

Moses Thatcher and Mormon Beginnings in Mexico

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Moses Thatcher, Apostle and first president of the Mexican Mission, carried on an informative correspondence with his family during his mission and, after his release, continued to write to his successors, offering encouragement and advice.

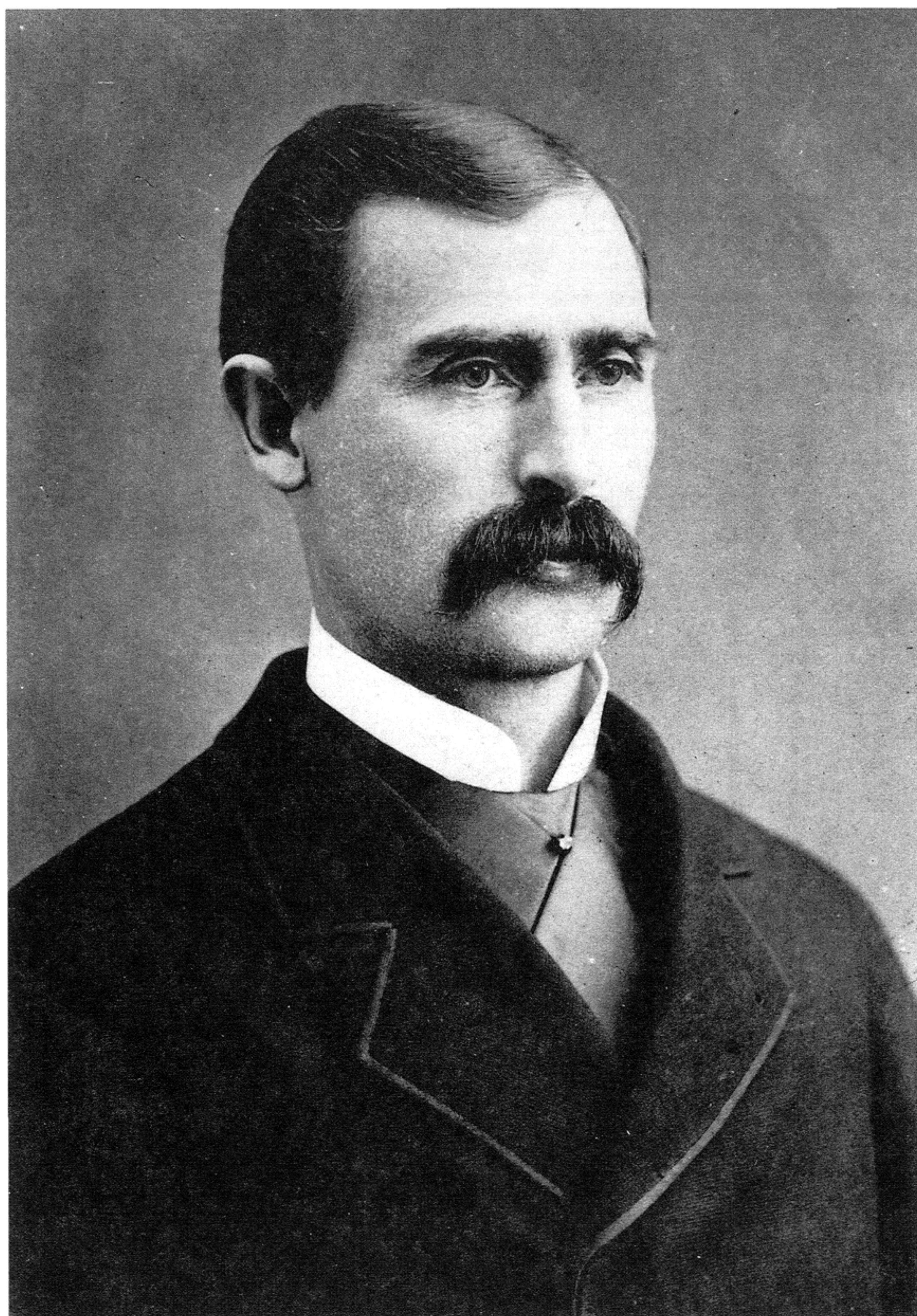
While serving as the first president of the Mexican Mission from 1879 to 1881, Moses Thatcher, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve, wrote a number of letters home to his family in Logan, Utah. After his release, he also wrote several letters to Anthony W. Ivins, his successor in the Mexican Mission. Elder Thatcher's missives contain interesting and important information regarding the beginnings of the Church in Mexico. Salient portions of these personal epistles pertaining to missionary work are quoted in this documentary article, interspersed with historical narrative.

