BENJAMIN FRANKLIN JOHNSON:
COLONIZER, PUBLIC SERVANT, AND CHURCH LEADER

A Thesis
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In Partial Fulfillment
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by
E. Dale LeBaron
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DEDICATED TO THE LIFE

OF

A NOBLE ANCESTOR

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN JOHNSON
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The tree that never had to fight
For sun and sky and air and light,
That stood out in the open plain,
And always got its share of rain,
Never became a forest king,
But lived and died a scrubby thing.

The man who never had to toil,
By hand or mind mid life's turmoil
Who never had to win his share,
Of sun and sky and light and air,
Never became a manly man,
But lived and died as he began.

Good timber does not grow with ease;
The stronger wind, the tougher trees;
The farther sky, the greater length;
The more the storm, the more the strength;
By sun and cold, by rain and snow,
In tree or man good timber grows.

Where thickest stands the forest growth,
We find the patriarchs of both,
And they hold converse with the stars
Whose broken branches show the scars
Of many winds and much of strife.
This is the common law of life.

----Author Unknown

It is believed that men's lives are shaped by the challenges which
they face and accept. The life of Benjamin Franklin Johnson is a life
filled with challenges, most of which were accepted and overcome.

His life is closely interwoven with the early history of the
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and was greatly influenced
by its doctrines and leaders. From a youth of thirteen when he first
accepted the teachings of this church, Benjamin remained loyal to its
precepts and endeavored to further its cause. He became a trusted
friend of the church leaders and was loyal to them. During his eighty-seven years Benjamin served faithfully under six Presidents of the Church. Through years of valiant service as a colonizer and legislator, he became known as one of the most prominent and influential men in the State of Utah.\(^1\) He also made various contributions in other areas.

The purpose of this study is to examine the memoirs of Benjamin Franklin Johnson and other documents dealing with his life to determine his contributions as a pioneer and colonizer, as a public servant, and as a missionary and church leader.

From the year 1831, the year following the organization of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, until the time of his death in 1905, he participated in many of the prominent incidents of Church history and he had many unusual experiences as he moved with it. In time, he became the trusted friend of the Prophet Joseph Smith and served as a member of the Council of Fifty from the time of its organization. Being taught the doctrine of plural marriage by the Prophet, Benjamin practiced and defended it. With the movement of the Church to the west, he struggled as a pioneer and colonizer. Besides his church assignments, including missionary work, much of his effort and time was devoted to serving in public office.

In this work the writer has drawn from many sources of information, but the main single source is the autobiography of the subject, titled "My Life's Review." This is Benjamin's personal journal which was begun

\(^{1}\)Typical of such evaluations are found in: Noble Warrum, Utah Since Statehood (Chicago-Salt Lake City: The S. J. Clark Publishing Co., 1919), II, p. 905.
in 1885, while he was in hiding to escape prosecution for practicing plural marriage. The writer recognizes the problem of historical accuracy when the narration of events is written many years after their occurrence. Benjamin's narrative reflects a vivid memory of events which are presented from a distant point of view—he being in his late years at the time of writing. His devotion to the Church and his implicit faith that it represented the Restored Kingdom of God often colors his interpretations of the past. His reason for writing his life's story so late in his life is given as follows:

... I ... took up another labor that had impressed itself for years upon my mind as a stern and nervous duty—that of writing for the benefit of my children, "A Life Review," to record the principle events of my life. From this duty I shrank for years and tried to excuse myself from it. But a voice within my soul has continually urged me to this effort, which has so long appeared nervous. But now, feeling I have no further excuse I commenced to write "A Life Review" from my early childhood.1 Italics, the writer's.

This large journal is now within a vault at the Historian's Office of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Salt Lake City. It has been published into a book, entitled "My Life's Review." The writer has examined both the personal journal and the publication, and has found the book to be, with few exceptions, a reasonable facsimile of the hand-written journal.

In addition to the journal, the writer has found much information from Church publications, newspapers, affidavits, and numerous letters written by, or to Benjamin Johnson. There are also various other writings by Benjamin, including articles and diaries, which were accessible to the writer.
CHAPTER II

FAMILY BACKGROUND AND YOUTH

For all who come into this land, there is a place, a page, where each may start his own life story, free to write it as he will, in his own hand, by his own works, and according to his own stature. In that freedom, Benjamin Franklin Johnson chose his place and his page. His life's work seems to have been shaped largely by his home life and his deep religious convictions. His life story can only be evaluated by looking at his contributions to his posterity, his church, and his country.

Benjamin Franklin Johnson, born July 23, 1818, in Pomfret, Chataqua County, New York, was the tenth child in a family of sixteen children born to Ezekiel and Julia Hills Johnson.\(^1\) His parents, who were descen-

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\(^1\)Family genealogy of Ezekiel and Julia Hills Johnson indicates they were born in Massachusetts and married January 12, 1801. They had the following children:

- Joel Hills Johnson  b. 1802, Mar. 23 Grafton, Mass.
- Nancy Marie Johnson  b. 1803, Northborough, Mass.
- Delcina Diademia Johnson  b. 1806, Nov. 19 Westfork, Vt.
- Julia Ann Johnson  b. 1808, Nov. 9 Westfork, Vt.
- David Johnson  b. 1810, Sept. 10 Westfork, Vt.
- Susan Ellen Johnson  b. 1814, Dec. 16 Pomfret, N.Y.
- Joseph Ellis Johnson  b. 1817, Apr. 28 Pomfret, N.Y.
- Benjamin Franklin Johnson  b. 1818, July 28 Pomfret, N.Y.
- Mary Maria Johnson  b. 1820, Feb. 7 Pomfret, N.Y.
- Elmer Wood Johnson  b. 1822, May 26 Pomfret, N.Y.
- George Washington Johnson  b. 1823, Feb. 19 Pomfret, N.Y.
- William Derby Johnson  b. 1824, Oct. 27 Pomfret, N.Y.
- Esther Melita Johnson  b. 1827, Jan. 27 Pomfret, N.Y.
- Amos Partridge Johnson  b. 1829, Jan. 15 Pomfret, N.Y.
dants of the Pilgrims, were born in Massachusetts; but like many other early Americans they moved from place to place along the frontier taking up ground, farming, building homes, etc., until in 1814 they settled in western New York.\textsuperscript{1}

Benjamin was even proud of his Puritan and Mayflower progenitors who he claimed, were the first of America's sons to offer their blood as the price of freedom and liberty for their children.\textsuperscript{2} Among these was a grandfather who fell at the battle of Bunker Hill.

The Johnson family was closely knit unit, united by the inspiration of a beautiful and loving mother.\textsuperscript{3} Julia was especially diligent in providing moral and spiritual training for her many children. Joel Hills, the eldest in the family, later observed:

\begin{quote}
I was so carefully instructed by a pious mother that I dared not do anything that would displease the Lord or my parents. As soon as I could read, she gave me a small New Testament which I carried in my pocket.\textsuperscript{4}
\end{quote}

During the first few years of his life, Benjamin was taken regularly to Sunday meetings at the Presbyterian church.\textsuperscript{5}

Through close association with his father, Benjamin developed a love for nature and pioneering that was to become a major part of his

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{1}Preston Nibley, \textit{Stalwarts of Mormonism} (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Co., 1954), p. 68.
\item \textsuperscript{2}B. F. Johnson, \textit{Mormonism as an Issue} (n.d.), p. 5. This was a pamphlet written to editor, Arizona Republican (on file in the Church Historian's Library, Salt Lake City, Utah).
\item \textsuperscript{4}Joel H. Johnson, \textit{Voice From the Mountains} (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructors Office, 1887).
\item \textsuperscript{5}Johnson, \textit{My Life's Review}, p. 2.
\end{itemize}
life. His childhood experiences of helping his father clear deep forests and of gathering forest nuts, wild fruits, and flowers with his brothers and sisters gave him precious memories throughout his life. The rugged life on the American frontier gave the boy Benjamin an appreciation and understanding of work and industry. The family members worked together to make their own cloth from wool, flax, and linen and to make their own cheese, butter, honey, sugar, soap, and candles. ¹

These experiences proved to be of great value in Benjamin's later assignments as a colonizer.

After years of struggling to clear the land and vainly striving to raise food for his large family, Ezekiel sought escape through liquor. Being a very sensitive child, Benjamin vividly recalls:

Neither his labors nor his love for his family seemed to diminish, yet the fiend of unhappiness had entered our home to break the bonds of union between our parents and to destroy the happiness of their children. In looking back over my childhood it almost seems that I was born to be a child of sorrow, for such was my love for both of my parents that because of the troubles and unhappiness my heart at times would seem almost to burst with sorrow and grief, and a feeling always seemed with me to wish that I had died at my birth, or that I never had been born. ²

As a result of Benjamin's study of the Bible at Presbyterian meetings, he learned to read and write. He also developed a fear of literal fire and brimstone if he did not "get religion." Hoping to receive forgiveness of his sins and release from the fears of the awful Hell, Benjamin faithfully attended all of the Presbyterian religious meetings. Even as a child he was greatly confused by the differences between the many religious faiths. His study of the life and sufferings

¹Ibid., p. 8.

²Ibid.
of the Savior and the Apostles had filled his soul with a desire either to have lived in their day or to have prophets and revelation in this day.⁠¹ He continued his faithful church attendance until he was thirteen years old, at which time he heard of the "Mormons."

Although Benjamin was greatly affected by organized religious groups and their teachings, the greatest influence in his early life came from another source. Reflecting upon his youth, as observed from a distance of a half century, he said:

In childhood my advantages for parental instruction and discipline were not great, owing to my mother's large family and my father's intemperate habits, but no influence was so potent as the love of my parents and my home, to restrain me to obedience and to the love of truth.⁠²

As a young boy, Benjamin was hampered in acquiring much formal education by his unfortunate sensitivity to criticism. When he was nine years old, he and his brother Joseph E., who was fifteen months older than he, were permitted to attend a winter school taught by an older brother Seth. Even here, because of this shyness and susceptibility to slight or ridicule, he tended to withdraw and was content to share only in the pride of Joseph's accomplishments. So that nothing would interfere with Joseph's success in school, Benjamin assumed extra duties and work at home. As a result, Joseph E. excelled scholastically while Benjamin had few opportunities for formal education.⁠⁴

A Hope Fulfilled

In 1829 a strange story appeared in the Pomfret village paper. It was an account of some young man who professed to have received from

⁠¹Ibid., p. 9. ⁠²Ibid., p. 10 ⁠³Ibid.
an angel, some golden plates engraved in a strange language and hidden in a hill. From these he claimed to have written a new Bible. As Benjamin pondered the possibility of this story being genuine, he "could hardly refrain from wishing or hoping it might be so."  

The following year when Benjamin's older brother David went to Amherst, Ohio, to visit his brother Joel H., the family heard more about "Joe Smith" and his "Golden Bible." While in Amherst, the two of them were converted and baptized into the Church of Christ by Oliver Cowdery, Parley P. Pratt, and other missionaries who had stopped there on their way to teach the Lamanites in Missouri. Julia, fearing that her sons might become deluded by the new doctrines of the Campbellites and Sidney Rigdon, wrote them a letter of caution. Her letter was answered with the horrifying news that her sons had joined the "Mormonites." The boys soon sent their mother a lengthy letter of explanation and a Book of Mormon.  

In order to become acquainted with the delusion into which the two boys had fallen, some of the family and close friends began meeting secretly to read the Book of Mormon and the letters of explanation. Because of various slanderous reports about Joseph Smith and the strong public opinion against him and the Book of Mormon, the Johnson family feared that the brothers had been duped. Shortly after receiving the

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1 Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 9.

2 In 1838, the Church was officially named The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

3 A term referring to the American Indians. It is taken from the Book of Mormon.

4 Nibley, p. 68.

religious material, Seth, the oldest son living at home, wrote Joel a letter in which he stated:

Strange things indeed I have found in your letter. Alas, how unexpected, how unthought of. Is it true? That I know not, but the Lord has raised up a Prophet. But I have fears, lest this is one of those false prophets, or lo, here spoken of and warned against by the Savior and His Apostles, 1st Epistle of John II, 12, etc. and that the right way of the Lord has been perverted by him through the influence of the devil, who has transformed himself into an angel of light. . . . The manner of your becoming convinced of the doctrine, and book I am not prepared to condemn, but since Satan will, if possible, deceive the very elect, I fear that you may have been deceived . . . I view it of infinite importance that we try the spirits by which we are moved in such cases, which I earnestly hope you have done. 0 how careful should we be to embrace nothing but the truth, as it is in Jesus; for says the Apostles though we hear an angel from heaven preach any other gospel to you than that ye have received let him be accursed.1

Although the older members of the family feared greatly that Joel and David had been deceived and had joined a movement which would bring great embarrassment to them, they also realized the importance of this new religion if its claims proved to be true Seth wrote further:

I judge not neither have I satisfied my mind sufficiently as yet to tell any man what I think on the subject further than to say it is a supernatural work, either divine or infernal . . . No my brother, never did I receive any intelligence in my life that so affected me as that contained in your letters.2

It was this great desire to find out the source of Joseph Smith’s revelations that motivated the family to study regularly and to discuss the material and information sent by Joel.

After several of these meetings, Benjamin was permitted to join them. As the family studied, their original feelings toward the boys’ conversion changed to wonder and interest. Benjamin noticed that the

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1Joel Hills Johnson, Diary of Joel Hills Johnson 1802-1882. I., pp. 8-11.

2Ibid.
reading "soon led to marveling at the simplicity and purity of what they read, and at the spirit which accompanied it, bearing witness of the truth."¹

Although Benjamin was only thirteen years of age, his home background and religious experiences have prepared him for this message. As he listened to what was read and discussed, he hoped that it was true.

... a feeling of the most intense anxiety came over me to learn more. It seemed as if I must hear it all before I could be satisfied; and the principle of faith began to spring up in my heart to believe it. This was in the early fall of 1831. Now a bright hope began to arise in my heart that there really was a living prophet on the earth, and my greatest fear was that it would not prove true.²

When David and Joel, returned home from Ohio, they testified that they believed this new religion to be true. Although they bore a strong testimony, neither they nor Almon W. Babbitt, who came with them, were capable of explaining the new teachings publicly. The Johnson family continued to study, and when Mormon missionaries, Elders ³ James Brackinbury and Jabez Durfee called on them, they were warmly received. Elder Brackinbury, a capable teacher impelled by a spirit of divine commission, brought a confirming witness to what had already been received.⁴

Benjamin's mother and Lyman R. Sherman, a brother-in-law, were soon baptized. However, Ezekiel, who was not interested in accepting membership in the Church, would not consent to Benjamin's baptism.⁵

¹Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 11.
²Ibid., pp. 11-12.
³An Elder is an office in the Priesthood of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Most missionaries are given this title.
⁴Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 12.
⁵Ibid.
There was an immediate neighborhood reaction against the Johnson family and the others who had joined the "Mormonites." Wheras these new converts had once been regarded as being among the most respected in their religious society, they were now opposed and ridiculed by the ministers and members of other faiths.\(^1\) This afforded the converts to this new faith a brief glimpse of the difficulties and trials which awaited them if they continued in this new way of life they had chosen.

Experiences in Ohio

Julia Hills Johnson and all of her children believed in the message of the Mormon church, and Ezekiel gave permission for the adult members of the family to be baptized. Some of their neighbors also chose this new religion.\(^2\) The adherents to this new faith were soon tested in various ways. Shortly after Elder Brackinbury had taught and converted people in this community, he became violently ill. After a few days of suffering, he died of bilious cholic. This sudden tragedy was a shock to the new converts. In his later years remembering this incident Benjamin said:

To us, then young and inexperienced members of the Church, his death came as a trial to our faith, as well as a very great grief. To think that so good a man, in such a field of useful labor, and far away from his home and family, should be permitted to die, and that too so suddenly, was naturally a test to the faith and integrity of so young a branch.\(^3\)

The death of this powerful missionary increased the ridicule from those who were opposing the Church. After the funeral and burial of


\(^3\)E. F. Johnson, "Show us a Sign," *Early Scenes in Church History* (Faith Promoting Series; Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1882), VIII, pp. 9-12.
Elder Brackinbury, the members of the Church were gathered in the Johnson home "to talk and pray and mourn together." While thus assembled, David Johnson felt impressed that some of their enemies were at that moment digging up the body of the deceased Elder, to dissect it. Rushing to the grave, the Johnson brothers found three men who had unearthed the coffin and were just lifting the corpse from it. When they saw the Johnsons approaching, the three men sprang from the grave and fled. One of the men was captured and imprisoned.¹

Considerable opposition was focused upon the Johnson family for yet another reason. One year prior to her conversion, Nancy Johnson had been thrown from a horse and had broken her hip. According to Benjamin, physicians all agreed that it would be impossible for her to ever have use of that leg again. Since the accident, Nancy had used crutches, being unable to place any weight upon the injured leg. Benjamin recalls that after the Johnson family embraced a religion which claimed divine revelation and power, "Priest and people came out to oppose the work, and would scoffingly ask 'Why, if miracles can be performed, do you not heal Sister Nancy?' Many would also say 'If they would only heal Sister Nancy we would all believe!'"²

These, with other unhappy events, caused the Johnsons to desire to leave their native place and gather with the Saints at Kirtland.³ Therefore, in the early spring of 1833, Benjamin, in spite of a wound in his ankle which caused him great suffering, and his oldest brother Joel walked

¹Ibid.
²Ibid.
³Ibid.
over two hundred miles to Amherst, Ohio. The rest of the family followed them to Ohio later in the summer.

It was during this year of 1833 that Benjamin visited Kirtland and became acquainted with the young Prophet Joseph Smith. In reflecting upon the beginnings of their friendship, Benjamin later wrote:

In 1833 I went to Kirtland, Ohio, where with Joseph Smith was gathered nearly all that were then converts to the New Revelation, only to the number of one or two hundred in all. I now became acquainted with the Prophet, he being then hardly more than a boy in appearance; but I soon learned he was a man indeed in wisdom and council, and although younger than he, I had great opportunities to scrutinize his life and habits, and such was the social and religious elements of his unselfish nature that they who knew him the best loved him most. And to me who was associated with him personally, in his family, his confidential friend, his financial agent, his trusted companion and nurse in his sickness—to me he was the embodiment and perfection of all that I comprehend in perfect manhood.

Ezekiel and the rest of his family also saw the Prophet, and for a time the family believed that their father was "favorably impressed, and to all appearance was becoming confirmed in the faith and truth of the gospel." However, their faith in this soon died, for it became obvious that Ezekiel was becoming bitter toward the Church. Previously, in the fall of 1832, Ezekiel had sold his property in New York and had traveled to Chicago with the intention of purchasing land there. Before


2This is an apparent error as in 1833 there were hundreds of Saints located in Misssouri and many more than two hundred living in Kirtland. In 1831, it was estimated that more than a thousand Church members were residing in Kirtland and vicinity. See: B H. Roberts, A Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1930), I, p. 250.

3Benjamin Franklin Johnson, "What I Know of 'Mormonism' and Its Enemies, or A Few Jots from a 59 Years Experience in 'Mormonism!" on file at Church Historian's Library, Salt Lake City.
leaving he told his wife that he would send for the rest of the family before the first of June. When Julia had not heard from him by then, she took her family to Kirtland and there traded their team and wagon for a home on "Kirtland Flat." When Ezekiel returned to Kirtland, he found that the letters he had written, telling of the quarter section of land which he had purchased, had not arrived. Since his family was now settled and did not want to leave, Ezekiel decided to stay with them, but his disappointment caused him to become bitter.¹

Although Ezekiel did not share his family's enthusiasm for the Mormon Church, and although he felt it was taking his family from him, he continued to manifest a spirit of love for his family and for his fellowmen. In speaking of his father and the effect his father had upon his life, Benjamin said:

... although my father was apparently opposed to the truth, and had developed habits, yet he was a man of the highest organization. As a husband and parent, he was by nature the most tender and affectionate. As a neighbor and friend, most obliging and true, and was a man of truth and honor among men. Never was a question known to be raised as to his integrity, for his word was his bond; and in all things he was a gentleman in the fullest sense, except only in the habit of intemperance, which at times would seem to change his whole nature. He was a man of full middle stature, about 5 ft. 10 in. in height; of solid build, fine light brown hair, a mild but piercing blue eye, with light smooth skin, and of natural personal attractions. He was beloved and sought after by his friends, and for his words only he was feared and avoided, for with no other blow than words was he ever known to strike anything living.²

Despite the fact that there were relatively few Saints living in Kirtland in the fall of 1833, they were called upon to build a temple.

²Ibid., p. 15.
The Prophet said that he had received a revelation commanding the Saints to erect a house unto the Lord.\(^1\) The members of the Church were all poor in terms of worldly goods; so much so, that when they were preparing to break the ground for the temple's foundation, they found that no one had an earth scraper, and that there were very few plows among them.\(^2\)

As the original plans were to build the temple of brick, Joel H. was asked to burn the brick, and Benjamin was assigned to help him. Their brother David, a tall, healthy and muscular young man of twenty-three, was charged with gathering the wood with which to burn the brick. In David's zeal and enthusiasm to fulfill his duty, he overtaxed his strength, took a severe cold, and began bleeding at the lungs. Benjamin records that on October 30, 1833, just prior to his death, David through the gift of tongues gave his last testimony to the truth of the restored Gospel. Don Carlos Smith, a friend and companion to David and brother to the Prophet Joseph Smith, interpreted this testimony.\(^3\)

Soon after work began on the temple, a stone quarry was discovered nearby,\(^4\) so instead of brick, stone blocks were used in the construction. Joel H. and Seth Johnson helped lay the cornerstone of the temple in the spring of 1834.\(^5\)

\(^1\)Joseph Smith, History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1902) \(1^{st}\) pp: 302-312. (Hereafter cited as "History of the Church.")

\(^2\)Ibid., pp. 15-16.

\(^3\)Ibid.

\(^4\)Clarence L. Fields in "History of the Kirtland Temple" (a thesis presented to Brigham Young University, August, 1963), p. 17, states that the quality of brick produced for three months was inferior; thus stone was used.

\(^5\)Ibid., p. 16.
On the night of November 14, 1833, Benjamin observed a heavenly phenomenon which he interpreted to be a partial fulfillment of the prophecy that "the stars should fall from heaven as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs." In describing this experience as he remembered it, Benjamin said:

"... my pen is inadequate to give a description of the scene then presented, for the heavens were full of blazing storm, from zenith to horizon, and a view more sublime and terrible the eyes of man may never have seen. To the fearful it struck terror, and even some of the Saints seemed almost paralyzed with fear, for it appeared for a time that both the heavens and the earth were on fire. I gazed upon the scene with wondering awe, but with a full realization of its purport as a sign of the last days. I afterwards learned that it occurred on the night following the driving of the Saints from Jackson County, Missouri."

When the men for Zion's Camp were being called to march the thousand miles to Missouri to help the fleeing Saints, Benjamin wanted to join them. His brother Seth and his brother-in-law R. Sherman were called, but because of his father's opposition, Benjamin had not been baptized, so the Prophet Joseph advised him to stay at home. Although this was disappointing to the boy, he was comforted by the Prophet:

"I was assured by the Prophet Joseph that no loss should come to me for waiting, for although not fully a member I had partaken of every hope, desire, and spiritual influence with which those around me were animated. It was with a joy almost unspeakable that I realized that I was living in a day when God had a prophet upon the earth."

During the winter of 1833-34 Benjamin attended the district school in Kirtland. That summer, in order to help his family financially, he

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1Ibid., pp. 16-17. 2Ibid., p. 17.

3Some two hundred volunteers, under the command of Joseph Smith, marched to Missouri to assist members of the Church who had been driven from their homes in Jackson County. See: Andrew Jensen, Encyclopedia History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Publishing Company, 1941), p. 973-975.
Benjamin became an apprentice to Uriah B. Powell in the saddlery business. He was to receive twenty-four dollars a year plus board. After only a few months, however, the business was dissolved. Benjamin was then employed operating a sawmill and doing carpenter work.¹

During this summer of 1834, Father Joseph Smith, Sr. visited some of the families and gave them patriarchal blessings.² Benjamin said that he felt a spiritual strengthening among the Saints as a result of these blessings and that the Spirit of the Lord was manifested among them in the gift of tongues, with interpretation, prophecy, and the gift of healing.³

During this summer, when men of faith were frequently exercising these spiritual gifts, a miracle was reported in the Johnson household. Benjamin later wrote:

About this time the Spirit of the Lord seemed to be poured out upon the Saints in Kirtland. Their families often met together to "speak of the Lord," and the gifts of the gospel were enjoyed in rich abundance. As yet my sister Nancy had never, since her hip had been broken, taken one step unaided by her crutches; but the time had now come for her release.

She was commanded by Elder Jared Carter—then a man of mighty faith—to arise, leave her crutches and walk.

She arose in faith, full of joy, and was from that hour made whole, and never again did she walk upon crutches or lean upon a staff.⁴

When Seth Johnson returned from Zion's Camp, he was quite ill with the cholera which had caused the death of so many. During the winter of

¹Ibid.  ²A Patriarchal blessing is believed to be a personal revelation through the patriarch to the candidate receiving the blessing. This blessing usually contains prophetic promises for future accomplishments or blessings which are dependent upon the person's worthiness.

³Ibid., p. 17.  ⁴Johnson, "Show us a Sign," p. 11.
1834-35, he tried to teach school, but he soon became too ill to continue, so he returned to his parents in Kirtland. Benjamin's deep sadness at Seth's experience was recalled as follows:

Here all was solicitude—our beloved brother had come home perhaps to die—a brother beloved by all who knew him, of whom no unkind word was ever known to be spoken; by me more than beloved, almost worshipped! Must he—could he die and leave us? Oh the cruel agony of such bereavement to the young, to whom in such sorrows, life appears so long and lonesome. But after all our anxieties, prayers and tears, in the midst of his testimonies to us and blessings upon us he died February 19, 1835.¹

Prior to his passing, Seth told the family that a personage had appeared to him and told him that because he had retained his faith, his earthly work would be completed by another and that an even greater work was now awaiting him. This greatly disturbed Benjamin. He felt it was not right that another person should receive blessings that belonged to his faithful and beloved brother. Comfort came, however, under the hands of Joseph Smith, Sr., the first Patriarch of the Church. Benjamin later recalled that in the spring of 1835, the Patriarch was giving Patriarchal blessings to members of the Johnson family. Although Benjamin had not yet been baptized, he was also given a blessing. He wrote the experience accordingly:

He blessed all according to age until he came to Joseph E. and myself, when he placed his hands first upon my head. My mother told him I was the youngest, but he said that mattered not—to me was the first blessing; and in blessing me, among other great and glorious things, he told me the Lord would call me to do the work of brother Seth, who had been called away by death. In this promise there was to me more joy than ever before I had known; my dear brother was not to be robbed of his blessings, and if I could only live faithfully, his work would be done, and I should do it for him. I felt this was the greatest boon the Lord could bestow upon me.

... My blessing from Father Smith was to be realized in spiritual ministrations and labors, while Joseph E.'s blessing related to the greatness of his work in temporal things.²

In March of 1835 Benjamin, now sixteen years old, overstepped his father's objections and was baptized into the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints by Elder Lyman Johnson. Because of Ezekiel's continued opposition to his family's activities in the Church and because of his addiction to liquor, he agreed to live apart from the family; thus he purchased a home in the adjoining town of Mentor. One of his daughters stayed with him to care for the house, and the other children visited him frequently. With the help of the children living at home, Julia now assumed the responsibility of providing for the family.\(^1\)

With his father living in Mentor, Benjamin became an active participant in the Kirtland branch of the Church and was a member of the choir which was led by Marvil C. Davis.\(^2\) Opportunities for greater experience and service soon came. At this time Benjamin's brother-in-law A. W. Babbitt returned from his missionary labors in New York, for a brief visit in Kirtland. His work had been very successful and he invited Benjamin to go back to New York with him. After hearing of Elder Babbitt's success in New York and recalling the taunts and ridicule which had been hurled at his family only two short years before, Benjamin yearned to return as a missionary to his native town.

\[\ldots\] I had not forgotten how all our neighbors had promised to believe and obey the Gospel if my sister Nancy should ever again be able to walk. I knew she had been healed by the power of God, and I thought it only necessary that I should go and tell them so, and all would at once be converted.\(^3\)

Realizing he would need money for the journey, Benjamin tried to obtain some of the "Kirtland Scrip," which the Saints were using for:

\(^1\)Ibid.

\(^2\)D. B. Huntington, Deseret Evening News, Oct. 16, 1897, on file at Church Historian's Library, Salt Lake City, pp. 7-8.

\(^3\)Johnson, My Life's Review, pp. 20-21.
currency.\(^1\) These were notes signed by the Prophet and issued from the "Kirtland Bank." Once he obtained enough of the "scrip," it was necessary to find some means of exchanging it for coins which could be used outside of the Kirtland area. Benjamin was unable to find anyone who was willing to exchange currency without charging such a discount that it would leave him without sufficient funds for his journey. After considerable thought and prayer, Benjamin decided to appeal to one more person.

... I took my scrip to the Prophet Joseph, told him where I wanted to go, and asked if he would give me money in place of it. He said, "Yes, Bennie, I will. It is right for you to go." And he comforted and blessed me, and his words made me more joyful than did the money, which I so much desired, and in other ways I now began to be better acquainted and more familiar with him.\(^2\)

In the forepart of October, Benjamin and Elder Babbitt began the trip to the place of Benjamin's birth. They walked the one hundred and fifty miles through mud and storm. It had been two and one-half years since this seventeen-year-old boy had seen his neighbors. The news of his sister's miraculous healing filled him with new confidence, but his hopes only met with disappointment.

... I soon learned that they were not as anxious to see me as I had been to visit them. When I told them my sister was healed, and that it was by the power of God, all interest seemed dead, and they felt no desire to talk upon the subject. After a few days of dis-

\(^1\)In 1837 an unchartered bank was established by the sale of stock, principally among the members of the Church. After excessive speculation and problems of misappropriation of funds, the bank collapsed in the financial panic of 1837. During the existence of the bank, notes were issued which were not honored by other banking institutions because the Kirtland Bank was not a chartered bank. See: Joseph Fielding Smith, Essentials in Church History (13th ed.; Salt Lake City, Utah: The Deseret Book Company, Deseret News Press, 1953), pp. 196-197. See also: Robert Kent Fielding, "The Growth of the Mormon Church in Kirtland, Ohio," a Thesis presented to Indiana University (Bloomington: 1957), pp. 162-206.

\(^2\)Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 21.
appointment and chagrin, disgusted at my overanxiety to visit them and my misplaced confidence in their sincerity, I took steamboat at Dunkirk and gladly returned home.¹

This unpleasant experience did not destroy his desire to share his religious beliefs with other people since Benjamin was to serve on more prolonged missionary assignments in future years. His disappointment from this first endeavor proved to be a valuable lesson which helped him to realize success in his future preaching efforts.

When Benjamin was seventeen years old (winter of 1835-36), he was privileged to broaden his education and experience by attending the "School of the Prophets," which was an organized effort by Joseph Smith to educate the members of the Church. Here Benjamin was instructed in grammar and geography. He noted that through this class in geography "I rapidly acquired the elements of that study, which inspired in me a thirst for history and other reading."² That Benjamin greatly appreciated his school experience is indicated by the following:

Through childhood and early youth, my advantages, even for primary education, were the most meager. At seventeen I attended the winter term of the grammar school taught by Wm. E. McLelland, in Kirtland, and presided over by the Prophet; at the same time attending night lectures in geography. These were my greatest opportunities for schooling, and in them was finished my school education; and if I have acquired in life anything further of worth, it has been as snatched from the wayside while on the run as a missionary, pioneer, or while in Nature's great laboratory with the axe, plow, spade or garden implements.³

The Johnson family was once again struck with death. Susan, about twenty-two years of age, suddenly became very ill. Family and physicians

¹Ibid.

²Ibid., p. 22.

were unable to improve her condition. After about two weeks of suffering she called all the members of the family to her bedside, expressed to them her faith in the gospel, bid them all farewell, then quietly passed away March 16, 1836. The Prophet Joseph expressed sympathy to the Johnson family in their time of sorrow, this loss so soon after the death of two faithful sons. Two days following Susan's death he wrote in his diary:

At ten o'clock went to the school house to attend the funeral of Susan Johnson, daughter of Ezekiel Johnson. She was a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and remained strong in the faith until her spirit took its departure from time into eternity. May God bless and comfort her afflicted parents, family, connections and friends. President Rigdon delivered a fine discourse on the occasion, and much solemnity prevailed.¹

Benjamin later lamented, "Such bereavements come with crushing weight. So much sickness and death tended not only to keep us as a family limited in means, but no doubt the more prompted us in humility to seek the Lord."²

The temple was now nearing completion, and the date for its dedication was quickly approaching. In his journal Joseph Smith wrote:

March 7, 1835. This day a meeting of the Church of Latter-day Saints was called for the purpose of blessing, in the name of the Lord, those who have heretofore assisted in building, by their labor and other means, the House of the Lord in this place.

The morning was occupied by President Joseph Smith, Jun., in teaching the Church the propriety and necessity of purifying itself. In the afternoon, the names of those who had assisted to build the house were taken, and further instructions received from President Smith. . . .

President Sidney Rigdon was appointed to lay on hands and bestow blessings in the name of the Lord. . . .³


²Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 22.

³Smith, History of the Church, II, pp. 205-206.
Benjamin attended the meetings, listened to the blessings given, and "felt a great joy in these prophetic words that filled and thrilled" him. He longed for the privilege of receiving such a blessing, but was disappointed to think that he would not qualify. In later telling of attending the final meeting, Benjamin said:

When on the last day of blessings, I was standing by the door in the crowded congregation, and oh! how I did yearn for a blessing! And as the last blessing, apparently, was given, the Prophet earnestly looked towards the door where I was standing, and said to his brother Hyrum, "Go and see if there is not one more yet to be blessed." Brother Hyrum came to the door, and seeing me, put his hand upon my shoulder and asked me if I had not worked upon the Temple. I said, "No sir," but it seemed like passing a sentence upon my fondest hopes. He then asked if I had done nothing towards it. I then thought of a new gun I had earned and given as a donation and of the brick I had helped to make. I said, "I did give often." "I thought," he said, "there was a blessing for you," and he almost carried me to the stand. The Prophet blessed me, with a confirmation of all his father had sealed upon me, and many more also. I felt then that the Lord had respect for my great desire. Even to be the youngest and last to be blessed seemed to me a high privilege. When the Prophet had looked towards the door, I felt as though he would call for me, though I could not see how I had merited so high a privilege. But so it was, and my joy was full.¹

The Kirtland Temple was begun in 1833 and was completed three years later. The cost of the building was estimated at about sixty thousand dollars, which was largely voluntary donations of money, materials, and labor.²

As the work on the temple progressed, there became greater unity within the Church, but the opposition and persecution of the Saints also increased.

... there had been by our enemies one continual persecution of the Prophet and contempt for the Saints and their religion. And such was their opposition and hatred towards the Temple during its construction, that it had to be guarded, not only by night but also by

¹Johnson, My Life's Review, pp. 22-23.
²Andrew Jensen, Encyclopedia History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1941)
day; and the laborers upon its walls, while with one hand they held
the hammer or trowel were always ready with the other to grasp the
sword. Much of my time in boyhood was spent in assisting to prepare
arms for the protection of the Saints. The lower story of my mother's
house in Kirtland was at that time used by Brother M. C. Davis as a
gunsmith shop, for the manufacture of defensive weapons for the use
of the people.2

Benjamin attended the dedication of the temple. He was told of
certain spiritual experiences received by the elders and of the ministering
of heavenly messengers within the temple.3 As he had not yet received
the Priesthood he was not privileged to participate in the temple ordi-
nances, but he felt the influence of them. "Greatly now was the power of
God manifested in the gifts of the gospel, and a general joy pervaded
the hearts of the saints."4

The Johnson family became personally acquainted with Dr. P. Hurl-
burt, the originator of "Manuscript Found" story which was to be an
answer to Joseph Smith's "false" story of the origin of the Book of Mormon.
In reflecting back from later life, Benjamin felt that even as a youth he
had developed some personal views concerning Hurlburt and his story, and
he wrote:

I then occupied a position through which I could obtain accurate
knowledge of all that transpired on both sides; my father being
regarded as an opposer, knew all their secrets, none of which did he
withhold from me; and as Hurlburt had boarded at my mother's, I had
good opportunity as well as reason for watching his course.5

1See also Clarence L. Fields, 'History of the Kirtland Temple,' op. cit.
3See History of the Church, II, p. 432.
4Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 23.
He [Dr. P. Hurlburt] was called "doctor" from his being the seventh son of his mother. He was of a conceited, ambitious and ostentatious turn with a degree of education, but of a low moral status. He had been baptized, ordained, and sent eastward with others, to preach the gospel. He labored for a time near Jacksonville, Erie County, Pennsylvania, but was soon for illicit association called back to Kirtland, where he was excommunicated, but afterwards rebaptized. He soon became enamored or greatly in love with Electra, sister of E. R. Sherman, and because she despised him for his immorality and rejected his suit he swore revenge upon the whole community and boastfully declared he would destroy the church. While preaching about Jacksonville he had learned of Solomon Spaulding, who once lived in that vicinity, and had written a romance called "Manuscript Found," and out of this he hoped to gain notoriety, obtain money, and work his spite upon the Mormons. So he gave notice to our enemies that he had struck a lead to destroy Mormonism, and if they would come together he would tell them where "Joe Smith" got his "Mormon Bible." He soon collected around him the congregations of our enemies, and in pert and pompous style told them the tale he had concocted of the "Manuscript Found," which of course was good enough when they could get nothing better. And so they readily advanced him means to hunt up the manuscript, and were greatly in hopes that now Mormonism would be at an end. But to all of them it was a failure, but not to Hurlburt, for he had their money.  

Tragedy was to strike once again within the Johnson family. In the early fall of 1836, Nancy began to weaken under the illness known as "consumption." With another family member so near death, only a few months after Susan's passing, a dark cloud of fear fell upon young Benjamin.

After all our previous bereavements, could we again endure this, another severe and crushing blow? And now just as I was approaching manhood, I seemed to come face to face with the great problem, whether as a family we were not all to die of the same disease—consumption, by which three had already gone, and another fast sinking?  

Nancy's condition became worse, until on October 30 she bid farewell to the family and quietly passed away. With four children having

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1Ibid., pp. 24-25. See also Francis W. Kirkham, A New Witness for Christ in America (Independence, Missouri: Zion's Printing and Publishing Co.) pp. 123-124.

died within the past three years, Benjamin's fears of an early death continued to grow.

Everything now seemed to confirm the idea of a short life for myself; if not for all my father's children. My muscular powers were small, and though large in vitality I had but small physical endurance. Through close application to my shopwork and long readings at night, I became effeminate and weak, and some influence like the whisper of the Evil One was always saying in my ear, 'You are doomed to die young.' At times I would remember the promises made by Father Smith in my patriarchal blessing, and the blessing of the Prophet upon my head and a desire to live and fulfill them, and to preach the Gospel would enthuse my whole being. Then the Evil Power would tell me all these blessings were forfeited, for through wild shopmate associates while away from home, I had been led into temptation, which brought me sorrow and repentance before the Lord. But under no circumstances had I ever failed to stand firm in the defense of our religion.1

Because of the recent deaths of her two daughters, Julia was unable to continue her small business in town, so she moved onto a farm about a mile from Kirtland.

In 1836 a wave of financial speculation swept across the nation, and Kirtland was taken up with it. The Saints "appeared to feel that Kirtland was to become and remain a great center of business and religious interest for the future. . . . At this time, town property and real estate went up to almost fabulous prices, and a general rush was made into business of all kinds."2 For some time the people rode the crest of this wave of wild speculation, with the Kirtland Bank generously issuing large amounts of credit. Suddenly, with the nationwide financial crash, the bottom fell out from under the investments, and a general panic resulted. The days and weeks that followed ripped at the very foundation of the Church and proved to be one of the greatest tests which its membership had faced since its organization.

1Ibid., pp. 26-27. 2Ibid., p. 27.
Disappointment engendered feelings which reacted upon fellowship, and men in high places began to complain of and reproach each other, and brotherly love was found smothered by the love of the world... The spirit of charity was not invoked, and brethren who had borne the highest priesthood and who had for years labored, traveled, ministered and suffered together, and even placed their lives upon the same altar, now were governed by a feeling of hate and a spirit to accuse each other, and all for the love of Accursed Mammon. All their former companionship in the holy anointing in the Temple of the Lord, where filled with the Holy Ghost, the heavens were opened, and in view of the glories before them they had together shouted "Hosanna to God and the Lamb," all was now forgotten by many, who were like Judas, ready to sell or destroy the Prophet Joseph and his followers. And it almost seemed to me that the brightest stars in our firmament had fallen. Many to whom I had in the past most loved to listen, their voices seemed now the most discordant and hateful to me. From the Quorum of the Twelve fell four of the brightest: Wm. E. McLellin, Luke and Lyman Johnson and John Boyington; of the First Presidency, F. G. Williams; the three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon, Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer and Martin Harris. ... I was then nineteen years of age, and as I now look back through more than fifty years of subsequent experience, to that first great Apostasy, I regard it as the greatest sorrow, disappointment and test through which I have ever passed; the first real experience among false brethren, the greatest sorrow and test for the faithful.1

This shocking experience, where men of great faith and leadership rejected the divinely appointed leader and followed the counsel of others, caused Benjamin great concern for his own spiritual security.

But with all my faults I did not forget the Lord nor His chosen servants. And in this day of great affliction and separation by apostasy, I felt to call mightily upon His name, that He would never leave me to follow these examples, but that He would keep me humble, even though in poverty and affliction, so only that I fail not. This prayer of my youth I have never forgotten, neither do I feel that it is forgotten by Him to whom it was made.2

This apostasy caused a division among the membership of the Church. The Apostate group made claim to the temple, printing office, and everything regarded as Church property. Joseph Smith's life was threatened, and he was sought by those desiring his arrest. Opposition became so

1Ibid., pp. 28-29.
2Ibid., p. 29.
intense that the Prophet and his family quietly and quickly left for Missouri in mid-winter. According to Benjamin, the printing office and the materials which the enemies of the Church planned to use were burned and destroyed by Lyman R. Sherman, Benjamin's brother-in-law.1

In commenting on Benjamin's activities at this, one writer said:

When the great apostasy occurred, and many had to hide from the apostates to avoid vexatious lawsuits, he [Benjamin] helped in every way he could to get them away to Missouri. The faithful Saints then were dubbed "lick-skillets" by the apostates.2

As the Church leaders were being forced to flee for their safety, most of the members made preparations to follow them to Missouri. It was difficult to sell property, because of the financial depression, but after great effort the Johnson brothers were able to sell their mother's farm and obtain teams and wagons for the thousand-mile journey. They planned to leave by July 4, but Benjamin's health was poor, and he feared he would be unable to go with them. When departure time arrived, the family found they needed help to drive some of the unmanageable stock a short distance--Benjamin offered to help. As he walked along, he felt a new vitality spring within him, and he began to feel stronger.

... a new faith and feeling sprang up in my heart, and I felt that the Lord had heard my prayers. I felt sure I was not soon to die, a dark cloud rolled from over me and a great weight from my heart; and to all in camp it was surprising to see how fast I increased in health and vitality to assist in our camp life. But to none was it so great a surprise as to me, and I felt in my heart to thank God and to devote myself to doing all the good in my power.3

With this new faith and strength, Benjamin continued with his family toward the western frontier and new experiences.

1Ibid.
2Huntington, op. cit.
3Johnson, My Life's Review, pp. 30-32.
CHAPTER III

TRIBULATIONS AND TRIALS IN MISSOURI

Because the Johnson family was among the last of the Saints to begin the trip from Ohio to Missouri, they joined what was later called the "Poor Camp." This was a company of seventy wagons consisting mostly of Saints who required financial help from other members of the Church. The group was led by Joseph Young, Elias Smith, Jonathan Hale, and others.¹ "All means for defraying expenses were put together, and so all were to fare alike, and did so as long as they remained in camp together."² Benjamin later referred to this group as "the first large emigration company of the Saints."³

So large a company, poor in appearance, and known to be Mormons, passing through the country where runners⁴ with Kirtland money had swindled the people, caused us to be more or less objects of contempt and persecution, and in a number of towns writs were served upon our leaders to compel a redemption of Kirtland bank notes. But the blessing⁵ of the Lord was with us, and there was always a way open for escape, and friends always at hand just in time of need.⁶

When their supplies were nearly gone, the group stopped at Dayton, Ohio, where the men worked to construct a road. During the month they were there, Benjamin made two trips to Cincinnati to visit relatives and

¹Huntington, op. cit.
²Johnson, My Life's Review, pp. 32-33.
³Benjamin F. Johnson, letter to Deseret News Editor, January 15, 1893, written from Mesa City (on file at Church Historian's Office, Salt Lake City, Utah).
⁴"runners" meaning solicitors or salesmen.
⁵Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 33.
also to do business for the Saints.¹ Upon returning from his last trip,

he found that sickness had spread throughout the camp and some deaths

had already occurred. Of this experience Benjamin said:

So much sickness in my mother's family, and so much ill health my-

self, had made me acquainted with the nursing the sick, and in some
degree the use of medicine, with which I had commenced in a small
way to deal, and to read medical works. And as I had now become well

and strong physically I adopted the sick as my especial charge.

Brother Willis appeared nigh unto death with typhoid malarial fever,

and on traveling through the day but little could be done for him,

but at night I gave him my undivided and sleepless attention. For

three weeks in this manner I did care for and nurse the sick by night

and travel on foot by day, only obtaining sleep by the roadside as

I got in advance of the company, or while feeding the teams at noon.

Often did I carry my little chest of family medicines and other

small articles of trade to exchange for butter, eggs, chickens and

fruit, and anything suited to the appetites of the sick and feeble.²

Benjamin was given the entire care of the sick during the journey
to Far West.³ To him this service was a labor of love. "Such was the

increase of my health and hopes that I felt that I could do or endure

anything to prove my gratitude to the Lord, for His blessings."⁴ Ben-

jamin's efforts to trade items he had for things he felt would help the

sick often caused him to be either ahead of or behind the rest of the

company. Many he met were curious about his people, and he frequently

found himself surrounded by "large numbers of . . . priests" and others

asking questions, but he was never insulted or abused. Benjamin felt

that such incidents were of great value and that they "afforded me just

the experience I needed, and my answers and testimonies were never wanting."⁵

¹Ibid.

²Ibid., p. 33.

³Huntington, p. 7.

⁴Johnson, My Life's Review, pp. 33-34.

⁵Ibid., p. 34.
While in a town of considerable size, Benjamin had a most memorable experience.

I was covered with dust, without a coat, and barefoot, and feeling mortified at my appearance wished to hurry on, but other questions were asked and I could not leave them unanswered, until I forgot to answer one question at a time and commenced to talk, and as I proceeded the people gathered, and when I ceased and looked around there were hundreds before me and all windows were open on both sides of the street, and crowded with listening women; and all appeared to wonder at the dirty, barefooted boy. But no one marveled more than myself, and it was near night when I left them and had eleven miles to walk to camp.

The next day being Sunday, a number of carriage loads of people came from town to our meeting in camp, stayed for a time and inquired for the young man who had preached to them in town the day before, of which no one knew anything. I saw them come and go again but was too bashful to attract their notice or speak to them. Such evidences of the favor of the Lord, through which, by the power of His spirit I could bear a faithful testimony to the world was of great worth and comfort to me.¹

About the first of October, both Brother Samuel Hale and his wife became ill, and Brother Hale soon died. It was decided that the Johnson family should stay and care for Sister Hale and her ten-year-old daughter. Sister Hale also passed away, leaving her only child, Mary Ann, with Benjamin's family (Mary Ann later became Benjamin's second wife.)²

Because he was so anxious to get into Missouri where he could again see and hear the Prophet Joseph, Benjamin left his family and continued on with the camp.³ On October 13, they crossed the Mississippi River into the little hamlet of Louisianna, Missouri. Although this company of Saints had fled Ohio because of opposition and had traveled nearly one thousand miles, they realized that they were unlikely to find

¹Ibid.
²Ibid., pp. 34-35.
³Diary of George Washington Johnson, unpublished copy in Brigham Young University Library, pp. 5-6.
peace in Missouri. Since 1832 there had been troubles between the Missourians and the Mormons. The reasons for this conflict were varied. The Missouri settlers were largely southerners who were strongly in favor of slavery and they were greatly suspicious of the large numbers of northerners who were coming among them. The fact that the Saints declared their intentions of establishing Zion in Jackson County, where only "the righteous would live," did much to increase distrust toward the Mormons. Then, too, the Saints voted as a block and as such could sway an election. These things, coupled with the tremendous influx of Mormons into Jackson County, caused the Missourians to believe that they would soon be completely overwhelmed by the Latter-day Saints. Therefore, the Protestant ministers used their influence to unite opposition against the rapidly growing Mormon religion.\textsuperscript{1} In 1833 the settlers, in this frontier area, joined in mobs and forced the Mormons to move out of Jackson County. The Saints then settled north of the Missouri River,\textsuperscript{2} but five years later the conflict began again. The rumors of trouble at Far West, and the warnings of danger to them if they continued their journey, only strengthened the desire of the "poor camp" to go on. To show his devotion to the work of the Lord, Benjamin was rebaptized during this time.\textsuperscript{3} About the twentieth of October, 1838 Benjamin's company camped at Haun's Mill. Joseph Young and his family chose to stay and barely escaped being killed in a massacre.\textsuperscript{4} On October 30, 1838 an armed mob rode down upon the small settlement of Haun's Mill and, without any

\textsuperscript{1}B. H. Roberts, A Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1930), I, pp. 321-329.\textsuperscript{2}Ibid.\textsuperscript{3}Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 35.\textsuperscript{4}Ibid.
warning, began to shoot at the Mormon settlers there. It was reported that at least seventeen Mormons were killed and twelve were severely wounded. This attack was made in response to an order issued by Governor Boggs that the Mormons must leave the state of Missouri or be exterminated.

As the camp approached Far West, the Prophet came out to greet the members. Benjamin "felt joy in seeing him again." Although Benjamin had planned to remain in Far West with his two married sisters Delcina and Julia, he was counseled by the Prophet to proceed to Diahman to assist others in strengthening that place against the mobs who were gathering there from the adjoining counties.

Under the direction of the Prophet, Diahman had been surveyed and divided into lots from which each man could choose one. Because the oldest and married men were given priority in selecting their lots, and Benjamin was only twenty years old and unmarried, he was one of the last to choose. Those left for him to choose from did not seem to be of much value.

... when it was my choice I found I must take the top lot on the promontory overlooking the Grand River Valley, or go farther away and lower down than I wished to. So I chose the upper, which at first appeared rocky, but which made the other lots appear almost enviable. When, after a few days, the Prophet accompanied us to this spot, and pointed out those rocks as the ones of which Adam built an altar and offered sacrifice upon this spot, where he stood and blessed the multitude of his children, when they called him Michael, and where he will again sit as the Ancient of Days, then I was not envious of anyone's choice for a city lot in Adam-ondi-Ahman.

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1History of the Church, III, pp. 182-187; see also A Comprehensive History I, pp. 480-483; see also Leland Homer Gentry, "A History of the Latter-day Saints in Northern Missouri 1836-1839, a dissertation presented to Brigham Young University, 1965. 2Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 35.

3Ibid. (Note: Joseph Smith taught that Adam-ondi-Ahman was the name of the valley in which Adam had held a special meeting, just prior to his death, and pronounced blessings upon his children. It is believed this will be a place of significance in future events. See Doctrine and Covenants 107:53, Sec. 116.)
Later in life, Benjamin wrote:

There are those still living who in 1838 were familiar with the city plot of Adam-ondi-Ahman as surveyed by Bishop Alanson Ripley who, as agent, recorded upon the city plot the names of those to whom lots were given, and I well know—to whom was given and recorded the lot at the top of the hill on which was scattered the many different sized stones, some of which had been burned; all partly buried and while there appeared a center from which they were scattered yet no one stone laid upon another to show the form or size of the Altar. This was before the identical place with the rock of the Altar had been pointed out by the Prophet Joseph.¹

A Defender of the Saints

At Diahman, Benjamin was without money, kindred, or home. Except for a few pieces of warm clothing, everything he owned had been used during the trip for the comfort of the sick. He was immediately placed in active duty—on guard duty at night and during the day he was scouting of "raiding the enemy for arms, ammunition and sustainance for our people while hemed in by the mob."² Since many of the Mormons had had their homes and property taken from them, they made organized efforts to defend that which they had left and also to make mounted raids among the Missouri settlers and obtain needed supplies. Having no kindred or home, Benjamin suffered much from privation and exposure. Regarding his conditions at that time, he wrote:

Too proud and bashful to make my wants known, or to accept gratuitous favors offered me, many nights I laid in freezing weather with nothing under or over me but the hay in the loft on which I slept. Many nights did I remain by the guard fire alternating between a roasting and freezing condition, as I changed sides to or from the fire, until


²Benjamin Franklin Johnson, "A Life Sketch," unpublished article on file in Church Historian's Office, Salt Lake City.
mother of President George A. Smith, who was always kind to me, learning my condition, came to the log barn in which I slept and gave me a nice warm quilt, which owing to the circumstances I shall never forget.¹

The Prophet soon came to Diahman and asked Benjamin to live with him at Sloan's boarding house.²

With opposition from the Missourians increasing, many families left their farms and almost all of their earthly possessions and sought safety in the Mormon communities. As Benjamin observed their pitiful condition, he not only felt sympathy for them, but tried to help them in whatever way he could.

¹⁸³⁸

It being now November and very cold for the season, a heavy snowstorm came upon many families with nothing but brush as a shelter, for the aged, or the sick or the mother with her babes. In this terrible condition some children were born. This to me was an appalling condition, but a condition still worse was upon us, for we were being hemmed in on all sides by our enemies and were without food. All the grain, cattle, hogs, and supplies of every kind were left in the country, or so far from home they could not be obtained except with a strong guard. So our only possible chance was to go out in foraging companies and bring in whatever we could find, without regard to ownership; and in this way corn, beef, cattle, hogs, bee stands, chickens, etc., with anything and everything left in the country that would sustain a thousand people, we took wherever it was found. Thus we did our best to obtain food, dividing it as was needed.³

One morning, after Benjamin had spent the night on guard duty, he was asked to go with Cornelius P. Lot and a company of twenty men to investigate a farm on which, they thought, was stored arms and ammunition for their enemies. Approaching the farm they noticed some people running

¹Johnson, My Life's Review, pp. 36-37.
²Ibid., p. 37.
³Ibid. (See also Leland Homer Gentry, "A History of the Latter-day Saints in Northern Missouri from 1836 to 1839, a dissertation presented to Brigham Young University, 1965, pp. 317-364.)
from the house into the cornfield. Upon gathering them up, they found that there were two men and a number of women and children. All of these "prisoners" claimed that there were neither arms nor ammunition on the place. Benjamin described his part in taking one of the men captive:

It was the first prisoner I had ever assisted to take, and I learned something of the influence of fear upon the human heart; for as we put our hands upon his shoulders there was such a look of expected death, and such begging for his life that he sank upon the ground.

. . . But we calmed his fears, told him for what purpose we had come, and that if there really were no arms or ammunition stored there to be used against us, we should leave them as we found them; but if we found they had those things we would burn them out.\(^1\)

After a thorough search of the building uncovered nothing, the company looked in the cornfields, and there they found the arms and ammunition. As the women gathered up all they could carry from the doomed home, Benjamin's heart went out to them.

. . . here I might say there was almost a trial of my faith in my pity for our enemies, even those who were plotting our destruction. Among the women was one, young married and apparently near her confinement, and another with small children and not a wagon, and many miles away from any of their friends, and snow had begun already (in November) to fall. My sympathies were drawn toward the women and children, but I would in no degree let them deter me from duty. So while others were pillaging for something to carry away, I was doing my best to protect, as far as possible, the lives and comfort of the families who were dependent on getting away upon horseback. When the horses were brought up for their use, there was one animal with a side saddle, on which the young woman was to get away; but it was taken away by one Sloan, who had kept the boarding house where I stayed, a man of education and apparently a gentleman. It was too much for me, so I took the animal from him by force, and put her upon it, and then got from another a roll of homemade cloth and fastened it on behind her. While others were doing the burning and plunder, my mission was of mercy as far as duty would permit.\(^2\)

By noon the company had set fire to the buildings and was on its way home. With much of the day still ahead of them, the twenty men in

\(^1\)Ibid., pp. 38-39.

\(^2\)Ibid., p. 39.
the company decided to separate and scout in different directions. Benjamin and two others went in pursuit of a band of horses they had seen. After they had followed the animals for some time, it began to rain. When Benjamin and his companions tried to return to the other men, they found that they were lost. They searched all night, fearing that any moment they would be discovered by the enemy. Toward morning they came to a deserted house and finding everything barred, they forced open a window. Benjamin went through first, and as his feet reached toward the floor, he fell headlong through a hole and down into the cellar. The floorboards had been pulled up to use over the windows and doors. After climbing out of the cellar, Benjamin found a pile of deer skins from which he made a bed. "Weary and faint through want of sleep and food," wet from the rain, and "more dead than alive," he told his companions he could not take his watch and laid down to sleep. About two hours later he was awakened by the sound of men who had surrounded the house and were demanding an answer from those within. How relieved they were to learn the men were not their enemies, but were some of their brethren in the Church. One of the men, Brother John Butler, was on a special commission and was riding the Prophet's black horse "Charley." He volunteered to leave the group and take Benjamin and his two companions back to Diahman. During their trip, they came upon a herd of good beef cattle and were able to take nearly forty head to the hungry people of Diahman.¹ In explaining such actions by the Saints, Benjamin said:

Here let me say that it should not be supposed, though we sought to repel mob violence and were compelled to forage for food when hemmed in on all sides by a mob who had driven us from homes they

¹Ibid., pp. 40-42.
had sold to us and been paid for, robbing us of everything but our lives and the little we could carry away leaving our crops, stock, and household goods to our enemies, that we were common robbers because we took by reprisal that with which to keep from starvation our women and children. Ours was a struggle for our lives and homes, and a more conscientious, noble, and patriotic spirit never enthused man than that which animated our leaders in this just defense of our rights. 1

Trials as a Lone Prisoner

When Benjamin returned home, he learned that most of the men had been called to protect Far West, so he was asked to serve in the Diahman home guard. While he was alone on guard duty a few days later, he learned that Far West, the strongest of the Mormon communities, had surrendered. Although Benjamin felt the capture of Diahman was inevitable, he continued in his line of duty. In reflecting upon this time of danger and uncertainty, he recalled:

My last night on guard at Diahman I have ever remembered as one of the most lonesome and fearful of my whole life. I was down the Diahman valley nearly two miles. The heavy dry grass which was up to my shoulders was on fire on the side of the road opposite to the wind, which was high and the flames reached apparently to the clouds. It required great care to protect myself and to do my duty. About 2 o'clock I heard the sound of coming wagons and felt almost certain that a division of the mob was approaching. In order to be more safe I went from the open toward the wood and brush-covered ground to meet them, and on hailing, found to my great joy it was some families of our own people just coming in.

General Wilson soon arrived with his 700 mob militia and every man in Diahman was marshaled into rank and marched with all arms into Wilson's camp, where his soldiers were formed into an open square into which we were marched, and at the word of command laid our arms inversely upon the ground. We were then, under guard, marched out upon the street to be insulted, abused and taunted by our enemies. As I was marching with others, one of the Taylors, whose place I had seen burned, came up to me in company with Col. Sashed Woods, of Dewitt fame, and said while pointing to me, "This is one of the men who burnt my father's place." Colonel Wood looked at me and asked if it was so. I answered, "Yes, sir." He drew his sword and pointing

1Ibid., pp. 42-43.
in the direction of Wilson's camp bade me march with quick step, which I did at the sword's point, to the General's marquee. Here I was at once put under strong guard, a prisoner in General Wilson's camp.

O. B. Huntington, a friend who shared many of these experiences with Benjamin, said that when the Mormons surrendered their weapons, "Benjamin laid down probably the most valuable rifle owned by a Mormon at that time. Besides being a true shooting gun it had sixty pieces of gold and silver inlaid upon stock and barrel."\(^2\)

Of this new environment Benjamin said:

I was now twenty years of age, over six feet in height, reticent and somewhat genteel in dress and deportment, and although not robust in habit or appearance, I could feel that where there was culture and refinement, my appearance commanded respect and pity. With the ignorant Missouri barbarians, however, I was a hated Yankee, and the subject for every insult. With few exceptions my guard was of the latter class.\(^3\)

Following his arrest, Benjamin was questioned by the State's Attorney from St. Louis, and the Dr. Carr of Gallatin who made the first speech in that county to drive out the Mormons. They wanted to know the names of the Mormon leaders in Diahman and also the name of the man who led the raid on the Taylor farm. It was difficult for Benjamin to be truthful and yet not betray his loyalty to his brethren, and he recalled:

I had been trained to revere and tell the truth, and in my heart I felt earnestly to pray that my answers might not implicate any of my brethren. It seems that wisdom was given me, and a great strength of memory, so that in answering a question once I did not forget the answer or explanation I had given; and when I was pressed to tell who led us to Taylors (the place of the burnings), I told them I had but just come to the place, and had made few acquaintances, but had heard the man called Captain Cornelius, it being Cornelius P. Lott. They

\(^1\)Ibid., pp. 43-44.

\(^2\)Deseret Evening News, October 16, 1897, p. 7.

\(^3\)Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 44.
had also questioned the Taylors, and learned how I had treated them as prisoners, and had assisted the women and even quarreled with my own companions for their sake.1

After considerable cross-examination, the two men said:

Now young man, we have questioned you over and again, and you have given us always the same answer, and in no way have you contradicted your statement. We believe you tell the truth, and have been raised an honorable man. We know you are in a very bad fix here, and apparently but little hope for escape from conviction. You are the only prisoner here, and the chances for you are the worse, as there is much expectation in the army here as at Far West of bloody revenge. If you are the only one to answer for all the burnings and raids upon the old settlers then your case is bad indeed. But we are your friends, and unasked will do all in our power to save you.2

The day after his arrest, Benjamin was brought before Justice of the Peace Adam Black, a man whom the Mormons regarded as "a pronounced and bitter mobocrat."3 In Black's log cabin courthouse, Benjamin found two "friends" who claimed his trial should be military and not civil, and thus Judge Black should not be presiding. At first Benjamin was fearful of their purpose, but he was soon convinced that the Lord had touched their hearts with a feeling of friendship and pity.4 Benjamin was to be tried for robbery on the grounds that he "sought food for perishing women and children wherever it could be found."5 With the thought of the possible consequences, Benjamin wrote:

And here a new feature inspired more fear or dread than the thought of death. I being the only prisoner, and Davis County not being in the same judicial district with Far West, if committed by the magistrate I would be sent more than 100 miles in an opposite

1 Ibid., pp. 44-45.  
2 Ibid.  
3 Ibid., p. 44.  
4 Ibid., p. 46.  
5 Benjamin Franklin Johnson, handwritten manuscript on file at Church Historian's Office, Salt Lake City.
direction to that of Richmond, where our leaders were imprisoned. The mere thought of being taken so far away alone to prison was indeed terrible, and even now after so many years, I realize that such was the dread associated with the idea of being among strangers, to await trial alone in prison, that I would have chosen to go with the Prophet, were it even to certain death, rather than go elsewhere to be alone. The thought was a nightmare to me.¹

The day following the hearing, Judge Black's court met again.

Benjamin wrote:

Justice Black being an ignorant Missourian, they had him so completely entangled and befogged in matters of law, that seeing he could not proceed as he wished he jumped up in anger and declared he would have nothing more to do with the matter, and the military might do whatever they pleased with him. He left the court, ordering the officers to take me to the general's marquee, so I was soon returned to my guard. Now my great fear was gone, but it was common talk that I was to be shot.²

Benjamin was released from the charge of robbery because "that crime would not require my being hung or shot--and the mob spirit was hungering for Mormon blood, and being the only prisoner, I must be the scape-goat or sacrifice to appease the wrath and meet the hopes of the people."³

As a military prisoner, Benjamin was questioned often. Many times he was promised his freedom if he only would disclose the names of the Mormon leaders.⁴ His interrogators constantly reminded him that they planned to kill him in vengeance of all that had happened. Nothing, however, could frighten him as much as did his guards. He recalled:

¹Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 46.
²Ibid., p. 47.
³Johnson, "What I Know About Mormonism,"
⁴Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 47.
This "fear for life" I was made plainly to feel through the guard placed over me at night, of four men who were relived every two hours. One relief was composed of Haun's Mill murderers, including the fiend, Rogers, who killed Father McBride with the corn cutter, by cutting off his fingers, hands, arms and then splitting his head. That same corn cutter, still crimson with blood, hardly dry, was swung over my head once and again, with boasting of what it had done and what it would yet do, and with oaths and cursings picturing the fate that awaited me. No fancied horror could equal the real horror of the presence and words of those fiends; and I have ever felt that their presence and their words, with the corn cutter covered with blood, was the most terrible ordeal through which I have passed. Yet it was not the fear of their killing me, for I could think upon death calmly; but it was a something that grew out of being with and subject to those monsters.1

In 1905 The Deseret News contained an article describing Benjamin's Missouri experience.

Mr. Johnson, then a young man of 20 years, had been taken prisoner by the ruffian horde styled an army, commanded by Gen. Clark, and for eight days kept under guard at a camp fire in weather intensely cold with no shelter from the piercing winds by day or night; no bed except a few boughs between his body and the snow, which was above a foot in depth; no covering of any kind, and his only resource against freezing at night a constant replenishing of the camp fire, making sleep almost impossible. In addition to all this, he was denied any food, and was only kept from starvation by the pity of the negro cook, who stealthily gave him scraps left from meals when could do so unobserved.2

Day after day Benjamin's life was threatened. His captors would frequently warn him, "We'll kill you tomorrow, sure, and in a way to make you yell right smart."3 The following, which he related many years later, tells of one attempt a guard made to carry out his threats:

While sitting upon a log one day a brute came to him with a rifle in hand, saying, "You give up Mormonism right now, or I'll shoot you." Receiving a decisive refusal he took deliberate aim not 10 feet distance and pulled the trigger. No explosion occurred,

1Ibid., pp. 45-46.
3Ibid.
and he cursed fearfully, saying he had used the gun 20 years and it had never before missed fire. He examined the lock, put in fresh priming and again essayed to shoot Johnson, but without effect, and a third time with the same result. A bystander told him to fix up his gun a little, and then said he, "You can kill the cuss all right." "Yes," said the would-be murderer, "I'll put in a fresh load." He did so and again essayed to kill Johnson. This time the gun bursted [sic] and killed the wretch upon the spot, and a by-stander was heard to say, "You'd better not try to kill that man." And thus, day after day, Johnson was continually threatened with death.1

In spite of circumstances, Benjamin always sought to keep a cheerful face, and whenever possible entered into light conversation with his guests. He often sang to himself and occasionally got his guards to join him in song, hoping that they would forget that he was a hated Mormon. As the snow was deep and the nights were bitterly cold, much wood was needed to keep a fire. The wood for the night fire had to be gathered during the day, and the soldiers were ordered to cut down the large trees nearby and bring them into camp. At first Benjamin volunteered to help, but his help proved to be such a good thing that the soldiers began demanding his assistance. One incident at this time portrays a part of Benjamin's personality rarely displayed:

To all this [Carrying wood] I compiled cheerfully, until one time I was ordered to march for wood, which I did— took a heavy load upon my shoulders, and started for the guard fire. I was walking slowly, for my load was heavy and the snow deep, when the guard behind me ordered me with an oath to "step faster, or he would stick the bayonet into me." Upon this a terrible revulsion of feeling came over me, and had I been Sampson, I should have felt no stronger. I threw down the load as if it had been a straw, and raised my hand as I turned and confronted him. I shook my fist, and told him I would not carry so much as another chip; that if I had a sword I would split him from end to end. My voice was earnest, and the Colonel just passing came quickly and asked me what they were doing to me. I told him I was packing wood for the guard fire, and the guard had threatened to bayonet me if I did not move faster, and that I would

1Ibid.
pack no more wood. He turned to the guard, and with an oath told him that if I was not from that time treated as a prisoner should be that they would all be put under guard.¹

After Benjamin had been a prisoner for six or seven days "with no one to share his sorrows, his integrity was put to the severest test. He was offered release and honor if he would betray his brethren—death if he would not."² In recalling this dilemma, Benjamin wrote:

"Which would require the greatest bravery—to stand up like a man and be shot, or like a dog live to be despised by all who loved me . . . could I endure such a living death?" Every feeling within me responded, "No! I am too great a coward ever to meet those I love, who are good and pure, and feel myself a traitor." My whole soul gave the verdict that I would not save my life at such a price. Many an hour while sitting upon my brush pile in the snow, did I picture myself standing by some large tree or in some open space with the weapons of death raised against me; and although my heart yearned for its young and beautiful life, not once did it shrink, or in any way consent to live in dishonor.³

(Many years later, on his 79th birthday, as Benjamin reflected upon this test of his loyalty, he said, with tears running down his cheeks, "I would rather have been tied to every tree in the woods and shot, than to have forfeited my integrity to my brethren."⁴)

Because "the brethren" were afraid Benjamin would betray them to save himself, a companion and friend, William D. Huntington was sent to the camp to learn what was happening. William and Benjamin were allowed to talk only in the presence of the guards. Concerning this conversation Benjamin wrote:

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¹Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 48.

