For early members of the Church, the summer of 1831 began with high expectations. An important conference was held during the first week of June in the schoolhouse on Isaac Morley’s farm near Kirtland. The room was crowded, and many sat just outside the open windows, straining to hear. The summer breeze carried the fragrance of freshly harvested mint, planted by the acre in the nearby fields. Joseph Smith opened the conference with prayer.

At this gathering, the first ordinations to the “high priesthood” were performed. Several of the elders experienced spiritual manifestations, including the casting out of evil spirits. Then, near the close of the four-day conference, Joseph Smith received a revelation that spoke to the dearest hopes of the faithful.

Ever since they had first read the Book of Mormon, believers had wondered how, where, and when the book’s prophecies would be realized. When would the Lamanites—then believed to be the North American Indians—be converted and join Church members in building a New Jerusalem in the Americas? These early members knew the site for the city would be “among the Lamanites.” They had even dispatched Oliver Cowdery and three other missionaries to the far western reaches of the United States to preach to American Indians near Missouri.

Now, in this new revelation, the Lord declared that Missouri was indeed “the land which I will consecrate unto my People.” Speaking of the New Jerusalem, He promised that He would “hasten the City in its time.” The revelation also called Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, and 13 other pairs of missionaries to travel two by two to Missouri, where the next conference was to be held. It also told them that if they were faithful, the Lord would reveal “the land of [their] inheritance.”

The pairs of missionaries departed for Missouri with high hopes. They believed the day of Jesus’s return to earth was very near and that they were traveling to locate and build a temple city in which they would gather to receive the Lord when He came. Rumors rippled that Oliver Cowdery and his fellow missionaries were on the verge of converting many American Indians. The missionaries anticipated that in Missouri “the objects of faith and hope, were to become the objects of knowledge and fruition.”

The Journey to Missouri

Isaac Morley and Ezra Booth were among the missionaries called. They had both attended the conference and had been ordained, and they were now designated to travel as companions.

Isaac Morley had been among the first converts to the Church in Ohio. At the time of his conversion, Morley; his wife, Lucy; his family; and several friends lived on his farm, sharing a communal lifestyle. They were trying the best they could to live as the early Christians mentioned in the book of Acts, who had “all things common” (Acts 4:32).
Ezra Booth and Isaac Morley

Ezra Booth had been a respected Methodist preacher in northeastern Ohio. His conversion created a small stir among his friends and acquaintances, who lamented his joining the “Mormonites.” Booth had felt strongly prompted to join the new faith. “The impressions of my mind were deep and powerful,” he recalled, “and my feelings were excited to a degree to which I had been a stranger.”

But by the time of his departure in June 1831, Booth had begun to doubt. The spiritual manifestations at the conference did not meet his expectations, and he was upset that Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon left for Missouri on a wagon, while he and Isaac were called to walk the entire distance in the summer heat, preaching along the way.

The journey was inconvenient for others as well. Joseph Smith departed just weeks after he and Emma lost twins shortly after birth. He left his grieving wife, who would have to care for herself and the newly adopted Murdock twins (whose mother, Julia, had died in late April and whose father, John, would also make the trip to Missouri).

When Ezra Booth finally arrived in Missouri, he felt deflated. He and others “expected to find a country abounding with the necessaries and comforts of life.” Instead, he looked around and noted that “the prospect appeared somewhat gloomy.” Booth remembered Joseph Smith confidently asserting before the trip that the Church in Missouri would be large and growing, but when they arrived they found only seven new members.

Joseph Smith himself might have been disappointed initially when he arrived in Missouri. The area around Independence was mostly open prairie with a few scattered trees. Far from inspiring visions of a millennial capital, the frontier town itself was “a century behind the times.” For most of the elders, the reality on the ground in Missouri was a disappointment. But they would deal with that disappointment in different ways.

A Prayer for Guidance

Was this really the place and time to try to build up Zion? On July 20, anxious to understand God’s timing and intentions, Joseph turned to the Lord. “When will the wilderness blossom as the rose?” he prayed. “When will Zion be built up in her glory, and where will thy Temple stand?” These questions prompted a revelation—now Doctrine and Covenants 57—that finally designated the site for the city and temple.

A further revelation on August 1 (Doctrine and Covenants 58) instructed the missionaries to dedicate the land but hinted that Zion would be built up only “after much tribulation.” The revelation chastised those who, like Ezra Booth, had murmured complaints. “They say in their hearts this is not the work of the Lord for his promises are not fulfilled.” It warned that “their reward lurketh beneath & not from above.”

