
Elias Higbee

1795–1843

D&C 113:7–10

In summer of 1832, Elias entered baptismal waters. He was ordained an elder on February 20, 1833, at Cincinnati, Ohio. By April 1833 he had moved to Jackson County, Missouri. After a few months there, Elias was forced by a mob to cross the Missouri River and seek safety in Clay County. In that northern county, he was ordained a high priest on August 7, 1834, by Orson Pratt.

Elias received a number of Church assignments after his ordination—high councilman, clerk, historian, and recorder. In March 1838 Elias asked the Prophet Joseph Smith to explain the meaning of Isaiah 52. The answers given to Elias are recorded in D&C 113.

Civically, Elias was appointed a justice of the peace and a presiding judge in Caldwell County, Missouri. In the latter capacity, he ordered “the sheriff of said county to call out the militia” to protect Latter-day Saints and rescue Latter-day Saint prisoners who had been unlawfully detained.¹ The Battle of Crooked River was a direct result of his order. After the battle, Elias fled from Missouri to Quincy, Illinois.

In Illinois, he continued to play a prominent role in Church affairs. On March 9, 1839, he was appointed to investigate lands in Illinois and Iowa offered for sale to Latter-day Saints. On October 6, 1839, he was appointed to accompany the Prophet Joseph Smith to Washington, DC, to seek redress for Missouri grievances. After hearing a description of the Latter-day Saint grievances against the state of Missouri, US President Martin Van Buren said, “Gentlemen, your cause is just, but I can do nothing for you!”²

¹ Smith, *History of the Church*, 3:425.

² History, 1838–1856, volume C-1 [2 November 1838–31 July 1842], 1016. Joseph Smith Papers.

Elias remained in Washington, DC, until March 1840. He wrote letters to Joseph Smith about his continuing efforts to right the wrongs committed against the Saints in Missouri. On February 20, 1840, he wrote,

I have just returned from the Committee Room, wherein I spoke about one hour and a half. ...

I told them first, that I represented a suffering people, who had been deprived, together with myself, of their rights in Missouri. ...

I went on to prove that the whole persecution, from beginning to end, was grounded on our religious faith. ...

I demanded from them a restitution of all our rights and privileges as citizens of the United States, and damages for all the losses we had sustained.³

In another letter, Elias admonished Joseph Smith, "If the Missourians should send for you, I would say consult God about going."⁴ In a February 26, 1840, letter, Elias lamented,

I feel now that we have made our last appeal to all earthly tribunals that we should now put our whole trust in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. We have a right now which we could not heretofore so fully claim—that is, of asking God for redress and redemption, as they have been refused us by man.⁵

Upon returning to Illinois, Elias was called to serve on the Nauvoo Temple Committee. He was privately chastened by the Prophet Joseph Smith for failing to fulfill his calling:

Elias Higbee, of the temple committee, came into my office, and I said unto him: The Lord is not well pleased with you, and you must straighten up your loins and do better, and your family also; for you have not been as diligent as you ought to have been, and as spring is approaching, you must arise and shake yourself, and be active, and make your children industrious, and help build the Temple.⁶

³ Smith, *History of the Church*, 4:81–82.

⁴ Smith, *History of the Church*, 4:87.

⁵ Smith, *History of the Church*, 4:88.

⁶ Journal, December 1841–December 1842, 67. Joseph Smith Papers.

On June 8, 1843, Elias died of cholera and inflammation at age forty-seven. The Prophet Joseph Smith wrote,

His loss will be universally lamented, not only by his family, but by a large circle of brethren who have long witnessed his integrity and uprightness, as well as a life of devotedness to the cause of truth.⁷

Where has Judge Higbee gone? Who is there that would not give all his goods to feed the poor, and pour out his gold and silver to the four winds, to go where Judge Higbee has gone?⁸

⁷ History, 1838–1856, volume D-1 [1 August 1842–1 July 1843], 1570. Joseph Smith Papers.

⁸ History, 1838–1856, volume E-1 [1 July 1843–30 April 1844], 1690. Joseph Smith Papers.