²"Birthday Reunion," Honors shown to Patriarch Benjamin F. Johnson, Arizona, Deseret Evening News, August 4, 1894.

³Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 47.

⁴Deseret Evening News, October 16, 1897, p. 7.
In ambiguous words he conveyed to me the fears of the people that I would prove a traitor. At this a sense of injustice came over me not easy to describe. I had stood there alone in prospect of death, or worse, and I had been true, and now instead of praying for me and giving me their faith they were prophesying evil, or exercising faith against me. A flood of grief gushed out of my eyes before I could hinder it. I told him to tell the people to have no fears, for with God's help I would stand true, even though they, instead of praying for me and exercising their faith for me, continued to prophesy evil against me. My very soul felt thrust to the center with their suspicions, and the feeling went to Brother William's heart.¹

William was convinced of the sincerity of Benjamin's words, and when he returned home, he related his experience to his mother and his sister Zina. They all agreed that Benjamin had been neglected, and Zina Huntington, then but a young girl, decided to do something about the situation.

Zina visited every family in the "Mormon" settlement not many miles away and persuaded men and women to meet at the log schoolhouse and pray for his Benjamin's release.²

Her efforts were successful. Men and women repaired to the appointed place, and in fervent prayer asked God that the young man might escape or be released. No sooner did one prayer cease than another commenced; and thus, without intermission, a continuous supplication ascended to heaven, hour after hour, all that day and the following night; some going home when necessary, while others returned to re-engage in supplication.³

Expressing his feelings during this time, Benjamin said, "That night I felt as though I knew the people were praying for me, and all grief, sorrow, fear and hardness left me. When Brother William came the next morning to bring comforting words I almost felt I had words of comfort for him."⁴

¹Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 49.
⁴Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 49.
As things had been, Benjamin's situation seemed almost hopeless, but he now received some unexpected help. He relates:

I was turned over to the Military to be tried by court martial. Here a friend came to my aid--a young attorney from St. Louis, who had accompanied by Army--a stranger to be but a man whom I shall never forget--from no inducement but prompting of his own heart he offered sympathy and friendship with his best efforts for my release. He wrought with the principal officers, and to General Wilson urged my release.1

The day following the prayers in his behalf, Benjamin was taken to the tent of General Wilson. After dismissing the guards the General told Benjamin that "he felt a strange indescribable interest and love for him; wanted to know where he was born, how he came to be there, where his relatives were and many more such items."2 Of this experience Benjamin wrote:

He said he believed I had been well raised and had good parents, and from all he could learn had in every respect been truthful and honest, and that which had been proved of me at Taylor's burning stood much to my credit. He said that he liked my appearance very much, and would have liked me to go and live with him. If I would leave the Mormon faith and go with him, and make my home with him he had every advantage to give me to become rich, and he would see that I would be one of the richest young men of the state. If I would do so, he would give me a pass and furnish me a horse to go direct to his home.

I thanked him from my heart, for his words were tender and kind, softened by a power he did not comprehend; but I told him I had parents back in the east, from whom I had till now never been separated, and that if I was ever free again I must go to them, for I knew my kindred were in great anxiety for my safety, and would fear I was dead until they saw me again. He said he did not blame me, and he would take the responsibility to give me a pass, but I must avail myself of the night time to get away, for old citizens around Diahman would certainly kill me if they found I was set at liberty.3

1Johnson, "What I Know of Mormonism"
2Deseret Evening News, October 16, 1897, p. 7.
3Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 50.
The Long Road to Freedom

About an hour before sunset, Benjamin was given a pass and taken to the Huntington home about half a mile from camp. There he hurriedly ate, obtained a few matches and a small amount of corn, and started through the woods toward Far West, twenty-five miles away. There was neither extra clothing nor a blanket available to him. 1 Of his newfound liberty was written:

But what a freedom—in snow two feet deep, no blanket, no arms to kill game or for self defense and no food except about two quarts of parched corn. And he must make his way many miles—for days—as he could not go to the "Mormon" village nearest at hand as he would be sought for there, be retaken, and murdered.2

As Benjamin traveled he watched for a house where he might spend the night. Since there were few homes in the area, it was late before he arrived at one. What happened after he knocked was recorded as follows:

The door was opened by a man who inquired what he wanted. He said he wanted a place to lie down and sleep and rest—he was cold and tired. The man pushed the door wide open and told him to look in. He saw no place on the floor where he could even stand. Every foot of space was covered with men, women and children, in best clothing and shape to pass the night—pilgrims fleeing from their homes, by order of Governor Boggs, and seeking a home beyond the Mississippi.3

After being directed to another home, he "sadly and slowly wandered in the snow and cold until he came to a house and on calling found it to be the same one he had left an hour or two before."4 This

1Deseret Evening News, October 16, 1897, p. 8.
2Deseret Evening News, December 19, 1905, p. 4.
4Ibid.
time he was escorted some distance and upon arriving at the home of
Elisha H. Groves was kindly received. The house was cold and the floor
was icy, and lying only upon a rug Benjamin shivered without sleep until
dawn. The next morning, after a small breakfast, he resumed his journey.\(^1\)
Nearly twenty miles of deep snow and rolling prairie lay between Benjamin
and his two sisters in Far West. He had begun this dreadful undertaking
on what he believed to be "the bitterest cold day of the whole winter."
He was already exhausted, and through his light clothing "the searching
winds seemed to find the very marrow of his bones."\(^2\) In describing his
situation Benjamin wrote:

The air was full of frost, and the sun through the mist looked blue
and cold, and the wind was terrible and would be full in my face.
Under the circumstances it looked like a fearful undertaking, but no
alternative appeared. Go I must, so I started with some miles of
unbroken snow before reaching the traveled road. The wind blew so
strong and steady that much of the distance I had to walk backwards
to keep my breath. Thus I traveled until I had got about half way
when I became so benumbed with cold and exhausted by fatigue that I
seemed I could proceed no further, without warmth and rest. I was
upon a high, bleak prairie, and not a house, tree or shrub could be
seen. It seemed that the angel of death stood before me, for my
heart and hope began to fail me. Yet I did not forget to pray in
my heart, and as I looked around upon the snowy expanse I saw just
at my left, a little from the road a small deep swale, where the
grass stood high and thick above the snow. I thought, "Oh that I
had saved just one match last night!" At the thought I felt in my
vest pocket and found just one match. With it, through the blessing
of the Lord I fired the grass. I inhaled the heated air, and soon
recovered warmth, and after a rest the wind was somewhat abated.\(^3\)

That Benjamin regarded such experiences as significant in shaping
his life is evident from the following quotation.

\(^1\)Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 51.

\(^2\)Johnson, "A Life Sketch"

\(^3\)Johnson, My Life's Review, pp. 51-52.
The little swale of tall grass and the one match when I supposed all were gone, did then and have ever since appeared as special providences to preserve my life; and in fact all the providences attending my imprisonment and liberation are ever remembered as the direct hand of the Lord for my preservation, to His own purpose and glory.1

With renewed strength and hope, Benjamin continued his journey and reached his sisters' home before dark. He found no safety at Far West, however, for he soon learned that the mobocrats of Diahman were hunting for him. With an old friend, Arthur Millican, who was also being hunted by the mobs, Benjamin purchased a few supplies and commenced walking toward Fort Leavenworth where they hoped to find protection.2

Through his many responsibilities and experiences during the past few months, Benjamin felt that he had achieved a degree of maturity to go with his large stature. However, he was occasionally reminded of growth yet to be made, as the following incident illustrates.

... my sister Julia had procured a pint can of honey, which with my young appetite I thought would be so good with our hard corn bread. I often thought of it as we plodded our way over the trackless prairie over which the sun was high and warm, until we came to timber upon the bank of a small creek. There we sat down to rest and eat such as loving hands had provided for us. I thought of my can of honey, and of the pleasure of sharing it with my comrade, but when I opened my pack it was not there--it had been left behind. As I realized its absence, a sense of disappointment and forlornness came over me, and as I sat upon the log I wept and sobbed, just like the big boy that I really was then.3

After traveling nearly two hundred miles they arrived at Fort Leavenworth in Indian territory, where they were given employment and promised protection. Living with about seventy-five men, Benjamin was thrust into a new environment, for he said:

1Ibid., p. 52.
2Ibid., pp. 52-53.
3Ibid., p. 53.
Here I began to comprehend more fully the vices of the world: gambling, drunkenness and prostitution were all bare and open-faced, and the Indian women and the negroes were just as common as was the money that would pay them. Yet while we in no way joined in with them in their gambling and carousing, they treated us with respect and often with kindness.\(^1\)

The winter months were spent driving six yoke of oxen to haul supplies to the fort and reservation. About the first of March, Benjamin learned of the death of Lyman R. Sherman, his sister Delcena's husband. Benjamin immediately made preparations to go to Far West where he could help her and her children leave Missouri. On his return trip to Far West, Benjamin found that he must cross a river where "much ice was running fearfully." The only transportation available was one canoe which would make just one more trip. Benjamin made arrangements to cross in the canoe. However, as he entered it, six others stepped in also, which, with the baggage, nearly sank the vessel.

The ferryman told us it was dangerous, and some had better get out, but no one would do so. When the canoe was still her rim was not more than one inch above the water. It was a fearful and almost hair-breadth escape, skulling through the masses of floating ice. But we landed safely, and ever since I have felt like holding my breath when the thought of that danger has occurred to me.\(^2\)

A. W. Babbitt traveled to Richmond, Missouri, to learn what they could about the welfare of the Prophet and his company, who were prisoners there. While there, Benjamin inquired about some of the Saints' possessions which they had shipped prior to their departure from Kirtland and also about his gun, which he had surrendered at Diahman. Benjamin found that the last of the Saints' shipment was just being auctioned to pay for

\(^1\)Ibid., p. 54.

\(^2\)Ibid., pp. 55-56.
freight charges. It was a great sacrifice, but the people had no means
of redeeming their belongings. While searching for his gun, which was
said to be the most valuable rifle in all upper Missouri, he was offered
a common gun as a replacement. He refused, insisting that he would accept
only the gun that he had laid down. After he finally located it, he
took it against the wishes of the officer in command. 1

Benjamin returned to Far West where he renewed his association
with William D. Huntington and spent much time in the Huntington home.
Benjamin later said, "the heart of . . . William with mine had become
in a degree as was David's to Jonathan, and to the companionship of his
sister [Zina] I was more than partial." 2 His spiritual experiences with
the Huntington family made a lasting impression upon Benjamin, for
he later said:

Often at Mother Huntington's did we have the most spirited and
enjoyable testimony or prayer meetings. There the gift of tongues
came to be in power, and never has it left me. To Sister Zina was
both the gift of tongues and interpretation given, and under the
influence of our spiritual enjoyment it seemed we formed a mutual
attachment, which before I left Far West grew into feelings of
reciprocal love, with hopes, which although not realized in full,
did not hinder our being ever the warmest and truest of friends. 3

Following the above statement in his journal, Benjamin wrote:
"On the 10th of March, 1839, I was ordained an Elder under the hands of
Apostle Heber C. Kimball, who then gave me notice that I would be
called to go with him the coming season on a mission to England." 4

1Ibid., p. 56.
2Benjamin F. Johnson, "A Tribute to Sister Zina Young," on file at
the Church Historian's Office, Salt Lake City.
3Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 57. 4Ibid.
When the Saints were expelled from Missouri in the winter of 1838-39, there were many who were poor and sick and who needed assistance. Under the leadership of Brigham Young, as President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, two hundred and fourteen able bodied men entered into a covenant "to stand by and assist each other". . . in removing from this State, and . . . never desert the poor who are worthy."¹ Benjamin signed his name to the document.² As the Mormon exodus commenced, Benjamin rendered assistance to many. He assumed the special charge of caring for his widowed sister Delcena and her six small children. Of these trying times, Benjamin wrote: "All who survived of the faithful proceeded as best they could to make their ⁷ Flight ⁷ from the state and through helping each other and best exertion all affected their escape to Ill. in early spring."³ Their journey took them over bad roads, and through storms and cold weather. When they safely crossed the river at Quincy, they found the citizens of Illinois showed great kindness to the persecuted Saints.⁴

Here to the everlasting credit of Quincy, Ill. and the adjacent counties, the sick, hungry and naked found sympathy and succor with a gleam of that humanity so in contrast with the fiendish, bitterness, deadly hate and suffering from which they had fled, leaving our leaders and friends in prison.⁵

¹Edward W. Tullidge, History of Salt Lake City (Salt Lake: Star Printing Co., 1886), p. 81.

²History of the Church, III, pp. 251-254.

³Johnson, Handwritten Manuscript, op. cit.

⁴Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 57.

⁵Johnson, Handwritten Manuscript, op. cit.
After finding a comfortable home for Delcena and her children Benjamin went on to Springfield, Illinois, to see those of his family with whom he had traveled from Kirtland. When he arrived there about the first of April, "there was a meeting and greeting, with gratitude to the Lord" for their reunion.\(^1\) In reviewing the many experiences he had between the time he left his family and the time he returned to them, Benjamin wrote:

I arrived [In Missouri] in October just in time to take part in and become familiar with all that transpired with us as a people. I knew of the onslaught upon DeWitt in Caldwell County and misery and deaths that accompanied it—knew all of the circumstances attending the murder of Elder David Patten and others on Crooked River—knew all the details of that most horrible butchery at Haun's Mill, when men, women and children were indiscriminately shot; and I looked into the well where 20 mangled bodies including small children were thrown together with Father McBride, a Revolutionary veteran, who fought with Washington the battles of Freedom—shot with his own gun and mangled with a scythe blade corn cutter, which I saw myself in the hand of his murderer, smeared with the blood of his victim, which I have great cause to remember. I was the witness of the terrible sufferings of those who were compelled to flee from the homes they had built or bought from our enemies by whom many were robbed of whatever they could not bear upon their backs; and as winter with its storms was now upon us, and terrible was the sufferings of women, children and the aged, for they were without tent or covering; and in this condition children were born; while the old and feeble perished both by famine and exposure. For we were hemmed in by the mob who now were in possession of our homes, grain, stock and all our resource for food. Under this condition of famine and exposure, myself with others made forage expeditions outside of our town or camp to procure upon a principle of reprisal corn, beef cattle, hogs or anything with which to sustain life. The cry then went out of plunder and robbing upon citizens by Mormons, and the Government listening to all the vile calumnies heaped upon us by our enemies, gave order Major General Clark and Atchison to legalize or organize the Mob military into an Army of 5,000 and with it exterminate the Mormons. The awful particulars of that followed in the betrayal of our Leaders - their insurrection with the fiendish insults and abuse to which they were subject, while a Military Mob in all their unbridled \(\text{sic}\) license ravished wives and daughters of now imprisoned or

\(^{1}\)Johnson, *My Life's Review*, p. 57.
disarmed and defenseless people—shot down that of less value in the streets. While every man of prominence was either in prison or making his way through winter storms to get outside of the State. . . . In all these things I was more than an eye witness.¹

I was now . . . with increased health, energy, endurance, and animated with brighter hope than before had ever inspired me, all begotten within me through a travail of tribulation and sacrifice since leaving Kirtland not more than nine months ago.

In looking back over the vicissitudes through which I had passed in that short period it seemed more like a dream than a reality; and when I think of it all as real, I feel a weight of gratitude to God that I find no words to express.²

Of Benjamin's part in these happenings, O. B. Huntington stated:

"The events of that time inducted him to lessons of experience that created pages of history in his life."³

¹Johnson, "What I Know of "Mormonism"
²Johnson, My Life's Review, pp. 57-58.
³Deseret Evening News, October 16, 1897.
CHAPTER IV.

ILLINOIS PERIOD--A TRUSTED SERVANT

In Springfield Benjamin was employed by Charles Lamb, a wholesale merchant and banker, by whom he was treated with the greatest degree of confidence. During his time he received a letter from Heber C. Kimball stating that during the June conference at Quincy he had been called to accompany the apostles on their mission to Europe. Because of this call, Benjamin earnestly applied himself to the business of saving money so he would be prepared when the brethren left.

Benjamin became acquainted with a rich young widow, the sister of Mrs. Lamb. She had been married to Secretary of State Falguar, and had one child. Of their association, Benjamin wrote, "My vanity was at least a little flattered even if I was not tempted by the partiality of this young lady. She was reputed very rich--a millionaire, and I felt very sure I could win her hand if I would, especially after I had overheard a conversation between her and her sister. . . ." In considering his opportunities, Benjamin wrote:

I pondered the matter prayerfully, and I could not but feel that to marry a woman with wealth would be to bring myself to the world, and would keep me from my mission, and if allured away from my calling in the Gospel, then all the new and bright hopes that had

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1 Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 59.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
wakened within me would become a failure. I felt it would be a sacrifice too great even for a lovely wife with inheritance of wealth.¹

When Benjamin learned that Commerce, in Hancock County, had been purchased as a gathering place for the Saints and that the Prophet had escaped from Missouri, he prepared to leave Springfield. He had now saved about one hundred dollars² and felt that the time might be drawing near to leave for Europe. Anxious to see the Prophet and other old friends at the new gathering place, Benjamin left Springfield on horseback July 28, 1839, the day of his twenty-first birthday.³

Service in Time of Sickness

Benjamin arrived in Commerce on August 1, 1839, and found that it was a time of general sickness and death among the Saints. Many had already died and almost everyone was sick with chills or typhoid malarial fever.⁴ In writing of these conditions, he stated that it seemed the sickness would sweep the place with death, for among all the families of the Saints it was rare to find one who was able to wait upon and care for another.⁵ Every house was a hospital, but without nurses for the sick. There were hardly enough healthy ones to bury the dead.⁶ From his past

¹Ibid., pp. 59–60.
²Johnson, "A Life Sketch"
³Ibid., p. 60
⁴Johnson, "A Life Sketch"
⁵Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 60.
experiences Benjamin knew what should be done, and he was immediately called to help. Concerning this time he wrote:

In this time of great sickness, poverty and death, the Prophet called his brother, Don Carlos, and cousin, G. A. Smith, as missionaries to administer to and comfort the people. And there being there two young Botanic medical students Doctors Wiley and Pendleton, he called them to prescribe medicine, and called me to follow and take general oversight and care of all the sick.¹

I had come to Nauvoo, which it was then beginning to be called, on horse back and as houses of the Brethren were scattered for some distance up and down the river I kept my horses under the saddle and rode from house to house giving medacines [sic] . . . caring for and nursing the sick and for six weeks did not take off my boots or coat for one nights sleep.²

When someone was too sick to be left alone through the night, Benjamin would often ride several miles through the country to bring young women to stay with them. This enabled Benjamin to visit and care for a larger number of the sick. In relating one such incident, he said:

I had spent four or more weeks and had not yet pulled off coat or boots for a night's rest. But I was getting worn out, when on one occasion, in going for one of the Robison girls to come to Bishop Granger's, it being warm, I rode away without coat or vest, and on my return the wind blew, and we were drenched with chilling rain. I felt then that I was "done for," and sure enough that night I took a terrible chill with fever, and lay for a day and a half, most of the time delirious, until Sister Sarah M. Granger, herself sick, got word to Brother Hyrum Smith, who the second day sent me some gruel. In this condition I lay for days, until I procured Sapinton's pills, a compound of quinine, which was now the common remedy. They broke my chill for a time, and I was soon able to walk about, when I was called by the Prophet to his house and requested by him to remain there and take care of myself. Over-exertion brought on a relapse, but I was soon up again, and waiting upon the sick.³

¹Johnson, Letter to Gibbs.
²Johnson, "A Life's Sketch"
³Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 61.
About this time the Prophet "had a violent attack of the prevailing sickness and as Emma was in no degree able to care for him,"¹ he chose Benjamin as his constant nurse and companion.² Regarding his care of the Prophet, Benjamin wrote: "It wholly devolved upon me, and both day and night, through a period of little less than two weeks, I was hardly absent from his room . . . and if any sleep came to me it was while lying upon his bed or sitting in my chair."³

Concerning the accounts of this time of general sickness in Nauvoo, Charles S. Sellers observed that "The Saints are generally well informed . . . but of the part which Brother Johnson took, none are apprised, a fact undoubtedly arising through Brother Johnson's modesty, and perhaps lack of friends, among those who write history."⁴

Soon after the Prophet's recovery Benjamin "came, apparently, nigh unto death through violent attack of the fever," and his "comfort was kindly looked after by the Prophet."⁵ Near the first of October, 1839, Benjamin received a letter from his family informing him that his mother was very sick and advising him to come as soon as possible, because it was doubtful that she would recover. O. B. Huntington commented on the effect this letter had upon Benjamin.

His mother was the joy and stay of the family, and Benjamin was ready to undertake almost an impossibility to see his dearly beloved parent once more—his love for her, his faith and his will power, so far overcame the disease that he prepared hastily for the journey of over 100 miles on horseback.⁶

⁴"A Last Witness," Improvement Era, XIV, p. 545.
⁵Deseret Evening News, October 16, 1897.
During the previous two months, Benjamin had ruined all of his best clothes and had spent all but ten dollars of the money which he had saved for his mission. Feeling feverish and weak, he took double doses of quinine pills, then gathered his belongings together and began his journey. Before leaving Nauvoo, Benjamin stopped at the home of the Prophet to pay tithing on the ten dollars which he had left. Of this parting visit Benjamin wrote:

Going to the Prophet I told him I was ready to leave and reaching to him the bill, I said, "As this is all I have left, I want to pay a tithe of it." He saw I was weak in body and that my heart was sad in leaving him, so thinking to cheer and arouse me, when putting the nine silver dollars in my hand he playfully knocked my hand upward, and scattering the money all over the room. My heart was full of tears, and my emotion must have vent, so forgetting all but the feeling that we were boy companions playing together, I sprang at and grappled him, as though to teach him a lesson, but the lesson was all to me for on making the one grand effort to throw him, and as my strength was fictitious and my real recovery but an illusion, I collapsed and fainted in his arms. He placed me in repose, and did all necessary for my restoration and comfort. Then gathered up the scattered money, and after a period of delay, weak, trembling and desolate, yet determined to start, I led my horse to the outer gate, and as I was passing through, with the bridle on my arm, his hand detained me, and placing his hands upon my head, he seemed to pour out his soul in blessing me. He told the Lord I had been faithful to care for others, that I was now worn and sick, and that on my journey I would need his care, and he asked that a special guardian might go with me from that day and stay with me through all my life. ¹

The foregoing incident served to assure Benjamin that the bond of love and friendship between himself and the Prophet had grown and strengthened. Throughout his life Benjamin was proud of this close association and friendship with the Prophet Joseph Smith.

Having Joseph's parting blessing to comfort and sustain him, Benjamin commenced his journey. The first night of his trip was spent with his brother, Joel, near Carthage. The following day as he was

¹Johnson, Letter to Gibbs, p. 5.
traveling, Benjamin was taken by a severe chill, followed by a high fever. This sudden chill and fever so prostrated him that he fell unconscious by the roadside. The Prophet's brother William and his wife, who were out picking wild plums, found Benjamin in this condition and took him to their home in Plymouth. William's sister Lucy tenderly cared for Benjamin and was greatly concerned to see him as sick as he was. He resumed his journey at ten o'clock the next day. That day Benjamin traveled without suffering a chill, but the day after that he was stricken with an even more severe attack of chills and fever than he had had previously. This time a stranger picked him up by the roadside and took him to his home.

In this way, alternately traveling and chilling, Benjamin got home and found that his mother and sister were not so sick as he was. The kind ministrations of friends did indeed seem timely. He was frightfully sick; his money was gone; and his clothing was worn and spoiled. After so much sickness, his mother and brothers too were in poor condition with very limited resources. This combination of circumstances made the prospects for Benjamin's fulfilling his assigned mission seem very dim.

While Benjamin was in Springfield his condition grew worse. The chill came every day, the spasms in his stomach became terrible, and he began having a fearful hemorrhage in which he voided a great quantity of blood, so much so that the doctor said if the chills came again, he would die.

Benjamin pondered the doctor's words and came to the conclusion that it would be better for him to die because he was a burden to his
friends and he had no money with which to go on his mission to England. Indeed, he had been sick so long that he almost felt a desire to die. However, the prescribed medicine was obtained and administered to him by careful hands and loving hearts. Two days passed, and the chill and paroxysm did not return and the hemorrhaging ceased. Before long he was able to walk, and life began to look hopeful again.¹

On October 5, 1839, Apostles Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball arrived in Springfield on their way to England.² Benjamin had to decide whether or not he would join them. Of their visit and his decision, Benjamin wrote:

When they saw how sick I was, and without money or suitable clothing they did not urge me to go but left it to my own faith and desire. I much wished to go but was so diffident, had no missionary experience, and fearing they would feel me a burden I had not faith enough to start. They told me to take a mission east as soon as I was able and this I felt determined to do.³

A Mission to Canada

In February of 1840, following the visit of Elders Young and Kimball, Benjamin’s desire to fulfill a mission, increased. Although he was too sick to sit up for very long at a time, unable to walk more than a few rods, and had hardly yet attempted to speak in a prayer meeting, Benjamin let it be known that he would leave for his mission if he could obtain one day’s ride out of Springfield. Mr. James Standing volunteered to take him in a sleigh as far as the snow would last. Lying

¹Johnson, My Life’s Review, pp. 63-64.
²Smith, History of the Church, IV, p. 11.
³Johnson, My Life’s Review, p. 64.
upon a bed in the back of the sleigh, Benjamin was taken to Paris, Illinois, a distance of one hundred and ten miles.¹ Here Mr. Standing left him, and Benjamin recalled his feeling of being alone:

Here I was left, and here now was a test of fortitude and perseverance that may find few equals. Only twenty-one years of age, I was alone, sick, and among strangers without money, the mud deep, weather stormy, without education or mission experience and bashful beyond the power of words to tell. Yet I did not wish myself back. The Lord had brought me carefully through an experience calculated to teach me that it would not do to depend upon my own wisdom and strength, and as for my own capability, it was really as nothing, and if the Lord had ceased to care for me I was of little worth. I told the Lord I had taken that mission because I was told to by His servants, and if there was anything a poor ignorant boy could do to please Him I was willing to try and do my best, but if He left me alone I was certain I could accomplish nothing. These were my feelings as Brother Standing turned his sleigh homeward through the mud in one direction, while I with my valise and a stick in hand slowly moved in the other pouring out my secret feelings to the Lord as I went.²

From Paris, Illinois, he walked to Pleasant Gardans, Indiana. Here he met Jonathan Crosby and his family, whom Benjamin had known in Kirtland. Soon after his arrival Benjamin again took the chills and fever and was kindly cared for and nursed by Sister Crosby.³ When he had recovered sufficiently, he was invited to many places to visit and to preach. He had never before attempted preaching in public, and of this he said:

So long sick, I was still feeble, and the chills still following me, my body was weak indeed, but my visits among the people had made them anxious to hear me, so I forced myself to the issue and when the congregation came I opened the meeting as best I knew how and arose with my eyes shut and commenced to talk. The spirit to talk

¹Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 65.
²Ibid., pp. 65-66.
³Ibid., pp. 66-67.
came upon me and I preached one hour and a half. . . . A number now came forward for baptism, and here I baptized my first convert. I now had calls to preach from many directions, and I was gaining in confidence and felt blessed in my labors, with the spirit of my mission.

While Benjamin labored here, a Doctor Knights, a member of the Church, furnished him with a horse. About the middle of July, 1840, they left Pleasant Gardens together and traveled four hundred miles to Kirtland. As they traveled, Benjamin preached in places where the Doctor was known. After arriving in Kirtland, the Doctor invited Benjamin to go on with him to Canada, suggesting that he could continue his mission in that area. Benjamin agreed to go.

In Toronto, Canada, he felt there was work to be done, so when Doctor Knights returned to Kirtland, Benjamin stayed behind. Although he found himself alone among entire strangers, over a thousand miles from home, on foot and penniless, Benjamin tried to get back into the spirit of his mission. After an unsuccessful attempt, he concluded: "I soon realized that instead of being in a new and fresh field of labor I was in the stubble field, already harvested by older and more experienced elders." Benjamin moved into the rural areas where he preached twice a week to large congregations with good liberty. He said that perhaps he began to feel a degree of self importance not approved of by the Lord. 2 While holding one meeting, Benjamin had an experience which left a lifelong impression on his mind.

At the time appointed a large and expectant congregation filled the house. With a degree of self-confidence I went to the stand with a feeling akin to exultation in the large congregation, and in

1Ibid., p. 67.

2Ibid., pp. 67-73.
what I felt so sure I should be able to say to them. I opened the meeting as usual, took my Bible and began to read from Daniel, but the scripture that had before seemed so full of light was now dark. I turned to others, but all was dark. The light of the Lord had left me, and I stood there alone before the great congregation, alone in my own strength, and in my nakedness I almost felt a horror of myself. I stood there speechless, and mortified. And oh! the sense of ingratitude to the Lord that came over me. The flood gates of my heart broke, and I wept. The congregation sat silent, and I could feel their pity. The thought came over me to be honest before God, the people and myself, and confess all before them, and as I opened my mouth, my speech came to me and I asked them if they had not often heard me speak to their understanding and edification, and if I had not always told them I was but a plow boy sent out like the apostles of old, to preach by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, and that without it, I was nothing, as was now proved there before them; that for some cause known to the Lord, His Spirit had left me, and they now saw me in my own strength, in which I could do nothing. I said, "As you have come out today only to be disappointed, perhaps you would not be willing to come again." But I saw they believed me honest, and I said, "If you will allow me to have another appointment, rise to your feet." When all the congregation rose, I said I would preach again if the Lord would help me, at the usual time, and dismissed the meeting. A feeling of kindness pervaded all, but oh, how small I felt. I prayed the Lord to forgive my great ingratitude, and I would try forever more not to forget how dependent I was upon Him.\(^1\)

While he was laboring in this place, it seemed to Benjamin that there were those who believed what he taught yet none came forward for baptism. He wondered if perhaps he looked too young and too feeble to baptize anyone. He was very thin and frequently afflicted with pain in his side. However, he seemed to lose all care for his health and life and would sometimes stand for three hours vehemently speaking to a congregation. So great was his wish to bear his testimony that he felt he could not die in a better cause. He thought that it was the Lord's business to take care of him if he was of any use to the Lord. But, he learned later that some of his ideas were the fruits of his sorrows.

\(^1\)Ibid., pp. 73-74.
and of his youth, rather than of the wisdom that age and experience bring.  

Seeking for a more receptive group of people, Benjamin traveled north to South Gilensburgh, and then on to North Gilensburgh, on the shore of Lake Simcoe. Again he found people who he felt believed his message, but they seemed to think he was too young and feeble to be trusted with their baptism. His health was poor and his constitution seemed terribly broken, so much so that he was often told that he would not live to return home. Although Benjamin seemed to be declining with consumption, this in no wise deterred him from filling every appointment to preach and from striving to fill his mission.  

Benjamin recorded an unusual experience which occurred in this locality:

In this vicinity there were many Indians on an island in Lake Simcoe. The government had colonized a large tribe and they were scattered upon the borders of the lake. Upon the lake shore . . . grew beautiful broad-spreading cedar trees, with branches so low and broad that they appeared almost like a canopy or tent, and the Indians often occupied this as a summer resort for fishing, etc. One morning while taking my walk along these trees I came upon a number of Indian families encamped. I found one Indian who could talk very good English and was quite intelligent. I questioned him in relation to their traditions of the past, and of their hopes of the future. At first he did not seem disposed to talk, but seemed willing to listen. I commenced talking to him of their forefathers, when the Spirit came upon me, and I spoke in their own tongue. All the Indians came running to me, to listen with glistening eyes and great attention through all my talk to them. When I ceased, the Indian with whom I had been talking said, "You talk good Mohawk, and we all understand." This was manifest to me, the Spirit of the Lord rested upon them, and they would now tell me anything I wished to know pertaining to their religion. I learned that their hopes of the future were almost identical with our own, and they realized that because of wars and wickedness they had been cursed, but that

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1Ibid., pp. 74-75.
2Ibid., p. 75.
through the ancient fathers it was promised that the power of their enemies should be broken, and a great prophet or prince would be sent to them by the Great Spirit. All of this was in the highest degree joyful to me, for I felt that I had been led to them to bear a great testimony to these Lamanites, that would not by them be forgotten, and that it would live in the hearts of their children.¹

Leaving Canada about the middle of November 1840, Benjamin began walking toward Kirtland. He stopped at Fredonia, his native home, and was greeted with an old-time friendship. Benjamin had visited Fredonia once since the Johnson family had left, but this time he wished to bear a testimony of greater strength, in hopes that some would believe him. He was disappointed once again. His former friends and neighbors could not be awakened to any love for the gospel. Realizing this he then bore to them his last testimony and left them.²

While traveling through the snow and cold in Erie County, Pennsylvania, Benjamin felt impressed to visit a family which he had been asked to contact. The word at once went out that a Mormon Elder had come, and many people appeared anxious for him to preach. Benjamin did preach the next day. The following day he was taken to Union district where he preached to a large congregation, and from there he was taken to an even larger gathering. Here, at last, a wide door for preaching seemed to be opening for him, but the opposition was not asleep. Soon the priests came out and filled the stand, without invitation, fully expecting to overawe and squelch the Mormon boy.³

¹Ibid., p. 76.
²Ibid., pp. 77-78.
³Ibid., p. 79.
Following one of Benjamin's talks, Rev. Jesse E. Church, a great and noted preacher, arose and gave out an appointment to preach the next evening. He said that he would down all this Mormonism and that he had once challenged Sidney Rigdon, who would not meet him in debate. Benjamin visited two of the Reverend's services and held two more himself. In referring to one of his own meetings, and the results of his labors, Benjamin wrote:

I invited any present who wished baptism to arise. Seven of his own members arose, and repairing to the creek and cutting through fifteen inches of ice, were baptized by the boy for whom he had shown such contempt. Among those baptized were some of the family of John Spaulding, brother of Solomon Spaulding of the Spaulding Manuscript story. This story, with every other previously invented, was paraded to defeat the Book of Mormon, and it should be remembered that in this vicinity lived Solomon Spaulding, and here he wrote "The Manuscript Found," which connected with the Book of Mormon. After this, the great Jesse E. Church, as he was termed by his admirers, was silent. Instead of squelching Mormonism, and the Mormon Boy, he had squelched himself, and few were left to follow or honor him.1

Although he preached two or three times each day for many weeks, Benjamin was not tremendously successful. Most of the people were interested only because his ideas were novel and exciting. They were bored with what their own ministers taught and were looking for someone else to follow. Benjamin felt that it was not really truth they were seeking but rather the sensation of something new. As the dullness of winter waned and spring brought its own sensations, his calls for preaching began to die away.2

Since Benjamin's opportunities for teaching the gospel had diminished, he worked on various jobs through the summer. In the fall

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1Ibid., pp. 79-80.

2Ibid., p. 84.
of 1841, his sister Julia and her husband A. W. Babbitt, visited him and invited him to return to Kirtland with them. He welcomed the chance to go. After serving about two years as a missionary, he was going home wiser because of his experiences and more courageous in defending his religious beliefs.

Return to Nauvoo

Some of the Church members had cherished a dream of restrengthening the Church in Kirtland, and this spirit of settling and building up Kirtland now began to grow among them. For those who stayed in Kirtland because of duty, privilege, or choice there appeared to be hope for a good home and business future although this was contrary to the wishes of Joseph Smith. Benjamin intended to comply with the wishes of the prophet. To him Kirtland did not seem like a home for the faithful and true Latter-day Saint. Because he was anxious to return to the "home of the church in the west" he applied himself earnestly to the business of earning sufficient means to make the journey.1

While living in the home of his brother-in-law, A. W. Babbitt, Benjamin became acquainted with a young lad, Melissa Bloomfield LeBaron, who with Benjamin's younger sister, was a student in the Academy at Kirtland. Melissa was an orphan, and Benjamin believed that in appearance, education, and ease of manner she had no equal in the vicinity. Because Benjamin was, by that time, a highly respected and successful missionary and because Melissa was a comely young heiress beloved by all who knew her, their friends hoped that they would make a match.

1Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 85.
After becoming acquainted with Melissa, Benjamin perceived that his company was not unpleasant to her. He felt attracted to her and could look upon her with a feeling of pride. As this feeling grew, it drew them naturally more and more together. Benjamin supposed that the Lord had placed before him a young lady of culture and refinement who was a good Latter-day Saint and who was willing, in the coming season, to accompany him to the gathering place of the Saints. He believed that the Lord had proved him to be virtuous and honest in his dealings with those whom he had loved and that He had for that reason brought Melissa there for him. In his own words, "It seemed to me the Lord had remembered that whatever I had earned I had cheerfully contributed in assisting his Saints from Missouri, and in caring for and supplying the sick at Nauvoo, as also those of the Kirtland Camp." And so it was that Benjamin, proposed to Melissa, knowing before he asked her that she would accept.

On Christmas day, 1841, the couple was married by Brother Babbitt in the house in which the prophet had lived while he was in Kirtland. At the wedding, Benjamin and Melissa had so many friends and well-wishers that every room in the house was crowded.

The members of the Church did not remain long in Kirtland. Because Almon W. Babbitt had remained in Kirtland, contrary to the counsel of the Church leaders, he was severely reprimanded by a revelation which Joseph Smith reportedly received on January 19, 1841. The revelation stated, in part: "And with my servant Almon Babbitt, there

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1 [Ibid.], p. 86.
2 Ibid.
are many things with which I am not pleased; behold, he aspireth to establish his counsel instead of the counsel which I have ordained, even that of the Presidency of my Church; and be setteth up a golden calf for the worship of my people.\textsuperscript{1} About the time Benjamin arrived in Kirtland, action was taken by the Church leaders in Nauvoo to disfellowship Brother Babbitt because he had continued in his business endeavors in Kirtland.\textsuperscript{2} It was apparent to Benjamin that all those "who were true Saints" would leave Kirtland and gather with the Church at Nauvoo. Benjamin observed that Brother Babbitt now believed that he would lose his business and that Brother Babbitt felt hurt by the rebuke in the revelation. Because of this, Brother Babbitt was "in great temptation to complain, and to turn his heel upon the Prophet."

Benjamin was greatly concerned for the spiritual welfare of his brother-in-law. He saw that it was wisdom to use every influence that he could to induce Brother Babbitt to return to Nauvoo. Brother Babbitt had brought many notes and claims against the Prophet or the Church, and with these he may be tempted to do a great wrong. Benjamin's love for him was so great the he was willing to make any sacrifice in order to promote Almon's love for the gospel and his fellowship in the Church.\textsuperscript{3}

Following a proposal by Brother Babbitt, Benjamin joined him as a partner in obtaining a small law library. Benjamin began to study law with his brother-in-law so that he could be close to him and encourage him in his church activity.

\textsuperscript{1}Smith, History of the Church, IV, p. 28.  
\textsuperscript{2}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 424.  
\textsuperscript{3}\textit{Ibid.}
About the last of January, 1842, Benjamin and his new bride decided to travel to her hometown of Leroy and then go on to Rochester to obtain some money due her from a legacy. This trip was also to be a mission among her relatives and friends. When Benjamin and Melissa inquired about her inheritance, they were disappointed to learn that much of it—some four hundred dollars in interest and some valuable household goods left by her mother—had been borrowed by a Bishop Granger without Melissa's consent. The money had been spent and the household goods scattered. Melissa was never reimbursed. The Johnson's did, however, obtain the principal.

Benjamin now prepared to move to Nauvoo. In June, 1842, he took his wife, his father, and his sisters Julia and Esther. Julia's husband, A. W. Babbitt, arranged to come later, bringing with him goods to start a merchandise business.

Traveling in beautiful weather with good roads, they should have had a safe and pleasant journey, but their animals were young and spirited and they were often in great danger. Because of his deep spiritual nature, Benjamin believed that the troubles of the trip were the Lord's way of teaching him a lesson. The following is taken from his own account:

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1Ibid.

2Johnson, "A Life's Sketch,"

3Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 73.

4Johnson, "A Life's Sketch"
With all past experience I had a lesson yet to learn. We were just over the Illinois line in the prairie country and it was the Sabbath. We had driven hard all the week and needed rest, yet our anxiety was so great to get to our friends that although we knew the Lord had said, "Thou shalt rest on the Sabbath," yet in our haste we did not do so, and driving until noon we crossed a deep creek, on the opposite bank of which was an open space of beautiful grass, surrounded by timber and high brush. Our teams were tired, and heretofore on the road had given no evidence that they were easily frightened or disposed to run away. So driving into the tall grass I slipped off their bridles, as I had often done before. But no sooner had I done so than they began to show signs of fright, and commenced to plunge and start to run. My father was just doing the same with his buggy horse, and my sisters stood holding the span attached to the family carriage. I did all possible to quiet my team but they broke away. My father's did the same; the others broke away from the women, and all went tearing through the timber and brush until every vehicle was smashed and with goods and harness strung piecemeal for three-fourths of a mile around. A greater smash up it was never my bad luck to see. At first I looked upon the wreck as impossible to reconstruct, but we gathered up and put the parts together and got all mechanical help possible, labored hard, and by the next Sabbath day we had so far reconstructed our vehicles that by noon we hitched up, and feeling again tempted through anxiety we drove fifteen miles to early camp, but when unhitching our horses they again—all but one—took fright, took the back track, and as though spurred by the Evil One ran the whole distance to our former camp. Upon the horse left I followed with utmost speed and found them with legs terribly lacerated by the tug chains, and streaming with blood and sweat. I made no stop, but hurried them back as fast as I could ride, arriving in camp just before sunset, and was up much of the night bathing the bruised legs of the animals, and telling the Lord if He would now forgive me and give us His blessing for the rest of the journey I would promise never to forget the experience of those two Sabbath days. We started early the next morning, and with all the fatigue and bruises, our animals seemed all right, and made us no trouble afterwards. I knew then and I know now that this experience was given to me of the Lord for my profit, and to record as a testimony to my children, that the Lord will not hold in favor those who do not rest upon and hallow the Sabbath day.1

At any rate, Benjamin and his group arrived in Ramus on July 1, 1842, where they were reunited with the rest of the family. Here they learned of the recent death of Amos, the youngest member of the family.

1Johnson, My Life's Review, pp. 89-90.
Benjamin, who possessed extraordinary faith in God, often evaluated his experiences as being signs given to him for his good. Perhaps some of his willingness to regard good fortune as a blessing from God and to attribute misfortune to the power of Satan came from his close association with Joseph Smith.

During the same summer in which Benjamin had returned from his mission, Joseph also had had an unfortunate experience with a horse. One day while Willard Richards was riding Joseph's galloping horse, the horse fell. The Prophet concluded that "it was a trick of the devil to kill my clerk."¹

Benjamin's tendency to see "the Hand of the Lord" in his experiences may also have been influenced by the fact that he wrote some of them from memory after having promoted his religious philosophy for forty years.

In contemplating the changes in his life since he had left Nauvoo, Benjamin was moved to write:

My return after an absence of two and a half years of such varied experience, was a time of glad greeting for all. I had left home when but a boy in experience, the uneducated one—starting while sick and without money; and truly, that promised Angel had been with me, to preserve my life and to open the way for my return in health, not now alone, for a loved and loving wife accompanied me, I was not now so poor, and I felt truly the Lord had given me more than I had earned and repaid all my sacrifices.²

Benjamin soon traveled to Nauvoo where he was welcomed by the Prophet. He discussed with the Prophet the business matters between himself and Brother Babbitt, expressing his confidence that with the Prophet's arm around him, Brother Babbitt, would remain true to the cause.

¹Smith, History of the Church, V, pp. 22-23.
²Ibid., p. 91.
This was the first time that Benjamin had ever spoken to the Prophet with feelings and opinions of his own. Benjamin felt that because he had let Joseph know how much he loved his brother-in-law and how anxious he was to help him, Joseph loved him (Benjamin) even more. At least Joseph told Benjamin to bring Brother Babbitt to see him as soon as he arrived in Nauvoo.

Because of his role as intercessor in this problem, Benjamin was given other responsibilities which he later outlined:

We found Brother Joseph in a happy mood and glad to see Brother Babbitt. When business matters were brought forward relating to notes bought from outsiders against him or the Church, Brother Joseph said to him, "Now Brother Almon, we will not disagree, for here is Brother Benjamin; you have all confidence in him and so have I; and now let us leave all our differences to him and stand by it, and be good friends forevermore," to which Brother Babbitt agreed. All was settled at once, and all papers between them were placed in my hands, which then included the Church property in Kirtland, and the Prophet said then that he wished me to remain in Ramus, as it was then called, and act as trustee or agent for the Church property at that place, consisting of the then surveyed town plat and all the lands around the town site. He then made and executed to me a power of attorney to use his name in buying, selling, and deeding property, which power I held and acted upon fully until the day of his martyrdom.  

Benjamin again entered into a business partnership with Brother Babbitt, but another call came to him. At this time Brigham Young, President of the Twelve, wished to send Benjamin to Pittsburgh to preside over and take charge of the branches of the Church in that region. However, Benjamin’s business prospects at home looked very good, and he felt that he should carefully look after the means that had come to him. It was with mixed feelings that he told the Prophet of his call. He describes his feelings as being sorrowful like the "Rich Young Ruler," but secretly he felt that business success might be the road to real

1Ibid., pp. 91-92.
usefulness. When Joseph told him to "tell Brother Brigham that Bro. Joseph say, 'Send some one else,'" Benjamin felt that the Prophet had described his feelings and decided accordingly.¹

Benjamin's life in Ramus involved "selling goods, keeping a tavern, and doing all the Church business for that town, which was in size, second only to Nauvoo." He later confessed that he was beginning to like the idea of getting rich, but he did not forget his Priesthood responsibilities and frequently preached both in meetings at home and the surrounding area.

While Benjamin was living in Ramus, the bond of friendship between him and the Prophet Joseph Smith became even more intimate. Benjamin explained this association as follows:

The Prophet often came to our town, but after my arrival he lodged in no house but mine, and I was proud of his partiality and took great delight in his society and friendship. When with us, there was no lack of amusement; for with jokes, games, etc., he was always ready to provoke merriment, one phase of which was matching couplets in rhyme, but which we were at times in rivalry; and his fraternal feeling in great degree did away with the disparity of age or greatness of his calling.

I can now see, as President George A. Smith afterwards said, that I was then really "the bosom friend and companion of the Prophet Joseph." I was as welcome at the Mansion as at my own house, and on one occasion when at a full table of his family and close friends, he placed me at his right hand and introduced me as his "friend, Brother B. F. Johnson, at whose house he sat at a better table than his own."²

Benjamin felt that such favoritism aroused some jealousy among the local residents, and he said:

The Johnsons were quite numerous and influential and the envious dubbed us the "Royal Family." When Joseph heard of this "honor" conferred upon us by our neighbors, he said the name was and should be a reality; that we were a royal family and he knowing the intem-

¹Ibid., p. 92.
²Ibid., pp. 92-93.
perance of my father, said that he should yet be a great man and stand at the head of a kingdom. On one occasion he blessed my mother and told her that not one of her children should ever leave the Church.

Instruction at the Hand of a Prophet

Many times the Prophet Joseph Smith and his companions stayed at Benjamin F. Johnson's home in Ramus, Illinois. In his daily Journal of Saturday, March 4, 1843, Joseph Smith records:

In council with Brother Benjamin F. Johnson and others from Ramus, on the subject of building a meetinghouse there, out of Church property I told them the property of the Church should be disposed of by the direction of the Trustee-in-Trust, appointed by the voice of the whole Church, and made the following comparison:—There is a wheel; Nauvoo is the hub; we will drive the first spoke in Ramus, second in LaHarpe, third Shokoquon, fourth in Lima; that is half the wheel. The other half is over the river: we will let that alone at present. We will call other Saints from Iowa to these spokes, then send elders over and convert the whole people.

This seems to be the first time Benjamin understood the idea of "Stakes" as representing spokes in the wheel in the organization of the Church.

At times when the Prophet was staying in the Johnson home, Benjamin would ask him questions relating to past, present, and future. In writing in his journal in May, 1843, Joseph Smith recorded: "Tuesday, 16... went to Benjamin F. Johnson's with William Clayton to sleep. Before retiring, I gave Brother and Sister Johnson some instructions on the priesthood; ..." Included in these instructions were the teachings which are now contained in the book *Doctrine and Covenants* 131:1-6.  

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1Ibid., pp. 93-94.


3Ibid., p. 391.

4Ibid. (*Doctrine and Covenants* is a compilation of some of the revelation claimed to have been received by Joseph Smith, Jr.)
Of these experiences, Benjamin wrote: "On April 2nd and May 16, 1843 the Prophet was at my house with Wm. Clayton as Scribe, at which time was written, in answer to questions asked, all of Sections 130 & 131 Doc. & Cov.,¹ and he then gave to us all keys of knowledge contained in Sec 129 & 132 . . . before it was written."²

On yet another occasion, when the Prophet was visiting the Johnson home, Joseph wrote in his diary, Friday, October 20, 1843, "In the evening I gave instructions to Benjamin F. Johnson and others in relation to the blessings of the everlasting covenant and the sealings of the Priesthood."³ Benjamin later testified in an affidavit that on this date President Smith "sealed my first wife to me for time and all eternity."⁴

Other instructions were privately given to Benjamin by the Prophet. While "lighting him to bed one night," Joseph showed Benjamin his garments⁵ and explained their meaning. He further gave some information regarding the endowment.⁶ He told Benjamin that "free-masonry, as at

¹Note: D. & C. confirms these "Instructions" given at Ramus. 130 and 131.

²Johnson, letter to President Anthon H. Lund Historian's Office, Salt Lake City, from Mesa City, Arizona, May 12, 1903. On file in the Historian's Office.

³Smith, History of the Church, V, p. 391.

⁴Affidavit by Benjamin F. Johnson in The Historical Record, May 1887, VI, pp. 221-222. (The Mormons believe that marriage by the Priesthood can seal the marriage for eternity or provide for the marriage to continue after death.)

⁵A sacred article of clothing worn by those L.D.S. people who have taken part in the endowment ceremony in the temple.

⁶A sacred ceremony which takes place in the "Mormon" temple.
present, was the apostate endowments, just as sectarian religion was the apostate religion." \(^1\) Apparently the Prophet made the association of Freemasonry with the temple endowment because of the similarity of Mormon temple endowments to Masonic rites. \(^2\)

A New Commandment

A doctrine which would greatly affect the rest of his life was privately taught to Benjamin by the Prophet. In recalling this experience, he wrote:

About the first of April, 1843, the Prophet with some of the Twelve and others came to Macedonia [Ramus] to hold a meeting, which was to convene in a large cabinet shop owned by Brother Joseph E. and myself, and as usual he put up at my house. Early on Sunday morning he said, "Come Brother Bennie, let us have a walk." I took his arm and he led the way into a by-place in the edge of the woods surrounded by tall brush and trees. Here, as we sat down upon a log he began to tell me that the Lord had revealed to him that plural patriarchal marriage was according to His law; and that the Lord had not only revealed it to him but had commanded him to obey it; that he was required to take other wives; and that he wanted my sister Almira for one of them, and wished me to see and talk to her upon the subject. \(^3\)

This was a shocking experience for Benjamin. The things which Benjamin heard were violently opposed to his puritan background as well as all of the accepted standards of society in America. His own religious beliefs were in strong opposition to the practice of plural marriage. However, Benjamin had professed great faith in Joseph Smith as a prophet of God. In describing his reaction to the Prophet's message, Benjamin said:

\(^1\)Johnson, *My Life's Review*, p. 96.


\(^3\)Johnson, *My Life's Review*, pp. 94-95.
If a thunderbolt had fallen at my feet I could hardly have been more shocked or amazed. He saw the struggle in my mind and went on to explain. But the shock was too great for me to comprehend anything, and in almost an agony of feeling I looked him squarely in the eye, and said, while my heart gushed up before him, "Brother Joseph, this is all new to me; it may all be true—you know, but I do not. To my education it is all wrong, but I am going, with the help of the Lord to do just what you say, with this promise to you—that if ever I know you do this to degrade my sister I will kill you, as the Lord lives."

Joseph smiled and looking into Benjamin's eyes told him softly that he would never see that day, and that Benjamin himself would not only know of its truth, but would fulfill the law and greatly rejoice in it. Benjamin then asked how he could teach his sister something he himself did not understand or show her what he himself could not see. Joseph told him that when he opened his mouth to talk to his sister, he would understand, and light would come to him and his mouth would be full and his tongue loose. In Benjamin's words:

He also told me that he would preach a sermon that day for me which I would understand, while the rest of the congregation would not comprehend his meaning. His subject was the ten talents, "Unto him that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundantly, but from him that hath not (or will not receive), shall be taken away that which he hath (or might have had)." Plainly giving me to understand that the talents represented wives and children, as the principle of enlargement throughout the great future to those who were heirs of salvation.

... But to me there was a horror in the idea of speaking to my sister upon the subject, the thought of which made me sick. But I

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1 Johnson, My Life's Review, pp. 94-95.
2 Gibbs Letter.
3 Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 95.
4 Gibbs Letter, p. 11.
5 B. F. Johnson, "Benjamin F. Johnson's Testimony," affidavit from The Historical Record, compiled by Andrew Jensen (Salt Lake City, Utah, 1882-1890), VI (May, 1887), pp. 221-222.
had promised, and it must be done. I did not remember his words, and have faith that light would come, I only thought, "How dark it all looks to me." But I must do it, and so told my sister I wished to see her in a room by herself, where I soon found her seated. I stood before her trembling, my knees shaking, but I opened my mouth and my heart opened to the light of the Lord, my tongue was loosened and I was filled with the Holy Ghost. I preached a sermon that forever converted me and her also, to the principle, even though her heart was not yet won by the Prophet. And so I had great joy after my tribulation.

The ability of Benjamin and his sister to accept this strange doctrine which so violently conflicted with their background is evidence of the strong faith and confidence which they had in their prophet. In explaining the manner in which these teachings were received, Benjamin said:

... I was taught by him/Joseph/ in the principle of Plural or Celestial Marriage, as a revelation from the Almighty direct to him, and for his Church, and it was shown to me plainly, that the whole object and end of matrimony was the procreation of our species and that the command to multiply and replenish the earth fell upon all the children of Adam both in obligation and privilege. ...

He also unfolded to me the scripture in which I saw that the most honored men of Bible history, those of whom, and by whom, the scriptures were written were polygamists and that so great was the distinction between polygamy and adultery that Moses prepared the tables of stone on which the Lord, with His finger in his presence wrote, "Thou shalt not commit adultery." And while the glory of God so shown from the face of Moses that Israel could not look upon him. Yet at the same time he was a polygamist. And while the law in Israel was death for adultery, Moses and many of the camp of Israel had a plurality of wives, and so far was this principle honored of God that when His Son Jesus was to be born, He chose for him the royal lineage of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Boaz, David, Solomon and other wise patriarchs and kings, who had honored the law of plural marriage. And he further taught me the eternity of the marriage covenant, also showing it to be a religious sacrament in the fact that in the first marriage God Himself joined together two Immortal or Celestial beings, which bond of matrimony had they not sinned must have held them in eternal union and through all time in the paradise in which they were placed.

\[1\)Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 95.\]
With these teachings, accompanied by the spirit in which they were given, I was able to overcome my Puritanical ideas of monogamic marriage.\(^1\)

Benjamin now had a different outlook towards the message which he had received from Joseph Smith. The subject that had seemed so dark to Benjamin now seemed, of all subjects pertaining to the gospel, the most lucid and plain. Benjamin said that never again did he need evidence or argument to sustain this high and holy principle.\(^2\)

Within a few days, Almira, at the request of the Prophet, accompanied Benjamin to their sister Delcena's home in Nauvoo. Delcena "had already been sealed to him Joseph\(^7\) by proxy."\(^3\) Here they were met by the Prophet, his brother Hyrum, and William Clayton, his private secretary. Of their meeting, Benjamin wrote:

Brother Hyrum at once took me in hand, apparently in fear I was not fully converted, and this was the manner of his talk to me: "Now Benjamin, you must not be afraid of this new doctrine, for it is all right. You know Brother Hyrum don't get carried away by worldly things, and he fought this principle until the Lord showed him it was true. I know that Joseph was commanded to take more wives, and he waited until an angel with a drawn sword stood before him and declared that if he longer delayed fulfilling that command that he would slay him." This was the manner of Brother Hyrum's teaching to me, which I then did not need, as I was fully converted.\(^4\)

After a little instruction, Almira stood by the Prophet's side and was sealed to him as a wife, by Brother Clayton.\(^5\)

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\(^1\)B. F. Johnson, "Open letter to the President of the United States," to Grover Cleveland from Underground R. R., January 15, 1886, written while hiding in St. George. On file in Church Historian's Library, Salt Lake City, Utah.

\(^2\)Johnson, Letter to Gibbs, p. 11.

\(^3\)Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 95.

\(^4\)Johnson, Letter to Gibbs, p. 11.

\(^5\)Ibid.
Almira continued to live in the Johnson home and would stay with the Prophet on his visits there.¹ In seeking to provide a home for her, the Prophet entered into a business arrangement with Benjamin. Benjamin was the legal business agent for the Prophet Joseph Smith. Joseph authorized Benjamin to construct a large brick residence at Ramus to be a mutual joint residence for Benjamin's sister (who was Joseph's wife) and for Benjamin's own family.²

Joseph also asked Benjamin for permission to marry his youngest sister, Esther, but when he was told that she was already promised in marriage, he dropped the matter.³ Benjamin suggested to the Prophet that Joseph might marry the orphan girl, Mary Ann Hale, whom his mother had raised and who was then living with the Johnson family. However, the Prophet replied, "No, but she is for you. You keep her and take her for your wife and you will be blessed." Benjamin said that he thought this was hurrying his blessings pretty fast, but the spirit of it came to him, and from that time he began to think of her as a wife that the Lord had given him.⁴

Benjamin now thought of the doctrine of plural marriage as a law which he would soon embrace, for he now "accepted plural marriage as a duty that he owed to his calling as an Elder of the true Church of Christ."⁵

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¹ Johnson, Letter to Gibbs, p. 11.
² Johnson, letter to Deseret News Editor, June 25, 1902, written from Mesa City.
³ Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 96.
⁴ Ibid.
⁵ Johnson, "Open Letter to President," op. cit.
Benjamin later took Mary Ann Hale as his second wife and throughout his life he was proud of having a wife who had been "given" to him by the Prophet Joseph Smith.¹

Because many of the teachings proclaimed by Joseph Smith did not conform with the religious and social practices and beliefs of the day, much opposition was stirred up against them. This was an immediate reaction to the teaching and practice of plural marriage. Nothing Joseph Smith had taught previously departed so radically from the social norms of the day. As early as 1842 Joseph was accused of immoral teachings and practices.² Because he was aware of what the public reaction would be if the doctrine of plural marriage was taught openly, Joseph Smith had sought to keep these teachings and practices secret and had only divulged them to his most trusted friends. The Prophet understood how people would be upset by the teaching of plural marriage, for Joseph said it had been difficult for him to accept. Benjamin heard the prophet explain that "an angel appeared unto him with a drawn sword, threatening to slay him [Joseph] if he did not proceed to fulfill the law that had been given to him [Joseph]."³

Joseph was careful in discussing the doctrine with only those in whom he had much confidence. Benjamin later recalled: "I do so well remember his declarations in the meetings of the Saints, that the Lord had revealed to him principles, that should he teach and practice them,

²Smith, History of the Church, V, (June 23, 1842), pp. 35-38.
those who were now his best friends would become his bitterest enemies."¹ Benjamin sensed that the Prophet became somewhat depressed on occasion, for of Joseph's last visit to Ramus² Benjamin writes:

After he had at evening preached with great animation to a large congregation, and had blessed nineteen children, he turned to me and said, "Benjamin, I am tired, let us go home," which only a block distant, we soon reached, and entering we found a warm fire with a large chair in front, and my wife sitting near with her babe, our eldest, upon her lap, and approaching her, I said, "Now, Melissa, see what we have lost by your not going to meeting, Brother Joseph has blessed all the children in the place but ours, and it is left out in the cold." But the Prophet at once said, "You shall lose nothing," and proceeded to bless our first born, and then with a deep drawn breath, as a sigh of weariness, he sank down heavily in his chair.³

³The Prophet said:⁴ "Oh! I am so tired--so tired that I often feel to long for my day of rest. For what has there in this life but tribulation for me? From a boy I have been persecuted by my enemies, and now even my friends are beginning to join with them, to hate and persecute me! Why should I not wish for my time of rest?"

His words to me were ominous, and they brought a shadow as of death over my spirit, and I said, "Oh, Joseph, how could you think of leaving us? How as a people could we do without you?" He saw my feelings were sorrowful and said kindly, "Bennie, if I was on the other side of the veil I could do many times more for my friends than I can do while I am with them here."⁵

⁴The Prophet continued:⁶ "I should not be far away from you, and if on the other side of the veil I should still be working with you, and with a power greatly increased, to roll on this kingdom." And such was the tone, earnestness and pathos of his words to me then, that they can never be fully recalled but with emotion.⁷

¹Johnson, My Life’s Review, p. 97.
²Joseph’s last reference of being in the home of Benjamin F. Johnson was October 20, 1843. Smith, History of the Church, VI, p. 60.
⁴Johnson, My Life’s Review, p. 97.
⁵Johnson, Letter to Gibbs, p. 8.
During this period, when Benjamin was experiencing an upsurge of spiritual growth, he became concerned for his father's welfare. At this time Father John Smith lived at Macedonia (Ramus) and presided over the Church there. He was who ordained Benjamin to the high priesthood. (In the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints men and boys who have kept the standards of the Church are ordained to the priesthood—the Aaronic priesthood for boys, the Melchizedek priesthood for men. The Melchizedek priesthood is the higher priesthood.) When the Prophet Joseph Smith called Father John Smith to Nauvoo to be set apart as a Patriarch to the Church, Benjamin accompanied Father Smith to Nauvoo for that purpose. Benjamin obtained, indirectly, Father Smith's first Patriarchal Blessing.¹

Benjamin's mother, who was living at Nauvoo, had finally separated from his father. Obedient to the counsel of the Prophet, she was sealed to Father John Smith. (Sealing is one of the peculiar doctrines practiced by Latter-day Saints in which husband and wife, parents and children are sealed not only until death parts them but also for time and eternity.) This sealing caused sorrow to Benjamin, for he loved his father and knew him to be naturally "a kind and loving parent, a just and noble spirited man." However, his father had not obeyed the Gospel and had fought it with his words. Benjamin said that in spite of his feelings for his father, he realized that "a stream must have a fountain and does not arise above it." Therefore, he felt some consolation in the afore-

¹The Latter-day Saints believe a Patriarchal Blessing is given by revelation through a Patriarch to the recipient. It generally contains a prophetic promise of future blessings and opportunities which will come to the candidate if he keeps the commandments.
mentioned sealing, and he was also reassured and comforted by the Prophet's words that a better day would come for his father.1

Called to the Council of Fifty

In one of his visits to the Johnson home, the Prophet had stated to those present: "The way I know in whom to confide--God tells me in whom I may place confidence."2 Joseph had confided in Benjamin on many occasions and had found in Benjamin a friend worthy of Joseph's trust. As time passed, the Prophet's confidence in Benjamin increased until, as Benjamin said, "It did seem to me that he had few secrets to keep from me."3 One of these greatest evidences of trust occurred in the spring of 1843.

About this time was organized his private counsel of fifty--the embryo kingdom of God upon the earth--an organization distinct from the Church, a nucleus of popular government which will exist for all people, "When the heathen are given for an inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth as a possession to him whose right it is to reign," a government formed of representatives from every nation, principality or tribe upon the earth; a government of God for the people and by the people, in which man will be taught to know his origin and to govern himself which will continue through the millennial period as the outer wall or government around the inner temple of priesthood, until all are come to the knowledge of God.

By the Prophet, Brother Babbitt and I were called to Nauvoo and made members of this Council and its organization.4

Its sittings were always strictly private, and all its rules were carefully and promptly observed and although its meetings were at

2Smith, History of the Church, V, p. 392.
3Johnson, Letter to Deseret News Editor, from Mesa City, June 25, 1902. See also History of the Church, VI, pp. 260-263, 267, 341.
4Johnson, My Life's Review (manuscript in possession of writer), p. 83.
times oftener than monthly and my home at Ramus being over twenty miles distant, I was present at every session, and being about the youngest member of that council, I was deeply impressed with all that transpired, or was taught by the Prophet.  

According to a letter written by Benjamin in 1895, he believed that the Council of Fifty was organized on April 3, 1843. In referring to those who made up the Council, Benjamin explained that it was "a select circle of the Prophet's most trusted friends, including all the Twelve, but not all of the constituted authorities of the Church, for Presidents Rigdon, Law or Marks, the High Council, or Presidents of Quorums were not members of that Council, which at times would exceed fifty in number."  

At this time many new doctrines and practices were explained to selected members of the Church. As a precautionary measure much instruction was done privately. Because of his membership in the Council of Fifty, when it was first organized, Benjamin was called to sit in council with the presiding officers of the Church. This was an opportunity which Benjamin cherished. Nearly forty years after the organization of this council, one of the members said, "Being called into the Council appears to me to be one of the greatest steps in my life."  

In referring to certain teachings and privileges given to him by the Prophet Benjamin related:

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1Johnson, Letter to Gibbs, p. 7.  
2Maricopa Stake History, August 16, 1895, on file in Church Historian's Library.  
4Minutes of Council of Fifty, Saturday, April 10, 1880, on file in Special Collections at Brigham Young University Library.
The keys\(^1\) of the endowments and plural marriage had been given, and some had received their Second Anointing.\(^2\) Baptism for the dead had been taught and the keys committed. All of these things I then comprehended, though in some I had not fully participated. These sacred principles were then committed to but few, but not only were they committed to me from the first, but from the first I was authorized by the Prophet to teach them to others, when I was led to do so.\(^3\)

As the Prophet had feared, some of those who had been intimately associated with Joseph in the leading councils of the Church could not accept the teaching of plural marriage and looked upon it as a corrupt doctrine of a fallen prophet. Having lost confidence in their leader, these men set out secretly to remove the prophet and establish their own leadership.\(^4\) Benjamin observed that "apostate spirits within were now joining with out enemies outside"\(^5\) and "the days of tribulation were now fast approaching."\(^6\) Joseph could foresee this great danger, for Benjamin recalled:

... as the Prophet so often told us, so it came to pass; and those he had called around him as a cordon of safety and strength were worse than a rope of sand, and were now forging his fetters. William Law was his first counselor, Wilson Law, Major General of the Legion, Wm. Marks, President of the Stake; the Higbies \(\text{sic}\) his confidential attorneys, and Dr. Foster, his financial business agent. All of these and many others entered into secret covenant so much worse than Judas,

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\(^1\)Power and authority to direct or preside over the people. For instance, "Keys of plural marriage" would be the authority to perform a marriage for eternity and also to designate those who are qualified to receive such a marriage.

\(^2\)A sacred ordinance performed in Mormon temples.

\(^3\)Johnson, \textit{My Life's Review}, p. 98.


\(^5\)Johnson, \textit{My Life's Review}, p. 98.