The Beginnings of the Church in Mexico City

Early in the 1870s, Brigham Young considered sending missionaries to Mexico.¹ Only a few years later, Mormons were proselytizing in northern Mexico. However, news of the Latter-day Saint movement sparked comments as far south as Mexico City when two Book of Mormon pamphlets fell into the hands of influential people, including Dr. Plotino Rhodakanaty, who soon sought baptism.² One year later, in the fall of 1879, President John Taylor dispatched the newly ordained Apostle, Moses Thatcher, with James Z. Stewart and Milton Trejo to Mexico City. The trio of missionaries arrived in Mexico City on November 15, 1879, and "put up at the Hotel Iturbide." Shortly thereafter, they organized that city's first branch.³

Hungry for news from home, disappointed in the progress of the work, and believing President Taylor had been misinformed regarding Church conditions in Mexico, Elder Thatcher, as early as December 1879, sent lengthy missives to family members in Utah expressing his disappointments. In a letter to his brother-in-law, Presiding Bishop William B. Preston, he also expressed some of his views regarding conditions in Mexico:

Whatever may have been the condition of the Indian races occupying Mexico at the time of the conquest; we know that the thralldom of their bondage



Courtesy LDS Church Archives

Moses Thatcher, 1842–1909. Photograph by Charles R. Savage, date unknown.

has, under the Catholic rule, been fearful since. . . . Without entering into the details of the many influences, oppressive powers and wicked machinations which have produced the many changes every where apparent, during the past 360 years, I will speak of things as we, in the line of our duty now find them.⁴

He went on to express his distaste at what he considered to be idolatry and excesses associated with the locals' Christmas-related festivals. He then turned his attention to the Church's beginnings in Mexico City: "I have baptized twelve persons, all men. Some women will join when we find a suitable place in which to baptize them."⁵

Two weeks later, Elder Thatcher again wrote to Bishop Preston, reporting that he had been introduced to the U.S. Minister in Mexico City and had witnessed the presentation of the Italian Minister to President Díaz. Also, he registered his disappointment in the results of some other denominations' "mode of securing converts in Mexico":

They spend money freely in the purchase of Church buildings: in establishing schools and seminaries for the benefit of the children of their converts; in hiring local native preachers and otherwise using cash "where it will do the most good."

Now, to our deep regret, after we had baptised 12 persons we learned that they, and many others, who wanted to be baptised if the things worked well, expected us to do likewise. In short they wanted help, in a financial substantial way. And, when we were asked if it would not be a good plan to rent a large house, so the Saints could all live together? And why could not the Church, now being well off, and established help the poor Saints here? That five cents a piece from 150,000 Saints at home would make \$7,500.^{00/100s}? We began to comprehend the situation. We began to fear with good reason, that there was still in the world lovers of the "loaves and fishes," as well as lovers of the better, and higher things of the Kingdom. . . .

There is no denying the too apparent fact, that our corrections have thinned our meetings, and made us realize that our labors are cast among a fallen people. . . . Among so many there must be those that are honest; and we believe that the Lord will raise up such, as will be willing and qualified to preach to the Indians, of whom there are over four millions in Mexico, and we all know that they in the right time of the Lord will receive a knowledge of the truth, and we believe it will be done through the agency of preaching by those who are sent. . . .

I have eaten but one meal since I left Ogden, that I have not paid for and that was at the house of Mr. Wells at Chicago. We can have no reasonable hope of a change in this direction at least for the present. We shall feel most happy when we succeed in thoroughly convincing those who have joined, that they must not under any circumstances expect financial aid from us. As it is we pay for every thing we get.⁶

Elder Thatcher, only months into his apostolic ministry, to his credit believed the Church in Mexico should be established on the firm soil of true faith. Realizing that the expenditure of only a few dollars would probably

result in numerous baptisms, he opted to withhold financial aid, hoping to find instead sincere truth seekers. He was willing to sacrifice spectacular numerical success on the altar of steady, sound, more secure patterns of conversion.

Apparently, Elder Thatcher failed to see the irony in pointing out to Bishop Preston that the Mexican people were not inclined to feed and support him and his companions, while he complained that many potential converts only wanted the Church's money. Even as he lamented the fact that many Mexicans were drawn to the Church in hopes of improving their economic condition, it was not apparent to him that his asking for food and lodging might have seemed to them the same as their expectation of financial gain from affiliation with the Church.

Moses Thatcher returned to Utah in 1880 to participate in general conference. Before he left Mexico, he and Elders Stewart and Trejo met in a rooftop room of their hotel, and each in turn offered a prayer. Elder Thatcher dedicated the land of Mexico for the colonization of the Lord's people and especially for the remnants of Israel.⁷ He subsequently left Mexico City on February 4, 1880, bound for Salt Lake City.⁸

In October, Elder Thatcher assisted in the organization of the Quorum of the First Presidency and attended general conference. He arrived back in Mexico on December 5, 1880. Only a few days after returning to Mexico, he received a brief letter from his mother, Alena (called Alley and pronounced Ollie) Kitchen Thatcher. On the second day of March, he composed a rather lengthy reply in which he told her of his attachment to his home and commented on early Christian history:

They [people during the great Apostasy] might continue to teach the commandments of men for doctrines. They might continue to sprinkle, as the Catholics do, adults, and call it baptism—a “burial” with Christ Jesus in “likeness” of his burial and resurrection. It would indeed be difficult to see any “likeness.” But that don't matter as it is one of the ordinances which has been changed by man. Catholic history shows this plainly: for the Catholic church for more than 200 years after Christ, baptized by immersion. As for sprinkling “infants” and calling it baptism that they might thus openly deny the efficacy of the attoning blood of the Savior (he himself declaring that “of such was the Kingdom of heaven”) they never thought of that, untill about 300 years later. Then they introduced the practice of sprinkling horses, cattle, asses and even church “bells” and called them baptisms. Then they “forbid to marry” so that all the world might know who the man of “sin” was of whom Paul had said he shall “forbid to marry” “abstain from meats &c.”