D&C 57

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In spite of disappointment and the enormity of the city building project, Joseph was determined to make a start. Together with Sidney Rigdon and others, he set to work. They consecrated the land near Independence for a place of gathering, laid the first log for a house in Zion, and set the northeast cornerstone for a temple.

Some of the elders, like Reynolds Cahoon, saw exciting possibilities in these symbolic beginnings. “There my mortal eyes beheld grate and marvilous things, such as my eyes once never even contemplated of seeing in this world,” he wrote, “but not worth going to Missouri to see.”

The Return to Ohio

Though a few of the missionaries had been chosen to remain in Missouri, the August 1 revelation commanded the rest of the missionaries to return to their homes, indicating that “the time has not yet come for many years for them to receive their inheritance in this land.”

Another revelation, now Doctrine and Covenants 60, instructed the returning missionaries to travel on the Missouri River east to St. Louis. There Joseph and Sidney Rigdon would travel speedily to Cincinnati, Ohio, to preach, while the others were to travel “two by two & preach the word not in haste among the congregations of the wicked.”

They embarked in canoes for St. Louis on August 8. The Missouri River was notoriously difficult to navigate. Steamboat captains dreaded the sawyers, or fallen trees lurking in the river, that frequently wrecked their vessels. The elders would later tell Elizabeth Marsh that the river’s roiling current “look[ed] mad as if it had been cursed.”

The journey was a contentious one for the elders. Exhaustion, heat, and the treacherous Missouri River
Ezra Booth and Isaac Morley

frayed their nerves. On their third day on the water, some of the canoes nearly became entangled in the sawyers, which threatened to capsize the canoes, endangering the lives of those who could not swim.

After they made it safely to shore, they continued bickering. Though certainly capable of contention himself, Ezra Booth had little tolerance for it in others. He later observed sarcastically, “These are the leaders of the church, and the only church on earth the Lord beholds with approbation.”19

Joseph Smith received another revelation the following morning on the riverbank (Doctrine and Covenants 61), in which the Lord warned them of danger upon the water but said, “It mattereth not unto me . . . whether they go by water or by land.”20

D&C 62

Joseph proceeded on land the next day with a part of the group. They encountered his brother Hyrum and others who had been delayed and had yet to visit the site for Zion. A revelation ( Doctrine and Covenants 62) admonished them, “Continue your Journey, assemble yourselves upon the land of Zion, & hold a meeting & rejoice together & offer a sacrament unto the most high.”21

Ezra Booth, on the other hand, decided to get back as quickly as possible rather than preach by the way according to the earlier revelation. He and a few companions traveled the remainder of the journey to Ohio by boat and coach.

“Confound Your Enemies”

Shortly after his return to Ohio, Ezra Booth parted ways with the Church in a very public fashion. Because his experience did not match his expectations of how Zion should look or how Joseph Smith should behave, he first wavered and then abandoned his faith. Beginning that October, the Ohio Star, a newspaper located in Ravenna, Ohio, began publishing a series of letters Booth penned, heavily criticizing Joseph Smith and the Church.

By December his letters had even started to hinder missionary work, and Joseph Smith received two revelations in December 1831 and January 1832, now found in Doctrine and Covenants 71 and 73. They challenged Booth and other dissidents such as Symonds Ryder to “bring forth their strong reasons against the Lord.” They also encouraged Joseph and Sidney Rigdon to preach actively: “Confound your enemies; Call upon them to meet you both in publick and in private.”22

Though Sidney Rigdon challenged Booth and Ryder to public debate, they declined, perhaps aware of Rigdon’s reputation as a fierce debater. Rigdon preached in Ravenna, Ohio, and in other locations, refuting Booth’s claims. Although Booth’s letters had a dampening effect on missionary work, that effect was short-lived.

Tragically, Booth’s cynicism had driven a wedge not only between him and the restored Church but also between him and his earlier spiritual experiences. He ultimately “abandoned Christianity and became an agnostic.”23

Isaac Morley’s Test

While Ezra Booth’s experiences in traveling to Missouri turned him away from the Church, Isaac Morley’s ultimately drew him closer. During the trip, Morley evidently shared, at least to a degree, in Ezra Booth’s cynicism. A revelation received on September 11 (Doctrine and Covenants 64) chastised both Booth and Morley: “They condemned for evil that thing in which there was no evil.” Any second thoughts Morley may have had about his mission were short-lived. Unlike Ezra Booth, Isaac Morley had ceased his criticisms and changed his outlook. The revelation continued in the Lord’s own
Ezra Booth and Isaac Morley

voice: “I have forgiven my Servent Isaac.”

