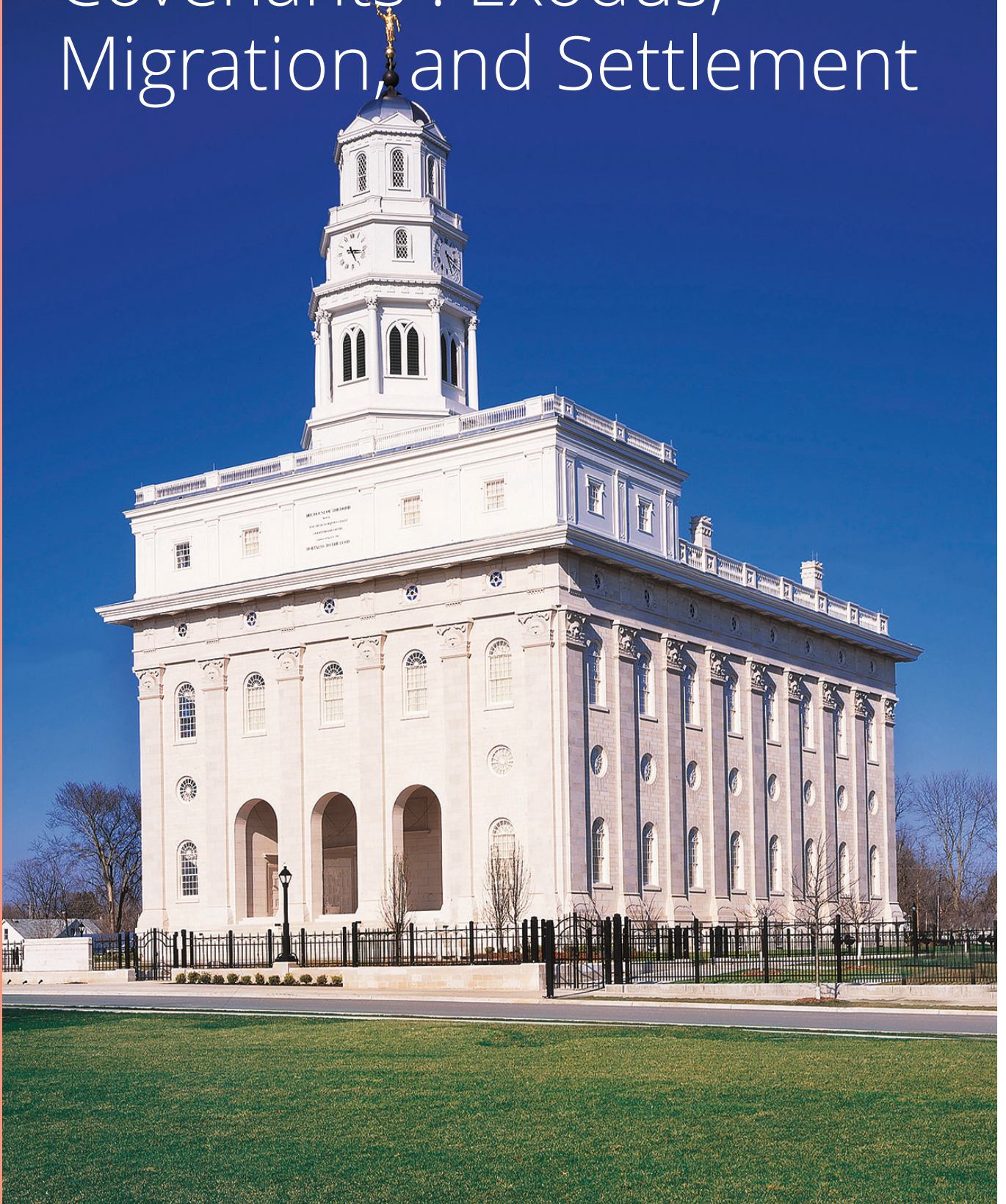




WOMEN'S TOPICS FOR  
INCARCERATED INDIVIDUALS

# "Cleave unto the Covenants": Exodus, Migration, and Settlement





## WOMEN'S TOPICS FOR INCARCERATED INDIVIDUALS

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THE CHURCH OF  
**JESUS CHRIST**  
OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS





# "Cleave unto the Covenants": Exodus, Migration, and Settlement

FROM *DAUGHTERS IN MY KINGDOM: THE HISTORY AND WORK OF RELIEF SOCIETY*

On June 27, 1844, an armed mob advanced on a small jail in Carthage, Illinois, where Joseph Smith was imprisoned unjustly with his brother Hyrum and with Elders John Taylor and Willard Richards. When the mob left, Joseph and Hyrum were dead and Elder Taylor was wounded.