\(^6\)\textit{Ibid.}, p. 99.
that they would have the Prophet's life, just in fulfillment of what he had said so often publicly. With all their power, they began to make a party strong enough to destroy the Prophet. ¹

I will relate a dream told to us in council by the Prophet but a short time before his death, which was as follows: "I dreamed that by the Laws, Marks, Higbys and Fosters, I was bound, both hand and foot, and cast into a deep well, soon after which I heard screams of terror and cries of 'Oh! Brother Joseph, save us, save us.' This cry continued until with my elbows and toes I had worked my way to the top, and looking out, I saw all of those who had bound me within the folds of a terrible serpent, that was preparing to swallow them, and I told them, 'that as they had bound me, I could render them no assistance.'²

Joseph was powerless to help them, and he saw them devoured by the serpent.³ Benjamin never forgot this dream which was fulfilled; for those were the men who opened the way for the Prophet's assassination.⁴ Benjamin said, "Many . . . great things were given by him, some of which, as with the ancient disciples, we could not comprehend until fulfilled."⁵

A short time before the death of Joseph Smith, he made an unusual presentation to the Quorum of the Twelve and others in the Council of Fifty. It was one of Joseph's last meetings with this Council. After "all had been completed and the keys of power committed," or after Joseph Smith had given his authority to the Twelve Apostles as a quorum, ⁶ the Prophet rose,

¹Ibid.
²Johnson, Gibbs Letter, p. 8.
³Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 100.
⁴Johnson, Gibbs Letter, p. 8.
⁶Joseph Smith taught that the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles "form a quorum equal in authority and power" to the First Presidency of the Church which is composed of the President and two counselors. In the event of the death of the President of the Church then the Church is presided over by the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles until a new presidency is selected. See Smith, History of the Church, II, p. 212
and with great feeling and animation he graphically reviewed his life of persecution, labor and sacrifice for the Church and Kingdom of God, both of which he declared were now organized upon the earth. The burden of which had become too great for him longer to carry, that he was weary and tired with the weight he so long had borne, and he then said, with great vehemence: "And in the name of the Lord, I now shake from my shoulders the responsibilities of bearing off the Kingdom of God to all the world, and here and now I place that responsibility, with all the keys, powers, and privileges pertaining thereto, upon the shoulders of you the Twelve Apostles, in connection with this council; and if you will accept this, to 'do it, God shall bless you mightily and shall open your way; and if you do it not you will be damned. I am henceforth free from this responsibility and I now shake my garments clear and free from the blood of this generation and of all men;" and shaking his skirt with great vehemence he raised himself from the floor, while the spirit that accompanied his words thrilled every heart as with a feeling that boded bereavement and sorrow.  

Those who were secretly conspiring against the Prophet now openly opposed him and "the full break had now come in Nauvoo."  

Everything possible was done by apostates and outside enemies to aggravate the Mormons. Hoping to weaken Joseph Smith's influence, they started the publication of "a most foul and slanderous paper to subvert the liberties of the people, and as an incendiary torch to inflame the public hate. It was abated as a nuisance by Municipal authority." The Mormon leaders became alarmed because of this paper, which was called the "Nauvoo Expositor." Only one number was printed, and this was distributed on June 7, 1843. The press used for printing this was soon destroyed by order of the Nauvoo City Council. This greatly excited the anti-Mormon population who began immediately to cry throughout the area that the Mormon leaders

1Johnson, Letter to Gibbs, p. 9.  
3Johnson, "What I Know of Mormonism,"  
4Smith, History of the Church, VI, pp. 430-432.
had denied persons freedom of the press. Writs were issued for the arrest of the Prophet and others on the charge of riot and destruction of the press. When Joseph Smith was released by habeas corpus issued by the presiding justice in Nauvoo,¹ "all hell . . . seemed to commotion. Mobs were rising in all the adjacent counties, with Missouri and Iowa in sympathy with our enemies. All conspired for the destruction of the Prophet, with his beautiful city and massive temple so fast nearing completion."²

As the opposition increased, the membership of the Church in and near Nauvoo was generally affected by it. Fearing a repetition of the Missouri incidents, the Saints began to make precautionary plans.

It was now June 1844, and mobs were destroying property, burning homes of the Saints outside of Nauvoo, and threatening the city. Governor Ford ordered out troops to enforce the law, but they were not reliable, and all was excitement. On the 15th an order came for able-bodied men at Macedonia to hasten to Nauvoo. On the 16th we started, and to avoid attack travelled all night across the prairie through mud, rain and darkness, terrible to those who were there. The Prophet came out to greet us. Here I remained a few days on duty, when I was sent by General Dunham, then in command, back to Macedon to look after and keep up a home guard. After returning to Macedonia I saw no more of Brothers Joseph and Hyrum.³

Joseph and his brother, Hyrum, prepared to flee Nauvoo after it was revealed to the Prophet, according to Hyrum Smith, that Joseph's only safety was in flight to the Rocky Mountains.⁴ However, through the persuasion and reproaches of his wife Emma, and others, Joseph was induced to return to Nauvoo and give himself up to the authorities to be tried for state treason. It was at this time that the Prophet was quoted as

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¹Smith, History of the Church, VI, p. 487.
³Ibid., pp. 101-102.
⁴Smith, History of the Church, VI, p. 547.
saying, "I go like a lamb to the slaughter, but I am calm as a summer's morning. . . . It shall yet be said of me--he was murdered in cold blood."¹ Later, in writing about this action by Joseph's friends, Benjamin was incensed. He felt these people had used poor judgment and that their action had, in part, led to his beloved prophet's death. Resentfully, Benjamin observed:

With all the persons who induced him to return I was well acquainted, and I know that fearful has been the head of the Lord to follow them from the day they sought to steady the Ark of God, which resulted in the martyrdom of his servants.²

News of the tragic murder of Joseph and Hyrum, on June 27, 1844, struck the Saints with shock and grief. Those who had been closely associated with the Prophet were especially distressed, as was Benjamin when the following day he heard of the assassination.

To attempt to delineate the feelings of woe and unutterable sorrow that swelled every heart too full for tears, I need not attempt. I stood up, dazed with grief, could groan but could not weep. The fountain of tears was dry! "Oh God! What will thy orphan church and people now do!" was the only feeling or thought that now burst out in groans.

I did not go to see their mutilated bodies. I had no wish to look into their grave; I knew they were not there, and the words of Brother Joseph began to come back to me, "I could do so much more for my friends if I were on the other side of the veil." These words, "my friends"--oh, how glad that he was my friend. These thoughts gradually gained the empire in my heart, and I began to realize that in his martyrdom there was a great eternal purpose in the heavens. But we were not able as yet to comprehend such a necessity. I could begin now to feel just what he meant, and his words, "do for his friends," to me, were like the promise of Jesus to provide mansions for his disciples that they might be with him always. These things now were my consolation, and when I could begin to rejoice in them the fountains of my tears began to flow, and I grew in consolation from day to day.³

¹Millennial Star, XXIV, p. 775.
²Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 102.
³Ibid.
Soon after the martyrdom, Benjamin realized his own life was in danger:

Our enemies, who, on accomplishing the murder fled in fear of Mormon vengeance, now began to return in boldness, and a mob came and searched my new building for arms, and to take me on a writ, as they had obtained evidence that I was a refugee from Missouri justice and was one of the incendiaries in Davies County. For days I was hidden in the woods, where trusted friends brought me food and at all times bore me company.¹

Gradually the "excitement and feeling for persecution" seemed to diminish, and the Saints began to hope for a brief period of peace. However, Benjamin "had no confidence now in anything here as a future home," and although the house he was building was enclosed and material was ready for its completion, he had neither energy nor faith to invest more into it.²

A Special Witness is Given

With the death of the Prophet, there arose the question of a future leader for the Church. The teaching of succession in the leadership had not been fully understood by the members of the Church, and this was the first time the problem had arisen in the fourteen-year history of the Church. This problem caused such dissension that it appeared to threaten the future of the organization. Benjamin wrote:

At the time of the martyrdom all the Quorum of the Twelve were absent except John Taylor and Dr. Richards, both of whom were with the Prophet in the Carthage jail, and Sydney Rigdon having retained a partial fellowship as one of Joseph's counselors, came forward claiming the right of Guardian of the Church. James J. Strang also claimed through a spurious revelation purporting to be through the Prophet that he should lead the Church. And so matters stood until the return of the Twelve.³

¹Ibid., p. 103. ²Ibid. ³Ibid.
To settle the issue of leadership a conference for the membership of the Church was called at Nauvoo on August 8, 1844. At this meeting two men were scheduled to speak. Sidney Rigdon was to be the first speaker who claimed authority to lead the Church by virtue of his position as counselor to the Prophet Joseph Smith. Rigdon was to be followed by Brigham Young who was then President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.¹ At this conference Benjamin claimed to have witnessed a miraculous experience. He was sitting near and listening to President Rigdon appeal to the conference to recognize and sustain him as "Guardian for the Church."² Benjamin felt President Rigdon's remarks were void of all power or influence.³

I was perhaps, to a degree, forgetful of what I knew to be the rights and duties of the apostleship, and as he closed his address and sat down, my back was partly turned to the seats occupied by Apostle Brigham Young and other Apostles. When suddenly, and as from Heaven, I heard the voice of the Prophet Joseph, that thrilled my whole being, and quickly turning around I saw in the transfiguration of Brigham Young, the tall, straight and portly form of the Prophet Joseph Smith, clothed in a sheen of light, covering him to his feet; and I heard the real and perfect voice of the Prophet, even to the whistle, as in years past caused by the loss of a tooth⁴ said to have been broken out by the mob at Hyrum. This view, or vision, although but for seconds, was to me as vivid and real as the glare of lightning or the voice of thunder from the heavens, and so deeply was I impressed with what I saw and heard in this transfiguration, that for years I

¹ Manuscript History of Brigham Young and other Original Documents, History of the Church, Period II, VII, pp. 231-242.
² Johnson, Letter to Gibbs, p. 17.
³ Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 103.
⁴ "The Prophet's lost tooth, to which I alluded, was as generally understood, broken out by the mob at Hyrum while trying to pry open his mouth to strangle him with acid, from which time, until the tooth was replaced by a dentist neighbor, a year or so previous to his death, there had been a whistle-like sound to accompany all his public speaking which I again plainly heard at the time of which I write." Johnson, Letter to Gibbs, p. 17.
dare not publicly tell what was given me of the Lord to see. But when in later years I did publicly bear this testimony, I found that others could testify to having seen and heard the same. But to what proportion of the congregation who were present, I could never know. But I do know that this, my testimony is true.  

Then I remembered his saying to the Council of Fifty, of which Sidney Rigdon was never a member, and I knew for myself who was now the leader of Israel.

As a result of this spiritual experience, Benjamin became one of the foremost in testifying that Brigham Young was the true successor of the Prophet Joseph Smith. Benjamin declared:

I will again bear this as a faithful testimony that I do know and bear record that upon the head of Brigham Young as chief, with the Apostleship in full, was by the voice of the Prophet Joseph, in my hearing, laid the full responsibility of bearing of the kingdom of God to all the world.

Benjamin now knew that Brigham Young as leader of the Church, and Prophet of the Lord, was the right man in the right place. He relates that "new confidence and joy continued to spring up within me, and the subject of our finding a new home in the wilderness of the great West was one that occupied much of my thoughts."

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1Johnson, Letter to Gibbs, p. 17.
2Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 104.
3Johnson, Letter to Gibbs, p. 17.
4Ibid.
5Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 104.
CHAPTER V

CONFLICT, EXODUS AND PIONEERING

In the brief period of peace which followed the martyrdom, the desire of the Church leaders was to finish the Temple to the acceptance of the Lord and to prepare for the great move that the Saints now contemplated. Benjamin was called by the Council of Fifty to rent and keep open the Nauvoo Mansion, home of the late Prophet, and so he began making arrangements to leave Ramus.\(^1\) He did not move to Nauvoo, however, until after February, 1845.

February 24, 1845, Brigham Young recorded in his journal: "After the company partook of refreshments, we met at Brother Benjamin F. Johnson's and enjoyed a pleasant evening; . . ." On the following day President Young wrote, "I spent the day in Macedonia, settling the church business with Elder B. F. Johnson."\(^2\) By following the instructions of the church leaders to move into Nauvoo and care for the Nauvoo Mansion, Benjamin suffered a financial loss. Concerning the financial sacrifice he chose to make at this time, he wrote:

I was still indebted in St. Louis for goods to the amount of $250 for which I was now being pressed, and to settle which, I gave a deed for my new brick building, with all needed material for completion that had cost me even thousands, together with seven city lots lying together on which it stood—all for that paltry sum, and then turned everything available in to pay rent and furnishing for the Mansion,

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\(^1\) Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 104.

to keep the prophet’s hotel to the credit of his name and his people.

From a broad and prosperous business and good circumstances, I was now only a renter, with everything available invested in the furnishing and supplying of a public house.¹

The law of plural marriage was now being practiced by some of the leading men in the Church. Wishing to follow the counsel which he had received from the Prophet regarding this law, Benjamin said:

After the death of the Prophet, I told President Brigham Young what he [Joseph Smith] had said to me relative to my taking Mary Ann Hale to wife. Pres. Young said it was right and authorized Father John Smith to seal her to me, which he did on the 14th of November, 1844.²

A family bereavement occurred on June 11, 1845. Benjamin’s younger sister Mary died while giving birth to her second child. Of her he recorded:

She dropped away before we could reach her, to receive her last adieu. But she, like the others, died in full assurance of the reward for the pure in heart of womankind. None could approach nearer to angelic character, in childhood, girlhood or womanhood, nor was there ever known from her associates one unkind word or feeling towards her, and she died as she had lived, beloved by all who knew her.³

About December 1, 1845, Benjamin took a third wife, Clarinda Gleason, who was sealed to him.⁴

The Conflict

The temple was now nearly completed, but again trouble was beginning to rise. Mob violence was driving the Saints from outlying areas

¹Ibid., p. 105.

²Benjamin F. Johnson’s Testimony, The Historical Record, May, 1887, VI, p. 22. Compiled by Andrew Jensen.

³Johnson, My Life’s Review, p. 104.

⁴Ibid., p. 106.
into Nauvoo.\textsuperscript{1} Anti-Mormon conventions were held in Carthage and Quincy in the fall of 1845. These conventions resulted in the demand for the prompt removal of all Mormons from the State of Illinois. An agreement was worked out between the Latter-day Saints and the citizens representing these conventions.\textsuperscript{2} It was agreed that the Saints should leave Hancock County in the Spring of 1846, "with the first appearance of thrifty vegetation."

There was intense activity among the Saints in making the necessary preparations for the great journey westward. On Saturday, October 11, President Young announced that captains of twenty-five companies, (each company to consist of one hundred families) had been chosen.\textsuperscript{3}

Benjamin had been appointed one of the captains of hundreds.\textsuperscript{4} Each captain was to organize a company to prepare cooperatively for a journey to the west. These preparations included constructing wagons; procuring teams and tents; and arranging for general gear and outfit. Benjamin organized his group of fifty and started making wagons in the basement of the large brick stable belonging to the "Mansion House."

This wagon making was not without problems, however. Benjamin said that some of the "hands" were at work, but some had an eye more to their own profit than to the general good of the company. This caused considerable trouble and loss to Benjamin.\textsuperscript{5}

\textsuperscript{1}Ibid., p. 105.
\textsuperscript{2}Roberts, \textit{A Comprehensive History}, II, pp. 504-520.
\textsuperscript{3}Preston Nibley, \textit{Exodus to Greatness} (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1947), p. 73.
\textsuperscript{4}Young, VII, pp. 481-482.
\textsuperscript{5}Johnson, \textit{My Life's Review}, p. 105.
The spirit of unrest had now caused financial problems in Benjamin's management of the Mansion House. In explaining, he said:

Public travel was now cut off and all business profits with it; yet our expenses were nearly the same, as the place must be kept open to receive county and state officials; as also people who came to inquire into the causes of our troubles. Among these were Judge Stephan A. Douglas, James Arlington Bennett of New York, and others, together with military officers sent by the Governor from time to time. So, instead of being profitable we were at great expense with small returns.¹

As if his troubles with finances and anti-Mormon mobs were not enough, Benjamin now had real family troubles. His third wife Clarinda was older, more experienced, and far more capable than was his second wife Mary Ann. Because of this difference Clarinda was unwilling to be second to the younger woman and was unsatisfied with her proper place in the family circle. Benjamin now had three wives and three children to care for. All of the money and supplies that he had left from his "joint house building project" in Macedonia had been spent for rent, furnishings, and supplies needed to keep the Mansion House in its status of respectability.² In the midst of all these problems, Benjamin was invited to bring his wives to the Nauvoo Temple to receive the second anointing.² He could not accept the invitation, however, because at that time General Arlington Bennett and his associates were guests of the city and were staying at the Mansion House. It was Benjamin's responsibility to see that General Bennett was properly entertained.³

Sheriff Jacob Backenstos, "a man of sterling integrity for law and order," was a boarder at the Mansion House at this time.⁴ On September

¹Ibid. ²A sacred ordinance performed in Mormon temples. ³Ibid., pp. 106-107. ⁴Ibid., p. 106.
16, 1845, a member of his posse killed a mob leader named Frank Worrel which greatly increased the hatred of the enemies of the Saints. Worrell had been in command of the militia which had participated in the murder of Joseph and Hyrum Smith. At the time Worrel was killed he was in the act of preparing to shoot Sheriff Backenstos.1

A report spread abroad that many anti-Mormons were being murdered in Nauvoo and the Nauvoo Mansion was cited as a probable place for the great crimes. So to allay excitement a troop of soldiers was sent by order of the Governor to investigate and make examination of the premises for the bodies said to be secreted there. They came and made a formal examination; appeared satisfied that nothing was wrong and quietly went away. But the end was not yet, for rumor still continued and our mechanics were seen in numbers about the basement rooms under the Mansion barn, creating renewed suspicion.2

Although the anti-Mormon convention had granted the Mormons permission to remain in Illinois until they could travel and have sufficient water and grass for their animals, the non-Mormons became impatient, and the Latter-day Saints were frequently subjected to mobbing and violence. In order to convince the non-Mormon citizens that the Church leaders were sincere in their promise to leave the state, and also to protect the church leaders, an exodus was begun from Nauvoo in February, 1846.3 Because mob violence was continually increasing and because the Mansion House was suspected as being the scene of Mormon atrocities, Benjamin felt that for his families' protection he should prepare immediately to accompany the church leaders in their exodus from Nauvoo.4

1Roberts, Comprehensive History, II, p. 481.
2Johnson, Letter from Mesa City to Editor Deseret News, January 15, 1898.
3Roberts, Comprehensive History, II, pp. 540-541.
4Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 106.
Just prior to his departure from Nauvoo, Benjamin, at a meeting of the Council of Fifty, was called to visit Emma Smith, wife of the Prophet, and to try to persuade her to remain with the Church. Emma had resisted the teaching and practice of the law of plural marriage when it had been presented by her husband, the Prophet, and she resented Brigham Young and other church leaders for continuing the practice after her husband's death.\(^1\) She had turned down previous invitations to accompany the church members in leaving Nauvoo, and now Benjamin was assigned to try to influence Emma to change her mind. The fact that he was selected for this diplomatic mission is evidence of the confidence which the leaders had in him as well as the friendship which must have existed between him and the Prophet's family. Benjamin, along with Bishop N. K. Whitney, labored with Emma all night, but she agreed to go only if she could be the "leading Spirit." Being unable to change her decision, they left without her.\(^2\)

The Exodus

Although Benjamin greatly desired to leave Nauvoo, he lacked the necessary supplies. When President Young learned of this problem, he advised him to obtain help from certain men of Benjamin's company. Of this Benjamin said:

I was now in great wonder how the way would open for my exodus from Nauvoo, but I managed, by the sale of beds, furniture, etc., at prices one-tenth, perhaps, their true cost, and with a little help from some of my friends, to buy three mules, and Brother Bostwick gave me property to exchange for another. I had one light wagon of my own, and Brother Ovid let me have a spring wagon or

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\(^2\) Johnson, My Life's Review, Manuscript
carriage, and Brother William Weatherby, a volunteer to take a load for the church, was sent to assist me so far as beans, etc., sufficient, with the feed, to load Brother Weatherby's wagon. Besides this we had a light spring wagon and a family carriage for the seven of us, with beds, clothing and camp outfit, ready to cross the river.

When conditions in Nauvoo grew worse, Benjamin was grateful that he had prepared early.

One afternoon, I think the 6th of February, 1846, I learned of a posse being sent from Carthage to search the manure piles around the Mansion stables for dead bodies, with a warrant for my arrest and others employed about the premises. Tales of great horror had gone about the country, of murders committed at the Mansion. But I left before the arrival of the posse, and with Mary Ann and Clarinda, went to a friend's house near the river and crossed about midnight in a bitter-cold storm. The next day the river was closed with ice from bank to bank. The camp of the Presidency and many others was on Sugar Creek, and on our arrival there we were without even a bit of canvas to cover our heads, but were kindly received by those who had shelter, one of the kindest of whom was . . . John D. Lee, whose generosity there I do not forget. But soon President Young ordered for us canvas for a tent, by which we were made comfortable.

But my first wife and children were at Nauvoo, with the wagons, which our friends loaded, and upon the ice brought all over to camp.

This sudden change from the comforts of the Nauvoo Mansion to the discomforts and desolation of the snow-covered, open prairie caused great tribulation for Benjamin and his family. He wrote the following account of his thoughts at the time of the exodus.

Now here we were, started in midwinter without a dollar, on a journey without any knowledge of its length or the time it would occupy, with three wives, the youngest in a delicate condition, three small children, two spans of animals to care for, with only provisions enough to sustain us for a few weeks at most, and with poor health which for the last year or more had been exceedingly precarious. I often suffered with acute, cutting pain in my stomach, which at times would cause the sweat to start from every pore. This, with constant piles and tendency to dyspepsia, made me very unfit for such arduous labors. The duties alone of caring for the teams and other camp

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1Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 108.

duties looked great indeed to me, and coming from one of the best tables in Nauvoo, with my delicate appetite—now how was I to live?¹

Hundreds of Saints left their homes in haste during February, 1846. On February 11, about four hundred families crossed the Mississippi River on the ice.² Many of the families who left Nauvoo during this winter exodus did not bring with them enough provisions. There was a lack of food. There was a need for protection from the winter storms. The conditions of the Saints caused some of them to complain to the Church leaders, but President Young told them that anyone who could not live on boiled beans and corn, trust in God and be grateful for what they did get, should start back at once, for the camp would be a poor place for them.³

Pioneering

Up to this time Benjamin had been unable to eat either cornbread or beans without getting unbearable stomach pains. He was, therefore, greatly concerned, for his family's limited food supply was comprised mainly of corn and beans.

I felt it was a subject of life or death to me, and I asked myself what show there would be for me in turning back with my three wives; and whether it were better to die, trusting in the Lord and being faithful than to feel that I could not conform to the necessities of the journey and go forward. This was on Sunday, and in the evening we talked the matter over. I told my wives I was there to trust in the Lord, and if He was not with us He certainly was not behind us, and I should not go back. I was willing to eat such food as we had and be grateful for it. And if the Lord did not take of us now, the

¹Ibid., p. 109.

²Roberts, Compréhensive History, II, p. 541.

sooner we were all dead, the better, for we would not be able to care for ourselves or protect our lives upon this journey.¹

Benjamin continued as the Captain over his division and was also appointed "Custodian of all property found upon this journey." As custodian Benjamin was "authorized to receive and preserve for the owners all the lost property found" by the Saints.² He often met in council with the leaders while they were camped at Sugar Creek.

The Saints remained at Sugar Creek until March 1, 1846, so that other members of the Church could leave Nauvoo and join them. In spite of the hardships forced upon them, Benjamin felt an improvement in the attitude of the camp members, and he felt that he, personally, was blessed. He believed implicitly that all good things came from God and because of this, he may have called some natural phenomena results of God's intervention. Nevertheless, he wrote:

From near the first of February to the first of March we were camped on Sugar Creek amid storms, the mercury at one time recording 20 degrees below zero. Yet there was a warm feeling in our hearts for we felt to trust in God. Even in the midst of tribulation, in a stormy winter's encampment, merry songs and happy voices were heard at every camp fire, and when the weather permitted all ages would join, inspired by sweet music, in the dance. At the signal for prayer, every occupation was suspended, and around the campfire, in wagons and tents, every knee was bowed, and a voice from every circle was raised in gratitude for past and in petition for continued protection. And here I will say that before breaking camp at Sugar Creek, the beans and corn, formerly uneatable by me, I could eat with relish, and from that time the old effect did not return to me on the journey. I had told the Lord what His servant had said, that by His help I would fulfill every requirement, and if it was His will that I should live to be His servant, He must cause my food to assimilate to the condition of my stomach, which I know He did.³

¹Ibid., pp. 109-110.
²Brigham Young, History of the Church, Period 2, VII, p. 592.
³Johnson, My Life's Review, pp. 110-111.
Moving west from Sugar Creek the camp experienced much inclement weather. Often they were forced to pitch their tents on ground covered with water and deep with mud. To illustrate the hardships they endured before arriving at Garden Grove, Benjamin related:

One day, in the open prairie, without a road, and ground full of water, our mules' feet, like pegs, could find no bottom and could go no further. So in the open, treeless prairie we were compelled to stay. The companies had all passed, and we were alone. In the carriage was a small sheet iron stove, but not a stick of wood. The evening was growing cold and snow began to fall. Here was a dilemma, without fire, and something warm to eat, all would suffer through the night. Seeing no other way I emptied a large, valuable chest, highly prized, split it up with the hatchet, and soon had a warm supper; then in the freezing storm, we crowded into our wagon and remained through the night. The next morning Brother Weatherby went 1½ miles for a green elm pole, which, with a little of the chest, gave us fire for our breakfast. Soon some of the brethren returned to look after and help us, but the ground was now frozen hard enough to bear both wagon and mules. We only needed help to get our wagon wheels out of the deep, frozen mud, in which they had been sunk. Measles was now in camp, and when its fever was upon our two eldest, the water came so deep into the tent that our beds were soaked. A number of children died, among whom was one of Brother Bostwick's, a little girl about six years of age. Oh! how sorrowful to put her little form, as we did, in a grave half full of water, as no drier place could be found. Yet, with all this, there was hope and cheerfulness in the camp, and perhaps no company of equal size ever journeyed together with less faultfinding or murmuring.  

The advance camp arrived at a place they called Garden Grove, one hundred and fifty miles from Nauvoo on April 25, 1846. ² It was decided to leave a group of families here to plant crops, recruit teams and be ready for an onward march in the coming spring. The Johnson family being one of those to remain, Benjamin consented to President Young's request that his "span of large, valuable mules go forward under saddle, for the pioneers."

¹Ibid., p. 111.

²Young, History of the Church, Period II, VII, p. 606.
On June 26, 1846, Captain James Allen of the United States Army rode into the Mormon camp at Mount Pisgah. His presence, at first, aroused feeling of suspicion and distrust among the Saints, and they presented the order which he delivered to the church leaders requesting five hundred Mormon men to serve as volunteers in the war with Mexico. It was soon learned that this recruitment came in response to Mormon appeals to the President of the United States. President Young had commissioned Elder Jesse C. Little, President of the Eastern States Mission, to appeal to President Polk for financial aid in helping the Church emigrate west. As the United States was at war with Mexico, the President chose to assist the Mormons by providing military service for their men. Captain Allen presented this plan to the church leaders.  

While at Garden Grove, Benjamin participated with other members of the Council of Fifty in deliberations concerning the formation of the Mormon Battalion. According to him, the Council of Fifty was "often called together" after the death of the Prophet. As an original member of that Council, Benjamin participated in their meetings. His record of assignment states:

To show you that I did know the motive of President Young in sending the Battalion, I will say that as one of that special Council organized by the Prophet, of which I have written, and of which Pres. Young being the head, I still held my seat and still had a voice in all general movements relating to our exodus as a people from Nauvoo. ... And I was present at the arrival of Colonel Little and a company at Garden Grove, with the requisition, by Govt. for five hundred volunteers for the American Army, sprung upon the fleeing Mormons as

1Roberts, Comprehensive History of the Church, III, pp. 64-74.

2Johnson, "My Life Review," original journal in B. P. Johnson's handwriting, p. 107 (in the vaults at Historian's Library, Salt Lake City.)

3Benjamin apparently means Captain Allen. He might have confused Captain Allen with Elder Little who was responsible for arranging for the Battalion.
a test to their loyalty and patriotism by Senator Benton of Missouri. It was well understood at the time, as the subject was fully ventilated by the council, and all comprehended it as a great sacrifice and that there was no reward or benefit offered by the government in any degree.

It was a test of the people's and our Prophet's loyalty and patriotism while under arrest; and this patriotism and loyalty was now to be placed upon the alter at a great disadvantage. And would we stand the test, even as did our Father Abraham answer this great question?

At Garden Grove all of the enlistment was filled, and now, this was unequalled patriotism and valor of the Sons of Zion, who sacrificed aged parents, wives and children, sweethearts and other dear ones, by leaving them homeless, unprotected, and to the mercy of the world and naked plains.¹

A Lesson in Obedience

President Young charged Benjamin and the others at Garden Grove to remain and work together. David Fullmer was appointed to preside over the camp. However, Benjamin, having been guided directly by the Prophet and after him by President Young, decided that he "would not be dictated to by anyone there, and finding a beautiful point about a mile from the main . . . moved to it and began clearing land."² After his unsuccessful attempts to raise crops, and after much sickness, Benjamin further disobeyed the counsel of President Young and started back toward Nauvoo. He later realized, however, that whereas previously he had the favor of both God and man, this move caused him to lose both.³

While stopping in Iowa, Benjamin found that his life was in danger. A group of irate citizens, who recognized him as the Mormon who had been in charge of the Nauvoo Mansion, gathered around him. His reaction to this fearful situation is illustrative of his courage and also of his

¹Johnson, Letter to Gibbs, p. 19.
²Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 112.
³Ibid., p. 115.
ability to gain respect. He was six feet two inches tall and weighed
about two hundred pounds. In writing his memoir of this incident Ben-
jamin was somewhat vituperative. He recalled:

At Nauvoo there had been a nest of thieves and counterfeite rs, as
vultures, to prey upon the property and character of the Saints.
These, too, were driven from Nauvoo, and were now plundering the
people, creating a bitterness towards all who were from Nauvoo. One
Gibbs, a near neighbor whom I regarded as honest, was found with
stolen property, affirming it was left at his house by an absent
party. He, being under arrest, I was induced to go with him to
Farmington, six miles distance, to help him out of trouble; but I
was soon convinced of his guilt, which left me in bad odor with the
people. When they learned that I was the Johnson that kept the Nauvoo
Mansion, a large crowd gathered around me, inspired by the old rumors
to which I have alluded. It was but a few days previous to this,

they had hanged Brother Folsom, our temple architect, until he was
nearly dead; and apparently they would serve me worse, judging from
their savage looks. There seemed little hope for me, but I realized
that cowardice would be fatal. So, standing in the center of the mob,
I placed my thumbs in the armholes of my vest, swelled myself out full
size and height, and with hat on the back of my head I looked at them
boldly, and asked what kind of a man they wanted, or were hunting for?
I said, "If it is an upright, honest, law-abiding man who never in
his life willfully or knowingly wronged a fellowman or woman, then
they had just the man they wanted, for I was just that man, and
dared all proof to the contrary. I said, "If you gentlemen are looking
through honest men's eyes, you can see and feel that I am telling you
the truth." A lawyer present asked me some questions, and as I gave
him my answers, the crowd grew less, and soon I found myself free.

I remained no longer there than I could help. 1

On September 17, 1846 an armed mob forced most of the remaining
Saints from Nauvoo. This last group of exiles contained many elderly,
sick, and poor who were not prepared for a long arduous journey. Many
were stranded on the prairies of Iowa. Joseph E. was in this group and
wrote to Benjamin asking for his assistance. Benjamin began to make pre-
parations to go to Nauvoo, but sickness and business interests interfered.
Finally in February, 1847, he returned to meet his brother and to go into
Nauvoo and visit with his mother, his sisters, and his brother-in-law,

1Ibid., pp. 116-117.
A. W. Babbitt. A. W. Babbitt was allowed to remain in Nauvoo as the agent for the Church. On his return trip, as he was crossing the frozen Mississippi with a very large and heavy span of English draft horses, he had a narrow escape.

In the morning of the third day we started to cross the river; but no sooner was the weight upon the ice than it began to bend and crack for a long distance around. It looked fearful—terrible, but we must not stay for the river to break up; for that would detain us weeks, and we must risk it. I got out of the carriage with my little five-year-old boy and went ahead, while my wife with the two small children drove the team close behind. It was a terrible ordeal. The bending, cracking ice at every step sounded to me like a death-knell of my loved ones. And why were we there? Only through my disobedience to the Word of the Lord. My remorse was great and my repentance full. The promised Angel was there still, and all was safe until passing a large steamboat moored at Montrose, the ice broke under their feet. The whip was applied, the horses sprang, and as the carriage sank deeply into the water, the forefeet of the horses struck the bank. They bounded forward, and all came safely on shore. But oh! how small I felt; and how merciful was the Lord! I would never be forgetful and disobedient again.

I was still determined to go West, but my health was poor, and I could hardly make more than a living.

Benjamin interpreted his recent difficulties as a rebuke by the hand of the Lord, and he did not forget this lesson. He was now penitent and desirous of joining the Saints.

Although he had disobeyed, Benjamin was not rejected by the Church leaders. In the spring of 1847 he received a letter from the Presidency, requesting that he and his family be in Winter Quarters ready to start with them as a pioneer. He later remarked, "How small I then felt I shall never forget."

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1Ibid., p. 117.
2Ibid., pp. 118-119.
3Ibid., p. 116.
Until time to go to Winter Quarters, the Johnson family stayed in a town named Bonaparte, in Lee County, Iowa. As Benjamin was in poor health much of this time, he became quite discouraged.

I remained in Bonaparte, very unwell, seeking to close up business and obtain whatever I could to take with me in our move across the plains. I was much oppressed in my spirits and cared little for my own life. I was sick, ashamed that I had turned back, discouraged and almost hopeless, and under these influences dreamed I was alone in a strange place in a great concourse of strangers and enemies. I felt friendless and desolate, and sought to avoid notice by sitting down; and looking up, I saw a man come in with a broad-brimmed, white hat which partly covered his face. He sat down near me. I looked under his hat and saw it was the Prophet Joseph. I clasped him around the legs and wept for joy. He placed his mouth to my ear and told me to be comforted, that he was still my friend and would not forget me. My tears had not ceased, and when I awoke I was still crying for joy; and I felt from that hour a new inspiration that nothing else could have given me. It was to me, light in the midst of darkness, or like a lost happiness returned.\(^1\)

Apparently, Benjamin gained much comfort and support from his dreams. At critical times of his life, he would sometimes have a dream which he believed was divinely inspired. He possessed great faith that God was guiding his life. His faith in dreams was perhaps developed through his associations with Joseph Smith and the Church teachings concerning spiritual gifts. The Prophet had related some of his dreams to Benjamin and discussed these things with him.\(^2\)

About January 1, 1848, Benjamin prepared to take his family to Winter Quarters. Prior to making the trip, Benjamin learned of the death of his father, of whom he said:

\[\ldots \text{During the last year of his life he had ceased to use ardent spirits, and had realized the great wrong}\]

\(^1\)Ibid., p. 120.

he had done himself and family by his opposition. He knew the Gospel was true and had asked for baptism, of which his sudden death deprived him, leaving all his temple work for his children.¹

Benjamin was later pleased to do ordinance work for his father’s family in the St. George temple. The Mormons believe that ordinances, necessary for salvation, can be performed vicariously within temples for those who are dead. Benjamin was consoled when these ordinances were later performed for his father.²

Benjamin and his family arrived safely at Winter Quarters. By the time he arrived at Winter Quarters, Brigham Young and one hundred and forty-two other men had found the future gathering place for the Saints. President Young and most of the Apostles had returned to Winter Quarters, arriving October 31, 1847.³ Benjamin realized he had missed out on one of the great epics in the history of the Church. Concerning his reunion with the church leaders and the rest of the Saints, Benjamin wrote:

At Winter Quarters I was welcomed by the Presidency and old associates, but I had lost blessings and caste, and could not but feel it. The pioneers had gone without me, found the land of our inheritance, and returned; and even now I was not ready to follow, and where was I to obtain the necessary outfit? I felt joy in being again with the Church, but the lessons of the past I must not forget.⁴

While eagerly making the necessary preparations to go west, Benjamin had a violent attack of pleurisy, and for a time he feared that

¹Johnson, My Life’s Review, p. 120.
²Ibid., pp. 308-309.
⁴Johnson, My Life’s Review, pp. 120-121.
he would die. He sat by the campfire at night bathing his side, taking medicine, and exerting his will and faith to live and go to the valley. His faith and determination prevailed, and on July 4, 1848 Benjamin and his family began their trek across the plains. Traveling with President Willard Richards' company, Benjamin's family traveled in two wagons. Along the way Benjamin's third wife, Clarinda, rebelled and joined another family. (She later divorced Benjamin and remarried.) Of the wearying, toilsome four months' journey he simply wrote: "... there were but few prominent incidents pertaining to my own history."¹

¹Ibid., pp. 121-122.
CHAPTER VI

STRUGGLE IN THE VALLEY

The Willard Richards Company, of which Benjamin and his family were members, arrived in Salt Lake valley October 22, 1848. With renewed determination, he began new challenges in a new era. In his words, "... the mercy and blessing of the Lord had been with us. I felt, on arriving in the valleys of the mountains to dedicate myself renewedly unto the Lord, to become more fully His servant."\(^1\)

However, being in the valley did not mean all would now be well. Benjamin and his family had used most of their provisions during the journey west, planning to replenish their supplies in the valley. It was with great disappointment that they learned that those who had come the year before had fought myriads of crickets, and after all their toil, had saved but a pittance. Benjamin asked himself, "What could I expect, with not one pound of bread to be bought even had I money with which to buy. And now, late in the season, winter should be upon us, and no house to shelter women and children."\(^2\)

While good weather remained, he set out to build a house from adobe. When the walls had been built, further work was halted by winter storms and deep snow. The two wagon beds were not suitable protection from the weather. Of their escape from this desperate situation he said:

\(^1\)Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 123.

\(^2\)Ibid.
Father John Smith invited us to move into the Fort by him, which we did; the room being ten by thirteen feet, built of large poles, covered with corn fodder and chinked with straw. In this a fireplace was made and into it we moved.¹

Benjamin F. Johnson demonstrated initiative as a pioneer; he seemed to foresee opportunities. After the Mormon Battalion returned, bringing with them horses and gold, he set about to provide for his family by establishing the first harness and saddlery shop in Salt Lake City.² By trading with the Indians, he obtained the necessary leather to make his product. Although he was paid in gold dust, he soon found that gold would not buy one pound of bread.

The winter of 1848-49 was very severe, with deep snows. Being short of all foodstuffs, the Johnsons did their utmost to be frugal with everything they obtained. "... Sometimes we dug thistles, bought all the beef we could, sometimes cooked beef hide, and never missed cooking the feet of beeves whenever we could get them."³

Along with the harness business, Benjamin began the first drug-store in the valley.⁴ Although he was kept occupied with these, he found time to work a few acres of land that someone had started to fence and till, but had abandoned. After completing the fencing and plowing, he planted the wheat which he had brought across the plains. When it became apparent that the wheat had rotted in the ground, he again plowed, and this time planted their choicest seeds with the greatest of care. No

¹Ibid., p. 124.
²Warrum, p. 905.
⁴Warrum, op. cit.
sooner had all this been done, than a claimant came demanding the land or pay for his improvements, at a large price. Benjamin wrote:

We paid him in full hope of an early, fruitful garden, but as time passed and the sun grew warmer we looked for plants to appear. Here and there a sickly looking pea, bean or spear of corn could be seen, with other plants, all struggling through a white, deadly looking substance forming on the surface. Yet we could not comprehend the possibility of a disappointment, for what could we do if the garden failed, on which we had staked our labor and planted all our seeds. No possibility for another garden in a new place. So we worked, still in hope, fear and desperation to care for a few sickly plants. They did grow, but it was less everyday, until at June all hope was gone and our garden abandoned.

Our food was now all gone, our clothes worn out. All this time we had worked day and night, almost on starvation rations, and not so much as a radish or a pinch of lettuce to reward our toil; and the wise could now tell us it was saleratus ground. But we had learned it by bitter experience, and it was too late for our benefit or gratitude.

Benjamin was now completely discouraged and could see no hope for the future. On Sunday, June 15, 1849, he noted:

The very heavens seemed brass over our heads. I did not wish to go to meetings; if I did, I was barefoot, and so I wandered out from a home of prospective starvation and nakedness. I stood pondering but my pen is inadequate to portray my emotions. Brother Burnham came to me and I said to him, "Jacob, there is one consolation to us left--if we starve, the Lord certainly will give us credit for industry, if nothing else. We have worked hard in hunger and weariness, but it does almost seem now that He has forgotten us."2

As Benjamin was talking, the news arrived that emigrants were arriving from the states on their way to California gold fields. After gold was discovered on January 19, 1848, the cry was vibrated across the country, but it was not until the summer of 1849 that the gold rush to the west really began. As these gold seekers arrived in Salt Lake valley many of them found that they needed supplies, fresh animals, or equipment

1Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 127.
2Ibid., pp. 127-128.
in order to continue their hurried trip to California. They began to arrive as Benjamin and hundreds of other Saints were faced with hunger, inadequate clothing, poor housing, and a gross insufficiency of tools and equipment.  

1 Being eager to reach the gold fields, the emigrants readily sold extra clothing, equipment, etc., to the Mormons at low prices and then purchased whatever they needed to continue to California. Usually they paid high prices for what they bought as Brigham Young declared:

"What! sell bread to a man who is going to earn his one hundred and fifty dollars a day, at the same price as you do to a poor laborer, who works hard here for one dollar a day? I say, you men who are going to get gold to make golden images . . . pay for your flour!"  

2 It is believed that about one quarter of a million dollars came to the Mormons as a result of the gold rush emigrants.  

3 The Saints looked upon it as a blessing of the Lord for their temporal salvation. Benjamin shared in these "blessings" by finding a ready market for his product. He said:

They appeared almost crazy with excitement about California and gold. I traded them a jack and jenny and began the making of pack saddles, rigging them with rawhide. Oh! what a change. I now could get flour, bacon, sugar, rice, soap, tea, powder, lead, tobacco, the finest clothing, with wagons, harness, etc., in exchange for packing outfits, which I could supply in quantity.

Now I remembered the public prophecy of President Kimball, that within six months clothing should sell cheaper in Great Salt Lake City than in New York or Boston—a prophecy now more than fulfilled. And now, instead of being forgotten, oh how ashamed I was that I had been so faithless, for everything desirable to eat or wear, was in piles around us, as a miracle by the hand of the Lord.

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2 Brigham Young, Deseret News, July 20, 1850.

3 Arrington, p. 71.

4 Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 128.
When the first "Colonial Council or Legislature of Deseret" was organized in the winter of 1848 to 1849, Benjamin was elected a member. He was given this position by virtue of his membership in the Council of Fifty which had been organized by Joseph Smith. The Prophet had originally organized the council to assist in obtaining constitutional rights for the Latter-day Saints and to help "secure a resting place in the mountains, or some other uninhabited region," where the Saints could live in peace. In the winter of 1848-1849, many emigrants had settled in the valley. President Young set up a provisional government to establish law and order until the area could become a recognized territory of the United States with a constitution. Benjamin claimed that President Young used the Council of Fifty "as a legislature of the people," under the leadership of Brigham Young and this governing body was known as the Colonial Council. It is believed that Benjamin's subsequent elections for many terms in the territorial government was also partly because of his position in the council. In May, 1849, he shared in the first military commission in Utah when the Council reorganized the Nauvoo Legion, which had previously been organized by Joseph Smith in Illinois. This military body now consisted of two regiments. Benjamin was given the commission of captain over the First company in the Cavalry.

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1Johnson, "A Life Sketch,"

2Smith, History of the Church, VI, pp. 260-261.


company of mounted guards, he commanded three lieutenants, four sergeants, four corporals, two buglers, and between twenty-five and fifty-seven privates.\(^1\) This company was ordered by President Young to protect the Saints against possible Indian attacks.\(^2\) Benjamin did not serve in this commission very long because he was called away from Salt Lake City about three years after his military appointment. The Nauvoo Legion was used in protecting the Saints, especially during the 1850's when the Mormons were involved in Indian battles and in preventing the United States government troops from entering the valley.\(^3\)

In a meeting of the First Presidency in June 1849, Brigham Young decided to call Benjamin F. Johnson, Francis M. Poweroy and Charles C. Rich to go on missions to California. However, because of the heavy emigration of gold seekers to the west coast at this time, the First Presidency did not issue the call.\(^4\)

In the winter of 1849-1850 he was called by President George A. Smith to go with him to make a settlement at what was then called Little Salt Lake, but an accident prevented Benjamin from traveling. Of another call which came to him, he wrote, "I was now called by the Presidency, to be ordained Bishop of the 16th Ward but as I suggested Brother Shadrach Roundy as an older and better man, he was ordained."\(^5\)

\(^1\)Ibid., p. 17.
\(^2\)Journal History, May 26, 1849.
\(^3\)Hansen, "Nauvoo Legion," p. 99.
\(^4\)Journal History, June 3, 1849 and June 10, 1849, p. 2.
\(^5\)Johnson, My Life's Review, pp. 132-133.
Benjamin married his fourth wife, Harriet Naomi Holman, on March 17, 1850. Joseph E. Johnson, Benjamin's brother, spent much of the summer of 1850 visiting with him. During August 1850, they accompanied the Presidency in selecting and surveying the Ogden city plot. Later in the summer, at a political meeting in the Bowery, Benjamin was nominated as a Representative from Salt Lake County to the Utah Legislature. He was elected to the Utah Legislative Council and served in its first session after the organization of the Territory in September, 1850. On January 10, 1851, he wrote from "Legislative Hall" to his wife Harriet that

... There is not much of interest transpiring in the House or City except home manufactory /sic/ which seems to create some interest, as great credit is publickly /sic/ given to one member of the House for having a full suit of home spun jeans & also a lady appeared /sic/ last Sunday at Church in a ______ skin sack---so you will see that home clothing will soon be the rage of the day.

This interest in home manufacturing was a result of Brigham Young's promotion of such things. Brigham Young realized that survival within the valleys of the mountains would depend upon the Saints becoming a self-sustaining people. President Young was not only determined to survive but he envisioned the Saints establishing a great kingdom over the broad expanse of the great basin. In order to realize his hope, Brigham Young sent out exploration parties soon after coming into the valley and commenced

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1Jensen, Church Chronology, op. cit., p. 40
2Journal History, July 26, 1851.
3Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 133. Also Journal History, September 18, 1851.
4Letter from B. F. Johnson to his wife Harriet, January 10, 1851. The letter is in the author's possession.
to establish settlements outside of the Salt Lake valley just two years after their arrival.¹ Because of his genius as a colonizer, a historian, Edward W. Tullidge, who was a contemporary of Brigham Young, said he was "perhaps the greatest colonizer that the world has ever seen."²

A Call to Colonize

In the spring of 1851, President Young invited Benjamin to accompany him with an exploration party up the Sevier, and over the mountains into what is now Iron County. This trip brought with it the commencement of a new era in the life of Benjamin Franklin Johnson. He wrote:

The second night out from Salt Lake City we camped at Summit Creek (Santaquin) in Utah County. It was the 1st of May, trees in full foliage, and the grass was like a carpet studded with flowers; the broad smooth lands sloped delightfully away to the west mountain, while here and there were rose and willow patches. The morning sun upon a clear sky, the air fragrant with spring odors, and trees, alive with singing birds. It appeared to me as enchanted ground, and I spoke of it as a place of beauty akin to Paradise. President Young heard me and asked if I would like to settle a colony there, and I said, "Yes," if he wished me to. He said he did, and that I might commence my arrangements as soon as I returned. I felt a little taken back, for I had never thought of leaving the city. I was getting a good run in the saddlery business, and had the best drug store in the Territory and was doing well. I owned the half block on which the Utah central depot now stands, besides many other valuable lots in the city and a number of 5-and-10-acre lots in the fields adjoining the city. Yet the call had come, and I could see providence in it. The more I thought upon the subject the more I became enthused with joy and pride, that I had been deemed worthy of so important a call.³

²Ibid., p. 6.
The party continued its journey up the Sevier and crossed the mountains near Parowan. The party camped at Parowan for six days exploring iron and coal deposits. While here Benjamin visited his brother Joel H. and his family who had just commenced a settlement. On May 24, 1851, the company arrived back in Salt Lake City.1 After more than a month of traveling with President Young and President Kimball, visiting the many areas selected for future settlements, Benjamin had received a greater insight as to what the church leaders desired to accomplish. He returned to Salt Lake, filled with enthusiasm for making a paradise at Summit Creek. Benjamin realized that the role of a colonizer was a paramount responsibility in the mind of President Young. Benjamin had been called to preside over a colony, and he was willing to meet the challenge. In extending this inland empire, Brigham Young would hand pick the men to begin a settlement. A man would be selected who had had experience and had been proved competent in handling frontier problems and in managing men and affairs.2 This man of special abilities was chosen to head a group of settlers and to preside in both a spiritual and temporal capacity.4 In some instances the colonizer was given the opportunity to choose the families which he desired to go with him in this new adventure. Benjamin was given the right to select the families for this settlement and was called to preside as Branch President.

1Jensen, Church Chronology, op. cit., p. 43.


After selecting a group of friends to help establish the new Colony, Benjamin traveled with them to Summit Creek to further explore and examine its possibilities for a settlement. Some of Benjamin's friends were enthusiastic about the prospect of colonizing at Summit Creek, but others did not care to attempt it. Benjamin returned somewhat disenchanted but still determined to fulfill his mission.¹ He soon realized that one of the great challenges of a colonizer is that of leadership.

The President told me to pick out such as I wanted to go with me, and that I need not have any I did not want. But there was something I had yet to learn; I could pick out the ones I wanted, and they might promise to go, and yet not feeling themselves under direct call of the priesthood, there would be delays. And so it proved, and none were really ready to go in sufficient numbers to settle in safety the first season.²

Although his enthusiasm for the country went down, Benjamin sold his home in Salt Lake City to A. W. Babbitt for $700 and began constructing adobe buildings at Summit Creek. In the winter of 1851, Benjamin wrote to the Deseret News his first report as a colonizer:

Dear Sirs: --I noticed in your columns a wish to hear from all the new settlements, for the benefit of your readers. In response, I would say, that our numbers though small are comfortably provided with houses and supplies for the winter. Seven houses and ten or twelve men compose the present strength of our little town, which we call Summit City. It is situated on the summit between Utah and Juab vallies [sic], about seventy miles from C.S.L. City. Its situation is picturesque and beautiful, with an entire view of Utah Lake and valley. Adjoining our town plat is a large tract of the best quality of farming lands. Our range for stock is the most superior, and so situated it can never become scarce. We have not yet explored sufficiently to know what our resources will be for sawing timber, but fire wood, fence poles, and cabin logs are abundant—the water in our creek, we have never known less than would be needed for sawing or grinding purposes, and would be sufficient for from twenty to forty families for all farming purposes.

¹Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 134.
²Ibid., pp. 135-36.
... We have no disposition to urge our brethren to settle with us; yet we would be highly pleased with a few more neighbors.  
... Such favors, together with the blessing of health, make us feel much at home in our truly romantic place. I remain yours, truly,  
B. F. Johnson

During 1850 through 1851, Benjamin tried to grow apple trees from seeds which he brought across the plains. The seeds were planted in his garden, but since there was no sign of their growing that year, Benjamin assumed that they were dead. The next year he allowed a woman to use the area of ground for a garden. One day while she was weeding her garden, Benjamin observed "the ground full of young apple trees just coming up." Ignoring all of his appeals to save the plants the "miserable specimen of a woman" intentionally hoed up the young trees. Benjamin estimated the young trees to be valued at more than a thousand dollars since they were claimed to be the first apple seeds planted west of the Missouri River. According to Benjamin from the seeds he gave to his brother Joel H. came the first start of fruit in southern Utah. From this fruit was later brought north to Salt Lake City.²

In the summer of 1851 Benjamin shared in what he believed was the first U. S. mail delivery contract ever given in Utah.³ His brother Joseph E. obtained a contract from the U. S. government and arranged for

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¹Letter to Deseret News, January 24, 1852.

²Johnson, My Life's Review, pp. 136-137.

³Benjamin may have been referring to the first mail contract issued for delivery of mail solely within the Territory of Utah. There had been previous mail delivery under the first official mail service contract, began in July 1850. Under this contract which was awarded to Samuel H. Woodson of Independence, Missouri, mail was delivered between Salt Lake City and Independence, Missouri. In April, 1851, another contract was issued to George Chorpening and Absalom Woodward for mail delivery between Salt Lake City and Sacramento, California. Ralph McBride, "Utah Mail Service Before the Coming of the Railroad, 1869" (Thesis, BYU, 1957), pp. 15, 19.
Benjamin to take part of it. Benjamin's contract was to carry the mail between Salt Lake City and Manti, with stations at Summit Creek and Salt Creek. With the settlement already begun at Summit Creek, Benjamin built a comfortable two-room house and brought to it his wife Harriet.¹

Wishing also to colonize at Salt Creek, Benjamin found some families who assisted him in gathering together winter supplies and materials for spring work. Here Benjamin built a house for his wife Mary Ann.² During the first winter, Benjamin and seventy-four others worked to build up this settlement, which is now known as Nephi.³ At a general conference, Brigham Young paid a special compliment to the settlement when he said: "The inhabitants there are 'no. 1' and when I was in that valley I prayed to God that he never would suffer an unrighteous man to live there."⁴

Although Benjamin employed men to assist with the delivery of the mail, he found that he spent much time on horsback. Besides the mail contract and the business in the city, Benjamin took time to plant crops. He wrote:

With my own and hired labor I had put in about sixty acres of wheat at Summit Creek in the spring of 1852, and some twenty acres at Salt Creek; had men, teams, cows, pigs, and every resource for prosperity and plenty, at both places and felt I was doing well. My hopes were bright for the future before me.⁵

¹Ibid., p. 137.
²Ibid.
³Nephi Ward History, Church Historian's Office, Salt Lake City.
⁴Journal History, September 6, 1850.
⁵Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 137.
Along with these responsibilities, Benjamin continued to be active in his political position. With a touch of humor he wrote:

They brag up some of my speeches when I did not half try. . . . I have lots of invitations to parties but have been so much occupied on Committees of the House I have not attended any. . . . I have got an act passed our House to incorporate Summit County taking Spring-ville and Payson.¹

The Territorial government began to function on September 22, 1851, and Benjamin was among the first to present a bill to the Legislature. On January 23, 1852, he presented a bill in the House of Representatives for the creation of another county by the name Summit County. This was apparently the first bill which had been formulated by Benjamin, and he was quite pleased with this achievement. Although this bill passed three readings in the House, it did not clear the Legislative Council the following day. The Council felt that it was "not expedient at present to divide Utah County. The bill was tabled.²

Besides his own affairs, Benjamin was conscious of the needs of others. Upon receiving word from his wife Harriet that her father was injured, he wrote to her:

If he is not able to work I want the boys to devote part of their time to watering his wheat even if they neglect mine. He will need a crop as much as myself & he has worked too hard to lose it for want of water. If anyone can be got from Payson to help him I will pay them if he cannot attend to his crops.³

¹Letter written by Benjamin F. Johnson in G. S. L. City to his wife Harriet in Summit Creek on Sunday, January 25, 1852. In possession of author.

²Journals of the House of Representatives, Council, and Joint Sessions of the First Annual and Special Sessions of the Legislative Assembly of the Territory of Utah, Held at Great Salt Lake City, 1851 and 1852 (Great Salt Lake City: Authority of the Legislative Assembly, 1852), pp. 37-39.

³Letter from B. F. Johnson to his wife Harriet. In possession of author.
In August, 1852, Benjamin was elected to the Legislature as a Representative from Juab County.\(^1\) Although because of another assignment he was unable to fill his term,\(^2\) Benjamin was honored in his elected office. Before he left the Territory in October, 1852, Benjamin was an invited guest at important social functions.\(^3\)

Through the summer of 1852, Benjamin found that business increased so much that when a "Special Conference of Elders of the Church" assembled in the tabernacle of August 28, 1852,\(^4\) he was unable to attend. One main purpose of this special conference was to declare publicly the doctrine of plural marriage. At this conference Elders were asked to prepare to leave their homes and take this special message to the far parts of the earth. These missionaries were called to Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia, and the Isles of the Pacific. Benjamin's name was the last of the ninety-eight names read. He, along with eight other Elders, was called serve as a missionary on the Sandwich Islands, which is now known as the Hawaiian Islands. Benjamin did not learn of his call for some time. When he was informed concerning it, he realized he had only ten days in which to prepare. Of this call Benjamin wrote:

> At first I could not believe it, but when I found it a reality I was dazed. How possibly could I be prepared in ten days—or even in ten months—to leave my families, now separated 100 miles; with a

\(^1\)Deseret News, August 21, 1852.

\(^2\)Journal History, September 18, 1852.

\(^3\)Deseret News, December 11, 1852; Letter to Editor dated September 30, 1852, by J. L. Heywood from Nephi City, Juab County,

\(^4\)The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Great Britain, The Latter-day Saints Millennial Star (Liverpool: Edited and Published by Samuel W. Richards), XV, p. 13. (Hereafter cited as Millennial Star)
U. S. mail contract, and unsettled business almost everywhere, from north of the city to Manti. Then my saddlery; with large bill or merchandise just imported, and drug store—all to be disposed of or thrown away! All this, and only ten days to rent out my farms, gather my family, dispose of my mail contract, settle all business, and get ready for a start. Reason said, "No, you cannot go; it is not just to require it under such circumstances." Three wives with eight small children—to be increased by two in my absence; and what a loss in means! Such a needless sacrifice! And then to go away among barbarians in a land of license! It was terrible for one so weak as I. "But what shall I do?" I asked myself; and Faith answered by asking, "From whom did you receive wives and children, farms and houses, goods and cattle? Who redeemed you when you were hopeless of life and name upon the earth? To whom do you owe all you are, all you possess, and all you help for, but to God?" Then why hesitate when you have professed to be willing even to die for the truth of the Gospel?" I could see but little choice between the grave and my mission. But in gratitude to God I said, "With the Lord's help I will go; and the cord that holds me from my duty I will cut loose from; for go I will with the Lord's help." I told the Lord I would now commence, and wanted His help.

Although Benjamin was much concerned about the sacrifice which his mission would require, he had learned the lesson of obedience to the leaders of the Church, and he was determined to serve in whatever capacity to which he was called. In looking back upon this dilemma, after thirty years, Benjamin said:

I started to the city to settle business, and find someone to take my farm at Salt Creek, to dispose of mail contract, saddlery, drug store, etc. Faith and hope grew in my heart. In Salt Lake City those I wished to see on business were the first I met, all dues to me seemed ready, and men I owed and not ready to pay were not pressing; men living in the north I had no time to visit, I met on the street; and the first men I met when looking for renters for my Salt Creek farm, were Brothers Vickers and Udell, with whom I at once closed an arrangement to take my farm for the term of my absence.

Thus Benjamin prepared for his second mission for his Church.

While in Salt Lake City he received a blessing from Brother J. M. Grant,

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1 Johnson, My Life's Review, pp. 139-140.
2 Ibid.
with private counsel and instruction from Presidents Kimball and Richards.

Concerning the blessing and instruction, Benjamin wrote:

President Grant, in setting me apart said, "Through you, succor and sustenance shall come to the mission to which you are called, and your brethren shall be fed, clothed and sustained by the blessings of the Lord through your ministrations; and the Lord shall greatly multiply both temporal and spiritual blessings upon the mission to which you are sent; and the brethren shall greatly rejoice in thy ministrations and councils; and the Angel of the Lord shall go before you to prepare you way."

In private counsel with President Richards, referring to my inability to learn the native language, he said I should have all I could do upon that mission in my own language.

... Our mission was to carry to the world the revelation on plural marriage, to advocate and defend it. We were told to go without purse or scrip, and on arrival in California to sell our teams and sent the money home.¹

According to Benjamin, this was the first group of missionaries assigned to carry the revelation on plural marriage to the world.²

Benjamin now moved his wife Melissa B. to Summit and took Brothers Vickers and Udell to Salt Creek. Benjamin was released as the presiding officer at Summit Creek, and he recommended that Brother Holman was charged to watch over Benjamin's family and property at Summit while Benjamin served on his mission.

As Benjamin left Salt Lake and started home, he observed:

When I left the city for home I did not think of one item of business left undone. And I knew the Angel had been right before me all the way. I now took an inventory of the improvements on land, grain on hand, houses, horses, oxen, cows, sheep, wagons, stock in trade, farm tools and implements that I left at Summit and Salt Creek to the amount of over $7000 after all debts were paid, taking one light spring wagon and a valuable span of horses with me.

¹Ibid., pp. 140-141.
²Johnson, "A Life Sketch,"
On October 22, I was ready and waiting for company, who came and passed, as all were to meet at Salt Creek and start from there on the 24th.¹

¹Johnson, My Life's Review, pp. 140-141.
CHAPTER VII

A MISSION TO THE ISLANDS

Although this was his third mission, for Benjamin it was very difficult for him to leave home. He was a mature man with a large family, but he was going to a foreign land. Strong in the courage of duty, Benjamin turned his back upon home and loved ones and started for California.

The company of missionaries traveled what was then known as the Southern route, holding meetings in some of the settlements. The group consisted of over forty Elders who were called to China, Australia, Ceylon, Hindustan, Africa, and the Sandwich Islands. There were eight who had accepted their call to the Sandwich Islands.

Two weeks after his departure Benjamin wrote a letter of comfort and instruction to his wife Harriet in which he expressed his feelings toward his mission:

I'm greatly blessed on the road & the Powers & Spirit of our mission is felt in a marvelous degree. There never was a company that enjoyed a greater amount of its influence. We rejoice in the sacrifice [sic] we have made of an omission of social relations in bidding Adieu to our dear wives & children & severing those ties which entwine themselves so closely in every feeling of our natures & caused our Hearts to yearn & our prayers to assend [sic] to our Father in Heaven for the Health, happiness and well being of those we love—knowing that those alone who are willing to make a similar sacrifice can expect to inherit the great blessings of Exaltation and Eternal


2Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 142.
Lives-- for which alone could I have been induced to make so great an offering. This present world is only a small matter when compared to the great field of enjoyment in the worlds that are to come & I had rather lose my present life in some far off clime in the field of usefulness & prove myself worthy of those that I love than to enjoy all the pleasures of life without a prospect of happy associations in the world that is to come. Where if I am faithful to my trust I may hope to enjoy the society of every loved object where our honor & exaltation will be according to our integrity & willingness to sacrifice our earthly pleasures for those of a more exalted nature.¹

The company stopped at Parowan over Sunday and participated in a worship service while there. Of Benjamin's part in the meeting he wrote:

The Spirit of the Lord rested greatly upon both hearers and speakers.
I was the last Elder called upon to speak, and only a few minutes were left for me to occupy. Being full of the good feeling and spirit of the meeting, I commenced not only to bear my testimony to the truth, but to prophesy of the future of some of the sons of Zion who were then going forth as her ministers.
I predicted that, through faithfulness, the wisdom of heaven would increase with us; that while the wicked became weaker, the Elders of Israel would grow wiser; that the nations of the earth would begin to look towards Zion for counselors and statesmen, and that, if the Elders now going forth to the ends of the earth were true to their calling, they would not all fill their missions until some of them would be called upon to give counsel to some of the rulers of the lands to which they were sent.
After closing my prophecy and remarks, and I had time to ponder on what I had said, I began to doubt the possibility of my predictions being fulfilled, and began to be troubled in mind.²

Continuing their journey, the company came upon three European gentlemen stranded in hostile Indian country. Although it was understood that these men would lose their lives if they were found by the Indians, the group decided not to take them along. Benjamin was greatly disturbed when they passed by "without the Spirit of the Good Samaritan,"

¹Letter by Benjamin F. Johnson from Elk Horn Springs, November 5, 1852 to his wife Harriet. Letter in possession of author.
²"A Prophecy Fulfilled," p. 75.
but was unable to change the minds of his companions. He was greatly relieved when two of the men walked into their camp early the next morning. As one of the young men could speak "a little broken English," he pleaded for the missionaries not to leave them. Benjamin quickly came to their defense, as he later recorded:

I at once proposed that we take these men with us and let them live, but was earnestly opposed by many of our numbers. A few said they would assist in helping them through. A meeting was called and I took the side of mercy, and Samuel Wooley advocated leaving them to take care of themselves. The camp was divided, and I said, "You brethren who are willing may help me to take these men, or with the help of the Lord I will do it alone."

I told them to put their things in my wagon, and from Beaver Dan the men remained with me through the whole journey. They traveled mostly on foot, did all my night guarding, brought firewood, and showed great gratitude to me; and I believe the Lord was pleased, and gave me special blessings.\(^1\)

This incident not only illustrates Benjamin's courage to stand for what he believed, but it also shows his ability to empathize with those who are in need. A quality of greatness which Benjamin demonstrated on many occasions throughout his life was the desire to ease the suffering of other people and attempts to help lift the burden of the less fortunate.

As they traveled, some of their animals were poisoned. One of Benjamin's horses became seriously ill. After working with it one night until discouraged and realizing he would have to walk if the horse died, Benjamin sought divine aid.

I had been merciful to two of His unfortunate children, and I asked Him now to have mercy upon me and heal my horse. And I commanded the disease to depart. I wept before the Lord and asked Him how I could go on without my horse. I got up feeling that I had done all I could, and would now leave it in the hands of the Lord.

\(^1\)Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 143.
I left the horse lying upon his side, as I supposed to die; but early the next morning I found him standing up, eating and apparently well, put him in the harness, and he was sick no more. To me it was like raising a horse from the dead, and I know the Lord is just as able to heal a horse, ox, cow, or any other animal as he is to heal us, his children, and will do it if we do our duty.¹

The company arrived at San Bernardino, California, on December 3, 1852 "in good health and spirits."² In writing a letter to Joseph Cain, Benjamin reported that "there is but one feeling in our midst, and that is to honor our Priesthood and do the work whereunto we are called."³

From San Bernardino the group traveled about eighty miles to San Pedro, a coastal port. Because he was riding in an open wagon, with December rain falling, the three days' journey was extremely uncomfortable for Benjamin. At San Pedro, Benjamin and another Elder were appointed agents to negotiate and transact business for the company and to arrange their passage to San Francisco.

While waiting for travel arrangements to be completed, the company stayed at a ranch owned and operated by a Spanish family. This gave Benjamin an opportunity to view the Mexican way of life, but he was shocked with what he found.

Seeing quite a number of young children, I sought in my natural way to make myself pleasant, both to parents and children. . . . There were also three daughters, the most perfect type of Spanish beauty, the eldest married, and the two younger not over fourteen and sixteen years of age, who were dressed in silks and canton crepe shawls. It seemed to me that one could hardly imagine a more perfect brunette beauty. . . I went to bed but was soon told the landlord wished to see me. I dressed and went below to his room in which

¹Ibid., p. 144.
²Ibid., pp. 144-145.
³Letter from Benjamin F. Johnson in San Bernardino to Joseph Cain, taken from the Deseret News, Saturday, Marcy 19, 1853.
was spread a table with wine and dainties. He greeted me cordially and bade me help myself, and turning to his daughters smilingly, told me they were to await my pleasure and bidding. Of all the sly tricks of the devil I felt this to be his arch attempt to destroy me. I thought of Joseph, in Potiphar's house, I looked upon them with love and pity and my very heart wept for such fallen loveliness. I made my excuse and adieu as gracefully as I could, and went to my own couch, carrying almost an anguish of sorrow, pity and regret that such lovely daughters of Eve could be to virtue and purity so insensible and ignorant.1

Passage was finally arranged aboard the ship "Fremont," and the company sailed for San Francisco. After ten disagreeable days, they reached their destination.2 Since San Francisco was the common port of departure for all the missions, the group decided to work together to raise the necessary travel money. Consequently, they rented a house large enough to accommodate all forty members of their group and then met to devise a plan for raising the money. It was customary at this time for the missionaries to travel "without purse or script," which means to travel without money or extra food and clothing. It was their desire to travel as the ancient apostles had done and rely upon the kindness of the people whom they visited for their individual needs. The missionaries believed that this would provide an opportunity for them to give their important message to the many people who would assist them. Benjamin wrote the following concerning the plan from which his missionary group obtained the necessary money for passage on the ship.

We . . . in general council agreed that a Circular Memorial to the people of San Francisco should be written, showing the object of our mission and asking for donations in money, to assist in defraying our expenses. Brother James T. Lewis, A.M. Musser, and Wm. Hyde were appointed to draw up this statement Memorial, which they zealously strove to do, but did not succeed in a manner satisfactory to themselves,

1Johnson, My Life's Review, pp. 146-147.

2Ibid., pp. 148-149.
and appeared discouraged. Acting then as chairman and sitting by the table, I picked up a pencil and proceeded casually to write as thoughts came to me. One of the committee read the following:

To all to whom they may come, greeting: we the undersigned, missionaries of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints from Salt Lake City, Utah, to the different nations of the earth, respectfully represent to the honorable people of San Francisco, that we, like the Apostles of old have left our homes "without purse or script," and are now in your midst awaiting passage to our respective fields of labor. We therefore humbly ask you, in the name of our Master, to assist us with means to defray expenses incidental to our journey, and the God whom we serve shall reward you a hundred fold.

