

## **The Mormon Battalion — A Ram in the Thicket**

I am Sam Parker, Bishop of the Tenth Ward, home of the Mormon Battalion. I welcome you here today and hope that you will continue to feel welcome here always — as Brigham Young said to the Battalion who were having their first reunion in one of the Church buildings....

You are welcome to the use of this hall. I do not know when the next party wish to occupy it; but if you are not through by the time that others want it, I will tell them to wait, therefore, take your time.

This is the oldest functioning ward in the Americas. This, the Mormon Battalion ward, is one of the original 19 wards in the Salt Lake Valley. David Pettegrew, Daniel Tyler, and Stanford Porter, all of Company of "E," comprised the first bishopric of the ward. I am the seventeenth bishop.

I want to share some thoughts on the topic "The Mormon Battalion — a Ram in the Thicket" as that topic relates to the motto of the Mormon Battalion.

The question is often asked, "What is the price of liberty?" Regarding the Battalion, I think the question was, "What is the price of survival!"

Brigham Young asked,

What gave rise to the brethren being called upon to go into the United States service?  
I will tell you some things about it.

Suppose it had been shown to you that there were men in Washington, influential men. Men who held control of the affairs of the nation, to a great degree, who held control of the affairs of the nation who had plotted to massacre the saints while on the frontiers in Indian country.

I was, and am fully persuaded that a senator from Missouri (Thomas H. Benton) did actually apply for and received permission from President Polk to call upon the militia of Iowa, Illinois and Missouri and if he wished, he had also authority to go to Kentucky and raise a force strong enough to wipe this people out of existence.

This would be the case if the Mormons, who had been driven from their Nauvoo homes should the Mormons refuse to comply with the unjust demand for 500 troops to fight in the Mexican war.

President Young continues:

Doubtless the spirits who surrounded the Senator Benton preached that the Mormons were hostile to both the federal and state governments. President Polk thus gave him

permission to call upon those governors and if we did not fill the tyrannical requisition for 500 of our men he would get troops enough to march against us and massacre us all.... So far a human nature can discern, I say that the men of the Mormon Battalion are the saviors of this people and did save them from carnage and death.

From their very beginnings, the Saints were persecuted! They were constantly under pressure from unholy and unsympathetic groups.

Starting in New York State, the targets of mob action, the Saints [were] driven from place to place, in each case leaving behind most of their earthly possessions.

In Kirtland, in addition to everything else, they left behind their beautiful Kirtland Temple, their most valued possession.

At about the same time, at the direction of the Lord, they began to settle and establish the Church in western Missouri. This was to be the land for which they had so long awaited, "a land of promise, a land flowing with milk and honey, upon which there shall be no curse, where the Lord should come; even Zion!"

They must go and seek their promised inheritance by faith, even as Abraham of old, who by faith, "when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whether he went."

It was not long before it was revealed that this place, Independence, Jackson County, Missouri was to be the New Jerusalem, the center stake of Zion... And Zion was to be the gathering place for the Saints from around the world.

The Mormons were a peculiar people very unlike the "Old Settlers" of Missouri who came to the banks of the "Mighty Missouri" from the Deep South and who, while generous and hospitable to the stranger, were very much intimidated by their new neighbors at Independence.

The Saints lived and believed philosophies and ideas diametrically opposite to theirs; things like the physical nature of God and their opposition to slavery.

As you will remember, Missouri in the 1830's and beyond was a strong slave state and — after all — they were "Southerners." A free black man was not welcome in Missouri and in fact was asked, even forced, to leave the state.

In addition, these Mormons were making friends with the Indians, telling them that they were a royal people, chosen of God. And that the day would come when they should be exalted! The Old settlers asked, "At whose expense! Me? My family? My property?"

While the "Old Settlers" were laid back and somewhat unorganized, the Mormons, on the other hand, were extremely industrious, large tracts of lands were under cultivation, homes schools and business began to flourish. The "Old Settlers" were intimidated.

Again the Mormons were preaching that Jackson County was to be the Mormons' "worldwide gathering place." It would be large, large in population and large in size, the City of Zion, the New Jerusalem alone would be a Mile square! Unthinkable!

Again these new neighbors, the Mormons, were well educated, all were able to read and write!

In no time at all, a Mormon printing press was up and running, rolling out copy that was intended, not only for the consumption and teaching of the Church members, but also as a proselytizing tool to all peoples.

The "old settlers" were threatened — threatened to the extent that they began to believe "that the only good Mormon, like a good Indian, was a dead one." So they sent a delegation to the Mormons giving them just fifteen minutes "ta start a pakin."

