

Come Follow Me Class Insights 21, D&C Sec. 51 through 57

I'm Taylor, and I'm Tyler. This is Book of Mormon Central's Come Follow Me Insights. Today, Doctrine and Covenants sections 51 through 57.

So the sections that we are covering today are going to take us from May through July of 1831, and there's a lot happening in the Church history at this time. Keep in mind we're going to end up in section 57, which will be our very first revelation received by the Prophet Joseph in Missouri, in what they refer to as the land of Zion, which is over eight hundred miles away from Kirtland where the other sections have been coming in this part of the Doctrine and Covenants.

You've got this huge migration of missionaries that's going to occur in this period of time, and they're spreading out and they're traveling west and they're preaching the gospel, baptizing and giving the gift of the Holy Ghost as they go on their journey to the land of Zion where these incredible revelations regarding the building up of the temple and this – this gathering place are going to come.

Now, let's go back to the first part of our scripture sections today, section 51. We pick up this story in Thompson, Ohio, where you have a group of just under 70 saints who have left Colesville, New York, under the direction of Newell Knight, and he's brought this group west to Kirtland to the area here, and Thompson is where they're settling down on the farm owned by Lemam Copley, he owns 759 acres, which is a lot of land, and he's promised to consecrate that land to the saints.

And for size, an acre is about the size of American football field, or an international soccer pitch for football is about 1.9 acres. Can you imagine, I mean that's like, doing the math here, almost 400 soccer fields. I mean, that's a lot of land, a lot of place to spread out.

So these saints arrive, and keep in mind, they've – they've got to plant the crops, they've got to build fences, clear some more land, build some buildings, and in the process of this, there's a lot that's been happening and there are a lot of people scratching their head, wondering how to make this law of consecration thing work even though the Lord has given more direction in previous sections, specifically 42 where he introduced more of the refined details of the law of consecration under the way they're living it, the United Order, and it's going to prove very difficult for this particular group of Colesville saints.

It's interesting, this word consecration, we sometimes think, oh, well that's what they used to do and God still invites us to consecrate. And let's just talk about this word just for a moment. So, it actually comes from the word sacred, and the con actually kind of means with or together. And really what it means is you make things sacred together, together with other people and together with God, and what you're doing is you're making what you're offering is sacred because you are contributing to building the kingdom of God. So anytime, wherever you are, that you share your time, or your talents, your ability, your love to build the kingdom of God, you are consecrating.

Now back in 1831 there were very specific things that God wanted these people to do, I mean, you have almost seventy people showing up in Ohio, and back then it wasn't like they just had stores you could just run to and - or Amazon and things could be drop-shipped at your house. You had to plant and you had to grow crops and tend to animals and you needed land for that, and so Lemman Copley, to have this much land created this opportunity for him to consecrate his land and for those coming to the land to consecrate their time and talents to making the land better. And we'll see here in just a few sections what happens when people start to have conflict about their offerings and what they're getting back in return.

So in this section, section 51, the situation is the bishop, Edward Partridge, who is in charge of taking care of all of these temporal needs and all of these people coming into Kirtland area and to Thompson specifically, for this section, and he's responsible to figure out how to appoint their – their goods and their lands.

Look at verse 2. So, Edward comes to Joseph and said, what do I do? This is a big group. There's a lot – there are a lot of moving parts here. Look at verse 2: "It must needs be that they be organized according to my laws; if otherwise, they will be cut off." So he's saying, look, you're not going to do this after the manner of men. You're going to do this after my laws, according to the directions I give you, "Wherefore, let my servant Edward Partridge, and those whom he has chosen, in whom I am well pleased, appoint unto this people their portions, unto every man equal, according to," and then he's going to give us a list.

You'll notice with the law of consecration that the focus here is he's going to be required to make an equal allocation of the Church's resources, everything that has been given into the Church's collective ownership. He now needs to make an equal distribution, so to speak, according to what? Number one, according to the person's family, number two, according to his circumstances, and number three, according to his wants, and number four, according to his needs.

