Philo Dibble was born on June 6, 1806, in Peru, Massachusetts. After his marriage to Celia Kent in 1829, they moved to the Kirtland, Ohio, area. In the fall of 1830, two neighbors asked him if he had heard about four missionaries who were preaching about a book called the Book of Mormon. The neighbors told him that one of the missionaries claimed to have seen an angel. Although the neighbors scoffed at the idea, Philo thought that if an angel had appeared, “he wanted to know about it.”[1] The four missionaries were Oliver Cowdery, Ziba Peterson, Peter Whitmer Jr., and Parley P. Pratt. When Philo attended a meeting where Cowdery taught about the restored gospel, Philo believed and was baptized by Pratt on October 16, 1830.

After his baptism he wrote the poem “The Happy Day at Last Has Come,” which was included in the first LDS hymnbook, 1835, now hymn number 32.

Among the miraculous events that Dibble witnessed and recorded include the following:

When Joseph came to Kirtland his fame spread far and wide. There was a woman living in the town of Hiram . . . who had a crooked arm, which she had not been able to use for a long period. She persuaded her husband, whose name was Johnson, to take her to Kirtland to get her arm healed.

I saw them as they passed my house on their way. She went to Joseph and requested him to heal her. Joseph asked her if she believed the Lord was able to make him an instrument in healing her arm. She said she believed the Lord was able to heal her arm.

Joseph put her off till the next morning, when he met her at Brother [Newel K.] Whitney’s house. There were eight persons present, one a Methodist preacher, and one a doctor. Joseph took her by the hand, prayed in silence a moment, pronounced her arm whole, in the name of Jesus Christ, and turned and left the room.

The preacher asked her if her arm was whole, and she straightened it out and replied: “It is as good as the other.”[2]

On February 16, 1832, Dibble went to the Johnson home at the time that Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon were receiving a vision that is recorded in the Doctrine and Covenants section 76. He wrote:

“The vision which is recorded in the Book of Doctrine and Covenants was given at the house of “Father Johnson,” in Hiram, Ohio, and during the time that Joseph and Sidney were in the spirit and saw the heavens open, there were other men in the room, perhaps twelve, among whom I was one during a part of the time—probably two-thirds of the time—I saw the glory and felt the power, but did not see the vision. . . . Joseph would, at intervals, say: “What do I see?” as one might say while looking out the window and beholding what all in the room could not see. Then he would relate what he had seen or what he was looking at. Then Sidney replied, “I see the same.” Presently, Sidney would say, “What do I see?” and would repeat what he had seen or was seeing, and Joseph would reply, “I see the same.”[2]

During the whole time not a word was spoken by any other person. Not a sound nor motion made by anyone but Joseph and Sidney, and it seemed to me that they never moved a joint or limb during the time
Philo Dibble

I was there, which I think was over an hour, and to the end of the vision. Joseph sat firmly and calmly all the time in the midst of a magnificent glory, but Sidney sat limp and pale, apparently as limber as a rag, observing which, Joseph remarked, smilingly, “Sidney is not used to it as I am.”[3]

Dibble moved his family to Missouri in 1832 where he homesteaded a twenty-acre farm on the Whitmer Settlement.

Philo Dibble miraculously survives a gunshot in Missouri

In 1832 I sold my possessions in Ohio, and, being called upon by Joseph to advance monies to purchase the land in Jackson County, I paid fifty dollars for that purpose and also gave Brother Parley P. Pratt fifty dollars to assist him as a pioneer. I was then called on for money to be placed in the hands of Brothers [Newel K.] Whitney and [A. Sidney] Gilbert, who were going to New York to purchase goods to take up to Jackson County, and gave them three hundred dollars.

I joined in with a company led by Brother Thomas B. Marsh, and arrived in Independence, Jackson County, on the 10th of November. I remained in Independence until spring and then removed to the Whitmer settlement, farther west, where I built a house, fenced twenty acres of land and put in a garden.