The martyrdom of Joseph and Hyrum Smith did not put an end to the Saints' faith and devotion. It also did not signal an end to the persecution of Church members. Because of continuing persecution, the Church's new leader, President Brigham Young, eventually counseled the Saints to leave Nauvoo, Illinois, for a new home, where they hoped to live and worship in peace. Many followed President Young, beginning their exodus in February 1846.

Leading up to this difficult time, the formal organization of the Female Relief Society was discontinued. However, the sisters' desires to relieve suffering, strengthen families, and be faithful and holy continued to burn bright. They followed the command the Lord had given their first Relief Society president: "Cleave unto the covenants which thou hast made" (D&C 25:13).

## Exodus: Sustained by temple covenants

The first Relief Society sisters were, like the ancient people of Ammon, "distinguished for their zeal towards God" and were "firm in the faith of Christ" (Alma 27:27). They had been taught by the Prophet Joseph Smith, and they had been blessed

through their formal organization under the authority of the priesthood. Now they needed the blessings of the temple.

More than 5,000 Saints thronged the Nauvoo Temple after its dedication so they could receive the endowment and the sealing ordinance before embarking on their journey into an unknown future. They came to the temple all day and long into the night. President Brigham Young wrote that they were so anxious to receive their ordinances that "I have given myself up entirely to the work of the Lord in the Temple night and day, not taking more than four hours sleep, upon an average, per day, and going home but once a week."<sup>1</sup>

The sisters never lost sight of the institution, nor the promises made to them by President Joseph Smith. . . . They were always ready with willing hands and tender sympathies to perform deeds of love and charity, and many were in need of such kindly acts for those were the days of toil, and of suffering, of scarcity and of hardship.

Emmeline B. Wells

The strength, power, and blessings of temple covenants would sustain the Latter-day Saints during their journey, when they would suffer



cold, heat, hunger, poverty, sickness, accidents, and death. They were strengthened and empowered—spiritually prepared to leave Nauvoo on their arduous journey into the wilderness.

## Serving in the temple strengthened Sarah Rich

Like many Relief Society sisters, Sarah Rich was buoyed by temple blessings as she faced the challenges of the exodus. Prior to leaving Nauvoo, she received a calling from Brigham Young to work in the temple. She later said:

"Many were the blessings we had received in the house of the Lord, which has caused us joy and comfort in the midst of all our sorrows and enabled us to have faith in God, knowing He would guide us and sustain us in the unknown journey that lay before us. For if it had not been for the faith and knowledge that was bestowed upon us in that temple by the influence and help of the Spirit of the Lord, our journey would have been like one taking a leap in the dark. To start out . . . in the winter as it were and in our state of poverty, it would seem like walking into the jaws of death. But we had faith in our Heavenly Father, and we put our trust in Him feeling that we were His chosen people and had embraced His gospel, and instead of sorrow, we felt to rejoice that the day of our deliverance had come."<sup>2</sup>

As Sister Rich implied, the exodus was not a "leap in the dark" for faithful Latter-day Saint women. They were sustained by their covenants. Like the children of Israel anciently, they followed a prophet into the wilderness in the hope of deliverance. In preparation for the exodus, President Brigham Young made the following declaration to the Saints: "This shall be our covenant—that we will walk in all the ordinances of the Lord" (D&C 136:4). Latter-day Saints walked into the wilderness bound by covenant to God, their families, and their fellow sojourners.



More than 5,000 Saints received temple blessings in Nauvoo, Illinois, before embarking on their journey to the Salt Lake Valley. Detail from *Nauvoo Illinois Temple*, by Scott Goodwin. © Scott Goodwin.

Before leaving Nauvoo, a group of Latter-day Saints wrote the following message on the wall of the assembly hall in their abandoned temple: "The Lord has beheld our sacrifice: come after us."<sup>3</sup> These words summarized their dedication and collective efforts. The Saints made the trek with a spirit of sacrifice, consecration, and faith in God. They did not make the journey as lone travelers but as the "Camp of Israel," a community organized into smaller groups, called companies, for mutual support.

In a revelation given to Brigham Young "concerning the Camp of Israel in their journeyings to the West," the Lord commanded the pioneers to "let each company bear an equal proportion, according to the dividend of their property, in taking the poor, the widows, the fatherless, and the families of those who have gone into the army" (D&C 136:1, 8).