Now, many of you looking at this list are going to say, okay, this one makes sense. A really small family isn't going to need the biggest property or the most resources of the Church. Circumstances: that could be age, physical health, mental health, capacity, knowledge, ability, skills, tools, all of that could come into play with number two. And then you come to number three and you say, huh? We're going to give – we're going to consecrate out this private stewardship idea, give you responsibility over things according to your wants? Because those get really big really fast.

Now here's the problem. You and I in the 21st century, we read that word right there in scripture and we think that it's what a person desires. It's things that they want to have. In reality, over the last hundred, hundred and fifty years, in English, we have - we have changed drastically the meaning of that word. It did not mean, back in 1831, what it does today when you read it. If you – if you want to verify this, you go to the 1828 Webster's dictionary. In fact, as lifelong learners, this is – this is something that Taylor and I feel very strongly about, is to help people find

resources that they can dig out answers and learn things on their own, moving forward without having to rely on other people telling them. This is one of those resources that we would recommend that you bookmark on your computer, because you can go to it at any time and click. It's a free – just search – 1828 Webster's dictionary. Once you're there, it's a free, online resource. You can plug in any word and it will give you how it was defined at the time that these very events are happening. If you do that with the word want in the 1828 Webster's dictionary, you're going to find that there are five or six definitions for the word. So notice in 1828 how the word want comes through. Number 1 : deficiency, defect, the absence of that which is necessary or useful. Number 2: need, necessity, the effect of deficiency. Number 3: poverty. Look at Number 4: the state of not having. Number 5: that which is not possessed but is desired or necessary for use or pleasure. Did you notice the very last of the definitions for want is the one that has become the overarching definition for us today that trumps all of these previous definitions?

Very clear, in the entire Doctrine and Covenants, if you search in your scriptures for every time the Lord uses the word want, plug in the 1828 Webster's dictionary as a deep, it's kind of a synonym in this context with needs. It's this lack, this deficiency, this, I'm indigent, I can't – I can't provide. I am in want. What am I going to do? That's what the law of consecration solves.

Now, the grand irony here is that whenever there's been a group of people in the scriptures who have actually made the full-blown law of consecration work under one manifestation of consecration which is united order, like the City of Enoch that was called Zion by the time you get to Moses chapter 7, or the two hundred years of a perfect society in the Nephite culture, they become so – so prosperous, so rich that we – that we don't have any deep needs or deficiencies to where you're actually filling their wants from our definition, not just theirs. So it's fascinating that God is looking down at the earth, and from this perspective he's saying we need to make sure that all of these things are taken care of.

So here's this group, they've been given this direction, Edward Partridge, that's how you're going to appoint to every man his portion for his family, and you're going to give, in verse 4, a writing where it's actually deeded to him; it's not private ownership, but it's private stewardship. It's as if you own it, but if you were to leave the Church or be excommunicated and not be a part of that consecrated group In this manifestation – once again, the United Order – then you don't get to take everything that you had consecrated, but you are allowed, according to this revelation, to maintain that which had been deeded back to you. And that was important, because later on there's going to be a brother in Missouri who's actually going to sue Edward Partridge for the money that he had consecrated in, and then he left the Church, and he wants all that money back. And so you have to figure out how to match God's law with the laws of the land, and so there's going to be some modification to this and some clarification to make it so that it's all above-board and that Edward Partridge actually can have his name on all of those consecrated properties and then deed them out for private stewardship.

Now, look at verse 9. This says: "Let every man deal honestly, and be alike among this people, and receive alike, that ye may be one, even as I have commanded you." He wants everybody to become one, this group all working together for the benefit and the welfare of everybody, not just yourself. And then verse 10: "Let that which belongeth to this people not be taken and given unto that of another church." So this Colesville group came and they're – they've got some resources from selling their farms and other possessions on their journey, and he's saying, don't take their possessions and give it to another branch of the Church in that regard unless it's a loan and it's agreed that it's going to be paid back. So, you understand that it's – it's not full, communal living, so to speak, for the whole Church here. He's saying, no, look at verse 11: Wherefore if another church – we could say another branch, another ward to use more common terms that we will be familiar with -- if they would receive money of this branch of this church, let them pay unto this church again according as they shall agree. So there still is some sense of this stewardship that we're collectively working, this Colesville branch is working together here on Lemman Copley's farm.