In the fall of 1833, a sectarian preacher by the name of [Isaac] M'Coy [McCoy] came to the Whitmer settlement where I was living to buy up all the guns he could, representing that he wanted them for the Indians. We suspected no trouble, and quite a number of us sold our guns to him. The sequel of his action was, however, soon apparent to us, for rumors soon reached us of mobs assembling and threats being made to drive us from the county.

When the mob first began to gather and threaten us, I was selected to go to another county and buy powder and lead. The brethren gave me the privilege of choosing a man to go with me. I took with me a man by the name of John Poorman. We thought we were good for four of the mob. We went to the town of Liberty, Clay County, and purchased the ammunition, and returned safely.

Soon after I returned [31 October 1833], a mob of about one hundred and fifty came upon us in the dead hour of night, tore down a number of our houses and whipped and abused several of our brethren. I was aroused from my sleep by the noise caused by the falling houses, and had barely time to escape to the woods with my wife and two children when they reached my house and proceeded to break in the door and tear the roof off. I was some distance away from where the whipping occurred, but I heard the blows of heavy ox goads upon the backs of my brethren distinctly.

The mob also swore they would tear down our grist mill, which was situated at the Colesville Branch, about three miles from the settlement, and lest they should really do so and as it was the only means we had of getting our grain ground, we were counseled to gather there and defend it. We accordingly proceeded there the next morning. The following night two men came into our camp, pretending they wanted to hire some men to work for them. Brother Parley [Pratt] ordered them to be taken prisoners, when one of them struck him a glancing blow on the head with his gun, inflicting a severe wound. We then disarmed them and kept them as prisoners until morning when we gave them back their arms and let them go.

The next day we heard firing down in the Whitmer settlement, and seventeen of our brethren volunteered to go down and see what it meant. Brother George Beebe was one of these volunteers and also one of the men who was whipped the night previous. (Brother Beebe carried the marks of this whipping to his grave, as the brethren who laid him out at the time of his death, in December, 1881, at Provo, Utah County, can testify.) When these seventeen men arrived at the Whitmer settlement, the mob came against them and took some prisoners. Brother David Whitmer brought us the news of this and said: “Every man go, and every man take a man!”

Battle near the Blue River, 4 November 1833

We all responded and met the mob in battle, in which I was wounded with an ounce ball and two buck shot, all entering my body just at the right side of my navel. The mob were finally routed, and the brethren chased them a mile away. Several others of the brethren

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were also shot, and one, named [Andrew] Barber, was mortally wounded. After the battle was over, some of the brethren went to administer to him, but he objected to their praying that he might live, and asked them if they could not see the angels present. He said the room was full of them, and his greatest anxiety was for his friends to see what he saw, until he breathed his last, which occurred at three o’clock in the morning.

A young lawyer named Bazill [Hugh L. Brazeale], who came into Independence and wanted to make himself conspicuous, joined the mob, and swore he would wade in blood up to his chin.

He was shot with two balls through his head, and never spoke. There was another man, whose name I fail to remember, that lived on the Big Blue, who made a similar boast. He was also taken at his word. His chin was shot off, or so badly fractured by a ball that he was forced to have it amputated, but lived and recovered, though he was a horrible sight afterwards.

After the battle I took my gun and powder horn and started for home. When I got about half way I became faint and thirsty. I wanted to stop at Brother Whitmer’s to lay down. The house, however, was full of women and children, and they were so frightened that they objected to my entering, as the mob had threatened that wherever they found a wounded man they would kill men, women and children.

I continued on and arrived home, or rather at a house in the field that the mob had not torn down, which was near my own home. There I found my wife and two children and a number of other women who had assembled. I told them I was shot and wanted to lay down.

They got me on the bed, but on thinking of what the mob had said, became frightened and assisted me upstairs. I told them, however, that I could not stay there, my pain was so great. They then got me downstairs again, and my wife went out to see if she could find any of the brethren. In searching for them she got lost in the woods and was gone two hours but learned that all the brethren had gone to the Colesville Branch, three miles distant, taking all the wounded with them save myself.

