

Lesson 48: D&C 135-136, "[He] Has Sealed His Mission and His Works With His Own Blood"

For this lesson I relied on the book:

Murder of the Mormon Prophet: The Political Prelude to the Death of Joseph Smith
by LeGrand Baker

Where the information on this subject is well compiled, outlined, and documented

Overview

After Missouri, Joseph concluded that the Saints would only be safe outside of the United States.

He was considering Texas, Oregon territory, and Mexico (Eastern ridge of the Great Basin) as a permanent location

He wanted to stay in Nauvoo long enough to strengthen the church and build a temple to endow the Saints

He wanted time to financially and logistically prepare for the move. This involved seeking compensation from Missouri for the property and possessions that they had taken

Political power of the Saints in Nauvoo

Size and growth of Nauvoo

In the five years between 1839 to 1844 Nauvoo's population grew to about 20,000 and became one of the largest cities in Illinois, dwarfing other communities in Hancock County.

When driven from their homes in Missouri, they sought shelter and protection in Illinois, they were fed, nursed, and hugged to the bosom by men of both political parties, each anxious to win their favor by excelling the other in kindness towards them. For a while all worked well. They purchased their town site, to which the Prophet and many of his followers removed, and in a short time their village numbered several hundred souls. Election after election came and so unsettled were they in political sentiments that each party dreaded their strength, yet feared to offend... neither party having independence enough to oppose it. (Bloomington Herald, Bloomington, Iowa, June 21, 1844)

In the beginning they accepted the Saints into Illinois to hope to gain political advantage

The importance of the Mormon vote

It is very well known that the Mormons are numerous enough in the State of

Illinois to control the character of its vote. If they control the vote of that State, they will succeed in a great measure, in controlling the vote of the whole western country, for it will be a very close vote at best. It therefore will be seen, that this insignificant body of men, may, in the event of the next Presidency, control the destinies of all the candidates. (New York Herald, March 20, 1844)

Illinois was a swing state and could determine the presidency
The Saints could swing Illinois
Like the Cuban-Americans in Florida
But was there a cause that could make the Saints vote as a block?

Appeal to congress and the president for compensation from Missouri

Joseph carried a petition from the Saints addressed to Congress, asking help for 491 individuals to obtain payment for millions of dollars worth of property that had been stolen from them in Missouri.

Joseph Smith

“During my stay I had an interview with Martin Van Buren, the President, who treated me very insolently, and it was with great reluctance he listened to our message, which, when he had heard, he said: “If I take up for you I shall lose the vote of Missouri.”

Joseph reported that the president also said, “Gentlemen, your cause is just, but I can do nothing for you.” (Woodruff Journal, 6:243-244)

... Because the hot issue at that time was States Rights

Find a presidential candidate that would support their cause

On November 2, 1843, Joseph, with his brother Hyrum, Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, Willard Richards, John Taylor, William Law, and William Clayton, sitting in council -
“agreed to write a letter to the five candidates for the Presidency of the United States, to inquire what their feelings were towards us as a people, and what their course of action would be in relation to the cruelty and oppression that we have suffered from the State of Missouri, if they were elected.” (HC, 6:62-63)

Joseph Smith becomes a presidential candidate

There's a lot to talk about here. He was a serious candidate and could have had considerable impact.

But while running he still talked about his objective of giving the Saints their endowment and preparing them to move West

Threats and protection

Nauvoo Charter and Legion inhibits direct mob attacks

The Illinois constitution required that every community have branch of the state militia. General Joseph Smith made sure the Nauvoo Legion was especially well-trained and well-armed

The Nauvoo Charter guarantee justice under the law – something Joseph and the Saints had often been denied

Attempt and failure to bring Joseph back to Missouri

In Missouri Joseph was convicted of treason. He was allowed to escape But that meant he was still wanted in Missouri

His attempt to be reimbursed by Missouri angered and frightened them

There was an attempt to murder Governor Boggs. Joseph was a suspect

Several attempts were made to kidnap Joseph and take him to Missouri where his enemies could easily kill him

Rockwell was also accused of attempting to murder Boggs. He was captured and jailed in Missouri

After Rockwell escaped from Missouri Joseph learned that now the plan was for traitors within to create a cause for another mob attack – and kill Joseph in the process

The reason why I made the remarks I did was on account of the reports brought from the Missouri jail by O. P. Rockwell, that my enemies were determined to get me into their power and take my life, and thereby thought they would accomplish the overthrow of “Mormonism.” And to enable them to effect this, they had secured the services of some of my most confidential friends, whom I did not suspect, and who were living in Nauvoo.... They did not design to try me, but hang me, or take my life anyhow. (HC, 6:164)

