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Wilford Woodruff, ca. 1853. Daguerreotype by Marsena Cannon.
Wilford Woodruff and Zion’s Camp: Baptism by Fire and the Spiritual Confirmation of a Future Prophet

Thomas G. Alexander

During his youth in Connecticut, Wilford Woodruff, who in 1889 became the fourth president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, turned his feet to the path that led to religious conversion.1 His journey eventually led to his baptism into the Mormon Church in 1833. The following year he accepted a call to march with Zion’s Camp. Wilford Woodruff was rebaptized by the fires of that experience, confirming his faith in Jesus Christ and causing him to devote the remainder of his life to the restored gospel.

The Woodruff Family’s Search for a Religion

Descendants of some of the oldest settlers of Farmington, Connecticut’s northern quarter, then called Northington and later organized as the town of Avon, Wilford’s relatives were among the community’s most prominent citizens. His grandfather Eldad, his father, Aphek, and his uncles Ozem and Eldad Jr. owned property and businesses. At times they held responsible offices such as tithingmen; tax collectors; agents to collect the minister’s salary and firewood; and overseers, prudential committee members, and committeemen for the local schools.

In addition to serving as community leaders, they were prominent Congregational laymen. Until 1818, Congregationalism remained Connecticut’s established church, and unless citizens could prove membership in another Christian church, they had to pay taxes to support the established ministry. Still, by 1815, as the War of 1812 drew to an end, the state had become a hotbed of religious change.2

After the war and as disestablishment neared, members of the Woodruff family moved in different religious directions. Aphek, who suffered business and personal financial reverses at the end of the war, investigated the Baptists for a time, but by 1830 he had rejected Christianity as he then knew it. However, he eventually converted to Mormonism. Eldad Jr. remained within the Congregationalist fold, while Ozem helped to organize the Northington Baptist congregation. Ozem, too, eventually converted to Mormonism, though he never gathered with the Saints in the West as his brother Aphek did.
Despite his schooling at Farmington Academy at the feet of the Reverend Noah Porter, a Congregational minister, Wilford let his commitment to Congregationalism die. Instead of following his father's course into irreligion or Ozem's into the Baptist Church, he became a seeker. He and several other family members and friends studied the Bible and tried to live by its teachings while searching for authentic biblical Christianity—the primitive Church.

During his search, Woodruff and his older brother Azmon came under the influence of an unorthodox Episcopalian named Robert Mason. A resident of Simsbury, the town adjoining Avon to the north, Mason had gained a local reputation as a prophet. The older man influenced the young and impressionable Woodruff boys by relating to them a vision he had experienced in about 1800. The vision had convinced Mason that he would never find Christ's church and kingdom before his death, but he prophesied that Wilford would.

By 1833, Wilford and Azmon had purchased a farm near Richland, New York, a town near Lake Ontario about forty miles north of Syracuse. In late December 1833, Mormon missionaries Zerah Pulsipher and Elijah Cheney began proselyting in Richland. The message they brought, the priesthood healings they performed, and other charismatic gifts they manifested led Wilford and Azmon to believe that they preached the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. On December 31, 1833, Pulsipher baptized them.

In early January 1834, Pulsipher organized a branch of the LDS Church in Richland. He ordained Azmon and Noah Holton, a former Freewill Baptist minister, as elders, and Wilford as a teacher. For a time, Wilford, Azmon, and other converts helped the missionaries spread the gospel throughout the Richland area.

Although the two brothers both converted to Mormonism, the divergent responses of Wilford and Azmon to a series of events that began in early 1834 led them to move in separate directions. Wilford accepted the call to march in the expedition to relieve the beleaguered Saints in Missouri, and his faith was strengthened by that experience. Azmon, who rejected the call, remained on the farm in New York, withdrew from the Church, and chastised Wilford for his errant ways. Although several decades later Azmon rejoined the Saints and moved to Salt Lake City where he lived until his death, he would never play the central role in Mormonism that his younger brother did.

