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# Joseph H. Wakefield

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(1792–1835)

D&C 50:37; 52:35

By 1820 Joseph was a resident of Watertown, New York. He entered baptismal waters in New York before gathering with the Saints to Kirtland, Ohio. In May 1831 the Prophet Joseph Smith received a revelation calling him to accompany Parley P. Pratt in preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ (see D&C 50:37). Elder Pratt wrote of their brief mission in Ohio:

In obedience . . . Joseph Wakefield and myself visited the several branches of the Church, rebuking the wrong spirits which had crept in among them, setting in order things that were wanting: ordaining Elders and other officers; baptizing such as believed and repented of their sins. . . . On some occasions we assembled fifty or sixty little children in one circle, in the midst of the assembly of the saints, and laid our hands upon them all, and prayed for them, and blessed them in the name of Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

By June 1831 Joseph Wakefield and Parley P. Pratt had returned from their missionary labors to Kirtland. Joseph attended the fourth general conference of the Church, where he was ordained a high priest on June 3, 1831, by Lyman Wight. Four days later, Joseph Smith received a revelation calling him to preach the message of the Restoration with Solomon Humphrey in the Eastern States (see D&C 52:35). In September 1832 Joseph Wakefield and Solomon Humphrey preached in St. Lawrence County, New York. There

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<sup>1</sup> Parley P. Pratt, *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*, ed. Parley P. Pratt Jr. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 51.

Joseph baptized George A. Smith, a future apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, “in the presence of [his] father and mother, and many of his neighbors.”<sup>2</sup>

After completing the mission, Joseph again returned to Kirtland. Unfortunately, this time in the city of the Saints he joined with dissidents in denouncing Joseph Smith. George A. Smith reported that after his apostasy,

[Joseph Wakefield] announced to the astonished world the fact that, while he was a guest in the house of Joseph Smith, he had absolutely seen the Prophet come down from the room where he was engaged in translating the word of God, and actually go to playing with the children! This convinced him that the Prophet was not a man of God, and that the work was false, which, to me and hundreds of others, he had testified that he knew came from God.<sup>3</sup>

Joseph Wakefield did not repent. In 1834 he was trying to defame the Prophet Joseph Smith by proving the Book of Mormon was written by Solomon Spaulding. George A. Smith claimed that his verbal attacks against Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon brought a wave of mob brutality against the Saints: “He headed a mob meeting, and took the lead in bringing about a persecution against the Saints in Kirtland and the regions round about.”<sup>4</sup> Joseph Wakefield died outside of the faith in Willoughby, Ohio, at age 43.

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<sup>2</sup> George A. Smith, “Auto-Biography of George Albert Smith,” *Millennial Star* 27 (15 July 1865): 438.

<sup>3</sup> George A. Smith, “Divine Origin of ‘Mormonism’—Doings and Sayings of Early Opposers and Apostates,” *Journal of Discourses*, 7:112.

<sup>4</sup> Smith, “Divine Origin of ‘Mormonism,’ 7:112.