Often during the migration, the ratio of men to women and children was low. In the spring of 1847, after many Saints had spent the winter in



a place they called Winter Quarters, about 520 men, accompanied by 35 women and 42 children, joined the Mormon Battalion to answer a call to serve in the United States military. Another 143 men, 3 women, and 2 children forged ahead in the first pioneer company, preparing the way for others. A sister named Presendia Kimball recalled: "Only a few men were left to raise grain and vegetables, and protect the women and children. . . . Thus were left the aged, the feeble, the women and the children."<sup>4</sup>

The Saints were blessed by priesthood power through the laying on of hands by brethren who held the priesthood. They were also sustained by the sisters' faith in God, charity, strength, and prayers.

### Eliza Partridge Lyman lost a baby boy to illness

With illness rampant, the sisters served as doctors and nurses to their own families and to one another, as they had in Nauvoo. Drusilla Dorris Hendricks recalled, "There was not a wagon in the whole camp, but what had sickness in it, [but] we bore it with the patience of Job."<sup>5</sup> The death rate was high, particularly among infants.<sup>6</sup>

Eliza Partridge Lyman gave birth to a son on July 14, 1846, in a wagon. Like many infants among the pioneers, the boy did not survive. In a journal, Eliza described her experiences:

July 14, 1846: "I am very uncomfortably situated for a sick woman. The scorching sun shining upon the wagon through the day and the cool air at night, is almost too much of a change to be healthy."

October 15, 1846: "We have taken possession of our log house today. The first house my babe was ever in. I feel extremely thankful for the privilege of sitting by a fire where the wind cannot blow it in every direction, and where I can warm one side without freezing the other. Our house is minus floor and many other comforts but the walls protect us from the wind if the sod roof does not from the rain."

December 6, 1846: "My baby [is] sick and getting worse. Has cried all day but I cannot see what ails him."

December 12, 1846: "The baby is dead and I mourn his loss. We have done the best we knew how for him, but nothing has done any good; he continued to fail from the time he was taken sick. My sister Caroline and I sat up every night with him and tried to save him from death, for we could not bear to part with him, but we were powerless. . . .

"I still have friends who are dear to me. If I had not I should wish to bid this world farewell, for it is full of disappointments and sorrow. But I believe there is a power that watches over us and does all things right."<sup>7</sup>

As Eliza said, she was sustained by the friendship of caring sisters. Later she provided that same friendship and compassion, helping other women who were dealing with similar grief. On June 1, 1847, she wrote: "Sister Elvira Holmes' babe died. Received an invitation . . . to come and spend the day with her which I accepted. Visited with her the grave of her child."<sup>8</sup>



Many Latter-day Saint women gave birth to children during their journey to the Salt Lake Valley. *Madonna of the Plains*, by Robert Barrett. © 1987 Robert Barrett.





## President Bathsheba W. Smith described how the pioneer women helped each other

In such trying circumstances, the sisters relied on the power of their covenants. Bathsheba W. Smith, the fourth Relief Society general president, later recalled those experiences:

"I will not try to describe how we traveled through storms of snow, wind, and rain; how roads had to be made, bridges built, and rafts constructed; how our poor animals had to drag on day after day with scanty feed; nor how our camps suffered from poverty, sickness, and death. We were consoled . . . by having our public and private meetings in peace, praying and singing the songs of Zion, and rejoicing that we were leaving our persecutors far behind. We were further consoled by seeing the power of God manifested through the laying on of the hands of the elders, causing the sick to be healed, and the lame to walk. The Lord was with us and his power was made manifest daily."<sup>9</sup>

The women also found spiritual strength in each other's love and compassion. Throughout the journey, as they suffered trials of illness and death, they prayed in faith for each other and comforted each other. "The love of God flowed from heart to heart," wrote Helen Mar Whitney, "till the wicked one seemed powerless in his efforts to get between us and the Lord, and his cruel darts, in some instances, were shorn of their sting."<sup>10</sup>

## Through their faith and charity, Mormon pioneer women saved souls

Remembering inspired instruction from the Prophet Joseph Smith, these faithful pioneer women had a vision of their power and potential for service. They helped establish homes and communities. Through deeds of faith and charity, they saved souls. Their sacrifices had a sanctifying effect on themselves and on those who received their offerings.