The Call to Zion's Camp

The call that changed Wilford's life came in April 1834 from Parley P. Pratt, an early convert to the Church and former Disciples of Christ (Campbellite) minister. After Woodruff accepted this call, everything else in his
life became secondary. Just as his conversion had led him to a new religious life, the experiences that followed the call from Pratt confirmed his spiritual rebirth while it stripped away the trappings of his previous temporal life. In the most profound sense, Wilford experienced an altered insight as he adopted a new mission.

**The Saints in Missouri.** The background for Wilford’s call lay three and one-half years earlier in western Missouri. In August 1831, Joseph Smith and a group of Mormon converts originally from Colesville, New York, met near Independence, Jackson County, Missouri, to lay the foundation for an American Zion—the New Jerusalem. Joseph designated Jackson County as a place of refuge, the holy place where Church members could escape the “abomination of desolation” and the “tribulation” prophesied in Matthew chapter 24 to precede Jesus Christ’s Second Coming. In Jackson County, Joseph called the Saints to live together as a covenant community in a religious order called the law of consecration and stewardship or the united order of Enoch. He also instructed them to build a temple where they could perform sacred rites.

Between 1831 and 1833, the Mormon community in Jackson County grew to about twelve hundred people. Under the united order, members purchased and consecrated real and personal property to the Church, some of which they received back as “inheritances.” They accounted for these inheritances to Bishop Edward Partridge, a Massachusetts native, former Campbellite, and successful businessman who manufactured hats in Painesville, Ohio, at the time the Latter-day Saint missionaries contacted him. Joseph’s revelations directed members to return their surplus property to Partridge at the end of each year. In return, he was to endow inheritances for poor Saints. The Church also began publishing a newspaper under the editorship of William W. Phelps, a native of New Hampshire who had engaged in local politics in New York and had edited a newspaper.

As the surge of Mormon converts swelled the Jackson County population, non-Mormon settlers became increasingly distressed. The three thousand people who lived in Jackson County before the Mormons arrived had built a thriving frontier community. Generally from the South and by culture Protestants or rough frontiersmen, these old settlers rejected as fanaticism or knavery the charismatic gifts and prophecy that had attracted the Woodruff brothers and others to the Latter-day Saints. Protestants who believed in a closed canon of scripture condemned as blasphemous the Mormon claim to divine revelation. Many noted the absence of slaves among the northern-born Mormons and denounced the impoverished Saints, whom they called “the very dregs of that society from which they came, lazy, idle, and vicious.”

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The Saints defended their unorthodox beliefs and practices and their communitarian lifestyle while admitting their relative poverty. They traded with one another, acquired inheritances, and practiced their new and unpopular restorationist religion. Far from apologizing, the Saints claimed that their relative poverty and communitarian religious lives merely provided further evidence of the restoration of New Testament Christianity.10

At a mass meeting on July 20, 1833, the old settlers of Jackson County appointed a committee that presented a list of demands to the Mormons. Insisting that the Saints sell their property and leave the area, they ordered the Mormons to stop publishing their newspaper and to dismantle their other business enterprises.11

After the Mormons rejected the demands, the old settlers organized into mobs. Trashing and demolishing Phelps’s newspaper office, they destroyed the merchandise in a store owned by Algernon Sidney Gilbert, a Kirtland businessman, and they tarred and feathered Bishop Partridge and Charles Allen. From July to November, in acts of ethnic cleansing, violent mobs forced the Mormons from their homes, farms, and businesses and compelled them to flee north across the Missouri River into Clay County.12

For information on conditions in Missouri, Joseph Smith and other Church leaders living in Kirtland, Ohio, more than nine hundred miles east of Independence, relied on infrequent correspondence, sketchy or inaccurate newspaper accounts, and delayed reports from travelers.13 Trusting reports from John Corrill, who was then serving as a counselor to Bishop Partridge, Joseph Smith concluded that Missouri Governor Daniel Dunklin would help them recover their property. Whether Dunklin ever intended to supply such help is unclear, but information provided by Corrill and missionaries such as Parley Pratt and Lyman Wight led Church leaders to believe that the expelled Mormons could return to Jackson County and reclaim their inheritances if the Kirtland Saints could send a force large enough to protect them.14

**Recruitment for Zion’s Camp.** On February 24, 1834, at a meeting of the high council in Kirtland called to consider the crisis in Missouri, Joseph Smith received a revelation that laid plans for a relief expedition, generally called Zion’s Camp.15 The revelation said he was to call eight men, including Parley Pratt, to recruit an army of one hundred to five hundred Saints to help their brothers and sisters in Jackson County (D&C 103).