Turning to his own mission affairs, he said:

We are here, in Mexico, not for money for we neither divine for money nor preach for hire; but we are here to do God's will. If I did not personally know that he requires his Servants to preach the gospel of Salvation to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people on earth I should not be here now. If I

did not know that he has revealed himself and will do so many more times in our age, I would not be here now. If I did not know the words of Jesus Christ to be true, when he declared that a man must be born again to even see the kingdom of God and that he must be born of the “water” and of the “spirit” before he could enter it, I would not be here trying to induce People to enter the “strait gate” and “narrow way.”⁹

The Church’s beginnings in Mexico were filled with hard labor and many disappointments. Thatcher found it difficult to penetrate the hearts of people he believed to be steeped in superstition and saturated with false doctrine. Overcoming his own deep discouragement, his great faith in spite of all obstacles helped him encourage the missionaries with whom he labored and those who came after, to whom he often wrote.

Thatcher also told his mother that the Protestant sects of the day in Mexico, who denounced the Roman Catholic Church as the “mother of Harlots,” themselves failed to see that if the “mother of Harlots” was near, then the “daughters” could not be far away. He felt that both Protestants and Catholics were united in “persecuting and reviling the Latter Day Saints.”¹⁰

First Mission Conference in Mexico

In the spring of 1881, while Church members in Utah awaited general conference, Thatcher, his missionaries, and a few Mexican Saints prepared for a special conference of their own. Traveling to Ozumba, they procured food, bedding, and two horses and proceeded to ascend Mount Popocatepetl.

The nine members of the party,¹¹ after a nine-hour climb, reached the upper edge of the timberline about sixteen miles from Ozumba. There they camped for the night, sleeping close to their campfire. As darkness descended, they held a “short and interesting meeting that was opened with prayer by Elder Thatcher.” A native elder, Silviano Arteaga, “spoke of the hope which [would] gladden the heart, rendering the deliverance from his race and people from bondage, superstition and ignorance if they would receive the truth, broad and freely offered without money or price by the servants of God.” Elder Thatcher expressed his feeling that “the present deplorable condition of blindness, misery and bondage of the Mexican people . . . was the result of disobedience, the killing of prophets and rejecting of god and His commandments by their progenitors fifteen centuries ago.”

The night was intensely cold, the wind howled, as did mountain lions, and the missionaries slept only fitfully. The next morning, following a light breakfast, the small, faithful band sustained the General Authorities of the Church and Moses Thatcher as the president of the Mexican Mission. Then three members of the group, including Thatcher and a guide named Páez, scaled the mountain to a height of 15,500 feet above the sea. On a ledge,

sheltered from the piercing wind, they read passages from the Book of Mormon regarding the Lamanites and promises made to them. Following the reading, they knelt in prayer:

Elder Thatcher besought the God of Abraham to whom the promise was made to remember the descendants of Joseph and fulfill the predictions according to the Book of Mormon regarding the remnants of his seed of the land. He pleaded with God to remove the scales of darkness from their eyes to open their ears and soften their hearts that they might see, hear, and understand. He prayed that the mountains might be sacred to the Lord, a mighty monument of honor and glory to himself and that his servants might from hence with increased faith and power to do good and the great rocks towering above us might be considered an altar upon which we come to pour out to him the devotions of our heart and the supplication of our hearts that the whole land wherever the Lamanites dwell might be dedicated and preserved unto the Lord in peace until they might hear the voice of the true shepherd and cease to follow strangers that they might received the truth with glad hearts and help to build up the center city of Zion.¹²

Moses Thatcher's Release from the Mission

Returning from Mount Popocatepetl and the impressive though small mission conference held there, Thatcher, on April 13, 1881, again wrote a letter to his mother expressing some of his concerns:

Two Protestants, one a minister, were killed a few days since, about 60 miles from here, with clubs and knives in the hands of a Catholic mobb. The newspapers will make a stir about it a few days then it will drop out of notice and be forgotten; life is of too little value in this country to bother long about the murder of a few "heretics." We shall avoid as far as we can, exposure and trust in the Lord for the rest.¹³

Continuing his correspondence, Thatcher wrote a long missive to his older sister Harriet, wife of William B. Preston. In his letter, Thatcher scolded her for working so hard and not enjoying life more. He also reflected upon lessons he had learned:

That God expects us as his Saints—male and female—to overcome our passions and to bring our minds thoroughly under the control of his eternal laws I know. But it is not, therefore, necessary that I must lacerate my tender feet upon the Sharp thorns of the prickly pear which I may find lying in my path, if I can step over it, or walk around it. How often can we, with a little care, pluck the roses and enjoy their sweet fragrance (of life) without piercing our finger with the thorns which we find concealed beneath the leaves that are fresh and beautiful. . . .

As, Latter day Saints there are many trials that are peculiar to us, and they are severe to every honest, upright just man, as well as to the loving faithful wife who nobly meets to conquer and overcome them with her husband. . . .

