Apostates at Walnut Creek

By Janet S. Porter

The Life and History of Phineas Wolcott Cook
pp. 39-40, using his own words

6 CHARACTERS (6 – 3 males, 1 female, friend, Narrator, 2 females if the dream is acted out)

PWC (Phineas Wolcott Cook)

Ann Eliza (his wife)

Levi Savage (and family members if available)

William Smith (brother of the Prophet Joseph)

Jack (William's apostate friend)

Narrator

Narrator: Phineas Wolcott Cook, his wife Ann Eliza, and their two children, Charlotte and Harriet left Michigan May 4, 1845 on their journey to be with the Latter-day Saints in Nauvoo, Illinois, a journey of almost 500 miles. Having said goodbye to their parents in Michigan, they gave thanks to God for their courage to follow their conscience and seek the City of Saints.

PWC: We've been traveling for about two weeks. I calculate we've gone over 200 miles, and I think we need a rest.

Ann Eliza: Yes, the girls need a rest too. It has been raining constantly since we left Michigan, and they need time to rest and play.

(Levi Savage comes in from the side of staging area. Family members could come in with him)

PWC: There is another traveler passing us, and another wagon with him. Ho, traveler, where might you be going?

Levi: And where are *you* going?

PWC: You aren't Mormons, are you?

Levi: And what about you?

PWC: We're Mormons, going to be with the church.

Levi: And so are we. I'm glad to meet you. Levi Savage here, and my wife and children. Over there is Benjamin Waldren, also going to be with the saints at Nauvoo.

PWC: I'm happy to meet you both. My name is Phineas W. Cook, and this is my wife Ann Eliza. Could we travel together? It's very lonely without someone to travel with.

Levi: A good Idea. We're almost at Walnut Grove, Illinois. We thought we would camp a week to rest and wash our clothes. Does that sound good to you?

PWC: Yes, we'll stay together.

(All three leave the stage. PWC, William and Jack come onstage)

PWC: Hello, I see we are camping near each other. Where do you come from?

William: I was in Nauvoo, but I'm traveling to Michigan.

PWC: Well, that's a coincidence. I'm from Michigan traveling to Nauvoo.

William: Hey, Jack, here's a Mormon convert, headed for Nauvoo.

Jack: My goodness, I wonder if he's heard about what's going on there.

PWC: What do you mean?

William: Well, I'm sure you've heard those Mormons have more than one wife, haven't you?

Jack: Yes, there are some who have 50 wives, a regular harem.

PWC: I heard about it from a man named Hiram Cook, but I didn't believe it. Polygamy is an old Bible practice, long ago done away with.

William: Maybe for everyone else, but not done away with them Mormons. They are grabbing up wives as fast as they can—a supposed commandment to my brother Joseph.

PWC: Who are you anyway? Are you a Mormon?

William: My name is William Smith, and I used to be a Mormon, but some of us don't like Mormons any more. We're traveling up to Beaver Island on the Michigan side of the lake where our king James Strang has organized a better church.

PWC: William Smith? You're not…

William: Yeah, my brother was Joseph, but he's dead now. The church is falling apart and I'm on my own. I don't need them anymore.

PWC: What do you mean the church is falling apart?

William: They mostly left Nauvoo during the winter to escape the mobs. I hear they're on their way to the Missouri River to get out of the country. But that's not for me. I'm off to Michigan.

Jack: Me too. We're done with those Mormons.

PWC: But what about the Book of Mormon, the prophet, the apostles? Surely you haven't given up your belief in those truths.

William: Oh, we'll organize our own church. Strang has good ideas too. I'm tired of being chastised by Brothers Brigham and Kimball. They're always looking down on me because I don't show a proper example as the brother of the prophet Joseph.

Jack: Phooey, we hate the commandments.

PWC: I guess there's no use going to Nauvoo after all.

William: Heck, no. Come with us. We'll have a good church too, and you can still bring your Book of Mormon if you want. And we won't have any of those strict rules.

Jack: We hate rules. We're not having any of them rules in our church.

PWC: I'm confused. I wanted to go with the Mormons, and I still believe the church is true. I don't know how you can say those things against it.

William: Stay away from those Mormons. They lost the spirit when they started preaching polygamy.

Jack: Yeah. Every time they asked us to change our ways and keep the commandments, I couldn't feel the spirit any more. Come with us.

PWC: I need to pray about this. Good night to both of you.

William: See you in the morning. We're leaving for Michigan about 10 o'clock. Come with us. Maybe you'll even be one of the apostles.

Jack: Oh, yeah. You"d make a great apostle. Elder Cook.