Following Joseph’s request, the eight began to recruit for the expedition among Mormon converts in the East and Midwest. On April 1, 1834, Pratt came to Richland with Harry Brown, a missionary who had proselyted in the Richland area. Because of the demands of farming and business interests, Wilford doubted at first that he could reasonably accept the call. Nevertheless, after contemplating the alternatives, he resolved as Pratt had
admonished to do his “duty to try to prepare” himself. Accordingly, he used “every exertion to settle” his accounts, arrange his affairs, and equip himself for the march to Missouri. He gave Amon power of attorney to dispose of the property he could not sell before leaving for Kirtland.16

On April 11, 1834, he hitched up his team and wagon and parted from Amon, Amon’s wife Elizabeth, their children, and others in the Richland area. Traveling with Harry Brown and Warren Ingles, Wilford drove across western New York and eastern Ohio to Kirtland. On the way, he became acquainted with the network of Latter-day Saints living in these areas. Wilford saw this experience as a sacred adventure, preparing him for his part in the redemption of Zion. One Sabbath on the road, he warmed to sermons by John Murdock and Orson Pratt, both former Cambellites,17 and on another day, he marveled over a draft of a plat for the City of Zion—Joseph Smith’s plan for a model community.18

Arriving on April 25 in Kirtland, Wilford spent his short stay immersing himself in the society of this rapidly growing Ohio town. Between November 1831, when the first Mormon missionaries established a branch in Kirtland, and April 1834, when Wilford arrived there, the town’s population had nearly doubled—to perhaps fifteen hundred inhabitants. Located south of a wide loop in the east branch of the Chagrin River, Kirtland lay on a crossroads formed by the Mentor Road heading north, the Chillicothe Road ambling south, and the Chardon and Willoughby Roads running east and west. In 1832, Newel K. Whitney had provided housing for Joseph Smith and his family in part of the store he owned at the crossroads. At the time of Wilford’s arrival, the Prophet was apparently living there.19

When the travelers arrived, they found Joseph Smith and his older brother Hyrum shooting at targets with a brace of pistols. A handsome, open, and affable man, this prophet, seer, and revelator invited Wilford to stay with him while he prepared for the expedition. Joseph gave Wilford a wolf skin to tan, which the Prophet planned to use to pad his wagon seat for the journey. The following day Wilford met Brigham Young and his close friend Heber C. Kimball, both Vermont natives who had converted to the Church in New York and who, like Woodruff, would both become members of the Church’s First Presidency. Young gave Woodruff a butcher knife blade and asked him to put a handle on it.20

On Sunday, April 27, Wilford heard sermons from Orson Pratt; Sidney Rigdon, a Pennsylvania native, former Baptist, former Disciple leader, and First Counselor to Joseph Smith; and Orson Hyde, originally from New Haven and a former Methodist and Cambellite. Reflecting on the sermons, Woodruff remarked that “there was more light made manifest at that meeting respecting the gospel and Kingdom of God than I had ever received from the whole Sectarian world.”21
The March of Zion’s Camp

Although Joseph Smith wanted the entire party to leave for Missouri on May 1, 1834, most were not ready. Less than a tenth of the army departed that day. Already prepared, Wilford left with the advance party for New Portage, Ohio, about fifty miles southwest of Kirtland, where they awaited the arrival of the remainder of the troops.22

Reaching New Portage on May 6, Joseph used a combination of state militia and Old Testament patterns to organize the camp into companies of ten to twelve people. Originally numbering about one hundred men, the army swelled through the addition of recruits along the way and through the arrival of about twenty men that Hyrum Smith and Lyman Wight had gathered in Michigan. At its largest, Zion’s Camp consisted of about 207 men, 11 women, and 11 children. A baggage train of some twenty-five wagons loaded with supplies for both the camp and the Missouri Saints accompanied the marchers. Like an American volunteer militia, each unit elected its own captain and assigned men as cooks, firemen, tentmakers, watermen, wagoners, runners, and commissaries.