We should also just talk about, this is pretty localized. Well sure, it's great that we love everybody in the world and we want to help people who are dealing with natural disasters, but God's focus is right here in your own community, in your own neighborhood. And what do the commandments say? 'Thou shalt love your neighbor as thyself' (Leviticus 19:18). God doesn't say you should love somebody you don't know who's in another country more than you should love your neighbor. And in here we're not trying to say don't care about people in other countries and foreign lands; it's just so interesting that this law is very much focused on family and friends and neighbors in a very small community, and that's where you can have your greatest influence, is by taking care of those who are right there in your immediate influence versus worrying about there's somebody 8000 miles away and what could I do to bless their lives? Well, that's okay. But what if we also spent time for somebody who's eight feet away or eighty yards away? What could I do to bless their lives?

And I love this idea of consecration. A ward or a branch today allows for this, right? Where we all serve one another. I love being in a ward. There's so many amazing people in our ward who bless my life in so many ways by teaching my children or being awesome at singing or so many things, and this is all today that we have this opportunity to consecrate our time and talents to building the kingdom.

And I think that's an important distinction to make that we've already mentioned in previous episodes as well as, Taylor, you mentioned it earlier, the fact that, no, we aren't living United Order, which is one fruit, one manifestation of the law of consecration. We're not living that one. But we are under covenant to live the law of consecration today, and you've just gotten through describing some elements of how that works, that we put – anything that I own, whether it be my vehicles, my home, any of my possessions, or any of my talents, any of the blessings, the spiritual gifts that God has given me, they become part of what you would call, quote unquote, the bishop's storehouse. If there's a need for a fireside or for a talk and a bishop can call upon you

to share from your storehouse of knowledge and study and experience to consecrate that to the needs, to the circumstances, to the things that are going on in your ward, or at a stake level. And when I go to the fast-offering experience or to the humanitarian fund, or tithing, it all comes in. This is the Lord's money and he has given us stewardship over it, but we consecrate it to the Lord so it becomes part of this larger consecrated effort to build up the kingdom of God in a variety of ways, but the one that he keeps coming back to over and over again is caring for the poor and the needy, making sure that we're not focusing so much on the acquisition of wealth from my kingdom, my little world, or my family, that we're turning our back on those who are in want. That is a group that Jesus is constantly reminding us to look to.

Now look at verse 19 to close: "And whoso is found a faithful, a just, and a wise steward shall enter into the joy of his Lord." Brothers and sisters, you could mark verse 19 and notice the footnote 19a. It takes you over to Matthew 24 verse 45 which happens to be Jesus's own words to his disciples there that is the question that he himself posed that he's going to answer himself in Matthew 25 which consists of three parables: the Parable of the Ten Virgins, the Parable of the three men with different amounts of talents given to them, and the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats, all of which are parables for helping us prepare for the coming of the Lord.

Who is a faithful and a wise servant, or a wise steward, to bring us back to consecration? He answers that with those three parables, oh, and by the way, you'll notice in that middle parable, the parable of the talents, it was the guy who got five who turned them into ten and the guy who got two and turned them into four, both of them ended up receiving their talents at the end of that parable, and they had no idea. They had no idea that's what was going on. It's kind of like another parable that is not scriptural. Some of you have maybe heard this about a carpenter, very, very gifted craftsman, who worked for a particular builder for decades. And he was faithful and he was loyal and his work was impeccable, and he got close to retirement and he told his boss that he was done. He's ready to retire, and his boss gave him a \$10,000 bonus which isn't much, and the request that, I'll give you this \$10,000 bonus if you'll build one more house for me, just one more. And the carpenter said, okay, I'll do it. And it happened to be in the most beautiful part of the town on the most beautiful property with the best views and everybody coveted that spot, and this builder asked his carpenter who was ready to retire, will you build this perfect dream home for me before you finish? I just want to benefit from this one last construction project that you're going to help me with. And he gave him unlimited access to funds to build this as beautifully as he could.