Traitors within

John C. Bennett

Drafted the Nauvoo City Charter

First Mayor of Nauvoo and first Major-General of the Nauvoo Legion

William Law

Second Counselor in the First Presidency

Wilson Law

Member of Nauvoo City Council, brigadier general in Nauvoo Legion

Dr. Robert Foster
Appointed surgeon general in the Nauvoo Legion
A Regent of the University of Nauvoo

William Marks
President of the Nauvoo Stake

The traitors come up with end-run: The Nauvoo Expositor

The Expositor presented a great threat to Joseph and the Saints

The Nauvoo Expositor is the title of a new paper about to be started at Nauvoo by the opponents of Joe. The prospectus has been issued, in which the proposed character of the paper is set forth. It will have nothing to do with religion; but goes in for the repeal of the Nauvoo City Charter, against political revelations, and unconstitutional ordinances. As the conductors of this paper are well acquainted with Joe, it will in all probability make some disclosures which will render Nauvoo too hot either for Joe or his enemies. We will endeavor to keep our readers well apprised of every thing of interest to them. In the mean time we say success to the new undertaking—for “a kingdom divided against itself cannot stand.” (Warsaw Signal, May 15, 1844)

Attack the Nauvoo Charter – their strongest source of protection

Accusations legitimate because “the conductors of this paper are well acquainted with Joe”

No way for the Saints to avoid the Expositor trap

Freedom of the press meant something different then than it does now: One could put no prior restraint upon any publication, but after something was published, if the publisher had infringed upon the rights of others, then appropriate legal action could be taken against the publisher.

They needed to wait until the paper was published or they would be guilty of violating freedom of the press

After the publication they could take legal action but the paper could continue to publish while the matter remained in the courts.

And the paper could print whatever lies it considered necessary to justify the mob actions

The Expositor's first edition

- Called for the repeal of the Nauvoo City charter
- Mormonism was once true, but Joseph is a fallen prophet
- Mormon leaders were at the center of a counterfeiting operation.
- Attacked Hyrum Smith, who was a candidate for the state legislature
- Claimed Joseph Smith's candidacy for the presidency was tyrannical
- Invited the mob to come into the city and expel the Mormons from their homes.

Shall we... lie still and suffer Joseph Smith to light up the lamp of tyranny and oppression in our midst?... Let us arise in the majesty of our strength and sweep the influence of tyrants and miscreants from the face of the land.

The question is asked, will you bring a mob upon us... to bring every offender to justice and to protect the innocent, if it is necessary to make show of force, to execute legal process. (The Nauvoo Expositor June 7, 1844)

The action of Mayor Smith and the City Council

Mayor [Joseph Smith] said, if he had a City Council who felt as he did, the [Nauvoo Expositor] would be declared a nuisance before night.... Here is a paper that is exciting our enemies abroad..... What the opposition party want, is to raise a mob on us and take the spoil from us, as they did in Missouri....

[Joseph said he] would rather die tomorrow and have the thing smashed, than live and have it go on, for it was exciting the spirit of mobocracy among the people, and bringing death and destruction upon us. (Minutes of Monday, June 10, published in Nauvoo Neighbor)

Joseph and the City Council realize a third option -
Declare the Expositor a public nuisance and destroy it.

There was precedence for this. You can find a number of accounts of cities during this time period that destroyed the press because they were considered a nuisance.

As expected, the Expositor gives the mobs their justification

Joseph Smith charged with "riot"

After their press was destroyed, the proprietors of the Expositor rushed to Carthage, the county seat, and swore out a complaint against the mayor and all members of the city council - not on charges of violating their rights of freedom of the press, and not on charges of destroying their property - but on the charge that they "did on the 10th day of June instant commit a riot at and within the county aforesaid, wherein they with force and

violence broke into the office of the Nauvoo Expositor.” (The writ is printed in History of the Church, 6:453-454)

The destruction of the Expositor was carried out by the City Marshal in a very orderly manner

Joseph Smith nor any members of the city council were present – but they were the ones accused of riot

Call to action for the mobs

The citizens of Carthage passed a series of resolutions designed to provide a justification for their intention to attack the City

