

# Chief Joseph



# Introduction to Chief Joseph

Chief Joseph (1840-1904) was a leader of the Wallowa band of the Nez Perce Tribe who is famous for leading his people on an epic flight across the Rocky Mountains in 1877. He was born in 1840 and called Joseph by Reverend Henry H. Spalding. Young Joseph and his father soon returned to their traditional ways in Wallowa, Oregon.



# Background and Early Life

Chief Joseph, born In-Mut-Too-Yah-Lat-Tat, entered the world in 1840 in the Wallowa region of northeastern Oregon. His father, Tuekakas, was the chief of the Wallowa Nez Perce band. They lived far from the main tribe body in Idaho but reunited often. Joseph spent his early years at Rev. Spalding's mission but returned to traditional ways.



# Government Pressure and Conflict



When Joseph assumed chieftainship, the government pressured him to abandon his Wallowa land and join the Nez Perce on a reservation in Idaho. Joseph refused, honoring his promise to his father. In 1877, disputes erupted into violence, leading to Joseph's epic flight across the Bitterroot Mountains into Montana with federal troops in pursuit.



# The 1855 and 1863 Treaties

Old Joseph and Young Joseph attended a treaty council called by Governor Isaac Stevens in 1855. The treaty allowed Nez Perce to retain their Wallowa homeland. However, in 1863, a new treaty demanded that they give up most of their lands. Old Joseph and other chiefs refused, dividing the tribe into treaty and non-treaty factions.



# Joseph Becomes Chief



After Old Joseph's death in 1871, Young Joseph became Chief Joseph. He was known for his charisma and commitment to his people's lands. Despite not being a warrior, he gained respect for his counsel and steadfastness. He resisted government pressure to sell or abandon their land, leading to inevitable conflicts.



# Flight Across the Rockies

By 1877, tensions escalated, and Chief Joseph led his people in a 1,200-mile flight across the Rocky Mountains to escape federal troops. Despite fierce battles and severe hardships, including treacherous terrain and hostile encounters, Joseph's leadership was crucial in organizing and guiding his band safely.





In October 5, 1877, at Bear Paw Montana 40 miles south of the Canadian border, Chief Joseph surrendered to federal troops with the famous words, 'From where the sun now stands I will fight no more forever.' His surrender marked the end of a significant chapter in Native American resistance against U.S. governmental pressures.



I AM TIRED OF FIGHTING. OUR CHIEFS ARE KILLED;  
LOOKING-GLASS IS DEAD. TOO-HUL-HUL-SUIT IS DEAD.  
THE OLD MEN ARE ALL DEAD. IT IS THE YOUNG MEN, NOW,  
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, AND SEE HOW MANY OF THEM I  
CAN FIND; MAYBE I SHALL FIND THEM AMONG THE DEAD.  
HEAR ME, MY CHIEFS; MY HEART IS SICK AND SAD. FROM  
WHERE THE SUN NOW STANDS,  
I WILL FIGHT NO MORE FOREVER!

Chief Joseph's surrender to General Nelson A. Miles, October 5, 1877

# Exile and Advocacy

After surrendering, Joseph and his people were moved to a reservation in Oklahoma, far from their native land. Joseph made several trips to Washington, D.C., pleading for a return to Wallowa, but his efforts were in vain. In 1885, they were relocated to the Colville Reservation in North Central Washington.



# Later Years and Legacy



Chief Joseph continued to advocate for his people's return to Wallowa until his death in 1904. He became a national icon, known for his leadership and eloquence. Despite never returning to his homeland, Joseph's legacy endures through various memorials and the continued remembrance of his life's journey and struggle.

# Links:

PBS Chief Joseph and the Nez Perce War

<https://www.pbs.org/video/chief-joseph-and-the-nez-perce-war-erosyw/>

I Will Fight No More Forever movie 1975

<https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x4tchf0>

News KTVB <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=doygs3oi1aY>

<https://www.nps.gov/nepe/learn/historyculture/1877.htm>