Well, the carpenter was a little put off by that. He was thinking, only a \$10,000 bonus for doing all this extra work. Whatever! And so he did the construction, but he cut corners here, he put shoddy work in there, and it wasn't great because he was a little bit feeling very negative about this the whole time. At the end of that experience, the house was complete, everything was finished, and the builder came to his carpenter who had just completed this project, and with a big smile on his face, handed him the keys to this house, and he said, you've just built your own house. It's my real gift to you. Thank you for all those years of service. At which point, the

carpenter realized, oh, I had no idea I was building this for me. I thought I was building this for you, and it made me kind of frustrated.

Brothers and sisters, that theme, that idea, is going to show up, and it's going to keep popping up through these sections and through the history of the Church. Sometimes we get resentful. Sometimes we get this feeling that God's asking me to do this for him. Brothers and sisters, let's be honest. God doesn't need you to do anything for him. He holds worlds without number in his hand. When he gives us resources, when he asks us to build things and to consecrate and to do things and to keep commandments, it's not for him. It's not to give him anything. It's him who, ironically, is actually using all of those means, all of these things that he's given us time, talent, energy, effort, experience, knowledge, wisdom, everything. He's our very life – it's given to us as a tool, as a resource to build something, but at the end of the day, we're not building a house. We're building a character. We're building our life; we're building discipleship, not just in us, but in other people, and you're going to see that sometimes working well and sometimes working very poorly. Why? It's not because God doesn't have this figured out, it's not because God hasn't given us the right resources or enough opportunity, it's because of the use of agency. You are going to see that throughout the history of the Church, and quite frankly, throughout the history of the world and all scripture, not just in the Doctrine and Covenants.

Now, turn over to section 52. As we transition from late May, we're now in early June of 1831, and there's a conference of the Church, a General Conference. They had them about every three months and they needed them; there's a lot of growth, a lot of change, a lot of questions, and section 52's an interesting one because there's a lot of people mentioned here, and there are a couple of names that aren't mentioned which end up showing up in section 53 and 55, and it's really amazing. This conference was actually the first time we have the use of the idea of priesthood, that people are called and set apart to priesthood offices, and it turns out the culture in that time, people when they thought about priesthood, a lot of Christians kind of thought, oh, that's priestcraft, and it's interesting as God revealed more about what the priesthood was, it is the power and authority to act in God's name. It's also office, and this - it gets clearer and clearer as the revelations come, but this is one of the first times we see, during this conference, that priesthood is now given to others and offices are designed, and then God calls all these men to go on missions, two by two, all throughout the Midwest. Well, back then it was actually the western frontier and many of them to head out to Missouri.

So God also promises that he will reveal the location of Zion, and there's a few verses we'd like you to pay attention to here, and if you look at section 52 verses 4, 5 and 6: "And inasmuch as they are faithful unto me, it shall be made known unto them what they shall do." That promise is to all of us. All of us would like to know God's will, and he's actually already revealed it. Be faithful to what he's revealed and you will learn more. So instead of sitting around not doing what he's asked you to do, hoping he'll give you more, it just doesn't work that way. "And it shall also, inasmuch as they are faithful, be made known unto them the land of your inheritance." I just find that so compelling. Here are these individuals, most of them have now moved from

New York or other locations eastward into Ohio, and there's this uncertainty about will I have a way to survive? They're trying the United Order, and God's saying, just trust me. I got this. I will give you a land of inheritance. This goes right back to what we have with the ancient Israelites. God takes them out of bondage, he has them out in the wilderness for a bit, and they're a little worried, like, what's going to happen? and he's, like, just trust me. If you leave these things, I will take you to a promised land. And in some way you can see the early saints following the similar pathway that, like the early Israelites, God is taking them out of Egypt, so to speak, into the wilderness of some unknown, and eventually wanting to give them a land of promise, and what we'll see is that in some ways, like the ancient Israelites, the early saints struggled to always trust God and to do what he asked them to do, and so sometimes God had to update his instructions to them about where he's going to give them a land of inheritance and what blessings they'll receive on that land.

