The Hand of the Lord

By Janet S. Porter

The Life and History of Phineas Wolcott Cook
pp. 45-47, using his own words

CHARACTERS (4 – 3 males, 1 female)

Phineas Wolcott Cook (PWC)

Ann Eliza (his wife)

Brigham Young

Chauncey Webb

B Young: This is an exciting time for us. After a winter of prayer and seeking help, we finally know where we will build Zion. It will be in the tops of the mountains by the Salt Lake in the Great Basin. We will be leaving in one month. Phineas Cook, you have worked for me all winter. You've proved yourself a good worker with a mechanical mind. I need men like you to be with me on this trip.

PWC: President Young, I'm grateful for your confidence, but…

B Young: That's why I'm hoping you'll be one of the 140 men who go with me to the Valley of the Great Salt Lake. There is nothing there but sand and rocks. We'll need good men to build a city and the industry which supports it. I have chosen the best men we have. Every one of them is a credit to God's Kingdom on Earth.

PWC: I would like nothing more than to be with you going into the valley. However…

B Young: Then it's settled. We'll leave in about one month. Gather what you need and be ready.

PWC: As much as I want to go, sir, I cannot do it. My wife is dying.

B Young: Oh, I didn't know. I guess it's a bad time for you.

PWC: I think she was weak after having the baby as we came into Winter Quarters, and then we couldn't seem to get enough food. She was all right until January, and then she began getting weaker and weaker, until she can't get out of bed. Our neighbors are helping with the children.

B Young: I'm sorry Brother Cook. It would not do for you to leave her, and you can be released.

PWC: Not only my wife, but the baby is dying too. Ann Eliza has no milk, and at five months old, the baby can't seem to swallow the gruel we try to feed her.

B Young: These are very hard times. But if you're going to be here another year, I want you to help George Grant and help the boys make a farm east of here. Do the best you can and I will help you. And God bless your family Brother Cook.

PWC: I'll do my best in whatever is needed. All I have is on the altar, and myself with it.

(They leave the stage. Ann Eliza comes to the stage and sits on a chair or lies on two chairs. Then Phineas comes in.)

PWC: Hello, my dear, are you any better?

Ann Eliza: Well, yes. Lorenzo Young brought some fish and a little flour for us. And Sister Rockwood gave us some sugar and tea.

PWC: The Lord is blessing us through the kindness of other people. After all our afflictions and sorrow, I can see the hand of the Lord in all things.

Ann Eliza: I know it's true. I was almost dead a month ago, and now I'm able to walk about the house for a few minutes each day.

PWC: I had given you up completely. In fact, one night you were unconscious and I gave you up for lost. I said to myself, 'I have pled with the Lord to save her that I might not be alone entirely in the world,' and made up my mind I would have to part with you by death if that is what God wanted.

Ann Eliza: We've been through so much together.

PWC But sometimes God answers our prayers in ways we don't understand. The Elders had administered to you and I had prayed fervently, but you continued sinking and your breath grew shorter and shorter. Then suddenly, I was impressed to go for Elisha Groves and we laid our hands on your head.

Ann Eliza: From that moment I began to feel better.

PWC: I knew it was a miracle. Yet our baby Eliza sinks lower each day. I fear in spite of our prayers and pleadings, she will not live.

Ann Eliza: She is so small. You did the best you could, but there wasn't enough money in this whole town to help everyone, and your wages simply couldn't buy enough food. We did our best but everyone was hungry.

PWC: I know. I couldn't stand by and watch others starve when I had flour from that job when we stopped in Iowa.

Ann Eliza: We both agreed we should share that flour, but by spring there was nothing left. No one had food and there was almost nothing even to buy.

PWC: But even yet, I know it was right for us to come. We both knew it was the right thing to do. Even in our trouble, I see the hand of the Lord in all things.

Ann Eliza: But I wouldn't have wanted to give up my baby. It's a hard thing.