Even without the formal meetings of the Relief Society, pioneer women followed prophetic teachings and kept their temple covenants, and in so doing they contributed to an extraordinary chapter

in the history of the Church and the American West. A prominent non-Latter-day Saint historian wrote: "That I do not accept the faith that possessed them does not mean I doubt their frequent devotion and heroism in its service. Especially their women. Their women were incredible."<sup>11</sup>

## Settlement: "Always ready . . . to perform deeds of love and charity"

When the first pioneer companies arrived in the Salt Lake Valley, they planted crops and built shelters for their own survival. They also turned to meeting the needs of others. President Brigham Young counseled the Saints to assist those in need, both spiritually and temporally. His counsel was like Amulek's exhortation in the Book of Mormon to the impoverished Zoramites: "If ye turn away the needy, and the naked, and visit not the sick and afflicted, and impart of your substance, if ye have, to those who stand in need—I say unto you, if ye do not any of these things, behold, your prayer is vain, and availeth you nothing, and ye are as hypocrites who do deny the faith" (Alma 34:28).

Sister Emmeline B. Wells, who later served as the fifth Relief Society general president, described the goodness and service of the sisters: "When the Saints left Nauvoo and during their journeyings, the Relief Society meetings were necessarily discontinued, though the sisters never lost sight of the institution, nor the promises made to them by President Joseph Smith, but continued their benevolent work wherever and whenever an opportunity presented itself; they were always ready with willing hands and tender sympathies to perform deeds of love and charity, and many were in need of such kindly acts for those were the days of toil, and of suffering, of scarcity and of hardship."<sup>12</sup>

## Matilda Dudley made clothes for American Indians

In 1854, Matilda Dudley sensed many needs among local American Indians. Acting first on her own initiative and later on instruction from President Brigham Young, she organized sisters under the direction of her bishop to make



clothing for native women and children. Similar groups developed in other settlements as Latter-day Saint women followed the charitable feelings of their hearts and gave service to meet the needs of those around them.

This pattern continued as more Latter-day Saints arrived in the Salt Lake Valley. Church leaders called people to settle the far reaches of the territory, expanding to areas north and south of Salt Lake City. Sisters remembered the legacy and foundational principles of the Female Relief Society of Nauvoo, and many groups were established in those settlements to serve others and relieve the poor.

### Mormon women donated clothing and bedding for the handcart pioneers stranded on the plains

Lucy Meserve Smith, for example, led a group of Latter-day Saint women in Provo, Utah. She and other sisters responded to calls to help Latter-day Saints who arrived in Utah. At the October 1856 general conference, President Brigham Young announced that handcart pioneers were stranded hundreds of miles away. He declared: "Your faith, religion, and profession of religion, will never save one soul of you in the celestial kingdom of our God, unless you carry out just such principles as I am now teaching you. Go and bring in those people now on the plains, and attend strictly to those things which we call temporal, or temporal duties, otherwise your faith will be in vain."<sup>13</sup>

Sister Smith recorded in her autobiography that after President Young's exhortation, those in attendance took action to provide relief for their brothers and sisters. Women "stripped off their petticoats [large underskirts that were part of the fashion of the day and that also provided warmth], stockings, and every thing they could spare, right there in the Tabernacle, and piled [them] into the wagons to send to the Saints in the mountains."

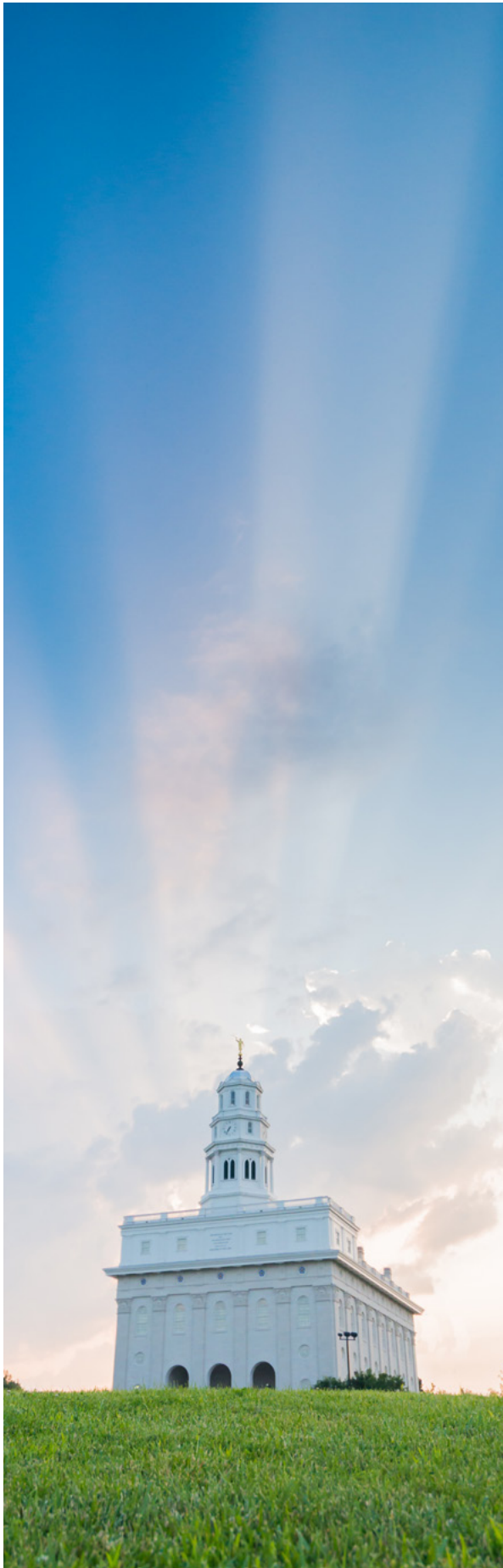
They continued to gather bedding and clothing for Saints who would arrive with only a few belongings in small handcarts. Sister Smith wrote: "We did all we could, with the aid of the

