

Tia Wilcox wrote this.
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The conversion story of Joel H. Johnson, another one of my ancestors on my mom's side: "In the fall of 1830, I moved my family to the town of Amherst, Loraine County Ohio. I there first became acquainted with the Book of Mormon and the elders of the church and was baptized on June 2, 1831..."(#2 pg.94)

There are a few important ways that prophets and revealed principles or practices impacted the life of Joel H. Johnson, after his conversion. Joel H. Johnson records the following: "I attended the first October Conference of the church. It was held in Orange Township, Ohio, 1831, where I first beheld the face of the Prophet Joseph and heard the words of life from his mouth which filled my heart with joy and thanks to God."(#2. Pg 94)

Another incident of Joel H. Johnson with the prophet:"I was at Joseph Smith's when the Word of Wisdom was given and have strictly hearkened to the precepts from that day to the present by not using tobacco, strong drinks of any kind, tea nor coffee, and but very little flesh."(#2. Pg 97)

The word of wisdom, if I remember correctly, when it was first given it was a suggestion and latter it became a commandment. Joel H. Johnson would most likely have followed any advice given by the prophet. He didn't put off trying to follow the word of wisdom till it was a commandment. I'm sure it was hard for him and many people and because most were addicted to tobacco or some type of strong drink.

On the 15th of May, (1851) President Brigham Young and many of the Brethren from Great Salt Lake City arrived in our beautiful valley on an exploring and visiting expedition. During their stay they organized our settlement into the city of Parowan, and I (Joel) was elected a member of the city council. (6)

Having been counseled by President Brigham Young to go with my sister, Julia Ann Babbitt, (widow of the late A.W. Babbitt, who was murdered on the plains by the Indians in the fall of 1856) to Council Bluffs City to transact some business appertaining to the estate and also to make what discoveries we could in reference to his death on the plains, I commenced on the first of April to make necessary arrangements. I settled up my affairs as much as I could in so short a time, and called my family together and gave them a fathers blessing and such instruction I thought necessary for them to harken to in my absence. I started on the 6th day of April, 1857, for Salt Lake City in company with my wife Susan, and two horse wagons. We arrived in Santaquin on Saturday evening the 11th, and found our friends all well. We tarried with them over the Sabbath, and called a family meeting on Monday morning in which I blest my two daughters, Sariah and Susan with their children and all my friends at Santaquin, from which place we started at 2 o'clock in the afternoon and arrive at Provo in the evening and stayed over night with Joel Bascom. The next morning we started for Salt Lake City, and arrived at Sister Babbitt's at about ten o'clock in the evening, Tuesday the 14th,. I, during my stay blest Sister Babbitt with her family, and my brother-in-law David Labaren, with his family and many others. 6)

In Joel H. Johnson's "Hymns of Praise", comprised of 360 songs from "Songs of Joel,"

He has tried "to teach the pure principles of the Gospel of Jesus Christ."(# 3 Pg.82) Reveled principles must have really affected his life in order to have at least 360 songs about them!

This is the story behind the writing of "HIGH ON THE MOUNTAIN TOP" by Joel Hills Johnson as told by his wife Margaret Threlkeld Johnson to her grandson Bernard A. Johnson.

Joel H. Johnson established a sawmill in Mill Creek Canyon soon after arriving in the Salt Lake Valley. Sawing lumber for the "Building up of Zion" was Joel's church calling. This meant that he spent his time sawing prime lumber and delivering it to the tithing office. In lieu of wages, he would go to the storehouse and get what was needed for him and his family.

As he made his wagon trips up and down the steep canyon, he often thought about the flag that had been planted on Ensign Peak. He knew he had safely made it down the mountain with his load when he turned north and headed for the tithing office. He always breathed easier when he could look up at that peak and see Old Glory waving.

In the early spring of 1850, Joel loaded up a load of prime lumber and headed for the tithing office. As he headed into the lot that housed this office, he noticed that there were several other wagon loads of tithing offerings ahead of him. He stopped his team, unhitched the horses and turned them into "Brother Brigham's" pasture, and sat down to wait his turn to unload.

Being a warm spring day, Joel sought the shady side of his wagon, leaned back against the wheel and waited. As was his habit, he pulled out a piece of paper and prepared to write. He found himself thinking about the breeze and how it must be making 'Old Glory' ripple. In his mind he pictured how it must look there on the top of the peak under the clear blue sky as it waved and fluttered in the breeze. His mind painted such a wonderful picture.

Almost as if written by unseen hands, words began to appear on the paper.

He originally titled his poem "DESERET". It was later changed to HIGH ON THE MOUNTAIN TOP.

Joel finished his poem, folded up the paper, put it in his pocket, and went about the task of getting his lumber measured and recorded. Much later in the day, he went home.

Sometime later he showed his poem to John Taylor, then a member of the Quorum of the Twelve. President Taylor liked the poem so much, he asked if he could keep it. In those days, words only were written down and then sung to familiar folk tunes. In just a short time it became one of the favorite songs where ever the Saints gathered

This poem was only one of hundreds that Joel H. wrote. But it became one of his most recognized ones. His poetry centered around four themes: His love and devotion to the gospel, his love of the Prophet Joseph Smith, his love of his family, and his desire to enjoy life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for himself and all other human beings.

Because today there is some controversy over the exact date this song was written, this account is being written. In his journal he states that at eighteen years of age "I commenced writing religious songs and hymns upon various subjects, some of which may be found in Zion's Songster, or the Songs of Joel, a work of my own, but many are lost."(5)

Joel H. Johnson was greatly impacted by prophets and revealed principles and made sure to follow their council and even wrote songs about the principles he was learning.

Bibliography

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3. Lesson Committee. An Enduring Legacy Vol. 6: Pioneer Musicians and Composers: Joel H. Johnson. Pg.'s 78-82. Utah: Utah Printing Company 1983
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