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# Ziba Peterson

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(1810–1849)

D&C 32; 58:60

Ziba was living in Macedon, New York, about four miles from Palmyra, at the time of his baptism on April 18, 1830.<sup>1</sup> He was ordained an elder in June 1830 at the first conference of the Church and was one of six elders present when “the Holy Ghost was poured upon us in a miraculous manner—many of our number prophesied, whilst others had the heavens opened to their view.”<sup>2</sup>

In October 1830 the Lord recognized the desire of the elders to know His will “as to whether elders should be sent at that time to the Indian tribes in the West” (D&C 32: Introduction). Ziba Peterson was one of four elders called to be a missionary to the Lamanites. The others were Oliver Cowdery, Parley P. Pratt, and Peter Whitmer Jr. (see D&C 32:1–3).

“As soon as this revelation was received,” said Mother Smith, “Emma Smith, and several other sisters, began to make arrangements to furnish those who were set apart for this mission, with the necessary clothing.”<sup>3</sup> On October 17, 1830, Ziba and his companions left Fayette, New York, on what would become a fifteen-hundred-mile journey to the borders of the Lamanites. Along the way, they preached to the Cattaraugus Indians near Buffalo, New York; the Wyandots in Sandusky, Ohio; and settlers in the Kirtland area. About fifty miles west of Kirtland, the missionaries stopped at the Simeon Carter home. When a warrant was served against Parley P. Pratt in the Carter home, Ziba was designated to accompany him to the nearby courtroom to resolve

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<sup>1</sup> See Irene Johnson and Kahlile Mehr, “The Other Missionary—Ziba Peterson” (n.p., July 10, 1991), 2.

<sup>2</sup> History, 1836–1856, volume A-1 [23 December 1805–30 August 1834], 41. Joseph Smith Papers.

<sup>3</sup> Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 190. Joseph Smith Papers.

the issue. During the night court proceeding, Parley invited Ziba to sing to the judge. He sang the hymn "Oh How Happy Are They." The exasperated judge jailed Parley but allowed Ziba to rejoin his other missionary companions.

It was not until December 1830 that missionaries to the Lamanites arrived on the western frontier of the United States. On April 8, 1831, Ziba and companion Peter Whitmer Jr. preached to the Indians residing on the banks of the Missouri River. Ziba later preached with Oliver Cowdery in Lafayette County, Missouri and in Lone Jack, a frontier community in southeastern Missouri.

On August 1, 1831, in Jackson County, Missouri, the Prophet Joseph Smith received a revelation chastening Ziba for trying to hide his sins: "Let that which has been bestowed upon Ziba Peterson be taken from him, and let him stand as a member in the church, and labor with his own hands, with the brethren, until he is sufficiently chastened for all his sins; for he confesseth them not, and he thinketh to hide them" (D&C 58:60). Three days later, Ziba confessed his sins, "which was satisfactory to the Church," and professed his testimony of the Restoration.<sup>4</sup> He was re-ordained an elder on October 2, 1832, by Lyman Wight. In May 1833 Ziba voluntarily withdrew from Church fellowship. A month later on June 25, 1833, he was excommunicated and delivered "over to the buffetings of Satan."<sup>5</sup>

Ziba did not face religious persecution in Jackson County. Because he had renounced his faith, he resided comfortably in the county as his former friends were being driven from their homes and forced across the Missouri River. Ziba labored as a farmer to support his family, except in the winter months. In stormy weather, he was a schoolteacher. By 1840 Ziba had moved to Lafayette County and was living next door to his father-in-law, Thomas Hooper.

Eight years later, he and his family bid farewell to family and friends in Missouri and journeyed to Northern California. His daughter Mary recalled the circumstances of their departure: "Although at that time only a little child of six years of age, the sadness of that parting has remained with me through life. . . . The captain giving his orders,

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<sup>4</sup> Donald Q. Cannon and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *Far West Record: Minutes of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1830–1844* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983), 9.

<sup>5</sup> Letter to Church leaders in Jackson County, Missouri, June 15, 1833. Joseph Smith Papers.

teamsters yoking their oxen. . . . Many relatives travelled with us yet for several hours, delaying till the last moment the parting.”<sup>6</sup>

In October 1848 Ziba and his family arrived at their destination—Dry Diggins, a mining town in Northern California. Ziba gained prominence with the miners and was elected sheriff. The *Alta California* newspaper printed a report of his hanging three desperadoes who had stolen six hundred dollars and threatened to kill a gambling house proprietor.<sup>7</sup> The hanging was the first “legal” hanging in California and the reason why Dry Diggins was renamed “Hangtown.” Ziba died soon after the hangings in 1849 at age 39. His widow left Hangtown and moved to Napa Valley. She purchased a lot in Sonoma from Lilburn W. Boggs, the former governor of Missouri.

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<sup>6</sup> Marjorie C. Pitts, “The Story of Mary Peterson Clark,” as cited in Johnson and Mehr, “The Other Missionary—Ziba Peterson,” 10.

<sup>7</sup> *Alta California*, February 8, 1849.