Cherish hatred towards none, love all whom it is possible to love. . . . Regard each others feelings with tender consideration, and remember that the bending tree yields not to the uprooting storm. Who bends easiest to the storms of life stands ready quickest to kiss the cheerful light which succeeds them.¹⁴

While serving in Mexico, Thatcher seemed able to cope with difficult challenges while at the same time rejoicing in the small successes that came his way. He found that he had the capacity to love the Mexican people even though he did not agree with much of what they did.

On July 21, 1881, James Stewart, the first of the original missionaries to be released, left for home. Seven days later, Thatcher, who had ongoing health problems,¹⁵ wrote again to his mother, unaware that President John Taylor had already sent a letter releasing him from his presidency:

You speak of a desire to have me return home; in reply to which I can only repeat your own surmises—that is, I must leave that matter wholly in the hands of the Lords servants unto whom I look for instructions. I shall be glad to return whenever they may deem such a movement right and proper. I did not call myself to this mission, and I certainly do not expect to release myself from it. . . .

I am now trying to gradually taper off my writing by doing less of it each day. There has been no real necessity for me to write as much as I have done, but I have done it mainly to keep myself employed and by that means avoid being lonely. Having for so many years been actively engaged among the people to whom I talked¹⁶ a great deal both in public and private, it was in coming on this mission just like reversing ones entire nature. Hence I have heretofore found vent, in a measure, for my thoughts in written expressions. But now after an absence, the second time of nearly nine months, I begin to feel that there is wisdom and pleasure in Silence. . . .

This mission, my dear mother, has thus far proven, because of the indifference, insincerity and down right dishonesty of the masses, a very trying one to me. So much so that at times I have had to muster all the faith ~~of~~ which I was capable of exercising, and pray earnestly to the Lord to remember His promises to the remnants of Israel, that I might not become wholly discouraged. And I now feel that whether my efforts have, or may hereafter result in good to them or not, I am satisfied that the experiences will prove beneficial to me personally.¹⁷

While Thatcher believed that many of the people among whom he labored were descendants of Lehi's colony and a people of destiny, he struggled as they, for the most part, continued to reject his message. Doubting their sincerity and baffled by their beliefs, he found himself exerting great faith that soon the Lord would remember his promises to them. Poor health and discouragement dogged the new Apostle on this, his most difficult mission. Moses Thatcher's letters provide a relatively rare glimpse into a Church leader's deepest feelings, and leave the door ajar just enough that we are made aware of his humanity.

It is evident that he had experienced a difficult mission and had not attained the success that he thought might occur. Like many missionaries who do not experience great numerical success, Elder Thatcher justified his Mexican sojourn by the personal growth resulting from his efforts. It is highly likely that his inability to speak the language fluently was also a factor in his discouragement. Yet his conviction, his testimony, and his sense of duty compelled him to continue his labors. The LDS Church, in its initial efforts to expand, experienced difficult challenges in cultures that were dominated by a state-protected Catholic Church.

However, President Thatcher may have accomplished more than he realized. The people he baptized were converted to the Church and its doctrines. Their own faith equaled that of their mission president. They were willing to sacrifice all on the altar of their faith. Furthermore, the foundation was laid for the conversions of tens of thousands of Mexico's finest citizens. The land dedicated more than once by Thatcher, like a giant oak in embryo, was even then beginning to sprout a mighty church in its fertile soil.

Continued Correspondence with Mexican Mission Leaders

Released, much to his relief, as the mission president in August 1881, Thatcher returned home. However, President Taylor appointed him as the apostolic contact for the new mission president, August Wilcken. Thus Thatcher maintained his interest in the mission and from time to time wrote to the missionaries sent there, answering their questions and giving them advice. Anthony W. Ivins and Nielson R. Pratt, within a few months after Thatcher's return home, were called as Mexican missionaries.

Thatcher wrote a number of letters to Anthony Ivins, giving counsel and encouragement. Ivins preserved the letters, and they are now in the Utah Historical Society Archives in Salt Lake City. Ivins, upon Wilcken's release, became the new mission president. Thatcher's initial epistle to Ivins, written November 2, 1882, is important for several reasons. In it, he informed a lonely, often discouraged Ivins that he had published Ivins's "interesting communication for the Press" and it "has proven interesting reading," for the Saints were interested in the "manners, and customs, and particularly the peculiarities of the Mexican people." "When enclined," Thatcher admonished, "give an account of Celebrations Feast observances, sittings of the Congress, political movements, scenes in police courts and c." He counseled Ivins further to compose an article on the National Museum as well as one on the life of a "Sir Tolis," [*sic*] to whom he had just been introduced. Ivins eventually became a fine writer, and the encouragement he received from Thatcher had a profound impact on his literary development. Moreover, the Apostle's letter provided encouragement for the

new mission president inasmuch as it reminded him that Latter-day Saints were very much concerned about the Mexican people and the progress of the mission.¹⁸

As the spring of 1883 approached, Thatcher composed another letter, which he sent to the new leader:

Your welcome and interesting letter of the 7th inst reached me yesterday and I write not in answer fully now, but only to say that I will submit your suggestions regarding more missionaries for Mexico, to the Council early next week and will acquaint you promptly with their decision.

