

Story of Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce



Younger Years:

Joseph was born in the Wallowa Valley of Oregon, the son of a beloved Chief. His Nez Perce name was Hin-mah-too-yah-lat-kekt, or Thunder Rolling Down the Mountain, but he was widely known as Joseph, or Joseph the Younger, because his father had taken the name Joseph the Elder when he converted to Christianity.

Joseph's father believed in his people having peace with the white settlers that had begun moving onto their land. Joseph the Elder even worked with the white men to establish a reservation, or safe place for the natives to live, that stretched from Oregon into Idaho. He taught his people that war and violence was not a good solution. But when gold was discovered on the safe reservation's land, the white people took back six million acres of the Nez Perce land, and forced the tribe onto a small plot of land in Idaho. This made Joseph the Elder feel betrayed and hurt so he decided to stay in his home, the Wallowa Valley, and refuse to move to Idaho or sign the papers that would make the new,

smaller reservation official.

The young Joseph watched his father show love for his people and for his home. He knew that it was important to his father that they stand up for what they believed to be right and fair. When his father died many years later, the younger Joseph would become the new Chief. Joseph promised his father that he would continue resisting the move to Idaho and defend their people's true home.

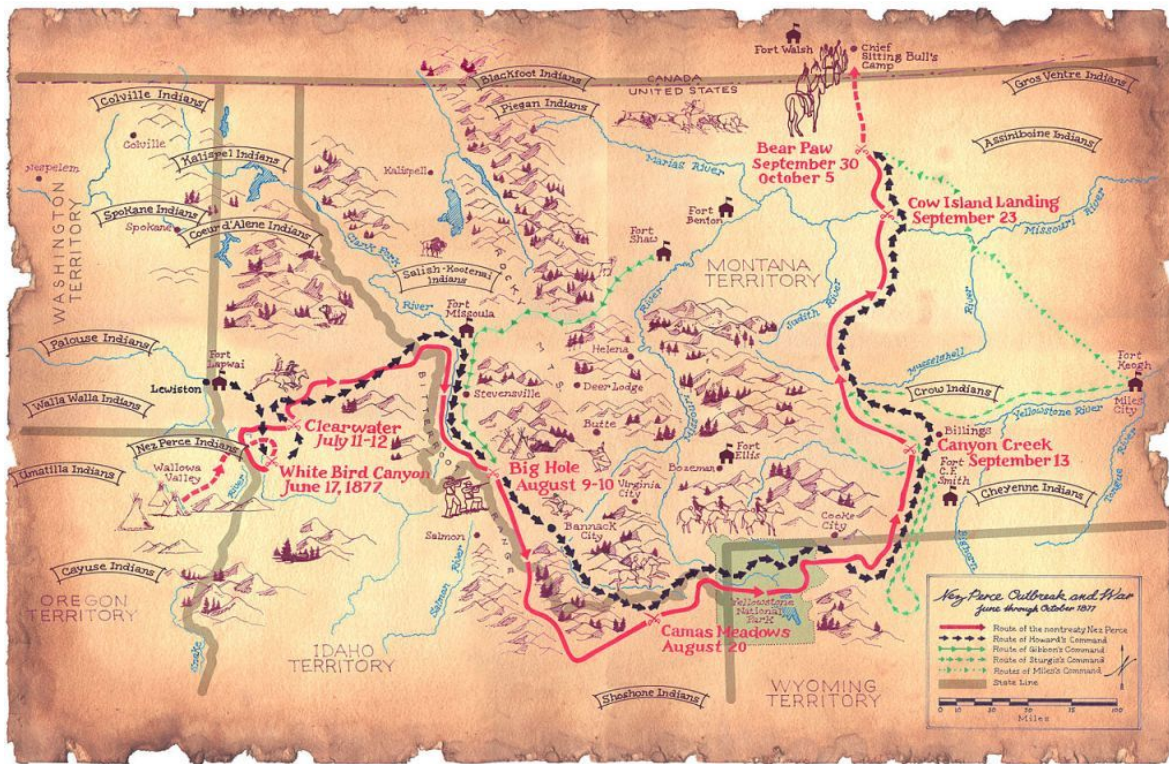
A New Chief:

While the new Chief Joseph was ruling his people, more and more white settlers were moving into the Wallowa Valley and the United States government continued to put pressure on the tribe to move to Idaho onto the small reservation. Chief Joseph continued to follow in his father's footsteps and refused to move. When a General of the United States Army threatened Chief Joseph with an attack on the tribe, he decided in order to keep his people safe to move them to the Idaho Reservation.

Unfortunately, twenty Nez Perce warriors were so angry they were being forced to leave their home, that they attacked a nearby settlement and killed many white people. The United States Army immediately reacted to defend their own people and came after the Nez Perce tribe.

The Nez Perce War:

Chief Joseph knew that his small tribe of 200 warriors would not survive a battle against the United States Army. He decided to retreat, or avoid fighting and lead his people away from the Army. He hoped to make it to Canada to meet up with another tribe that could help them. This retreat came to be known as the Nez Perce War because even though Chief Joseph didn't want to fight, he would fight in order to protect his people. He led his people on a 1,170 mile retreat towards Canada and fought many battles along the way. Although he didn't have many men, they fought with much strategy and skill and had many successes. However, after a freezing five day battle in Montana, and after losing many of his men, Chief Joseph surrendered so that no more of his people would die.



The speech he gave when he surrendered became famous:

Tell General Howard I know his heart. What he told me before, I have it in my heart. I am tired of fighting. Our chiefs are killed; Looking Glass is dead, Too-hul-hul-sote is dead. The old men are all dead. It is the young men who say yes or no. He who led on the young men is dead. It is cold, and we have no blankets; the little children are freezing to death. My people, some of them, have run away to the hills, and have no blankets, no food. No one knows where they are—perhaps freezing to death. I want to have time to look for my children, to see how many I can find. Maybe I shall find them among the dead. Hear me, my chiefs! I am tired; my heart is sick and sad. From where the sun now stands, I will fight no more forever.

Older Years:

Chief Joseph didn't give up fighting for peace for his people. He convinced the Army to allow most of his people to safely return to the Reservation, however he was taken as a Prisoner of War and moved to Kansas. He continued working for peace and eventually traveled to Washington D.C. to meet with the President of the United States, Rutherford B. Hayes, to plead for his people to live peacefully in their home of the Wallowa Valley. Many years later, he met with another President, Theodore Roosevelt. Each time he asked for his people to be able to return home to the Wallowa Valley. However, he was never granted this request.

Chief Joseph never earned what he had hoped for for his people. Many of his people lived out their days on a reservation in Idaho, many others on a reservation in Oregon. When Chief Joseph died, his doctor said it was because of a broken heart. But he kept his promise he made while surrendering that he would "fight no more forever".

**Adapted from articles from:

- http://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/people/a_c/chiefjoseph.htm
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chief_Joseph