He said, "This is just what we want," and read it aloud, and all agreed that was just what was wanted. I begged the committee to review it which they ought to do, but they said they could not better it, and asked me to write it over, which I did, carefully.

It was given to the brethren, who, two by two, went through the city visiting stores, public houses and business places, to present this memorial and ask for donations. Many responded in small sums of one, two and five dollars, but the amount we must have was not less than six thousand dollars. This was continued for a few days, and having been a member of the Utah legislature I was asked to visit the State legislature, then in session in Sacramento, and present our Memorial, and ask for help. I was about to start when Brother John M. Horner, a wealthy L.D.S. of San Francisco, came and wished us to cease all further efforts to raise money, and said he would furnish us five or six thousand dollars when we were ready to sail.¹

After spending another two weeks in San Francisco, holding meetings and discussing with many the revelation on plural marriage, Benjamin and the other Elders assigned to the Sandwich Islands sailed for their mission January 29, 1853.² During their voyage, the captain treated them with extreme kindness. Benjamin felt he was especially honored and trusted by Captain Lambert.³

On February 17, 1853, the company arrived at Honolulu where they were met by Philip B Lewis, President of the Sandwich Island Mission.⁴

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¹Johnson, *My Life's Review*, pp. 149-150.
²Jensen, *Church Chronology*, p. 47.
Mormon missionaries had been proselyting since December 1850 when the mission was founded. Before Benjamin's arrival there had only been about fifteen missionaries on these islands representing the Mormon faith. Five of these had become discouraged after a brief stay and had returned to California. In three years the Elders had been successful in establishing a church organization and had baptized over six hundred converts.\footnote{Letter written by B. F. Johnson to S. W. Richards from Honolulu, March 29, 1853. Published in Deseret News.} However, the Protestant churches had been established for decades before the arrival of the Mormon Elders, and, as a result, they manifested considerable strength among the people.

Shortly after his arrival Benjamin sent a report to Salt Lake evaluating the mission and the people with whom he was to work. He wrote:

There are on all these islands, about eighty thousand natives, and a few thousand foreigners. There are about twelve hundred native Saints, with a few among the foreign population. . . .

. . . We have much priestcraft to contend with, it bears almost universal sway here, and even the king seems disgracefully controlled by its influence, and the natives generally are enslaved by a fear of offending the missionaries. \footnote{Meaning non-L.D.S. missionaries.} In fact, the present structure of government, although they \footnote{Non-Mormon Church.} may be worth their hundreds of thousand in lands and palaces, is exempt from taxation, while the poor man who has not even a barren patch to raise food for his destitute family, is made to pay a heavy tax, and to work upon the highways, to beautify and embellish the streets leading to the magnificent residences of the missionaries, etc. . . .

. . . The missionaries \footnote{Non-L.D.S.} upon these lands, with all their home revenue, and near forty years' operation, have done not as much as honest men could have done in ten years, without one dollar of foreign revenue to assist them. The fleece has been their object, and they have kept their flock closely shaved, and they are now much the richest class upon the islands. The natives might all, ere this, have been taught English language, and have been advanced in agriculture, manufacture, and science. But they are now debased by every degrading, immoral, and degenerating principle. And if I am not much mistaken, this people have decreased at least fifty thousand since
missionary influence became established among them. These fertile islands, which are capable of producing all the tropical fruits, and the finest wheat, with every comfort to gladden the heart of man, are producing comparatively nothing; and instead of virtue, wealth, and independence, which might have been realized, almost universal vice, poverty, and slavery are the fruits of this great missionary expense, thus fulfilling the words of our Savior, "Ye compass sea and land, to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves."

We feel sanguine that this people are of the Covenant blood, and that a great work is to be done among them. Many of them are quick of apprehension, and are apt to believe the truth. They are naturally an honest, and kind-hearted people, and were it not for that unnatural fear of the missionaries, thousands would believe and soon embrace the truth. But we look for this yoke soon to be broken off, a revolution in the government is bound soon to take place.

The eyes of the priests are upon us, and they are reading their own downfall in our success. The hand writing begins to appear upon the wall, and they are beginning to tremble; and may their fears be realized, is our earnest prayer. I will not tell you all that we hope and expect upon those subjects, but let time show what the Lord has designed to effect here."

Being away from home in such a strange environment required a considerable adjustment for Benjamin. He found that homesickness and native food were his greatest burdens, both of which caused him some illness during his mission. He enjoyed his association with the people and was often invited into their homes, but he found it difficult to enjoy eating their food. It was the custom among the natives to give nicknames to the missionaries. Benjamin received the name, "Loe. Hee. Mormonia," which meant "the tall Mormon with black whiskers."  

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1 The Mormon Church believes that the American Indians and many of the Pacific Island natives, are descendants of Abraham and are therefore entitled to special blessings which are believed to have been promised by God to Abraham and his posterity.

2 Letter from B. F. Johnson to S. W. Richards, written in Honolulu, March 29, 1853. Also see History of Hawaiian Mission, March 29, 1853, p. 1.

3 Benjamin F. Johnson, a diary labeled Book "A" under the date of March 1, 1853. On file in the Church Historian's Office.
after his arrival in the Sandwich Islands, he recorded in his diary that he "tried to eat some Poi."

I found it almost impossible to swallow even one mouthful of it as my stomach would not consent to receive it. I, however, hope soon to be able to eat of it, as without, I shall no doubt many times go hungry for food. In going among the natives to see their manners and customs I begin to think the prospect bids fair for me to soon be cured of my fastidiousness in cooking, etc. The poorest meal that I ever eat in my own house would relish better now than the best that I can expect among the Natives.¹

When Benjamin had not heard from his family for some time, he became extremely homesick. His deep depression caused him to become physically ill and he was administered to by the Elders. After this administration he recognized the cause of his sickness and rededicated himself to the work which he had come to sustain:

I have myself chastened more sensibly for the spirit of Idolotry which I have continued to cherish towards my family, creating many anxieties, hopes and fears, which have in some respect, kept my heard divided in the work of God.
I felt to humble myself before the Lord and make a better exertion to forget my family and enter unreservedly into His work. The exercise of mind cost me many sorrows and tears. I now feel more reconcilable to leave my family unreservedly in the hands of a kind providence.²

He could now see more fully his own limitations as well as the immense task of trying to lift a people above their environment. In anticipating the challenge before him, he recorded in his diary, "I never in my life felt more the force of my weakness and the necessity of calling on the Lord in mighty prayer."³

Benjamin found that the mission was in scanty and humble financial condition, and although he felt that this could be improved, his optimism was not shared by others.

¹Ibid., February 28, 1853.
²Ibid., March 12, 1853.
³Ibid., March 17, 1853.
The blessings, predictions and counsels to me by the Presidency, relating to this mission, all tended to inspire a faith that the results or fruits of my labors would be in temporal as well as spiritual good to the people, and to the mission. But in speaking in relation to an improved temporal condition of the mission it seemed to inspire jealously among the brethren, especially in brother Tanner whose experience and standing should have inspired greater wisdom and discernment.¹

A missionary conference was held on April 9, but Benjamin became sick with a fever the night before. So that me might participate in the meeting, Benjamin had his cot taken into the conference room. What transpired in the meeting greatly disturbed him, and he wrote:

While lying sick the things I had said growing out of my faith in the future of the mission were unsparingly criticized and inflated by Brother Tanner and others. To all appearance I was in disgrace for having faith in the words of the Prophets to me. Prejudice against me resulted in Brother Tanner being chosen first counselor to President Lewis, and in assigning me to take alone, as my field of labor the poorest and most helpless. I listened to it all and wept and prayed for humility, and power to trust in God, that I was there to do His will, and that all might be overruled for His glory and my good.²

While endeavoring to learn the native language, Benjamin thought a great deal about the secular and financial condition of the mission and felt something must be done to change it. He was pleased when he was sent to serve in Honolulu, for now he had the opportunity to accomplish his desires.³

Early in 1853 a branch of the Church, "consisting of white people," was organized at Honolulu with elder Benjamin F. Johnson as president.⁴

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²Ibid., p. 153.
³Ibid., pp. 154-155.
⁴History of Hawaiian Mission, April 26, 1853, on file in Church Historian's Office, Salt Lake City.
President Lewis wrote to the First Presidency regarding Benjamin's new assignment.

We thought it advisable that brother Johnson remain here for the present, to see what can be done among the foreign population, and act as a watchman in the English language, as this is the capital of the kingdom, and the head of all civil and religious liberties. He takes charge of the foreign branch here, composed of fifteen or twenty members.¹

With the approval of President Lewis, Benjamin wrote a letter to King Kamahamaha III, ruler over the Hawaiian kingdom. As the Church had endeavored to spread its teachings to foreign lands, the missionaries frequently met with opposition. Resentment to the Mormons' practice of plural marriage was as prevalent in foreign countries as it was in America. Missionaries were sometimes expelled from a country or prevented from entering. There had been some difficulties encountered by the Elders on the Sandwich Islands; but, a short time prior to the arrival of Benjamin's company, the government gave its full consent for their missionary work to continue. Benjamin's purpose in writing to the king was apparently to assure the continuance of their freedom to proselyte. In the letter Benjamin explained why the missionaries had come to the Sandwich Islands, the principles of the Gospel, and the Book of Mormon. The letter was translated into Hawaiian and presented to a member of the King's cabinet, who in turn presented it to the King. Upon reading it, the King asked his Privy Council to read it and explain it to him. The letter was written in the two court journals and printed for publication in both Hawaiian and English.²

¹Millennial Star, XVI, pp. 62-63. Letter from Phillip B. Lewis from Honolulu, Oahu, June 30, 1853, addressed to "Brethren of the Presidency."

Concerning the growth of the Church at this time, Benjamin wrote:

I felt an inspiration to urge the ordination of natives to the priesthood, to assist the foreign elders in preaching the gospel. In this, President Lewis and Brother Cannon and others were with me, while others opposed; but no sooner were a few ordained and sent than all objections vanished, for they proved far more efficient than we had hoped. Through them the work spread mightily, and many of the best educated were baptized and soon became efficient auxiliaries.

About the first of May at Honolulu, after a Sabbath meeting invitation was given to all who wished baptism, and a hundred or more came forward, followed by a multitude to see the ordinance administered. And now the native Saints, as in the days of Jesus, brought out their sick or sent for the Elders to administer to them, and the power of God was greatly manifest in our administrations. . . Some are healed who for months had been afflicted. Some even for years, and they go forth joyfully into the waters of baptism.

Native elders now in the field were exerting a powerful influence, and it almost seemed as though all the Hawaiian people would become members of the Church.¹

On June 4, 1853, Benjamin wrote that "between three and four hundred have been baptized within the last few weeks within the vicinity of Honolulu."² Regarding the natives who were ordained to the priesthood, Benjamin wrote, "Some five or six are becoming sons of Thunder in preaching and many more teachers and Priests are magnifying their offices with much success."³

These experiences and successes were developing confidence and qualities of leadership within Benjamin. These qualities were manifest on one occasion when a counselor in the Mission Presidency entered into a "dispute, or quarrel, and even to threatening words" with the Mission President. As Benjamin occupied an adjacent room, he heard this dispute. Benjamin wrote his reaction:

¹Ibid., pp. 155-156.

²Letters from B. F. Johnson to Brother J. Horner, dated June 4, 1853. On file at Church Historian's Office.

³Ibid.
I told him [The Counselor] that being a High Priest it became my duty to rebuke his language and spirit; and although not interested in their quarrel, I was interested in seeing that the President of the Mission was not dishonored or outraged in his calling. President Lewis was my president, and if he was not his President then I would withdraw my vote in sustaining him [The Counselor] in the Presidency and I would see that others did the same.  

A Ministering Servant

In mid June, 1853, a severe smallpox epidemic swept the island. Benjamin reported that when the Catholic and Protestant missionaries learned about the disease, they left their flocks and fled. Many of the physicians were also too frightened to remain, and the natives were filled with terror. Although Benjamin was not protected by vaccination, he remained with President Lewis and Elder Farrar to help in whatever way possible. He realized the danger involved in his remaining in the contaminated area. As he recorded in his diary:

I feel that it will be the power of God that preserves me if I escape the contagion, as I am told by physicians that I am not protected by any vaccination. . . . I pray that I may escape the contagion and my trust is in God as I only seek to benefit my fellow man in exposing myself to its contact.

When some of the natives died, the others were filled with panic, and "at the appearance of fever they fled to the sea to plunge into the surf--almost to certain death."  

Because of his experience in caring for the sick and suffering in Kirtland Camp, Benjamin's services were invaluable in rendering relief to the afflicted Saints. The epidemic which lasted for weeks claimed hundreds of lives and was so terrible that President


2Benjamin Johnson, Diary labeled Book "B". On file in Church Historians Office.

3Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 156.
wrote: "Such scenes of wretchedness and misery, my eyes never before beheld."  

In Benjamin's account of what happened, he wrote:

Almost the whole native population was sick, dying, or lying dead. Such was the terrible condition of the city that State's Prisoners were pardoned on the condition they would assist in burying the dead. At first the health officers took them to hospitals or pest houses, and to escape this many fled to the mountains and died in some by-place. Accompanying Brother Lewis to the hospital at one time to look after some of our brethren, the stench from the dead and dying so overcame me that I was helped from the room to open air. And going from house to house among the sick we found yards where perhaps twenty had lived, now not a soul alive, while some of the dead were still unburied. Often in one day we used two quart bottles of oil in anointing the sick, for we ministered to all who asked us, feeling they were all our Father's covenant children."

Besides his physical endurance being put to a severe test at this time, Benjamin found that it also became a great spiritual trial for him. He asked himself questions which no man could answer, but for which he must obtain an answer. Of this Benjamin wrote:

I cannot describe the piteous sights we often witnessed. On one occasion coming to a house where lay upon the mats a man and boy too swollen to be recognized, as we ministered to the man he seemed to revive and tried to talk, and I felt sure it was one of our brethren. I looked around and saw a coat which I knew belonged to one of our dearest friends, a most devoted member of the Church. All the rest of his family were dead and he was nearly gone. So went most of our dearest and most zealous brethren and friends--our most active help in the ministry--and my heart wept, and my whole soul cried out to the Lord for that poor people. I was in great affliction, and marveled that the Lord would permit all his most faithful servants to die, so dear to us, and whose help we so much needed. I pondered the subject prayerfully until the light of the Lord shone upon my understanding, and I saw multitudes of their race in the spirit world who had lived before them, and there was not one there with the priesthood to teach them the gospel. The voice of the Spirit said to me, "Sorrow not, for they are now doing that greater

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1Millennial Star, XVI, pp. 62-63. Letter by Phillip B. Lewis from Honolulu, Oahu, June 30, 1853 to Brethren of the Presidency.

work for which they were ordained, and it is all of the Lord." So I was comforted, knowing that through the Spirit of Elijah, the hearts of the children were now being turned to the fathers in the Spirit land. Of the 4000 who died in the vicinity of Honolulu, some 400 had received the gospel, including the most efficient and the very best of the native saints.  

Experience as a Lawyer

Because of the good which resulted from the three missionaries' service, Benjamin believed that the ministers of the other churches became jealous and hateful toward the Elders. Some of them tried to influence the city officials into preventing the Mormon missionaries from visiting their people. The city marshal listened to the ministers and threatened the missionaries with charges of violating quarantine regulation if they dared to enter any of the village homes. When Benjamin and the others paid no attention to the threats, the city marshal contacted a noted pugilist or bully, and instructed him to assault the Mormon Elders. Elders Lewis and Farrar were attacked by him, and he "fell upon them like a fiend, beat and bruised them and tore their coats from their backs." Benjamin insisted that justice should be done.

The three missionaries went to the officials and filed charges against the assailant, a man named Turner. Trial was set for the following day. Of the trial proceedings, Benjamin wrote:

Next morning I went to the court to witness its force. There being no prosecuting attorney, and Brothers Lewis and Farrar being ignorant of law proceedings, they were so bamboozled by the attorney for the defense, that as the case progressed they appeared to be on the defense, for malpractice in medicine and breach of quarantine laws. The court adjourned until next day, when I was to be called as a witness.

1Ibid., pp. 157-158.
2Ibid., p. 158.
On taking the stand I told what I knew of the assault, and then asked His Honor the privilege of acting as attorney for the prosecution, to review the proceedings of the previous day to see that the case was kept properly before the court; for it now appeared reversed from served process, and being somewhat familiar with law terms and proceedings, the court seemed convinced at once as to my qualifications as an attorney-at-law, and permitted me any privileges I asked. I then said I stood before the court as a practical physician, and that as such the plaintiffs in this case had been my assistants, carrying out my instructions in nursing and administering to the sick; and if the court had doubts as to my capacity and qualifications, I wished him to summon before his court, Doctors Rook and Lathrop, physicians of the Board of Health and Quarantine of the city. Medical phrases as well as law terms were familiar to me, and a few only were necessary to convince the judge of my eminence in medicine as well as law.

I now had the case all in my own hands, and my evidence being last, the case rested. Lawyer Blair, the leading attorney in the kingdom, made a short plea for the defense, yet honoring me in all the professional eminence claimed, after which I reviewed the case, showing how we had left our homes, coming to these lands without fee or revenue, even without purse or script; and as good Samaritans, when their shepherds had deserted them and fled in fear, we had, at the risk of our lives, remained with them to minister comfort and blessing in their hour of suffering and death, and that the assault made upon us was the fruit of jealousy and hate of those by whom they had been desereted and left to die uncared for and alone. I said I did not blame the poor ignorant man employed to do this dirty work, and asked lenience for him.¹

Benjamin felt confident that he had effectively presented the case before the court. He then used this opportunity to explain to the people his reason for coming to their land. Benjamin continues his narrative:

We had left our homes thousands of miles away, and were here to bless the poor and ignorant; and although the court had so kindly admitted my qualifications as attorney-at-law and as a practical physician, yet these were not the callings that I desired to honor before the court and the world; it was as an Elder of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—a higher and holier calling, to honor which was my highest aspiration.

My plea was of considerable length—the Spirit of the Lord was with me. The courthouse was full and the yard thronged. The eyes even of our enemies were wet, and Turner, the assailant, wept like a boy, for he felt that I had plead his case to better effect than his attorney had. He was fined the small sum of $12. We left the courthouse, the natives following us, feeling that we were not forgotten

¹Ibid., pp. 159-161. See also Deseret News, December 15, 1853. A letter from Nathan Tanner to Brother Campbell.
of the Lord. The same evening Turner came, confessed he had done great wrong—said he thought we were bad men, but found he was mistaken—was sorry for what he had done, and in tears, asked us to forgive him.1

In writing to the First Presidency about this trial, the Mission President paid tribute to Benjamin by stating: "Benjamin F. Johnson acted as attorney in the case, and brought it through triumphantly, by the assistance of the Holy Spirit."2

So that Benjamin's talents as a lawyer could be used whenever one was needed, he was appointed Attorney for the mission and was given money to purchase the whole code of the Hawaiian laws. From this incident began a new career through which Benjamin was to continue to render service and to gain distinction.

At this time in 1853, the political situation on the island was very unstable.3 Dr. Judd, the Prime Minister, who was formerly a Protestant missionary among the natives, was the real power behind the throne. He had great wealth and influence, and it was believed that he even held a mortgage on the royal palace. As Judd's power and influence grew, he became hated by many people. Mass meetings were held, and inflammatory speeches were made against him. The people chose a committee of thirteen to present petitions demanding the removal of Dr. Judd before the King. The Prime Minister's influence was opposed by the dominant church to which many of the cabinet officers belonged. However,

1Ibid.

2Letter from Phillip B. Lewis to First Presidency, from Honolulu, Oahu, June 30, 1853, published in Millennial Star 16:16-63.

3Hawaiian Mission History, December 29, 1853; Millennial Star, XV, p. 429. Letter from President Lewis to S. W. Richards, Honolulu, Oahu, Sandwich Islands, April 4, 1853.
to the disappointment of the people, the King did not act immediately, and they waited impatiently. After a month had passed without any action by the King, the people became angry. The Committee of Thirteen tried to elicit from the King information regarding his proposed policy, but he would not see them.\textsuperscript{1} The courthouse and other large halls were crowded with people indignantly protesting against Dr. Judd. Benjamin attended these meetings as a careful observer.\textsuperscript{2}

One night, about September, 1853, when Benjamin retired in his bed, the political crisis weighed heavily upon his mind. While he slept he had the dream which he related as follows:

I dreamed that I stood upon the side of a mountain and near it ran a large river of beautiful water. As I looked down upon the river I saw a large building apparently designed for a mill, of plain and rude workmanship, built of coarse and unseasoned timber. As I looked I saw a smoke arise from the building, heard the cry of "fire" and saw people running and shouting "fire."\textsuperscript{3}

It seemed that the wind blew strong from the mountain towards the building. The people came up on the opposite side of the building, to put out the fire, and they were blinded by the smoke which blew in their faces. I thought how foolish they were to thus stay on the opposite side from the wind, to be blinded with the smoke.

Looking, I saw a bucket with a rope attached on a flume through which the water ran. I quickly took it up, drew it full of water, looked for the center of the fire, dashed it in, and, all at once the flame was extinguished.

I thought a multitude of people came crowding into the building, wondering by whom the fire had been extinguished. Although I was with them, they appeared to comprehend nothing of my agency in the matter. I thought they were almost wild with joy, that the building, although somewhat charred and damaged, had been saved. They calculated that the damage the building had sustained was about fifty thousand dollars.\textsuperscript{4}

\textsuperscript{1}Johnson, \textit{My Life's Review}, pp. 161-162.

\textsuperscript{2}Johnson, "A Prophecy Fulfilled"

\textsuperscript{3}Johnson, \textit{My Life's Review}, p. 162.

\textsuperscript{4}Johnson, "A Prophecy Fulfilled"
Benjamin's religious nature caused him to have much faith in dreams. When he awoke, he was strongly impressed by the dream but could not understand its significance. After relating it to one of his fellow missionaries, Benjamin mentioned that he believed the dream's interpretation was near. Shortly after this time, Benjamin was informed that at the King's request Prince Leholeho and Chief Halalia, a member of the Privy Council and friend and counselor to the King would visit him the following night. The purpose of this visit was to explain to Benjamin the King's great political trouble and ask his advice. Benjamin was convinced that this was the meaning of his dream. He recorded the incident as follows:

I earnestly prayed for wisdom, that anything I might say or do might tend to the honor and glory of God.

And as Nicodemus came by night, so did Halalia and the Prince come to obtain counsel from a humble Mormon Elder, to guide the King out of great State difficulties. Halalia said the King was now in great trouble; that nearly all of his foreign subjects had become enemies to Dr. Judd and had demanded his removal. While he, and most of his native subjects, felt that he had been a friend and benefactor to the Hawaiian people, the King himself was under great personal obligation to him for money loaned, and he had been for some time considering to whom he should apply for advice. He had thought of the American Minister, but the Americans wished to obtain his kingdom by annexation, and the English, French, and all other governments had some selfish end in view, relating to his government so that he had no confidence in their friendship; but he felt that the counsel we would give him would be disinterested and wise; that he had read our words and seen our acts, and knew of our faithful friendship to his people in their distress. And so he wished to learn our thoughts in regard to his present political trouble.

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2. Johnson, "A Prophecy Fulfilled."

This situation presented a tremendous challenge to Benjamin. Never in his thirty-five years had he ever been called upon to give counsel to heads of state, and the crisis which existed added to the responsibility of giving wise counsel. Concerning his reaction to this unusual request, Benjamin wrote:

While Halalia and the princes were delivering their message I was continually praying in my heart that the Lord would give us wisdom to say such things as would do honor to His cause, for I felt very small for such an important occasion.

After they delivered the King's message in full, I arose and told them that we were not sent to meddle with governments, nor to teach political science, but to preach the gospel of Christ as now revealed. But, inasmuch as the King was our friend, and desired counsel of us, we would give him such as the Lord would put in our hearts.

I told them the Bible said, that "when the wicked rule the people mourn!" that if Dr. Judd was really a good man and a true friend to the King, as the King had believed him to be, he would not allow the King to be in such great trouble on his account, but, like a true friend, would resign his office for the sake of peace between the King and his subjects.

The fact that he was disposed to hold on to his office, at the expense of peace to the King's realm showed, conclusively, that he was influenced by other motives than the peace and welfare of the kingdom. "We feel," said I, "that the present great political trouble and mourning is owing to Dr. Judd not being a good man, but wickedly holding a grasp upon the government office against the wishes of the people, for which there is no necessity, as the King has many true subjects of more than equal ability, any one of whom he could appoint as Dr. Judd's successor."

Since the Prime Minister exerted influence against the Church, Benjamin's advice may have been influenced by his dislike for Mr. Judd. The manner in which the political trouble had developed made Benjamin's counsel appear to be sound.

When I ceased speaking, the King's messengers clasped my hands and said: "The things you have told us we had not thought of, and they are true. The King will be glad when we tell him what you have said, for we can see it plainly, now. We will assure you that, at

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1Johnson, "A Prophecy Fulfilled,"
ten o'clock tomorrow, you will hear the King's herald proclaiming through the streets of the city that Dr. Judd is removed from office. They left us with the warmest feelings of gratitude and friendship.

The next morning at ten o'clock, the heralds were heard proclaiming the dismissal of Dr. Judd. The news created wonder and astonishment among the people, and they hurried together with public demonstrations of joy. They greatly marveled and queried by what agency, or through whose influence this long delayed, though most desirable object had been attained.  

When the Committee of Thirteen called a meeting for mutual congratulations, I sat in their midst, full of contemplation as to the small and unperceived means by which the Lord brings to pass his purposes. Just as I dreamed, so it all came to pass, and no one but myself could realize that the Lord had used the humble efforts of His elders to accomplish what the wisdom and wealth of the multitude could not accomplish. When the auditing committee examined Dr. Judd's ministerial records and accounts it was said he had swindled the government to the amount of $50,000, as I had dreamed.

Thus my prophecy  

"That the Elders of Israel would grow wiser; that the nations of the earth would begin to look toward Zion for counselors and statesmen," and that some of the Elders in that company "would be called upon to give counsel to some of the rulers of the lands to which they were sent."  

and my dreams were fulfilled together, and peace returned to the people. Joy came to our hearts that the Lord, through the inspiration of His Holy Spirit, had made us His humble Elders, the means of giving saving counsel to princes.

This experience not only brought Benjamin much satisfaction, but strengthened his faith in dreams and built more confidence in himself.

Benjamin, having demonstrated his ability as a leader, was now given greater responsibilities. On October 6, 1853, at the semi-annual conference of the Hawaiian Mission, the Mission Presidency outlined its main objectives for the immediate future. To fill these objectives,

1Ibid.

2Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 164.

3Johnson, "A Prophecy Fulfilled,"

4Ibid.
they organized three committees, and Benjamin was asked to serve on each of them.¹

Responsibility Given

The first objective was to have the Book of Mormon and other church literature translated into the Hawaiian language and prepared for printing.² Elder George Q. Cannon had been working upon the translation of the Book of Mormon for nearly two years.³ To complete this project, they needed money for a printing press and supplies. Benjamin was assigned to help President Lewis and George Q. Cannon in raising the necessary funds and in obtaining the printing press.⁴ Although the cost would be considerable and the members of the Church in the mission were quite poor, Benjamin approached this assignment with determination and optimism.

Heretofore the mission had been very poor, and it appeared a great undertaking, especially to raise the money necessary to buy a press and material sufficient for the work before us. But with me it was a principle of faith, and according to prediction that means should come into my hands through the blessing of the Lord, to sustain and comfort my brethren, and to accomplish every purpose pertaining to my mission. Thus far the way had been marvelously opened, and I felt strong faith that we would succeed.

¹Ibid.


³Jensen, Church Chronology, p. 45.

⁴History of Hawaiian Mission, October 6, 1853, p. 2.

⁵Johnson, My Life's Review, pp. 164-165.
Another of the mission's objectives concerned the "gathering of the Saints." This was a time of general gathering in the Church. As people were converted by the missionaries they were usually instructed to prepare to leave their homes and join the body of the Church in the valleys of Utah. This gathering was essential to Brigham Young's plan for building an inland empire, and it was also necessary so the new converts would be allowed to freely practice their religion in the isolated Mormon settlements. However, most of the converts among the Sandwhich Islands were comparatively poor and unskilled in trades, and there were also, at this time, laws preventing the natives from emigrating from the islands. Therefore, President Brigham Young sent word that the native Saints should not be called upon to gather to Salt Lake valley, but that a place suitable for them should be located and established somewhere within the mission. Benjamin was selected to help fulfill this directive.

The third committee was chosen to work out the solution to a problem between the Church and the government. In the conference minutes is found the following:

As the Saints heretofore had been abridged in their rights regarding schools, that subject was considered and Elders Benjamin F. Johnson, Geo. Q. Cannon and Nathan Tanner were appointed a committee to draft a memorial to the proper authorities setting forth their grievances in regard to that matter.¹

Along with placing major responsibilities upon Benjamin during this conference, the Brethren singled out his commendable achievements during the brief time he had been in the mission. The clerk of the conference recorded:

¹History of Hawaiian Mission, October 6, 1853.
It was motioned and carried that the conference highly approved of the labors of Elder Benjamin F. Johnson during the past six months in Honolulu, which place was assigned him as his future field of labor, while not engaged elsewhere in the business of the mission. 1

Before the Elders separated for their fields of labor, Benjamin received a blessing under the hands of Elder George Q. Cannon. Under the date of October 12, 1853, Benjamin wrote the following in his diary:

Brother Cannon prophesied upon my head many comforting things. 2Re7 said I should be a counselor to my Brethren; that I should be called to counsel Kings and Princes, and be blessed in all the responsibilities and callings, and be able to preach to the natives, and return to my home in honor. 2

Following the mission conference, Benjamin worked to carry out the responsibilities which he had been given. In trying to find a suitable location for the gathering of the native Saints, Benjamin traveled with other members of the committee to the various islands. Benjamin said that he viewed terrain and plant life which exceeded in beauty anything he had ever observed, and they were all greatly honored by the natives. All was not perfect, however, for during their trip they had a very trying experience:

A storm the night before our leaving for Lahaini left the channel very rough, and on setting sail in the morning we were at once in a choppy sea and then in a dead and sultry calm of tropical heat. The natives plied their oars until exhausted, with little progress. The choppy sea and sultry calm was a terrible ordeal, and all became seasick--so very sick, and like some others I became unconscious. When aroused from stupor I heard Brother Cannon tell Brother Napela to pray. He stood up in the bow, and in his native tongue and simple faith asked the Lord to have mercy upon His servants there so sick, and sent the wind quickly or they might die. I knew the wind would come, and it did, in less time than I take to write it, and we soon gladly landed at Lahaini. 3

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1Ibid.

2Benjamin Johnson, a diary labeled Book "C" under the date of October 12, 1853. On file in the Church Historian's Office.

3Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 169.
The site for the gathering was not found at this time, however, because of a disagreement which arose between Benjamin and Elder Nathan Tanner, a member of the committee and counselor in the Mission Presidency. The dispute was initially over the location for gathering, but soon developed into a personality conflict. Benjamin felt that Elder Tanner manifested dislike and jealousy toward him, and Elder Tanner accused Benjamin of seeking to control the mission. A meeting was called for the following day to air the problem and consider the charge against Benjamin. He records that "after full consideration of the subject, President Lewis with the whole council decided that Brother Tanner had no cause for accusation, and should make satisfaction." From this experience Benjamin felt that he learned a valuable lesson. He wrote:

Brother Tanner, finding he had failed, arose and sought to smooth his offense, saying he did not wish to hurt Brother Johnson. Full of the Spirit and discussing the thoughts of my heart, I said, "This is one thing I feel it would be well for Brother Tanner and all of us to remember that although we may try we can do each other no lasting harm, but we can easily hurt ourselves." I said I would forgive Brother Tanner the wrong he had done me, and would be glad to know he had not hurt himself. And the influence of this great principle, as it came to me then I have never forgotten, and can plainly see that all the real evils that come upon us are the result of our own and not another's wrong; that when by good works we enjoy the fellowship of heaven we have nothing personally to fear.

Because of this problem, as well as others within the committee, it was decided to cease, for the present seeking a gathering place. President Tanner's views in regard to their dispute were not available to the writer.

Distressing news from his family reached Benjamin. He was informed of the deaths of his mother, his sister Delcena, one of his daughters,

1Ibid., manuscript pp. 146-147 in possession of the writer. 2Ibid.
3Benjamin F. Johnson, Letter to "an old friend," written from Honolulu, Oahu, November 19, 1853, in possession of writer.
and a son whom he had adopted some years before. To his sorrow was added news of an Indian attack upon the settlement of Summit Creek; his family had been driven from their home and their home burned; livestock and other property were destroyed; some men were killed and others were wounded in trying to defend themselves. Undoubtedly the fact that Benjamin learned of his losses at a time when he was experiencing much satisfaction and growth as a missionary helped him to accept his losses with apparent equanimity. (Following his return from his mission, Benjamin enter a claim for ten thousand dollars against the U. S. Government for his losses from the Indian attack, but he never collected it.)

Of this unexpected loss and other news which came to him, Benjamin was moved to write:

> From property valued at nearly $7,000, I am again reduced to poverty. But there also came tiding of one great happiness to balance against these disasters: there had been born to me two sons—a great gain—for others are not lost, only gone before, to meet again. And so while I am sorrowful I am yet glad—grateful to the Lord in my heart.

Benjamin continued his labors in Honolulu. He presided over the foreign branch of Church members and took care of much of the business of the mission. Elder George Q. Cannon remained in Honolulu to preach to the natives, and Benjamin took "great pleasure in the business relations and companionship of Brother Cannon."

As Benjamin was concerned with finding land for the gathering place and money with which to purchase the press, he was elated to

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1 Deseret Evening News, December 6, 1905.
3 Ibid., pp. 170-171. See also letter from George Q. Cannon to President Young, published in Deseret News, March 2, 1854.
learn that Halalia, the friend and counselor to the King, offered to help in both projects. This wealthy native offered to give any of his lands to the Church for the gathering place and also to loan five hundred dollars toward the purchase of a press. According to Benjamin, the reason for this unusual demonstration of generosity was due to the close bond between the islander and himself. Regarding the native friend, Halalia, Benjamin wrote:

He wishes Brother Cannon to assure me that he regards me as his hai carne—meaning a friendship greater than that for a brother, a friendship of perfect reciprocity in everything, not excepting money, wardrobe, grown daughters, young children, and not even his bed and wife. Such was their ancient and still is their present custom.¹

Besides this generous offer, a native member of the Church, Brother Dennis, agreed to loan the mission one thousand dollars toward the purchase of a printing press. Benjamin reported that Brother Dennis had been a true friend from the first and had on different occasions provided Benjamin with shelter, money for clothing, and traveling expense.²

Benjamin's integrity prompted others to place trust in him. After selling some property, Brother Dennis was anxious to put his money in safe keeping. Benjamin recorded:

He came to my room with a sack containing $7000 in gold, and laying it upon my table said he wished to leave it in my charge and that I might use any amount of it that I needed, just as though it were my own; and to give to my friends if they were in need.³

Besides the two generous loans the missionaries had collected a large amount of money toward obtaining the press. Benjamin and Elder

¹Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 170.
²Ibid., pp. 171, 175.
³Ibid., p. 175.
Cannon sent their recommendation to President Lewis that arrangements now be made for procuring a press from Boston. It was decided that Elder Cannon and some other missionaries who would soon be returning home should arrange for the purchase of the press when they arrived at San Francisco.\(^1\) To supplement the funds already received, Benjamin drafted a petition to seek more funds from members of the Church and friends in California. The petition is illustrated on the following page.

In reflecting upon this accomplishment Benjamin wrote:

It is yet scarcely a year since our arrival, at which time the mission appeared in such poverty that the bare suggestion from me that a press could be obtained for the mission, brought upon me almost a persecution. But the Lord had verified the prediction of His servants, and I rejoiced greatly.\(^2\)

In January, 1854, Benjamin had another opportunity to financially benefit the mission.\(^3\) Since Brother Dennis planned to emigrate to California, he offered his tin and copper smith business to Benjamin on credit. Benjamin realized that President Lewis was a master of the smith business, and that it could provide profitable for the mission. He felt sure this was a blessing of the Lord so he immediately wrote to President Lewis, recommending that the mission purchase the business. When Benjamin's letter was received, President Lewis immediately returned to Honolulu and bought the business.\(^4\)

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\(^1\)Ibid., p. 173.

\(^2\)Ibid., p. 174.

\(^3\)Letter written by Benjamin F. Johnson to his wife Harriet from Honolulu, January 28, 1854, in possession of writer.

PETITION FOR FUNDS WRITTEN TO THE SAINTS IN CALIFORNIA BY BENJAMIN

To all the Saints in California:

Our Father, these are greatly desired funds that we may

influence yielded to the Saints of the People in the

West for the benefit of the Saints who are suffering

from the want of a building and from the want of

money. May the Lord bless and prosper this labor of

love.

The Saints have now arrived who have come to

Vermont to do their part in the Lord's work.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy

Spirit, Amen.
To assure the success of the newly acquired industry, President Lewis devoted most of his time to it. This made it necessary to delegate the responsibilities of the mission to someone else. President Lewis asked Benjamin to take upon himself the "spiritual care and duties of the mission" and gave him a blessing to this end.¹ Benjamin now found that because of his added duties he had no spare time. He took over all of the business of the Church in Honolulu, visited with officers of government, attended to the legal matters of the mission, and helped Sister Lewis care for the Home in which the missionaries lived.² Benjamin also reported to the First Presidency concerning the progress and needs of the mission.³

It had now been about eighteen months since the Church leaders had publicly taught their belief and practice of the law of plural marriage. In that time missionaries had been sent to various parts of the earth to proclaim these teachings. The reaction, especially in the Christian nations, was often intense opposition. Benjamin and the other missionaries sent to the Sandwich Islands with the special message from the Church leaders, now experienced a public reaction from the Protestant churches on the island. During April, 1854, the largest island newspaper published an article entitled "Mormon Polygamy," attacking the L.D.S. Church.⁴ Benjamin wrote that the article was "an attack upon our

¹Ibid.
²Letter by Benjamin F. Johnson to his wife Harriet, op. cit.
³Johnson, My Life's Review (manuscript), p. 159.
⁴Letter by Benjamin F. Johnson to his wife Harriet from Honolulu, Sandwich Islands, April 22, 1854, in possession of writer.
religion, portraying Brigham Young as a seducer, adulterer, a fiend of lust—a man of all wickedness and corruption." The writer of the article sought "to prove all ancient polygamy reprobate to virtue" by referring to Biblical quotations.

With feelings "almost akin to terror," Benjamin felt that something should immediately be published to "vindicate the truth and repel this attack." He tried to persuade President Lewis and Elder George Q. Cannon to write a response, but both men declined.¹ Benjamin felt a personal responsibility in this matter because of the special charge to teach and defend plural marriage, which he had been given by the First Presidency of the Church. Both President Lewis and George Q. Cannon, although very able writers, had come on their missions at a time when the doctrine was not publicly preached and they may have felt that it would be wiser to keep silent in the matter. Benjamin, however, favored a course of action:

To me this attack upon our religion and beloved President was more than I could bear, and a desire to repel it was like a smouldering fire within me, and without regard for weakness of body I must attempt what to others stronger seemed too great an undertaking. I realized that if I was able to do anything according to my desire it must be through the inspiration of the spirit of God. I closed my door, and bowed weeping before the Lord; told Him our enemies were exulting over us through the falsehoods published against his servants and the gospel we were sent to preach, and asked Him to make me able to vindicate the truth to his own glory. In this feeling I poured out my soul in earnest prayer, dedicating myself to the guidance of His Spirit. I then sat down with my pen, trampling under the great and new duty of writing for publication our defense; and so I wrote, and if fear, doubt, or self glory brought darkness I at once prayed for the light; and thus I continued for two days and nights to write and search the scriptures for the proofs needed in the reply. And when I had finished the manuscript and read it to Brother Lewis he was

¹Johnson, My Life's Review, pp. 176-177.
full of joy, and said the Lord had been with me. Brother Cannon with all the brethren were called in to hear it, and all appeared to feel as President Lewis had expressed. ¹

Although Benjamin thought that his twenty-six page article was good, he could not find a newspaper which would publish it, so consequently, the missionaries decided to send the article to San Francisco to be published in a pamphlet form. Donations were gathered to finance the project. ² Elder Nathan Tanner was assigned for the printing of the pamphlet upon his return to California in April, 1854. Soon after, the mission received four hundred of these pamphlets, and the missionaries distributed them widely. Benjamin was quite proud of the attention this pamphlet received. He wrote:

... We at once sent copies to the King and to each member of his cabinet; his Privy Council, and to each foreign minister; also to the Board of Foreign Missions and to every prominent officer in the government. For many days there was general excitement throughout the city, and had a thunderbolt fallen at the feet of our enemies it would not have made a greater sensation. To me it was both instructive and amusing to hear the comments and remarks by the people. ... while men who thought for themselves seemed anxious to make my acquaintance. Even General Miller, the pompous British Minister, made repeated calls—brought the French Minister and others, taking copies to send to his friends, assuring us that one copy should go in a report to his Government. In all of this I saw how honorable the Lord could make his unlearned servants, if humble, when at heart they desire to honor him in a defense of the truth. ³

The success of this article gave Benjamin confidence and experience which he later relied upon in defending the practice of plural marriage in other writings. This defense of the practice of plural marriage also brought Benjamin's literary skills to the attention of the First Presidency and other general authorities of the Church.

¹Ibid., p. 161

²Letter by Benjamin F. Johnson to his wife Harriet from Honolulu, April 22, 1854, in possession of writer.

³Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 179.
Following the acclaim he received for his pamphlet, Benjamin was given a position to coincide with the responsibilities he was already carrying. At a mission conference in July, 1854, he was sustained as "Counselor pro tem" to President Lewis in the absence of Elder Tanner, who had traveled to California.¹ According to the minutes of the three-day conference, the final day was observed as a day of fasting and prayer, and it proved to be a day of blessing and rejoicing. Concerning Benjamin's part in these activities, Elder George Q. Cannon wrote:

We had a long meeting, everyone speaking their feelings freely. Brothers Woodbury and Johnson spoke in tongues and the interpretation was also given; all felt the importance of hearkening more diligently than heretofore to the counsel of the presidency here.

... We adjourned until evening when we held a blessing meeting. Brother Lewis was anointed and blessed first, under the hands of his counselors and the other brethren, Brother Johnson being mouth. Brothers Johnson and Karen were then blessed, Brother Lewis being mouth... I was mouth several times and afterwards by the request of Brother Lewis I blessed him and also Brother Johnson.²

Forty years later in his life, Benjamin noted that the blessing he received at this mission conference under the hands of President Lewis and Elder George Q. Cannon was still being fulfilled.³

Soon after this mission conference, Elder Cannon and other missionaries left for America. Benjamin helped to provide money for their passage.⁴ He was sad to see Elder Cannon leave, not only because of

¹History of Hawaiian Mission, July 25, 1854.
²Ibid., July 27, 1854.
their pleasant association, but also because Benjamin knew of no other missionary qualified to take charge of the press.¹

With the more urgent matters having been cared for, Benjamin now turned his attention to the unfinished business of locating a gathering place for the native Saints. One of the main reasons for desiring to gather the native Saints together was to isolate them and protect them from the corrupt influences of their environment. In a letter written on June 4, 1853, Benjamin said:

You can hardly imagine the low and drunken conditions of this Priest enslaved people. These Isles are truly the Brothers of the Pacific . . . and it seems that virtue here was never known . . . or that it has taken to flight. Foreigners are but little different from the natives and thousands are aging with the curse, that nature designed should follow licentiousness . . . and under the present condition of things, this people would become wholly extinct in a few years but it seems that the providence of God has interposed to preserve a remnant.²

Although Brigham Young had counseled that a place be found in the islands, Nathan Tanner believed that it would be better for them to emigrate to California and settle there. Elder Tanner traveled to California to obtain a ship for this purpose.³ In the summer of 1854, President Young sent specific instructions that the place for gathering should be established upon one of the islands and the gathering should commence as soon as possible.⁴ A month later news was received that Elder Tanner’s project had met with disaster resulting in great expense to Parley P.


²Benjamin F. Johnson, letter to Brother J. Horner, from Honolulu, Sandwich Islands, June 4, 1853 (on file in Church Historian's Library, Salt Lake City).

³Letter from Benjamin F. Johnson to President Heber C. Kimball from Honolulu, Oahu, March 28, 1854, published in Deseret News, June 22, 1854.

⁴History of the Hawaiian Mission, October 6, 1853, p. 2.
Pratt and others then living in California. This caused Benjamin to conclude (perhaps while reflecting upon the similar lesson that he had learned at Garden Grove):

And so Brother Tanner's long cherished hobby of a vessel to emigrate the native Saints—like all other air-castles built outside the legitimate channel—fell to pieces, involving loss to others and no honor to himself.¹

As a member of the original committee selected for locating the place for the gathering and now as a member of the Mission Presidency, Benjamin was given the special charge of finding a suitable place. Land had been offered to the Church for this purpose of gathering by Halalia, a member of the King's cabinet who had proven to be a friend to the Mormons. Benjamin was told he could choose a site for a settlement on the island of Lanai, and the Church could have the option of either using the property free of charge for a number of years or of purchasing it at a small price.² President Lewis "blessed Brother Johnson . . . and told him he should know the spot . . . to commence operations for farming, and also for building."³ Assisted by other missionaries, Benjamin obtained farm implements, seeds, and necessary outfit and then sailed for the island Lanai on August 22, 1854. After several days of searching for a suitable location, Benjamin selected a site for the gathering.⁴

One of the missionaries on the island stated that the spot was pointed

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¹Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 183.
²Ibid., pp. 180-181.
out by revelation. Concerning this experience in making this selection, Benjamin wrote:

On this morning, I started alone for a walk, without thought as to where or how far I would go, and was glad to see Brother Green coming with me. . . . We talked of not having yet agreed upon the place for a town to be established, and wondering how the point would be settled, and were oblivious as to the distance we had come, or the features of that part of the valley over which we were walking, until we came to a tree, and stopped to look around. But when we did, it was with an admiration and an inspiration that filled us both, and I exclaimed, "This is the spot we have been looking for!" to which he bore testimony. It was a plot of some hundreds of acres of excellent mesa or table lands, sufficiently elevated to overlook the whole beautiful valley. We had walked about one and a half miles which we soon retraced, and made our report to the brethren, who were eager to visit the spot. . . . We soon returned to the spot with the other brethren and all with one voice said "This is the place," and joy seemed to fill all. After a short period of congratulation, it was moved that Brother Johnson name and dedicate this spot of ground for the gathering of the native saints; and this being expressed by unanimous vote I named the plot "Joseph" and the valley "Ephriam." We knelt together in the dedication prayer, and on arising all were full of prophecy of good upon this spot, and I well remember the words of my prediction, "That through the faithfulness of the elders from this spot, salvation should begin to go forth to the children of Joseph upon these lands."²

This brought about an immediate reaction among some of the native members, as Benjamin wrote:

Many of the brethren were on hand as pioneers, and already engaged in putting in seed, and evincing an energy and zeal which with them we had never before witnessed. Since that period we have learned of their continued prosperity, together with an increase of facilities and help.³

When a new group of missionaries arrived on September 27, 1854, Benjamin assisted President Lewis in instructing them about their work and directing them to their various assignments. Benjamin reported that

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¹Letter from F. A. Hammond to George Q. Cannon, op. cit.


the group, which included Elder Joseph F. Smith, appeared anxious to learn the language and cheerfully adapted themselves to the conditions necessary to attain it. He further wrote: "A feeling to obey counsel, and to rejoice in their missions, seems to fill the hearts of each of our newly arrived brethren." Benjamin's nephew, Sixtus E. Johnson, was one of the new missionaries. At the request of the Presidency, Benjamin set apart and blessed his nephew prior to the commencement of his mission. Benjamin claimed this was in fulfillment of a dream he had had a few nights prior to his nephew's arrival. Since he had been away from home for more than two years and since some of the Elders who had come out with him had already returned to Utah, Benjamin thought that his mission too was drawing to a close. In writing to Brigham Young Benjamin considered the experiences of the past two years.

I have ever felt to rejoice in my mission to these lands, and to be thankful for the many mercies and blessings I have enjoyed since leaving the home of the Saints; and humbly trust that the experiences I have gained may never be lost upon myself.

I pray that I may ever be humble and that I may live to become a blessing to my fellow man, and to manifest that love which is due to the cause of virtue and truth.

Because Benjamin now found himself growing physically weaker, with a cough and pains in his side, President Lewis advised him to return to his home. However, the press arrived at this time, and money

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1 "History of Hawaiian Mission, November 29, 1854. Letter from Benjamin F. Johnson to President Brigham Young, Honolulu, Oahu, November 29, 1854.


4 Benjamin F. Johnson, Letter to his "Brother," from Honolulu, Oahu, October 19, 1854, in possession of writer.
was needed to pay the freight bill and other expenses. Feeling a sense of responsibility to complete the arrangements for the printing press, Benjamin worked two more months helping to raise the necessary funds. On December 30, 1854, the Mission Presidency received a letter from Elder Parley P. Pratt advising them to ship the printing press and materials back to San Francisco. Concerning this news, Benjamin wrote, "In this I feel greatly relieved, as I have much wished to learn my duty in relation to the 'setting it up' upon the Islands." Since there was now sufficient money to meet all the mission's liabilities, Benjamin felt worthy of a full and honorable release from his missionary work.

Although the past two years had been generally a pleasant and rewarding experience, thoughts of returning to his home and family filled him with excitement. His roots had sunk deeply in the valleys of the mountains. His love and longing for his home in the mountains had prompted Benjamin to endeavor to express his feelings through poetry.

MY MOUNTAIN HOME

Yea beaustious vales of Deseret,
My peaceful, happy Mountain Home;
Thy lovely scenes I'll ne'er forget
Though far away from Thee I roam.

Thy rock-bound mountains lofty-bold,
With snow-crest tops that tower so high,
Have been prepared from days of old
Thy proud oppressors to defy.

Thy scented chambers are designed
A safe retreat for all the just,
Who peace shall in thy bosom find
When war and pestilence sweep the earth.

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1 Benjamin Johnson, diary labeled Book "D" under the date of December 30, 1854.

There midst Mount Ephraim's tops shall rise
The hand of God by His command,
And catch the wondering nations' eyes,
The joy of Saints from every land.

Then shall the sons of God rejoice,
And there the words of life be known,
And there be heard our Prophet's voice,
And there again his face be shown.

And then from those we've bid adieu,
Who're sleeping now beneath the sod,
We'll learn what we for them shall do
That they, too, may be heirs of God.

Then may I ever faithful prove
"Till I return, no more to roam,
To dwell in peace with those I love,
In thee My virtuous Mountain Home."  

President Lewis suggested that Benjamin prepare to sail on a ship leaving January 16, 1855. As President Lewis realized Benjamin did not have the fifty dollars for his passage to California, he decided to evaluate the financial condition of the mission and use any surplus money for Benjamin's ticket. Benjamin decided, "If there is the necessary money it shall be a sign it is right that I return home; otherwise I will remain until the Lord shall open the way." Benjamin had great faith that he had been called on his mission by the Lord and that when the Lord was ready to release him He would make it known. Benjamin had begun to anticipate reunion with his family, and when President Lewis balanced the mission finances and found no surplus, Benjamin could not help feeling disappointed, and he later wrote:

A voice within said, "Ask President Lewis to count that money again." But I had seen it counted, and felt it would be foolish . . . and tried to forget the matter, but could not and at evening

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1Benjamin Johnson, a diary labeled Book "C," written under the date of Thursday, September 1st, 1853. On file in the Church Historian's Office.
I told him I was . . . prompted to ask him to count the money again. He seemed almost offended; said he knew it was counted right, but would do so if I wished. He counted it again as before, and when every claim was balanced there was just $50 lying on the table--surplus.

President Lewis was astonished and my heart was full, for I then remembered a prophecy to my mother, when in my youth, that while some of her sons were in foreign lands the Angel of the Lord should provide for them and with their own hands should minister to their wants. This, I knew, they had done, and I was filled with more joy than I could express. So, my way being opened, it was plainly the will of the Lord that I should now return home.

The Return Home

Benjamin had developed a love for the work and for the people and he now found it difficult to leave. Benjamin described his departure:

The native Saints, learning I was soon to leave them, came with their small offerings in money--large, considering their poverty--and with tears and sobs said, "Goodbye." I found about $20 in these small sums. I was glad in the hope of seeing again my family, but had not realized how my heart was entwined with these poor people, and it required an effort to subdue my own grief at parting with them.2

This gift from the native Saints was a token of their love and respect for Benjamin. The twenty dollars represented a considerable sacrifice when one considers their condition of poverty. George A. Cannon had explained: "The islanders had but little money. A dollar with them was a very large sum, a ten cent piece was a much larger sum with them generally, and more difficult to procure, than a dollar was to Americans."3

1Johnson, My Life's Review, pp. 185-186.
2Ibid., pp. 187-188.
3George Q. Cannon, Treasures of Pioneer History, compiled by Kate B. Carter (Salt Lake City: Daughters of Utah Pioneers, 1956), V, p. 142.
Benjamin met with the mission brethren for the last time on January 15, 1855. At this meeting Benjamin asked President Lewis for a blessing. Accordingly, President Lewis and all of the Elders present laid their hands on Benjamin’s head preparatory to giving him a blessing. Benjamin said that in his blessing Brother Lewis prophesied many joyful things for him and further told him that although the voyage home would be prolonged, still the Ángel of the Lord would be with them, and they would arrive in safety. President Lewis also told Benjamin that he would return to his families in health and peace and that he should labor in the Holy Temples of the Lord and become a savior on Mt. Zion.¹

Benjamin sailed for home the following day. During the journey the following incidents occurred: a terrible storm, fire aboard the ship, and profane and vile passengers; and Benjamin nearly fell into the rough sea. Of the latter Benjamin wrote:

The storm continued, and coming next morning on deck, being very weak, the ship made a sudden lurch and I was sent almost like a bolt through the gangway of the bulwarks, and would have shot away into the sea had not my left arm, as by a miracle, caught around an iron rod as I was going through. Again I knew my guardian angel was with me.²

Benjamin was grateful to end his twenty-two day sea voyage, and while in San Francisco, he visited with Elder Parley P. Pratt. Elder Pratt complimented Benjamin for his services in the islands, and said that nothing had been published on plural marriage that was better than Benjamin’s pamphlet.³

¹Johnson, My Life’s Review, p. 190.
²Ibid., p. 190.
³Ibid., pp. 188-192.
Having to assure himself a safe journey to Utah, Benjamin joined a company of men who were traveling there. With some of the money which he was taking to President Young and others, Benjamin purchased some horses and an outfit necessary for his trip to Utah. Mr. Holladay, the former owner of the horse where Benjamin was going to ride, told him that the horse was wild and had thrown everyone who had tried to ride him. Benjamin was afraid of being hurt by the animal, but he had no other horse to ride. Deciding to trust in the Lord, Benjamin nervously prepared to mount it. In his own words:

... I saddled my colt, thinking of what Holladay had told me. The feeling I can never forget as I raised my foot to the stirrup, and my heart to the Lord, for I had no hope but in Him. I left the colt to himself; he stood for a moment as if surprised, then awkwardly followed. I patted him and talked to him as if he were a child, and soon saw that my talking and fondling pleased him. I will only say that through the blessing of the Lord in answer to prayer, one of the most vicious colts in Southern California became a faithful servant, friend and companion, gentle, obedient, and true; and proved the hardiest and most desirable saddle horse in the whole company. ... I made a vow to the Lord that so long as "Ranger" could be ridden by others in safety, he should be like me, a public servant, and from 1855 to 1875, through all the Indian raids and the Buchanan invasion, he was always in the front, and was finally buried in our garden at Spring Lake.

During their overland journey, when moving through some thick timber and brush, the company was suddenly surprised by a band of Indians. Benjamin related this frightening experience:

As I dismounted, an Indian jumped up with a whoop before me, at once repeated by Indians all around us. We sprang upon our horses and hurriedly sought to drive the loose animals to the open plain, but the Indians gathered, and with bows and arrows in hand formed a single file on each side of us, apparently about a hundred in number. As they both followed and kept in our front with bows ready the situation was grave and fearful.

... As there was no possibility to escape them by fast driving, we halted for a parley, and so, drawing close together we sought

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1Ibid., p. 194.
to learn their purpose, which was difficult, as none could talk with them except a smattering by Pope. I remembered that Nephi—my nephew—had been among the Piutes and spoke his name to them. They at once turned to me, and we made them understand that he was my brother's son; and so they knew we were Mormons, which was what they were trying to find out. Had they learned otherwise we would have been doomed. We gave them buscuits [sic], and tobacco and told them of a horse we had left behind they might have, so they hurried away to find it. We hastened forward, feeling that we had been delivered from the jaws of death.

Benjamin arrived home on March 26, 1855. In reflecting upon the past two years, Benjamin wrote:

On leaving home I had made a memorandum of property left to the amount of seven or more thousand dollars in cutter horses, wagons, etc. but as the "Walker War" occurred in my absence nearly all my property had been destroyed by the Indians, my house burned and my family driven to Payson.

I am again at home with my family in Payson, though worn, weary, weak and thin in flesh. But I knew the Angel sent with me by the Prophet and the one promised me on my leaving the islands has been with me to open my way, and I look back with wonder to the many providences that have sustained me upon my mission and upon my return.

But I returned in debt, having used money of others in the purchase of my outfit, to the amount of $150, and I had promised myself I would not go to Salt Lake City to see the Presidency until I could take the money with me and repay it. In the depleted condition of our means this might be difficult to do at once, and it caused some wight upon my mind, until speaking of it to my wives they told me they had just $150 which had recently been paid for a mule. So I was in no way embarrassed, for the Angel had been before me.

Again Benjamin gave the Lord credit for his good fortune. He took the money to Salt Lake City and pleased at the cordial welcome

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1Ibid., p. 195.

2The Walker War was a series of battles between the Indians living in the Utah Territory and the white settlers of the region. These Indians were led in battle by a Ute chief named Joseph Walker, hence the name "Walker War."

3Johnson, "A Life Sketch."

4Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 196.
he received from the Presidency of the Church, who also commended him for his missionary labors and his ability to write. Brother Heber C. Kimball took Benjamin by the arm and said, "Bennie, I always knew the lion was in you, and when I read your defense of polygammy, I could see they had waked him up." Benjamin felt, however, that Elder Kimball knew, as he knew, that the "Lion" was Benjamin's love for God and His Kingdom and that the Lion's power had come through prayer and humility before the Lord.¹

¹Ibid., p. 197.
CHAPTER VIII

THE RETURN TO COLONIZING

After Benjamin returned from his mission, President Young gave him his approbation and blessing and counseled him to again colonize Summit Creek. Happy to again be called to preside over a settlement, Benjamin prepared to meet the challenge.¹

Benjamin's financial condition was poor. All of the buildings which he had erected prior to his mission had been destroyed by Indians,² and shortly after his return forty acres of wheat were destroyed by locusts. Having no grain in storage and no money with which to purchase any, and having thirty persons to provide for, Benjamin was distressed.³ In desperation, he sold a choice lot in Salt Lake City for one hundred twenty dollars. With the money from this sale, the family was able to procure bread for a time.

Determined to succeed at Summit Creek, or Santaquin as it was later named,⁴ Benjamin replanted his crops in June, 1855. Hoping to move there before winter, Benjamin built corrals, put up hay, constructed a cabin and began a stone fort. He sent the following appeal for families to join him in building the settlement:

¹Johnston, My Life's Review, p. 197.
²Santaquin Ward History, on file at Historian's Office, Salt Lake City.
³Johnston, My Life's Review, p. 197.
⁴Santaquin was named after an Indian Chief by that name. Santaquin Ward History.
EDoR-INoF: DESERT NEWS:

Dear Sir:---As I am directed by proper authority to build a fort and replace the settlement formerly made at Summit Creek, in Utah County, I wish, through your columns, to invite to our assistance, some of the new immigration who are looking for a desirable location, or those of your city who purpose to leave for a country residence. Those who are looking for a good situation, and understand the facilities by which we are surrounded will, it appears to us, require only the present welcome to determine them to become our neighbors.

... Standing upon the site for our fort we have a full view of the Utah Lake and adjacent country, of Provo City, twenty miles distant, and of Springville, Palmyra and Payson, the latter being about six miles to the north of us.

Many have supposed, from the altitude of our position, that we were more subject to frost than our neighbors, but this is not the case, for frost visits us from four to six weeks later than it does the lower lands, consequently for growing fruits and vines we fancy it will not be excelled by any spot in the mountains.

The plan for our fort was furnished by architect T. O. Angel, as designed by President B. Young, who pointed out the site for its location. It is to be two stories in height; the first story is to be built of stone, and must be put up this fall, in order to be our protection through the winter and cropping season in the spring. It will not be difficult to accomplish this, when each section finds a claimant with willing hands, as materials are easy of access, and some are already on the ground.

Men and teams are needed; also a number of stone masions, a good carpenter, and blacksmith, all of whom it is hoped will soon be ready to lend a hand before the present season is too far advanced. We trust that all who may desire to associate with us, will feel to cheerfully comply with the instructions given, viz: "that our families remain in other settlements until our own is provided with safe and ample protection." Such are the conditions on which we should be happy to see some fifteen or twenty more of our brethren ready and earnest to engaged in developing the facilities of and in beautifying the already delightful situation for the future "Summit City."\(^1\)

When Benjamin crops were again destroyed by crickets and an early frost, he decided it would be necessary to postpone the settlement until the following year.\(^2\)

\(^1\) Johnson, Letter to Editor of Deseret News, October 17, 1855.

\(^2\) Johnson, My Life's Review, pp. 197-198.
In the territorial election after his return from his mission, Benjamin was re-elected as a member of the Legislative Council. This gave him the opportunity to again associate with many friends, resulting in an "unusually pleasant" winter in Fillmore. After being absent for the previous three years from his political circles, Benjamin especially enjoyed his association with his former associates. Among those he worked with were his brother Joel, who was chaplain of the House, and his brother-in-law A. W. Babbitt, who was Secretary of State. This assignment kept him very busy.

Desiring to become an authorized attorney at law, Benjamin wrote and passed his bar examinations and was admitted as a member of the Utah Bar. His "Sheep Skin" was presented to him by the clerk of the Supreme Court on January 18, 1856. Because of his political position, his experience, and talents, Benjamin was called as a delegate to the Constitutional Convention for the State of Deseret. (On February 1, 1849, Brigham Young called a convention in Salt Lake to consider the political needs of the people. This convention resulted in the organization of the New State of Deseret. This provisional

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1 The fifth annual session of the Legislature of Utah convened in Fillmore December 10, 1855. This was, however, the only session of the Legislature ever held in Fillmore. Although the site for Fillmore had been selected specifically for the purpose of building the Capital City, it was evident that Salt Lake City was industrially and socially the real center.

2 Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 198.

3 Benjamin F. Johnson, Letter to his wife Harriet from Great Salt Lake City, March 22, 1856, in possession of writer. The certificate which he refers to as "Skeep Skin" is in possession of writer. A reproduction of this certificate can be found on the following page.

The United States
Supreme Court for the United States
Within and for the Territory of Utah
Regular January Term, 1856

To all whom it may concern: Or where these presents shall come, greeting.

I know ye, that Benjamin J. Johnson, on the
Fifteenth day of January, 1850 One thousand, eight hundred, and fifty, of 1856, after the preparation
of the said Benjamin Johnson, and several other Members of the Bar, consisting a Committee of five
Admitted, by the said United States Court, for practice, as an Attorney and Counsellor, at Law, and
Solicitor in Chancery, before said Court, and that the said Benjamin J. Johnson, appeared before the Clerk
of said Court, and was duly sworn, to support the Constitution of the United States, and to demean
himself as such an Attorney, with fidelity, an all other duties to persons and clients, according to the best of his ability.

In testimony whereof, I have hereunto subscribed my name, and affixed the Seal of said Court, at Salt Lake City, this twenty-fifth day of January, 1850, One thousand, eight hundred, and fifty-five
And of the Independence of the United States of America the Eighty-sixth day.

William J. Appleby, Clerk

CERTIFICATE AUTHORIZING BENJAMIN TO PRACTICE LAW IN UTAH
state created by the pioneers included all of the present state of Utah, all of the portion of Arizona which belonged to the United States in 1849, 96% of Nevada, approximately one third of California and Colorado, about one seventh of New Mexico and Wyoming and small portions of Oregon and Idaho. In the Constitutional Convention Benjamin played a significant role in preparing Utah for statehood.

On February 3, 1856, Benjamin married Sarah Melissa Holman, his fifth wife. President Young performed the ceremony.

In the spring of 1856, Benjamin's attention again turned to his assignment at Summit Creek. With his other families comfortably settled in Payson, Benjamin took Sarah Melissa and faced the challenges of developing their new home. Benjamin was able to induce more than twenty other families to work with them.

Again their crops were destroyed by crickets. With a severe food shortage, Benjamin divided what they had among his family and with determination and faith in God faced a year of famine. Of this year Benjamin wrote:

What bread we had we dedicated to the Lord, and we, Sarah Melissa and I, agreed together and told the Lord that so long as anything remained in those two sacks no one should go from us hungry; and I felt that the Lord heard our words. As President of the settlement we had many calls from friends and travelers, and all were supplied; and whenever we heard that any of our neighbors were without bread a share was taken to them. And there stood our two sacks of

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4. Ibid.
5. Santaquin Ward History.
breadstuff side by side in the... only room we then occupied. How often did our eyes turn, wondering, to see that they were not yet nearly empty, until a conviction, strong as knowledge itself, assured us that the Lord had accepted our offerings, and that our bread was like the widow's meal and crust of oil. Realizing that so many were in scarcity while we had felt no lack, I did not wish to pass through the approaching harvest without realizing a little of that scarcity of which others had felt so much. I said to my wife in a partly thoughtless way, that as we have as yet seen no scarcity I hoped our bread would be out a week or two, that we might more fully realize what others had suffered. Our assurance of bread had become to us a principle of faith without fear, so we kept on going as we had and took no further thought even, to look at the sacks, until about 10 days before a new supply would come, my wife said, "Benjamin, our bread is all gone." At first I felt a little surprise and chagrin, but in a moment I remembered what I had said, and I knew the Lord had taken me at my word.1

When the harvest came it was neither sufficient to replenish depleted supplies nor to provide flour for making bread. (In later years, as Benjamin looked upon these years of comparative poverty, he thought of them as one of the happiest periods in his life.2)

Ahtough the crops had been unproductive, much progress had been made in the short time since the colony had been established. This was noted by two General Authorities of the Church, Joseph Young and Albert P. Rockwood, for after visiting the colony in the spring they wrote:

... We accepted the polite invitation of President Johnson to remain all day at Santa Quin /sic/. This settlement is only a year old, yet it exhibits a wonderful development for its age.
A big field of 1000 acres has been taken in, and the fence is nearly completed. The crops look well and there is every reason to believe that this will be a flourishing settlement.3

Benjamin was re-elected to the Legislature in the fall of 1856. As the Legislature had adjourned to Salt Lake City, Benjamin proceeded

1Ibid., pp. 199-200.
2Ibid., p. 200.
3Santaquin Ward History, 1857. Also see Deseret News 7:96.
to travel there with his wife Harriet and two children. In traveling between American Fork and Lehi they were overtaken by a fierce storm. Benjamin and his family nearly perished in the blizzard which he described:

A mountain storm of wind, snow and hail burst upon us in all its fury, the snow blotting out the road and filling the air with such a fearful whirling mass that the horses' heads could not be seen. The snow had fallen over a foot in depth, and turning to retrace our way we found ourselves lost. Night would soon be upon us and the children, and we had no wraps to protect us from soon perishing. Our condition, to me, seemed terrible in the extreme. For a few moments only we hesitated. I thought of the promised Angel, and let the horses take their own course. As they started I could just see my little dog "Ring" forward under the neckyoke in the lead. The horses kept their pace and the dog kept his place through that blinding, terrific storm, in which we could know nothing of our course or whereabouts, until we found ourselves going through the Lehi city gate. I have encountered many fearful mountain storms, but none equal to this in its terrors, or in the marked providence by which we were delivered.¹

Upon his arrival in Salt Lake City, Benjamin learned that his brother-in-law and close associate A. W. Babbitt had been killed by the Cheyenne Indians, while returning from Washington, D. C. (When Benjamin's sister Julia Babbitt died the following year, Benjamin took their children into his care and provided for them. Ten years after their father's death, Benjamin gave them a farm valued at one thousand dollars.)²

Early in the year 1857, the leaders of the Church felt a need for a general spiritual renewal among the membership of the Church. Consequently, the Elders were strongly reminded of their duty to increase their families according to the revelation on marriage.³ After receiving

²Benjamin F. Johnson, Letter to President Young written from Rep. Hall, Salt Lake City, January 4, 1867, on file in Church Historian's Office.
³Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 204.
counsel from President Kimball,¹ and after fasting and prayer, Benjamin married Susan Holman and Sarah Jane Spooner.²

Benjamin felt the influence of a reformation movement within the Church and with several others was rebaptized in 1857. Of this experience he wrote:

... Through the winter was inaugurated the great general reformation in the Church, in which every feeling in the hearts of the Saints was stirred to seek out and put away iniquity and sin. In my own heart, when lit by the candle of the Lord, I found more of evil than I wished to carry, and I laid all down at the feet of the Lord and His servants, and in the waters of baptism and repentance sought to live a higher and more perfect life.³

In reporting to President Young concerning the settlement of Santaquin, Benjamin wrote: "The spirit of the people here has much improved since the reform commenced..."⁴

The Coming of Johnston's Army

In July of 1857 the members of the Church were alarmed to learn that the United States army was approaching under the command of General Albert S. Johnson. The Saints understood that it was being sent out at command of President James Buchanan "to squelch or destroy the Mormons." Evidently President Buchanan had accepted as facts charges made by William W. Drummond and Judge George P. Stiles and others that all the

¹Benjamin F. Johnson, Letter to his wife Harriet written from Fillmore City, December 24, 1855, in possession of writer.