You did perfectly right in giving me your views on the subject, and I rejoice with you in the spread of the Gospel in that land among the remnants of Israel. . . .

I thank you also for the information conveyed in your postscript. And while it caused regret, it did not particularly surprise me. I wrote to Bro Wilcken about a week ago, giving him my ideas regarding his release to return home. . . . You did not inform me as to whether or not you had received my letter written from St David Arizona,¹⁹ or if you had received a remittance of \$500.00^s. Will write you again soon. My regards to Bros Wilcken & Pratt. Perhaps the former will have left you ere this reaches Mex: Keep me fully posted please.²⁰

Thatcher did not disclose just what in President Ivins's letter caused him regret, but it may have been Wilcken's desire to return home before his official release. However, this letter must have encouraged Elder Ivins as he was informed that his request for additional missionaries would be considered by the General Authorities. He needed help, and the prospect of having more elders sent to Mexico must have filled him with great anticipation.

Only a week after the conclusion of general conference, Thatcher again wrote to Ivins. In this letter, he gave him the good news that his request for more missionaries had been granted and that Thatcher was making their travel arrangements:

Elder Heleman Pratt²¹ and your brother in law Franklin Snow²² were called at the Conference to go on a mission to Mexico. . . . President Taylor felt a little undecided about letting Bro Pratt go owing to his financial condition having a large family depending upon him for their daily support. It has been decided finally, I believe, to let him go, President AM Cannon, with some assistance which I can render assuming the duty of seeing that his family shall be cared for. I am sure you will be greatly pleased on receiving this news; for the brethren named will prove a comfort & aid to you in the work which the Lord will, I feel sure, prosper and bless. . . .

. . . I was greatly pleased to hear of the good progress made by Bro. Nielson Pratt²³ in acquiring the language. Give him my love. . . .

To the local Saints, I send greeting and say may God bless & prosper them in doing right.²⁴

News that Elder Thatcher, in spite of the hardships, continued to champion the cause of the Mexican Mission among the leaders of the Church must have been a comfort to Ivins. Knowing that Thatcher, who had walked in his shoes and who understood conditions in Mexico, was his chief advocate surely alleviated many of his concerns. These letters reveal that Elder Thatcher continued to influence affairs in the mission by serving as the liaison between the mission president and the General Authorities. At the beginning of the above letter to Ivins, Thatcher wrote, “While attending the recent general Conference I had a number of Conversations with Elder Erastus Snow about the Mexican Mission”—in private Thatcher was pushing Ivins’s cause as well. Elder Snow, who was Ivins’s father-in-law and a senior member of the Twelve, was in a position to see that President Ivins’s needs might be met. Ivins must also have been pleased to learn that all the Apostles were “greatly pleased with its [his letter to Thatcher] contents and the spirit in which it was written.”²⁵

On the last day of May, Thatcher wrote another letter to Ivins breaking the bad news that Elders Pratt and Snow would not arrive until fall, and by way of encouragement in the face of loneliness and rejection, he wrote:

When we can realize that we are engaged in God’s, not mans work, and that He is pleased with our efforts we have a source from which to draw comfort that the world knows not of.

You will not be forgotten either by the Lord or His people while on your mission in Mexico laboring for the salvation of those with whom promises have been made and recorded in the Book of Mormon. How all the predictions contained in that book concerning the remnants of Jacob are to be fulfilled I have no idea, but the words of God through His inspired Servants never fail, and in this special work of preaching to the Lamanites there is a broad field and happy is the Elder who does his work well in that direction for they though degraded and demoralized are the children of promise.²⁶

As a voice from the dust having a familiar spirit, Ivins’s letter conveyed to Thatcher feelings that mirrored his own as he had labored in Mexico. Having experienced homesickness, discouragement, and loneliness, Elder Thatcher sympathized with the new mission president. Bearing witness that Ivins was engaged in God’s work, he assured him that he had not been forgotten, and he bore powerful testimony that, although he had no idea how God’s plans for the Mexican people would come to fruition, Deity’s words never fail. This communication is important, too, in that it reveals that even the most dedicated missionaries—even future Apostles such as Ivins—are sometimes despondent while serving missions.

Ivins had also written to Thatcher informing him that the missionaries were trying to gain influence with the Mexican people by teaching them English. Answering a letter he had received from Ivins on May 20, 1883, Thatcher penned a June reply:

Your welcome letter of May 20th reached me yesterday and was read with pleasure. Regarding the time you devote to the classes studying English under your instruction, I cannot see how you could, at least for the present, devote it to better advantage or more in the real interest of the mission in which you are now engaged. The object in view in prosecuting missionary labor in Mexico is not only to preach the Gospel and extend the warning voice as far and wide as possible in a given time, but also to make and retain as many influential friends there as we can.

It is not possible to instruct Young men, as you are doing, in the use of language without gaining a greater or less influence for good over their minds, and the Spirit of God will prompt you how to use wisely that influence when gained.

By teaching you can reach a class that otherwise might be unwilling to listen to an Elder at all; and thus, many may hear your testimony who, while they may not wholly receive and profit by it, will nevertheless use an influence in its favor because of the personal regard entertained for their instructor.