The next morning I was taken farther off from the road that I might be concealed from the mob. I bled inwardly until my body was filled with blood, and remained in this condition until the next day at five p.m. I was then examined by a surgeon who was in the Black Hawk War, and who said that he had seen a great many men wounded, but never saw one wounded as I was that ever lived. He pronounced me a dead man.

David Whitmer, however, sent me word that I should live and not die, but I could see no possible chance to recover. After the surgeon had left me, Brother Newell Knight came to see me, and sat down on the side of my bed. He laid his right hand on my head, but never spoke. I felt the Spirit resting upon me at the crown of my head before his hand touched me, and I knew immediately that I was going to be healed. It seemed to form like a ring under the skin, and followed down my body. When the ring came to the wound, another ring formed around the first bullet hole, also the second and third. Then a ring formed on each shoulder and on each hip, and followed down to the ends of my fingers and toes and left me. I immediately arose and discharged three quarts of blood or more, with some pieces of my clothes that had been driven into my body by the bul-
lets. I then dressed myself and went outdoors and saw the falling of the stars, which so encouraged the Saints and frightened their enemies. It was one of the grandest sights I ever beheld. From that time not a drop of blood came from me and I never afterwards felt the slightest pain or inconvenience from my wounds, except that I was somewhat weak from the loss of blood.

The next day I walked around the field, and the day following I mounted a horse and rode eight miles, and went three miles on foot. [4]

Philo Dibble miraculously survived being shot in Missouri, and goes on to be with the saints in Nauvoo, Illinois in 1840. His wife died the following year, leaving him with five children. He married Hannah Ann Smith in February 1841. He eventually had three more children.

After the martyrdom of Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum, George Cannon cast death masks of the two and Dibble took care of them for over forty years.

Dibble and his family moved to Iowa in 1850 but were not able financially able to leave for Utah until 1851. He first settled in Bountiful, Utah. He directed a co-op store in Centerville, Utah, and traveled with a mural of scenes from Church history and relics from the lifetime of the Prophet Joseph Smith. Dibble moved his family to Springville, Utah, at the time that US president James Buchanan sent federal troops to Utah. He died in Springville, Utah Territory in 1895. His obituary reads as follows:

Elder Philo Dibble, an aged and respected Utah veteran, died at his home in Springville at 2 O’clock this morning. Elder Dibble had been failing for some time past and was perfectly resigned to his position. He was in the ninetieth year of his age, and had very remarkable career. In his death it is thought the oldest member of the Church has passed from mortality. He was baptized Sep 15th 1830 by Parley P. Pratt. He was wounded by a mob during the troubled times of 1833 in Jackson County, Missouri. He was shot in the abdomen. The ball passed through his body and lodged near the backbone just beneath the skin where it remained up to the time of his death. On May 27th, he was visited by some Elders of the Church and among other things he said at that time:

“I know, he said, the Church was established by divine revelation, Joseph Smith being God’s Prophet, Seer and Revelator. With him I was familiar and closely associated during his life from 1833 until 1844. When I beheld him as a martyr, shot with four bullets, even unto death; and I now lie here on my death bed with lead in my body at the age of 89, and I shall soon go to meet the martyr, for I now feel that my work here on earth is done, and my desire is that I may soon go in peace where I shall see many others who, like myself, have suffered many tribulations for Christ’s sake.”

His funeral will be held at Springville, from the meeting house on Sunday afternoon next, beginning at 2 O’clock. He lived in Springville until Jun 7, 1895, when he died. He was buried at Springville, Utah.[5]

Notes
1. “Philo Dibble’s Narrative,” in Early Scenes in Church History (Salt Lake City: Deseret News), 1882, 79
2. Juvenile Instructor, May 1892, 303
3. Juvenile Instructor, May 1892, 304