²Johnson, My Life's Review, pp. 204-206.

³Ibid., p. 204.

⁴Benjamin F. Johnson, Letter to Brother Brigham Young from Santaquin, February 25, 1857, on file in Church Historian's Library.
people of Utah were in open rebellion against the laws and government of the United States. Without thoroughly investigating these charges of insurrection and the simultaneous charges of scandalous behavior and immorality among the leaders of the people of Utah, Buchanan sent twenty-five hundred soldiers of the U. S. Army to put down the rebellion. Benjamin, as many others, had experienced oppression by military forces, and the news immediately brought back unhappy memories. But the Church had grown for ten years in the valleys of the mountains, and they felt like a young man who, as a boy had experienced frequent beatings by a mean stepfather and was not facing another whipping. Brigham Young said, "Our enemies have kicked us and cuffed us about so much that I have got used to it ... I say now to my enemies, you have got to fire long shots, unless you come much nearer to us than you are."¹

Benjamin expressed his feelings also:

For such a measure there had been no occasion, and the injustice of such a move upon an innocent people aroused every patriotic feeling and every arm to repel the invasion. From city, town and hamlet, citizens came forth armed for military service and were sent as scouts, pickets or as a standing army to defend the mountain passes against their approach. Our men stampeded their stock, burnt [sic] the grass upon the range, and compelled the army to winter at Fort Bridger, near Bear River.²

The Saints dreaded the possibility of having to leave their homes and begin again in a less desirable place. The settlers of Summit Creek, which had now grown to thirty-one families,³ called a mass meeting in the small rock school house. The purpose of the meeting was to draft

¹Young, Journal of Discourses, V, p. 5.
²Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 207.
³Benjamin F. Johnson, Letter to Brigham Young, written at Santaquin, September 22, 1857, on file in Church Historian's Library.
a formal statement in support of President Young's policy with regard to the army. When Brigham Young learned of the approach of Federal troops, he called a council of the leading men of the territory for the purpose of deciding a policy. The council decided to resist the entrance of troops into the valley. Among other things Governor Brigham Young said, "Liars have reported that this people have committed treason, and upon their representations the President has ordered out troops to assist in officering the territory. We have transgressed no law, neither do we intend to do so; but as for any nation coming to destroy this people, God Almighty being my helper, it shall not be."  

In counseling the people to make preparations for the defense of the territory, Brigham Young outlined the following policy: "If there is any man or woman who is not willing to destroy anything and everything of their property that would be of use to the enemy if left, I want them to go out of the Territory. ... Before I will suffer what I have in times gone by, there shall not be one building, nor one foot of lumber, nor stick, nor a tree, nor a particle of grass and hay that will burn, left in reach of our enemies. I am sworn if driven to extremity, to utterly lay waste this land, in the name of Israel's God, and our enemies shall find it as barren as when we came here."  

After the Saints at Summit Creek had discussed Brigham Young's policy, the following resolutions were passed at this meeting:

Resolved, that we, as a people have suffered enough from the violence of mobs and soldiery, stimulated by corrupt priests, lying editors and disappointed politicians and that we will no longer bear such injustice and oppression.

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1Joseph Fielding Smith, Essentials in Church History, p. 500.

Resolved, that our lives, property and all our influence is pledged to repel all further aggression of the approach of an armed soldiery into our midst.

Resolved, that before our peaceful homes and our possessions shall be desecrated by our enemies, our houses shall be burned and our pleasant homes desolated and we, with our families, will show to the world, by our patriotism and struggle for liberty, that their blood flows in our veins.

Resolved, that we consider the present administration totally corrupt and that President Buchanan, by his official movements towards Utah, has forfeited the confidence and respect of every patriotic citizen and that we do not hesitate to give to the world our disapprobation and protest to his feelings and designs towards us.1

These irate citizens were called upon to prove their sincerity by helping to support and participate in the Utah War. Although he had been unsuccessful in reaping a good harvest for three consecutive years, Benjamin was called upon to meet his share of this great expense and labor. Benjamin met this situation with fortitude:

To me, with a large family, weak in body, and no one old enough to carry responsibility, it was a giant's load. But I called upon the Lord, who had promised to bless and sustain those who were faithful and obedient, and the Lord raised up to me a help in the time of my greatest need; . . . 2

The help which Benjamin received came as a result of his willingness to help those who were in need of assistance. He related this incident as follows:

. . . I was returning from the city with my sister, Julia Babbitt, and overtook a young man and his wife, Reece and Ann Llewellyn, each carrying a small bundle. From his broken English I found they were of the handcart company just come in, not long married, and just from Wales, had no acquaintance, and had no particular settlement in view, but were seeking a home. I asked them to ride and they went home with us, where we made them welcome to stay as long as they pleased. After a few days they desired to know upon what terms they could remain to live with and work for us. I told them I could not hire them by the month or by the year, but they could stay with

1Santaquin Ward History, 1858.

2Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 207.
us until fully rested and could look about to find a home that would suit them better; and as winter was coming on, if they should remain with us they would be provided for as though a portion of our family, but could leave at any time they desired. He had always been a coal miner, and a timekeeper, and had had some degree of charge in the coal mines of his native town.

... With this view they remained with us, and I felt that in Reece Llewellyn I had a son, a companion, and a fast-growing pillar of strength to lean upon; and his mind seemed inspired with the same feeling and same channel as mine. Being younger and more hardy he took the front in all expeditions to impede or repel the invading army. ¹

Seven men were called from the Santaquin Ward to participate in active duty within the Mormon army, called the Nauvoo Militia. Besides providing the needed outfits to carry supplies to the front, Benjamin also went into debt in purchasing supplies which he felt would be needed by the seven men from his settlement. ²

In 1858, before the conflict was settled, the Saints in the settlements north of Provo were advised to evacuate their home. Benjamin describes this strange scene:

... All commenced at once to prepare for the general move, which began in April and continued until every city, village and habitation north of Utah County was abandoned and prepared for burning. Every team and vehicle was called into use to assist the people to move: horses, cows, and even dogs were loaded to their capacity, and families marched without even these helps, carrying what they could in their hands. The people of Ogden as a Ward, with many from Salt Lake City and elsewhere came to our little town for shelter, and to await coming events. We divided with them our lands, which they accepted with no apparent expectation of ever again returning to the homes they had left. The entire people felt determined that if the U. S. troops should attempt to quarter themselves in our cities or to arrest our leading men, every city of the north should be reduced to ashes and the country again be made a desert. With this determination all of the cities and elegant houses of the north, with their beautiful furniture, etc., were abandoned, and their owners now lived in tents, dugouts and brush houses. ³

¹Ibid., pp. 207-208. ²Ibid., p. 209.
Problems Occur Over Rights

An unusual spiritual experience occurred about this time, which greatly affected Benjamin and the members of his family. A young woman came to the settlement, whom Benjamin described as being "subject to fits" and "possessed of the devil."

Living near us and being taken with terrible convulsions, the Elders were sent for, as also the neighbor women, among whom were my wives, Sarah Melissa, Susan and Sarah Jane, my daughter Esther and others. The Elders who administered were all strong men . . . and when by the authority of the priesthood the devil was cast out, . . . he turned upon all the members of my family present, and four were seized by this terrible power and were in convulsive spasms at the same time. And upon Sarah Melissa, who appeared the strongest, the evil power was so great that she sank to the very door of death, even to pass within the veil, and to converse with our kindred, and to gaze upon the beauties of that spiritual home which awaits the true and faithful.

Through her whispered converse with my mother, brother Seth, and sister, Mary, while lying before us apparently lifeless, were marvelously portrayed the beauteous landscapes with palaces, gardens and flowers awaiting us, if faithful. She vividly described the labors of our kindred there, who are preparing for our coming while we complete their work on earth—all seemed made plain; as also their teachings and earnest instruction relating to a family union in the law of obedience, and while expressing the greatest confidence of love for me of those behind the veil, it was most earnestly enjoined upon the family to accept my counsels as the word of the Lord to them; and in doing so none of their children should depart from the truth. Such was the influence of the heavenly views opened to her, and of the approbation and love of those behind the veil towards me, that on her recovery to consciousness, she appeared dissatisfied, and wished to return to the society of those who had ministered to her. Through their teachings she had become so deeply impressed that for a season, at least, her feeling of confidence and love towards me was a worship. My wife, Sarah Jane, in a large degree partook of the same experience, received the same admonitions, obtained the same views, and bore the same testimony as to the love towards me of those behind the veil, and of their joy in the works that I would do for them and our kindred dead, and with the same exhortation that all, as a family cleave to my counsel as the work of the Lord, and thereby cement a union which could not be broken by the evil one.¹

¹ Ibid., pp. 210-212.
The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints teaches continuation of the family organization after death for the faithful Saints. It also teaches that, following death, a person continues to live as a spirit in a spirit world until the resurrection. The messages reportedly delivered by Benjamin's wives contained considerable meaning to the Johnson family.

Benjamin gave considerable thought as to what the significance of this unusual experience might be, and it caused him to examine his life more closely:

This seeming flow of love, confidence and approbation as from the hearts of dear ones behind the veil, coming to me through the warm hearts and lips of those I so much loved, may have been a design of the evil one to fill me with vanity, and self-love; but in looking back over my life's pathway, strewn with so many weaknesses and follies, I saw nothing of which to be proud; and I felt with all my heart to call upon the Lord that I might be humble, and through faithfulness become more worthy of His confidence and of the love and confidence of my kindred, both the living and the dead. 

For some time Benjamin had experienced difficulties with some of the other men in the settlement. Following Benjamin's mission he was again assigned to preside over the ward the year after Benjamin went, resumed charge of the ecclesiastical affairs at Summit Creek. In this awkward situation, the Bishop handled the tithing, while Benjamin, with two counselors, presided over the branch. This was a very unusual organization structure. The writer has never heard of a similar structure being established in any other ward or branch of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. With this divided and overlapping leadership, public relation problems were inevitable. There was still

1Ibid., pp. 212-213.

2Santaquin Ward History, 1856.
another area of potential difficulty. In 1865 the Territorial Legislature had granted Benjamin certain range and timber rights. He reported that these rights were given to him in order to protect the local resources from people of other settlements. So he was granted control of all timber and range land "from Spring Creek, north, including a strip of Juab County on the South, and extending west to Salt Creek or Goshen, and east to the summit of the mountains."¹ Benjamin claimed that this large area was under his control for the purpose of establishing herd grounds, building mills, opening canyon roads into the timber and cutting the timber. Granting such rites to the early colonizers was not unusual since laws were often passed to help assure the success of Brigham Young's plans for colonizing. Because of this special privilege given to Benjamin and also because of his close association with the church leaders, others not so fortunate might be inclined to become jealous. It was said of him that "he was one of the most prominent and influential men of the state, a close personal friend of Brigham Young and of all the leaders of the church of his time."²

In 1856 Benjamin noticed that certain men manifested a spirit of jealousy and prejudice against him. He feared these men were trying to destroy his influence at home and abroad.³ As the presiding officer of the settlement, Benjamin sought solutions to the problems. He "called councils and brought those men on trial for fellowship; - they often

¹Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 198.
²Ibid.
³Ibid., pp. 200-201.
professed repentance, but without reformation."¹ Because the problems
continued to increase and his canyon rights had been violated, in 1858
they were brought to the attention of the church leaders. Benjamin
related:

They had become my enemies without cause; our troubles had been
investigated by the Stake Presidency and the Presiding Bishop,
and by them my assurers were rebuked, and required to speedily
repent, which at the time they professed to, which proved only a
regret that they had done so little to injure me.²

Apparently the reason the Church leaders defended Benjamin was
because his canyon rights had been violated. Although in 1853 he jointly
with James S. Holman had been granted exclusive rights for the establish-
ment of a sawmill in Summit Creek canyon, the first mill in that canyon
was built by George Wilson in 1856.³

During his colonizing days in Utah County, Benjamin had difficulties
and disputes over his rights. Some of the settlers, who did not believe
it was fair for Benjamin to have special privileges and who realized
that much of the area under the grant was not then being used, they would
help themselves to some of the timber and grazing lands. On some
occasions resources were taken over by other settlers which Benjamin
had already commenced to develop.⁴ Sometimes Benjamin was the victim of
maliciousness on the part of certain antagonists. At such times he would
have little patience with the offenders. For example, in a letter to
his wives he wrote:

¹Benjamin Johnson, a diary labeled Book "D" written under the date
³Memories That Live - Utah County Centennial History, compiled
by Emma N. Huff (Springville, Utah: Art City Publishing Co., 1947),
pp. 475-477.
⁴Benjamin F. Johnson, Letter to President B. Young from Santaquin,
July 4, 1859 (on file in Church Historian's Library).
Don't fail to get your pig fattening fast as [there is] no chance for beef. Somebody killed that big fat ox out of spite over Payson Springs and the Damned thieves have stolen too good wagon covers from the old house, one was borrowed from J. E. [his brother Joseph E.] I wish they were all in Hell. They think to choke me from saying anything by skinning me but I'll show their mistake as opportunity offers and if some of them don't get out of here it will get hot for them one of these days or they'll get cold with their faces in the dust. I am getting an unutterable [sic] hatred for some who I once thought friends and comparatively honest but now know them to be damned vilians [sic] and they'd better keep out of my way.1

He reported that only on one occasion in his entire life did he strike a man. That incident occurred about this same time when his life was endangered by one of his "enemies." Benjamin recorded the incident in his memoirs:

...when on a division of fence material of a public corral, some portion belonging to me was claimed by one of my enemies. I took a heavy post upon my shoulder, and he in anger caught hold of it to take it from me as I was crossing a bridge, and gave me a heavy surge to send me and the post on to the rocks in the creek below, which might have killed me, had not Reece [Benjamin's hired man] seen his intention and saved me. I knew he had no regard for my life, and so went at him with my fists, to stamp my brand upon his face. This was the first and only time I ever used my fists upon a human being.2

Because of these special rights had been granted while Brigham Young was Governor of the territory, Benjamin knew that President Young would support him.

Later in the year of 1858 the enmity and opposition became so great that Elders Hyde and Richards of the Council of Twelve Apostles were sent by President Young to investigate and settle the troubles. Through this investigation, Benjamin's life as a colonizer was

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1 Benjamin F. Johnson, Letter to Wives Harriet and Susan from Santaquin, September 30, 1862, in possession of writer.

2 Johnson, My Life's Review, pp. 208-209.
very scrutinized. Of the happenings Benjamin wrote:

After remarks by the Apostles a vote was called to sustain Brother Johnson as President of the Branch or ward, which appeared almost unanimous in my favor; but when the contrary was called fourteen hands were raised, and the persons called upon to stand up, . . . . These persons were each called upon to state their reasons for voting against me, which each in turn proceeded to do, which occupied the whole first day and much of the subsequent night, together with answering questions and explaining their grievances to the Apostles. The next day's first meeting was occupied by the testimony of my friends, with the privilege to me of making my statement of the case, which I did in a brief and pointed manner. After which Apostle Hyde called upon all of my accusers to repent at once, and that they would give them but a few minutes in which to ask my forgiveness, otherwise they should all be at once cut off from the Church. Father Morley had been deceived by their falsehoods, and when the facts became ventilated and my real enemies exposed, he came to me before the whole congregation; said he had wronged me, and upon our knees we wept together—a mutual and eternal reunion of our hearts, while the expression of others seemed only formal, and their words of contrition to come only from their lips.

In the afternoon Elder Hyde summed up the merits of the investigation and said "it was always grievous to chastise or reprove presiding authorities but in this case it must be done, for we find Brother Johnson in one grave fault and only one, which is, that he did not long since cut from the church all who have been his accusers; that Brother Johnson had carried their public burdens and was not deeply in debt thereby; he had tried to do them good and they had repaid him with injustice; and being a better man than they deserved he should be released from his thankless calling, and another appointed to preside over them."

Both Benjamin and Bishop Holman were released from their respective positions and the Church leaders asked Benjamin whom he would recommend to serve as Bishop of the ward. Following Benjamin's suggestion, William McBride was ordained as Bishop, and the position of Branch President was discontinued. Within his ordination, Bishop McBride was charged that he should "... see to it that this spirit to find fault with and accuse Brother Johnson have no further place among the people. . . ."

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Being now relieved of his leadership responsibility, Benjamin devoted his efforts to clearing his many large debts. Because he had again lost his entire wheat crop, \(^1\) Benjamin threw his energy into making lumber, raising livestock, and devising others ways to provide an income for his large family.

The U. S. Army had now camped just thirty-five miles from Santaquin and Benjamin feared that their large herds of cattle would be allowed to graze on his land. To prevent this, Benjamin hastily moved his cattle and sheep to his grazing area and took part of his family with him. The spent the summer living in "tents and booths made with poles and tall cane. . . ." Through Benjamin's industry and with the help of his family, they were able to benefit financially.

It was now July and the cane was just in proper condition to cut for feed, and as there was no other hay to cut, I began at once to cut and stack all the cane possible. I had faith that the Lord would bless our labors, and we did not cease to call upon His name. One large stack after another arose, as the result of our toil, and my wives, too, who shared this labor with me, were patient, faithful and true; and their cheerful and loving help made the time of our isolation and labors appear quickly to pass. For three months, we had continued our labors, not knowing what might be the result, yet hoping the army commissary would buy, at some figure, the cane we had stacked.

About the middle of September, I found that a large number of oxen had been driven upon my ranges, and learned they were sent by the army quartermaster. If they were to remain, we would be obliged to move our stock and ourselves, and all our stacks would soon be destroyed. But I arose equal to the occasion, and wrote General Albert Sidney Johnston, the commander of the army, a letter both dignified and persuasive; . . . \(^2\)

In response to this letter, Benjamin obtained an audience with the General and was informed that the army wished to buy Benjamin's

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\(^1\)B. F. Johnson, Letter to Brigham Young from Santaquin, Sept. 22, 1857.

stacks of cane. Benjamin was surprised to receive more in payment for the cane that what he had asked. He was also pleased to receive a contract for delivering the cane to the army post.

From this venture, Benjamin was able to pay $200 cash tithing, meet all of his debts, and have one thousand dollars left. Benjamin used the extra money to open a road through the canyon and build a sawmill. As lumber was then in great demand, Benjamin obtained a contract to deliver lumber for the U. S. Army at Camp Floyd. Through this he prospered greatly.1

Johnston's army had brought with it many things which the Saints needed, vis. rope, nails, woolen clothing, blankets, boots, money, etc. To the Saints it seemed more than "poetic justice" that those who were sent to destroy them should be the means by which the settlers would prosper. It is reported that prior to the abandonment of the U. S. Army camp vast stores of provisions and supplies were sold to local merchants and citizens at an enormous sacrifice in price. It is estimated that four million dollars worth of goods were disposed of for $100,000.2

While the U. S. Army was establishing a camp in Utah, lumber was in demand. Hoping to take advantage of the high price for lumber, a group of men from Santaquin infringed upon Benjamin's canyon rights and constructed a sawmill at a location which Benjamin had selected for himself. Benjamin's protests to this action went unheeded, so he hired help to build his mill higher in the canyon. Because of the steep,

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1Ibid., p. 216.

rugged canyon, with its almost vertical walls, it appeared an almost impossible task, but after a winter of hard work, the road was opened, and the mill was constructed.¹

Benjamin was disturbed because of the disregard of his canyon rights. Especially was he concerned because Bishop McBride, with whom Benjamin had once enjoyed the fullest confidence and fellowship,² had participated in this trespass. In the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints members are advised to work out disputes under the direction of Church leaders rather than fighting one another in legal courts. It is hoped that this procedure will settle difficulties in a spirit of love and brotherhood rather than stimulate the negative feelings which are usually the product of a legal battle. Because Benjamin felt his rights had been violated, he again sought help from the Church to resolve his difficulty. This grievance brought before the Church leaders, and Elders Hyde and Richards were again called in to settle the problem. Benjamin wrote:

I made a brief statement of the trespass upon my rights and of Brother McBride's joining in it, which was full of evidence; and at a late hour at night Apostle Hyde, in reviewing the subject, referred to Bishop McBride to the charge given him to protect my rights... he told him to go home and see to it that he got my forgiveness, and to see that every other one in the ward, who had again imbibed the old spirit, came to confess their sins and again to be forgiven; and that until I forgave them they should not be forgiven... But they had so whipped themselves that I felt they were entitled to my pity, and I gave them more for their mill than it was ever worth to me. What was required of the people was but partly fulfilled, but I have forgiven them.³

¹Ibid., p. 217.
²Ibid., p. 174.
³Ibid., pp. 217-218.
Besides the conflicts with certain persons in Santaquin, Benjamin was also involved in inter-community misunderstandings. As there were few fences and specified boundaries were not always common knowledge, some of the settlers from a neighboring community allowed their cattle to graze on Benjamin's land. It was estimated that Benjamin lost about one thousand dollars as a result of this.\(^1\)

Elder Hyde counseled Benjamin to move away from Santaquin to prevent a reoccurrence of the past problems.\(^2\) Purchasing a house in Goshen Valley, just six miles away, Benjamin moved with his wives Harriet and Susan. After this was done, he received a letter from President Young informing him that he could remain at Santaquin with President Young's full approbation and blessing.\(^3\)

The difficulties over Benjamin's rights did not long continue. Soon after the Church leaders had investigated into the problems, conditions began to improve between Benjamin and members of the settlement. He recorded in his diary that "prejudices now seemed to give place to confidence and friendship, and things now moved more smoothly."\(^4\)

A decade later, Benjamin recorded:

> The spirit of Peace appeared to be increasing. . . Many who were formerly my enemies, have within the last two years become so changed apparently that they are now my warmest friends. It is all of the Lord, will not be forgotten, and their enemies will not triumph over them.\(^4\)

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1. Benjamin F. Johnson, Letter to President Brigham Young, from Santaquin, July 4, 1859, on file at Church Historian's Library.

2. Orson Hyde, Letter to Benjamin Johnson, written from Great Salt Lake City, December 4, 1858, in possession of writer.


4. Benjamin Johnson, A diary labeled as Book "D", written under the date of March 1, 1859. On file in the Church Historians Office.

5. Ibid., written under the date of February 6, 1870.
Benjamin continued to work toward the completion and development of his sawmills. During this difficult time, Benjamin appreciated the devotion and faithful labors of his wife, Sarah Jane, "who," Benjamin wrote, "was a constant companion and help, patiently making her home in the mountain cave or under the shelter of forest trees, as conditions would require. . ."\(^1\)

Along with his other work, Benjamin made shoes for his six wives, all of his children, and others who were living with the Johnson family. Altogether, his household numbered more than thirty persons.\(^2\) Due to the high price and scarcity of leather, many shoes were made from military shoes and boots which had been discarded by the soldiers.\(^3\)

Benjamin noted that in the spring of 1859 a spirit of jealousy began its work to destroy the confidence, union, and love in the hearts of the members of his family. He became concerned that murmuring, disobedience, disunion, and strife were becoming prevalent. As these negative traits continued to grow, Benjamin felt that their relatively prosperous condition would soon be reversed:

While I knew the Lord was willing to entrust me with riches, I could see plainly that a want of gratitude to God, and a proper family union would necessitate a further experience in poverty; and while yet in comparative prosperity, I told my wives by prophecy that a day of poverty and great want was again to be upon us.\(^4\)

Shortly after Benjamin had given his family this warning, the United States army was ordered to return. (Because of the outbreak of

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\(^2\)B. F. Johnson, Letter to Pres. Young from Santaquin, February 17, 1859, on file in Church Historian's Office.


\(^4\)Ibid., pp. 218-219.
the Civil War, all Federal troops were called to serve in the Union Army.) The army at once stopped all sale of lumber to the government. At this time Benjamin owned nearly one hundred head of cattle, a good flock of over one hundred sheep, a large number of town and garden lots, farming lands and equipment, and two sawmills. Within two short years all of his stock, with the exception of a few cows, had been killed or stolen, and both mills were nearly destroyed by floods. Although he still had most of his other possessions, Benjamin felt that a tide of adversity was upon him.¹

Reece Llewellyn and his wife, the Welch immigrant couple Benjamin had picked up on the road, had lived with the Johnson family for the past four years, and Reece had become very fluent in the English language. Benjamin trusted him with the management of his business affairs, and it was only after much consideration that Benjamin decided there should be a change.

... I felt it my duty to counsel him to leave me, and provide for himself a separate home. This to me was a trial indeed, and I had learned to lean upon him for strength, and I loved him almost more than a son; for he was also companion and friend. When I told him the time had come for him to leave me and to go himself, he looked at me as though I had struck him and seemed grieved at the idea of going by himself, and asked if I really wished to get rid of him. I told him he was now able to do better for himself than I could hope to do for him. That he had but a small family; that mine was large and fast-increasing, and it would be unjust to him to stay and share but equally with us; that as a son he should now share equally, according to his number, in what we then possessed. I gave him two yoke of oxen, with wagon, cows, and general outfit; and in addition to the one child born with us, Sarah Jane gave them Viret, a small Pah-erd girl she bought; which the Indians according to their custom were about to kill.²

¹Ibid., pp. 221-223.
²Ibid., p. 120.
Thus, at a time when his labors told severely upon his health and at a time when he believed the trials were to become greater, Benjamin considered the welfare of others.

On September 4, 1860, Benjamin suffered a greater loss than wealth. While giving birth to her ninth child, Melissa Bloomfield LeBaron Johnson passed away. Benjamin recalled:

I saw she was going soon, and called the family, but they had hardly assembled before she drew her last breath. She passed as one falling asleep while in my arms, her head upon my breast. The dear loving wife of my youth had left us; our home and our hearts were desolate and in mourning, with a more perfect knowledge of her value to us, now that she is gone.1

Soon after her death the newborn infant passed away also. Along with his many misfortunes and sorrows, Benjamin became sick. This caused him to feel "weak, nervous and discouraged, until at times" Benjamin "cared little for life . . ."2

Colonizing at Spring Lake

Benjamin found that the life of a colonizer is not an easy one. He found that both nature and people are unpredictable, and that both can be unmerciful. Hoping to better his situation, in 1862 Santaquin's first settler sold his property at a small price and purchased property at Spring Lake. Spring Lake was an undeveloped settlement located midway between Santaquin and Payson, but was part of the Santaquin Ward. As with Santaquin, Benjamin was the first to preside over the settlement of Spring Lake.3

1Ibid., p. 222.
2Ibid., p. 223.
3History of Spring Lake Ward, Nebo Stake, on file at Church Historian's Library, Salt Lake City.
Although Benjamin had hoped this move would improve their conditions, he continued to suffer ill health; the locusts continued to destroy his crops; and thieves continued to steal his cattle. As a result, Benjamin's family was "becoming scant indeed in all the comforts of life."\(^1\)

About the only means of income Benjamin had was through the sale of syrup. He claimed to be one of the first to manufacture syrup from sorghum, the tall cane which was indigenous to the area. The manufacture of the syrup required Benjamin's care and labor both day and night. In October, 1863, through an over-exertion of his strength, Benjamin developed inflammation of the lungs and was near death for six weeks. Through the attention of his family and the ministrations of Presidents Young and Smith, Apostle Snow, and other kind friends, Benjamin slowly regained his strength.\(^2\)

While Benjamin was sick, his family's financial condition worsened. Wheat became scarce, and the price increased from one dollar per bushel to six dollars per bushel. The family was in debt and also destitute. Benjamin lamented, "Our prospects for food and common comforts were as dark as death, and only a remembrance of the Angel, who so many times had opened the way for relief kept me from despair."\(^3\) Benjamin found that his trust in the Lord was not in vain, for he was given a wagon load of wheat and other provisions by some old and true friends.

Hoping to realize a financial gain, Benjamin agreed to feed two hundred sheep for another person. Benjamin had one hundred tons of hay

\(^1\)Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 224.

\(^2\)Ibid., pp. 224-225.

\(^3\)Ibid., p. 225.
which was more than that number of sheep would need. When the sheep were sold, he was to be paid a share of the profits. When winter came, it was very wet, and the sheep began to die of disease. The Johnsons desperately tried to save all they could and even took some into their house and used their scanty supply of milk, but all was in vain. When spring came almost all of the sheep were gone. In addition to this great loss, all of his oxen and all of his cows except one had died.\(^1\) Benjamin found himself in deep poverty, and his family did not have even ordinary household necessities, as he described:

Near our dwelling gushed up large springs of the coolest and clearest waters, where many would stop to refresh... One day an acquaintance with strange ladies drove up in a carriage and asked for a cup with which to dip water. My daughter, Julia, then approaching womanhood, went to obtain one, but finding nothing she thought respectable, and ashamed of the best, a worn tin cup—she sent it by the Indian girl, Elva. But they chose to do without it, and in a few days there was sent to us by someone unknown, two new tin cups, an offering perhaps of pity or contempt—if pity,"we may perhaps return it; if contempt, we will pity them the more.\(^2\)

As a result of his continued efforts, and because of selling some property, Benjamin was able to supply food for his family. His position as a Representative in the Legislature also helped the family financially.

Experiences with the Indians

Through the years 1865-1868, the Mormon experienced what has been referred to as the most serious and disastrous of all their Indian troubles. This Black Hawk War, as it was called, began from an incident

\(^1\)Ibid., pp. 225-226.

\(^2\)Ibid., pp. 226-227.
which occurred in Manti, Utah, on April 9, 1865. A man named John Lowry, angry because of a threat towards him, thrashed a young Indian chieftain. For some time the Indians had resented the settlers for taking much of the Indian grazing lands and giving them smallpox in return. As word of the attack on the young chief was spread among the Indians, they became incensed and looked upon the incident as sufficient justification for wholesale depredations. The Indian attacks spread across much of the territory. The war was named after the Utah Indian Chief who was foremost in carrying out the many attacks.¹

The Mormon settlers suffered considerable loss as the Indians committed their depredations. Benjamin lost a fine mare, and some of his stock was shot down. However, because of the friendship that existed between him and the Indians, Benjamin felt that Blackhawk was unaware that the animals belonged to the Johnsons. Of his close relationship with the Indians in the area, Benjamin said:

They always came to me in their trouble or sickness, for counsel or administrations, or for food if they were hungry... such was their faith, that when they were sick, if I would only—as they would say—talk to the Lord for them, or give them a letter to recommend them as good Indians, they would become well at once. For years my counsel or requirement was law to them, my influence growing out of honest, generous dealing with them.²

Benjamin also gained respect from the Indians because of his courage and integrity, which they admired.

In early fall of 1865 he [Blackhawk] came on horseback one afternoon with his squaw, and with tomahawk in hand and in an imperious way, demanded melons, of which we had a nice patch near the house, where with Sarah Jane, I was alone. At his demand I

¹Andrew Love Neff, History of Utah, 1847 to 1869 (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1940), pp. 399-407.

²Johnson, My Life’s Review, p. 228.
stood in front of him, looked him in the eyes, and said I had no melons to give him, that he was a bad Indian; that he had stolen a mare from me and had shot some of my cattle on the range; that I did not like him, and that the good Indians as well as the Mormons knew him to be bad. He looked as though he would like to kill me, as we stood together with the melons all around us.

I turned from him and called his squaw, who stood a little way off in her blanket. I shook hands with her, told her she looked like a good squaw, that I had heard nothing bad of her, and she should have as many melons as she wanted. So I filled her blanket, and with the best, while he stood looking on in surprise and with an angry pleasure. Taking the melons, he turned as he went through the bars and said that I was a big and wise captain, and that all the Indians like Johnson. He never after that made trouble in our immediate vicinity. . . .

The Indian hostility did not diminish in other areas, however. Many settlements were advised to evacuate. At Spring Lake Benjamin constructed two hundred feet of heavy stockade for the protection of his family. In a letter to President Young, Benjamin described the fortification:

To make it safe I pulled down all of my log houses, procured much other timber and erected a heavy stockade on the south side of my . . . buildings, with suitable bastion and lookout. Kept a good supply of arms with ammunition [sic] and from twelve to fifteen persons to use them . . .

For some time Benjamin shared this protection with other families living nearby:

During the Blackhawk war troubles the few inhabitants at Spring Lake Villa forted in at Benjamin F. Johnson's place, preferring to do this to moving to Santaquin which they had been advised to do, their settlement being considered too weak to be safe against Indian attacks.

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1 Ibid., pp. 228-229.
2 Deseret News, August 2, 1866.
3 Benjamin F. Johnson, Letter to President Young from Rep. Hall, Salt Lake City, January 4, 1867, on file at Church Historian's Library.
4 History of Spring Lake Ward, Nebo Stake, 1864 (manuscript).
Although neither he nor his family were harmed by hostile Indians, Benjamin saw the results of some of their raids. Early one morning, Blackhawk with some of his friends came to the Johnson home and demanded breakfast. After their meal, the Indians "produced a short pole or staff from which dangled a number of human scalps, . . . and they boasted of the murders they had committed upon the American emigrants."¹

Through his association with the Indians, Benjamin was able to build many warm friendships. One such association was with an Indian named Guffick, who refused to harm the settlers. Rather than join his tribe, Guffick went into the mountains and hid. As an illustration of his friendship with Guffick, Benjamin wrote:

Early one morning a young Indian came and said he had lain out all night and was hungry, and that he was hunting for Guffick. I fed him and told him to tell Guffick to come to see me. The next morning I saw someone moving in the brush at the foot of the mountains, and thinking it might be Guffick, I started in that direction. Seeing me, he hurriedly came, clasped me in his arms and wept. I asked him with his family and friends, to come and live with me through the war, and I would give my life for his did anyone kill him; or his. He said he could not, for if the Mormons did not kill him the Indians would, should he do so. His grief for the war then going on appeared extreme, and at parting he again hugged me and wept as before. Such was his integrity to me, and our mutual confidence and love for each other that to but few would I have entrusted my life sooner than with him.²

Through various experiences, the Indians came to respect the words of Benjamin. Such an experience occurred with a renegade Indian named Ponsook, who returned to Spring Lake after the Indians had ceased fighting. Benjamin wrote:

¹Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 229.
²Ibid., pp. 229-230.
This one--Ponsook--a large and self-important Indian, was sick the previous winter and came to me for a "Pokent" or letter, as medicine, to cure him, which he said it did; but he had joined Blackhawk; was foremost in murder of women and destruction of property, and was now, in his own estimation, a great warrior. He rode up to me on his return, with great pomp and impudence and said my "Pokent" or medicine was not good, and he had thrown it away; that he was not a great captain, and that the Mormons were not good. I said I had been his friend, and was still a friend to Guffick and all good Indians; but that now he was my enemy; he had killed my friends and I wished him to go away from me quick, and come to me no more. He went at once and I saw him no more for some weeks. He then came on foot, leaning upon a long staff in decrepitude; was very humble; said he had done wrong in throwing away my "Pokent," or letter, and that he should die if I did not give him another. I told him he had killed the Mormons and that Lóats (the Lord) would not now hear me talk for him, and I would give him no more "Pokent," or medicine, as I was no longer his friend. He said, "Then I shall die," went away, and within a short time his body was found in the Goshen Mill race, . . .

On another occasion, when an Indian had not been honest in his dealings, Benjamin tried to explain to the Indian that friendship and honor were of greater value to him than was a buckskin. He gave the Indian the buckskin, hoping to teach these values to him. Benjamin believed that the Indian was overcome with guilt and "looked as if he would sink in crest-fallen disappointment. He dragged the skin after him to his horse and rode away." Later that day, Benjamin was informed that the Indian had gone home to die. Of this unusual incident, Benjamin wrote:

. . . he had told the Indians that Johnson was a great and good captain, that all his words were good, and his medicine was good, while he, himself was small and mean; that he had not done right, and my words had killed him, and he would soon die; but that they should have ears to hear what Johnson told them. I did not think it possible that he could die, but soon learned he had disposed of all he possessed, had taken to his bed; and his squaw and friends were already in mourning for him. His home was nearly ten miles away in Goshen Valley, and although Sunday, and a stormy,

1Ibid., pp. 230-231.

2Ibid., pp. 231-232.
cold time, I sent for Dr. Simonds, and taking everything for his comfort, we went to see and minister to him. We found him alive, but all our efforts to arouse him were vain, and he died the next day. We felt sorrow, for as an Indian he was an exception.1

Because of the circumstances of the Indian's death, Benjamin feared that the tribe would hold him responsible and punish him. He was relieved to learn that he had nothing to fear, and he was surprised when he saw how the Indians had even greater respect for him as a result of this experience.

. . . they willingly do nothing without my sanction or advice. So broad had this confidence extended, that when Arrapeen, the principal chief of all the Utes, was asked what should be done with certain Indians who had been doing wrong near us, he said, "Take them to Johnson, and let him handle them if he wants to, and all will be right, for he is a great captain and a friend of the Indians."

At one time he came to see me and said, "Your words to the Indians are all good, and all the Indians know you. I want them to hear and obey you, and when they don't you must whip them. If they steal, you must hang them, and it is all right." But only by Blackhawk did I ever lose anything worthy of note; and I never had occasion to punish them except by words. They were to me as my children and friends.2

Benjamin was admired by the Indians because he had proven to them that he loved them as a people. Benjamin said: "From boyhood I had been enthused with a love and care for the remnants of Jacob;3 had been taught by the Prophet, as to the travel of the Church, of our mission to the Lamanites,4 and our hopes in connection with them."5

1Ibid., p. 232.

2Ibid., pp. 232-233.

3The Book of Mormon teaches that the American Indians are descendants of the Old Testament prophets, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

4The term Lamanites is taken from the Book of Mormon and is used by Latter-day Saints in referring to the American Indians.

5Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 268.
This love for all Lamanites had grown while Benjamin was on his mission to the Sandwich Islands, during which time he had expressed his feelings in a letter to Harriet: "Oh, I forgot to tell you how glad I feel to learn that the time has come for the gospel to go to the Lamanites [Indians]. I have never felt more to pity [sic] than to despise them."  

At different times Benjamin had care: for five Indian children and loved them as his own. Some of these Indian children he had bought and raised to adulthood. (It was a common practice among the Indians to sell children. This practice was one of the causes precipitating the Walker War.) Harriet Naomi Johnson, one of Benjamin's daughters, related the following experience:

One day my father heard a small Indian boy screaming loudly. On investigating, he discovered it to be a child they [the Indians] had stolen from another tribe and it was their intention to torture it to death with hot irons or rocks and flint. He tried to get them to cease torturing the boy and let him go but they refused and after some persuasion they sold him to father for a horse and some flour. Kemo, the Indian boy, remained with our family until he reached manhood. This adopted Indian boy was not only cared for in the Johnson home but was given every opportunity to learn. He was taught to play the violin and became so skilled at playing it that he would sometimes travel hundreds of miles to perform.

1Benjamin F. Johnson, Letter to Harriet from Honolulu, January 28, 1854.

2Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 220.

3Neff, op. cit., pp. 370-396.

4Harriet Naomi Johnson LeBaron, Biographical Sketch of the Life of Harriet Naomi Johnson LeBaron (unpublished), in possession of writer.

5Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 220.
A humorous incident which occurred during the period of the Blackhawk War was related as follows:

One night we were startled by our attention being attracted by hundreds of lights on the hillside and over the meadows. Kemo gave a loud yell thinking it was Indians. Everyone became frightened and a council meeting was held and it was decided that Kemo and three other men go out and investigate to see whether the Indians were on the warpath or friendly. The men after making an investigation returned laughing and gave us the good news that the cause of our great alarm was only swarms of lightning bugs.

In September, 1870, about five years after the Blackhawk War, Benjamin announced to the settlers in the area that Blackhawk, the feared desperado, had died. He learned of the Indian's death when some of Blackhawk's friends brought his body to Spring Lake and buried it at the place of his birth, near Benjamin's home.2

Problems and Progress

During the years 1865 through 1866, when the Indians were attacking the white settlements, Benjamin seemed to receive his greatest troubles from his fellow settlers. Benjamin's neighbors moved to Santaquin for protection, but because he had no great fear of the Indian attacks and also because of his fortification, Benjamin chose to remain at the settlement. This created a feeling of envy among his neighbors, and soon he was counseled by the Church authorities to move his family to Santaquin. This came as disturbing news to Benjamin, as he wrote:

This, to me, was a test of my obedience. I had colonized Santaquin, and through many years of famine by crickets and Indians had become poor and deeply in debt while living there; and to get away from there had almost given away my possessions, the most valuable in the

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1Ibid.

2Manuscript History of Spring Lake Ward, Nebo Stake, 1870. Also see Deseret News, IXX, p. 405.
place, now worth many times the price I had received for them. At Spring Lake we had good homes, excellent land and other great advantages; and to be forced to return to the place of my former experience of injustice and poverty, was to me very irksome and cruel.

But I could not afford to disobey counsel, for I desired to do my duty and be obedient, and I prayed that I might be humble. ¹

The Presidency of the Church felt that obedience to the counsel and calls of the priesthood was so important that failure to obey actually placed a man in jeopardy of losing his family in the eternities. President Heber C. Kimball said, "When a man violates his calling and the priesthood, he forfeits his wife and everything that pertains to that calling and priesthood, or to that limb, when the limb is severed from the tree."²

Benjamin was greatly relieved when he was informed by Elder George A. Smith that he could move to southern Utah. Because he was unable to sell his property at Spring Lake, President Young advised him to remain there another year, if Benjamin felt safe in doing so.

Besides the manufacturing of syrup, Benjamin now entered into two more industries. He commenced making brooms and liquor. Benjamin also purchased some property on which there was a distillery, and he operated this for one season. In addition to these industries, he continued to develop his gardens and orchards. It was reported that in the summer of 1866, Benjamin was "cultivating 125 acres in crops of various kinds" and was harvesting one hundred acres of grass plus some wheat. Besides

¹Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 233.

this the family "enjoyed an abundance of strawberries, gooseberries, currents and other small fruits." By way of evaluation, the editor of the Deseret News said, "For the number of inhabitants, it will be readily conceded that they are very industrious, and we are glad they have so good a prospect for reward of their praiseworthy labors."¹

Education was of concern to Benjamin, and he felt a need to provide learning opportunities for his family. During the legislative term of 1861-1862 Benjamin had been appointed to serve on the House Committee for education in the Territory. Through this service, he probably became well acquainted with the problems and needs related to education in the area. According to Benjamin's son, Benjamin Farland Johnson, a teacher was hired to teach the Johnson family. As there was no other family to help share the expense of a teacher and to provide the necessary facilities, Benjamin bore the cost himself. He believed that education was necessary for the proper development of his family, which was one of the largest in the Church. (Benjamin had forty-five children, and thirty-nine of these children reached adulthood. He also cared for five Indian children.) He believed that just as it was necessary to hire extra help to provide food for his young family, so it should be necessary to hire help to provide an education for them.² To provide improved facilities, a small building was constructed in 1874. Besides being used as a school, this building also served as a meeting house and amusement hall. However, prior to its construction, a large room in the Johnson

¹Deseret News, August 2, 1866.

²Benjamin Farland Johnson, "A Sketch of the Life of Benjamin Franklin Johnson written by his son" (on file in Church Historian's Office, Salt Lake City, Utah.)
home was used as a classroom. In January, 1867, Benjamin wrote President Young: "We have a good school, and Mary Ann, . . . my wife, is with us and all my unmarried children have now good school privileges."2

The Johnson home, which was referred to as the "adobe Mansion" or the "Castle," was also used for ward meetings and social gatherings prior to 1874. It became the cultural, social, educational, and religious center for the Johnsons, besides providing living accommodations for the family. One of Benjamin's daughters wrote how her early years in the Johnson home had influenced her life:

Yes, that big old house still lives in my memory, with all its pleasure of being together, the morning and evening prayers, the talks to us and truths explained, the recounting by our parents of hardships endured for the gospel's sake, the teachings of a wise and venerable father who had been so closely associated with the Prophet Joseph Smith and tried always to impress on us the need of praying always, morning and night, that we might be guided by the Holy Spirit to choose the right path, and follow the gospel plan. Such teachings were never to be forgotten. They were a great safeguard for us all through our lives, as well as a help in keeping us close to the Lord in our childhood and youth.

After training in this way for a while, the mothers were instructed to teach their children in their separate rooms how to act, to train sons and daughters how to take the lead. In this way they learned to carry on in their own homes when they married.3

In a report to the Deseret Evening News in 1876, Benjamin explained the spiritual and cultural progress which had been made at Spring Lake:

We have . . . been able to construct a school-house of comfort and credibility, which is now occupied by a week day school, taught by Brother A. W. Babbitt [Jr.], and our Sabbath meetings are well attended. Every one here seems manifesting a feeling to wake up to

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1 Memories that Live, p. 473.

2 Benjamin F. Johnson, Letter to President Young from Rep. Hall, January 4, 1867, Salt Lake City.

the renewal of their covenants and to a more perfect conformity to the pattern of the gospel. Our young people are so far alive to a desire for self improvement, that each night in the week our school-
house is occupied by their classes, lectures, or by public meetings, and our Sabbath school would prove at least that here "the first great command" is not ignored or forgotten. Our singing class, taught by Brother Thomas Broadbent, appears to be doing credit both to their teacher and to themselves.¹

In the spring of 1867, President Young advised Benjamin to remain in Spring Lake and released him from his call to southern Utah. Benjamin was also promised that in staying in Spring Lake he would be blessed with increased prosperity. This greatly pleased him, as he wrote: "This was what I most desired, and I knew that my willingness to do as had been told had brought to me this great blessing."² To better provide for his large family, Benjamin purchased the house and property of his brother Joseph E., who was moving to southern Utah.³

While serving in the Legislative session of 1866-1867, Benjamin was shown recognition by the Church leaders. Besides being called upon, with Charles C. Rich, to speak during a meeting in the tabernacle, Benjamin was also called by the First Presidency to come with his wives to receive "further blessings in the second anointing."⁴ Although this was an unusual privilege, Benjamin was disappointed that only two of his wives were prepared or willing to accompany him. It seemed to him that as they grew in material blessings, they dwindled in humility, harmony and obedience.

¹Deseret Evening News, March 5, 1876.
²Johnson, My Life's Review, pp. 234-235.
³Ibid., p. 235.
⁴Journal History, January 20, 1867.
The many years of continuous struggle, filled largely with disappointments, poverty, and poor health had finally begun to break down Benjamin's spirit of optimism and happiness. Possibly even more depressing to Benjamin was his belief that he was not receiving the love, respect, and obedience from his wives and children to which he was due. One of Benjamin's sons wrote:

Father's word was law to his wives and children and as he listened to the counsel of those who were over him in authority so he expected those whom the Lord had given him to listen to his counsel and obey him . . . which made it unpleasant to some of our mothers and they would rebel, whereas if they had discerned what was for the best they would have listened to what he had to say for he had the whole burden to carry of them all; the responsibility of providing for the whole family . . . ¹

Because Benjamin was much concerned about his family members complying with the teachings of the Church and honoring the patriarch of the family, he sometimes had little patience with those who disobeyed. While he was on his mission, he wrote a letter to his wife, Harriet, which illustrates that he was aware of this characteristic. He evaluated his weakness:

. . . My sensitive temperament has sometimes led me to give you occasions perhaps to think otherwise, but such has been my feelings but my words to you have been ever so reproving or unkind, that I have ever loved you faithfully & honorably. I feel you cannot for a moment doubt I have loved all my family but too fondly for my own good, my anxiety for their welfare has often caused me to be . . . nervous & irritable, when I have spoken things that have afterwards grieved me to the heart & often brought the tear of sorrow to my eyes, but of this you are well aware. I have my weaknesses, one is to love with too much fondness, another is to speak from the impulse of the moment words of unkindness & severity, all those subjects have occupied many, many a lonely & solitary hour. I have thought

¹Benjamin Farland Johnson, "A Sketch of the Life of Benjamin Franklin Johnson," unpublished article on file in Church Historian's Library. Benjamin Farland is son of Benjamin Franklin Johnson.
of my severity with my children & my want of that amount of patience which should characterize a Father as well as a Husband & I must honestly confess that I have felt much grieved & ashamed, .

Although Benjamin could see his weaknesses as a father and husband, he found it difficult to effect a change in his behavior after he again became involved coping with the problems of rearing and providing for a large family. Some months after his return from his mission he wrote the following in his diary:

And I with the most earnest hopes trusted that I might be enabled so fully to appreciate the blessing of being with his family that its influence might be salutary in governing all my acts and feelings in time to come.

But alas! how disappointed may be the human mind in regard to the powers and ability to govern and control the action with the impulses of the human heart. May it suffice to say that with the experience of the past few months I have learned that I am the same, possessing my former habits and unhappy spirit, which has often tended to render my home unhappy and to bring a cloud upon that spot that I have so earnestly desired should become a heaven.

Benjamin's family troubles continued to increase, until, about 1864, his wife, Mary Ann, left him. She moved to Sanpete with some of her children. During the time when they were disaffected, Mary Ann signed a bill for divorce. However, in 1869, a reconciliation was made and she returned to live with Benjamin.

He recognized that his "fretful and over sensitive temper" was the main cause of much of his family troubles. Although his children

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1 Benjamin F. Johnson, Letter to Harriet, written from Sandwich Island Mission, Honolulu, March 17, 1853.
2 Benjamin Johnson, a diary labeled Book "D" written under the date of December 22, 1855. On file in the Church Historian's Office.
3 Ibid., written under the date of February 5, 1866.
4 Ibid., written under the date of February 6, 1870.
5 Ibid., written under the date of July 28, 1861.
seemed to grow up with a love for their father, Benjamin's wives tended
to withdraw from his confidence and much of the remainder of his life
was spent with anxieties because of their withdrawal. Somewhat dis-
ilusioned and discouraged while Mary Ann was separated from him, he
commented:

Excessive labors, to which I was not equal, with infirmities for
years, and increasing disobedience, unhappiness, and disunion in
my family did at times almost dethrone my better judgement, leaving
me without the wisdom of "soft words to turn away wrath," as due to
the high and holy calling of husband and father. Worn with cares
and infirmities and disappointment in my life's ideal of a happy
home, I became somewhat austere, perhaps morose, even towards those
without whom I couldn't be happy. All this discouraged my ambition,
mortified my pride, made me unsocial, and inspired a feeling to
withdraw from public callings and positions of honor.  

Desire for Isolation

In 1867, as a result of this despondency, Benjamin refused to
stand re-election to the Legislature. This was a difficult decision
for Benjamin to make because he had served for fourteen years as an
elected officer, beginning with the "Colonial Council" when government
was first established in the great basin. The experiences as a public
servant had been rewarding for Benjamin. He had been active in his
elected position as long as he was in office, and it seemed to be his
nature to do his best in whatever he did. During the years he served
in the Legislature Benjamin's abilities were used by being called to
serve on the following committees: roads and bridges, territorial
milita, petitions and memorials, counties, claims, herding and herd

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1Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 236.

2Utah Since Statehood, op. cit., II, p. 905.
grounds, and education. 1 A short time prior to the end of his last term, Benjamin was appointed to a committee which was to determine the legal boundaries and area of the Territory. In commenting on this work, the Journal History states, "The promptitude of the committee in filling the duties assigned them is praise-worthy while the result of their labors is a work of permanent benefit."2 Turning from politics, Ben-
jamin now focused his entire attention upon his family.

By 1869 Benjamin was no longer concerned with the pressures of poverty. He prided himself in having "the largest fruit gardens owned by any one man in Utah."3 This had been a goal he had wanted for a long time. Along with making a profit from his orchards, Benjamin was prospering through market gardening, operating a nursery, and manufact-
uring brooms and syrup. Benjamin was not content, however, in this material success alone. He believed that "we are rich only as we are grateful to the Lord; and too often measure our own blessings as compared with that others possess."4 Although he had been successful in lifting the burden of poverty from his family, Benjamin believed there was yet something important to be done.

Because of his love for his children and his concern for their "eternal lives," Benjamin had tried to protect his family from any out-
side influence which he felt might harm them. They were denied even the association with other Mormon people. Benjamin had surrounded his homes

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1 Journals of the House of Representatives, op. cit.
2 Journal History, January 14, 1867.
with fruit and ornamental trees like a forest, with shrubs and flowers to make it attractive and pleasant. He did all this in hopes that home would be attractive to his children and meet their needs. His desires for seclusion were complicated by the coming of the transcontinental railroad in 1869. The railroad brought an end to isolation for the Mormons. As industry began to grow and outside influences poured into the area, Benjamin noted a change in conditions and in the Latter-day Saint people. In the settlement of Deseret, Brigham Young insisted that the Saints develop agriculture as the primary industry because food, clothing, and shelter were their more urgent needs. He knew that there were rich mineral deposits in the territory, but he feared that mining would bring an influx of hostile people to the territory. However, the minerals were discovered, and the coming of the railroad increased the flow of those seeking wealth from mining and attendant industries. Many of the Saints were afraid that the lust, gambling, and evil of the mining camps would destroy the faith of their children. Benjamin's years of experience among the non-Mormons in four of the eastern states, combined with his views of raising his family caused Benjamin much anxiety. He wrote:

"Our earnest prayer for so many years that the Lord would "hide from our enemies the treasures of the earth, that they came not to defile our inheritance," was being forgotten, when all so suddenly, mines were discovered in every direction, causing strangers to flock into our midst. To me this was a fearful evil, to bring baneful consequences to us, and I loathed the thought of coming again in contact with the outside element. Although I knew that such would be the case, I was yet unprepared to see introduced among us their

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1 Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 238.

2 Daughters of Utah Pioneers Lesson, compiled by Kate B. Carter (October, 1963).
vices, or to again suffer their persecutions... And now I felt ready for their sake, to sacrifice all and move my family away to some secluded place, if only safe from such evils.

Despite his fears for the spiritual welfare of his family, Benjamin was unable to move them to a secluded spot.

Benjamin's health continued to decline, until the spring of 1870 he sought the help of three "eminent surgeons." In order to find the cause of his infirmity, which had kept him in ill health for twelve years, the doctors did an exploratory surgery using chloroform for anaesthetic. Believing they had found his trouble, they operated on him, but complications followed, and for three weeks he was seriously ill. It was through the kind attention of his family that he was able to gradually regain his strength.2

Believing he was wholly cured, Benjamin again concerned himself with seeking a solution to the people of his environment. President Young and several other brethren and their families left Salt Lake City to spend the winter in St. George. Although Benjamin was now enjoying a degree of prosperity, his anxiety for the spiritual welfare of his family resulted in his decision that they, too, should spend the winter in St. George.3 Thus, on November 23, 1870, Benjamin and some of his family left Spring Lake and after driving for fifteen days, arrived in St. George. Here they met relatives and friends and were pleasantly greeted by President Young and the Council.4 Since there were five

1Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 238.
2Ibid., pp. 238-239.
3Ibid., p. 240.
4Ibid.
Johnson brothers and a sister spending the winter in St. George with their families, it was decided to have a family gathering. The following article appeared in the *Deseret News*:

News from the South.—The following dispatch was received, per Deseret Telegraph Line, this morning: St. George, Dec. 30

DESERET NEWS:—A Reunion Festival of the Johnson family, ancient Mormons, met of the 28th inst. Joel H., Joseph E., Benjamin F., George W. and William D., with one sister, Esther W. LeBaron, with their families amounting to seventy-seven persons, partaking of the feast; representing four generations, three of which were born in the Church. President Young, together with many old friends participated. The descendants of Ezekial and Julia Johnson number 228, in this Territory, none of whom ever raised hand or voice against Zion. . . .

As the family members sat in the Social Hall, Elder George A. Smith, a long-time friend of the family, recounted some of the family history. Benjamin wrote:

... President George A. Smith alluded to historical family incidents; said he became acquainted with the Johnson while journeying together from New York to Kirtland in 1833; since which he had known each member personally; that my brother, Seth, was with him in Zion's Camp; that my brother David, died from over-exertion in work for the Kirtland Temple; that our mother was married to his father, and our family was now perhaps the largest family in all Israel, and of all the members not one had yet apostatized or been convicted of crime; and of them all there was not one unwelcome to the name of Smith; and if we were not of the Smith family then he belonged to the Johnson family.

While in St. George, Benjamin had occasion to meet with the Presidency. During one of these meetings, President Young suggested that the Johnson brothers colonize the Scootempah or Rock Spring Valley,

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1 *Deseret Evening News*, December 30, 1870.

2 Benjamin's mother, Julia Hills Johnson, was "sealed" or married to Father John Smith, who was George A. Smith's father. See *My Life's Review*, pp. 98–99.

about twelve miles from Kanab. This gave Benjamin the opportunity he needed to get his family to some secluded place and he, along with his brothers, accepted the offer. About January 25, 1871, Benjamin, Joel, William, Joseph, and George Johnson, their brother-in-law David T. LeBaron, and Benjamin's nephews, Sextus Johnson, Nephi Johnson, and Elmer Johnson left St. George to explore Rock Spring Valley. Because this was a family expedition, the settlement which was made was named Johnson and when a ward was created there six years later, it was named Johnson Ward.¹

Establishing Johnson Settlement

In describing the valley, Benjamin wrote:

We found Rock Springs Valley to be a narrow valley, or broad open canyon of fertile soil, and apparently well watered, with abundant grass on the adjacent low mountains, which were studded with pinon pine, cedar, oak and other scrub forest trees, and in the mountains a few miles distance was the long-leaf pine.²

A council was held and the land and water were divided among the family members and "all was pleasantly arranged." Nephi Johnson was called to be their Bishop. After a few days the company returned to St. George where they began making preparations to move to Johnson.³

Anxious to move to the isolation of his new-found home, Benjamin traveled north to Spring Lake in February, 1871. He described the journey as "more perilous than I had conceived possible." From the


³Ibid., pp. 241-242.
FIVE SONS OF EZEKIEL AND JULIA HILLS JOHNSON
Seated, left to right: George Washington Johnson, Joel Hills Johnson and Benjamin Franklin Johnson.
Standing, left to right: Joseph Ellis Johnson, and William Derby Johnson.
pleasant climate of Southern Utah, Benjamin came into winter storms with
terrible roads. As Benjamin and his wife were traveling through deep
snow in a canyon, a wagon wheel broke, leaving them stranded. Having no
one to help them and no way to make repairs, and being a long way from a
settlement, their condition looked grave and fearful. How gratefully
relieved they were when Joshua Sylvester came along. Brother Sylvester
had materials with which to fix the wagon wheel and then he further
assisted them by carrying much of the load to the Johnson home.¹

Upon arrival Benjamin immediately announced his plans for his
family at Johnson and invited all of them to accompany him. Two
daughters, a son, and their families agreed to go. Gathering the
supplies and equipment they would need in colonizing, Benjamin prepared
to leave. In reflecting upon his hasty preparations, Benjamin wrote:

With a zeal and hope born more of fear than knowledge, I hur-
riedly arranged for speedy return to Johnson, the new place, filled
only with a desire to get away from the present outside influences,
with my eyes shut to all present advantages of home comforts,
society and education for my children.²

After a tiresome journey of four weeks, Benjamin and his family
arrived at Johnson on April 7, 1871. Benjamin was disappointed in the
reaction of some of the members of his family. He said that after they
had looked around they seemed to be singularly unimpressed with the area.
They did not see it as he did, and their motives were unlike his own.
After a short stay in Johnson, during which time Benjamin unsuccessful
in filling his family members with enthusiasm, most of the family
members returned to their home. Benjamin was left virtually alone in

¹Ibid., p. 242.
²Ibid., p. 243.
his endeavor.1 Determined to continue to achieve his dream, Benjamin, with the few family members who stayed, began the task of making the land produce. As a seasoned colonizer, Benjamin realized that there was much hard work ahead, and it would be especially burdensome without help from his sons. He set up his camp in what became known as "Uncle Ben's Grotto." This was described as,

... a circular opening like an amphitheatre of two or more acres, surrounded by a precipitous wall with woodstudded cliffs far above. The overhanging rock around this enclosure gave us deep and ample shelter from storms, and was a cool retreat from heat, and partial protection from Indian hostilities, to which all new settlements were more or less liable; while wood in abundance we could toss to our camp fire from cliffs above. A spring dug within our rock shelter afforded plenty of water. So, while our food supply would last we had nothing to do but work.2

We planted hundreds of orchard trees, thousands of grape vines and cuttings, with all desirable in a garden, purposing largely for a grain crop without a thought that water could become scarce for some 80 acres of field crops, besides our trees and garden.3

About the last of May, as the weather became hot, Benjamin was alarmed to find that their water supply had dried up. Although there had been a large stream running when they had explored the area in the winter, there was now no available water for irrigation. Being determined to succeed, Benjamin build ditches to springs that were higher up, but to no avail. Seeds were planted in damper places, and wells were dug. Desperately trying to save their crops, Benjamin and his family daily carried hundreds of gallons of water in the hope of saving choice trees, vines, and seeds which had cost them so much. According to Benjamin, his two little girls, Ann and Jenny, carried over 10,000 gallons of water from

1Ibid.
2Ibid., p. 244.
3Ibid.
the wells quite a distance away. But again, all to no avail. The
effects of the hot sun and sandy soil were too much to combat.¹

Benjamin now shows the characteristics which made him a great
colonizer. By combining his unbending determination with hard work and
initiative, he would often continue after other men had quit. Not
always did he succeed, but he would not accept defeat as long as he
could see a glimmer of hope. Many times Benjamin looked up and saw his
Glimmer of hope while other men's eyes were cast down in despair.

As Benjamin's crops were withering and dying from want of moisture,
swarms of grasshoppers destroyed the plants still living. Following his
description of this loss, he said, "yet we were not wholly disheartened." Benjamin
joined with his nephew and went into the mountains about three
miles, where they found a small pond. There they proceeded to clear
and prepare the land for planting. Following their planting, they dug
a ditch to draw water from the pond in a final attempt to raise the
necessary crops. In disappointment they found there was insufficient
water.

Although Benjamin was discouraged, he had self-respect in the
knowledge that he had done everything possible to succeed. He expressed
the feeling that this failure was for a purpose, and he wrote:

... I knew the Lord did not want me there, but had permitted
me to come and learn a lesson for my own good. The Lord knew I
had been willing to sacrifice for the good of my children, and he
had accepted my offering. I could now look upon our labors and
rejoice, even in our disappointment. I knew it was of the Lord,
and our home was to be yet at Spring Lake. I could now see, as
I had been told that the Lord had a purpose in bringing us again
in the outside world, as another test to see if our children could
be enticed away, to become like them. If this be the case, why
should I try to avoid it by taking my family away from an experience
needful to all?

¹Ibid., pp. 244-245.
This all came plain, as though spoken to me, and I was now as anxious to return as I had been to come.¹

Benjamin and his family bid adieu to the place of toil, sacrifice, and disappointment, and returned to Spring Lake. There he saw things differently than he had seen them before. He wrote:

... looking over the broad, green fields, the luxuriant garden, and orchard laden with ripening fruit, it seemed to me the loveliest spot I had seen upon the earth, and I felt like one from banishment returning to Paradise, increased to me in value more than to pay all our sacrifices. We learn the value of blessings by their loss.²

To add to this happiness, there was a celebration the day following his return. He noted:

The 28th July, 1871, the anniversary of my fifty-third birthday, was enjoyed by all my family and kindred, with many friends from Payson with the Brass band and many evidences of a glad welcome for our return.³

Experience with Goats

The following is part of an article that created considerable interest when it was published in the Salt Lake Herald, December 6, 1871.

CASHMERE GOATS: - We had a very pleasant call yesterday from Joseph E. Johnson, Esq., of St. George, and his brother Benjamin F. Johnson, Esq. These gentlemen are superintending the shipment south of a flock of Cashmere goats, ... One hundred and thirty-three goats were shipped, of which sixteen died on the way, six, we believe, will be taken to the Sandwich Islands, and the remainder of the flock will be driven south, as a co-operative herd. ... The goats are very prolific, and yield long and silky hair, which takes color beautifully, and makes an excellent fabric of cloth. We wish the gentlemen all success in their enterprise.⁴

¹Ibid., pp. 245-246. ²Ibid., p. 247.
³Ibid., p.
⁴Journal History, December 5, 1871.
This unusual venture had been brought to Benjamin's attention by his brother, Joseph E., in the fall of 1871. Joseph E. knew where he could purchase a flock of Cashmere goats which, it was claimed, had been imported from Tibet. It was also believed that these expensive animals would do well in a climate like southern Utah. Benjamin was immediately interested in obtaining the goats because about this time much had been published regarding the manufacture of expensive shawls made from the hair of the Cashmere goat.\(^1\) Also, the Church leaders were encouraging the introduction of new industry, especially textile industries. Under the promotion of President Young, a silk industry had begun in 1868,\(^2\) and in the 1850's John Taylor had introduced the sugar industry.\(^3\) Benjamin had supported this policy of the Church leaders to promote new industries. In a report to the *Deseret Evening News* he explained that at one time he was simultaneously engaged in the industries of lumber making, canning fruit, manufacturing of brooms, and producing silk. Of the latter industry he wrote:

They \(\text{Johnson and Sons}\) are also doing something at silk, and have the largest amount of mulberry in Utah County. Their families have raised bushels of cocoons and they did the past season advertise a gratuitous distribution of the silkworm eggs for the encouragement of others.\(^4\)

Hoping to gain assistance for the goat venture, Benjamin discussed his ideas with Elders Erastus Snow and John Taylor, both members of the


\(^2\)Jensen, *Encyclopedic History*, pp. 841-843.

\(^3\)Ibid., p. 795.

\(^4\)Deseret Evening News, March 5, 1876.
Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Both were agreeable to the purchase of the goats, and a meeting was held in Salt Lake City to organize a joint stock company. The company was to be directed by John Taylor, President; Erastus Snow, Vice President; Joseph E. Johnson, Secretary; and Benjamin F. Johnson, Superintendent. Shares were sold at fifty dollars each, and about ten thousand dollars worth of stock was sold. President Taylor invested one thousand dollars, and Benjamin and Joseph E. invested heavily also.  

The expensive goats arrived in Salt Lake City in the latter part of November. It was decided that for the winter, the goats should be driven to Johnson, in southern Utah, and that Benjamin should direct the movement of the herd. Following the arrival of the goats, Benjamin wrote:

A great responsibility was now upon me in the safety of the goats, which cost so much, and in which great hopes were centered. It was coming winter and I must hurry them into a warmer climate and abundant feed. . . . While arranging outfit and company for another trip to Johnson, I sent Son-in-law D. C. Babbitt with others to the city to bring the goats to Spring Lake, and our start must be hastened or the kids would be dropped before reaching their destination. Arriving with the flock in Springville just at evening before corralling them, one of the most valuable of the female goats stepped aside and was not missed until morning. Parties found the goat, and thinking it a sheep killed it for the mutton—an important cashmere, at least $300 in value. In the morning all was discovered, and the two men were arrested for grand larceny, and put under bonds. At Spring Lake, we hastened preparations, and on December 24, 1871, the goats, together with our flock of sheep and one baggage wagon started south in charge of my sons, B. Farland and B. Samuel, assisted by the man named Townsend who came with the flock.

2Journal History, December 5, 1871.
3Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 248.
Benjamin followed with his wife and son a few days later, and they hurriedly pushed on while weather and feed were good. The goats excited much curiosity and speculation as they were taken through the different communities. Benjamin had many offers to sell stock in the company or to sell some of the goats. A business man in the town of Beaver inquired concerning the price of a pair of goats. Hoping to discourage the man, Benjamin quoted him the price of three hundred and fifty dollars. The man agreed to buy them at that price. Benjamin found the sale fortuitous, because the money was needed for their immediate expenses.