I love that and I love watching as God respects and empowers their agency throughout – throughout this wilderness wandering and journeying and the upgrading of the laws and the commandments and the covenantal relationship with him. He is never, ever, reaching down and squeezing people by the heart, saying, you will love me. He doesn't do that. He gives them commands. He gives them direction. He tells them how to govern their affairs, but we see over and over again that there are some who, for a variety of reasons, choose not to use their agency to do what God has laid out for them. And look at verse 6: "And inasmuch as they are not faithful, they shall be cut off, even as I will, as seemeth me good." So he doesn't say, look, I love all of you with a perfect love, therefore, it doesn't matter what you do. He does love every one of us, all of his children, but he may or may not trust all of us and entrust us with more. So, like Taylor was saying, if you're faithful from verse 5, you're going to learn this, and the more faithful you are to the covenant, the more of the covenant God reveals to you. The more commandments he actually gives you, the more opportunities to connect with him actually come along. And we're going to see that on both verse 4 and 5 and verse 6 throughout the rest of this story.

It is fascinating. We'll get to this in a couple of sections coming up how God had given out the law of consecration, want you to live the United Order, people use their agency, and God's, like, well, I am changing my command and changing instructions based on how you guys acted. So we should always expect a God, for God to be interactively involved in our lives based on what we're doing.

Very good. So at this conference, it was a three-day conference in Kirtland, and in this conference was the first time where you get high priests ordained. So we've had elders, and we've had deacons, teachers, and priests; we've had other offices, but you can see the Lord revealing more of his priesthood, more of his direction for the lands, more commandments, more mission calls, so as faithfulness increases, more blessings are given. If we want more revelation, our invitation to us individually and to us collectively is, dig in and be more faithful to the stuff we've actually received.

So the rest of this section 52 is fascinating. It's called the pattern. For those of you who know anything about building or about working with cloth and sewing, you realize the benefit of a pattern or a blueprint so that what it is that you're manufacturing or making actually turns out the way it's supposed to turn out to fit with all the other parts. So this section is a pattern. Verse 9 says: "Let them journey from thence preaching the word by the way, saying none other things than that which the prophets and apostles have written, and that which is taught them by the Comforter through the prayer of faith." I love that he wants them spreading out as they make this long journey from Kirtland, clear over more than 800 miles away to Independence, Missouri, and he wants them taking different routes. He wants them spreading out and preaching the gospel along the way.

Brothers and sisters, once again, we've talked about this before, it's not just the end that's the important part. It's also the journey. It's how we get there. It's who we are becoming along the way and the good that we're doing today, not just what we are going to do once we arrive at the destination.

Then look at verse 14, or sorry, 13: "Behold, he that is faithful shall be made ruler over many things." Back to our parables of the way to prepare for the coming of the Lord. If you're faithful, you're going to be made ruler over many things. Now look at verse 14 again. "I will give unto you a pattern," you could circle those two words, a pattern, so God's giving us a template to follow. And, by the way, look at verse 19: "Wherefore, by this pattern ye shall know the spirits in all cases." So this is that – one of those little “inclusios”, one of those bookends that come up in the scriptures: I'm going to give you a pattern. This is the pattern. Look in between, here is what the Lord is telling us, how to discern spirits, and he tells you in verse 14: "for Satan is abroad in the land, and he goeth forth deceiving the nations." Pretty effective. He's a liar from the beginning and he's very effective at deception.

Now here's the pattern, verse 15: "Wherefore he that prayeth, whose spirit is contrite, the same is accepted of me if he obey mine ordinances." Anyone can get up and say the right words in a prayer. They can even put on a show, they can make it really grandiose. The pattern is, they have to obey mine ordinances.