Unwilling to reason or wait and give the Saints time to prepare for an exodus, they resorted to mob action and force to rid themselves, the State of Missouri and the Earth of the people they had come to hate.

The cost of life and material to the Mormons was enormous. Most costly, of course, was the loss of life, the treatment and suffering inflicted on the Saints was so inhumane, so villainous, so repulsive and repugnant as to defy description.

From the book "Porter Rockwell," written by Richard Lloyd Dewey, page 41:

On October 30th, under a quiet autumn sky at Haun's settlement, 30 Mormon families were peaceably going about their chores, when over 200 Missouri militiamen thundered into the community chasing down unarmed farmers, blowing the brains out of one Mormon settler after another.

As the Saints and their children scattered, the militiamen gave chase. A surviving woman reports. "...After our men were shot down by them, they went around and shot all the dead men over again, to make sure of their lives."

Another recalls, "I sat down to witness the dreadful scene. When they were done firing, they (the mob) began to howl... They plundered the principal part of our goods, took our horses and wagons, and ran off, howling..."

"I came down to witness the.... Scene.... My husband, and one son 10 years old, lay lifeless upon the ground, and one son seven years old, was wounded very bad; the ground covered was with the dead.... Dogs were howling.

Nathan Knight reports, "Sister Haun and my wife passed the night dressing the wounds and making comfortable, as far as possible, the wounded and the dying. Their groans and shrieks made the night hideous and horrible beyond description...."

Joseph Young describes the aftermath: "When we arrived at the house of Mr. Haun, we found that Mr. Merrick's body lying in the rear of the house, Mr. McBride's in the front, literally mangled from head to foot... Mr. York's body we found in the house; and after viewing these corpses we immediately went out to the blacksmith shop where we found nine of our friends, eight of whom were already dead, the other, Mr. Cox of Indiana, struggling in the agonies of death and soon expired." Additionally, numerous others were dying."

David Lewis adds, "because there was no time... the women were compelled to bury their husbands by throwing them into a well close to the blacksmith shop."

The same day as Haun's Mill Massacre, the Missouri State militia, lead by Lieutenant Governor Lillian Boggs, arrived at Far West, camping just outside the Mormon stronghold in preparation for a major offense the next day.

Interestingly enough, the next day was the dawn of another Halloween.

Approximately 1,200 people were driven from Jackson County. So on they went, this time north to a gentle bend on the Mississippi River, to the swampy city of Commerce.

Here they built a city, Nauvoo, the City Beautiful. Again the industrious saints planned, built homes and harvested, until in just three short years, Nauvoo became the largest city in Illinois.

Nauvoo was truly beautiful; the homes were strong, neat and clean. The farms, orchards, and gardens were beautiful; the crops were bounteous. It was estimated that at harvest, there was standing in the orchards, gardens and fields enough produce to feed the population of the immediate area for two years.

Unfortunately, the attitudes and actions of the "Old Missouri Settlers" followed the Saints to Illinois. Sadly, the results of were the same, and in the dead of winter of 1845 demonic, mean spirited, calculating men the likes of Illinois Governor Thomas Ford and Illinois Senator Stephen A. Douglas again forced the Saints from their farms, businesses, and homes.

With heavy hearts, they left their beautiful Nauvoo, most of their worldly possessions and crossed the Mississippi on the ice, to the uncharted and untamed Indian territories of Iowa.

This time the loss of life was even more devastating to the group because, among those killed by the satanic mobs was the Prophet of the "Dispensation of the Fullness of Times," Brother Joseph, and The Man of Ohio, his brother Hyrum.

All else was like unto Missouri, the evil acts inflicted on the Saints were the same, only the faces had changed.

Our beloved pioneers were a hated people thrown out of the country they loved with little or no preparation; again they left behind, a beautiful city, a sacred temple, crops, gardens, and orchards. All left standing, unharvested and unattended.

Expelled from the United States whose Constitution should have guaranteed their rights as citizens. Now to be separated, perhaps forever, from that beloved document that they had come to believe was inspired by the Lord Himself. Forced at gunpoint from their nation and their Constitution.

The Constitution and the Bill of Rights had magnetically drawn them from far off lands. They had come believing that they could live and worship according to the dictates of their own conscience. They had come dreaming of a new start and the hope of a better future for themselves and their families to this marvelous land of hope and promise.

Their expulsion was a gut-wrenching blow to their hopes and their dreams! This led them to ask why?