But the Lord had additional sacrifices in mind for Isaac Morley. He was asked to relinquish his large landholdings in Kirtland and return to Missouri with his family. In a revelation given shortly after Joseph Smith’s return to Kirtland (Doctrine and Covenants 63), the Lord instructed Morley’s brother-in-law Titus Billings to “dispose of” Morley’s farm. In the revelation given on September 11, the Lord explained that he commanded the farm be sold, “that my servant Isaac may not be tempted above that which he is able to bear.”

Isaac and Lucy Morley willingly made the sacrifice. In October 1831, Titus Billings sold much of Morley’s farm. Morley took his family back to Independence, as he was commanded, and set to work once again to establish a foundation for the temple city. Having persevered through his doubts, he went on to serve as a bishop and a patriarch. He passed away in Utah in 1865.

Footnotes

1. These ordinations to the “high priesthood” refer to what later became known as the office of high priest within the Melchizedek Priesthood.


4. Ezra Booth mentions these rumors. See also “Letter from Oliver Cowdery, 8 April 1831,” josephsmithpapers.org.

5. Ezra Booth, in Eber D. Howe, Mormonism Unvailed (Painesville, Ohio: By the author, 1834), 192. Ezra Booth’s letters were originally published between September and December 1831 in the Ohio Star (Ravenna) and were later reprinted in Howe’s book.


7. This was a term commonly used to refer to early members of the Church. See Mark Lyman Staker, Hearken, O Ye People: The Historical Setting of Joseph Smith’s Ohio Revelations (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2009), 73–74.

8. Ezra Booth, in Howe, Mormonism Unvailed, 176.

9. Ezra Booth, in Howe, Mormonism Unvailed, 199.


12. “Revelation, 1 August 1831 [D&C 58],” josephsmithpapers.org.


15. “Revelation, 1 August 1831 [D&C 58].”

16. The group likely consisted of Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, Oliver Cowdery, Sidney Gilbert, W. W. Phelps, Reynolds Cahoon, Samuel Smith, Ezra Booth, Frederick G. Williams, Peter Whitmer Jr., and Joseph Coe.

17. “Revelation, 8 August 1831 [D&C 60],” josephsmithpapers.org.

Morley emigrated to the Great Salt Lake Valley in 1848 with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church) following the death of Joseph Smith, and is considered the founder of Manti, Utah. After Ute Indian leader Wakara invited Church president Brigham Young to send Mormon colonists to the Sanpitch (now Sanpete) Valley in central Utah, Young dispatched Morley and James Russell Ivie as leaders of the first company of 225 settlers. Morley and his group felt that part of the purpose of the settlement was to bring the gospel to the Indians.

He wrote, “Did we come here to enrich ourselves in the things of this world? No. We were sent to enrich the Natives and comfort the hearts of the long oppressed.”

Morley and the settlers arrived at the present location of Manti in November 1849, and established a winter camp, digging temporary shelters into the south side of the hill on which the Manti Utah Temple now stands. It was an isolated place, at least four days by wagon from the nearest settlement. Relations between the Mormons and the local Utes were helpful and cooperative. The first winter was severe and, although the settlers were fairly well supplied, they had great difficulties. A measles epidemic broke out and the settlers used their limited medicine to nurse the Indians. When supplies ran low, Indians helped settlers haul food on sleds through the snow.

Morley encouraged the settlers in their work and assured them that their community would grow to be one of the best in the mountains. The settlers and members of the Ute Sanpitch tribe referred to him affectionately as “Father Morley”. Morley supervised the building of the first schoolhouse and the first gristmill in Sanpete Valley. The Sanpete Valley settlement grew and prospered and became known as a prime agricultural area.

Morley served as a senator in the general assembly of the provisional State of Deseret. In 1851, 1853 and 1855, he represented Sanpete county in the legislative council of the Utah Territory.

During his last years, Morley spent most of his time on his calling as a Patriarch, conferring priesthood blessings on thousands of church members. He died on June 24, 1865 in Fairview, Sanpete County, Utah.

On a wall inside the Manti Utah Temple is a framed piece of temple clothing used by Morley in the Nauvoo Temple when he was endowed there.