Look at verse 16: "He that speaketh, whose spirit is contrite, whose language is meek and edifieth, the same is of God if he obey mine ordinances." Hmm. Did you notice that the Lord just used “if he obey mine ordinances” twice in a row in verse 15 and 16? It is one of the shortest words in English in letters, and it's one of the longest words in English in meaning and in power, because it's tied directly into agency. God's not forcing anyone to do anything. He's giving you invitations, and if you follow those invitations, then as a God he never lies, he never breaks a promise, he'll never go back on what he's said before, if you do your part he will always do his part, and he's telling us here, here's the pattern. Follow this pattern and watch for this, you'll know. Verse 17 again, "he that trembleth under my power shall be made strong, and shall bring

forth fruits of praise and wisdom, according to the revelations and truths which I have given you." There is the pattern.

Then he's going to go into this long list of making companionships, kind of like a mission president and the APs might do. Let's put these two together and we're going to send them here, and a couple, he adds to it in 35, of two others, Joseph Wakefield and Solomon Humphrey he's going to send to eastern lands instead of west, and then verse 37: "In consequence of transgression, let that which was bestowed upon Heman Basset be taken from him, and placed upon the head of Simonds Ryder." Once again, God had given a commandment to Heman Basset to fulfill something, and because of agency and because of choice, he went a different direction. He chose to reject that command, so he did not do what was commanded, and so his call is taken from him and now given to Simonds Ryder.

And you'll notice, many of you are probably familiar with the story of Simonds Ryder. He lives out in Hiram, Ohio. He's a next door neighbor to John and Elsa Johnson. Simonds Ryder was baptized two days before this revelation was given. He's a convert of two days when the Lord gives this revelation, and in the revelation he's called to take Heman Basset's place on this mission. There's only one problem. We have a slight complication. Simonds Ryder spells his name with a y, and in the revelation Joseph spells it with an i, and it caused this two-day convert who came out of the Campbellite congregation there, he had leadership in the Campbellite group, it caused him to say, wait a minute, if the prophet can't even spell my name right, then I wonder if he can really get the revelation right to send me on this mission.

It's going to be a short time later when Simonds Ryder leaves the Church, and he is going to join with Ezra Booth as two of the most active people in trying to destroy the Church and Joseph and everything that has been built up. Hmm. Isn't it ironic? Look at this in English, look how this works. This is actually a question. Why? Why did you leave the Church? And the answer is way more complex than just the spelling. This was just one issue of many that led Simonds Ryder to disaffect himself from the Church and then fight against it. But it seems to be one of the key starting points for him. Line upon line works in an upward direction, and line upon line works in a downward direction, too. Why did he start this process? Isn't it interesting that the focus was on i – the focus is on me, and, brothers and sisters, this reminds me of one of those beautiful verses in the Book of Isaiah in chapter 29, where Isaiah speaks of people making a person an offender because of a word, or in this case, an offender because of a letter that starts that slide downward away from – from the prophet.

It's a sad - it's a sad story. I love what President M. Russell Ballard said on one occasion speaking to the young adults in the Church. He said, we may be General Authorities, but we're not authorities in general. You can't expect them to be absolutely perfect on everything. When somebody is set apart to be an Apostle or a Prophet and hands are laid on their head, or at a more local level, as a Stake President or a Bishop or a Primary President or a Relief Society second counselor or a Young Women's secretary, whatever the calling may be, that setting apart doesn't

bring with it perfection and all knowledge and all power. These are people who are going to do the work of the Lord, but they may occasionally mess up on some things that, quite frankly, aren't as important in the eternal scheme of things. And so we just need to be careful that we give people the benefit of a doubt and not make them an offender for the word – for a word¹.