As they traveled with their herd of goats and sheep, the company encountered various obstacles. When some of the animals became frightened and ran into the hills, it took quite some time to recover them. It was difficult to get the animals safely across the Virgin River.\(^1\) While the company was camped one night, one hundred miles from their destination, a disaster occurred. Benjamin described this as follows.

The cold storm arising through the day now became fierce and terrible over our bleak and unprotected camp. The piercing winds seemed almost to freeze the very marrow of one's bones. And now while in this fearful and perilous condition, came that crisis we had so much dreaded—the dropping of young kids—a consideration of so great value. Before we knew that parturition had commenced, many were dropped and some already dead. We hastened out, gathering the flock close to our wagons, hunted far and near for wood, finding nothing but stuff like weeds and grass. With this we made what fire we could to warm the deep dry sand, into which we buried the kids as fast as they appeared; but even in this way we were able to save but a small number of the many born through the night. Morning found us more dead than alive, but still doing our best to save those costly kids. We rolled in blankets those we had saved alive, and started early, arriving at Kanab before noon and at Johnson the same evening, January 23, 1872, in time to get assistance

\(^1\)Ibid., pp. 248-249.
from my brother, William D., and nephew, Sixtus E. Johnson, in
caring for our weary selves and the flock.¹

Considerable attention was yet required in caring for the goats,
as the kids which had been saved were disowned by their mothers.
Benjamin found bottles and hand-fed the kids, feeling that they would
eventually be paid for their efforts, for he said, "Enthused with ideas
of great value of the Cashmere goat, we looked upon the kids as worth
every exertion."²

However, Benjamin's hopes were again to meet disappointment.

... we cared for the flock through the winter, through all
of which I carefully observed and studied their character, and
together with my readings, a clear conviction was drawing upon
my mind that the whole thing, from its inception was in great
degree a fraud upon the company; and after becoming satisfied upon
the subject, I wrote to Apostle Taylor, President of the company,
a full account of our journey, condition of the flock, and my
impressions and views relating to its real value. His answer
expressed eminent satisfaction with what I had done, but with
hopeful assurance that I was mistaken as the real value of the
goats, but results proved I was not. The flock of nearly 300
goats was represented as nearly of full blood, and a number of
them as imported from Asia, of which there was no proof; and most
of the flock was one cross from Cashmere. And when it was
realized that in all the country there was no machinery to work
their fleece, and consequently no market, and that in early spring
their wool loosened and dropped too soon to be shorn, my estimation
of their value became very low, and I concluded I could not retain
the management of a business resulting only in loss to those who
employed me. And so in early spring, I arranged with my nephew,
Sixtus E. Johnson, to care for both goats and sheep until other
arrangements were made, and on the 28th of March we started for
home. ...³

For the second time within only a few months, Benjamin had found
disappointment at Johnson. After he left, some of the goats were lost
in the mountains, and the remainder were drowned while crossing the
Colorado River. Thus ended the hope of beginning a new industry in the

¹Ibid., p. 250. ²Ibid., p. 250. ³Ibid., pp. 250-251.
 Territory. The only income Benjamin realized for his investment and labors was money received for a pair of goats sold and payment for the one which had been killed by two men in Springville.¹

Perserverance Against Disappointment

To add to Benjamin's losses, he learned upon his return that a fire had destroyed much of his property at Spring Lake. Of this misfortune, Benjamin's daughter wrote:

When I was about 7 years old, my father's house caught fire, starting in the broom factory and it went through the whole house. Father was away, everyone large and small ran to help put it out, some throwing water on it, others carrying things out in the city lot, clothing, bedding and most necessary things. The small children were sent into the big library to carry out the books but they threw them in the dirt and water and nearly every book was spoiled; the fire was extinguished before it reached the library. It burned thousands of dollars worth of machinery, furniture, etc. and most of the living rooms were burned up. Several new saddles and other things stored upstairs were burned, also a patch of broom corn which they tried hard to save, caught fire from the sparks and went too, making a great loss to my father.²

In the summer of 1872, Benjamin conceived the idea of putting a steam sawmill at a high elevation in the canyon. Leaving his farm with his sons and sons-in-law, Benjamin devoted his time and energy in trying to make his sawmill a profitable business. Although in ill health much of the time, he continued to work into the winter. In describing the winter conditions, Benjamin wrote:

Our mill was nearly 10,000 feet in altitude and snow was already deep on the mountains. On Christmas day the soft, damp snow fell in clouds, and the night following was made hideous by the crashing

¹Ibid., pp. 251-252.

²Harriet Naomi Johnson LeBaron, "Biographical Sketch."
thunder of snow slides in every direction. In great fear of being overwhelmed, we spent a night never to be forgotten. We had arranged with the hands [workers] with supplies, to come up the following day, which now they could not do, and should they attempt might be caught in the slides. I went down the canyon to count twenty slides—a fearful sight. About noon, Charlie Townsend arrived on foot and said the canyon was blocked from near its mouth.

After the storm, all got to work, and with shovelers, trampler, and oxen we soon opened the road, and men gathered in for logging. It was fearful and dangerous to handle logs on the steep mountain-sides of these narrow canyons, with snow from 5 to 20 feet deep, liable to slides and sudden storms and I felt great responsibility resting upon me, for the lives of those with me.¹

I had all my life held sacred the name of God, never permitting it to be profaned upon any inheritance, and calling the attention of my friends, family, and work hands to the dangers around us, I told them by prophecy that everyone who remembered his prayers and held sacred the name of the Lord should be unharmed. Having in my employ some most profane outsiders I feared they would be offended, but they accepted my words, attended family prayers, and with the exception of one—and he born in the Church—I heard of no other profanity in the canyon and he felling a tree upon himself, was brought down the canyon upon a stretcher, and for a time supposed to be dead. We ministered to him and he lived; the only serious accident through the winter.²

The sawmill expanded until Benjamin hired help in the management of it, but he soon found that the business was losing money due to the faulty record keeping of his hired help. In the summer of 1873, Benjamin closed the mill, feeling that he had been "greatly robbed" by those he had hired to manage his affairs. As this discouraged Benjamin's ardor for lumber making, he turned it over to the members of his family. In April, 1874, the mill caught fire and burned to the ground, an estimated loss of ten thousand dollars worth of property.³

In pondering these recent setbacks, Benjamin said, "This was a hard blow upon all, especially upon me, as the mill was yet unpaid for,

¹Johnson, My Life's Review, pp. 253-254.
²Ibid., p. 254.
³Ibid., p. 255.
our houses unfinished, our farm unfenced, and many claims for lumber standing due . . ." In Benjamin's typical determined fashion he then observed, "... we must cast about for some other enterprise."

Industry and Horticulture

For his next "enterprise" Benjamin decided to develop a new cannery. Since he owned a fruit orchard which was now second to none in Utah, he believed that he would gain greater profits by canning his fruit before marketing it. The industry of canning had not yet been greatly developed and there was much to learn about the process. Benjamin accepted this challenge as he accepted life itself, and he wrote: "We were ignorant as to the process, and we must learn by experiment. But what had my life been but an experiment? And how else had I attained to any knowledge?"

As he commenced canning fruit he found difficulty in releasing the air from the cans of boiled fruit without allowing the juices to escape. After considerable experimenting, Benjamin said:

"... we had started in faith, determined not to fail, and at last stumbled upon the secret, which was simply to reduce the heat of boiled cans by a few moments' immersion in cold water. We now proceeded with better success, yet many cans were imperfect, we still suffered loss, but not enough to discourage us."

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1Ibid., p. 256.
2Ibid.,
4Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 256.
5Ibid., p. 256.
By continuing to improve his methods, Benjamin gradually found success, and his fruit was esteemed as the best in the market. He took pride in knowing that his canned fruit was shipped to places outside of the Territory. In reporting his progress to the *Deseret Evening News*, Benjamin proudly wrote:

> Although we are but a small settlement, our gardens and orchards are the largest and our class of fruits perhaps the best of any in the Territory. Johnson and Sons have engaged in the canning of fruit which they have so far made a success, . . . They are now arranging to enlarge their gardens, and as early as possible to greatly extend their orchard, with a view to a commercial business in fruit. Their canned fruit sent east last fall, as well as their dried fruits, gave the highest satisfaction, and they think that if the citizens of Utah would devote themselves to the cultivation of stone fruits, the price and demand for Utah fruits would be greatly increased, and to this objective they are turning their more full attention.

> Fraternally yours,
> B. F. Johnson

In addition to his reputation as an industrious colonizer, Benjamin became known as "a pioneer in horticulture." Over the past twenty-five years, Benjamin had shown an interest in gardens, but during the next quarter of a century he was to contribute much through his experiments with plant life. Like a true scientist Benjamin was always anxious to share any new found knowledge with those interested. Besides discussing his findings with others and showing other people his methods and results, Benjamin wrote a number of letters to newspapers to share his information through that media. The following news release is an example:

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1*Deseret Evening News*, March 5, 1876.

2*Deseret News*, June 7, 1882. See also *Journal History*, June 7, 1882.
CORRESPONDENCE.
The Compton Surprise.

Spring Lake Villa, October 26th, 1875.
Editor Deseret News:
I see in your issue of the 19th reports upon the Compton Surprise potato. The past Spring a friend brought me two potatoes of that kind that weighed scant half a pound each. The help of one of them I lost by accident and had only three-quarters of one pound, which I planted, and I have just dug, and weighed one hundred and eighty pounds from it; and a few were evidently lost. So to beat that you must call up the man who can report a greater yield. I believe that Compton could, under the most favorable circumstances and culture, be made to yield one thousand bushels per acre.

Yours,
B. F. Johnson. 1

The Reform Then: Proving His Integrity

In the winter of 1874, President Brigham Young had inaugurated a reform movement called the United Order, which was to improve the living standard of the Church members, to provide better care for the poor, and to motivate the Saints to keep the commandments more fully. One reason this reform was enacted was to help the Saints overcome the effects of a national depression. In this United Order movement President Young also advocated that all surplus property or profits be given to the Bishop, who would distribute them equally according to needs. 2 This movement was begun at St. George and then moved to other areas, including Spring Lake. Benjamin wrote his feelings about this:

In 1875 was preached the "United Order" and previously had been taught in the School of the Prophets, many great and glorious principle; and now all were required to again renew their covenants in baptism, to which I gladly responded, animated by a hope of a

1Deseret News, October 26, 1875. See also Journal History, October 26, 1875.
2Roberts, A Comprehensive History of the Church, pp. 484-490.
more perfect union as a people; and that as a family, taught in every holy principle, we might attain to a more perfect union.

With joy, I accepted the principle of the United Order, and was ready and glad to follow with all I possessed, the example of our leaders, or obey their counsel.1

When the United Order was instituted in the Santaquin area, Benjamin was selected to be the vice-president in administering the affairs of the order. He was pleased with the effect of this movement. He said, "In this move the people were well united, and never before did I feel so high a resolve to devote myself and all I possessed to the great purpose of gospel union. . . ." Because of Benjamin's position of leadership in directing the United Order, jealousy was aroused among some of the members of the Santaquin Ward. Apparently the past problems in which Benjamin had been involved at Santaquin were again stirred up by the man who presently served as Bishop of that ward. While in St. George at the dedication of the Temple,2 he learned that false rumors were being circulated about him. Benjamin wrote:

I had spent twenty-five years of my life's best years in toil and sacrifice in colonizing Santaquin and Spring Lake and developing the country, . . . I will not stop to explain as to how things occurred or even to call names, but will say that indignities were offered me, both in public and in private, until in the fall of 1876, it was told to those going to St. George with President Young that Brother Johnson was becoming apostate.3

No accusation could be made of Benjamin that would be more upsetting to him. Throughout his life, Benjamin had endeavored to live so that his loyalty to the gospel and the leaders of the Church would be

1Johnson, My Life's Review, pp. 257-258.
2Ibid.
3Ibid.
above reproach. He was particularly anxious to have the Brethren respect and trust him for this loyalty. Benjamin wrote his reaction to these false accusations of his fellow ward members:

This at first I took more as a joke, but soon found by the cold shoulder of my old acquaintance that it was too much a reality to be pleasant. I knew at once where this defamation had come from, and I at once went to Apostle Erastus Snow, who was the president of the stake, and told him what I had learned and something of the injustice I had received from my Bishop both at home and abroad and here; and not able to restrain feeling I wept and told him I demanded it as a right that the authorities should find some means of test through which to prove my love and loyalty for God and His kingdom, and that I cared not what the ordeal should be. He kindly said, "Wait for a little, and all will come right."¹

Although others still "appeared cold," Benjamin was pleased that President Young now kindly welcomed him to spend his spare time in the President's office. Through the last winter of Brigham Young's life, Benjamin was privileged to spend time with President Young "listening to counsel to others, sometimes given to me, in which I was greatly instructed and blessed."²

The St. George temple was dedicated April 6, 1877, and Benjamin was privileged to participate in the dedication—the baptisms, endowments, and sealings for the living and the dead. When ordinance work began on April 9, it appeared by the number who were there that the people generally did not understand the importance of this work for the dead. In a sermon delivered in the Tabernacle April 6, 1853, Brigham Young had explained the need for the endowment:

Let me give you the definition in brief. Your endowment is to receive all those ordinances in the House of the Lord, which are necessary for you, after you have departed this life, to enable you to walk back to the presence of the Father, passing the angels who

¹Ibid., pp. 259-260.
²Ibid., p. 260.
stand as sentinels, being enabled to give them the key words, the signs and tokens, pertaining to the Holy Priesthood, and gain your eternal exaltation in spite of Earth and Hell.¹

Latter-day Saints believe that these endowments were given in earliest dispensations of the Gospel and that they are necessary for exaltation in the Celestial Kingdom. Therefore, they perform these sacred ordinances for both the worthy living and the dead. The First Presidency decided to send missionaries through all the settlements in the area to "wake up the people and teach them their privileges and duties" pertaining to them and their dead. Benjamin was called with two other men to visit the northern settlements and teach the people that their own salvation depended on their performing the saving ordinances for their kindred dead. Benjamin was fearful of this assignment:

I greatly dreaded the mission; I felt I was no preacher; my name had gone abroad vilified, and I felt crestfallen and bowed down in spirit. But I realized that this was in a degree the test I had asked for and demanded; and although ignorant as to what was to be taught, yet I told the Lord I would go and do my best, and that as I had always loved the truth and had always been valiant in my testimony for it, and had honored his name, that He could afford to bless me with the inspiration of His spirit, and of the mission, that I might honorably acquit myself, and overcome in the hearts of the people all the aspersions cast upon me.²

Although this new assignment took only about a month, Benjamin felt that through it he had been able to prove himself again. He wrote:

We started February 10 and although cold, with deep snow, the meeting houses were crowded, while the might of the Lord was with us in teaching, even in things which before we had not known. The Lord had taken me at my word, and I was satisfied, in the kindness and confidence with which I was everywhere received and listened to. It seemed a pleasure to my companions that they could use me to do most of their preaching.

Soon after our return, the people began to flock to the Temple, and the burden upon my spirit was now gone.³

The Dream Then the Call

After spending some time vicariously performing ordinances for the dead, Benjamin returned to Spring Lake. Upon his return, he was grieved to find a spirit of antagonism still existed within the neighboring settlement. With feelings of great concern, Benjamin prepared to attend a conference which was held in Provo the last Saturday and Sunday of May, 1877. The night before he left for this conference, Benjamin had a dream which he related as follows:

I thought I was with Bishop Holladay, who standing by a boat, ordered me to get on board, which, desiring to be obedient I did, with a reserved thought that he should not take me with him from the shore. As he sat down with his back toward me, to take the oars to push from shore, lying upon my back I quietly and unknown to him, put my left leg over the side, and rolled myself out upon the beach; and looking up saw a man, who, pointing to another boat said, "There is a nice safe one prepared for you," which I took with a feeling of deliverance from an unnatural and irksome association. My dream caused me to marvel, I felt it had a meaning but had never thought as to how it might be fulfilled.¹

Being disturbed, Benjamin traveled to Provo and attended the conference which was presided over by President Young. Concerning his anxieties while attending this conference, Benjamin said:

... I found the same asperity and unjust dominion as before, and I felt I could not endure it longer without becoming rebellious, and I chose rather to die than set such an example to my family. I asked the Lord earnestly to take me away before yielding to such a weakness.

From treatment by my Bishop, my feelings were almost in bitterness, and the repugnance of such an association was almost more than I could bear. I went on Saturday to Conference, saw him upon the stand, and in shame for my feelings toward him I prayed most earnestly that I might die, rather then be left to dishonor the high calling of an Elder in Israel, which I greatly feared I should, if existing conditions continued. I did not enjoy the Conference, and asked the Lord to take away my bitterness of feeling or let me die to be rid of it.

¹Ibid., p. 262.
I returned home Sunday, not wishing to remain longer, crestfallen and disappointed. ¹

I had not thought it possible that President Young had understood my feeling and condition in Santaquin Ward; and a possibility that Spring Lake could be organized as a ward had never dawned upon me until the next morning after our return from Provo. Brother Clark came and said that after I had left the Conference President Young had called for me to come to the stand to be ordained Bishop of Spring Lake Ward. This was indeed a surprise, and I could now see the full meaning of my dream, and I knew it was of the Lord—a relief from a bondage of feeling I cannot describe.

I was ordained Bishop by Apostle John Taylor, and organized a ward, mostly of my own family. ²

From this experience, Benjamin did some self evaluation. He had throughout his life felt a need to be respected and admired by Church leaders, and he jealously protected his reputation with these men. Few offences could be as disturbing to him as to have someone darken his name. In examining himself, Benjamin said, "My great fault is in not loving those who injure or offend me, and Brother Holladay, with all his faults, may be in many respects my superior . . ."³

Family Troubles

Through his many business pursuits, Benjamin prospered, but he was sad because his family was not as united as in times of poverty and famine.⁴ Benjamin, who had been authoritative in presiding over his family, now became disturbed to find that his counsel to his wives was becoming less potent and that a desire for property and self-control had been growing in them.⁵ In evaluating his family problem, Benjamin wrote:

¹Ibid., pp. 261-262.
²Ibid., pp. 262-263.
³Ibid., p. 263.
⁴Ibid., p. 257.
⁵Ibid., p. 264.
... my house was being "divided against itself," and I felt ashamed before the Lord and his servants. I knew my record had been always in obedience, and I felt that my counsel should be heeded. I regarded obedience as our only claim upon the Lord for his love and blessing; and because I was earnest and at times austere, I was regarded as a "tyrant." But a tyrant, like the Lord, does not love those whom he robs of liberty or life. The Lord and his servants admonish those they love and thereby prove them, that they may love them the more. I may have been austere, and often unwise and selfish, but I could not be a tyrant with my soul so full of anxiety for their welfare, and yearning for their love and confidence.1

The pressures of Benjamin's many personal problems became a burden which he felt he should no longer carry. Being "borne down with the ingratitude" of his family and realizing his own weakness and faults, Benjamin sought divine help in working out his family problems. Regarding his supplication through prayer, Benjamin said, "I told the Lord I could stand it no longer, that I wished to turn myself, my family and all I possessed into His hands, to deal with us all in mercy as should be for our good and His glory. I asked the Lord for a sign that He had heard me and had accepted my offering." Benjamin said that immediately following his prayer he calmly watched as a storm completely destroyed his crops. This, Benjamin believed, as an act of God to humble Benjamin and his family.2

Through his willingness to sacrifice six thousand dollars worth of produce and to be brought down again near poverty, for the welfare of a family which had shown him abuse and disrespect, Benjamin believed that he could feel empathy with the Savior. Benjamin explained:

I could now see why He who suffered most of all, could pray for those who scoffed and spit upon him and nailed Him to the cross; and I could see that through His patient suffering, in charity and

1Ibid., p. 265.
2Ibid., pp. 265-266.
love, "He brought them with a price," and I could now see that my consent to give all into the hands of the Lord--of Justice--must cause me, as the head, to suffer the greatest loss.\(^1\)

From this experience, Benjamin developed a desire to incorporate into his life at least one quality exemplified by the Savior. He said: "I am more determined now in patience to bear, to drop all authority or austere manners in government, and to harmonize my feelings and way more to the wish and spirit of my wives."\(^2\)

Following this loss of crops, Benjamin felt that "the Lord opened many avenues of blessing," so that his family was never in real want. Although Benjamin felt that he had learned valuable lessons from this experience, he was disappointed to note that the spirit of complaint and murmuring continued against him.\(^3\) As Israel clamored for a King, so clamored the women for property.\(^4\) This caused Benjamin continued anxiety, as he dearly loved his family but did not know how best to help them.

\(^1\)Ibid., p. 266.
\(^2\)Ibid., p. 267.
\(^3\)Ibid., p. 267.
\(^4\)Ibid., p. 268.
BENJAMIN AT AGE FORTY-EIGHT

BENJAMIN AT AGE SIXTY-NINE

PHOTOGRAPHS TAKEN IN THE LATER LIFE OF BENJAMIN F. JOHNSON
CHAPTER IX

A CALL TO ARIZONA – CONTINUING TO COLONIZE

Early in the year 1882, Benjamin was invited by his brother Joseph E. to try again colonizing the south. Although he felt his land was already too small for his large and rapidly increasing family, Benjamin, now almost fifty-four years old, had little desire to face such a task. After forty years of sacrifice and service, Benjamin was looking forward to spending his "evening years" in the comforts and beauty of their home at Spring Lake.¹

At the suggestion of his son, Benjamin wrote to Elder Erastus Snow of the Council of the Twelve Apostles and asked his advice. Arrangements were made for Benjamin to meet with Elders Snow and Lyman at the annual Church conference. At this meeting Benjamin was told that he and his family would be called to move south and establish a colony in Arizona. He talked the matter over with the Presidency and other Apostles, they instructed him to begin immediately making arrangements to leave.² Although Benjamin did not want such an assignment, he began as he had consistently done before when his services were requested by the Church leaders.

Soon after his return from conference, Benjamin received a letter from President Taylor, the new President of the Church,³ asking him to

¹Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 268.  ²Ibid., p. 269.
³Following the death of President Brigham in 1877, Elder John Taylor presided over the Church.
come to his office at once. The following day, Benjamin took the train to Salt Lake City. President Taylor told Benjamin of a new Federal legislation prohibiting the practice of plural marriage. The public mind had become incensed toward the Mormons practicing plural marriage from the time the law was first publicly taught by the Church in 1852. Ten years following the official church announcement of the practice, when the Saints were seeking statehood for Utah, they were turned down and an anti-polygamy act was passed by the Federal government. This now made it illegal to marry more than one wife. With the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869, Utah was no longer isolated, and the practice of plural marriage by the Saints became even more publicized. The irate public was alarmed to see the practice of plural marriage continue in spite of the Federal law. It was stated by a governor of Utah that "Mormon polygamy is a practice which is punished as criminal in every part of the Republic, but flourishes unchecked in Utah."\(^1\) In March, 1882, Congress passed the Edmund's Bill which amended the previous anti-polygamy law. This new law defined polygamy as a crime and any person convicted of contracting a plural marriage could be punished by a fine not to exceed five hundred dollars or five years imprisonment, or both. The law further defined polygamist living as "unlawful cohabitation" and made this offense punishable by a fine not to exceed three hundred dollars or imprisonment not to exceed six months, or both fine and imprisonment at the discretion of the court. A person could be prosecuted for both polygamy and unlawful cohabitation.\(^2\)

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\(^1\)Statement made by Governor Murray in October, 1880. See H. B. Roberts, *Comprehensive History of the Church*, VI, p. 4.

\(^2\)Ibid., pp. 41-45.
This new law meant that Benjamin and others who were living the law of plural marriage were subject to arrest under the Edmunds law.\(^1\) President Taylor said that he could foresee persecution upon all who were living in plural marriage and wanted to know if, instead of colonizing in Arizona, Benjamin would help locate a place of refuge in Mexico for those who needed to flee to safety. Benjamin realized there would be many trials and hardships in accepting a call such as this so late in his life, but he also realized that the call came from the President of the Church. Benjamin wrote, "I told them [The First Presidency] I was subject to God and His servants, and ready to try to do anything required of me."\(^2\)

President Wilford Woodruff of the Council of Twelve Apostles set Benjamin apart for his mission and gave him a blessing. He was instructed to return to Arizona with Brother A. F. Macdonald, who would assist him in establishing a settlement in Mexico. As Benjamin returned home, he was enthused with the spirit of his calling and especially pleased that all his family—sons and sons-in-law and their families—and his brother Joseph E. were called to go with him.\(^3\) He was concerned, however, for he feared he would not be ready in the prescribed time of four weeks. Also, he was not sure that he could persuade his wives to accompany him. Benjamin realized that most of his wives and the care of many children or were burdened with sickness, both of which would be too great a trial in an assignment of this kind. Upon arriving home, Benjamin called all his family together and read them the instructions he had received,

\(^1\)Johnson, My Life's Review, pp. 269-270.
\(^2\)Ibid.
\(^3\)Ibid., p. 270.
explaining the object of their going. He told them that "... as I was becoming aged and worn I needed the companionship of a wife for comfort, and of my sons to strengthen and sustain me, and asked for volunteers to go with me. A number of my sons were willing and would be ready, but of my five wives not one could afford the sacrifice."\(^1\)

On The Move Again

Undaunted, Benjamin began preparation to leave. Being in debt, he realized that he must sell his homestead if he was to be able to pay what he owed and to obtain necessary materials for his new assignment. Since there appeared to be no prospect for a buyer, Benjamin became concerned and went to the Lord for help. According to his account he had implicit faith and confidence that God would assist him. He wrote:

I asked the Lord for guidance, considered carefully the price for my possessions, and concluding upon a sum I could afford to take, I told the Lord that if it was his will that I should sell and go immediately with all my family to send a buyer, to give me the price I had fixed upon. If no buyer came I would take it as a sign that I was to move slowly in the matter. I had hardly told my family my feelings, and purpose, before an offer came, in amount more than the price I had thought to ask. And so it was the sign I had asked of the Lord. I closed the sale.\(^2\)

For five years Benjamin had served as the Bishop of his ward, and when he was released, he felt that he had served honorably. He said, "I knew the Lord had accepted our endeavors to sustain the good character of our ward; our tithes and offerings were well paid; there was no drunkenness or profanity, or Sabbath-breaking; our meetings were spirited, ...."\(^3\)

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\(^1\)ibid.

\(^2\)Ibid., p. 271.

\(^3\)Ibid.
An indication of the value of the Johnson family to the Spring Lake is given in the following account from the Spring Lake Villa Ward History:

In the spring of 1882 Benjamin F. Johnson sold his farm to Tempest and Rita for $5000, and subsequently all the Johnsons consisting of nearly the entire ward moved to Arizona which virtually broke up the ward organization. However, counselor Openshaw and George T. Wilson kept up meetings until the fall of 1883 (Oct. 1883) . . . the ward organization ceased to exist.¹

When Benjamin was ready to leave, he was happy to be accompanied by six of his sons, a son-in-law, and his wife Sarah Jane. With his finances in order and other arrangements completed, he was prepared to leave his comfortable surroundings and to face his new challenge. That Benjamin understood the seriousness of his new mission is indicated by his following statement:

It is now the 20th of May, 1882, and we are about ready for starting to find and make another home in a far off and different clime, among a strange people, perhaps of another tongue, say good-bye to the land of our birth; and I must leave most of my dear ones and the graves of my loved ones. And now at 64, with life's pioneering, perhaps to return not again to the place of so many years of love and labor, of hope and fear, of sorrows and joys; but with the promise of his servants that the hand of the Lord shall lead and open the way. As a son of Abraham, I am willing to go, to do my best, and trust my remaining days to the will of Him who is true and faithful to His obedient children.²

As Benjamin left his home he said that "the clinging embrace and tearful kiss of those I so much loved, inspired courage and renewed within me the hope of happier days in another land."³

Benjamin's departure for his new assignment received public notice. For thirty years Benjamin had been active in colonizing and in

¹Spring Lake Villa Ward History on file in Church Historian's Office.
serving the Church and the public, and when it became known that he had left for another assignment, the following article appeared in the

Deseret News:

DESERET NEWS, 7 June, 1882.
Southern Colonists. - Elder B. F. Johnson, of Spring Lake Villa, disposed of his farm, orchards and canning establishment a short time since, and has gone southward as the advance guard of an extensive colony, to found and build up new homes. The colonists were undetermined as to their future location, but purposed examining the Gila and Salt River Valleys in Arizona, as well as those of the Yoko and Janas in Old Mexico.

Speaking of the passage of the advance party, through Silver Reef, Kane County, the "Miner" of that place remarked as follows:

Mr. Johnson, the promoter of this exodus, is 64 years of age, patriarchal in the fullest sense, being the father of forty living children, 22 of whom are married. Of the number there are 25 sons. This advance party consists of seven families, 25 persons in all, with eight vehicles, well equipped, which will make camp and remain in the vicinity of St. George until the 10th inst., when another contingent will join them in their journey over the southern deserts in search of "the promised land." Mr. J. E. Johnson, of this city, brother of B. F. Johnson, and who, like him is a pioneer in horticulture in Utah, will accompany the party.¹

When Benjamin arrived at St. George, he found that his brother Joseph E. was not yet prepared to leave, and that Brother Macdonald would not be ready for some time. In order to help his brother Joseph, Benjamin bought him supplies and a wagon and carriage. In order to supplement their funds, Benjamin's sons found a job hauling copper ore in Benjamin's wagons. This proved costly to Benjamin, however, as some of his wagons were broken and his best span of mules was stolen.²

After this unexpected delay and expense, and without any forewarning, Brother Macdonald informed Benjamin that the Macdonald company was going to begin the journey to Arizona the following day and that

¹Deseret News, June 7, 1882. See also Journal History, June 7, 1882.

²Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 274.
Benjamin should be ready to leave. Benjamin could not possibly leave on such short notice, and the Macdonald company left without them. Of this Benjamin merely said, "Our having to wait for him /Brother Macdonald/ in St. George, and his cold notice of leaving us, did not inspire a feeling I wish to record."  

A week later, as the Johnson company prepared to leave St. George, Benjamin noted how saddened the people of the community were to see Joseph E. leave them. Joseph E. had held places of honor and public trust and had gained the respect and love of all. To illustrate this Benjamin said:

The evening before our start the people crowded the largest hall in town in an ovation to show regret at the parting and express kindly hopes for his future. I listened with the proud assurance that he was worthy of all the gratitude and honor they could express. He had been more faithful to the public than to himself. 

On June 22, 1882, the Johnson company started on their long journey south. For the trip, they established the following organization to direct the affairs of the company: Benjamin F. Johnson as President or Captain, Joseph E. Johnson as Chaplain, and William S. Johnson as Captain of the Guard.

Because they were late in starting, the Johnsons had to go one hundred miles out of their way in order to find a safe place to cross the Rio Virgin River which was swollen from the spring run-off. The weather was extremely hot, and the deep sands and winding river slowed their travel and made the journey perilous. One evening, about a week

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1 Ibid., p. 274.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid., p. 275.
after their departure, as they were looking for a suitable camping spot, the company came upon a beautiful open space near the river, with apparently every facility for camping. The group was eager to stop here, but Benjamin felt prompted otherwise. Benjamin recorded the incident:

I drove my light vehicle over the green grass so inviting, and stopped to look around, but a voice within me said, "Go on." I looked ahead and saw a high ridge to go over, and my feelings said "No," but the voice said, "Go on over the ridge." My hand involuntarily drew the mules back to the road, still wondering why I did so and fearing all would be offended. But I went on, the company following up and down a long, rocky dry way, and going nearly two miles we came upon a high table of flat rock, which offered nothing inviting, but safety. Here we camped, and I greatly feared I had given offense but nothing was said, and we put our stock upon higher ground. We soon heard thunder with fearful lightning and wind—a tempest was upon us which continued till near daylight with a dreadful roaring. In the morning we saw that the valley was covered with rolling flood of thin mud, from mountain to mountain. We beheld the fearful picture with wondering astonishment, and with joy and gratitude to God that by his angel we were so marvelously led to the only safe spot for many miles upon the bank of this river. Had we camped at the place first chosen, all would have been overwhelmed; and we learned that a wagon with salt had camped there, and the teamster narrowly escaped with his life, losing his wagon and load; and the dry ways we had traversed the day before were now impassable.¹

The company could not travel until the flood had subsided and the mud had dried. They now faced the problem of having sufficient water, as there was nothing near their camp except thick, red, muddy water. When the small supply of water in their wagons was gone, both the members of the company and the stock began to suffer. Benjamin could not see any solution to their crisis, but had confidence that they would not suffer long. In relating the manner in which they were delivered from their suffering, Benjamin wrote:

I could think of nothing but the promise of God through His servant to me, that His angel should go before to open my way, for the sal-

¹Ibid.
vation of all with me. My son William S., not yet twenty-one, who had been a faithful guard and servant to the company, deeply felt the situation and while thinking of it fell asleep, and suddenly waking thought he had seen or could see in the vision of his mind a green spot in which was a spring of clear, cold water. He took his gun, and following his impression went up into the foothills and saw in the distance the green spot pictured in his mind, and soon came to the spring of which he had dreamed or saw in vision. This spring was about three miles away, at the head of a smooth wash leading to the foot of the bench on which we were camped. The carriage was soon filled with empty vessels, and we soon had 100 gallons of cold, clear water in our camp, our teams being all driven to the spring, and this trouble was at an end. We could almost feel the "Rock" had again been smitten for our salvation.1

After waiting five days, the company was again on the way. It was now early July, and they were forced to endure blistering heat. They had been warned that just ahead of them was fifteen miles of deep dangerous sand and had been advised that for safety they should carry only light loads, but plenty of water. One night, as they camped near the sand, Benjamin pondered upon what course of action they should take the following day. As the wind would blow off the sand toward him Benjamin observed that it was like putting his face into the mouth of a flaming furnace. This was frightening to him, and again he felt the need for divine intervention if he was going to accomplish his assignment.2 He said:

Late at night I laid down, but was too anxious and fearful to sleep, feeling we were again in peril. But I did not forget the promise while earnestly calling upon the Lord, it began to thunder and a heavy cloud came almost over us. I asked the Lord to let it rain and wet the sandy road; but none came to us, and I felt disappointed and sad that we must pull through the deep, dry sand that could so easily have been made wet for us.

Fearful, yet in hope we started, and coming at once upon the sand found to our great surprise and joy that the road had been de-

1Ibid., p. 276.
2Ibid., p. 277.
luged with water, although the rain had not reached us, not half a
mile away. I felt ashamed that I had been so fearful, and we all
felt certain the angel had filled the road with water for our spe-
cial blessing. 1

On July 7, the company safely crossed the Colorado River at Lee's
Ferry, 2 and that night they had a pleasant journey over a forty-five
mile desert. Benjamin began to feel relieved in knowing that they were
now over the worst of the trip, with their teams and company in good
condition. The remainder of the traveling was over good roads with
grass and water readily accessible. Traveling in the night of July 22,
they passed President Madconald, camped near the road. So, after start-
ing two weeks later, and going a hundred miles out of their way, they
were now ahead and would be in Mesa before him. 3

Benjamin was pleased with the apparent success and the spirit
enjoyed among the group. After more than a month of travel, there was
not one complaint or one unkind word. All were in good health, the
teams were in good condition, and not one animal had been lost on the
way. However, Benjamin did mention that there was not a good feeling
with his wife. Although not mentioning a specific incident, Benjamin
commented, "... from a wife loved too much I may have expected too
much. ... in my Eden there was the serpent of discontent, ... I
was worn with infirmity, weary with fatigue and care, was petulant, and
perhaps selfishly looked for sympathy more due to another." 4

1Ibid.

2James H. McClintock, Arizona Historian, Mormon Settlement in
Arizona (Phoenix, Arizona: The Manufacturing Stationers, Inc., 1921),
p. 219.

3Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 277. 4Ibid.
On the morning of July 23, 1882, the company arrived in Mesa. There they relaxed and rested at the home of Joel E. Johnson, the oldest son of Benjamin's brother Joseph E. Joel had come to Arizona the previous year. The first Latter-day Saints to visit Arizona were the members of the Mormon Battalion. From their reports of the area, the leaders of the Church became interested in Arizona as a possible location for L.D.S. communities. As a result of this interest many Saints were called to colonize in Arizona, particularly during the period 1870-1890. Consequently, when Benjamin and his family arrived in Arizona, there was already an L.D.S. community at Mesa.

Establishing a Settlement

Immediately after arriving in Mesa, Benjamin's thoughts turned to the purpose of his journey. He wrote, "I was now meager in flesh and weak in body, but my mission was before me, and I must keep alive to its necessities and duties." In considering the next stage they should take Benjamin wrote:

... it was now the hottest time of the year, mercury at 110 degrees, no shade but our wagons, and they were becoming intolerable. And we must have immediate relief. In the evening of July 24, I called my brother and sons together to consult upon the best move to make, and it was deemed best to return to Tempe, and take shelter from the woods along the main avenue of that place, and should it be thought best would buy city lots, build small houses, and make that place our base of supply for our future movements toward Mexico. Calling upon President Macdonald for suggestion, he advised just as we had planned, and so we felt assured it was according to wisdom. The next day we returned to Tempe, found ample shade, and with canvas and other materials soon made ourselves comparatively comfortable for camp life; and we were now ready to consider the object of our mission, and the future before us.\footnote{Ibid., p. 278.} \footnote{Ibid., pp. 278-279.} \footnote{Ibid., p. 278.}
Benjamin and his family were the first members of the Church to settle in Tempe, which later became a Mormon settlement. He is recognized as the founder of the Tempe ward in the Maricopa Stake of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Typical of his industrious nature, Benjamin set out to find a means of providing for his family. Although in a strange land, he soon found employment hauling hay and grain. Shortly thereafter he had the opportunity to purchase thousands of acres of good land with water available for irrigation. The land was located sixty miles from Tempe at a place called Gila Bend. Being advised that he would investigate the land before buying, Benjamin and some of the other members of his family set out to do so. Benjamin's age and many years of hard labor, however, began to affect the capacity for work, and he wrote:

We started soon, but I was tired, worn and almost an invalid; my strength was not equal to my ambition. We stayed the first night at Phoenix where I became quite ill with fever, which increased until I was unable to sit up to ride. We had forgotten some points in description to the place, and passed it twenty or more miles; and finding we were lost, and being now so sick they feared I would die, they turned with a feeling to drive for home as fast as possible. Coming opposite the place we had come to visit and meeting a miner, he accompanied us to Mr. Webbs.

At Mr. Webbs, Benjamin received excellent care, and his health soon improved. When Benjamin was able to examine the property, he estimated that there were sufficient water and land to provide for ten thousand people. He purchased the property for four thousand dollars, paying half the amount himself. Benjamin immediately established a settlement upon the property and three of his sons settled there.

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2 Maricopa Stake Quarterly Historical Report, July 22, 1882 (on file in Church Historian's Office).

4 Ibid., pp. 279-280.
A Trip to Mexico

Although Benjamin was still very weak when he returned to Tempe, he felt that he should travel to Old Mexico to find a good location for their settlement there. Benjamin and several other men left for Mexico about the first part of September, 1882. Although Benjamin had been given the responsibility of building the settlement, he found that President Macdonald, whose calling was to assist Benjamin, took over all leading responsibilities from the first.¹

Along their way to Mexico, the company visited with members of the Church who were colonizing in southern Arizona. They traveled through Apache territory which caused them concern because at this time there was great danger from raiding Apaches. Near the Mexican border the company arrived at an old ranch, where the company camped. President Macdonald, who had thus far taken all responsibility, called everyone together and asked Benjamin if he wished to take the lead in accomplishing that objective. Benjamin, with his many years of experience as a colonizer, did not feel it would be suitable for settlement and told President Macdonald distinctly that he did not want to do so, that "the spirit of my calling on this mission had not manifested to me that this was the place for me." So President Macdonald called upon Brother Bunker, who consented to take the lead. As President Macdonald had been called only as an assistant, Benjamin had no faith in this arrangement.²

¹Ibid., p. 280.
²Ibid., pp. 280-281.
Family Disappointments

Disappointed and too sick to even drive the team, Benjamin returned to Arizona, along with the rest of the company. Although he had been disturbed by his trip to Mexico, his homecoming caused him to rejoice, for three of his wives, Harriet N., Sarah M., and Susan A., had sent word that they and their younger children planned to move to Arizona, traveling by train. In contemplating their coming, Benjamin remarked:

I left them at Spring Lake with feelings of warm and earnest love, animated by hopes of future reunion, which had increased through the period of separation, until receiving a letter from President Woodruff, accusing me of neglect in providing for them, and they were seeking to obtain the money and means I had left in Utah. Such an accusation was utterly untrue, and I would not realize it had been made, and so was not fully prepared for the reality that followed.

Arranging everything for their comfort, I awaited them at Maricopa with arms hungry to embrace them; but our meeting was in every respect just what I hoped it would not be, apparently cold, and dead to love or care for me.

Bringing a larger carriage for the others, I had given the one in which I came to Sarah Jane and her mother, an old lady, in full expectation of finding a place and comfort with them.

And so, when late in the evening, coming to camp after riding as baggage through the day, I found myself the "man between two stools," and having no place offered me, and too proud to sleep with my driver, I sat out, alone, through a late November night, in a condition of physical and mental discomfort that I trust may never be endured by those who occasioned it.

Benjamin soon returned to his newly founded settlement at Gila Bend, being "discouraged, disappointed and despondent with the sorrow of living bereavement." With these dark feelings and with no apparent hope for the future, Benjamin set out to be alone with his thoughts as

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1Ibid., pp. 280-281.

2Ibid., pp. 281-282.
he explored some of the land he had bought. Earlier, he had explained
the necessity of hope in his life:

Hope, without which the heart would break, and life without it
would have no incentive; while with hope deferred the heart becomes
sick. Such is our experience in mortality, and without experience
in both good and evil we are as nothing:

This was a low point in Benjamin's life. After spending a life-
time of struggling for his family who, he claimed, meant more to him than
his own life, Benjamin now felt that he had been completely rejected by
his wives. Things looked dark to Benjamin as he walked around his new
property.

I started alone to look at an inheritance without eyes to see or
a joy to anticipate; and carried away in gloomy thought I took
little notice of the land marks or of my direction, until turning
for home, I struck into a broad open arm of the valley, of excellent
mesquite lands, which I followed far, wondering that I saw no
familiar point of feature. I stopped to look around and reflect,
and saw I had gone wrong, and was lost as to my way home. I had
come miles through a broad forest of mesquites and Palo Verdes of
which I had before no knowledge. It was late in the afternoon, and
being November, the night would be cold and I had no coat, and had
eaten but a light breakfast, and was becoming faint with fatigue.
Thirst was increasing, to go back was a long way, and I was uncertain
how I might be led. I had a few matches and tried to start a fire
or smoke, hoping it might be seen; but in this I had poor success,
as I was too weak. A spirit of bewilderment and fear came over me,
for it would soon be night.

Reflecting, I asked myself what there really was for me to fear?
I had knowingly done no wrong, and always sought to know and do my
duty; I had not come to this land for any vain purposes; and if my
work was done and the Lord would now accept me, what had I to lose?
And in reality—what had I now to live for? My wives were willing
to sell me for pottage, and those more dear than life were my accu-
sers to bring reproach upon my old age. These were my thoughts as
I stood alone pondering, when a voice asked, "Why do you not call
upon the Lord?" which I at once did, and asked that if it was His
purpose that I should still live to labor for His kingdom, that He
would open my eyes to see the way of my return. Looking around I
then saw a high point or bank I had not before noticed, and climb-
ing its top I saw away in the distance, in another direction, green

\[1^1\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 273.}\]
trees that I knew grew upon the Gila River, and I could now understand how I had become lost. With hurried walking I got home before dark, a little wiser, and the current of my thoughts a little changed, knowing that the angel had still been with me.¹

More Bereavement

Benjamin was grief stricken to learn of the serious illness of his brother Joseph E. As youths they had been particularly close, and although they had been separated most of their adult years, they had hoped to spend their declining years together in their new settlement. As soon as Benjamin learned of Joseph's condition, he rushed to Tempe to be with him. Benjamin writes:

⁹⁹ I found him with an attack of complicated pneumonia, and as soon as I looked upon him I felt assured he would not recover, and although I administered to him and prayed, and tried to stimulate his faith and courage, yet my own faith was dead, and I felt assured he would die and I soon be left alone! Yes, alone; for there was but him that could enter into my feelings and comprehend my motives or give me advice and sympathy! My children may be a source of great happiness, my hope of the future; may minister to my wants with loving hands—in caressing affection; but they are not my contemporaries, they were not the companions of my childhood. or of my youth, to emulate my aspirations in manhood or middle age.²

While with Joseph, Benjamin received a letter from their oldest brother Joel H., stating that he and one of his sons planned to come to Arizona and join Benjamin and Joseph. The same day the letter arrived, Benjamin read an account in the Deseret News of the sudden death of Joel.³ A few days later, on December 17, 1882, Joseph E. also died.

¹Ibid., pp. 282-283.
²Ibid., pp. 283-284.
³Ibid., p. 284.
Although Benjamin became sick and sometimes almost tired of life, he held to the hope of establishing a settlement in Mexico.\(^1\) To help arrange for the settlement in Mexico, Elder Erastus Snow, Moses Thatcher, and James H. Martineau were sent to Arizona. While in Mesa, Elder Snow organized the Maricopa Stake, with A. F. Macdonald as President. On the recommendation of President Macdonald, Elder Snow and others visited the San Bernardino Ranch to investigate the possibilities of establishing a colony there. They confirmed Benjamin's earlier evaluation of that location and said "the place was not worth purchasing, being destitute of everything necessary to a new settlement." Elder Snow visited other areas but was unable to find any that he felt suitable and becoming very ill, he returned to Salt Lake City.\(^2\)

Since it appeared unlikely that Benjamin would be able to establish the settlement at Gila Bend and have the contented family situation he desired, it was agree that he would return his share of the property to the previous owner. With this Benjamin received back his original investment plus payment for the improvements which he had made to the property. Benjamin felt that his wives still had the same spirit of unkindness previously demonstrated, and all they seemed to want from him was property. Thus, Benjamin agreed to meet their wishes by dividing his property in Tempe and Mesa among them. A committee was formed with sons of each of the three wives participating and President Macdonald presiding. This committee divided the property equally in proportion to the number in each family. A son of each of the three wives was given the responsibility of helping his mother care for the property. Benjamin

\(^1\)Ibid. \(^2\)Ibid., pp. 284-285.
looked upon this transaction as "greatly relieving the burden of his hands to make it heavier upon his heart."\footnote{Ibid., pp. 285-286.}

A Call to Patriarch

Since leaving Spring Lake, Benjamin had not held any official Church position. Because he was getting older and his health would not permit him to carry out some of the more taxing ecclesiastical assignments, Benjamin was called upon to use his abilities in a different manner. President John Taylor recognized Benjamin as a deeply spiritual man, and he wrote Benjamin that he would be ordained a Patriarch by the first member of the Council of the Twelve Apostles who should visit that area. On January 7, 1883, Benjamin was ordained to this high calling by Elder Brigham Young, son of the late President of the Church.\footnote{Ibid., p. 286.} For the remainder of his life, Benjamin was active in performing the main duty of this office, that of giving Patriarchal Blessings.\footnote{\textsuperscript{3}}

Progress in Agriculture

Not long after Benjamin had arrived in Arizona, he began looking for opportunities to continue his work in horticulture. By importing a wide variety of plants from California, Benjamin soon had his two acre plot in Tempe looking like a paradise. In barely two years Benjamin had built a large nursery and established an apiary containing nearly

\textsuperscript{3}A Patriarchal Blessing is believed by the Latter-day Saints to be a personal revelation through a Patriarch to the individual receiving the blessing. It usually contains certain promised blessings from the Lord which the person can receive if he lives a faithful life and specific things of which to beware.
one hundred bee hives.\textsuperscript{1} Through his careful attention and his wide experience, Benjamin was able to build both of these projects into lucrative operations. His accomplishments in such a short time came to the attention of the public, even back in Utah. In the newspaper, the Territorial Enquirer, there appeared this statement:

Our old friend, B. F. Johnson, formerly Bishop of Spring Lake in this county, is following his old and favorite pursuit--horticulture--at Tempe, Maricopa County, Arizona. He and his sons have a very extensive nursery there embracing a quarter of a million trees of almost every description.\textsuperscript{2}

Public interest increased among many of the Utah Saints, and Benjamin was invited to send a detailed report of his successes to the Deseret News. Part of his report is as follows:

\begin{quote}
A WONDERFUL COUNTRY

A LAND FLOWING WITH HONEY AND OTHER THINGS IN PROPORTION

Tempe, Arizona, Oct. 23rd, 1884

Editor Deseret News:

You say through issue of the 14th, in reporting a Bee meeting, "Let us hear from Arizona, again," etc., But first, I wish to explain or correct Brother Stuart's Bee report from Mesa City. About the first of April last I imported from California 70 swarms of bees, 25 of which were paid for by the citizens of Mesa. On their arrival about two-thirds of the bees were dead. I kept them all in my care until the first of June, when all the hives, by careful manipulation, were again well filled with bees and so had full swarms to give to those who had paid for them. . . . Our bees were laid down at Maricopa station at a little less than Seven dollars per hive.

From our 45 stands of bees we extracted not less than TWO TONS OF HONEY

and multiplied them into 200 swarms, which we found to be very bad policy, as we were not able to provide tight hives and it being the dearth season, and not being able to give them the care they needed, no less than 50 of the weakest colonies were destroyed by bee moth.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{1}Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 287.

\textsuperscript{2}Journal History, December 19, 1884.
Had they been kept at the number of about 100 swarms we could have easily attained four tons of honey in all.

But the bee is not the only marvel of increase in this land of almost constant spring and summer. I have just come from

MEASURING A FIG TREE

One of nearly a hundred that I put out as cuttings not 20 months since. It is 10 feet high and near to 10 feet through the limbs, and five inches in diameter of wood at the surface of the ground, and now ripening its third crop of fruit. I also found many trees in my nursery from peach pits planted the past spring, over nine feet high, and grape vines from cuttings planted the spring previous have produced as high as 35 or more pounds of fruit. Could you take a

LOOK AT THE FLOWERS

in front of my door, you would see nearly fifty oleanders that were cuttings the past spring, and now some of them are five feet high and bowed down with the weight of their loveliness. On some of them I counted 15 large festoon of flowers.

And then the pomegranates put out at the same time have also been in bloom and will produce fruit another season, and the olive also, which is long in starting from cuttings, is already over three feet high. But all this is more than you have asked, and perhaps more than you will thank me for, . . .

Benjamin continued to promote industry and efforts to beautifying the landscape as long as he had the opportunity to do so. One of Benjamin's grandsons fondly recalls Benjamin's ability with plants, and his unselfishness, as follows:

He had a pleasant home and lovely landscaped grounds with fine garden and fruit orchard. I know because he often needed me to hoe weeds and do his irrigating. His garden always seemed too big but he said he liked to grow more than he needed as the Indians or someone else might need some. He was always happy to share with his friends, white, Indian, or Mexican.

He loved horticulture, birds and bees and was always experimenting with new varieties of flowers, fruit, nuts and vegetables.

Whenever B. F. Johnson stayed for a few weeks in one place during his extensive travels, he either started a nursery or planted trees and grapes and flowers. Like Johnny Appleseed, I suppose he left a much longer trail of not only apples but so many other varieties

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1Deseret News, November 5, 1884.
of important food-producing fruits, shrubs and vegetables, that only a very few of the most important can be mentioned here. Many large trees are still growing in Salt Lake City that he planted, also at Spring Lake, and Santequin where apple, peach, apricot, and cherries are still bearing. The same was the case in Tempe, Mesilla, Arizona; Deming, New Mexico; Diaz, Juarez and Dublan of Mexico.

Although much of this last twenty years of life was spent in traveling and trying to evade arrest for unlawful cohabitation, during which time he lost most of his nursery plants, orchard, bees, etc., Benjamin continued to contribute in the area of agriculture. As late as 1894 there was a news release about a canaigre plant, which was on exhibit in the window of the Deseret News Building, which was sent there by Benjamin F. Johnson. The article noted:

... a full write up of the subject is promised by Mr. Johnson in a letter soon to follow. Interest in the roots, which ran so high during the late session of the Legislature, ought not to be allowed to dwindle and die out. It contains within it the possibilities for an immense industry--one that should be worth millions to the west.

As it now appeared to Benjamin that President Taylor was going to use members of the Council of the Twelve Apostles to find a suitable settlement in Mexico, Benjamin began to think in terms of spending the evening of his life in the comfort of his home in Tempe.

A Mission to Mexico

In November, 1884, Elders Brigham Young Jr. and Heber J. Grant of the Council of the Twelve Apostles, stopped in Mesa on their way to a

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2Canaigre is a large dock (weed-type plant) of southern U. S. and northern Mexico, having a root rich in tannic acid, and yielding a yellow-orange dye. This is excellent for tanning leather, leaving the leather soft, plump, and tough.

3Deseret Evening News, June 7, 1894.
mission among the Yaqui Indians, one hundred miles south of Guaymas on the California Gulf Coast. They planned to make a treaty with the Yaqui Indians to settle in Southwestern Sonora.¹ A meeting was held in Mesa to select men to accompany them, and Benjamin's name was mentioned as a possible candidate. Elder Young said that he feared Benjamin was too old and weak to endure the hardships that they would be called upon to endure. However, Benjamin greatly desired to go. His desire to make this journey may have been due to his interest in participating in the mission for establishing a settlement in Mexico—which he had been called to do by President John Taylor, or Benjamin may have been motivated by a desire to enjoy the association of the Church leaders. At any rate, Benjamin stated:

... I desired much to go, and felt the spirit of the mission almost thrilling me; and I told the Lord that if he was willing I would go and be valiant and stand in my place. Again my name was called, and Brother Young said he feared I could not do without my tea and coffee, as all who went must keep the "Word of Wisdom."² Benjamin apparently overcame his need for tea, coffee and tobacco as he later wrote in reporting a social activity to the Deseret Evening News: "Sumptuous fastings, songs, recitation, children's plays and teaching, with music by band, occupied the day to the happiness and joy of all, without tea, coffee, tobacco of strong drink being known upon the ground."³ I said he might try me if he would; he consented and said that if I became sick he would care for me in all patience. And calling my son Heber, to accompany me, our carriage was fitted with mules and everything needful for the trip; ...⁴

¹Thomas Patten Romney, Mormon Colonies in Mexico (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1938), p. 53.
²the "Word of Wisdom" is a health code practiced by the Mormons which prohibits the use of tea, coffee, alcohol, or tobacco.
³Maricopa Stake History, February 8, 1895 (on file in Church Historian's Office, (Salt Lake City).
As the group was organized, Benjamin was chosen to be chaplain. The company set out from Mesa on November 18, 1844. When they arrived at the Mexican border, Benjamin was surprised to see a friend from his youth, who had at one time been a prominent citizen. In relating this incident, Benjamin wrote:

Here I visited my old schoolmate, the once great Samuel Brannon, living in great poverty with a Mexican woman, in a poor Mexican hut, decrepit with palsy. As I looked upon him with pity, I thought, "Oh! how art thou so fallen!" In boyhood we were companions; in manhood he was brilliant as a speaker and writer. He came by the ship Brooklyn to San Francisco in 1847, and through the discovery of gold soon amassed wealth. He met President Young soon after his arrival in Salt Lake and vehemently urged a removal to California. He was told that Salt Lake was the place for the Saints; and that if he sought only for riches he would die poor and friendless which had now been fulfilled, as no wife or child was left him. In 1852 on my way to the Sandwich Islands without purse or script, I met him in San Francisco, and although then one of the richest men on the coast, he gave me nothing to sustain a cause he had once loved and ably advocated. Learning we were going to the Yaqui country he told me that in the Maximilian War he advanced the Juarez government one million dollars which was still his due; that the government ceded to him the Yaqui country, and that his going there to claim it had stirred up that people to rebellion and he was now waiting for another grant elsewhere from the Mexican government.¹

Remembering Sam Brannan's illustrious past and the position of trust and leadership which he had once enjoyed with the Church, then contrasting that past with the pitiful condition in which Mr. Brannan now lived, Benjamin was moved to comment, "To die in poverty while waiting for the Mexican government! Poor Sam! To have worked for the Lord would have paid him better!"²

While they were camped at the Mexican border, the expedition was joined by other men who had also been called to make the journey. The addition of these men expanded the company to about twelve wagons.³

¹Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 289. ²Ibid. ³Ibid.
Crossing into Mexico, Benjamin and a few of the other men met with the governor of the territory to learn what they could about the Yaqui Indians. They were informed that the Yaqui Indians were in rebellion against the Mexican government because the Mexicans had attempted to sell and use land which the Yaquis believed had been given to their people by the King of Spain. The missionaries were warned that they would be in great danger if they traveled in the Yaqui country, and it was said that a number of travelers who had visited these people had not returned.¹

In spite of these warnings, the company continued their journey to the coastal city of Guaymas, where arrangements were made for them to travel down the coast aboard a large single-masted fishing vessel. When people in that community heard that the company was planning a trip into Yaqui country, they became quite excited and gathered at the wharf to warn the missionaries that they would be killed. Benjamin recorded the unusual actions of the people:

A Catholic priest came also and most vehemently warned us of certain death but if we would go, he commanded us to come to confession and get absolved from sin before starting; and at last came the Harbor captain to see the vessel clear and to give us final warning that we would certainly be killed by the Yaquis. Their warnings so took hold of poor Valenzuela [a member of the company]² that he dared not go, and so he returned to the camp at Hermosillo.

The boat set sail amid a clamor of warning but was unable to travel because of a strong wind and so returned and anchored for the night. It being the stormy season, the rain fell in torrents. The vessel had not the proper facilities, so Benjamin slept upon three sacks of corn which were partly sheltered by the hatch.

¹Ibid., pp. 290, 294-295.
²Ibid., pp. 291-292.
The following day they sailed down the coast. After four tedious days on board, they met some natives who agreed to lead the brethren to a Yaqui village. The natives informed the missionaries that they would have to cross a flat of mud and water which was about two and one-half miles in width. Benjamin humorously relates this experience:

Hiring them [the natives] to carry our baggage and starting, we found it a deep clinging mud with alternate water nearly bootleg deep, and five miles instead of two and one half.

In this tiring and tedious tramp, Brother Young was signally unfortunate in his avirdupois1 and No. 6 boots, both tending to his greater depth in the mud. And here was my advantage and triumph, both in being web-footed with No. 10 boots, and in being like Pharoah's lean kine, for I was the only one of the party that passed through that terrible ordeal with dry feet, which took nearly three hours to wallow through.

The Elders were kindly received at the Yaqui village, but were told that the leaders of their tribe were not in the village. That evening the missionaries arranged a meeting, of which Benjamin said:

At night around the small fire of sticks and bamboo the natives gathered to listen while Brother Ray as our interpreter gave them a brief history of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, the record of their forefathers; and that we had come to tell them of these things to prepare them for greater knowledge and blessing that would come to them as a people. They listened eagerly and by earnest inquiry sought to obtain all the knowledge they could upon the subject. Although late and we were tired, they could hardly permit the subject to drop, and long sat talking among themselves after we had retired for rest.3

The weather was damp and cold, and Elder Young took a chill and became sick. The day after their arrival in the village, the missionaries were given an audience with one of the chiefs. Because Elder Young was so sick, President Macdonald and Benjamin were sent in his place. Along with the chief, fifty other Indians were seated before them on the ground.

1Stoutness; heft of body.
2Johnson, My Life's Review, pp. 292-293. 3Ibid.
Standing before them and teaching them the principles of the Mormon religion, reminded Benjamin of his experiences in the Sanwich Islands. He said, "The Yaquis were in physiognomy, dress and mode of living very much like the Hawaiians were on the seacoast." ¹

That night the missionaries held their final meeting with the Indians. All the principal natives again gathered around the campfire, and listened eagerly, late into the night. They said they would wait anxiously for the day when the Book of Mormon would be brought to them in the Spanish language and asked how long they could expect to wait for the missionaries to do this. They were told that they might expect it in six months. ² (Ten years later, Benjamin commented that the Book of Mormon had not been taken to these people in the Spanish language.) ³

Being concerned for the welfare of Elder Young, who was now very sick, the company made a hasty departure the following morning and hurried back to the Mexican border. As Elders Grant and Young were preparing to depart for Salt Lake City, Benjamin felt that a bond of love had drawn him and Elder Young together. In recalling their mission, he observed:

... Brother Young was still sick with fever, and contrary to his fears for me, and his willingness to care for me, it has been my privilege while still in health to assist in caring for and ministering to him in sickness, and afterwards providing for his comfort. I had now so learned to know and love him that I felt it almost a robbery that I had not better learned him in the past. I can realize more fully how much can be lost of profitable and happy associations through idle or mischievous misrepensentation of men the most noble and true. ⁴

¹Ibid., p. 294. ²Ibid., p. 295. ³Ibid. ⁴Ibid., p. 296.
On December 15, 1884, the two dignitaries left for their return home. Prior to their departure, Benjamin received Elder Young's blessing which Benjamin later related:

... Apostles Young and Grant are already at the station and parting seemed akin to bereavement. Driving through the city I turned past the railroad station to see and perhaps wave an adieu to them in the distance. Brother Young, seeing me from his window, sent for me, and on coming to him he said, "I am glad you are come, Brother Johnson, for I wished to see you again and bless you. You have disappointed my expectations, and have cared for me when I had fears of your not being able to endure the trip. I have been glad you came and I say, "God Bless you, Brother Johnson." Your face is one of the first in my remembrance, and you have from my earliest childhood been in the front rank of the kingdom, faithful in every calling. And now if there is nothing for you in reward what can there be for me? Who have not so long labored in faithfulness. And now we as Apostles say to you as the Lord said to my father--Go your way and provide comfort for yourself and family, and let no public calling hereafter bind you. Your labors have been enough and we release you from every public labor but such as you volunteer to accept. And as to your Mexican Mission you shall move in that just as you shall desire. You may stay where you are or go elsewhere as you may desire, and gather your family around you just as it shall please you and them; and the Lord shall be with you all your days.¹

This praise and blessing pleased Benjamin, but possibly not as much as the consolation which he received from Elder Young regarding his family troubles. Elder Young said:

And as for your family trouble do not take that to heart, but remember that all good men have lacked appreciation at home. My father had his troubles, Heber C. Kimball² the same; and who ever suffered greater peril in his own home than did the Prophet Joseph? You just take things natural, and go right along and all the good will follow you.³

Being lifted up by Elder Young's generous blessing and consoling instruction, Benjamin said, "His words, so kind and comforting were like oil upon troubled waters of an overburdened heart, now full of tears of joy and sadness at again parting."⁴

¹Ibid., pp. 296-297.   ²Ibid., p. 297.   ³Ibid.
Benjamin arrived home in Tempe on December 26, 1884, where he commenced giving patriarchal blessings. Shortly after his return, he had a severe attack of pleurisy. At the time of his sickness, he learned that Presidents John Taylor and Joseph F. Smith of the First Presidency were in Arizona. Accompanied by others, these Church leaders had made a trip into Mexico in order to locate a suitable place for a colony. On their return they stopped at Mesa and held a meeting. Although Benjamin was still sick he attended the meeting and visited with the brethren. The following day, prior to their departure for Salt Lake City, President Taylor and his party of twenty-four were dinner guests at Benjamin's home. As they were leaving, President Taylor gave Benjamin a blessing that inspired great joy within him.

Opposition to the practice of plural marriage was becoming more and more intense. Along with other polygamists, Benjamin was in almost constant danger of arrest. Shortly before President Taylor's visit, Benjamin had written a letter to the Deseret News of this danger in Arizona:

... BOTH POLITICAL PARTIES are now getting off their heaviest figurative guns, and as the "Mormons" are supposed to be democrats, they come in for the republican heaviest shots. Of course polygamists are being hunted for, and men who are so morally and physically rotten that they require a bandage to hold themselves together, are the ones here and elsewhere who are howling themselves hoarse about "Mormon" corruptions. Quite a number of the citizens of Mesa have been indicted by the grand jury and have given bonds. ... and I think the end is not yet. 1

The Underground

President Taylor counseled Benjamin to go "underground" or into hiding in order to avoid arrest. He also advised him to go to St.

1Deseret News, November 5, 1884. See also Journal History, October 23, 1884.
George and help to take care of Joseph E.'s family there. Benjamin immediately made preparations to leave, although he realized it would mean a considerable personal sacrifice. In regard to his feelings about leaving under these conditions, he remarked:

... I must leave house and improvement unfinished, and my one third in the nursery of over 100,000 trees and vines to become a failure through want of personal attention; and my bees, like the nursery, to be cared for by those without practical experience. My town lots, land and other property to be left with my sons, whose hands were more than full with their own business and cares. Yet I must go, without regard to the loss of the poverty it may entail. Yet why should I complain? I chose to honor God—to keep his command I married plural wives, who, with their children have ever been the objects of my care; and in no manner have they brought to me shame or a disappointment, while in obedience and affection my children have ever been all I could wish. They are a reward for life's labors, a staff for my declining years—my true riches. Then why stop to consider the value of that which I cannot take with me.\(^1\)

After making arrangements for his business and property to be cared for, Benjamin left his comfortable home on the night of February 3, 1885. Benjamin, along with others, traveled by lumber wagon to Maricopa and then to Salt Lake City by train. The weather was cold and snowy, and Benjamin felt worn and weak with age.\(^2\) In Salt Lake Benjamin was impressed with the change both in property and people, since he had last been there. He saw many places that now had great value, which had once been his own. He saw that while he had been struggling with the wants of a large family and pioneering for new settlements and homes, his old associates who had remained in the city had become wealthy. He wondered if his old friends' influence and his comparative poverty would make them not to care to recognize him.

\(^1\)Johnson, *My Life's Review*, p. 299.

\(^2\)Ibid., pp. 299–300.
Benjamin went to President Taylor's office and met with a number of the Apostles and other friends. He was asked to give Brothers F. Little and H. Clawson letters of introduction to Judge Hayden and other public men at Tempe and Phoenix. He was also told that he was now released from the duty of purchasing land in Mexico.¹

In Salt Lake City, Benjamin spent his time visiting with friends and relatives, and giving patriarchal blessings. He was honored to speak at a Church meeting in the Tabernacle and also in the Fifteenth Ward Church.

Although his health was much improved while in Salt Lake City, Benjamin found that the trip south was exhausting. Regarding the last part of the journey, he wrote that the last sixty-five miles to St. George were over the roughest public roads in all Utah; the "Buckboard" was so crowded that he had to hold onto his bedding and satchel; and he arrived almost paralyzed by fatigue.²

Benjamin was warmly received by his many friends and relatives in St. George. The Sunday following his arrival, and for many subsequent Sundays, he was called upon to speak in church meetings. During the next two years, he engaged himself in giving patriarchal blessings, doing genealogical research, attending the temple, and visiting with relatives and friends. He also began writing an account of his life, which he first entitled "A Life Review." It was during this time that he wrote a twelve-page open letter to President Cleveland on the subject of persecuting the Mormons for plural marriage.³

¹Ibid., p. 300.
²Ibid., p. 301.
³Ibid., pp. 302-312. (See Appendix II for this open letter to President Cleveland.)
In July, 1885, Benjamin was visited by Jacob Hamblin of which he recorded:

My old friend, Jacob Hamblin, a "nobleman in disguise," being like myself on the underground, spent with me a few mutually pleasant days, comparing notes of our experiences; and on leaving I blessed him with a full heart, as though I would see him no more on this side of the veil, which proved true, as he died on return to his home.1

That month Benjamin celebrated his sixty-eighth birthday. He wrote, "But my spirit is still young, and only in a pace more slow, with greater inclination for rest, do I realize that I am becoming aged."2 He stated that four years previous, when his brother Joseh E. died at Tempe, Arizona, he had felt there was not much left in life for him, but now his work in the temple and writing and revising of "A Life Review" gave him renewed enthusiasm and vitality.3

During a long interview with President Woodruff, Benjamin was advised to remain in St. George with his family. Sarah Jane was the only one who chose to remain in St. George with him, and before the others of the Johnson family returned to Spring Lake, they attended the temple to receive sealings, second anointings, and other ordinances for themselves and their dead.

