

Chapter 3

FIRST TRIP TO OHIO

Driving to church one Sunday in May of 1987, Susie and I were discussing the possibilities of either a trip to Kirtland the following week, or of taking the children to Chicago's Museum of Science and Industry. After some discussion, we decided we would, in fact, go to Chicago.

Arriving at church, a man who had been friends of my in-laws for years was the guest speaker. About halfway through the sermon, he switched to a different topic altogether, saying he felt impressed to share a personal testimony. He then detailed his earlier desire to see the temple in Kirtland and how, for reasons not much different than my own, decided not to. But a peaceful assurance convinced him to proceed with his original plans, a trip in which he related being very blessed. He met a tour guide at the Temple Visitor's Center who seemed sincere in his recognition of our friend's desire. The tour guide played host in his very own home next door to the Center as they spent hours discussing the concerns they both had for the church. He also told us how they discussed the significance of the Temple as holy ground for the Lord's purpose.

Many things our speaker said that day precisely defined my struggles. As he finished his testimony, he recommended a visit to the Temple for anyone who had not yet done so. I felt as though he was speaking directly to me. I don't know why he said what he said on that particular day, but I do know that he had no intention of that testimony being a persuasive instrument that would result in the events that would later transpire. After the service, I mentioned to him our decision and concerns. Recommending we make the trip, he suggested we call and plan to have a tour given by the guide who had hosted him, Jeffrey Lundgren.

Upon leaving the church services that day we felt that the Lord had truly answered our prayers. Perhaps there really was something special about the Temple in Kirtland and that we should go and "seek the Lord's instruction" for His will in our lives. Susie's parents would watch our children. We were looking for answers to questions—questions about church doctrines, the *Book of Mormon*, and its role in bringing Christianity to the American Indian as well as to the Jews. We had questions about various revelations which were in the *Doctrine and Covenants*; which ones were truly inspired by God and which ones might have been only fervent desire, or even "cover up" (increasingly accepted by Restorationists) by past "apostatized" church prophets; why the church seemed to fail at the tasks outlined in these doctrines, and what was the direction that it was now going? We believed there was to be a "great and

marvelous” work to be done, yet the description of it in the *Book of Mormon* and *Doctrine and Covenants* showed that it was, at best, incomplete. Perhaps the Great and Marvelous Work had not even begun.

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WHEN WE ARRIVED IN KIRTLAND, OHIO, our first stop was at the Temple Visitor’s Center. It was already late afternoon as we introduced ourselves to Jeffrey Lundgren. He suggested that we return the following morning so that we could catch the first tour. He indicated that there would probably be few, if any, people on the morning tour, which would give us more individual time for meditation and discussion.

True to what we had been told by the guest speaker in church, Jeff had indeed acquired an insight to the Temple, but whether or not it was based on fact, I don’t know. He claimed to have invited some rabbis from the Jewish community to tour the Temple. They were able to declare it “the house of God” by explaining the Hebrew meanings behind the many symbols throughout its architectural details, both inside and outside. Supposedly, these symbols declared an open message as to Whose house it was. My ignorance of what temples in the Bible really looked like was quite evident. Jeff explained that there was a “pattern” in the Temple called chiasmus, a Greek term meaning, “to mark with an X.” Basically, it is symmetry. Just as the letter X is symmetrical top to bottom, so it is from left to right. The Temple architecture reflected this symmetry left to right and front to back. Jeff determined it to be a standing example of this pattern, for much the same reason Moses’ tabernacle had been built (Hebrews 8:5 and Exodus 25:40). The temple in Kirtland is clearly an architecturally symmetrical building. But I now know this is more characteristic of the architectural period of which it was built, than a revelatory characteristic of God. And there is no resemblance of pattern between the Kirtland Temple and temples built in Old Testament times.

Explaining the concept of chiasmus as “mirror imagery” Jeff continued to “teach” us that it was a more correct way to read God’s inspired word. Prior to this visit, I had read an article about chiasmus in an RLDS church publication. It was apparent that at least some scholars concurred there was proof of this pattern of writing in the *Book of Mormon*, justifying evidence to them that the book is of Hebrew origin, as it claims to be. Although I now see chiasmus as an imaginative semantic manipulation process, any explanation of it will not only be difficult, but inadequate in presenting the influence hundreds of hours of class time (indoctrination) bore in our lives and thoughts.

