
Algernon Sidney Gilbert

(1789–1834)

D&C 53; 57:6, 8–10; 61:7, 12; 64:18–19, 26; 82:11; 90:35

From 1820 to 1827, Sidney was a successful entrepreneur buying and selling properties in Ohio and Michigan and setting up commercial trading centers on the banks of Lake Ontario and the Erie Canal. His enterprise of most interest to Church members was a mercantile partnership with Newel K. Whitney in a general store in Kirtland, Ohio—N. K. Whitney and Company.

In 1830 Sidney and his partner Newel K. Whitney entered baptismal waters and committed themselves to be disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. On June 6, 1831, Sidney was ordained an elder. Fourteen days later, he accompanied the Prophet Joseph Smith on a journey to Independence, Missouri. After they arrived at the Independence town center, the Lord revealed to Joseph, “Let my servant Sidney Gilbert plant himself in this place, and establish a store, that he may sell goods without fraud. And thus provide for my saints, that my gospel may be preached unto those who sit in darkness and in the region and shadow of death” (D&C 57: 8, 10). In compliance with the revelation, Sidney opened a branch store of dry goods and groceries in Independence that mirrored the N. K. Whitney and Company store in Kirtland.

The Independence store prospered, much like other enterprises owned by Sidney Gilbert. Although it could be assumed that Church leaders were pleased, a letter written by Sidney put leaders on edge. (The Sidney Gilbert letter no longer exists). The angry reaction to the letter by Orson Hyde and Hyrum Smith is all that remains: “Brother Gilbert’s letter of December 10th, has been received and read attentively, and the low, dark, and blind insinuations, which were in it, were not received by us as from the fountain of light,

though his claims and pretensions to holiness were great.”¹ Apparently, the Lord also concurred with their views, for on March 8, 1833, he revealed to the Prophet Joseph, “I am not well pleased with my servant . . . Sidney Gilbert” (D&C 90:35). Even though rebuked by Church leaders and the Lord, Sidney did not falter in his commitment to the Church.

For example, when mobs demolished the brick portion of Sidney’s home in Independence and broke his windows, his faith did not waver. When the front doors of his store on the Independence public square were split open and his goods tossed into the street, Sidney’s commitment to the Restoration was unfazed. Even when he was arrested and imprisoned on trumped-up charges of assault on November 4, 1833, Sidney’s faith in the Lord and Church leaders was unshakeable.

Yet wanting to be free from further religious persecution, Sidney and his family fled from Jackson County across the Missouri River to Clay County. The only known possessions he carried with him across the river were his Bible and handwritten revelations of the Prophet Joseph Smith—Doctrine and Covenants sections 20, 22, 42, 50, 51, 53, 57, 61, 63, 64, 72, 76, 83, 86, 87, 88, 89, and 91, plus Matthew 24 and biblical notes. It is assumed that these revelations were of great worth to Sidney in his service as one of seven presiding high priests in Missouri.

A month after Sidney had taken up residence in Clay County, he was told through the Prophet Joseph *not* to sell his store in Independence (see D&C 101:96). Being no longer a resident of Independence, obedience to the revealed word of God from his Prophet was a trial of faith to him. Yet Sidney complied.

Leaving his empty store in Independence as a monument to mob rule, he now opened a general store in Liberty, Missouri, with plans to use merchandise to care for the poor. Parley P. Pratt wrote of Sidney’s generosity to him—

“Well,” says he, “brother Parley, you certainly look too shabby to start a journey: you must have a new suit; I have got some remnants left that will make you a coat,” etc. A neighboring tailoress and two or three other sisters happened to be present on a visit, and hearing the conversation, exclaimed, “Yes, brother Gilbert, you find the stuff and we’ll make it up for him.” This arranged, I now lacked only a cloak; this was also furnished by brother Gilbert.²

A further example of Sidney’s generosity was the opening of his home and farmland to men who had marched from Ohio to Missouri in Zion’s Camp. A few days after they began camping on his land, thirteen men and one woman died of cholera—five of the deaths

¹ History, 1838–1856, volume A-1, [23 December 1805–30 August 1834]. Joseph Smith Papers.

² Parley P. Pratt Jr., ed, *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 108.

occurring inside of his home. On June 29, 1834, cholera also took the life of Sidney Gilbert. His body was rolled in a quilt and buried with those who had died in Zion's Camp.

Although historian B. H. Roberts eulogized the contributions of Algernon Sidney Gilbert, he wrote, "[Sidney] was once heard to say, when informed that he had been called to preach the gospel that he would rather die than go forth to preach the gospel to the Gentiles."³ According to B. H. Roberts, the Sidney Gilbert comment "did not arise out of any lack of faith in the truth of God's great latter-day work, but from a . . . lack of confidence in his ability to preach."⁴

³ Geraldine Hamblin Bangerter and Susan Easton Black, *My Servant Algernon Sidney Gilbert: Provide for My Saints (D&C 57:10)* (Salt Lake City: Rollins, Hamblin and Bangerter Families, 1989), 40.

⁴ B. H. Roberts, *Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* 6 vols. (Provo, UT: BYU Press, 1965), 1:360, n.7.