Joseph appointed a number of men to his staff. He selected Frederick G. Williams as paymaster and banker to whom the recruits entrusted their money. A counselor in the Church’s First Presidency, Connecticut native, and physician, Williams owned some of the land in Kirtland that the early Saints settled on. Lyman Wight served as Smith’s second in command.23

Better equipped than most of the Zion’s Camp recruits, Wilford owned his team, wagon, and personal armaments. Appointed a teamster, he had charge of sixteen horses. Like the others, he furnished his own arms, but unlike some with antiquated weapons, he carried a rifle, sword, dirk, and pistol. Joseph asked for the sword, and Wilford made him a gift of it.24

Zion’s Camp took a generally straightforward route to Independence. Angling southwest to Dayton, Ohio, they turned west, traveling partly on the national road through Indianapolis and Terre Haute, Indiana, to Springfield and Jacksonville, Illinois. They crossed the Mississippi River at Louisiana, Missouri, and paralleled the Missouri River almost directly west across the Salt River. They crossed the Fishing River just inside Clay County.25

When the camp reached the Salt River, Joseph Smith, eager to secure the safe return of the Saints to Jackson County, sent Parley Pratt and Orson Hyde to Jefferson City to meet with Governor Dunklin. Waffling on what the Saints perceived as his commitment to assist the expelees, the governor refused to call out the militia to protect the Mormons. Dashing their hopes even further, he ordered Zion’s Camp not to march under arms to protect their friends and suggested that they apply to the courts for relief.

Recognizing that following Dunklin’s recommendation would leave them at the mercy of the Jackson County mob and a pack of unfriendly
judges, the Mormons continued marching west anyway. They encountered a well-armed force of perhaps three hundred men from Jackson, Ray, and Clay Counties on June 19 but escaped a potentially disastrous defeat through the intervention of a violent thunderstorm that poured large hailstones on the unprotected enemy. The tempest damaged the enemy’s clothing and arms and scattered their horses, as it swelled the Fishing River to an impassable flood. Some of the Zion’s Camp recruits protected themselves by taking refuge in a Baptist meetinghouse. On June 22, after the high water had subsided, Sheriff Cornelius Gilliam of Clay County came to the camp to discuss the impasse with the Mormons, and the Zion’s Camp leadership wrote a statement of their purposes for public dissemination.

By this time, however, disaster had struck the relief army. Beginning on June 21, a cholera epidemic that had spread from India across western Asia and into Europe and Canada before descending on the United States swept through the camp. In the epidemic’s wake, seventy people including Joseph Smith lay stricken. Thirteen of those who marched in Zion’s Camp died, including Warren Ingalls, who had accompanied Wilford since they left Richland.

Sick, discouraged, and unable to solve the conflict through state intervention or force of arms, the Mormons tried to negotiate a settlement with the Jackson County residents. This too failed, since the old settlers insisted that either they or the Mormons buy all of the property. The Mormons declined both alternatives because they did not have enough money to buy all the old settlers’ property and they refused to sell their inheritances in Zion. The Saints proposed instead to purchase the property of those who declined to live as their neighbors, paying cash within a year at the appraised price less the value of damages inflicted upon them by the mobs. The old settlers rejected this counteroffer.

Zion’s Camp marker at Mound Grove Cemetery, Independence, Missouri. The marker honors those who died in the cholera epidemic at Rush Creek, southwest of Liberty, Clay County, Missouri. The reverse of the marker is shown on page 155.
Ultimately, Zion's Camp accomplished none of its secular aims except furnishing the Missouri Saints with some clothing and supplies. Many soldiers, poorly shod and unused to such marching, experienced blistered and bloody feet, as well as illness. Moreover, the army had to contend both with spies seeking to thwart their purposes and with taunts and questions of the merely curious. However, in part because of these hardships they endured, Wilford and others found in the experience the fulfillment of the spiritual expectations awakened in their conversions.

