
DOCTRINE & COVENANTS 121-123

CHRONOLOGY

- **August 6, 1838** – Election Day skirmish in Gallatin. Beginning of the "Mormon War."
- **August 8, 1838** – Adam Black Confrontation.
- **August 11, 1838** – JS attempts to warn Canadian Saints.
- **October 2, 1838** – Kirtland Camp arrives in Far West.
- **October 5, 1838** – JS led defense and evacuation of Latter-day Saints at De Witt, Carroll County.
- **October 18, 1838** - Mormon forces plundered and burned residences and some businesses of perceived opponents and two communities supportive of anti-Mormon vigilantes, Daviess County. Missouri [JSPP]
- **October 24, 1838** – Apostles Thomas B. Marsh and Orson Hyde prepare an affidavit against JS for Danite destruction of non-Mormon property.
- **October 25, 1838** – Battle of Crooked River. Apostle David Patten killed.
- **October 27, 1838** – Gov. Boggs issues "extermination order."
- **October 30, 1838** – Hawn's Mill Massacre.
- **October 31, 1838** – JS and others surrender in Far West and are imprisoned.
- **November 1, 1838** – JS and other sentenced to Death; Brigadier General Alexander Doniphan and others objected, thus preventing the execution.
- **November 9, 1838** – JS and other incarcerated in Richmond, Ray County.
- **December 1, 1838** - JS, Hyrum Smith, Sidney Rigdon, Lyman Wight transferred to Liberty Jail.
- **January 26, 1839** – John Smith directs a committee to organize exodus from Missouri.
- **February 1, 1839** – Beginning of large scale evacuation of Saints from Missouri.
- **March 20, 1829** – JS begins writing his Liberty epistle; **D&C 121-123**.
- **April 6, 1839** – JS and others transferred to Gallatin.
- **April 11, 1839** – JS indicted for treason but granted a change of venue.
- **April 12, 1839** – JS departs for Columbia, MO to stand trial.
- **April 16, 1839** – JS and others allowed to escape.
- **April 22, 1839** – JS arrived in Illinois.
- **April 30, 1839** – Church agents purchase land in Commerce, IL.

DOCTRINE AND COVENANTS 121-123 LETTER, MARCH 20-25, 1839

SETTING

JS was incarcerated in the dungeon that was Liberty Jail. The Saints had begun evacuation and were more destitute than they had ever been to this point. This is quite possibly JS's darkest hour. This

letter was addressed to "the church of Latterday saints at Quincy Illinois and scattered abroad and to Bishop Partridge in particular."

PUBLICATION HISTORY

This letter was first published in the *Times and Seasons* (May and July 1840) in Nauvoo. It was added to the Doctrine and Covenants in the 1876 edition.

ORIGINAL LETTER

I strongly encourage you to read the original text of this letter as presented in this article in *BYU Studies*:

<http://byustudies.byu.edu/PDFLibrary/39.3JesseeWelch%20516881fd-2cfd-467a-a5c2-e2003b8d57ee.pdf>

Dean C. Jessee and John W. Welch, "Revelations in Context: Joseph Smith's Letter from Liberty Jail. March 20, 1839," *BYU Studies* 39, no. 3 (2000): 125-145.

The sections of the D&C are extracted and compiled from this letter.

COMMENTS

121

1-6. These vv. are a plea to God. They appear in the letter after a section which recounts some of the horrors experienced by the Saints. Immediately after these vs. is also a large uncannozed section of the letter.

The following text appears immediately before the text found in vv. 7-25:

but those who have not been inclosed in the walls of a prison without cause or provocation can have but a little ideah how sweat [sweet] the voice of a friend is one token of friendship from any sorce whatever a wakens and calles into action evry simpathectick feeling it brings up in an instant evry thing that is pased it sesses [siezes] the presant with a vivacity of lightning it grasps after the future with the fea<r>ness of a tiger it rетроgrades from one thing to an other untill finally all enmity malice and hatred and past diferances misunderstandings and mis= managements be slain victoms at the feet of hope and when the hart is sufficiently contrite and then the voice of inspiration steals along and whispers [text of vs. 7 in the voice of the Lord follows]

6-8. That which does not kill you...