... to command the efforts and the services of every good citizen to put an immediate stop to the career of the mad Prophet and his demoniac coadjutors, We must not only defend ourselves from danger, but we must resolutely carry the war into the enemy’s camp,... that we hold ourselves in readiness to cooperate with our fellow citizens in this state, Missouri and Iowa to exterminate, utterly exterminate, the wicked and abominable Mormon leaders, the authors of our troubles,... A war of extermination should be waged, to their entire destruction, if necessary, for our protection. (Warsaw Signal, June 14, 19, 1844)

Joseph agrees to face charges – but not in Carthage

Constable Bettisworth arrived and presented his warrant to the Mormon leaders. After the officer got through reading the writ, I referred him to the clause in the writ—“Before me or some other justice of the peace of said county,” saying, “We are ready to go to trial before Esquire Johnson or any justice in Nauvoo, according to the requirements of the writ;” but Bettisworth swore he would be damned but he would carry them to Carthage before Morrison, who issued the writ and seemed very wrathful. I asked him if he intended to break the law, for he knew the privilege of the prisoners. (HC, 6:454)

This is an example of the lawfulness the Saints faced without the protection of the Nauvoo Charter

There was a hearing in the Nauvoo Municipal Court concerning the actions of the city leaders. It was determined that no crime had been committed – so obviously they were innocent of any wrongdoing

Now the mob instigators truly had the incident they needed. Joseph and the leaders not only destroyed the Expositor but they had escaped justice

The mobs gather

The editor of the Warsaw Signal announced that the time for the invasion of Nauvoo had come.

We have one chance left. Joe will undoubtedly have the power to oppose, but if he attempts to exercise it, we will throw ourselves on our reserved rights. Justice we will have. If the law is cheated out of its efficacy and can no longer protect our persons and property, we have the consolation to know that steel and gun powder can. (Warsaw Signal, June 12, 1844)

We are informed by gentlemen direct from Carthage that the citizens are ordered to assemble at their various places of rendezvous on Wednesday next. (Warsaw Signal, June 14, 1844)

“Wednesday next” was June 19th.

Also this addition of the Warsaw Signal stated the places of rendezvous were Warsaw, Carthage, Green Plains, Spilman’s Landing, Chili, and La Harpe

Different reports state that thousands of men gather to these rendezvous locations

Show of force saves Nauvoo from the mob

Mayor Joseph Smith declares martial law

The Legion and police force are given control protect the city

General Joseph Smith address the Nauvoo Legion

General Joseph Smith was in full dress uniform when he stood on the platform and addressed his troops.

Literally the entire city had turned out to hear him.

We are American citizens. We live upon a soil for the liberties of which our fathers periled their lives and spilt their blood upon the battlefield. Those rights so dearly purchased, shall not be disgracefully trodden under foot by lawless marauders without at least a noble effort on our part to sustain our liberties....

I call God and angels to witness that I have unsheathed my sword with a firm and unalterable determination that this people shall have their legal rights, and be protected from mob violence, or my blood shall be spilt upon the ground like water, and my body consigned to the silent tomb.... I do not regard my own life. I am ready to be offered a sacrifice for this people. (HC, 6:498-500)

the Saints were prepared to fight and if necessary die for their homes and families. The mob just wanted to kill and to loot, but not to be wounded or to die.

The mob needs the State Militia to defeat the Nauvoo Legion

The Actions of Governor Ford

Ford comes to Carthage to control the situation

He meets with mob and anti-Mormon leaders

He opens up the State armory for the local mob/militias

Ford demands Nauvoo city leaders come to Carthage

Governor Ford asks for meeting in Carthage with “one or more well-informed and discreet persons, who will be capable of laying before me your version of the matter.” (HC, 6:521)

After waiting the Governor’s pleasure for some time, we had an audience—but such an audience! He was surrounded by some of the vilest and most unprincipled men in creation.... Wilson, and, I believe, William Law were there, Foster, Frank and Chauncey Higbee, Mr. Marr, a lawyer from Nauvoo, a mobocratic merchant from Warsaw—in all fifteen or twenty persons, most of whom were recreant to virtue, honor, integrity and everything that is considered honorable among men. I can well remember the feelings of disgust that I had in seeing the Governor surrounded by such an infamous group...