I only regret that we have no more Elders engaged in the same manner in that land. I can understand perfectly what you say regarding the difficulty of holding meetings on other than Sundays, and inasmuch as your classes in no way interfere with your more direct ministerial duties on the Sabbath, I unhesitatingly express the view that you should continue teaching as heretofore.

The idea expressed by you in relation to Elder Pratt is a good one. He will improve much more rapidly in the use of the Spanish language with bro Lino, at Ozumba, than he possibly could in the City of Mexico where he doubtless hears English spoken daily. And what is equally important he will be able to direct, under your instructions, the efforts not only of Bro Lino himself but those also of other Native brethren there. The location is a healthy one, and I found no place in Mexico where a more peaceful and heavenly Spirit brooded. Elders Stewart, Young Lino and myself once felt while praying among the pines of the little hill Southwest from the town of Ozumba, that the Lord was near, heard, and would answer our requests in behalf of the people of that place who might be honest and would try to Serve Him.²⁷



Anthony W. Ivins, 1852–1934. Photographer and date unknown.

Courtesy LDS Church Archives

In his letter, Thatcher mentioned several objectives propelling Mormon missionary activity in Mexico, thus providing Ivins with a framework from which he could judge the success of his mission. The missionaries should continue to teach English, Thatcher asserted, so that influential friendships could be cemented. He encouraged Ivins to continue directing some missionaries to labor among the common folk who spoke only Spanish—besides helping the missionaries become more proficient in speaking the language, this practice significantly increased their effectiveness as missionaries as they labored with native companions. Thatcher believed that a special spirit hovered over Ozumba and that continued proselyting there would prove profitable. His letter validated the inspiration Ivins received as mission president.

In September 1883, Elder Thatcher returned home from an extended visit to the Wind River Indian Reservation to find two letters from Ivins. He responded on September 21, 1883. In this important letter, Thatcher explained why he welcomed the passage of a Mexican law prohibiting the holding of outdoor religious meetings in that land. The law, Thatcher asserted, was passed “in the interest of the oppressed” and to curtail obligatory public religious observances.²⁸

The letter also refers to the difficulties that Elder Nielson Pratt was having with Mexican authorities for being the first to have violated this law. In doing so, it seems that Pratt had disregarded the counsel of Ivins, his Church leader. Thatcher wrote:

I am sorry, you are sorry, our young brother Pratt and the few of his friends who have heard of it are sorry and yet that does not cover the recollection nor mitigate the pain & humiliation to which he and brother Lino were subjected at the hands of wicked men and enemies of the truth; but a reason for even deeper regret than all this is found in the fact that President Taylor and this Council have deemed the matter of such importance that they have, so bro: Wilcken informs me, [word crossed out] decided to release brother Pratt from the mission to return home as soon as it is safely Convenient. This action of the brethren was predicated upon the reading of your letter written to Bro Wilcken and which contained a similar report to that made by you to me. As yet I have submitted neither of your letters to the brethren. . . . Conference is near at hand and I will then have an interview with President Taylor in hopes that he may modify his views and permit brother Pratt to remain [t]here a while longer, for I agree with your idea that the unfortunate transaction will prove a lasting lesson to him, so that in the future he will understand that there is little safety outside of the Counsel of his presiding brethren.²⁹

Believing, as did Ivins, that Pratt had learned a valuable lesson, Elder Thatcher was willing to advocate that Pratt be allowed to remain serving in Mexico. Realizing the impact that an early release, especially under cloudy circumstances, could have on a missionary, he sought the right moment to importune President Taylor and convey to him his own feelings as well as

those of Ivins. Both men seem more concerned with saving a soul than with strictly adhering to an absolute standard of justice. Still, Thatcher acknowledged that President Taylor was the Lord's mouthpiece, and he believed that after he had talked with the prophet, the decision made would be the right one.

Having met with the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in the Church's October general conference, Thatcher again wrote to Ivins informing him that the decision whether to allow Brother Pratt to remain in the mission field was in Ivins's hands. All matters pertaining to the Mexican Mission were to be sent to Thatcher who had the liberty of determining which "if any, shall be submitted to" local leaders. He then turned his attention to other matters:

This however I may say: we expect to commence the translation of the Book of Mormon into the Spanish language about the 6th prox: and it is now understood that Elders James Z Stewart, M J Trejo, A W Wilcken and a German recently baptized in the East by the name of Snyder. He was formerly a Catholic Priest and it is said understands thoroughly the English French, German and Spanish languages.³⁰

Away on an assignment to visit and instruct the Bear Lake Saints, Thatcher returned home only to learn of the death of Elder Charles C. Rich back in Bear Lake County. Upon being asked to be a speaker at Rich's funeral, Moses returned to Idaho. Finally arriving home again, he found time to write to Ivins and answer questions posed in three letters that had arrived in his absence. Disappointed and feeling forgotten, Ivins had written letters that moved Thatcher to tears. His November 28, 1883, reply is filled with encouragement and love:

Your letter of Oct 16th in which you speak of your deep disappointment occasioned by the non arrival of an expected letter from me, was written in a spirit of such profound sadness that its perusal touched me deeply and I was unable to restrain fast gathering tears that silently flowed unbidden. I comprehended fully your feelings for I too had, in that far off land, watched and waited for letters that never came. Once in the deep humility of bitter disappointment, for deferred hope made my heart sick, I pened among other lines the following:

A herald of truth among strangers I roam
When absent in memory held sacred at home
By others if slighted, neglected, forgot,
By brother and sister remembered or not.
In sunshine or shower, in darkness or light
I must battle alone with unwavering might.
The body may faint but my spirit is free
For innocent children, are praying for me.