10. Some use this as a prooftext for Job's historicity. I don't.

11. hoar frost is the large feathery crystal frost. E.g.:



13. This is essentially a curse to suffer as they have caused others to suffer.

16. Again, who are the Lord's anointed?

19. No temple for the cursed.

21. Again with the lineal priesthood. This time as a cursing. To my knowledge this was never enforced.

Between vs. 25 and 26 is another long uncannonized section of the letter. It is an optimistic view of the Missouri experience as a purifying crucible. JS instructs the Saints that while in captivity, the Saints should be governed by a general conference (like in the early days). Then he warns the Saints against prideful, and deceitful brethren. Also right before the text of vv. 26-32 is an exhortation for all the Saints to be better. 26-32 are a continuation of this exhortation and are in the voice of the authors.

26. I'm guessing that in light of vs. 27 it is the knowledge and not the Holy Spirit which has previously been unrevealed.

28-32. JS is getting the Nauvoo engine primed. aaaahhhhh yeeaaaahhhh.

vs. 33 is sandwiched between a metaphor about floods, water and purity before it and the identification of Governor Boggs and the enemies of the Church as the flood wood and filthiness.

The letter then concludes and another letter begins. Note that the letter is signed by JS, Hyrum Smith, Lyman Wight, Caleb Baldwin and Alexander McRae.

The next letter begins: "We continue to offer further reflections to Bishop Partridge and to the church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day-saints..."

The letter begins with some general advice about land acquisition in Illinois. After some discussion of Missouri martyrdom, the authors discuss the qualities of those who should convene the aforementioned general conference.

The text of Section 121:34-46, and the entirety of section 122 follows unbroken in the letter. This section is in the voice of the authors.

As a side note, this is, I think, the most timeless text of the entire Doctrine and Covenants. Theological gold.

34. Who are called?

36. rights == authority. But authority alone cannot wield the powers of heaven. Again priesthood is not power. Power comes through faith and righteousness.

37. Bingo. I think it is helpful to view priesthood authority in two ways here. The legal authority which is only managed by the church, and then the personal authority that points to the temple and is independent of the Church.

38. JS had specific people in mind with this.

39. "almost all men." Is this true? Is it true in the Church today?

41-2. And here we see the true source of Godly power or influence among humankind.

43. An increase of real love. That is key.

45. How do you get confidence to stand in the presence of God?

46. How do you have a dominion without compulsory means?

SECTION 122

Remember that verse 1 follows immediately after the end of Section 121 in the letter without a break.

3. This must have been a comforting promise.

4. The confidence to stand in the presence of God would also appear to translate into the confidence to stand before one's enemies.

6. Lyman Wight described the scene when JS was taken captive from Far West. This is likely what JS had in mind in these vv:

About the hour the prisoners were to have been shot on the public square in Far West, they were exhibited in a wagon in the town, all of them having families there, but myself; and it would have broken the heart of any person possessing an ordinary share of humanity, to have seen the separation. The aged mother and father of Joseph Smith were not permitted to see his face, but to reach their hands through the curtains of the wagon, and thus take leave of him. When passing his own house, he was taken out of the wagon and permitted to go into the house, but not without a strong guard, and not permitted to speak with his family but in the presence of his guard and his eldest son, Joseph, about six or eight years old, hanging to the tail of his coat, crying father, is the mob going to kill you? The guard said to him, "you damned little brat, go back, you will see your father no more."¹

¹ Lyman Wight, *Times and Seasons* 4 (July 15, 1843): 268.

7. It is difficult to determine who is speaking here. JS uses I in the sentence immediately following these verses. It appears that JS is vacillating in and out of the voice of the Lord, seamlessly.

8. What does it mean to "descend bellow them all"?

9. This was pretty optimistic considering the context. Inspiration, indeed!

SECTION 123

Immediately after the last vs. of Section 122, JS gives more counsel regarding the aforementioned general conference, specifically with regard to Saints in the process of gathering and with regard to teachers handling advanced principles too carelessly.

1-4. gather a record of the damages and abuses. These were used to petition for redress, which process was generally fruitless.

5-6. The Church still does this today. Even online.

12. "kept from the truth because they know not where to find it" These are the folks that make all the work, worth it.

16. This is like Elder Uchdorf with the planes!

15-16. President Johnson spoke in Stake Conference on Sunday about this. His friend who shared the gospel with him in highschool, didn't change his life. Through his posterity, it changed society!

After the text of this Section, JS counsels against the organization of bands like the Danites and calls out Samson Avard, the Danite Chief as the cause of much suffering and weakness. He then speaks of religious freedom and treating those of other faiths with "grater liberality." He makes an appeal to the constitution of the US and testifies of the Church cannon.