigdon's first prayer President Frederick G. Williams saw an angel enter a window, take a seat beside Joseph Smith, Sr., and remain throughout most of the service. Heber C. Kimball described the individual: "*He was tall, had black eyes and white hair, and stooped shoulders, and his garment was whole, extending to near his ankles on his feet he had sandals. He was sent to accept of the dedication.*"⁴⁴ Lydia Knight remembered that Smith arose during the service and told the congregation "*the personage was Jesus, as the dress described was that of our Savior, it being in some respects different to the clothing of the angels.*"

David Whitmer reported seeing three angels pass through the south aisle and seat themselves in the congregation. George A. Smith summarized the experience: "*There came a shock on the house like the sound of a mightily rushing wind, and almost every man in the house arose, and hundreds of them were speaking in tongues, prophesying or declaring visions, almost with one voice.*" The service was brought to a close about 4:00 p.m. Hyrum Smith and Sidney Rigdon made a few closing remarks prior to Rigdon's short benediction. The congregation then ended the meeting with a shout, "*Hosanna! Hosanna! Hosanna to God and the Lamb.*" They repeated this exclamation three times, sealing each series with three amens.

One week after the dedication, on 3 April 1836, the prophet and Oliver Cowdery, his principle assistant in transcribing the Book of Mormon, went to a pulpit in the west end of the Kirtland temple. Lowering curtains that hung from the ceiling, they knelt and began to pray. As they meditated, Smith later recorded, the Savior appeared before them, standing on the breastwork of their pulpit, and formally restored to them the fullest authority to conduct his work. Following this vision, the prophet attested to seeing Moses, Elias, and Elijah, each entrusting to them the power of the holy priesthood.

Elijah said that "*the keys of this dispensation are committed into your hands, and by this ye may know that the great and dreadful day of the Lord is near, even at the doors*" (D&C 110). The pronouncement, claimed to fulfill the final prophecy of the Old Testament found in Malachi 4:5-6, implied that a significant restoration had occurred. A holy temple existed where Christ could dwell and manifest himself on the earth at will. The last days were officially inaugurated, and God's authority was fully restored to the first authentic prophet since Biblical times.

The temple seemed to possess its own spirit, an intrinsic sacredness. Orson Pratt later wrote:

God was there, his angels were there, the Holy Ghost was in the midst of the people, the visions of the Almighty were opened to the minds of the servants of the living God; the veil was taken from the minds of many; they saw the heavens opened; they beheld the angels of God; they heard the voice of the Lord; and they were filled from the crown of their heads to the soles of their feet with the power and inspiration of the Holy Ghost.... In that Temple, set apart by the servants of God, and dedicated by a prayer that was written by inspiration, the people were blessed as they never had been blessed for generations and generations.

Nevertheless this edifice, the spiritual touchstone of the period, was savored only briefly. Just six months after the dedication, discontent within the fold became evident. By

late 1837 internal unrest turned into open dissension, culminating in the abandonment of Kirtland and the temple the Saints had struggled so ardently to build.

We can conclude that that Sidney Rigdon played a significant role in the restoration of the Gospel and could be classed as an important forerunner.