PWC: That is the hard part, and I myself have been feeling poorly. Something is hanging about me that I do not understand. My food seems of no use to me because I feel weak and feeble all the time. I talked to Doc Sprague about it and he gave me some medicine, but it did me harm, and I have stopped using it.

(There is a knock at the door, and Chauncey Webb enters)

C Webb: Brother Phineas, I've heard you have fallen on hard times.

PWC: It's true, Brother Webb. I sometimes wonder if something is trying to discourage us from staying in the church. We've had nothing but hard times since we were baptized by your brother Edward.

C Webb: That's why I'm here, Brother Cook. I'm going to Missouri. This place will kill us all. Please come with me. Bring your wagon and team and we'll get work. It might be a chance for you.

PWC: We have all been sick, Brother Webb. Our baby is dying. Good sense tells me you're right and I should go with you. But I've been counseled by the Brethren to stay, and stay I will.

C Webb: This may be your only chance. You may all die here in this place.

PWC: I have suffered everything almost that a man could live through. I did it to stay with the church, and I am determined to do as I am told.

C Webb: Do as you're told? You don't have to do what they tell you. Men will counsel you to give them your birthright if they could get it.

PWC: I am determined to do as the prophet has counseled, whatever the consequence.

C Webb: Then I'll leave you to your own way, which is to welter in your poverty and sickness. Goodbye, don't say I didn't try to save you.

(Chauncey Webb leaves)

PWC: I didn't tell him, but Brigham's Uncle John Young asked if Brigham could take my wagon to the mountains. I can build another one for us next year.

Ann Eliza: You always do what is best for God's kingdom.

PWC: I gave up my wagon, but I also had a blessing from Uncle John Young. I've had such a bad year. Little by little my strength has left me, and I've had so little food, even what I can eat now does me no good. Uncle John told me I have dyspepsia. He said I should take pulverized egg shells and soot tea and promised I would feel better immediately. He knew where to get the egg shells, and I have taken some of it the past few mornings.

Ann Eliza: It sounds terrible, but did it help?

PWC: I feel much better. In fact, I think my old energy is coming back.

Ann Eliza: You know what? I think things are going to get better for us. You feel better and I feel better and summer will soon be here.

PWC: It's just as I have been saying all along, in bad times as well as good. Even if it takes a long time, if we just stay obedient and faithful, God will bless us. We just have to hold tight on during the bad times. I really do see the hand of the Lord in all things.[1]

[1] This last statement is a direct quote from Phineas. The Life and History of Phineas Wolcott Cook, Second Edition, published by the Phineas Wolcott Cook Family Organization, p. 46, lines 25-26.

Family Discussion

In Phineas Wolcott Cook's printed journal, on page 46, lines 25-26 he wrote: "I could see the hand of the Lord in all things." On the same page (line 14) he stated "all I had was on the altar, and myself with it."

After all the hard things which had happened to this family, from having his parents take what he needed so they wouldn't leave Michigan, to the winter with not enough food and the eventual death of their baby Eliza, how was he able to make such statements of faith and commitment?

President Dieter f. Uchtdorf reminded us of the power of obedience, of continuing to do the right thing even when everything is going wrong. He said:

"Maybe obedience is not so much the process of bending, twisting, and pounding our souls into something we are not. Instead, it is the process by which we discover what we truly are made of…We come to see obedience not as a punishment but as a liberating path to our divine destiny." ("He Will Place You On His Shoulders and Carry You Home," *Ensign*, May, 2016, pp. 103-4)

How did hunger, privation and sorrow prove to Phineas what he was made of?

What decisions might he have made if he had expected God to make life easy?

How would he have reacted if he hadn't consecrated himself to God's work of building Zion?

Phineas had made promises to himself and God, which helped him stay true to both the principles of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to the counsel of the church leaders. In spite of continual discouragements, he saw his future with the church, serving God to the best of his ability. He had placed himself on the altar of the Lord, which put details of his life into the proper perspective. Thus, he was able to recognize the hand of God even in his trials.