Following is an example of how a chiasm would be written:

A – Old King Cole
 B – was a merry old soul
 B – and a merry old soul
 A – was he

The similarities identified as A or B in this nursery rhyme, present a mirror image. When looking for the “pattern” one does not start from the top, rather, one would find the middle, known as the center point and work outward. Writings of poetic structure seem to be the most applicable to this type of rhetorical manipulation as well as a great deal of the Old Testament, also in poetic form. These writings, along with their symbolism (which often needs interpretation anyway), are the most easily divided. However, with enough imagination, almost anything can be read (divided) in this manner.

Quite foolishly, I was amazed at these things. I had prayed that we could receive some insight to the purpose of the church and answers to the questions I have mentioned. Could we be getting answers? In listening to Jeff explain that there was a divine purpose in the Temple, he told us our body’s physical symmetry was like that of the Temple. Further he spoke, that the Bible says if He dwells in us, we are to be the temples of God. All the while, Jeff spoke of experiences he’d had, and we discussed topics of church history, and meanings of passages from the *Book of Mormon* and *Doctrine and Covenants*. Jeff took us next door to his house, provided by the church in return for his tour guide duties. We met Jeff’s wife, Alice, who had studied church history to a noticeable degree and appeared as though she knew her “purpose” in life, confident of where she was.

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GENERATIONS OF RLDS MEMBERS have anxiously awaited the building of a temple in Independence as prophesied in the *Doctrine and Covenants*. Their inability to do so lay in the belief that a specific, divinely appointed location for its construction was designated over 160 years ago. Efforts had been made for years by both the Mormon (LDS) and RLDS churches to purchase this “appointed” Independence property from another of the Joseph Smith factions called the Hedrickites, or Church of Christ-Temple Lot, who actually hold the land title. After much frustration in not being able to obtain the historically and spiritually significant land, the RLDS world church broke ground across the street from that originally designated plot in 1992, and a new RLDS temple was built, much to the objection of Restorationists over its location.

Jeff’s belief was that, having “apostatized” many years before 1992, the church should never have left Kirtland in the 1830s. He used scriptural justification to instruct us that due to “sinfulness” within the early church, early members had to leave Kirtland. By this “pattern” changes in successive printings of the *Doctrine and Covenants* would show up. He cited Section 83, a major source for the identification of where Zion is to be built. It will be important for the reader to see the first verse and a portion of the second in order to grasp the point Jeff was making. I no longer believe these doctrines, and therefore, no longer believe this section to be even partially a revelation from God. It is quite clear that it is nothing more than an introduction. Jeff, however, was not alone in his belief among fundamental church members that this

introduction was added at a later date by the church leadership of that period in order to justify plans for moving the church to Missouri.

“A revelation of Jesus Christ unto his servant Joseph Smith, Jr., and six elders, as they united their hearts lifted their voices on high; yea, the word of the Lord concerning his church, established in the last days for the restoration of his people, as he has spoken by the mouth of his prophets, and for the gathering of his saints to stand upon Mount Zion, which shall be the city New Jerusalem; which city shall be built, beginning at the Temple Lot, which is appointed by the finger of the Lord, in the western boundaries of the state of Missouri, and dedicated by the hand of Joseph Smith, Jr., and others, with whom the Lord was well pleased.” (D&C 83:1)

Moving on to verses 2a–b, it should be evident that the original revelation had indeed originated in Kirtland.

“Verily, this is the word of the Lord, that the city New Jerusalem shall be built by the gathering of the Saints, beginning at this place, even the place of the Temple, *which Temple shall be reared in this generation*; for verily, this generation *shall not pass away* until an house shall be built unto the Lord.” (D&C 83:2a–b)

It is hard to argue with historical facts: Within four years a Temple *was* built in Kirtland, which is still standing today. In the same sentence reference is made to the temple being built in “this generation” (anyone living in 1832), which has certainly all passed away. So, while there simply can be no other than the Kirtland interpretation, for those who believe in the inerrancy of Smith’s writings, careful scrutiny of these conflicting verses regarding the designation of the “place of the Temple” would, of necessity, render this a false prophecy. This is not the only reference Jeff offered but it best illustrates the issue of location that we were confronted with that day: *to what location should the church gather to Zion?*

I was amazed at how these sections of the *Doctrine and Covenants* seemed to back up Jeff’s argument. He and Alice seemed very sincere and energetic about being in service to God. They mentioned that Jeff was teaching a Sunday school class at the local congregation, but that they, as we, were not in agreement with the direction the church was presently headed. I was impressed with how confidently they proclaimed that they were where the Lord wanted them to be, doing what He wanted them to do. After more than six hours, Alice told us “You’ll be back,” as though she could sense our sincere search for the truth.