On September 29, 1885, Benjamin moved into the home of Lucy B. Young formerly owned by President Young. He lived there during the remainder of his stay at St. George.4

Benjamin devoted much effort and correspondence in genealogical research during the time he was in St. George. About the first of April, 1886, he recorded his feelings regarding this work:

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1Ibid., p. 304.  
2Ibid., p. 311.  
3Ibid., p. 311.  
I had now been in St. George over one year, and although much of the time in poor health, earnestly sought, by writing many letters to obtain a knowledge of my mother's kindred, to get the names and dates of their dead in order to do the necessary temple work for them. I now felt that my labors for them had been accepted. But I had obtained no knowledge of my father's family and kindred, and my heart yearned anxiously for the privilege of becoming a savior to my father's house, as had been promised me; and I had not forgotten my vow to the Lord in the endowment house in 1875, which I felt ready and anxious to fulfill. Oppressed by these feelings I went to the Temple to finish my present work and bring away my clothing, but in conversing with Brother Parnsworth, Temple Secretary, upon the subject of my being through, he asked me why I did not take up the Johnson list of nearly 1000 names, all of Massachusetts, and their genealogy from early 1600 down to near my father's time. His question aroused new thoughts, and the spirit of them filled me, and as a vision, it was opened before me and I saw they were waiting for me to move for their redemption. And as it were a voice said to me, "The Lord heard your prayer and has opened your way. These are your kindred; you now have the key of parentage. [Benjamin was at this time the oldest living member of his family] and it is yours in birthright to lead in your redemption. It is of the Lord, in answer to your prayer."

My aversion to that list was now turned to joy in possessing it --my soul was filled with gladness. I knew it was a revelation from the Lord; and I felt now with all my heart to fulfill as I had vowed, "Even though in poverty to do the work for my father's kindred if the way ever opened for me to do so. The way was now open, and the privilege mine."

Benjamin was in exile, that is, he could not live with his family at St. George for two years. During this time he experienced the great loneliness of those whose families are gone. In spite of this, he was grateful, for unlike many others he was not in prison, so he felt that he could not complain. His philosophy was that what God permits or ordains must be for the best.

Benjamin received a letter from James F. Johnson from Arizona that he was coming to St. George to take him back home. Benjamin answered that with three indictments still against him there, he did not want to go.

1Ibid., pp. 314-315.
2Ibid., pp. 315-316.
James replied that it was the desire of all the family that he leave about the seventh and so at the risk of his liberty, he prepared to leave St. George. In leaving he wrote:

I have here, too, ties in affection that bind me. Here. I have found many kind and dear friends; . . . and though I leave with the hope to return again, how little do we comprehend the leading of the unseen hand or know the designs of the Lord pertaining to our future. In life’s experience we may almost conclude that with us there is nothing certain but the unexpected.1

Throughout his life Benjamin had demonstrated that he had the ability to adjust to situations and make the best of them. Each time he was called upon to leave friends and family, he was able to find happiness and accomplishment in his new environment.

Benjamin enjoyed a pleasant reunion with his family and friends from Santaquin and Spring Lake. Of his visit he wrote:

At Spring Lake I visited that old home where so many of my children were born; where so many of life’s vicissitudes had overtaken me; where joys and sorrows had so often mingled in my cup. Happiness in this life is not without alloy, for He who was greatest of all was "a man of sorrow and acquainted with grief." So let the anguish and disappointment be forgotten, and like Him cherish with gratitude the good received; and with a feeling to forgive and forget every unhappiness of the past, I turn away, in sadness but not with regret, feeling assured the Lord had led us to a land and home of great usefulness and blessing.2

Following a few days in Spring Lake, Benjamin was taken back to Arizona by some of his family. Still fearful of being arrested, he rode the last thirty miles to Mesa under a wagon cover in smothering dust and on a hot day.

Not knowing what course of action to pursue regarding his future, Benjamin frequently discussed his problem with Judge Hayden, a friend to

1Ibid., p. 317.
2Ibid., pp. 314-315.
the Mormon people, and also with Church leaders. He was told of a plan to establish a colony in Mexico in the near future, and he received a letter from Elder Erastus Snow advising him to come to Mexico to investigate the possibility. With the pressures of imminent arrest still great, and not having the money to fight his case in the courts, Benjamin left his home once again. Enroute to Mexico, in May 1887, he met an old-time Salt Lake City acquaintance, Brother John Squires. Brother Squires, in exile to escape arrest due to the practice of plural marriage, was living alone in a tent and teaching in a small school. Benjamin commented that his home in Salt Lake City was a palace compared to this tent and said, "I would not like to be so buried while still alive."2

In Mexico, Benjamin and Elder Snow examined potential sites for settlements, and some land was purchased for that purpose near Colonia Juarez. Elder Snow discussed with him a tract of 7000 acres of choicest lands for $6000, and offered to purchase this for Benjamin to settle on and to develop. Upon investigation, Benjamin found it to be all that Elder Snow had claimed it to be. Although he could see attractive possibilities in the property, he hesitated because of the existing family conditions, and he wondered if his family was united enough to acquire such a rich and desirable inheritance. The following day, while he was trying to decide whether or not this land was for them, he learned that it had been bought by another party, so the matter was dropped.3

1Ibid., pp. 315-316.
2Ibid., p. 317.
3Ibid., pp. 318-320.
As Benjamin prepared for his return to Arizona, he was disturbed by the paradox in which he found himself. Due to his fear of arrest, he was unable to find peace by living near his family in Arizona, and he was physically unable to begin again without them. As the company made a rushed trip through dangerous Apache territory, Benjamin writes:

June 12, [1887], Sunday. Quite worn, I would have gladly rested, but the rest of our party are anxious to get home. "But where is home? Perhaps the "Pen" [Penitentiary] for a term of years, or to continue as a wanderer."

When they returned to Arizona, Benjamin learned that his wife Sarah Melissa was very ill with "spells of sinking and at times very low." He went to Tempe and brought his wife Harriet to attend her sister. In the evening before leaving, he and his sons prayed for and administered to Sarah. He wrote, "Power was given to rebuke and cast out from the house every spirit or power, and a feeling of old-time confidence and love gushed from her heart. She asked me to come tomorrow, and with a feeling that I ought to remain with her, yet not being invited to stay, I returned to Tempe." This feeling of mutual confidence was only brief, however, and the following days matters were worse again.

Benjamin, now in his sixty-ninth year, had to flee from state to state and to stay in hiding to avoid arrest. Unable to relax and enjoy the comforts he had labored so hard to obtain, he resented the attitude and actions of those wives who shunned him. On July 4, 1887, he wrote:

I spent a portion of the day at my son-in-law, Wm. J. LeBaron's where were assembled a number of my children and my wife, Susan A., who has not spoken to me since my return from over two years' exile, hiding from the penalty of the law. . . [That she might have] the privilege, . . . of being the mother of her own dear children, 

1Ibid., p. 321.
2Ibid., p. 322.
and of attaining the highest and almost sacred blessings ever on
the earth bestowed upon woman. But therein is manifest the cunning
of the evil one in destroying family union, and the faith of the
youth in Zion. 1

Benjamin continued in hiding while he counseled with Judge Hayden
and others as to the best course to follow. He would frequently change
his place of hiding when he was warned that the marshals suspected where
he was. The following is an example of the pressure under which he
continually lived.

August, 1887 Aunt Hannah came and told me her girl, Winnie, while
on her way from Phoenix this morning, heard men say they were coming
for Johnson tomorrow morning. I concluded to leave the coming night,
but in the afternoon, as I sat writing, a knock at the door drew my
daughter to it, and she saw the men described by the girl. She gave
me a hint, and I dodged out the back into the garden thicket and
through the orchard, to my son Frank Carlton's await darkness, when,
with S. Openshaw, D. T. and Wm. J. LeBaron and some of my own boys
I left, and about midnight arrived at the Johnson ranch, where we
remained through the night. But I was sleepless, pondering the sub-
ject as to what I should now do, or where to go to avoid the "pen." 2

It was learned later that the two men who had frightened Benjamin
were not after his arrest but were coming to see him about business mat-
ters.

The constant fear of arrest, being unable to appear in public or
visit friends and relatives as he desired, caused Benjamin concern, but
his faith sustained him. As he considered the possibilities of again
having to flee from his home, he commented:

I have now a comfortable residence, surrounded with the choicest
fruits and flowers with every convenience and comfort for my age and
infirmitiess. If I have to leave it, where or when shall I be able
to procure another. Never before did I so feel the need of a home,
or so highly value its comforts. 3

1Ibid., pp. 322-323.

2Ibid., p. 324.

3Ibid., p. 326.
But as the Lord wills, so may it be; and if in, this life there is no place for future home and peace, through faith and patience I may still hope to find it where the hearbeats of disappointment, anxiety and yearnings are all stilled within the mother's bosom.¹

Through the summer months, Benjamin continued to move quietly from place to place among the homes of his family members. He kept occupied visiting, giving patriarchal blessings, writing and carrying on his business pursuits the best he could. Sunday, October 23, 1887, he received the first public recognition he had enjoyed for some time. He recorded:

Today at Sunday School I met Governor Zulick and party from Phoenix. . . . I was invited to accompany them to dinner at President Robinson's, where I was introduced to twenty or more ladies and gentlemen of the highest official station in the territory. In presenting me, President Robinson told them of the indictments against me, and my many years of pilgrimage on the underground. All the party seemed friendly and sympathetic and promised their influence in my behalf should I submit myself to the court.²

The following month, Benjamin was informed that writs had been issued for his arrest. At the suggestion of Judge Hayden and others, he submitted a statement "in plea for justice and personal liberty," to the District Judge and Prosecuting Attorney. In this plea Benjamin explained his background and his reasons for practicing this law. He then explained that he had married all of his wives prior to the Edmund's Law of 1882 which prohibited the practice of plural marriage. He concluded his plea by stating that since coming to Arizona in 1882, he had not lived in unlawful cohabitation at any time.³

On November 26, 1887, the day after he submitted his plea, Benjamin was informed by the Stake Presidency that they had promised the

¹Ibid.
²Ibid., p. 326.
³Ibid., pp. 326-328.
federal officers that he would give himself up and appear in court in two days. Being tired of life in the underground, and having confidence in his Stake Presidency, he prepared to travel to Phoenix.

The Trial

At the appointed time Benjamin submitted to arrest and was treated with kindness and respect by the marshal and also by the members of the federal court. When he appeared in court he entered the plea of "Not guilty," but then following consultation with his attorney and church leaders, he changed his plea to "guilty to the minor charge of unlawful cohabitation," hoping to expedite this suit against, still affirming that he had lived within the law. Of the events which followed, he said:

In reply he [The Judge] said that as I had now pleaded guilty, he would be obliged by law to pass sentence, which he regretted to do if I was not guilty; and looking up the law's penalty for unlawful cohabitation, he asked me if a fine of $75 would hurt me much? On which one of the sons came forward and deposited that sum upon the desk. The judge waved me a kindly discharge, and I left the courtroom followed by officers and attorneys in congratulation, among whom was my self-appointed counselor, Attorney Briggs Goodrich, one of the most eminent lawyers in the territory, who would accept no fee for his services, but taking me by the hand said, "Not one dollar, Uncle Ben, not a dollar. I did not work your case for money, but for my friendship for you. Still there is a favor I would ask--I wish a copy of your statement made to the Judge and prosecuting attorney in plea for justice. I want it to file away as a memorial specimen of Mormon spirit and pleading." I promised him a copy, and in a short time a messenger from his Honor was sent saying he had ordered a rebate of $2 from my fine, which amount was lying on the desk for me.

Through all my experience in court or among the people of Phoenix, it was seemingly more an ovation of respect, than of contempt for a criminal. I returned to Tempe in a freedom of spirit I had not before felt for years.¹

¹Ibid., pp. 329-330.
That this trial was noticed by the church members in Utah, is evident from the following article which appeared in the *Deseret News*, January 21, 1888:

In Arizona.
A few days ago Elders B. F. Johnson, A. F. MacDonald, Jesse Steel, Don M. LeBaron and Orson Richings, who have been under indictment in Arizona for some time, for unlawful cohabitation, gave themselves up, and on being arraigned in court pleaded guilty. The first named was fined $75 and the others $100 each. There are now no cases under the Edmund's law in our sister Territory.¹

Freedom at Last

Benjamin was greatly relieved not to be under the fear of arrest and to be able to appear publicly again. His journal entry for the day following the trial, reads: "November 29, Tuesday. Today for the first time in three years I walk through town to visit my friend, Judge Hayden, and others."²

Benjamin had enjoyed his new-found freedom for less than two weeks, when on December 10, 1887 he had a severe attack of Pleurisy. He suffered all that winter and on March 25, 1888, he wrote: "I have now a painful cough with hemorrhage to show me that without immediate relief my lungs may become affected beyond recovery. And a grave doubt arises as to my long remaining above the sod."³

Fearing that the end was near, Benjamin tried to repair his family problems, but without success. In despair and with little hope, Benjamin recorded:

¹*Deseret News*, January 21, 1888.
³Ibid., p. 332.
As I have just made another fruitless effort to effect a family reunion, I can now more fully realize the combined power that is against me, while age and infirmity are lessening my ability to resist or patiently endure it. And in view of this cruel condition sustained by those to whom I have given my life's best offering—to whom I was never disloyal or untrue as a husband, I feel a sadness that leaves no desire to remain longer in this life than to properly prepare my manuscript, "Life's Review," and to put in order papers that may interest my children after I am gone.¹

This not only appeared to be a crisis in Benjamin's life but it also appeared to be the lowest his morale had ever gone. His sickness continued to get worse. On the night of April 8, 1888, he began coughing up blood. With this new symptom, he became convinced that he would soon die in the same way as his father had died. He told his wife Sara Jane that he felt that he had only about two weeks to live; and from what she saw of his condition, she, too, believed his time would be brief.

That night while Benjamin slept, he had a dream which told him he would become well again. According to Benjamin, the following morning his decaying lungs had become sound and well, and he was again in good health. He commented that he felt like "one coming through a resurrection back to life and hope."²

On June 5, 1888, Benjamin learned of the death of Elder Erastus Snow of the Council of the Twelve Apostles. Since boyhood they had shared many experiences during the early history of the Church. At the organization of the Council of Fifty, Benjamin and Elder Snow were the youngest members called to that select group and were given a special charge by Joseph Smith. The prophet urged them to "remember, and when

¹Ibid., pp. 332-333.
²Ibid., pp. 333-334.
they were hoary with age, to bear testimony of his teachings pertaining to the Kingdom of God as it should be established upon the earth."¹ Benjamin was sure that there was now no person living who was more personally acquainted with the Prophet than he was.

Feeling lonely and partly forsaken by his wives, Benjamin wrote to President Woodruff² seeking permission to marry again. Following is an excerpt from this letter:

office of
B. F. JOHNSON & SONS
dealers in
BEE KEEPERS' SUPPLIES
and proprietors of the
Pioneer Apiary and Mesa Nurseries

Tempe, A. T. July 24th, 1888

Pres. W. Woodruff
Dear Brother

... This young woman through the suggestion of the wife with whom I live and by her own choice has consented to remain with us and fully expresses a wish to go with us to Utah and become my wife, and the object of this writing is to obtain for this your sanction and blessing.

... Each of my present wives have comfortable homes of their own and I am fully able to supply the same for another.

Will you please write me at the earliest that I may know your mind to govern myself thereby in regard to my going north. [To Utah]²

Awaiting reply, I remain,

Truly your brother and Fellow servant,

B. F. Johnson³

The practice of plural marriage in the Mormon Church, was under the direction of the President. The members of the Church believed that the Prophet, or President, was the only person who held the "keys" of

¹Ibid., p. 334.

²President John Taylor died July 25, 1887. He was succeeded by Wilford Woodruff.

³Johnson, letter to Pres. Wilford Woodruff, on file in Church Historian's Office.
authority to preside. No plural marriage was to be instituted without the sanction of the President of the Church. Although Benjamin greatly desired the love and attention of a companion in marriage, he recognized the presiding authority of President Wilford Woodruff. President Woodruff apparently refused Benjamin's request, because there is no record that he married again.

On July 28, 1888, Benjamin celebrated his seventieth birthday. As Benjamin relived in his memory, the many experiences of his life, he wrote:

"... I am left to wonder that so much of joy and gladness, so much of grief and sadness, so much of hopes and fears, so much of love and yearning, so much of deathless affection, so much of poverty and toil, so much sickness and anguish, so much sorrow and tears with death and mourning, could be crowded into the brief space of one short normal life."

It has been just fifty-seven years since he was a young man in Ohio and his life had truly been crowded with experiences. However, he had never been accustomed to looking only into the past, and with typical optimism, he said: "I still retain a degree of vitality, with hopes that for a time ... I may continue my labors."²

Benjamin continued his experiments in horticulture. Much time and effort was spent in developing new varieties of plants. On one occasion while he was out in the country collecting cactus seeds and plants, he had an accident which nearly proved fatal. Again he attributed his delivery from death to divine protection.³

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² Ibid., p. 337.
³ Ibid., pp. 338-339.
During the fall of 1888, Benjamin imported "large quantities" of fruit trees from Alabama. He exported many trees and bees to the Mormon colonies in Colonia Juarez and Colonia Diaz, Mexico.\(^1\) With his background in public office, his ability to write, and his knowledge of plants, Benjamin was soon recognized as an authority in the field of plant life. Articles which he wrote on this subject were published in newspapers, and many people came to him to order plants and to get information on caring for them. Benjamin was pleased with the effect he was able to have on non-Mormons, or "outside people" as he called them. He said that they seemed to marvel greatly that a Latter-day Saint, especially a polygamist, should have advanced ideas. As he had done throughout his life, Benjamin believed that this influence was the reason the Lord was keeping him at Tempe.

Benjamin held membership in the Beekeepers' Association, which was "an important corporation of business men." Because of his reputation in horticulture and his contributions in the bee industry, he was elected as the President of that association at a meeting held in Phoenix. He felt that this broadened his association and influence with the non-Mormon men. Benjamin sought friends among these people, hoping to lessen the opposition to the church. He also bore them his testimony of the truthfulness of his church, in hopes they might become converted to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Through his zealous efforts in sharing his religious convictions with others, he was able to influence two preachers from the Christian Church, and during the spring of 1890 they became converted to the gospel. These two men, J. M. Crosby

\(^1\)Ibid., pp. 338-339.
and George W. Ingram, had been prominent in their own church, and Mr. Ingram had been a mission President in New Mexico and Arizona. On June 14, 1890, Benjamin baptized these men and they became very active members in the area.¹

Opposition to the Mormon practice of plural marriage now began to revive. In the fall of 1889, Territorial Governor Lewis Wolfley made a public attack upon the Mormon polygamists. Governor Wolfley, a bachelor, who had the reputation of being "a man of sterling qualities and high ideals," made the attack soon after his appointment as governor. He was, however, released from office before his term expired because of his lack of executive ability and his inability to get or hold public support.² Benjamin became so annoyed by the Governor's attack on the church that he resorted to his old method of resisting attacks—that of writing an answer to the charges. He wrote an open letter which was printed in a local newspaper. Part of Benjamin's letter is as follows:

Brothers in harmony.
What one of Tempe's citizens has to say to our dictator.
Tempe, Arizona, October 26, 1889.

Open letter to his excellency, Governor Lewis Wolfley:
My dear Governor:

As we should be good Republicans as well as fellow citizens, suppose we have a little whisper together on this troublesome Mormon question. Now as to Mormon morality, Governor. Is it really so much more immoral in a true sense to bring home a second wife, where all concerned are agreeable, than to keep mistresses, ... Governor, did you ever hear of a pauper among the Mormons? Or of a house of ill fame? A gambling hell? Or a whisky saloon? Until they were forced upon them by carpet bag, federal officers of their

¹Ibid., pp. 340-347.

²Arizona Historical Review, A Quarterly, III, No. 3 (Published quarterly by Arizona State Historian, Phoenix, Arizona), pp. 11-12.
territory? And as to our "Christian and Moral Law," now Governor, I have read the Bible through again and again and I find that plural marriage was common in the days of Christ and His Apostles. Yet they failed by any word to admonish or reprove it and while nearly all the men of whom and by whom the Holy Bible was written were polygamists; and as Christ so honored plural marriage, how can we call laws Christian, inacted against it? . . . And how, my dear Governor, do the Mormons differ from other political parties, voting for their friends instead of their enemies? To me, Governor, a man would appear an idiot who would vote for his pronounced enemy. And I am quite of the opinion, Governor, that if they would conclude to vote with us it would greatly diminish that deformity, so apparent while they vote with the Democrats, . . . And regarding their numbers in our territory, Governor, is there any constitutional law to forbid even eighty thousand instead of eight thousand to find homes in Arizona? and suppose, Governor, that no one was allowed to become a citizen but those who were above criticism, whom everybody loved, what place of use would there then be for you and me, Governor.

Respectfully,
B.F. Johnson.

This action, on Benjamin's part, was apparently unwise, because as his letter appeared in the Arizona Gazette it seemed to create considerable sensation which later developed into animosity. However, Benjamin felt that the reason the Governor was soon removed from office was because of his attack against the Church.

As opposition to plural marriage continued, Benjamin was brought into the public eye, Because of his prominence in the area and because of his public support of plural marriage, he was the object of an editorial attack in the Arizona Republican. He said that the editor portrayed him as a Mormon horror, who had a dozen wives and a hundred children living within the broad light of Christian civilization.

In June of 1889, Benjamin again wrote in defense of his practice of plural marriage. It was entitled "My reply to the Republicans:

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1 Johnson, My Life's Review, pp. 341-343.
2 Ibid., p. 347.
"Mormonism as an Issue." This article was printed in pamphlet form and was published in the *Arizona Gazette*. According to Benjamin, the public reaction to his article was frightening. He said that the public raked up all the hear-say crimes and and horrors of Mormon history through sixty years and poured them all upon his devoted head, and then they called for the strong arm of the law to take into its iron clutch the criminal wretch that he was made out to be.¹

Perhaps it was his loss of prestige, or the intense opposition to his beliefs, or perhaps it was that he was growing old, but whatever the cause, during 1890, he found himself growing physically weaker. His business, too, was becoming less profitable and he felt that he could no longer endure hard labor, or be active in business affairs. However, Benjamin enjoyed the occasional visits of General Authorities of the Church and loved the association of his children and grandchildren. On his seventy-second birthday, July 28, 1890, he was honored by a party which was attended by over two hundred family members and friends.

On January 1, 1890, Benjamin noted that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was now completing its sixtieth year of existence, and felt that the church was half-way through its existence prior to the Second coming of Christ. He supposed that there would be another sixty years in which to preach the gospel, gather the Saints, redeem the center Stake of Zion, build the holy Temple, convert the Lamanites, rebuild Jerusalem and received the Ten Tribes from the North.

At the beginning of 1890 he expected to see conditions improve and move quickly toward the fulfillment of these prophecies, but by November it was obvious that this was not so. His writing had fanned a flame which built an inferno of opposition, and public resentment toward him continued to increase until it was no longer safe for him to remain in Arizona. Thus in his seventy-third year, Benjamin was to write still more pages in his book of life.
CHAPTER X

EXILE IN MEXICO

As resentment toward the Saints increased, the Church leaders became concerned for the safety of those who were living in plural marriage. On December 7, 1890, after speaking at the Nephi Ward Conference, in the Maricopa Stake, Arizona, Benjamin was informed by his Stake President that he should plan to leave for Mexico immediately in order to avoid arrest for unlawful cohabitation. President Hakes also informed Benjamin that there were others who planned to leave on the train that night. Benjamin was greatly concerned about this unexpected turn of events. He felt that he had lived within the law and that it was unreasonable to charge him with unlawful cohabitation. However, his first wife had died and the others were not regarded as legal. He had to either remarry one of his wives under the law or be imprisoned for unlawful cohabitation. Benjamin said that he would not outrage his own sense of honor by making a choice between his wives, therefore his only alternative was to exile himself from them all.¹

Quickly and secretly, Benjamin prepared to leave Arizona. His needs for his journey were kindly provided by family members. He said that he made a hasty departure in the winter season, bidding adieu to the comforts of home and dear ones, to take a chance of finding a place of shelter and safety outside of his native land.²

¹Ibid., p. 351.
²Ibid., p. 352.

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The train on which Benjamin was riding was detained for five hours at Maricopa. Because he had to spend the time waiting in an open room which had no fire, he contracted a cold. According to Benjamin, he suffered so much that he feared he might not recover, but once again he felt that the Lord blessed him and he was able to continue his journey south.

For some time the Church leaders had felt that they were not obtaining justice in the court trials for unlawful cohabitation. In 1884, President Taylor had written a letter to the President of one of the Arizona stakes, as follows:

A general attack is being made upon our liberties throughout all the territories where our people reside. It is said that prosecuting officers in making this raid are acting under instructions from the department at Washington. Whether this be true or not, there can be no question that there is apparently a concert of action on their part to push our people to the wall and to destroy our religious liberty and with it our religion itself. In Utah Territory God-fearing men, whose only offense is that they have obeyed a command of the Almighty, are thrust into prison while appeals are pending in a higher court, being refused bail, a boon which should be granted to every person not guilty of a capital offense. In Arizona we learn that the same course is being pursued, that to be accused before any of these courts is equivalent to being convicted. Our counsel has been and is to obtain a place of refuge under a foreign government to which our people can flee when menaced in this land. Better for parts of families to removed and go where they can live in peace than to be hauled into jail and either incarcerated in the territory with thieves and murderers and other vile characters, or sent to the American Siberia in Detroit to serve out a long term of imprisonment.

Although as early as 1882, Benjamin and other church leaders had gone into Mexico to try to locate a proper site for the settlement in that country, there was not a permanent Mormon colony established

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there until 1885. This settlement was named Colonia Diaz.\(^1\) Part of Benjamin's family had gone to Mexico to aid in the establishment of settlements. Benjamin had assisted them by shipping trees and bees to their colonies.

On December 14, 1890, Benjamin arrived at Colonia Diaz and was greeted warmly by his family. He was also welcomed by Elder George Teasdale, a member of the Quorum of Twelve Apostles, who was presiding over the mission there. Soon after his arrival, Benjamin decided to prepare a home in this land and to encourage the rest of his family to join him. He apparently gave up hope that conditions would improve in Arizona within the near future.

In Mexico, members of the Church frequently sought counsel and Patriarchal blessings from him. He enjoyed a particularly close association with Elder Teasdale, who frequently called upon him to speak in various church meetings. Benjamin was asked to sit on the stand beside the visiting general authority in all public meetings.\(^2\)

The winter of 1890 - 1891 was a time of general sickness for the Saints in the Mexican colonies. There were epidemics of smallpox, diphtheria and other diseases. Benjamin spent much time ministering to the sick. After continuously laboring for several weeks at one time, and being unable to stop the spread of smallpox, the leaders did not know what course to follow. On February 26, 1891, Benjamin wrote:

A number of persons exposed to smallpox now have incipient disease and send for Apostle Teasdale to administer to them. He came to council with me and for The sake of others who would

\(^1\)Ibid., p. 53.

be exposed, we felt it not wise to visit them until our duty is made more plain. So we retired to a private room and together called upon the Lord to show more plainly our path of duty. We asked Him that the terrible disease might be stayed, and its power be broken among the people, which it at once was, and from that hour no case of smallpox was developed among the Saints at Diaz.\(^1\)

As Benjamin became established in Mexico he tried to persuade one of his wives to join him. When he received no response from any of them, he again became very despondent. He continued, however, to make arrangements for a permanent settlement by selling his property in Tempe and Mesa at a great sacrifice, so that he could buy land in Colonia Diaz. He also arranged to have much of his nursery stock shipped to him in Mexico so that he could set up his business there.

The prospect of facing his remaining years without the kind attention of a wife was not pleasing to Benjamin. He sadly wrote: "At no period of my life did I feel the want of a home with its comforts, as at present."\(^2\) Under these discouraging conditions, he considered taking a wife from among the Saints in Mexico but he realized there were no more plural marriages sanctioned by the Church. In September of 1890, President Wilford Woodruff issued the "manifesto" which was a declaration by the President of the Church announcing the discontinuance of plural marriage. Again, Benjamin recognized and supported the man who he believed to be a Prophet of God. In writing in his journal he said: "But my wives do not wish to come to Mexico, and to enjoy the comfort and sympathies of a home. I would be compelled to look elsewhere, which the "manifesto does not permit."\(^3\) Regarding Benjamin's

\(^1\)Ibid., p. 258.

\(^2\)Ibid., p. 357.

\(^3\)Ibid., p. 362.
attitude toward plural marriage and the manifesto, one of his son's declared:

To him, as he taught his family, and exemplified in his life, the Revelation on Polygamy was a divine and sacred commandment of God, and in the same measure was the Manifesto both sacred and binding.

The main theme of his teaching to members of his family was "OBEY THE COUNSEL OF THE HEADS OF THE CHURCH, FOR THEY ARE PROPHETS OF THE LORD,. UPON OBEDIENCE TO THIS WILL DEPEND YOUR HAPPINESS . . . HERE AND: HEREAFTER."¹

Through the summer of 1891 the crops in Mexico suffered under a severe drought. The prospects for the saints in the settlements appeared very dark. Benjamin's nursery and gardens failed and he lost hundreds of dollars. His troubles were complicated by ill health and he considered the possibility of returning to Arizona. However, this did not appeal to his feelings of pride since his wives refused to follow him into exile. On August 15, 1891, Benjamin received a letter informing him that it was the desire of the Stake Presidency as well as of his family for him to return. Since the manifesto had been issued by President Wilford Woodruff, the threat of prosecution of polygamists decreased in Arizona. Although Benjamin had not been enthusiastic about returning to his former home, for reasons of comfort and health, he now began to consider the possibility. The drought lasted all summer and conditions were critical. Almost no crops had been raised and the cattle on the ranges were starving. During their church service on August 25, 1891, the congregation in Colonia Diaz decided to seek divine aid in obtaining relief from the drought. Benjamin was called upon to exercise his faith in behalf of the rest of the saints. Concerning his part in this meeting Benjamin said:

¹Elis H. Johnson, Affidavit sworn at Maricopa County, Arizona, on July 22, 1959. (On file in Church Historian's Office, Salt Lake City.)
Being called to make the closing prayer, with a feeling of assurance, that He would, I asked the Lord to send rain, to make the earth and its perishing cattle glad, that His saints might have cause to rejoice in His mercy and blessing. Clouds soon overspread the sky and rain is still [two days later] coming in abundance.¹

The rain continued for days. About one week later Benjamin travelled with Elder Teasdale to Colonia Juarez, for the purpose of dedicating a church building. They were surprised to find that the rain was not general. September 1, 1891, Benjamin recorded in his daily journal that only four miles from Colonia Diaz they found the ground still dry. Apparently the rain had fallen only at Diaz.²

When his health would permit, Benjamin continued to give patriarchal blessings, to travel on speaking assignments, and to visit with relatives and friends. On November 25, 1891, he received more letters from Arizona urging him to return to his family, so Benjamin made preparations to return to Mesa. Because of their love and respect for Benjamin, the Saints in Mexico honored him with a surprise social prior to his departure. Elder Teasdale and "other kindred and friends," gathered in an evening of spontaneous music, recitation, dancing, speaking, songs and feasting. After describing the activities which went into the morning hours, Benjamin writes:

With full hearts and a "God bless you" from each, all returned to their homes, leaving me to ponder the kind words of Apostle Teasdale, of the Bishop, of Sister Teasdale and others, loving words spoken for my comfort, which I would not repeat, but my eyes were not dry while listening to them.³

¹Ibid., pp. 363-364.
²Ibid., p. 364.
³Ibid., p. 367.
Benjamin made plans to travel with a company, but just at the time the group was prepared to leave, a little girl of whom Benjamin was particularly fond, became very ill, so he remained behind to help care for her. He gave her a blessing and told her that she would get well. According to Benjamin, she then began to improve.

Although, after a year in Mexico, he found it difficult to leave his friends and part of his family, he knew that he must return to Arizona. After bidding fond farewells, Benjamin travelled by train and arrived in Mesa the end of 1891.
CHAPTER XI

THE EVENING OF LIFE

Soon after his return to Arizona, Benjamin took a severe cold and was sick in bed for eight weeks. During this time he felt that he was oftentimes near death, but finally his condition improved. While he was ill he longed for the care and attention of one of his wives, but was disappointed as none of them visited him during that time. When he was recovering, he wrote the following in his journal:

My children have given me kindest attention and have carefully supplied my wants. In their solicitude and love I have great consolation, yet there is in the heart, yearnings that the love and companionship of children cannot fully supply. I returned from Mexico animated by a hope that the mothers of my children would be pleased to see me and meet me in kindness, but nothing appears more certain than the unexpected. Sixty days with lonely nights in sickness I have waited, in hope for the coming of those I so much wished to see, have listened for the foot fall and watched the open door, yet no wife has come in affection to look after my welfare or to minister to my wants. Such can never be my feelings toward the dear mothers of my children, for no matter the distance or the sacrifice, were they in sickness, tribulation, or real want, my feet would hasten to minister to them, comfort and bless them. I do not write this in feeling of reproach, for I am not without fault, but that our children, in a coming time may comprehend in a degree the great love I ever cherished for their mothers.¹

Concerning this time in Benjamin's life, one of his granddaughters wrote:

We lived so close to him [Benjamin] when we were in Mesa and would stop in . . . on our way to town, and grandfather would be there sitting in his chair in his room or in the garden. I remember him so well. . . .

¹Ibid., pp. 370-371.
I realize now how lonely grandfather was in his last days and how thoughtless we must all have been ... we could have done a lot of things we didn't do.

Although Benjamin's condition improved slightly he was still too weak to leave his bed. After having been in bed nearly three months and having been unable to attend his church meetings, the ward leaders took the sacrament to him. This caused him to feel "renewed in spirit." While in bed, Benjamin continued writing his "Life Review," which he felt was a duty he owed to his children.

In the spring of 1892, Benjamin's wife, Sarah Jane invited him to live with her in her home in Tempe. Benjamin's pride would not permit him to accept this invitation, and he said "I am wondering if the time is come for women to rule over us ...?" Although he felt humiliated and hurt for having had to live so many years alone, he appreciated the apparent change in his wife's attitude toward him. When Sarah Jane decided to move to a new home, Benjamin proposed that they build and own a home jointly. Since this proposal was acceptable to Sarah Jane, he felt pleased that his family relations had improved.

During the remainder of 1892, Benjamin continued his church activities and writing. He also re-entered business, and became chairman of a company which was organized to establish a flour mill in Mesa. Many of his articles on agriculture were printed in Arizona publications. He struggled to establish himself again in various industries but found that his venture in Mexico had been too costly. Even though he had lost much financially, Benjamin did not blame the church leaders for his

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misfortune. That he still had his faith in an overruling providence is evident for he recorded in his journal:

All my investments of nursery stock, labor and money paid out in [Colonia] Díaz have proved wholly a loss, and to me only an experience remains, and were I disposed to criticize the counsel that called me there, I should say as do others, "There was no necessity for my going," but I know it was all for my good. Although it brought me to poverty it was an experience and a test that I needed.¹

Benjamin worked diligently and managed frugally until he was once more able to become well established in business. In a letter written to the Deseret News, August 17, 1895, he describes the prosperous conditions in the Mesa area.

The present season here is one of general health and good abundance in field crops and fruits; . . . the peach, pear, plum, quince, pomegranate, with the coming orange, olives and other fruits are in plenty. We yet have little market to encourage the producer and so in money matters times are still hard. I am told of 500 tons of stacked hay that sold within the last few days for less than that many dollars. This is a country of great abundance just now in everything but money, and in that it is improving a little. Our steam roller flouring mill is a success and is now furnishing a fine commercial brand.

Our summer has been dry and rainless. The river was low for a time but showers are now coming, canals are overflowing, and all appears green and verdant again.

"Uncle Ben"²

A special report on the growth and progress made in Mesa, was published in the World's Fair edition of the Arizona Gazette on September 28, 1893. Part of this article was devoted to agriculture. In this section, B. F. Johnson, Sons and Company were singled out for their production of canned fruit. It reported that Benjamin had canned

¹Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 383.
²Maricopa Stake History, August 17, 1895, on file in the Church Historian's Office Salt Lake City.
up to four thousand cans of "superior quality peaches, apricots, and grapes. . . ."\(^1\)

The dedication of the Salt Lake Temple occurred in the spring of 1893 and some of the Arizona Saints planned to attend. Benjamin wanted to participate in this historic event but he was afraid he would be unable to do so because of ill health. As the time for their departure grew nearer, his health began to improve, and he decided to make the trip to Salt Lake City.

Benjamin was warmly welcomed by members of his family who were living in Salt Lake, and was thrilled when the Presidency of the Church assured him that he would have a seat at the temple dedicatory services. Following the dedication of the Temple on April 6, 1893, he attended the General Conference of the Church. While in Salt Lake City, he spent time visiting relatives and friends and giving patriarchal blessings. One of the family he visited was J. W. Fox, Jr. In appreciation to Benjamin for his influence in her life, Ruth M. Fox wrote the following poem:

To Benjamin F. Johnson

In feebleness, dear Uncle Ben
My gratefulness I try to pen;
I fain would have thee know that I
Thy name will cherish till I die.

I would that these few lines may be
A bond of love twixt thee and me,
For kindly words from thy lips fell
Which healed my heart and all is well.

A noble patriarch art thou
That thou canst graft so green a bough
Upon thy fruitful Family tree
But worthy I will try to be.

In blessing me thou shalt be blessed
To what extent can't be expressed,
But know the influence of thy love
May op'n for me the gates above.

And let the love of God divine
Into my heart and bosom shine
That I like thee may send it forth
To bless the sad and sore of earth.

And like the Patriarchs of old
Thy words and deeds though not all told
Shall follow down the stream of time
And shed their rays on thee:and:thine.

Say wilt thou not be blessed indeed
In yonder realm where thou shalt lead
If too the Father I shall tell
This is the man whose heart did swell

With sympathy and love for me,
And helped my heart from sin to free
That I might choose the broader way
That leads to life and endless day.

I honor him, our Uncle Ben,
As one of thy most noble men
And when his crown shall given be
Place one bright gem in it for me. 1

Benjamin returned to Arizona and continued his activities there.
He enjoyed the comforts of his home and surrounding gardens and felt
pleased that his residence was considered to be the finest in Mesa. 2

On January 12, 1894, Benjamin noted the anniversary of the
birth, death, and marriage of his father. He was impressed with the
growth which had occurred within the Johnson family, and the contrib-
utions made by them.

. . . we have found nearly two thousand that by birth or marriage
are kindred in the Johnson family tree. No doubt by far the largest
number of descendants from any one pair of parents who received the
gospel and died within the Church and of all who were born in or
have married into the Johnson family up to the present, no one has

1Johnson, My Life's Review, pp. 379-380.  2Ibid., p. 381.
yet apostatized from the Church, and of my own family of children, grandchildren and great grandchildren, as one branch of the Johnsons we are now over three hundred in number. 

Although Benjamin's descendants were many, he showed an interest in each one. He enjoyed the opportunity to visit with them, especially on his birthday. Benjamin's grandson, William F. LeBaron recalls:

Grandpa was always happy when 28 /of/ July came and the entire population would assemble to celebrate his birthday . . . . He loved his friends, but was especially fond of his own wives and children, and seemed extra kind to the grandchildren; took care to learn all their names, treated them not as babies but as people and he enjoyed giving each one a Patriarchal blessing as soon as they were old enough.  

On July 28, 1894, Benjamin celebrated his seventy-sixth birthday. An account of that day was written in the Deseret News.

Yesterday a part of the family of Patriarch Benjamin F. Johnson, to the number of 144, and thirteen friends of the family, met in the grove of Don M. LeBaron, in Nephi Ward, to celebrate the seventy-sixth birthday of the Patriarch . . . . A pleasing sight it was, to see our Patriarch, looking hale and full of life, despite his 76 years, surrounded by so many of his children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, although many were unavoidably absent, and by a few of his many friends. Had it not been a family reunion the grove would have been too small to shelter his many friends, and therefore a general invitation could not be extended.

The table being cleared, the family choir gave a greeting song, followed by a short address from the Patriarch, touching upon his childhood and youth, passed amid the sorrows, cares and fires of persecution in Ohio, Missouri and Illinois . . . . Responding to a call, short addresses were made by James H. Martineau, Bishop Samuel Openshaw and J. M. Crosby, all bearing testimony founded upon many years personal knowledge of the integrity of Brother Johnson and his unswerving devotion to the cause of God during his sixty-three years' membership in the Church. . . not a feeling except that prompted by love or friendship was manifest. At the conclusion the patriarch bestowed a fatherly blessing upon all, and we separated with a feeling that such reunions should be more frequent.

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1Ibid., p. 382.

2William F. LeBaron, letter written to the writer, op. cit.

3J. H. Martineau, reporting to the Deseret Evening News, August 4, 1894.
The combination of Benjamin's dignity, his intense faith and his love for others made an indelible mark upon the memory of many who came in contact with him. Another grandson, Neal LeBaron, who lived close to Benjamin until he was seven years of age, related the following:

Grandfather's home was situated just across the street from us and after my father's death he would come to our home almost every day to try and help and comfort us. Well do I remember many times sitting on his knee and hearing him tell of early Church experiences, of the Prophet Joseph—his friendship and fine relationship with the Indians, etc.¹

In his later years, Benjamin not only enjoyed a closer association with his family, but he was also shown respect and honor by the Church leaders. At stake conferences, or whenever some of the general authorities would visit Mesa, Benjamin would usually meet with them and he insisted on entertaining them. "It was well known that 'Uncle Ben' would be one of the main speakers at every conference."² Regarding Benjamin's ability as a speaker, one acquaintance stated: "I heard him speak ever so many times at the Alma Ward where I lived, and in the old Tabernacle. Whenever he was in Mesa and called to speak he drew a large crowd and everyone liked to hear him. He was a fine speaker."³ One resident of Mesa wrote:

... I recall seeing Benjamin F. Johnson many times in our L.D.S. meetings, sitting on the stand as a patriarch, and also going to and from church in his long swallow-tailed coat and hat, all in black, and using a cane. In my youth (at the age of about 15 years) I considered him one of our leaders in the church.⁴

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¹Homer Neal LeBaron, affidavit made in Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada, September 27, 1960. Copy in possession of writer.

²William F. LeBaron, letter to writer, op. cit.

³John L. Riggs, Affidavit sworn at Mesa, Arizona, on September 22, 1960. (On file in the Church Historian's Office, Salt Lake City.)

⁴E. E. Brundage, affidavit sworn on September 24, 1960, in Mesa, Arizona. Copy in possession of writer.
Benjamin made an unusual impression upon the mind of Joseph E. Robinson. In a letter written a few years following Benjamin's death, Mr. Robinson wrote:

C. S. Sellers, Mesa, Ariz.  
Los Angeles Cal.  
June 28, 191_

Dear Brother:

At last an opportunity has afforded me of giving a brief account of the dream I had when I was a child, so far as it concerned the late B. F. Johnson.

It was related by Bro. Cowley in the S. S. conference at Mesa, June 14, 1903, 28 years after it occurred, and I bore testimony to it, altho I saw Pat. Johnson for the first time at the conference June 14, 1902. At that time I was sitting on the rostrum with Apostle Hyrum M. Smith, J. Golden Kimball, Pres. Mikes and other brethren, when the door, at our back opened and Bro. Johnson came in.

I recognized him at once as the one I had seen in a dream when I was a lad 8½ years of age. I arose and offered him my chair and trembling with suppressed emotion, called him by name. He was much surprised and replied, "That's my name, but I do not remember of ever having met you before." and asked me how I knew him. I told him he never had met me but after The meeting I would tell him how I knew him. When the services were over and he learned my name, he said "Now for that explanation."

I said, "First I should like to ask you two or three questions."

"Very well," he said.

Then I asked, "Did you ever know the Prophet Joseph?"

He drew himself up proudly and said, "I should think I did. I was his confidential secretary and advisor for a time in the early days of Commerce, or Nauvoo, and he married my oldest sister for one of his plural wives."

I said, "Were you ever a military man?"

He said, "Yes, in a way. Joseph chose me to succeed Hyrum as his aide-de-camp in the Nauvoo Legion, but owing to conditions immediately following I did not fill that position, however, later I became an officer in the first page torn but word missing is probably "militia" of the state of Deseret."
Then I asked him if he ever used tobacco. He was somewhat ashamed and said, "What made you ask me that?"

I said, "Because I wanted to know but I did not want to be offensive in asking."

"Well," said he, "at the time when you are speaking, I am ashamed to admit it I used to sometimes smoke a cigar." Then I told him of a dream wherein I saw the Prophet Joseph Smith talking with the other men. One of the men seemed on more intimate footing with the Prophet, than either of the others, --tall, straight, lithe in figure, with black hair cut rather long, piercing dark eyes, an aquiline nose, and a hearty infectious laugh. He carried a cane and smoked a long black cigar. Next to the Prophet his likeness was fixed upon my childish mind.

Years after in telling my dream to Judge James Lewis, who was well acquainted with the Prophet, he said, "You have given a most accurate description of him, the Prophet, and that dark military looking man you speak of was a man by the name of Johnson, who was closely associated with the Prophet."

That was the reason I knew the name of Bro. Johnson when I first saw him in that meeting at Mesa so long afterwards. As to what the Prophet said to me, etc. has no place in this story.

I treasure very highly my acquaintance with Bro. Johnson and a wondrous Patriarchal blessing he gave me the remainder of the letter is either missing or too badly to follow. 1

Perhaps the last great public honor which came to Benjamin occurred on October 6, 1900. At the General Conference of the Church, held in the Tabernacle in Salt Lake City, Benjamin was called upon to be the concluding speaker of the afternoon session. His remarks were recorded as follows:

My dear brethren and sisters, it is a pleasure that I did not expect, to have the privilege of standing here to bear my humble testimony to the truth of the words this day spoken in your hearing—the truth of the great fact that God has set His hand to the accomplishment of the great purpose of gathering together all things in one in Christ. I feel to express my gratitude that God has

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1 Letter from Joseph E. Robinson, written in Los Angeles, California between 1911 and 1919. (The last digit of the year is torn off from the letter.) The letter is on file in the Church Historian's Office.
given me the privilege of living in this day of the harvest time of the earth—a period toward which all energies, all desires and hopes have been directed from the earliest times. I know that Joseph Smith was a Prophet of the Most High God. It is a pleasure to me to look around upon this vast assembly and say to you that this is my testimony, and that I know that the work in which we are engaged as Latter-day Saints, is the work of God. Amen. 1

Following Benjamin's testimony, the choir sang the anthem "Light and Truth," after which the benediction was given to the conference.

The spirit of colonizing and pioneering which had been so important in Benjamin's life, was passed on to his posterity. In March, 1902, he watched forty-two of his descendants leave Arizona to find new homes in Canada. The company of eight teams and wagons travelled to Southern Alberta where they established settlements. Again in 1903, Benjamin saw his wife Harriet Naomi Holman Johnson, and her widowed daughter Harriet Naomi LeBaron leave with his four grandchildren, and travel by train to Canada. He never saw his wife, Harriet, again as she died in Raymond, Alberta on August 2, 1914. 2

As Benjamin was now one of the few living members of the Church who had been a close personal friend of Prophet Joseph Smith, and who had witnessed scenes of early Church history, the leaders requested him to record some of the important things he remembered. This was done through a letter to President Anthon H. Lund of the First Presidency, 3 and a more lengthy letter addressed to Elder George S. Gibbs. 4


2Interview with Homer Neal LeBaron of Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada, on July 15, 1966.

3Benjamin F. Johnson, letter to President Anthon H. Lund, from Mesa City, Arizona, May 12, 1903. (On file in Church Historian's Office.)

4Benjamin F. Johnson, letter to George S. Gibbs. (Original on file in Church Historian's Office.)
The largest gathering ever held in Benjamin's honor was the celebration of his eighty-seventh birthday anniversary. This event, held less than four months before his death, was described as follows in the Deseret Evening News:

Mesa, Arizona, Aug. 15.—The eighty-seventh anniversary of the birth of Patriarch Benjamin Franklin Johnson occurred on July 29, 1905, and his children and friends prevailed upon him to be "at home" during the day. An announcement to that effect was made in the Mesa Free Press, and as a result probably as many as 300 people gathered at some time during the day to shake hands with the venerable patriarch and receive his hearty blessing. Preparations in the way of light refreshments had been made and the guests were treated to grapes, cantaloupes, lemonade ice cream and cake.

Elder F. T. Pomeroy received the guests and took charge of the gathering, and about 4:30 p.m. he called the people to order, and after a hymn and prayer, he gave a brief sketch of the life of "Uncle Benji," from his boyhood days in New York, where he received the Gospel when 13 years of age, until his arrival in Arizona many years ago. He stated that probably there was no one now living that was so intimate with the Prophet Joseph Smith, during his life time. He had been the close friend and confidential business agent of the Prophet, from Kirtland until the hour of the Prophet's martyrdom, and for a number of years before his death he acted as his private secretary. Thus the lives of the two had been very close, and his mind, which today is bright and keen, is a veritable storehouse of incidents of the Prophet's life. He first met the Prophet Joseph Smith at Kirtland in 1833, and was present when Brigham Young and the Twelve were chosen to lead the Saints, and witnessed the transfiguration of Brigham Young.

Elder Pomeroy referred to the numerous posterity of the venerable Patriarch, numbering in all about 800 souls, and said his second wife, who now was with him, and present, was given him by the hand of Joseph Smith himself.

He further said that for one to see his family of children, grandchildren and note the intelligence, morality and the elements of good citizenship they possessed was ample refutation of the common estimate placed by the world upon the tendencies of polygamous marriages formerly practised among the "Mormon" people.

Uncle Benjamin is proud of his posterity, and well might he be, for in no community do you find a finer looking, brighter lot of men and women than his sons and daughters and their children to the third generation, who are a credit to any community. His posterity possibly numbers larger than any man of his generation.

President C. R. Hakes, also addressed the assemblage. He recounted vividly many of the events in the life of this good man that were a great lesson the people enjoyed. He bore a faithful testimony to the worthy life of the patriarch, and admonished his children to always remember the testimony of their father.
Uncle Benjamin then addressed the assembly and for an hour he stood up and recounted the stirring scenes of the early rise of the Church. There was something majestic about him as he bore a strong testimony to the life and divine mission of Joseph Smith and the cause that he gave his life to establish.

The Patriarch said in part:
"I know the Gospel is true. I know the Book of Mormon is true, as I know that my soul lives; and before the bar of eternal justice before which I must stand shortly, I testify to you that these things are true. I know Joseph Smith was called of God. Though but a boy when I first saw him, I felt the presence of pure intelligence in him. I knew then and I know now that Joseph Smith was and is the great prophet, who talked with God the Father, and the Son, and has revealed to him the truths of eternity, that will save mankind. And I desire to bear this testimony particularly to my children, for this may be the last time." Benjamin then related some of his experiences with the Prophet Joseph Smith and Brigham Young. He concluded by testifying: "I knew then where the cloak of the Prophet fell. I remembered then what he had said, and I knew and still know that Brigham Young was a Prophet of God—the true successor to Joseph Smith, and I know that the successors to Brigham Young were the chosen of heaven."

In answer to the question to what were Joseph Smith's feelings towards the United States government, "He was loyalty itself." was the reply of Patriarch Johnson. "How could he be other than loyal when the Lord revealed to him that this government was raised up by Him, and that He had inspired the men who brought forth the Constitution, and that it should endure, and finally through it and the broad principles of liberty, religious and otherwise, it should leaven the whole earth."

At the conclusion of his address, all of the children present, about 50, filed by and dropped a birthday present for "Father Johnson" and received his blessing.

The "at home" continued until 11 p.m. Among those present who were interested listeners, were a number of friends from Tempe and four Japanese, who with their gramophone, played some of the national airs of their far away homeland. The occasion was one long to be remembered by those who participated and all joined in wishing "Uncle Benji" many happy returns of the day.

F. T. Pomeroy

During the remaining four months of his life, Benjamin did not keep his journal and the writer has been unable to find any information pertaining to his activities. It is not known whether Benjamin enjoyed comparatively good health or whether he went into a gradual decline.

However, his family members in Canada were deeply shocked when they

1Deseret Evening News, August 26, 1905.
learned of his death. At the time of his death, he evidently knew that the end was near. Before he died, Benjamin wanted to reassure his loved ones that he had maintained his tremendous faith in the religion which he had accepted some seventy-four years previously and which he had made the motivating power in his life. Samuel J. Johnson, a grandson of Benjamin, recorded the following incident.

... I ... was at the bedside of my Grandfather, Benjamin F. Johnson, when he died and heard him give his last testimony. When he called his children around his bedside, with a twinkle in his eyes, he mentioned the Prophet’s name.

He said, "Children, listen to my last testimony. Joseph Smith was a Prophet of God, faithful and true to the end of his days. I know, I traveled with him, slept with him, lived with him. I was his Bodyguard, Private Secretary, and Business Manager for years. I have always loved and revered him and all his successors, as I know them all to be Prophets, Seers and Revelators. I was one of the first persons he mentioned plural marriages to and he asked for my sister, Almera. The Manifesto has been given by a Prophet, Seer and Revelator. It is just as binding on us as the first, for all the keys of the Priesthood are held by the President of this Church. May God bless you and help you to follow the leaders of the Church."  

On November 18, 1905; Benjamin Franklin Johnson’s life came to a close. Thirty-five years earlier, when his life was full of sorrow and uncertainty, he had received the patriarchal promise:

I say unto thee be of good faith and of good cheer for better days await thee. The Lord hath heard thy petitions and knoweth the integrity of thy heart and is satisfied, therefore be at rest in thy mind and put thy trust in the Arm of Almighty and thy pathway shall be made strait and thou shalt fulfill thy mission here upon the Earth and fill up the measure of thy days and accomplish a work for which thy name shall be held in honourable remembrance and handed down from generation to generation, and written in the Lamb Book of Life. Thy posterity shall also be numerous and bear thy name in honourable remembrance and I say unto thee let thy faith

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1 Interview with Homer Neal LeBaron of Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada on July 15, 1966.

2 Samuel Joseph Johnson, affidavit sworn in Mesa, Arizona, on October 8, 1960. On file in Church Historian’s Office.
fail not and thy days and years shall be lengthened according to the desires of thy heart.\(^1\)

Benjamin's death received public notice in Arizona and Utah.

The following article appeared in the *Deseret Evening News* of December 6, 1905.

**MESA, ARIZONA.**

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**FUNERAL OF B. F. JOHNSON**

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Honored Patriarch closes Eventful Career in 88th Year

Special Correspondence.

*Mesa, Maricopa Co., Ariz., Nov. 20. ---*

The funeral of Patriarch Benjamin F. Johnson who died Nov. 18, was held in the Latter-day Saints' tabernacle yesterday, Bishop James M. Horn presiding. The speakers were Elders F. T. Pomeroy, Noah Brimhall and President Isaac Dana, all eulogizing the noble, upright life of the departed. There was a large concourse of people in attendance to do honor to his name and his remains were followed to the Mesa cemetary by a cortège a mile long.

He has ever been a faithful, consistent member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and was Patriarch in the Maricopa Stake, where like Abraham, and Isaac and Jacob of old, he not only blessed his own children "concerning things to come" but hundreds of others. And many of them bear testimony of his prophetic words being fulfilled on their heads.

... He was beloved by all who knew him. He had the pure love of God in his heart, which was abundantly manifest in his remarkable love for his fellow men.

"Uncle Benji" was over 87 years of age, and for years his birthday had been annually celebrated by his friends and descendants of whom he has a great number in Utah, Arizona, Mexico and Canada. For years he has been a patriarch in the Church, and has converted many people to his faith. He was fond of telling stories of early Church history, and of the Prophet with whom he was so intimately acquainted. He was a man much loved by both the old and young people in his neighborhood, and his memory will long be held in loving esteem by those who knew him.\(^2\)

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\(^1\)Patriarchal Blessing given by Patriarch John Smith at Spring Lake Villa, December 10, 1869. In possession of the writer.

\(^2\)*Deseret Evening News*, December 6, 1905.
CHAPTER XII

SUMMARY

"For all who come into this land, there is a place, a page, where each may start his own life's story, free to write it as he will, in his own hand, by his own works, and according to his own stature. In that freedom Benjamin Franklin Johnson chose his place and his page. His life's work seems to have been shaped largely by his home life and his deep religious convictions." His life's story has been evaluated by looking at his contributions to his posterity, his church, and his country.

Epitomizing, Benjamin's life was interwoven with the early history of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He heard the teachings of this church, in 1830, the year of its organization and along with most of his family, he accepted it the following year. As a youth he shared in many experiences of the young church as it moved from New York to Ohio, to Missouri, and then to Illinois. It might be said that as the church grew and developed, so did Benjamin. His friendship with the Prophet Joseph Smith increased until he became a trusted companion of the Prophet in Illinois. Following the death of Joseph Smith, Benjamin witnessed the mantle of leadership shifting to a new leader and he cast his lot with Brigham Young and the Saints as they faced and fought the deseret to build a new home in the Great Salt Lake Valley. Benjamin sought to conquer the deseret as a colonizer, he served fourteen terms as an elected public servant, he defended his church as a missionary and he promoted industry and horticulture. He was always

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active in the church—if not in a leadership capacity, he worked in assisting and defending those who were called to preside over him.

Benjamin's unusual experiences and abilities, combined with his integrity and courage, earned him the respect and admiration of the leaders of the church. Because of these qualities he was considered for a position in the leading councils of the church. In a meeting of the First Presidency, Council of Twelve Apostles and Presidents of Seventy on October 23, 1859, President Young asked the brethren for recommendations of men to fill a vacancy in the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and Council of Seventy. Because of Benjamin's many qualifications, his name was suggested by Elder Erastus Snow of the Council of Twelve Apostles. However, in this meeting, George Q. Cannon was chosen to fill the position in the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, for which Benjamin had been considered.

In evaluating Benjamin's achievements, it becomes apparent that there were several basic reasons for his success.

One of the characteristics which motivated Benjamin's life was his intense faith in a Heavenly Father and a Savior, and his belief that these Supreme Beings were deeply interested in his welfare. The unusual strength of his faith gave him the courage and determination to forge ahead and to continue to struggle regardless of the obstacles. As a young man held prisoner in Missouri, his faith gave him courage to face his enemies. It strengthened him in his incessant struggle to succeed as a pioneer and colonizer, and in the face of sickness, poverty
or calamities of nature. His faith supported him in forsaking his many business interests and leaving his family to journey to a foreign land to defend his religion for two years. Benjamin's faith in God motivated him to accept challenges which he felt were greater than his own abilities. He seemed to believe that if something was God's will, then with the help of the Lord he could not fail, but without this help, he could not succeed.

One of the qualities which gained the trust and confidence of the Church leaders, and which brought him responsibilities that he honorably fulfilled, was Benjamin's obedience to counsel. He seemed to manifest an absolute conviction that the Church was divinely established and that the leaders of the Church were inspired men. One man who was closely associated with Benjamin, testified: "I have never heard B. F. Johnson say anything that was contrary to the teachings of the authorities of the Church. He told me many times that if I always followed the leaders of the Church I would never go wrong."\(^1\) The request of the church leaders became the law by which he was governed. The following experience which occurred in April, 1857, will serve to illustrate.

He said:

I was at the General Conference, and intended to take a young wife, felt a degree of pride as well as the want of many things—some of which were imperative; but I had only a little money for expenses and purchases. On the first day of conference, President Kimball said a certain sum of money was needed and must be raised at once—by donation—and he wanted all the elders that were present to empty their pockets of the last dollar for that purpose, before they left the house. If they would do so, trusting in the Lord, on his promise, they should have more instead of less; their way should be opened, and they should lack for nothing while in the

\(^1\)John F. Horne, affidavit sworn at Mesa, Arizona on Sept. 23, 1962. (On file in Church Historian's Office.)
city nor on their return. I felt of the few dollars in my pocket, and remembered that I had not bought even a small present for my new wife, had expenses to meet, and oh! so many things we needed to buy. But I hurriedly emptied my purse, to the last dime, and went out. I did not feel that I had done it in faith, but in obedience, and I wondered how I could get home, and how I could get money to pay my present expenses. I thought, too, how I must leave without getting a present for a wife or even for the little children at home. But when passing through the south gate a man from the north, with whom I had dealt years before, whom I never expected to see again, caught me by the arm and said, "Brother Johnson, I am glad I have found you for I want to pay what I owe you." And he paid me four times more than I had given. And I felt ashamed that I had been so unbelieving; and before I was ready to go home, so many ways had opened to me that I was able to meet every present need and to supply all the real wants of my family at home, so many times this experience admonishes me to trust in and claim all blessings promised by authority of the priesthood that I have learned by obedience.\footnote{Johnson, \textit{My Life's Review}, p. 206.}

To the casual observer it may seem that Benjamin's life went from "miracle to miracle" because he always gave the Lord credit for his good fortune and sometimes blamed the temptings of Satan for his troubles. However, if there was nothing miraculous in the circumstances of his life, the fantastic co-incident, involved in it may be even more of a miracle. From research and investigation into the written records and from conversations with those who knew Benjamin F. Johnson, the writer has found no reason to doubt Benjamin's veracity.

Throughout his life, Benjamin seemed magnetically drawn to those who were suffering or in need. Whether it was travelling with the Kirtland Poor Camp as a youth, or witnessing the ravages of an epidemic among Hawaiian natives, or seeing a family from a foreign land hopelessly trying to establish themselves in Utah, he was drawn to them by a desire to help them. He seemed to empathize with them in their time of need.
and also seemed to feel a bond of brotherhood to them, regardless of their religion, race, or position in life. Because of this quality, many blessed his name and became his loyal friends.

Although Benjamin professed deep trust in the help of God and His angels, he did not expect the Lord to do for him what he would do for himself. A major factor in his many accomplishments was the combination of his extraordinary initiative, imagination and hard work. These things were essential in the success of any colonizer and Benjamin undoubtedly possessed them in abundance. He taught his family to be industrious, and he was eager to share his knowledge with anyone else who was willing to try. The following, taken from the life story of John Henry Spainhower, will illustrate this. John was a convert to the church from North Carolina, who brought his young family to Utah, but he was unsuccessful, at first, in finding any way of sufficiently providing for his family. He had hopes of eventually buying a place of his own.

John Henry got work mowing grass with a scythe and cutting grain with a cradle. What he made provided meager fare for his hungry family of eight. For six weeks Utah did not seem much like Zion to the homesick, impoverished family. Then a change of fortune came. B. F. Johnson, a prosperous farmer and businessman came from Spring Lake, a small town south of Payson, looking for a family of workers—the man, a carpenter with a wife who could spin and weave; children who were able to work. He found in the Spainhovers such a family and sent for them the next morning.

John Henry was soon busy. He built a loom, repaired a flax wheel and a spinning wheel. His wife went to carding and spinning wool, weaving denim and linsey. The girls were taught to quilt and spin and worked at it regularly. Jacob worked in the broom factory and young William was sent into the foothills to herd Johnson's two hundred head of sheep. It was a wonderful opportunity for the Spainhovers. They were given a place to live with plenty to eat and wood for the fireplace.

In a few years they were able to buy land of their own.¹

¹Kate B. Carter, Our Pioneer Heritage, (Salt Lake City, Utah: Daughters of the Utah Pioneers, 1965), VIII, p. 379.
Benjamin's life was not free from disappointments or unhappiness. His greatest disappointment, which brought him much anxiety during the latter part of his life, was the feeling that he had been rejected as the patriarchal authority over his wives. He apparently was quite authoritarian in presiding over his family and he realized that his disappointment was partly because he sometimes lacked patience and understanding. The following is an excerpt from a letter Benjamin wrote to one of his wives in 1856.

When I think how angry you used to get last summer at me and how often your feelings were ruffled when they should have been calmer, I almost wish I had left you alone or with your mother & kept out of your sight, at least most of the time. But I'll look out to be more wise the next time. When I think of such subjects I almost feel like running away from myself and all of you. No man living loves peace more than me, or has much less of its enjoyments. The true cause the next world must develop, and I must grow in patience & self control.

Undoubtedly, there are many variables which influence the successes and failures within the life of a person. In the opinion of the writer, these are some of the characteristics which, to a large degree, molded the life of Benjamin Franklin Johnson. Although he did not achieve the fulfillment of all of his hopes in life, he left a marked influence for good upon the lives of innumerable people and his ever growing posterity are justifiably proud of their ancestor.

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1Benjamin F. Johnson, letter to Harriet Johnson, from Filmore, Utah, January 6, 1856. In the possession of the writer.
APPENDICES
APPENDIX I

BENJAMIN F. JOHNSON’S TESTIMONY OF PLURAL MARRIAGE

The following affidavit was sworn to before James Jack, a notary public, in Salt Lake City, March 4, 1870:

On the first day of April A.D. 1843, President Joseph Smith, Orson Hyde and William Clayton, and others, came from Nauvoo to my residence in Macedonia or Ramus, in Hancock County, Ill., and were joyfully welcomed by myself and family as our guests.

On the following morning, Pres. Smith took me by the arm for a walk, leading the way to a secluded spot within an adjacent grove, where, to my great surprise, he commenced to open up to me the principle of plural or celestial marriage; but I was more astonished by his asking me for my sister Almera to be his wife. I sincerely believed him to be a Prophet of God, and I loved him as such and also for the many evidences of his kindness to me, yet such was the force of my education, and the scorn that I felt towards anything unvirtuous, that under the first impulse of my feelings, I looked him calmly, but firmly in the face and told him that ‘I had always believed him to be a good man and wished to believe it still and would try to; and that I would take for him a message to my sister, and if the doctrine was true, all would be well, but if I should afterwards learn that it was offered to insult or prostitute my sister, I would take his life.’ With a smile he replied, ‘Benjamin, you will never see that day, but you shall live to know that it is true and rejoice in it.’

He wished me to see my sister and talk to her. I told him I did not know what I could say to convince her. He replied, ‘When you open your mouth you shall be able to comprehend, and you shall not want for evidence nor words.’ He also told me that he would preach a sermon that day for me which I would understand, while the rest of the congregation would not comprehend his meaning. His subject was the ten talents, ‘unto him that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundantly, but from him that hath not (or will not received), shall be taken away that which he hath (or might have had).’ Plainly giving me to understand that the talents represented wives and children, as the principle of enlargement throughout the great future to those who were heirs of salvation.

Andres Jensen, The Historical Record, (a monthly periodical developed exclusively to historical, biographical, chronological and statistical matters. Published in Salt Lake City 1882-1890), May 1887, VI, p. 221-222.

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I called my sister to private audience, and with fear and trembling and feelings I cannot express, commenced to open the subject to her, when, just as he had promised, the light of the Lord shone upon my understanding and my tongue was loosed, and I, at least, was convinced of the truth of what I was attempting to teach.

My sister received my testimony, and in a short time afterwards consented to become the wife of President Smith.

Subsequent to this I took her to the city of Nauvoo, where she was married, or sealed for time and eternity, to President Joseph Smith, by his brother Hyrum Smith, in the presence of myself and Louisa Beaman, who told me she had also been sealed or married to the Prophet Joseph. This was at the residence of my sister, the widow of Lyman R. Sherman, who also was a witness.

After a short period, President Smith and company, viz., George Miller, Wm. Clayton, J. M. Smith, and Eliza and Emily Partridge (who were the wives of the Prophet) came again to Macedonia (Ramus), where he remained two days, lodging at my house with my sister as man and wife (and to my certain knowledge he occupied the same bed with her). This visit was on the 16th and 17th of May, 1843, returning to Nauvoo on the 18th.

Again, on the 19th of October, the same year, President Smith made us another visit at Macedonia and remained till the 21st. He was accompanied by Wm. Clayton. At this time (Oct. 20th, 1843), he sealed my first wife to me for time and all eternity.

He also visited my mother at her residence in Macedonia and taught her in my hearing the doctrine of celestial marriage, declaring that an angel appeared unto him with a drawn sword, threatening to slay him if he did not proceed to fulfill the law that had been given to him. And counseled my mother to be sealed to his uncle, Father John Smith (father of Geo. A. Smith), to which she consented, and to my certain knowledge was subsequently sealed to him by the Prophet.

After the death of the Prophet, I told President Brigham Young what he (Joseph Smith) had said to me relative to my taking Mary Ann Hale to wife. Pres. Young said it was right and authorized Father John Smith to seal her to me, which he did on the 14th of November, 1844.

(Signed) B. F. Johnson
APPENDIX II

AN OPEN LETTER FROM BENJAMIN F. JOHNSON
TO GROVER CLEVELAND, THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES
IN DEFENSE OF PLURAL MARRIAGE

A Woman's Estimate of Cleveland's Gush and of Himself

"The strength, the perpetuity and the destiny of the nation rest upon our homes established by the law of God, guarded by parental care, regulated by parental authority and sanctified by parental love. These are not the homes of polygamy. The mothers of our land who rule the nation as they would the characters of their sons, live according to God's holy ordinances and each secure and happy in the exclusive love of the father of her children, sheds the warm light of her true womanhood, unperverted and unpolluted upon all within her pure and wholesome family circle."

