
The Doctrine of Gathering

D&C 37:3

Of the doctrine of gathering, the Prophet Joseph Smith wrote, “All that the prophets have written, from the days of righteous Abel, down to the last man that has left any testimony on record for our consideration, in speaking of the salvation of Israel in the last days, goes directly to show that it consists in the work of gathering” (see Deuteronomy 30:1–4; Revelation 21:3; 3 Nephi 20:22; Ether 13:1–12).¹

In December 1830, eight months after the organization of the Church, Joseph Smith received this revelation calling upon Church members in New York to assemble in the state of Ohio to welcome Oliver Cowdery as he returned from the borders of the Lamanites.

Although the January 2, 1831, entry in the *Journal History of the Church* reads, “The Saints manifested unshaken confidence in the great work [in] which they were engaged, and all rejoiced under the blessings of the gospel,” the doctrine of gathering led to heated divisions among the converts in New York.² Some accepted the doctrine as the word of God while others refused to acknowledge the directive as coming from the Lord.

Even stalwarts like the families of the Whitmers and Knights with some reluctance left their homes, farms, and shops in New York to obey the divine directive. Peter Whitmer Sr. sold his Fayette acreage and farmhouse for \$2,200 before leaving. Other converts sold their properties but not at such a favorable return. “As might be expected, we were obliged to make great sacrifices of our property,” penned Newel Knight.³ But to some the words of convert Phoebe Carter were representative of their real sacrifice: “When the time came for my departure I dared not trust myself to say farewell; so I wrote my good-byes

¹ Letter to the Elders of the Church, 16 November 1835, 2. Joseph Smith Papers.

² *Journal History of the Church*, January 2, 1831.

³ “Newel Knight’s Journal,” *Scraps of Biography, Faith-Promoting Series. Designed for the Instruction and Encouragement of Young Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1883), 10:68.

to each, and leaving them on my table, ran downstairs and jumped into the carriage. Thus I left the beloved home of my childhood to link my life with the saints of God.”⁴

The Prophet Joseph and his wife Emma were the first of the New York Saints to arrive in Kirtland, Ohio. As for Oliver Cowdery, he did not join them until late August 1831, about eight months after this revelation was received by Joseph Smith.

As to the Prophet Joseph Smith and his followers gathering to Ohio, not all local residents were pleased. The editor of the *Painesville Telegraph* expressed discomfort at seeing “about two hundred men, women and children, of the deluded followers of Jo Smith’s Bible speculation, have arrived on our coast . . . from New York.” The editor feared, “If the growth of the Church were not soon halted, inhabitants of Kirtland would be governed by the revelations of the Mormon Prophet.”

So great were the number of New York Saints arriving in Kirtland that one journalist announced the “whole world” would soon be living in rural Kirtland.⁵ His prediction was absurd. However, available housing in the area was soon filled.

⁴ Phebe Carter quote, in Edward W. Tullidge, *The Women of Mormondom* (1877), 142.

⁵ *Painesville Telegraph*, May 17, 1831, and April 17, 1835.