About five o’clock in the afternoon we took our departure with not the most pleasant feelings. The associations of the governor, the spirit that he manifested to compromise with these scoundrels, the length of time that he had kept us waiting, and his general deportment, together with the infernal spirit that we saw exhibited by those whom he admitted to his counsels, made the prospect anything but promising. (John Taylor’s account is in HC, 6:543-545)

Little hope that Ford wanted a peaceful resolution

Ford threatens Nauvoo if Joseph does not come to Carthage

Gov Ford gave John Taylor a letter for Joseph

“submit yourselves to be arrested by the same constable, by virtue of the same warrant and to be tried before the same magistrate whose authority has heretofore been resisted.... I tell you plainly that if no such submission is made as I have indicated, I will be obliged to call out the militia; and if a

few thousand will not be sufficient, many thousands will be, [and] your city will be destroyed, and your people, many of them, exterminated.” (HC, 6:533-7)

This was illegal because Joseph had already been tried for “riot” and could not be tried again

But the message was clear: come to Carthage or Nauvoo destroyed and many Saints will be exterminated

Ford takes State issued arms away from the Nauvoo Legion

Which he had no cause to do. But the Legion still had personal weapons.

Other overt acts while Joseph is in Carthage

Joseph leaves Nauvoo to face charges in Carthage

Last option: Joseph escapes to the West

Joseph was inspired to understand that Nauvoo won't be attacked if he's gone. He crosses the river to go West and prepare a place for the Saints to follow. But he receives a letter from Emma and others accusing of being a coward and asking him to come back. He tells Hyrum, “If my life is of no value to my friends it is of none to myself.” and goes back to Nauvoo

Joseph goes to Carthage to face charges of riot

On the 24 June, Joseph, Hyrum, John Taylor, and fifteen other members of the Nauvoo city council set out on horseback for Carthage, accompanied by Willard Richards and a number of other friends.

[Joseph] sent a messenger immediately to Carthage to tell the governor he would meet his staff. They have just passed by here, on their way there. My heart said, Lord bless those dear men, and preserve them from those that thirst for their blood. Their giving themselves up, is all that will save our city from destruction. The governor wrote if they did not do so, our city was suspended upon so many kegs of powder, and it needed only one spark to touch them off, so you can see how he feels. What will be the fate of our dear Brethren, the Lord only knows. (“Life in Nauvoo, June 1844: Vilate Kimball’s Martyrdom Letters,” 234-235)

But is charged with treason

The City leaders were accused of riot. Bail was set at \$500 each (should have been about \$70). They all—not only the prisoners but also their friends who had come to protect them—signed deeds to their homes and farms in lieu of cash to secure their release.

But Joseph and Hyrum Smith was arrested again by Constable Bettisworth, this time on charges of treason against the state of Illinois. So, the brothers were prevented from returning to Nauvoo.

Later Ford would justify the treason charge because Joseph declared martial law.

Ford “convicts” Joseph and Hyrum of treason

8:30 a.m.—Governor Ford called all the troops and ordered them to form a hollow square on the public ground near the Court House; and when formed, he mounted an old table, and addressed them in a most inflammatory manner, exciting the feelings of indignation against Generals Joseph and Hyrum Smith,... giving his assent and sanction to the rumors that had gathered them together, and stating that although they were dangerous men in the community, and guilty of all that they might have alleged against them, still they were in the hands of the law, which must have its course. (HC, 6:562-3)

The governor had just pronounced the defendants “guilty” of a capital crime without a trial or even a preliminary hearing.

Joseph and Hyrum are murdered

On the June 27th Governor Ford, for no apparent reason, left for Nauvoo and, for his protection, took much of the militia with him. He left the Carthage Grays in charge.

He lectured the Saints in Nauvoo, "Another cause of excitement is the fact of your having so many firearms. The public are afraid that you are going to use them against government. I know there is a great prejudice against you on account of your peculiar religion, but you ought to be praying Saints, not military Saints."

Initially six friends went with Joseph and Hyrum to jail. Throughout the day, for various reasons, all left except John Taylor and Willard Richards

At about 5PM a mob of about 100 men attacked the jail

A bullet fired through the panel of the door struck Hyrum in the left side of his face

Joseph discharged his six-shooter into the crowded hall. The shots delayed the assassins only a moment.

John Taylor attempted to jump out of the window, but was hit by gunfire. A shot through the window from below hit the watch in his vest pocket and knocking him back into the room. He fell to the floor and was shot again in his left wrist and below his left knee. Rolling to get under the bed, he was shot again in his left hip

“Joseph, seeing there was no safety in the room,” tried the same escape. Instantly the

mob fired on him, and he fell mortally wounded through the open window

Someone yelled "the Mormons are coming" and the mob scattered

Willard Richards alone remained unscathed, having only had a bullet graze his ear. He dragged John Taylor into the next room, deposited him on straw, and covered him with a mattress. The straw, Elder Taylor believed, saved his life by helping stop his bleeding.