Wilford Woodruff's Observations during the March

Significantly for the participants, the march recapitulated on the American continent the expedition of the children of Israel to redeem the Holy Land, with Joseph Smith as the Lord's prophet. "Our march," Wilford wrote, "was similar to the ancient Israelites." The members of each company prayed together. On Sundays selected brethren preached, and "Joseph often addressed us in the name of the Lord while on our journey and often while addressing the camp he was clothed upon with much of the spirit of God." Joseph Smith's teachings, Woodruff wrote, "were very inspiring & Edefying."33

A number of events along the trek struck Wilford as singularly inspiring. Near the Illinois River, they encountered a series of high mounds constructed by the region's ancient inhabitants. While digging in one mound with other militia members, Milton Holmes found a human skeleton with an arrow embedded in its back. Joseph then reported a vision about the remains. The man, Joseph explained, was a soldier by the name of Zelph, who was one of the Lamanites mentioned in the Book of Mormon, and who had died in battle under the command of a prophet named Onandagus.34 Impressed with the find, Woodruff put one of Zelph's thigh bones in his wagon and carried it to Clay County, Missouri, where he reburied it. By this symbolic act, Woodruff took Zelph as near to the New Jerusalem as he safely could.35

Other events impressed him with the power of God and the authority of Joseph Smith. All things considered, he wrote, the expedition was "a great school for us to be led by a Prophet of God a thousand miles, through cities, towns, villages, and through the wilderness." The hailstorm at Fishing River was "the mandated vengeance... gone forth from the God of Battles to protect his servants from the Destruction of their enemies."36

But the Lord had decreed punishment for the members of Zion's Camp as well. After some murmuring in camp, "Brother Joseph prophesied That in consequence of these things... a scourge awaited the camp." God punished them with cholera, which brought sickness and death.38 Wilford believed this plague fell upon the Camp because, as Joseph said, the recruits had not imparted "of their substance, as becometh saints, to the poor and afflicted among them" (D&C 105:2–4).39
Zion's Camp routes
The Effect of Zion’s Camp on Wilford Woodruff and His Family

On June 23, two days after the cholera outbreak and the day following the revelation chastising the recruits for disobedience, the Prophet ordered Lyman Wight to leave a reserve unit to care for the sick and to disperse the remainder of the camp. Wight invited Wilford, Milton Holmes, and Heman T. Hyde to spend the summer working for him at Liberty, Clay County. Wight needed capable workers, since he had contracted to make one hundred thousand bricks and to build a house for a man named Michael Arthur.40 Wilford and Wight lived in the Arthur’s home, and throughout the summer and early fall, they made bricks, cut wheat, quarried rocks, and worked as laborers.41

On July 3, 1834, before returning to Kirtland, Joseph Smith called a meeting in Arthur’s yard, where he organized a presidency and high council to govern Church affairs among the refugees in Clay County. Choosing David Whitmer as president with W. W. Phelps and John Whitmer as assistants, he then called twelve others including Lyman Wight, Parley P. Pratt, Orson Pratt, and John Murdock to the high council. Joseph remained in Liberty until July 7, when he left for eastern Clay County and then for Kirtland.42