(William and Jack leave the stage)

PWC: Everything has changed. I don't know what to do. I have to pray about this. *(He sits down and puts his head in his hands.)*

(Ann Eliza comes to Phineas)

Ann Eliza: Phineas, you've been out here for hours.

PWC: I'm afraid I've listened to William Smith and his friends laugh and criticize the church all week. They wouldn't leave me alone, and I couldn't seem to get away from them. Their stories about the church, especially about polygamy, keep ringing in my ears. I can't sleep a wink until I have some peace.

Ann Eliza: One of us needs to be up with the children. I'll leave you alone so you can pray, but I'll pray for you. We need to find some answers before we go on.

PWC: I'll pray under this tree all night if I have to.

Ann Eliza: Be careful, I see a storm coming. There's already thunder and lightning close by.

(Ann Eliza leaves.)

PWC: The fireworks in the sky match what is going on in my heart. Right now I can't feel any peace, but I know if I pray to God for His spirit I'll understand the truth. I know if we're doing the right thing and praying for light and knowledge, God will speak to our hearts. Otherwise Mother will be right. Her last words were that I'll be back to Michigan to winter after all.

(Phineas puts his head in his hands, but stands when Ann Eliza returns)

Ann Eliza: Phineas, you're awake.

PWC: I finally was able to sleep. I feel much better.

Ann Eliza: Tell me what happened. When I went back to the wagon to sleep last night you were terribly distressed.

PWC: Yes, I was miserable. I knew in my heart the church is true, but those apostates had filled me with doubts until I couldn't think right. I had actually begun to believe their accusations were true—that the Prophet Joseph was evil and the apostles just want to have power over the lives of other people. Suddenly what they were saying was making sense to me, and I just wanted to go back home again.

Ann Eliza: I'm so sorry, Phineas. But now you're happy again. Please tell me what made you feel better.

PWC: Just as the storm hit, I had a dream.

(The dream could be acted out.)

PWC: While the thunder and lightning were raging all around me, I suddenly felt myself in a peaceful, quiet place. Across the meadow came a lovely young lady, tall and slim and with red hair. Then came another one, not quite as tall. I looked at them and a peaceful feeling came over me. I knew they would be my wives, but all the fear and trouble was gone from my mind. It was as if God had touched my heart and healed all the sorrow and fear.

Ann Eliza: It is from God. We have yet another witness that the church is true, and that whatever we must endure can be healed by the Lord's hand if we're willing to stay true to what we know, and wait for His light.

PWC: Yes, now we can go on. But at least we know not to turn south to Nauvoo. I have found where the saints are going. We will have to head across the Mississippi River, across Iowa, and to the Missouri River.

Ann Eliza: It sounds like a long way. I hope we're there before this baby is born. I think we have about one month.

PWC: I'll do my best. My heart is light once more. Thank goodness we have learned God can speak to us and answer our questions. We will be blessed as long as we want to do the right thing and make choices to keep that channel flowing.

Ann Eliza: My dear Phineas. It's so good to have your cheery self back. When you're sorrowful and questioning, it's as if you're another person.

PWC: But now I'm filled with the spirit. I feel as if I can do anything. Let's go find Levi Savage and Brother Waldron, and get on to the Mississippi River!

Ann Eliza: That's my Phineas. Nothing stops him.

Family Discussion

William Smith and his friends did everything they could to discourage the new, inexperienced members.

How did Phineas feel after the apostates did their best to discourage him?

How were Phineas and Ann Eliza able to go through with their plans to go to Zion?

They may not have read the Doctrine and Covenants yet, but had learned to place their faith in their Heavenly Father rather than in man's wisdom. Instinctively, Phineas knew what Oliver Cowdery had learned about continuing on your inspired course. Oliver learned and Phineas knew we first must make a decision with all the knowledge we have, and then seek God's help in confirming that decision:

> *"Study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right, and if it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore you shall feel that it is right."*
>
> *"But if it be not right you shall have no such feelings, but shall have a stupor of thought…" (D&C 9:8-9)*

In D&C 11: 12-13, Hyrum Smith received a revelation which describes the peace and joy Phineas felt after his dream. It is the confirmation of the Spirit we all need if we are to gain courage for hard times and difficult decisions ahead:

> *"And now, verily, verily, I say unto thee, put your trust in that Spirit which leadeth to do good—yea, to do justly, to walk humbly, to judge righteously; and this is my Spirit.*
>
> *"Verily, verily, I say unto you, I will impart unto you of my Spirit which shall enlighten your mind, which shall fill your soul with joy."*

And Joy is what Phineas felt. Knowing how it feels to experience the confirmation of the Holy Ghost, and recognizing the light and joy which accompanies the Spirit, Phineas was able to ignore the bad advice he had been given all week, and go forward with the plans both he and Ann Eliza knew were inspired.