good brethren and sisters, to comfort the needy as they came in with handcarts late in the fall. . . . As our society was short of funds then, we could not do much, but the four bishops could hardly carry the bedding and other clothing we got together the first time we met. We did not cease our exertions [un]til all were made comfortable." Sister Smith said that when the handcart companies arrived, a building in the town was "loaded with provisions for them." She continued: "I never took more satisfaction and, I might say, pleasure in any labor I ever performed in my life, such a unanimity of feeling prevailed. I only had to go into a store and make my wants known; if it was cloth, it was measured off without charge. [We] wallowed through the snow until our clothes were wet a foot high to get things together."<sup>14</sup>

### "What comes next for willing hands to do?"

These Relief Society sisters manifested charity, "the pure love of Christ" (Moroni 7:47), as they donated their petticoats and pieced quilts to save freezing, starving Saints whom they had never met. They found great joy in this service. After they had done all they could to help the handcart pioneers, they continued to help others. Lucy Meserve Smith's words expressed the feelings of their hearts: "What comes next for willing hands to do?"<sup>15</sup> This question epitomizes the goodness of Relief Society women—then and now.

[Note: Subheadings were added or altered in this chapter. Scripture references were moved from the endnotes into the text of the chapter.]



## Endnotes

1. Brigham Young, in *History of the Church*, 7:567.
2. Sarah DeArmon Pea Rich, "Autobiography, 1885–93," Church History Library, 66; spelling, punctuation, and capitalization standardized; quoted by Richard G. Scott, in Conference Report, Apr. 2009, 42; or *Ensign*, May 2009, 44–45.
3. In Charles Lanman, *A Summer in the Wilderness* (1847), 32.
4. Presendia Lathrop Kimball, "A Venerable Woman," *Woman's Exponent*, June 1, 1883, 2.
5. Drusilla Dorris Hendricks, "Historical Sketch of James Hendricks and Drusilla Dorris Hendricks," in *Henry Hendricks Genealogy*, comp. Marguerite Allen (1963), 28.
6. See Jill Mulvay Derr, Janath Russell Cannon, and Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, *Women of Covenant: The Story of Relief Society* (1992), 67.
7. Journal of Eliza Partridge Lyman, July 14–Dec. 12, 1846, Church History Library, 32–35.
8. Journal of Eliza Partridge Lyman, 38.
9. Autobiography of Bathsheba W. Smith, typescript, Church History Library, 13; punctuation, spelling, and capitalization standardized.
10. Helen Mar Whitney, "Scenes and Incidents at Winter Quarters," *Woman's Exponent*, Dec. 1, 1885, 98.
11. Wallace Stegner, *The Gathering of Zion: The Story of the Mormon Trail* (1981), 13.
12. Emmeline B. Wells, "After the Days of Nauvoo," in Record of the Relief Society from First Organization to Conference, Apr. 5, 1892, Book II, Church History Library, 234–35; spelling and capitalization standardized.
13. Brigham Young, "Remarks," *Deseret News*, Oct. 15, 1856, 252.
14. Lucy Meserve Smith, "Historical Sketches of My Great Grandfathers," manuscript, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah, 53–54; spelling, capitalization, and punctuation standardized.
15. Lucy Meserve Smith, "Historical Sketches of My Great Grandfathers," 54.







3. How did faith strengthen pioneer women as they crossed the plains? How can faith strengthen you in your trials?

Lined area for writing the answer to question 3.

4. What can you do now to serve your fellow sisters in their struggles during your incarceration?

Lined area for writing the answer to question 4.

5. What else have you learned in this lesson that you would like to share?

Lined area for writing the answer to question 5.

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