So let's talk about section 53. You have this conference where all these men get called on missions, and Sidney Gilbert, who was converted by receipt of the Book of Mormon, Parley P. Pratt, this incredible early missionary, I mean, so members of the Church in the early Church came into the Church through the preaching and the efforts of Parley P. Pratt. There were other – Oliver Cowdery and the four of them. Yeah. And so Parley had sold a Book of Mormon or given a Book of Mormon to Sidney and Sidney had converted, and he's at this conference, and he doesn't hear his name announced, and so in section 50 – well section 53 is received because he goes to Joseph Smith and says, what about me? I want to build the kingdom of God, so he then initiates this conversation with Joseph, do I have a place to build the kingdom too?

And he gets a specific revelation just for him, and I love how God introduces the section. And if you begin it in verse 2 it says: "Behold, I, the Lord, who was crucified for the sins of the world, give unto you a commandment that you shall forsake the world." Think about that introduction, not like I'm the Son of God, it's like, I've been crucified, remember the cross. Look at the prints in my hands and my feet, it didn't say all those things, but it also says, forsake the world. Now, Sidney was an incredible businessman. Now, for all of us, we all might struggle to forsake the world, but he was very capable at worldly things. Actually it's the Gilbert and Whitney store, isn't it, back there in Kirtland? And he gets called in this section to go down to Missouri to be an agent for the bishop, to help Edward Partridge, and he sets up one of the first stores right there in Independence. And it's interesting to me how Sidney is so faithful. Now this is 1831. He leaves his business in Kirtland, moves to Missouri, and you've got to realize Missouri is not a happy place all the time for the early saints. In fact, the first -- in three years there's lots of persecution, he gets thrown in jail, he gets arrested. In fact, he dies of cholera in 1834, just three years after this. He was 45 years old, and he was completely faithful to God's call to build the kingdom in the way that he could.

Notice the very opening to 53 along these lines. Verse 1: "Behold, I say unto you, my servant Sidney Gilbert, that I have heard your prayers." Brothers and sisters, in the context coming right after section 52, that's beautiful, that though your name wasn't mentioned in 52, I am fully aware, I have heard your prayers, I know your deep desires, and then verse 3, I've got this assignment for you. Verse 3: "Take upon you mine ordination, even that of an elder, to preach faith and repentance and remission of sins." Have you noticed this idea of I'd rather not preach, so what does God call him to do? Go and preach. There's this beautiful concept that shows up over and over and over in scripture where God finds people resting, succeeding, prospering, just moving along nicely in a comfort zone, and what does he do? He plucks them out of that comfort zone,

¹ Ballard, R. M. (2019, August 12). *BYU Devotional: Elder Ballard's "questions and answers"*. BYU Devotionals. <https://news.byu.edu/news/byu-devotional-elder-ballards-questions-and-answers>.

and where does he drop them? He usually leads them out into a wilderness. What's the root word? Wild. You can't rely on what used to work. You can't rely on your – your possessions, your money, your skills, your connections, your relationships, the cooperative group in that comfort zone when you're out in a wilderness, and God keeps bringing these people out of semi-comfort zones at least, from New York and Pennsylvania, bringing them to Kirtland, put your roots in here. Well, for some of them the roots aren't going to last very long as we're going to find in section 54 before he plucks them back out and sends them further out into the wilderness, and it gets to the point where we could start saying, what am I doing wrong? Why does life have to be so hard? Why can't I just enjoy life a little longer?

Brothers and sisters, we didn't come down here on this earth for a vacation or a pleasure trip. We came down here to have our test, to have this test of faith, this trial of our patience and to build character with the help of the Lord working with us throughout this process, and that seems to take place a little more effectively out here than it does here. Some of you have heard the old cliché, there's very little growth in a comfort zone, and there's very little comfort in a growth zone. And I think that's what we're seeing over and over, so if your life right now seems a little bit topsy-turvy, a little bit frustrating that it's not more predictable, not more comfortable, perhaps we could bow our head and thank the Lord for giving us opportunities to grow and plead with him to help us learn those lessons and to use that agency that has been given to us to help us to be covenantally faithful and loyal to him and to learn what we need to about him and about ourselves in the process.

Briefly, you might remember the Israelites were taken out of civilization out into the wild where they encountered God. Lehi was taken out in the wild where he encountered God. So sometimes God wants us to more fully experience him, and to do that he's got to get us into the wilds. And we'll get more to the wilderness when we get to 57 as well.