Wilford could have returned to Kirtland or to Richland, but he decided to remain in Liberty because Joseph had asked those who could arrange their affairs to stay with the Missouri Saints.43 Wilford’s decision to abandon his previous life and remain with the Saints in Missouri deepened a breach that had opened between him and other family members after he left Richland. In August 1834, Azmon collaborated with their brother Ozem Thompson (called Thompson), who had joined him in Richland, to write Wilford a letter telling him that he (Azmon) had abandoned Mormonism. Wilford did not receive the letter until November. Opposed to Zion’s Camp from the beginning, Azmon proclaimed his pacifistic views. Citing Jesus’ teachings against violence and His admonition to turn the other cheek, Azmon questioned how God’s revelations to Joseph Smith could contradict the Savior’s counsel. He also questioned the terms under which Joseph had counseled members to gather to Kirtland or Independence. In this connection, he rejected the counsel that if his wife and children refused to gather to Zion, he should leave them and go himself. This seemed to contradict biblical teachings about the responsibility to care for his family. He found also a basic inconsistency in Joseph Smith’s teachings that Kirtland was merely a temporary gathering place. He pointed out that the feverish activity in Ohio, especially the projected temple construction, gave every indication of permanence. Thompson added a postscript in which he urged Wilford to return home to his family, invoking the name of their father, Aphek, in telling Wilford that he had “gone after such erronious [sic] principles.”44
Notwithstanding this chastisement, Wilford’s experiences in Kirtland and with Zion’s Camp and the Missouri Saints had deepened his resolve to separate himself from the world—even from his family if need be—and to devote his life to Mormonism. In an apocalyptic letter, Wilford clarified both the sorrow he felt at the cleft that separated him from his family and his conviction that he had taken the right course. He warned of the tribulations that were prophesied to precede Christ’s Second Coming. Referring to Genesis 19 and Matthew 24, he said he believed that “Lot would have been as safe to have remained in Sodom after being warned to flee out by the Angel of God, as I should have been to have remained in Richland. . . . I believe,” he wrote, “that sword, pestilence, and famine await this generation of the human family, who do not repent and turn unto God, and stand in Holy places.” In turn he pleaded for his family to accept the new revelations as from Jesus, and he denied any contradictions in the teachings of Joseph Smith.45

Earlier in the fall of 1834, Wilford had also written to his parents laying out similar arguments in different terms. In apocalyptic passages, he wrote that God had restored the new and everlasting covenant to prepare for Jesus’ Second Coming. The kingdom that God had established, as Daniel had prophesied, would break the kingdoms of the earth apart and grow to fill the whole earth. Joseph Smith, he wrote, was God’s spokesman who gave true prophecies to the world.46

Convinced of the gravity and divinity of the work he had taken up, Wilford began to keep a personal journal sometime during the last half of 1834. Seeing it in some sense a counterpart to scripture, he entitled the first volume “The First Book of Wilford.” For him the journal testified that God had received him into the new and everlasting covenant, that he stood as a witness “for the gospel of Jesus Christ,” that he willingly followed the Savior “through evil as well as good,” and that he had surrendered “himself a living sacrifice holy and acceptable unto God.” Believing in the benefit of reviewing his past life and in the duty and privilege of keeping an accurate account of his present activities, he wrote, “I shall endeavour henceforth to keep a journal of my travels that when required I may give an account of my stewardship.”47

Next he took steps to consecrate himself to the work of Jesus Christ. Lyman Wight, with whom he was living, recommended Wilford, Stephen Winchester, and Heman T. Hyde [Hide], all former Zion’s Camp members, for ordination as priests. The high council approved Wight’s recommendation, and they were ordained on November 5, 1834.48 Then, desiring to preach the gospel to the unconverted, Wilford prayed about the matter, and after Elias Higbee told him he had a strong impression that Wilford should serve, Bishop Edward Partridge called him on a mission to Arkansas, Tennessee, and Kentucky. Woodruff asked Harry Brown, whom he had known since Richland and who was ordained as an elder, to accompany him.49
Wilford Woodruff and Zion’s Camp

In a sacred act of dedication, on December 31 he signed a deed consecrating all of his property to the Church. Valued at $240, his possessions included a trunk of books, his weapons, personal items, and $150 in collectible notes. He gave his property to the Church to become “a lawful heir to the Kingdom of God even the Celestial Kingdom.” Following the biblical model, he left on his mission without purse or scrip. He would become one of the most powerful and successful missionaries in the Church, baptizing hundreds of converts in the United States and the British Isles.

Conclusion: A Life Apart

For Wilford Woodruff, as for many others, Zion’s Camp constituted a spiritual crossroad in the path he had chosen in Farmington. The experience washed away his previous temporal and spiritual life and returned him to fundamentals. In part he and the others in Zion’s Camp, in the words of Dwight Bozeman, had “lived ancient lives,” or to paraphrase Mircea Eliade, they returned symbolically to primordial times. Since they viewed Mormonism as the restoration of all things ancient and modern, the Old and New Testaments, the Book of Mormon, and Joseph’s revelations coalesced into an omnipresent spiritual unity. Woodruff perceived a nexus connecting the exodus of the children of Israel, the kingdom of God which Daniel had prophesied, the expectation of Christ’s Second Coming, the lives of Nephites and Lamanites, and the establishment of the New Jerusalem as a covenant community and refuge.