How much more must they endure! This was a crushing blow. Never before had they found themselves in such a dire circumstance. They were a people without a country, without homes. A lonely, destitute and an unwanted people. Fortunately, they were unaware of the evil plans conspiring men had in store for them.

Like Israel in Egypt, besides hating the Saints, some wanted to use them for extortion.

On February 4, 1846, 235 Saints, 70 men, 86 women, and 100 children boarded the ship *Brooklyn* and sailed out of the New York harbor southbound for San Francisco around Cape Horn.

Before leaving New York, Elder Samuel Brannan believed or feigned to believe that the government in Washington was opposed to the departure of the Saints from the Union. This under the presumption that it might be in the interest of the Saints to take sides either with Great Britain or Mexico against the United States for the possession of the Mexican and Oregon territories. War with these nations was regarded as imminent, and when you consider the serious wrongs endured by the Saints in Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois, you can see how one might arrive at such a conclusion. Further it was thought and taught in many parts of the country that it was not good policy to allow the Saints, twenty thousand strong, armed and with sufficient cause to resent the United States, to leave the states and perhaps establish a new nation.

In reality, those who had conferred with Elder Brannan in Washington were not motivated by any consideration of patriotism at all, but only by greed.

Their real intent was to use the "Mormon People" for gain through the acquisition of property. So they pretended to be aware of intentions on the part of the "administration" to prevent the Saints from leaving the United States.

The deal was that the Mormon leaders would agree to transfer to the A.G. Benson, Kendall & Co., their heirs or assignees, one half of all the lands and lots they might settle in the new, unsettled country in the West. Imagine! One half of all of the ground settled by the migrating saints to be deeded to all-powerful A.G. Benson, Kendall & Co. For this, the A.G. Benson, Kendall & Co. would agree to represent the Saints to the federal government and guaranteed the Saints the right to migrate without interference.

A strong cadre of about 25 of Washington's politicians was connected with this attempt at extortion.

Primary and the author of the conspiracy was Mr. Amos Kendall, Postmaster General to two administrations — Andrew Jackson's second term and Martin Van Buren's presidency.

In his letter to Brigham Young bearing the date of January the 26th, 1846, Brannan said:

I haste to lay before your honorable body, meaning the 12 apostles, the result of my movements since I wrote you last, which was from this city, stating some of my discoveries, in relation to the contemplated movements of the general government in opposition to our removal.

He continues,

I had an interview with Amos Kendall, in the company with Mr. Benson, which resulted in a compromise, the conditions of which you will learn by reading the contract between them and us, which I shall forward by this mail.

I shall also leave a copy of the same with Elder Appleby, who was present when it was signed. Kendall is now our friend, I will use his influence in our behalf, in connection with twenty-five of the most prominent demagogues in the country. You will be permitted to pass out of the state without interference. Their counsel is to go well arm, but keep them well secreted from the rabble.

I shall select the most suitable spot on the Bay of San Francisco for the location of a commercial city. When I sail, which will be next Saturday, at one o'clock, I shall hoist a flag with "Oregon" on it.

Brannan's letter reaches President Young at his camp on Sugar Creek, Iowa, in February 1846. We learned from the following excerpt from President Young's journal the final deposition of the matter:

The council considered the subject, and concluded that as our trust in was in God, and that, as we look to him for protection, we would not sign any such unjust and oppressive agreement.

This was a plan of political demagogues to rob the latter-day Saints of millions, and compel them to submit to it by threats of federal bayonets.

As a matter of interest, the apostolic council did not even dignify the contract by corresponding with the "A. G. Benson, Kendall & Co."

This was the condition of the Saints when Capt. Allen, with three dragoons, approached the camps of Israel. Mothers grabbed their children and ran. Some cried warning voices that they were again being attacked.

You, my friends, know the rest of the story... Brother Brigham had beaten them at their own game and continued to do so for years to come... But this great Battalion was literally "a ram in the thicket!" They had saved the Mormon People...

They had made every sacrifice; they had fulfilled every demand made of them... Saviors they are...

Through their wholly committed and unselfish sacrifice they saved the "people of God" and they put to rest forever "the question of patriotism..."

Our Prophet Brigham Young stated that through the sacrifice of the Mormon Battalion:

It was most thoroughly and incontrovertibly proven that we are ever true to the United States of America and that our loyalty to this great nation and its people is beyond question!

My great and good friend, President Spencer W. Kimball has said that the most important word in any language is the word "remember!"

The Mormon Battalion will never be forgotten, remarks Brother Brigham, worlds without end, they will be had in honorable remembrance, forever and ever...

This is our never-ending assignment...May we do it well is my prayer...