Thus, my dear brother, you see that you and I have thought alike, under like circumstances; and I candidly make the confession to you of that which some might deem weak sentimentality, hoping that it may find a responsive chord in your heart.

With regard to mission affairs Thatcher wrote:

You speak of [?]. I wonder if he is the person by that name who was baptized when we were there? If so he is rather tall dark hair rather pale and intellectually bright. If the same treat him kindly but watch his movements as we had excellent reasons for believing that he took valuable property from our room belonging to Terra. . . .

I must close now, simply adding that we are busily engaged in the translation into the Spanish language of the Book of Mormon. Elder Stewart and Tejo [*sic*] being at present all that are engaged upon it, but are making excellent progress. Please tell bro. Nielson Pratt that I will answer his brief letter soon and that I forwarded the one addressed to the Presidency promptly to Bro: Taylor³¹—Give my love to him, bros. Helaman and Snow and accept the same yourself.³²

In his final letter to Ivins written February 8, 1884, Thatcher again commiserated with his friend regarding his long absence from home and loved ones. Thatcher, too, briefly reviewed the last five years of his own life and wondered if he was being spread too thin. Still, he took some consolation in that when he was home he could crowd more joy and real happiness into a single quiet, peaceful evening than most people could in a whole year. He also made reference to the introduction of bills against the Mormon people in the United States Congress.

With respect to the Mexican mission, he composed the following:

I hope at least to attend the April Conference, at which time I shall talk with Bro E Snow³³ about your affairs and that of the Mexican mission, and as soon as I learn the result and what President Taylors feelings are regarding you I shall hasten to let you know.

Since my first mission to Mexico over five years ago, my life has been a most singular one, and as you know, a most busy if not an eventful one. Three trips to Old Mexico—Three to New York Two to Washington D.C. and one among the Indians of the North. I sometimes fear that the brethren are spreading me over more ground than I can cover. I am willing, however, to do the best I can.³⁴

Six weeks after Thatcher's last letter, March 28, 1884, Ivins was released as president of the Mexican Mission. While laboring in Mexico, he had personally baptized fifty-seven people into the Church. Ivins later became an Apostle and for many years served in the First Presidency.

Thatcher continued his apostolic work until 1896 when he was dropped from the Quorum of the Twelve for refusing to sign the "Political Manifesto." For the next thirteen years, he pursued his business interests and frequently suffered from health problems. After a long illness, he passed away August 21, 1909, in Logan, Utah.

Conclusion

Moses Thatcher's correspondence with his family and with Anthony W. Ivins is a significant cache of historical data for several reasons. From his letters, we learn that Mormon beginnings in Mexico were difficult and challenging. Because it seems that some of the initial investigators and converts into the Church in Mexico sought financial compensation for becoming members, it is a credit to Thatcher and to the Church that he stood firm, not yielding to pressure, and sought disciples whose faith rested on the restored gospel of Christ and not on a love of "loaves and fishes," to use Thatcher's own metaphor. It takes exceptional courage for a mission president, even one who is an Apostle, to slacken his pace, shorten his stride, and reject prospective converts who desire to affiliate with the Church for the wrong reasons. That Thatcher did so, in the long run, built a foundation for Mexican Saints on the solid rock of true conversion.

Thatcher's letters also provide insight into his personality and faith. We are moved by his affection for his home and family. He longed to be with them to share their lives, and more than once declared that only his belief that his call came from God's prophet kept him away from them. His absences deepened the joy he felt on those rare occasions when he was home. His attachments to his family approached in depth his commitment to the gospel.

Though comparatively young, Thatcher made wise decisions. It is apparent in the delicate case of Nielson Pratt that he used his influence with John Taylor so that the matter was resolved in Pratt's favor. Having waited for Ivins's letter to arrive, Thatcher heeded his counsel, found that it corresponded to his own feelings, and then had the courage to express his views. This resulted in a change in President Taylor's decision, and Pratt was allowed to complete an honorable mission.

The letters Moses Thatcher and Anthony W. Ivins wrote to each other have a certain poignancy. Both men shared a deep trust for one another and developed an abiding friendship. They felt free to disclose their despairs, discouragement, and disappointments. Loneliness and a longing for home is a conspicuous aspect of their correspondence. Thatcher's confidence in Ivins and his good judgment must have significantly impacted the young leader. Politically, theologically, and temperamentally they were strong companions.