We’d gone to Kirtland in search of answers, but now we had many more questions. Alice had stated that she knew who the choice seer was. I felt she was perhaps referring to Jeff. Like a foolish little fish, I nibbled at the bait. Years later at my trial I would hear by Alice’s own testimony that she no longer thought of Jeff as a prophet of God. But I’m sure there was a time

when she (as did Susie) strongly believed it would be her husband who would be the next prophet. Susie had many experiences of her own to indicate I was this choice seer. I was one hundred percent dedicated to doing God's will, but I could not understand why He would not give direction to me. I felt guilt at being so deaf to His instruction; how could Susie be so certain about her claims of me? It was confusing and frustrating, and caused arguments between us. Her first reaction to Alice's statement about knowing who the choice seer was, was that Alice was talking about me, and that Jeff and Alice were in Kirtland in order to help with whatever it was that I was supposed to do. She seemed to believe Alice "knew who I was," and could confidently proclaim that we would return.

After sharing our hearts with the Lundgrens and studying *Doctrine and Covenants*, section 38, "Go to the Ohio and there ye shall receive my law," we were somewhat leaning toward a move to Kirtland. Jeff and Alice strongly insinuated that we could not learn the things that they were learning until we moved to Ohio. Although not prepared to make such a move, I was intrigued. I had done a great deal of praying and fasting in search of the Lord's guidance. With the visit concluded, we drove back to Missouri. You've heard that if you place a frog into boiling water, it will immediately jump out, but if you put it into cool water and slowly raise the temperature of the water, the frog will sit there until cooked to death. Similarly, Jeff's "cool water" control over us would come slowly. The result would be the death of our individuality and, eventually, even our thoughts. Our visit lasted only six hours, and although we were not yet ready to move to Ohio, it had, indeed, taken a foothold that would eventually lead to a second visit.

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THE CONFUSION WE'D FELT would turn to frustration during the months to follow. Hadn't I prayed and fasted in search for the truth? With the coincidence of a sermon message speaking to my personal dilemma, hadn't we made a trip to Kirtland after initially deciding against it? What now? With lifelong background of doctrines regarding Zion, accompanied by some condemning scriptural backing for not having fulfilled it, could I possibly be turning my back to His instruction? These questions would become paramount during that summer of 1987.

Summer came and went and I was invited to preach at a few congregations around the area. We began attending church with about 30 people at my father-in-law's house, a practice becoming increasingly common, due to the church's growing practice of silencing priesthood members. During this time, I also continued writing poems as an expression of my desires toward God. Believing our doctrines to be true, I was troubled by what appeared to be the church leaders ushering members away from church doctrines. Disturbingly, to Restorationists like myself, it appeared as if they were coming more into line with Protestantism.

The chiasms received by mail that summer from Jeff reminded us of the necessity to be in Ohio in order to receive the law (truth). He said the chiasms reflected how essential it was that anyone desiring truth and understanding should move to Ohio. Exhibiting an attitude of nonchalance, it seemed not to matter to him whether we were interested in what he had to say; there were no outward appearances of his seeking a following. All this helped to relax my defenses with no obvious threat that he was trying to manipulate us. I was aware of deceitful people in the world, but I was under the misguided conception that I would be qualified to recognize such a person.

Again, I prayed to know what the Lord wanted from me, because I felt driven to be a part of what I believed in and thought it my responsibility to run for the prize.

I had been studying some chiasms for a couple of days considering the conclusions Jeff was drawing from them when some church friends returned from a trip to Alaska. They showed us a videotape of the Aurora Borealis. With Jeff's teachings in my head regarding the symmetry of nature, the narrator stated that the exact same shapes, colors and sounds that are seen and heard at the north pole are also being presented at the south pole, at the same time, but in mirror image. I was shocked and amazed. The timing of this information had more impact than the information itself. Again I had to question, "Was God trying to say something to me here?" The coincidences that surrounded this time of our lives were staggering. Looking back, I often feel as if I was "set up." My intentions were so strong and sincere; did I really have any choice, considering the timing of so much we had experienced? The answer to such a question doesn't really matter. Yet, not understanding its consequences can be a matter of life and death. Ignorance is what allowed the enticement to become my entrapment.