Totally immersed in the experience of Zion’s Camp, Woodruff’s life, as well as the lives of many others who participated, took on a new meaning with the Savior at its center. Little wonder that many of Mormonism’s future leadership came from Zion’s Camp recruits. Like others, Woodruff felt at once an intense desire to “go forth into the world to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ,” to “repent and turn unto God and stand in Holy places,” and “to consecrate and dedicate all their properties with themselves unto God in order to become lawful heirs to the Celestial Kingdom.”

He wanted desperately for his family and friends to share in his new spiritual life, but, rather than spurn these precious gifts, he intended to remain a subject of God’s kingdom and a member of Christ’s family instead of returning to his earthly family and to the sinful world he had left behind. A convert who had just experienced a baptism by fire or a thirsty pilgrim who had just crossed a trackless, arid wilderness to arrive at a flourishing oasis, Wilford drank in Joseph’s teachings like the water Jesus offered the Samaritan woman that quenches all thirst and springs “up into everlasting life” (John 4:14). Wilford Woodruff had emerged from Zion’s Camp as an unconditionally committed disciple of Jesus Christ under the new and everlasting covenant.
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3. Noah Porter’s son of the same name became president of Yale University.


5. The Latter-day Saints considered Matthew 24 so important that they published Joseph Smith’s revision of the chapter as part of the Pearl of Great Price in 1851 and accepted it as scripture in a general conference on October 10, 1880.

Wilford Woodruff and Zion's Camp


7. For a discussion of the development of the Mormon community in Missouri, see Warren A. Jennings, “Zion Is Fled: The Expulsion of the Mormons from Jackson County, Missouri” (Ph. D. diss., University of Florida, 1962), 10–118; the statistic is on page 105.


9. History of the Church, 1:374–76, reproduces a document written by the leaders of those in Missouri who attacked the Saints and wanted them to leave.


11. For a full list of the demands, see Jennings, “Zion Is Fled,” 138–41.


16. Woodruff, “Autobiography,” 37, 54; Woodruff, Journal, 1:7 (January–April 1834); Wilford Woodruff to Aphek and Azubah Woodruff, September 26, 1834, photocopy, Aphek Woodruff Family Papers, Archives Division, Historical Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City (hereafter cited as LDS Church Archives).


25. Backman, Heavens Resound, 183–90; see especially the map on page 183.


Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought 12 (fall 1979): 6–12. The first cholera epidemic apparently began in India, spread through the Middle East, reached the United States from Canada in 1832, and spread southward and westward from the Great Lakes region. The Zion’s Camp marker lists fifteen cholera victims. Two of those listed, Algernon S. Gilbert and Phebe Murdock, did not march with Zion’s Camp but met the expedition in Missouri.

38. Woodruff, Journal, 1:12 (June 1834); Backman, Heavens Resound, 194.
42. History of the Church, 2122–24, 136.
44. Azmon and Thompson Woodruff to Wilford Woodruff, August 9, 1834, Woodruff Correspondence, LDS Church Archives. Wilford did not receive the letter until November. Woodruff, “Autobiography,” 53–57.
47. Woodruff, Journal, 1:3. At the beginning of each year for some time he added a new title. Thus, his journal for 1836 is entitled “The Second Book of Willford for 1836,” apparently since he started it at the first of the year rather than late in the previous year as in the case of the first book.
49. Journal History of the Church, January 13, 1835, LDS Church Archives, microfilm copy in Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.
50. Woodruff, Journal, 1:16–17 (December 31, 1834). I find no evidence that he received any of this property back as an inheritance, and he traveled on his mission without visible means of support.
53. Wilford Woodruff to Azmon and Thompson Woodruff, November 29, 1834.
55. Wilford Woodruff to Aphek and Azubah Woodruff, Liberty, Missouri, September 26, 1834, Aphek Woodruff Family Papers, LDS Church Archives.