Undergirding all these efforts, Thatcher's vision regarding the destiny of the Mexican people never blurred. Not always understanding just how God's prophecies regarding the Lamanites would come to pass, Thatcher's prayers, speeches, and letters reflected his faith that some day tens of thousands of Mexicans would respond to the sound of the gospel trumpet. The

success of the Church in Mexico today more than fulfills Thatcher's hopes and dreams for those people.

Thatcher's letters provide important insights into the man and his term as mission president. Because of his later difficulties with his fellow Apostles, Thatcher's contributions to the Church have often gone unnoticed. Now, over a century later, the seeds he planted in the earliest years of the Mexican Mission have borne rich harvests of extraordinary fruit.

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1. F. LaMond Tullis, *Mormons in Mexico: The Dynamics of Faith and Culture* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1987), 14. About this time, President Young also sent emissaries to identify possible places for Mormon settlement, which began in Colonia Juárez in 1885. Shirley Taylor Robinson, "Mexico, Pioneer Settlements," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow, 4 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 2:895–96.

2. Tullis, *Mormons in Mexico*, 34–36. Rhodakanaty was baptized November 20, 1879, and was soon called to preside over a local congregation. He left the Church within two years after failing to convince Thatcher of the necessity of establishing a Mexican United Order. Tullis, *Mormons in Mexico*, 39.

3. Manuscript History of the Mexican Mission, November 15 and 23, 1879, microfilm, Archives Division, Historical Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City (hereafter cited as LDS Church Archives).

4. Moses Thatcher to William P. Preston, transcript in the author's possession.

5. Moses Thatcher to William B. Preston, December 12, 1879, quoted in the *Logan Leader*, January 16, 1880, 1.

6. Moses Thatcher to William B. Preston, December 22, 1879, B. G. Oleson Endowment Collection, Special Collections, Merrill Library, Utah State University (hereafter cited as Oleson Collection).

7. Manuscript History of the Mexican Mission, January 25, 1880, LDS Church Archives.

8. Tullis, *Mormons in Mexico*, 37.

9. Moses Thatcher to Alley Kitchen Thatcher, March 2, 1881, Oleson Collection.

10. Thatcher to Thatcher, March 2, 1881, Oleson Collection.

11. The group included Elders Feramorz L. Young and James Z. Stewart, as well as Church members Silviano Arteaga, Fernando Lara, Ventura Páez, and Lino Zárate. Marciano Pérez, Lino's brother-in-law, and Florentino Páez, Ventura's nephew, also took part in the climb. During the mountain top meeting, Zárate was ordained an Elder. See Manuscript History of the Mexican Mission, April 6, 1881, LDS Church Archives.

12. Minutes of Mexican Mission Conference, April 1881, transcript in possession of the author.

13. Moses Thatcher to Alley Thatcher, April 13, 1881, Oleson Collection.

14. Moses Thatcher to Harriet A. Preston, June 25, 1881, Oleson Collection.

15. While serving on a mission to Great Britain, Thatcher began having pains in his left side as well as in his stomach. Writing seemed to exacerbate his discomfort. His struggle with ill health followed him throughout his life. Some doctors think he may have had gall or kidney stones while others blame ulcers for his problems.

16. Thatcher was one of the Church's finest public speakers. Occasionally Mormon audiences applauded his discourses, something not ordinarily done.

17. Moses Thatcher to Alley Thatcher, July 28, 1881, Oleson Collection.

18. Moses Thatcher to Anthony W. Ivins, November 2, 1882, Utah State Historical Society Archives, Salt Lake City (hereafter cited as Historical Society Archives).

19. St. David, a small community in southern Arizona, was founded and settled by Latter-day Saints. Thatcher had recently visited there.

20. Moses Thatcher to Anthony W. Ivins, March 31, 1883, Historical Society Archives.

21. Helaman Pratt, in the autumn of 1875, had filled a mission to northern Mexico together with Anthony W. Ivins.

22. Franklin Snow, born September 21, 1854, in Salt Lake City, was the son of Erastus Snow and Artimesia Beman. He fathered eleven children and served as first counselor in the Ensign Stake presidency. A businessman, he organized the Consolidated Wagon and Machine Company. He died December 12, 1916.

23. Nielson Pratt had accompanied Ivins to Mexico.

24. Moses Thatcher to Anthony W. Ivins, April 13, 1883, Historical Society Archives.

25. Moses Thatcher to Anthony W. Ivins, April 13, 1883, Historical Society Archives.

26. Moses Thatcher to Anthony W. Ivins, May 31, 1883, 2–3, Historical Society Archives.

27. Moses Thatcher to Anthony W. Ivins, June 14, 1883, Historical Society Archives.

28. Moses Thatcher to Anthony W. Ivins, September 21, 1883, 2, Historical Society Archives.

29. Moses Thatcher to Anthony W. Ivins, September 21, 1883, 3–4, Historical Society Archives.

30. Moses Thatcher to Anthony W. Ivins, October 19, 1883, Historical Society Archives.

31. It would appear that Pratt sent the Church President a letter of apology.

32. Moses Thatcher to Anthony W. Ivins, November 28, 1883, Historical Society Archives.

33. Erastus Snow, a senior Apostle, was responsible for missionary work in Mexico.

34. Moses Thatcher to Anthony W. Ivins, February 8, 1884, 3–4, Historical Society Archives.