The foregoing gush is a part of the slush that constitutes that pot of mush known as the President's Proclamation.

The Chicago Tribune and nearly all the other papers appalled by the immense amount of diluted nothingness, voluminous and vague as a London fog, boiled it down, and kept boiling it until they got it so that it would go into their huge sheets by crowding nearly everything else out. I know it must have hurt Mr. Medell of the Tribune awfully to publish it at all in any shape, for he has no more affection for the chief magistrate than I have; and yet neither he nor any other editors I know of dare quote the passage I have quoted, and say to Mr. Cleveland...

No man, but a living monument of brass, bolstered up by the highest position in the land, would dare speak of the sanctity of paternity, knowing his own illegitimate child, and knowing that all the world knows of it. And your words, Mr. Cleveland, are an insult, an outrage to every pure home in the land. You prate of polygamy! You are not a polygamist! The members of this misguided tribe are honest in comparison with you. The history of that people has never in a single instance been blackened by the revelation of a woman betrayed, ruined, deserted and disgraced by the loathsome touch of a seducer. And this is your record! Yes, you acknowledged record. Where is Maria Halpin; and the dear little child, where is he? Certainly not in the home established by the law of God, guarded by parental care, regulated by parental authority and sanctified by parental love. He is an outcast together with the mother whom your...

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1A copy of an article Benjamin included as preface to his letter to President Cleveland.

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accursed lust ruined. Hagar and Ishmall; they have gone out into the great desert of life, where no green thing grows, where no living waters run. Sahara lies all about them. And you Great God! You sit upon the top step of executive justice in a great nation and stultify your black soul by prating of the sanctity of paternity.  

--------------------- The Women's World

Underground R.R.  
Jan. 15, 1886

To His Excellency Grover Cleveland  
President of the United States

Most Honored Sir:

Enclosed you will find a clipping from "The Woman's World" which I truly hope is not a correct representation of your history and character.

I proudly watched your public career as the executive of my native state and with glad hope saw you elevated by the nation's choice to the highest honors, confident that as the Democratic President of a free people you would look above the narrow bigotry of selfish minds and base your administration upon the broad principle of self government with the "Inalienable right of Life, Liberty, and the persuit of Happiness," and the constitutional right of worshipping God according to the dictates of conscience secured to all. And as I enclose to you what purports to be a short chapter upon your past and present life, will you please permit me, in all kindness and respect to present to you a brief sketch of my own.

I was born in a western New York of Puritanic Revolutionary Parentage and am now in my 68th year. In earliest childhood I was taught to believe in God, to pray to Him and to revere the Holy Scriptures as His divine word; much of which I committed to memory, in the Sabbath Schools of my native town. While very young and even before I was twelve years, I read with a degree of surprise this declaration in His word, "They who would live Godly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution," and while reading of the persecution and martyrdom of all of the former day saints, I was led to marvel at the popularity of the present professed Christian Ministry, in contrast with the poor persecuted and despised Ancient Apostles, who until their martyrdom traveled without purse or script to preach the gospel throughout all the world.

In the year 1831 there came to my native town near Fredonia, New York, an elder of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, professing to preach the ancient gospel of Christ in its purity, with a new revelation from heaven giving a history of the Aboriginal Inhabitants of the American Continent. But no sooner did he commence to preach than
both Priest and people began with lying slander to revile and persecute
him, and like the ancient Pharisees to mockingly ask for a sign that
they might believe. "I knew that they were influenced by a wicked and
un-Christian spirit, and I reasoned with myself that a similar cause
only would produce a similar effect, and the evidence to me was the pure
gospel was again restored to the earth. I soon saw Joseph Smith and
although I was but a youth I knew him to be a prophet of God. After
which period I assisted in building the city of Kirtland in Ohio and
helped construct a costly Temple at that place; from which as a people
we were driven through religious persecution. In poverty, we went to
Caldwell Co., Missouri, where those of our people who had been previously
driven from Jackson Co., had settled. Here the City "Far West" was
built, as also Adomondiahman in Davis Co., from both of which places and
from all other parts of the State we were driven in the winter and early
spring of 1838 - 9.

When ten (or more) thousand people after many both old and young
had been murdered, women ravished, and their leaders imprisoned; were
driven homeless from the State by a mob of hireling priests and professed
Christians. I was witness to many of its blood-curdling horrors, and
the scenes of suffering through the winter storms, without shelter in
the deep snows and without food, in which condition many children were
born, and old people died from the cold and exposure. And I saw the
well into which some twenty mangled bodies of men and young boys were
thrown, as one of the terrors of that fiendish, bloody and (never to be
forgotten) massacre at Hauns Mill, and the old corn-cutter still red with
the blood of Father McBride, was raised, threateningly [sic] above my
head, by the same man Rogers, who, with taunting, boasted having done
the horrid deed— that of hewing off the arms, and murdering while
living an old Revolutionary Veteran, after shooting him with his own
gun, which he had surrendered while asking for his life. All of these
things I know, and bear witness were persecutions for our Religion's
sake.

We left our chief men in Missouri prisons and returned to Illinois
we bought the then sickly and deserted town of Commerce upon the Missis-
sippi River, which we soon built into the beautiful and healthy city of
Nauvoo, where we constructed a magnificent Temple, costing one
or more millions; from which, together with large possessions in many
other towns and cities, we were driven again by mob violence in 1846 - 7,
after the most treacherous and cold-blooded murder of our beloved Prophet
and Patriarch, Joseph and Hyrum Smith. Where some 20,000 souls most
of them in mid-winter were again compelled to flee, to leave the rich and
beautiful city of Nauvoo, and take to the wild, desolate and unexplored
West, to find again a home as best they might, somewhere in the "Great
American Desert," to be surrounded by barbarious and war-like native
tribes.

But to recount all of the cruelties of that expulsion, with all of
its attendant sacrifices and sufferings, thro' winter storms, in snow and
mud, when through cold, weariness, want of food and needed care, the
feeble and aged would die, and with our little ones be buried by the
way side; and then through the weary mid-summer months—over the thirsty deserts and rugged mountain ways, dotted with the graves of our dead, and strewn with the carcasses of our worn out cattle—to find at last through swarming crickets, locusts, sterility and drouth for years, only a famine stricken home. But of all this it would take volumes to recount.

Previous to the death of the Prophet Joseph, I was taught by him in the Principle of Plural or Celestial Marriage; as a revelation from the Almighty, direct to him and for his Church, and it was shown to me plainly, that the whole object and end of matrimony was the procreation of our species and that the command "to multiply and replenish the earth" tell equally upon all the children of Adam both in obligation and privilege. But as the modern Christian Nations through their necessity for vast armies, navies and to sustain wars were depriving their females of marriage relations—as also the influence of capital against labor, which together with the fashions, follies and corruptions of modern society, were all tending to degrade humanity and to have multitudes of "surplus" or unmarried women, never to become under Monogamic laws, honored wives and happy mothers of legitimate children, and so, through laws of customs in which they have no direct voice, they are shut out from all the most valued and sacred privileges of true womanhood, to the shame and dis-honor of man, under whose heel she has been for ages kept to pander to his unholy lust and to gratify his dishonest pride. ---And to remedy this great injustice and wrong, and for the speedier accomplishment of his purposes upon the earth, God gave a Revelation and Commandment, that the Elders of his Church should take the daughters of His people,—the "surplus women" of his Church to wife, in Plural Marriage, to raise up children, who should be taught to honor His Holy Name and, in as much as they would honor this law, in this life, that they should inherit these wives and children in an eternal relationship in the "Life to Come."

He also unfolded to me the scripture in which I saw that the most honored men in Bible History — those of whom, and by whom the scriptures were written were Polygamists and that so great was the distinction between Polygamy and Adultery, that Moses who prepared the tables of stone on which the Lord, with His finger, in his presence wrote, "Thou shalt not commit adultery" and while the glory of God so shone from the face of Moses that Israel could not look upon him. Yet, at the same time he was a Polygamist, and while the law in Israel was "death for adultery," Moses and many of the camp of Israel had a plurality of wives; and so far was this principle honored of God that when his Son, Jesus, was to be born, he chose for him the royal lineage of Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Boaz, David, Soloman and other wise Patriarchs and Kings, who had honored the law of plural marriage. And he farther taught me of the Eternity of the Marriage Covenant, also shewing it to be a religious Sacrament. In the fact that in the first marriage God himself joined together two immortal or Celestial beings, which bond of matrimony, had they not sinned, must have held them in Eternal union and thro' all time, in the paradise in which they were placed.
With these teachings, accompanied by the spirit in which they were given, I was able to overcome my Puritanical ideas of Monogamic Marriage, and I accepted Plural Marriage, as a duty that I owed to my calling as an Elder of the true Church of Christ, now upon the earth. And at that time the Prophet gave to me my first plural wife, since which and after being robbed of property and business in Illinois, and driven from a valuable home, I arrived in Salt Lake Valley in 1848—in poverty, without food, or more than the scantiest clothing for wives and children, and with no apparent means by which in my worn and weak condition I would procure it. Yet, we lived and future history will tell the tale as to how, since then, other wives have been sealed to me, through the order established by the Almighty—yet none of them later than 1858, four years prior to the especial Congressional Act of '62. And, of the wives given to me thro' the laws of our Church I have now near 40 living children, most of them grown to maturity and married, and not one of them as men or women, were even known to lie, steal, get drunk, gamble, or profane the name of God, and no one of them was ever guilty of an unchaste or immoral act, and both in example, and in precept they are honored by all who know them. Of grand children I have over 100—quite a number of these are married and some great-grand children are already born—and of the six mothers of my children there is not one of them whose love and confidence is not more dear to me than my natural life. And, as to myself Mr. President, I am and ever have been a God-fearing, law abiding citizen of my native land, with a feeling of proud loyalty to its Constitution and its flag, and never do I think of the great Washington, Franklin, Jefferson, Adams, and their compatriots but I feel assured that they too were raised up by the Almighty and by him inspired with the spirit of Freedom right and with a revelation to them of the true principles of liberty, as embraced in the Constitution of the United States, and whether at home or in other lands, I have looked with pride upon the Flag of my country, and happily congratulated myself that I was, as were my fathers before me, among her native born sons. And also, in reviewing the labors sacrifices of a Pioneer life, which my own had been for nearly 50 years, I feel a proud consciousness that very few have done more toward developing the resources of the Great West, or in filling it with Orchards, gardens and happy homes, or in making it "to blossom as the Rose." And yet Mr. President, I am ostracized from Citizenship, am a Refugee from what should be a Court of Justice—and because of special Congressional Act and retroactive unconstitutional laws, I must flee my native country, or go as a convict and criminal to her prisons. While you, sir, are charged with the crime of illegitimacy and sexual sin, I would by far rather my head were severed from my body, than to be justly so accused, and I stand at the defiance of all men and women, to truthfully accuse me of immorality or dishonesty. I drink no ardent spirits, never gambled nor profaned the name of God in my life—have ever been a faithful, loving, God-fearing husband, an affectionate, prayerful counselor to my children, setting them examples of honest industry, temperance and frugality.

And now, Mr. President, in what do I lack to be a good citizen? Is it to disown and make outcasts of the loving, trusting mothers of my children—who, with me have suffered hardships, poverty and privation
almost to starvation, while pioneering out the possibilities of this "Great American Desert." Is it to bastardize and disown my pure and noble sons, my chaste and loving daughters, whose love is to me of more worth than all else that the world could give? If this, then, Mr. President is the price for citizenship and immunity from my country Prison, I spurn its acceptance, and say No! a thousand times No! for at such a sacrifice of Love and Honor I would not accept a Salvation in Heaven. Nor can I honor or obey those unjust, cruel and unconstitutional laws which have originated in the Para saic hypocrisy and narrow minded bigotry of an apostate, hireling Priesthood with which to persecute and destroy the most law-abiding and God-fearing people now upon the earth---while Priestcraft avarice lust and hate, like the virus of a deadly cancer is eating out the vitals of all social, religious and political institutions of our once virtuous, free and happy country, which is now fast ripening for the darkwinged angel of desolation who is already hovering the people and cities of our now bloodstained and polluted land.

There is one thing further Mr. President, to which I would call your attention that must be obvious to all who reflect upon the unhappy "Mormon Question" and history, which is that through all the terrible persecution of the past, in Ohio, Missouri and Illinois, and even in Utah, up to the Congressional Act of 1862. It was then, because we were "Mormons" that we believed in Joseph Smith as a Prophet of God, in the Book of Mormon as a revealed history of the Aboriginal Inhabitants of the American Continent,---in the literal gathering of Israel, and the near approach of the Savior to the earth.

For believing in these principles, and in the apostolic organization and gifts of the church, as set forth in the New Testament we have as a people in the past been persecuted with a far more relentless hate and bitterness than as yet endured or even attempted under the present popular howl or war cry of polygamy. It was not polygamy that drove us in the past from city to city and from state to state. It was not plural marriage that murdered our beloved prophet and patriarch, that ravished our wives and daughters, that murdered our fathers, brothers and sons, that burned our Holy Temple, that so often despoiled and robbed us of our homes and finally drove us to the far off "Desert" to finish by starvation or by the hand of the savage, or that dotted a thousand tedious and weary miles with graves of our loved ones.

And now Mr. President, animated by a spark of that fire which enthused a grandfather who fell on Bunker's Hill and that inspired Patrick Henry, I too ask for the inalienable right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, and the constitutional right to worship Almighty God as He has made His will known to me. Inasmuch as I invade not the rights or privileges of another in doing so, which as yet I have never done.

Most respectfully yours,

B. F. Johnson
APPENDIX III

LETTER BY BENJAMIN F. JOHNSON TO GEORGE S. GIBBS

Dear Brother:

In resuming my answer to your scholarly and effusive epistle, I feel in every degree incompetent to the task. Especially do I feel the want of learning, and my writings, of course, must betray to you my poverty in classical education. Through childhood and early youth, my advantages, even for primary education, were the most meager. At seventeen, I attended the winter term of the grammar school taught by Wm. E. McLelland, in Kirtland, and presided over by the Prophet; at the same time attending night lectures in geography. These were my greatest opportunities for schooling, and in them was finished my school education; and if I have acquired in life anything further of worth, it has been as snatched from the wayside while on the run as a missionary, pioneer or while in Nature's great laboratory with the axe, plow, spade or garden implements. I have been hard at work to provide sustenance for that flock which the Father has sent to my special care. And while it may be a degree common, even with the youth of Zion, whose advantages so far surpass their parents', to look upon the aged as "black numbers," "old fossils," or "mossbacks", yet not one whit of that spirit do I feel in your letter, and my heart goes out toward you in love and blessing, as though you were indeed one of my own sons. And I most earnestly pray that the Lord will so inspire my thoughts and so awaken a remembrance of the past, that I may be able to write to you as by the voice of the spirit of my calling in the Priesthood of the fathers, of anything pertaining to the gospel principle or of our historic past, that may better equip you for that sphere of greater callings and responsibilities that await you as a son in Zion, in the lineage of Ephraim, and of the seed of the blessed.

According to Charles S. Sellers, who discussed this letter with Benjamin F. Johnson, in the early part of the year 1903, Elder Gibbs, through the recommendation of the First Presidency of the Church, applied to Benjamin Johnson for a written statement of his personal knowledge of incidents and facts that came under his observation, from almost the earliest history of the Church. The manuscript was written and completed between April, 1903, and the following October, during which period Brother Johnson passed his 85th birthday, being 85 years old on July 28 of that year. The original letter is on file in the Church Historian's Office in Salt Lake City, Utah. This letter is a facsimile of the original except for a few parts of the original which had been destroyed. In these parts of the letter the writer resorted to a copy of the letter which had been previously reproduced by Charles S. Sellers.
Your thoughts in regard to the need of positive keys for interpreting our true position, condition and relation to the gospel, both in the past and for the future, strictly accord with my own, and to me it simply means that the spark of life or of light, brought with us at birth, thru a cumulative experience, has attained its present status in intellectual and physical power.

In infancy we were fed upon milk, and in childhood by a loving hand, while our mistakes were tenderly admonished. As we became older we began to grasp the principles and issues of physical life and the modes for its sustenance thru labors of our hands; while the gospel, as an alphabet, with its possibilities of reaching every principle of truth and light within the great science of eternal lives, is given to us as spiritual or intellectual food, thru which, by faith, we can forever grow in the knowledge and power of the Gods, to become in reality and fullness even the "Sons of God," with glory, exaltation, dominion and eternal progression, thru the procreation of endless lives.

And to how much of this greatness in knowledge and power have we yet attained? As well may little children in making their mud pottery claim perfection as sculptors, as for us to claim a fullness in the knowledge of Gospel principles, precepts, or powers.

When were we, as a people, ever able fully to live by the law given to us of the Lord? In 1831 and '32 we were tried in Missouri with the Law of consecration, in which we failed; in '33 we were given, in Kirtland, the Order of Enoch and the Word of Wisdom. The Order of Enoch was not fully honored, and after seventy years experience in accumulating wisdom many are not yet wise. While thru His mercy, the Lord in '36, gave us, when under His rod, the Law of Tithing in place of the former law, but how have we, as a people, fulfilled it? And again, when in '43 he gave us, by command the high and holy law of Plural Marriage, with the sealing power of the Holy Priesthood, did we, as a people, receive it in the spirit and purpose for which it was given? Or have we been slow in comprehending even the primary lessons and precepts of this life's mission?

And as for even our leaders being always filled with the light of their calling, to see the "end from the beginning," or always to discern correctly the thoughts and purposes of others, has not been, according to my experience or knowledge. Does not the Lord tell us in D. & C. Sec. 130, that the Holy Ghost may descend upon a man and not always remain with him? And do we not all, at times, feel that to be a reality, as did the Master, when thru mental anguish He "sweat blood at every pore", as also when upon the cross He cried out in agony of soul to His Father to know why He was forsaken? And to show a change of mood, even in our great Head, witness Him entwining a rope and in anger scourging out merchants and money changers from the temple and kicking over their tables, and in a gush of resentment toward those who hated Him he cries out: "Oh you Scribes and Pharasees, hypocrites, ye are of your father the devil, and his works ye do!" calling them "garnish sepulchres,
full of dead men's bones", "robbers of widows and orphans, and oppressors of the poor"; and as though He would have them fight for the kingdom He had sent them to preach, He told those who had not swords "to sell their coats and buy one". But oh! how changed in feeling, when He, on the cross, could realize the enormity of their guilt and the greater sufferings consequent to them, and then with heart melted in pity for His murderers and those that hated Him, He cried to His Father with entreaty that they be forgiven.

And just such phases, to a degree, have I witnessed in the life and character of our great Prophet, who stood in the presence of both the Father and the Son and personally conversed with them both; being often visited by Holy Angels, while continually receiving by revelation the word of the Lord to His people. And yet he was altogether of "like passions with his brethren and associates."

"As a son, he was nobility itself, in love and honor of his parents; as a brother he was loving and true, even unto death; as a husband and father, his devotion to wives and children stopped only at idolatry. And his life's greatest motto after "God and His Kingdom" was that of 'wives, children and friends". And on one Sunday morning while sitting with him in the Mansion dining room in private converse, two of Emma's children came to him, as just from their mother, all so nice, bright and sweet, and calling to them my attention, he said, "Benjamin, look at these children, how could I help loving their mother; if necessary, I would go to hell for such a woman." And although at the time he had in the Mansion other wives, younger and apparently more brilliant, yet Emma, the wife of his youth, to me, appeared the queen of his heart and of his home.

But to return: Joseph the Prophet, as a friend he was faithful, long suffering, noble and true to that degree that the erring who did love him were at times reminded that the rod of a friend was better than the kiss of an enemy, "while others who sopped in his dish" but bore not reproof, became his enemies, and like Laws, Marks, Foster, Higby and others, who hated him and conspired to his death.

As a companion, socially, he was highly endowed; was kind, generous, mirth loving, and at times, even convivial. He was partial to a well supplied table and he did not always refuse the wine that "maketh glad the heart". For amusement, he would sometimes wrestle with a friend, or oftener would test strength with others by sitting on the floor with feet together and stick grasped between them, but he never found his match. Jokes, rebuses, matching couplets in rhymes, etc., were not uncommon. But to call for the singing of one or more of his favorite songs was more frequent. Of those, "Wife, Children and Friends", "Battle of River Russen", "Soldiers' Tear", "Soldier's Dream" and "Last Rose of Summer", were most common. And yet, although so social and even convivial at times, he would allow no arrogance or undue liberties, and criticism, even by his associates, was rarely acceptable, and contradiction would rouse in him the lion at once, for by no one of his
fellow would have been superseded or disputed and in the early days at Kirtland, and elsewhere [one or more of his associates] were more than once, for their impudence, helped from the congregation by his [Joseph's] foot, and at one time at a meeting at Kirtland, for insolence to him, he soundly thrashed his brother William who boasted himself as invincible. And while with him in such fraternal, social and sometimes convivial moods, we could not then so fully realize the greatness and majesty of his calling, which, since his martyrdom, has continued to magnify in our lives, as the glories of this last dispensation more fully unfold to our comprehension.

One small incident, among the many, I will relate to show his playful, familiar, kind and loving nature toward one who to him was as a protege or a younger brother. Soon after the Prophet's escape from Missouri and arrival at Old "Commerce," the future Nauvoo, in 1839, I was with him. The people had flocked in from the terrible exposures of the past and nearly every one was sick with intermittent or other fevers, of which many died. In this time of great sickness, poverty and death, the Prophet called his brother, Don Carlos, and cousin, G. A. Smith, as missionaries to administer to and comfort the people. And there being two young Botanic medical students Doctors Wiley and Pendleton, he called them to prescribe medicine, and called me to follow and take general oversight and care of all the sick, which for weeks, I did, without even one night of respite for sleep. The forepart of September, Dr. Wiley became sick unto death, which soon occurred, after which the Prophet too had a violent attack of the prevailing sickness. And as Emma was in no degree able to care for him, it wholly developed upon me, and both day and night, through a period of little less than two weeks I was hardly absent from his room; as almost his only food was gruel; and about the only treatment he would accept was a flush of the colon with warm water perhaps tinctured slightly with capsicum and myrrh, or a little soda and salt, both of which were prepared and administered by me in the room he occupied; and if any sleep came to me it was while lying upon his bed or sitting in my chair. At the termination of this sickness and fasting, he arose from his bed like a lion, or as a giant refreshed with wine. He went to President Rigdon with great reproof, commanding him and his house to repent; and called for a skiff, crossed the river, and finding Elija Fordham in death's struggle, he commanded him to arise, which he did at once, and was made whole as also were others by his administrations.

But I am writing at too great length. Soon after the Prophet's recovery I too came apparently nigh unto death through a violent attack of the fever, through which my comfort was kindly looked after by the Prophet.

About the middle of October a letter came to say that my dear mother and young sister were apparently near to death, in Springfield, Illinois, and were anxious for my return. And in my anxiety again to see my mother, I procured quinine, which was just becoming known as an antidote for fevers and taking it in large doses, my fever soon abated, and under it's tonic influence I fancied I had become well, and in great
kindred at Springfield. My horse was in the yard ready to mount, but I wished to take leave of the Prophet, with the hope of again to receive his blessing. Of the whole sum I had obtained with which to pay for an outfit and passage to England, with the twelve, when they should start, to which I had been called by the June Conference at Quincy, "I had but one ten tollar bill, I said, "As this is all I have left, I went to pay a tithe of it." He saw I was weak in body and that my heart was sad in leaving him, so thinking to cheer and arouse me, when putting the nine silver dollars in my hand he playfully knocked my hand upward, and scattering the money all over the room. My heart was so full of tears, and my emotions must have vent, so forgetting all but the feeling that we were boy companions playing together, I sprang at and grappled him, as though to teach him a lesson, but the lesson was all to me, for on making one grand effort to throw him, I found myself in strength no more than a bullrush as compared with him, and as my strength was fictitious and my real recovery was but illusion, I collapsed and fainted in his arms. He placed me in repose, and did all necessary for my restoration and comfort. Then gathering up the scattered money, and after a period of delay, weak, trembling and desolate, yet determined to start, I led my horse to the other gate and as I was passing through, with the bridle on my arm, his hand detained me, and placing his hands upon my head, he seemed to pour out his soul in blessing me. He told the Lord I had been faithful to care for others, that I was now worn and sick, and that on my journey I would need his care, and he asked that a special guardian might go with me from that day and stay with me through all my life. And oh! my dear brother, how often have I seen through life and footprints of that angel, and knew that his hand had drawn me back from death.

The day after leaving Nauvoo my fever returned with all of its virulence. The next day, near night, I was found by the Prophet's brother William, lieing helpless by the roadside, and the next evening I was found by strangers, being unconscious in the road, who kindly cared for me until I could again get upon my horse to finish the journey to my mother in Springfield, where I soon arrived, and remained very sick until Apostles Young and Kimball came in January to find me apparently nigh unto death with hemorrhage of the bowels. At leaving, they told me to take a mission East so soon as able to start, which I did through kindness of Brother James Standing, who, upon my bed in a sleigh took me a hundred and ten miles to Paris, Illinois. Turning home on bare ground, he left me in deep mud, alone, and near penniless, sick and among strangers, while borne to the earth by a burden of bashful ignorance—the long green of young manhood; but my "Angel" was always with me to open the way.

Now you see how I have wandered from the subject of your "Three Keys," but you said you wanted to learn more of my history and personalities, so what I have written may serve as a glimpse of my earlier life.

Now, returning to the subject, shall I tell you that just the other day at Quarterly Conference one of our best missionary speakers was led
to say that "our Gospel was revealed as a whole, and not fragmentary", and I felt to tell him that the Gospel had not only been given to us by fragments, but that of the great science of Eternal Lives, we have not yet received or learned more than it's alphabet; and perfection here can only exist in parts or degrees. And while the Holy Ghost may not always remain upon a man, may not even a prophet to whom it was not yet all revealed, make mistakes, as in the baptism for the dead, and also in the prophet sermon at the funerals of a child of Winzor Lyon and King Follett, when he preached that children, "even infants, would sit upon thrones with dominion," which was published in the "Times and Seasons" at the time, but which, like President Woodruff, I am positive he afterwards reconsidered. And those who were with him in Kirtland, Missouri and Nauvoo, will remember many things in which his sanguine and prophetic hopes seemed disappointed.

The Prophet Joseph laid the foundation of our Church in a military spirit, and as the Master taught His disciples, so he taught us to "sell our coat and buy swords", but never did the sword fully prevail with us, not even with the Indians, and never before were we apparently so safe from them, or our outside enemies, as since the Lord, through the government, permitted us to be robbed of armed self protection; and even our mission martyrs have generally been murdered after a show of resistance. And are we not beginning to see that charity is the life and core of our religion? and that love is the great life spring and centrifugal power of the universe, and in our gospel there appears no place for hate or resentment,—not even towards those that would nail us to the cross.

Yet neither in Kirtland, Missouri or Nauvoo, did we fully comply with this rule, and even in Utah many were left to cherish toward our poor lamanite brethren, vindictiveness and hate; and in Missouri by Apostle Lyman Wight we were taught to "pray for our enemies," that God would damn them, and "give us power to kill them". And while "three witnesses" with his counsellors and many of the apostles with their president, as also many others of our leading men, had turned their "heel against the Prophet, how could he, in such disunion and enmity, always be strong in the might of his calling? And as the "eyes" of the Church, betrayed by those he loved who had so often "sopped with him" when there was little in the dish, under such disappointment and sorrow, may he not have been blinded even by his tears?

Jesus spent His life in teaching His disciples, and yet they did not understand Him or His doctrine. And altho He spent a long period after His resurrection in teaching them of the "common salvation," and although His last word to them was a command to""baptize all nations" yet Peter, the chief Apostle, had not yet swallowed it; and the Lord had at last to choke it down him, through his vision upon the housetop. And even after that, Paul "withstood" his partiality for the old law.

And now of your third Key, I do not feel to say much, as I fear I am writing in too great profusion, and that what I have written you will
deem as of little worth. But from my standpoint of view, I can see that we have been in evolution since from before the world was, and that we were never without our agency, and never will be, unless we become the sons of Perdition, and that through our voluntary doings, or our failing to do. We fore-ordained, or elected ourselves to just the condition in which we were placed on earth; and we are now, through our works of good or evil, ordaining ourselves to the good or evil that awaits us in the great future. And I see that only through darkness do we comprehend the light, and that by their opposite do we comprehend the attributes and exaltation of the Gods. And just as we know love and care for our little children and for-see effects to them from causes, and have a purpose beyond their comprehension for their good, just so our Father has a purpose in everything relating to our condition here, for we are not here by accident or mistake, and that "all things must work to the good of those who fear God" and evolute in the "upward and onward"; and so I will thus leave your third key.

And then you would have "further truths from the teachings of the Prophet". And where shall I commence? and how shall I write to your understanding even the little I may have retained in memory? You will not forget that the march in science thru the last seventy years has in many things reversed the world's thought, changed its modes and almost its face, and is fast exploding the dogmas of outside theology. Well, the keys to all this knowledge was first committed to the Prophet Joseph, as a part of the gospel, for the world's benefit, for all of which he was derided. He was the first in this age to teach "substantialism", the eternity of matter, that no part or particle of the great universe could become annihilated or destroyed; that light and life and spirit were one; that all light and heat are the "Glory of God", which is his power, that fills the "immensity of space", and is the life of all things, and permeates with latent life, and heat, every particle of which all worlds are composed; that light or spirit, and matter, are the two first great primary principles of the universe, or of Being; that they are self-existent, co-existent, indestructible, and eternal, and from these two elements both our spirits and our bodies were formulated, and he gave us to understand that there were twelve kingdoms, or planets, revolving around our solar system, to which the Lord gave an equal division of His time or ministry and that now was His time to again visit the earth. He taught that all systems of worlds were in revolution, the lesser around the greater. He taught that all the animal kingdoms would be resurrected, and made us understand that they would remain in the dominion of those who, with creative power, reach out for dominion, through the power of eternal lives. He taught us that the saints would fill the great West, and through Mexico, Central and South America we would do a great work for the redemption of the remnant of Jacob. Of what he taught us relating to the Kingdom of God, as it would become organized upon the earth through "all nations learning war no more", and all adopting the God-given constitution of the United States as a Paladium of Liberty and Equal Rights.
But this, of itself, would require a long chapter, which must wait
until the fulfillment of a prediction by the Prophet, relating to a
"Testimony that I should bear, after I had become hoary with age, of things
which he that day taught to the circle of friends then around him," of
whom I am the only one living. So here I will leave this subject for
your further interrogations, and proceed to give you, so far as I can
remember the Prophet Joseph's last charge to the Quorum of the the
Twelve Apostles.

It was at Nauvoo early in 1844 in an assembly room, common to
the meeting of the Council, or a select circle of the Prophet's most
trusted friends, including all the Twelve, but not all the constituted
authorities of the Church, for Presidents Rigdon, Law or Marks, the
High Council nor Presidents of Quorums were not members of that council,
which at times would exceed fifty in number. Its sittings were always
strictly private, and all its rules were carefully and promptly observed
and altho its meetings were at times oftener than monthly and my home
at Ramus over twenty miles distant, I was present at every session, and
being about the youngest member of the council, I was deeply impressed
with all that transpired, or was taught by the Prophet.

Criticism had already commenced by those near him in authority
with regard to his teachings and his doing. And we began now, in a de-
gree, to understand the meaning of what he had so often publicly said,
that "should he teach and practice the principles that the Lord had
revealed to him, and now requested of him, that those then nearest him
in the stand would become his enemies and the first to seek his life";
which they soon did, just as he had foretold. And to show you that
under conditions then existing that the Prophet did not really desire
longer to live, and that you may see how my mind was in a degree prepared
for after results, I will briefly relate an incident that occurred at
his last visit to us at Ramus.

After he had at evening preached with great animation to a large
congregation and had blessed nineteen children, he turned to me and said,
"Benjamin, I am tired, let us go home", which only a block distant, we
soon reached, and entering we found a warm fire with a large chair in
front, and my wife sitting near with her babe, our eldest, upon her lap,
and approaching her, I said, "Now, Melissa, see what we have lost by
your not going to meeting, Brother Joseph has blessed all the children
in the place but ours, and it is left out in the cold." But the Prophet
at once said, "You shall lose nothing", and he proceeded to bless our
first born, and then, with a deep drawn breath as a sigh of weariness,
he sank down heavily in his chair, and said, "Oh! I do get so tired and
weary, that at times I almost yearn for my rest", and then proceeded
briefly to recount to us some of the most stirring events of his life's
labors, suffering and sacrifices, and then he said, "I am getting tired
and would like to go to my rest." His words and tone thrilled and
shocked me, and like an arrow pierced my hopes that he would long remain
with us, and I said, as with a heart full of tears, "Oh! Joseph, what
could we, as a people do without you? and what would become of the great
Latter-day work if you should leave us?" He saw and was touched by my emotions, and in reply he said, "Benjamin, I should not be far away from you, and if on the other side of the veil I should still be working with you, and with a power greatly increased, to roll on this kingdom." And such was the tone, earnestness and pathos of his words to me then, that they can never be fully recalled but with emotion.

And now before fully returning to the council and subject in connection with the above, I will relate a dream told to us in council by the Prophet but a short time before his death, which was as follows: "I dreamed that by the Laws, Marks, Higby's and Fosters, I was bound, both hand and foot and cast into a deep well, soon after which I heard screams of terror and cries of 'Oh! Brother Joseph, save us, save us!' This cry continued until with my elbows and toes I had worked my way to the top, and looking out, I saw all of those who had bound me within the folds of a terrible serpent, that was preparing to swallow them; and I told them that as they had bound me, I could render them no assistance." This dream made upon my mind an impression never forgotten, and just as he related it, so it was fulfilled in his death; for those were the men that opened the way for his assassination.

And now returning to the council and the "Last Charge." Let us remember that by revelation he had reorganized the Holy Priesthood, and by command of the Lord (D. & C. 124 and 123) had taken from the First Presidency his brother Hyrum to hold as Patriarch, the sealing power, the first and highest honor due to priesthood; that he had turned the keys of endowments, to the last anointing, and sealing together with keys of Salvation for the dead, with the eternity of the marriage covenant and the power of endless lives. All these keys he held, and under these then existing conditions he stood before that association of his select friends, including all the Twelve, and with great feeling and animation he graphically reviewed his life of persecution, labor and sacrifice for the church and kingdom of God, both of which he declared were now organized upon the earth. The burden of which had become too great for him longer to carry, that he was weary and tired with the weight he so long had borne, and he then said, with great vehemence: "And in the name of the Lord, I now shake from my shoulders the responsibilities of bearing off the Kingdom of God to all the world, and here and now I place that responsibility, with all the keys, powers and privileges pertaining thereto, upon the shoulders of you the Twelve Apostles, in connection with this council; and if you will accept this, to do it, God shall bless you mightily and shall open your way; and if you do it I now shake my garments clear and free from the blood of this generation and of all men"; and shaking his skirt with great vehemence he raised himself from the floor, while the spirit that accompanied his words thrilled every heart as with a feeling that boded bereavement and sorrow.

And now, my dear brother, after 60 years have passed, at 85 in age, I bear to you and to all the world a solemn testimony of the truth and veracity of what I have written above, for although so many years have intervened, they are still in my mind, as fresh as when they occurred; no doubt as a part fulfillment of a prediction by the Prophet relating to "testimonies I should bear of his teachings, after I had become hoary with age."
There were, dear brother, other teachings to that council, of which I am not at full liberty to write, but if I had your ear, I would remember that the Prophet once said to me: "Benjamin, in regard to those things I have taught you privately, that are not yet for the public, I give you the right when you are so led, to commit them to others, for you will not be led wrong in discerning those worthy of your confidence."

And now to your question, "How early did the Prophet Joseph practice polygamy?" I hardly know how wisely to reply, for the truth at times may be better withheld; but as what I am writing is to be published only under strict scrutiny of the wisest, I will say, that the revelation to the Church at Nauvoo, July 21, 1843, on the Eternity of the Marriage Covenant and the Law of Plural Marriage, was not the first revelation of the law received and practiced by the Prophet. In 1835, at Kirtland, I learned from my sister's husband, Lyman R. Sherman, who was close to the Prophet, and received it from him, "that the ancient order of Plural Marriage was again to be practiced by the Church." This at the time, did not impress my mind deeply, although there then lived with his family a neighbor's daughter, Fannie Alger, a very nice and comely young woman about my own age, toward whom not only myself, but every one, seemed partial for the amiability of her character; and it was whispered even then that Joseph loved her. After this, there was some trouble with Jared Carter, and through Brother Sherman I learned that "as he had built himself a new house, he now wanted another wife", which Joseph would not permit.

And then there was some trouble with Oliver Cowdery, and whisper said it was relating to a girl then living in his family; and I was afterwards told by Warren Parish, that he himself and Oliver Cowdery did know that Joseph had Fannie Alger as a wife, for they were spied upon and found together. And I can now see that as at Nauvoo, so at Kirtland, that the suspicion or knowledge of the Prophet's plural relation was one of the causes of apostacy and disruption at Kirtland although at the time there was little said publicly on the subject.

Soon after the Prophet's flight in winter of 1837 and 1838, the Alger family left for the West and stopping in Indiana for a time Fannie soon married to one of the citizens there, and although she never left the state, she did not turn from the Church nor from her friendship with the Prophet while she lived. . . .

And now, looking back through the stirring adventures and incidents of thrilling experience of the four years that followed, from 1838 to 1843, such as accompanying the "Kirtland Poor Camp", and arriving in Missouri just in time to take in all the experience of that period, such as imprisonment in Wilson's camp with for many days—the Hauns Mill and McBride murderers as my guards, my wonderful escape and preservation, and my return the following summer to meet the Prophet at Nauvoo, with the terrible sickness that followed, both with others and myself; after which a two and a half year's mission to Canada and Middle States, all so full of change and thrilling incidents that all past experience of my life seemed as partly swallowed up or forgotten, but on meeting the
Prophet at my return to Nauvoo, in June, 1842, he greeted me with great warmth, and almost at once installed me as his legal agent, with the right to use his name as I might be led in business transactions, especially as related to the Church lands and town property of Ramus, all of which were placed by my charge.

And now, in visiting my sister, the widow of Lyman R. Sherman, who died a martyr to the conditions at Far West, I found with her a former acquaintance, Sister Louisa Beeman, and I saw from appearances that they were both in his care, and that he provided for their comfort; and as I was held closely to business, and my home at Ramus was twenty miles distant, I saw but little of them until after the Prophet, in early spring of 1843, had come to Ramus to teach me plural marriage, and to ask my other sisters to be his wives, an account of which I have heretofore given by sworn statement but will here repeat as it occurred.

It was Sunday morning, April 3rd or 4th, 1843, that the Prophet was at my home in Ramus, and after breakfast he proposed a stroll together, and taking his arm, our walk led toward toward a swale, surrounded by trees and tall brush and near the forest line not far from my house. Through the swale ran a small spring brook, across which a tree was fallen and was clean of its bark. On this we sat down and the Prophet proceeded at once to open to me the subject of plural and eternal marriage and he said that years ago in Kirtland the Lord had revealed to him the ancient order of plural marriage, and the necessity for its practice, and did command him then to take another wife, and that among his first thoughts was to come to my mother for some of her daughters. And as he was again required of the Lord to take more wives, he had come now to ask me for my sister Almira.

My words astonished me and almost took my breath. I sat for a time amazed and finally, almost ready to burst with emotion, I looked him straight in the face and said: "Brother Joseph, this is something I did not expect, and I do not understand it. You know whether it is right, I do not. I want to do just as you tell me, and I will try, but if I ever should know that you do this to dishonor and debauch my sister, I will kill you as sure as the Lord lives." And while his eyes did not move from mine, he said with a smile, in a soft tone: "But Benjamin you will never know that, but you will know the principle in time, and will greatly rejoice in what it will bring to you." "But how," I asked, "Can I teach my sister what I myself do not understand, or show her what I do not myself see?" "But you will see and understand it," he said, "And when you open your mouth to talk to your sister, Light will come to you and your mouth will be full and your tongue loose, and I will today preach a sermon to you that none but you will understand." Both of these promises were more than fulfilled. The text of his sermon was our use of the "one, five and ten talents," and as God had now commanded plural marriage, and was exaltation and dominion of the saints dependended upon the number of their righteous posterity, from him who was then but with one talent, it would be taken and given him that had ten, which item of doctrine seems now to be somewhat differently constructed.
But my thought and wish is to write of things just as they occurred, and I now bear an earnest testimony that his other prediction was more than fulfilled, for when with great hesitation and stammering I called my sister to a private audience, and stood before her shaking with fear, just so soon as I found power to open my mouth, it was filled, for the light of the Lord shone upon my understanding, and the subject that had seemed so dark now appeared of all subjects pertaining to our gospel the most lucid and plain; and so both my sister and myself were converted together, and never again did I need evidence or argument to sustain that high and holy principle. And within a few days of this period my sister accompanied me to Nauvoo, where at our sister Delcena's, we soon met the Prophet with his brother Hyrum and Wm. Clayton, as his private secretary, who always accompanied him. Brother Hyrum at once took me in hand, apparently in fear I was not fully converted, and this was the manner of his talk to me: "Now Benjamin, you must not be afraid of this new doctrine, for it is all right. You know Brother Hyrum don't get carried away by worldly things, and he fought this principle until the Lord showed him it was true. I know that Joseph was commanded to take more wives, and he waited until an angel with a drawn sword stood before him and declared that if he longer delayed fulfilling that command he would slay him." This was the manner of Brother Hyrum's teaching to me, which I then did not need, as I was fully converted.

Meanwhile, the Prophet, with Louisa Beeman and my sister Delcena, had it agreeable arranged with Sister Almera, and after a little instruction she stood by the Prophet's side and was sealed to him as a wife, by Brother Clayton; after which the Prophet asked me to take my sister to occupy from number "10" in his Mansion home during her stay in the city. But as I could not be long be absent from my home and business, we soon returned to Ramus, where on the 15th of May, some three weeks later, the Prophet again came and at my house occupied the same room and bed with my sister, that the month previous he had occupied with the daughter of the late Bishop Partridge, as his wife.

And at this time he sealed to me my first wife for eternity, and gave to me my first plural wife, Mary Ann Hare, an orphan girl raised by my mother then living with us, who is still with me, and is probably the only wife still living with the man to whom she was given by the Prophet.

At the marriage of Sister Almera to the Prophet, there was still our youngest sister, for whom he manifest partiality, and would gladly have married, also, but she being young and partially promised to my first wife's brother, although reluctantly, the matter by him was dropped.

On learning from the Prophet that even in Kirtland "the Lord had required him to take plural wives, and that he had then thought to ask for some of my sister's" the past with its conditions and influences began more fully to unfold to my mind, the causes that must, at least in part, have led to the great apostasy and disruption in Kirtland. Without a doubt in my mind, Fanny Alger was, at Kirtland, the Prophet's first plural wife, in which, by right of his calling, he was justified of
of the Lord (see D. & C. Sec. 132:59-60); while Oliver Cowdery, J. Carter, W. Parish, or others were not justified of the Lord either in their criticisms upon the doings of the Prophet, or in their becoming a "law unto themselves," thru which they lost the light of their calling and were left in darkness.

Fanny A., when asked by her brother and others, even after the Prophet's death, regarding her relations to him, replied: "That is all a matter of our own, and I have nothing to communicate." Her parents died in Utah, true to the church. And to my knowledge, was by President Kimball in the temple at St. George introduced as "Brother of the Prophet Joseph's first plural wife."

The marriage of my eldest sister to the Prophet was before my return to Nauvoo, and it being tacitly admitted, I asked no questions.

And as to the number that came into the plural order, before the Prophet's death, I can think of but five, whose names I will not now attempt to recall, but the number soon after his death began to increase. But on the finishing of the Temple, with endowments that followed, the number was greatly augmented. And so there was at least a "few who had accepted" and practiced plural marriage from about 1842 to 1852, when the revelation was published to the world.

"How generally was polygamy practiced in Utah?" is a question that I am not qualified to answer, but from my narrow observation, I would "guess" that one-tenth of our church men married plurally, and that two-thirds of that number made a fair success in raising good families, and that the other third was more or less a failure. But my judgment is not to be fully relied upon.

Of the number of plural marriages in Joseph's day, I have already said of men there was but few, comprising the Prophet and part of the Twelve, with a few others who were his confidential or bosom friends.

You ask if plural marriage was ever Manditory? If you mean by the Lord then I say yes; for it was by command to the Prophet from the first. But from the Prophet to the people, it came as counsel, which when personally given, was not always heeded. But no one who lived worthy of his priesthood and calling was deprived of a right to plural marriage. And just as it was a "happy privilege" for us in poverty and self-sacrifice to have our homes to preach the gospel, or to fill any calling in labors of love and charity for the salvation of the Father's children, thereby to learn their gratitude and love as our reward just so it was a privilege. For do we attain to real happiness but in administering happiness to others?

The first command was to "multiply" and the Prophet taught us that dominion and power in the Great Future would be commensurate with the number of "wives, children and friends" that we inherit here, and that our mission to the earth was to organize a nuclei of Heaven, to take with us, to the increase of which there would be no end.
And while I can believe that to some plural marriage was a great cross, yet I cannot say so from my own experience, for although in times that tried men's hearts, I married seven wives, I was blessed with the gift to love them all; and although providing for so many was attended with great labor, care and anxiety, yet there was sympathy and love as my reward. And there is not one of my children of their mothers that are not dearer to me still than life.

On my return in 1855 from a mission to the Sandwich Isles, I found that Santaquin [Utah], with the homes of my family and all that I possessed to the amount of thousands was destroyed or stolen by Indians in the Walker War, and my family homeless. And yet in 1856, although conditions appeared forbidding, council suggested that I take other wives; and feeling sure it was the voice of the Lord to me, with promise of His blessing, so I married three more young wives, which was followed by cricket and locust raids to destroy nearly all our crops for five years, and yet we were neither hungry or naked. These were days that tried the souls of both men and women, and yet the love and gratitude of any one of my children today more than repays all, and I know that both men and women in plural marriage were happy in the assurance that they were obeying the command of God and the council of His servants.

And without the consent and approbation of him who held the keys of that priesthood, no one had the right even to speak upon the subject of plural marriage to the women he would marry, and even then, he ought first to obtain consent of her parents before having the right to speak to her upon the subject. And this was ever the law so far as I understand it. And for all plural marriages or sealings there was the one only that held this right, which he, if necessary, could delegate to others.

And then with regard to a man's right to take a second wife without the knowledge and consent of the first, I will only say, if his first wife be like the Sarah of old, there would be no such necessity, but if other wives, then see D. & C. Sec. 132-64-65.

And now your question as to the cause of the early persecutions of the Saints. To answer this question, we should go back to its inception to find cause for the hate that is ever behind to incite persecution. Between the present and former dispensations there is a striking analogy. Jesus appeared to the learned, haughty, dignified and opulent Jews as the "poor illiterate carpenter's son of Nazareth", a despised "Galilean," who claimed to be the son of the Highest, the Great Jehovah, that "without him there was nothing made that was made," that he held "all power both in Heaven and on Earth," that he could "destroy the temple and rear it up in three days," etc. while the multitude turned from them to follow Him the "lowly Nazarene," hence their envy and jealousy which ripened into hate and in their nailing Him as a malefactor to the cross, and just so it has been in our day.

Joseph Smith, of lowly birth, a farm boy of common class, poor, illiterate and without distinction other than being religiously inclined; he attended revivals, was in these anxious circles honestly seeking
religion and to learn which was the right church; and calling upon the Lord in simple faith that he might know. Both the Father and the Son in a pillar of light descended, and in teaching him commanded that "he join no religious sect, as their creeds were all an abomination in His sight."

And this blow, by an ignorant son of poverty at fourteen years of age, in the face of all Christendom, was an insult to the dignity of all priestly learning, greatness and wealth; with all their millions in Bible, missionary and other societies for converting the world, all their greatness defied and denounced by an ignorant boy, their contempt led to hatred and persecution. And when that same boy became a man, he claimed having revelations, and that an angel had delivered to him golden plates containing the history of a fallen people, and that God, through him was about to restore the ancient gospel in its purity, which, if true, would blot out all their greatness. And so inspired by hate, they made lies their weapons with which to fight the truth; both of which are attributes of the devil, whose servants they were, as "blind leaders of the blind." The leaders blinded by envy, jealousy, self-interest and hate while the multitude were blinded by the popular prejudice and cry of "away with them"; and all going together to the pit; just as the Master saw, and upon the cross "prayed His Father to forgive them as they knew not what they did." Our Prophet Joseph like the Master, was held in contempt by learned priests, bigots and hypocrites, and like Him, was scorned, despised, and derided by the rich; and by all Christendom was hated without cause, and persecuted unto death by those who would not know him.

It is true that the Prophet seemed to lay the foundation of our Church with a military spirit, and so, unlike the present, he taught us resistance to all oppression; to defend our liberties with the sword. But I can now see as the temple of truth and love is built higher by the Master's hand that resentment brought to us only calamity and the reverse of our hopes. And I can also see now that unnecessary offences were at times given to strengthen the prejudice or hate of our enemies; for that was the infancy of the Church and its days of child-like enthusiasm and great hopes. And at times, no doubt, leading elders made child-like boasts to irritate our enemies.

But of that period and experience, as compared with today, you can realize but little, and so I do not marvel at your criticisms upon the common manner of disposing of the question of "causes," for all is now so changed.

And as since, before 1830 the Lord began, through the Prophet Joseph, to turn the keys of knowledge to flood the world with new light and life, or to plant in the "three measures of meal" that "leaven" through which all the world will yet become "leavened", which has since its inception been working in the world's thought to produce great change, politically, religiously, socially, financially and scientifically -- the increased light that came to earth through the keys of knowledge
turned by the Prophet Joseph for which he was derided, hated, and killed, but towards which all searching eyes of inquiry are now turning with new thoughts leading towards the great truths of the gospel.

While many principles of our religion are being counterfeited by the world to thow dust in the eyes of the thoughtless, that they may not discover that this is the great day of "God's preparation" for regenerating the earth with a Zion for its Capital City.

"The Prophet and his hobbies," The Prophet fully realized that arrayed against him, or the truth, was combined all the religious, political, financial, educational and social powers of the world. And all this power he had to meet with wisdom that came alone from God. He had no time or place for "hobbies", but stood boldly to defend the truth with such weapons and helps as came to him of the Lord.

P. P. Pratt, through his "Voice of Warning to all the people," published at an early day in Kirtland, was a primary exponent of the Prophet's theology. And the Prophet's reply to journalists who early, in Nauvoo, asked him for a copy of the "Mormon creed" has since become our "articles of Faith." And if the Prophet did have a "hobby" it was to provide for the poor and to defend the liberties of the people, for which he organized the Nauvoo Legion, and for which he laid down his life. And the principle of his government or influence over his people is explained in his reply to a church dignitary, I think a Catholic Bishop, who at Nauvoo Mansion asked him "by what power he governed so great a people?" He replied, "I do not govern them, I teach them correct principles and they govern themselves," which was a "hobby", if he had any.

"The Prophet's teaching of love" was not to work upon the sympathies and sensibilities of the people, but by his great example and self-sacrifice, and in showing us that while all the world were against us, our only hope was in our union, and that union was only possible as the fruit of our love for each other. And in teaching us the "Fatherhood of God, and the Brotherhood of Man," we could begin to see why we should "love God supremely, and our brother as ourselves." He taught us that God was the great head of human procreation---was really and truly the father of both our spirits and our bodies; that we were but parts of a great whole, mutually and equally dependent upon each other, according to our conditions. And in our love of God we show, as do the members of our bodies, naturally a greater love and protection for our head. But this reasoning could not be fully understood by all, and as I have said before, in the infancy of the church, our minds and views were more narrow, and we were more petulant, resentful and perhaps more vindictive than now, that the principles of charity and love are seen to be the life spring and core principle of our gospel. And now that we see the temple of charity, union and love, reared above its foundation, once guarded by the "Nauvoo Legion," commanded by the Traitor, "Joab, General in Israel," we are led to feel that those were the days of childhood's mistakes, yet all leading to great purposes as was the call
of Judas to the apostleship. And we are as a people today, in wisdom, stature and power with God, just what we have grown to be through accumulating experience in the Father's care.

"Early day marriage among the Saints." Replying to your question, relating to early day marriages in the Church, I will say, that there were no arbitrary rules relating to marriage, other than that the ceremony be in strict accordance with statute law of the state. And as no one of the elders at a very early day took to themselves the right to perform that ceremony, it was left to the Justice of the Peace, until Elder Seymour Brunson at Kirtland, assumed that prerogative and was patronized until others followed his example; and I remember of no marriage by the Prophet until at Nauvoo. And for marrying with the outside, the rule from the first was as now, strongly against it by council, but tolerant as to common fellowship, while all the wise understand that such marriage is of no eternal worth.

In reply to your question on Early proselyting and attitude of the Church toward other denominations, "I must say again, that in the rise of the Church all advantages of wealth, education and popularity were with our enemies; while the few poor, unlearned elders, called of the Lord, were at every disadvantage. But in having the truth and a trust in the Lord, and they at times, through their faith and zeal, enthused by the spirit of their callings, were led to use the gospel truths as a battering ram, to demolish creeds and hypocrisy, as fabrics."built upon the sand," instead of first rearing in view of all the gospel temple of truth and love, as a home of refuge for the honest in heart, when their houses built upon the "sand" should fall.

And our labors then were perhaps not always in the wisdom and charity that the experience and learning of subsequent years has brought. And in proportion as we were derided, persecuted and held in contempt by a hireling priesthood, whose creeds we knew were but an abomination, and all their ministry but frauds, and so we regarded their show of sincerity as hallow mockery and pretence, all for popularity or gain. And of all the sects, we regarded the Catholic church as the great head of priestcraft and hypocrisy. And so far as I am personally concerned, I am hardly rid of that view and feeling yet, that they are really but "garnished sepulchers" filled with the bones of a dead and rotten past.

And right here a full chapter could be written of young men, who, while yet but boys, went forth in ignorance, and through their humility and in the spirit of their calling, soon became mighty both in word and in deed, and for a season would be as brilliant stars of our hopes, but through forgetting the Lord, in remembrance of their own greatness, too many, like bright meteors, sank from sight to rise no more, in fulfillment of His word that "no flesh should glory in His presence"; while others, trusting in their own strength, were led into sins and were swallowed up in their transgressions, after a labor in faithfulness for a season.
"Pioneers and Oregon." With others, from the Prophet at an early day, I took in the idea of our pioneering or exploring, to find somewhere in the west a place of safety for the Church. And while some thoughts would be of valleys in the mountains, an oasis in the "Great American Desert," others did talk of Oregon, but not in the Prophet's day did any properly organized company start. But at his death the star of our hope for a home of peace began more plainly to rise in the Great West, somewhere to be found. But where, we knew not. Among the speculations as to where, Oregon was talked of, and then of Van Couver's Island, which, with its great advantages for Mormon safety from persecution, was pointed out by our professed friend Stephen A. Douglas, who came to the Nauvoo Mansion in 1845, then kept open by myself, soon after which the praises of Upper California began to be rehearsed and sung. But by Brigham Young, to my knowledge, there was never a pointer given as to our destination as a people. And although in organizing the Pioneer Emigration, I was appointed captain of fifty wagons, and was among the first to cross the Mississippi, and camped on Sugar Creek, I yet heard no suggestion by our leader as to where we were going, nor did I know of a "Scout, mountaineer, or guide" being in our camp for one day, or for anyone to give a word to point or direct our way but Brigham Young. And never until after our arrival in Salt Lake Valley, did I see Fremont, Kit Carson, Peg Leg Smith or Captain Bridger, all of whom I saw after our Modern Moses guided alone by revelation, had led us to the Salt Lake Valley.

"Of changes and mistakes," I hardly feel inspired to write, for change is everywhere and in everything, and liability of change and mistakes is with every one, and if the Master "learned obedience" through experience, how much more need of experience have we? I believe that the mistakes of a true man will be as steps upon which he will rise to greater wisdom, exertions, and to broader views. And why should not the experience of yesterday make us the wiser today? We are not always in the same mind and feeling; for when prompted by hunger, He cursed the tree that bore Him no fruit; and when angry with scourges he drove from the Temple "money changers" and kicked over their tables. But this was not His mood when at the grave of Lazarus He so wept that the guests exclaimed, "Behold how He loveth him!"; nor when in view of calamities to come He wept over Jerusalem; and does it not look like a mistake that He chose as one of His apostles a Judas to betray Him?

And now all of this, to a great degree, finds a parallel in the life of the Prophet Joseph. He was already to fight for the rights and liberties of his friends, and his heart was ever full of sympathy and tears, to sorrow with those he loved; and he too chose among his counsellors and friends those who did betray and bring him to death. And no man, seemingly, could make greater mistakes in selection of associates than did the Prophet; and this, with the many other things of which he was accused, his enemies held as evidence that he was a fallen prophet. And even the Lord not only at times admonished him for neglect of duty; but speaks of his "sins" and "transgressions", which would imply that he was not always equally enlightened and guided by
inspiration. And in the earliest days he did so make mistakes that the Lord at one time withheld from him the keys of his calling. And he does not in his own history hesitate to say that after conversing with both the Father and the Son, and being administered to by holy angels, that he made great mistakes and was overcome in transgression and sins. And as to mistakes through want of properly discerning the "times and seasons" of prophetic events, we were over seventy years ago taught by our leaders to believe that the coming of Christ and the millennial reign was much nearer than then we believe it to be now. And mistakes through imaginations and groundless hopes have been all along the line of our experience as a Church. And are not our reverses, disappointments and mistakes permitted to be monitors and guides for the future? And I do know of things done and of principles taught by the Prophet Joseph that our Prophet, Joseph F., would not today accept as an example for him to imitate. And is not our growth in wisdom the cumulated fruit of our experimental or active life?

"President Brigham Young." Of Brigham Young as President of the Church, I will again bear this as a faithful testimony that I do know and bear record that upon the head of Brigham Young as chief, with the Apostleship in full, was by the voice of the Prophet Joseph in my hearing, laid the full responsibility of bearing of the kingdom of God to all the world. And I do further bear this as a testimony, faithful and true, to the Church and to all the world, that at a conference of the whole Church, at Nauvoo, subsequent to the Prophet's death and return of the absent Apostles, that I sat in the assembly near to President Rigdon, closely attentive to his appeal to the conference to recognize and sustain his claim as "Guardian for the Church." And I was perhaps, to a degree, forgetful of what I knew to be the rights and duties of the apostleship, and as he closed his address and sat down, my back was partly turned to the seat occupied by Apostle Brigham Young and other Apostles, when suddenly, and as from Heaven, I heard the voice of the Prophet Joseph, that thrilled my whole being, and quickly turning around I saw in the transfiguration of Brigham Young, the tall, straight and portly form of the Prophet Joseph Smith, clothed in a sheen of light, covering him to his feet; and I heard the real and perfect voice of the Prophet, even to the whistle, as in years past caused by the loss of a tooth said to have been broken out by the mob at Hyrum. This view, or vision, although but for seconds, was to me as vivid and real as the glare of lightning or the voice of thunder from the heavens, and so deeply was I impressed with what I saw and heard in this transfiguration, that for years I dare not publicly tell what was given me of the Lord to see. But when in later years I did publicly bear this testimony, I found that others would testify to having seen and heard the same. But to what proportion of the congregation who were present I could never know. But I do know that this, my testimony is true.

The Prophet's lost tooth, to which I alluded was, as generally understood, broken out by the mob at Hyrum while trying to pry open his mouth to strangle him with acid, which from time, until the tooth was replaced by a dentist neighbor, a year or so previous to his death,
there had a whistle-like sound to accompany all his public speaking which I again plainly heard at the time of which I write.

And while I do know that Brigham Young as President of the Church, was the right man in the right place, and a great leader for Israel, I still know that he never claimed to be perfect in all of his ways, but that, like his brethren, he at times was liable to mistakes. And to some of his mistakes I am a witness, and also that he saw some of his mistakes and nobly corrected them.

And to show more fully his leading traits and general "personal character", I will go back to relate that soon after embracing the gospel in 1832, Brigham Young started with his brother from their home in the state of New York, to visit the Prophet at Kirtland, and on their way called upon us at Pomfret, N. Y., who had received the gospel just before them, and remaining overnight with my sister's husband, Lyman R. Sherman. And while at evening in animated conversation upon the gifts as promised to accompany the gospel, the spirit came upon Brother Sherman in mighty power, and he opened his mouth in an unknown tongue, to the great surprise and joy of all, and I think that Brother Brigham also at that time received the gift; Brother Lyman R. Sherman being the first known to have spoken in the gift of tongues by the power of God in this dispensation. And on Brother Brigham arriving in Kirtland at the Prophet's home, being called to lead in family prayer, as a surprise even to the Prophet, he opened his mouth in a strange tongue, the first heard by him, which he said at once was in the language of our first parents. And he, at that time, made the Prediction upon the head of Brigham Young that "at some period he would become the leader of the Church, and that there would be but one danger to beset him, and that would be his love of wealth." These things were told me by Brother Sherman at near the time of their occurrence, who remained almost as the right hand of the Prophet until the day of his death. And while I am witness that after the Prophet's death that Brigham Young became Israel's great leader, a Prophet, Seer and Revelator, to the Church in all the world, I yet know that he was a great financer and at times did manifest a love for wealth, and did make mistakes, some of which he may not have lived fully to rectify. But with all of his mistakes, private or public, his voice was ever the voice of the true shepherd to Israel. And in looking for mistakes, I feel admonished to look after my own personality, which, with all of his faults, might perhaps leave me, in comparison, too small for a full claim to notice.

From him young manhood, all through his after life, in close observation, I saw him through every calling, rise to become Israel's great chief, holding every key of Priesthood and power pertaining to the Kingdom of God on the earth and the salvation for the dead. And I saw, too, that through his great capacity as financier, with his love of riches, that he became as the Prophet had foretold, possessed of great wealth, which, although it may have had an influence to a degree upon his children, it had none to draw him from the love or duties of his high calling, in which, at times, he seemed fully tested, and the confidence of the people was towards him from his first assuming the Presidency.
His great influence as a leader seemed to lie in his quick discernment, his ready decisions, and in his right judgement, in placing men and things in their proper position, and to their best possible use; while his intuitive magnetism, his kindly sympathy in afflictions, his noble bearing as a brother, friend and as a man in its true and full sense, inspired confidence, respect and love in all who really knew him. And as for comparing him with others filling the same position, I can only think of them all, and each, as strong and mighty pillars in the Great Temple of our Hopes, equal in strength and use, but each molded by the Master hand in symmetry and beauty to a difference in form and mind but not in Priesthood and purpose.

"Brigham Young, his interest in education." Upon this question I will not prolong remarks. With Brigham Young from 1832 until his death in 1877 I was often closely associated, and I know him to have been a pioneer, a promoter, and a true friend to education, and although he was not himself cultured in scholarship or refined by classic education, yet he by nature was highly cultured and refined both in habit, demeanor and conversation, and no one could associated with him and not be impressed by his refining influence. And so far as the influence of music and drama tend to civilize and elevate, or refine society, credit should be due to Brigham Young as the pioneer chief in their promotion and establishment in the heart of the "Great American Desert," to give musical tone and inspiration to all its divisions into states.

But we should not forget that Brigham Young was the leader of a people, driven before the cannon and bayonet, of a heartless and cruel mob, who fled across the Mississippi in winter, leaving their homes without opportunity to provide food or clothing; and plundered of all they could not carry, and to go they knew not where; and to save the lives of all of these many thousands now devolved on Brigham Young, even to look after the possibilities for transportation, to learn the way, to open roads, to see that all had food, and then protect them from the tomahawk, scalping knife and bullet; and when in the Valleys, to measure out land, to formulate laws, and to counsel the people how to save a pittance from swarms of crickets and locusts that ravaged their field.

And for some years, President Young, with all the people, were devotedly seeking to save the souls of the people alive, from starvation, with hope of a better day for education.

But enthused by the spirit of our leader, in every way-station on the road, in every town or ward settled after arriving in Utah, about the first house built by the people was for public school and meeting purposes. And that Brigham Young opposed education, with desire to keep his people in ignorance, is a monster in falsehood, for he was not only the pioneer in education in the mountain states, but so long as he lived he assisted it liberally with his means, and the Brigham Young Academy and College, in Utah, will continue to bear fruit to the honor of his name after his traducers with their falsehoods, are buried in forgetfulness, under the contempt of God and all just men.
"What I know of the objects and purposes, in raising the Mormon Battalion." To show you that I did know the motive of President Young in sending the Battalion, I will say that as one of that special Council organized by the Prophet, of which I have written, and of which President Young being the head, I still hold my seat and still had a voice in all general movements relating to our exodus as a people from Nauvoo. And I will say that this council, as a legislature of the people, did continue under the Presidency and became the Colonial Council, or legislature of the State of Deseret. And I was present at the arrival of Colonel Little and company at Garden Grove, with the requisition, by Gout for five hundred volunteers for the American Army, served upon the fleeting Mormons as a test to their loyalty and patriotism by Senator Benton of Missouri. It was well understood at the time, as the subject was fully ventilated by the council, and all comprehended it as a great sacrifice and that there was no reward or benefit offered by the government in any degree.

It was a test of the people's and our Prophet's loyalty and patriotism while under arrest; and this patriotism and loyalty was now to be placed upon the alter at a great disadvantage. And would we stand the test—even as did our Father Abraham answer this great question?

At Garden Grove all of the enlistment was filled, and now, this was unequalled patriotism and valor of the Sons of Zion, who sacrificed aged parents, wives and children, sweethearts and other dear ones, by leaving them homeless, unprotected, and to the mercy of the wild and naked plains.

That such a privilege was sought for by the Mormons, should be stamped as a monstrosity in falsehood. But that it was a great and far-reaching test of loyalty all will admit, which was to establish the truth of Mormon love and loyalty to that heaven-inspired and God-given Constitution of the United States, which will yet give guarantee of liberty and equal rights to all people of the earth and nations shall "learn war no more," and shall learn to better comprehend that great principle of the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man.

I do not think of more to write.

Signed, Benjamin F. Johnson
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BENJAMIN FRANKLIN JOHNSON:
COLONIZER, PUBLIC SERVANT, AND CHURCH LEADER

An Abstract of
A Thesis
Presented to the
Department of Graduate Studies in Religious Instruction
Brigham Young University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
E. Dale LeBaron
August 1966
ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to study the life and labors of Benjamin Franklin Johnson and to examine his contributions to his nation and to his Church.

Benjamin accepted the teachings of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints the year following its organization. The events of his youth were closely associated with the early history of the Church. He witnessed its struggles and troubles in Ohio. He participated in the conflict in Missouri, and was held as a prisoner during that turbulent period. While the Church was settled in Illinois, he was called by the Prophet Joseph Smith to serve in responsible assignments, and enjoyed a close friendship with the Prophet.

As the Church was driven westward, Benjamin played a prominent role in conquering the desert and establishing an inland empire. This was done through his efforts as a colonizer, businessman, horticulturalist, Church leader and legislator. He was credited with founding the settlement of Santaquin, in Utah County, and was the first member of the Church to settle in Tempe, Arizona. He also contributed to the settlement of other colonies in the west.

Throughout his life, Benjamin was active as a missionary for the Church, both through formal mission calls and through his efforts to share his beliefs with his friends. His most extensive missionary assignment sent him to the Hawaiian Islands for two years. During this mission he met unusual challenges. Because of the manner in which these
challenges were met, he was commended by the Mission Presidency and called to serve in positions of leadership.

The law of plural marriage was introduced to Benjamin by the Prophet Joseph Smith, who instructed Benjamin that he should live the law. Obedient to the counsel of the Church leaders, Benjamin took seven wives who bore him forty-five children. His posterity numbered about eight hundred at the time of his death in 1905. Although Benjamin dearly loved his family and found much happiness through his association with them, he also experienced much heartache and many of the problems which were quite common with the practice of plural marriage. During the latter years of his life, he experienced much anxiety because of his lack of control and influence over his wives.

Benjamin's life could be divided into three main periods, i.e.: his first thirty years—years of preparation—were spent with his family and with the main body of the Church; his next thirty-four years were spent mainly in colonizing and helping to build Utah; and his remaining twenty-three years were devoted largely to establishing settlements in Arizona and Mexico and in strengthening the Church in those areas. During this final period of his life, Benjamin served as Patriarch in the Maricopa Stake.

The Church became a motivating power in the life of Benjamin Franklin Johnson. During the seventy-four years that he was associated with the Church, he served under the first six presidents. His life became a monument of dedicated loyalty and service to the Church, its leaders, and its principles.