Now look at verse 7: "Again, I would that ye should learn that he only is saved who endureth unto the end. Even so. Amen." You know, among all these stories that we're telling where some people are struggling to keep the covenants, this is one of those, Sidney Gilbert, where it's just nice to be able to say, this is a guy who did, from our perspective, who did exactly that. He endured to the end, and endured great persecutions out in the wilderness for the Lord and died three years later of the cholera as a faithful, devoted and consecrated saint.

So, let's talk about what happens with the saints back in Thompson, Ohio, who are trying to live the United Order. You might remember, Leman Copley, he was a Shaker, converts to the gospel, and he gets sent to the mission, section 49, send him up, go back, and at this point he has given his land to the Church, at least in word, he hadn't actually ever signed the contract, 759 acres, and all these saints, you know the Newell Knight group, comes, living on his land and improving it, they're planting, building fences, and Leman Copley basically fails as a missionary among the Shakers; nobody's converted, okay? So outwardly it might look like he's a failure, and so when he returns, he's already questioning, like, have I made the right choice to be a member of the

Church? And it's interesting, some reports are that when he returns back to his farm, the saints there, the Colesville saints, actually criticize him and say negative things about him as a missionary, like, well, you obviously were a failure because no Shakers were converted. And this may have also contributed to him saying, I'm done, and he gets a little crazy. He breaks his covenant, that he'd covenanted with God and the Church, to let people make use of the land. He says, nope, you guys are all off my land. Oh, and I'm charging you rent. And they had to pay \$60, which was a lot of money. And this is after they'd spent quite a bit of time planting and building and making fences and improving the land, and so we get some interesting things here.

If you look at verse 3, this is actually speaking to the Colesville saints on the Copley property: "And if your brethren desire to escape their enemies, let them repent of all their sins, and become truly humble before me and contrite." So Newell Knight, who's the leader of the group, has been seeing these problems, goes to Joseph Smith and say, how do we handle this issue? And one of the things God says is, well, you guys need to repent of not actually being humble. It may be that they were being mean to Leman Copley, okay?

And other ways where the universal sin, according to President Benson's, yes, others have talked about it, is pride, that it wouldn't just be in the way they're treating Leman Copley, it would be the way they were treating each other, the way they were treating others, and perhaps they're saying, we deserve better than this, and he's saying no, you need to become humble before me and contrite.

What's also interesting as we were talking about this before, is what does God say to Leman Copley who had consecrated, covenanted to share. So let's take a look at what God now says about Leman Copley. Verses 4 and 5: "And as the covenant which they made unto me has been broken, even so it has become void and of none effect." Who broke that covenant?

Yeah, isn't that interesting. Here's this nutshell definition. I'll be your God, you're going to be my people, we've talked about this before, God never breaks his covenant. He is steadfast, sure, unmovable. He's always there and he makes these promises, and Leman Copley is the one who breaks the covenant, which makes this agreement what? Null and void.

And God says about Leman Copley, verse 5: "Wo to him," Leman Copley, "by whom this offense cometh, for it had been better for him that he had been drowned in the depth of the sea." That's a really nice thought. Pretty powerful consequence. But he goes on and says in verse 6: "But blessed are they who have kept the covenant and observed the commandment, for they shall obtain mercy."

Isn't it interesting, by the way, that what is it that Leman Copley was focused on? In this case it's this land and it's the possessions, and he hears things are going to be moving west, we're going to be starting over on the frontier, and it makes you wonder if part of him was saying, no, I've got 759 acres. He is so interested in the land and the soil, in the farm, in the fences and the fields and

the dirt, it seems, that there were probably a series of events that triggered this downward direction to cause him to break the covenant.

Here's the key lesson for me, at least, as I look at our own world today in the 21st century, not just the world in 1831 in Thompson, Ohio. God has given us certain covenantal agreements from his perspective and I have my agency. I get to choose what I do with that. If I choose to come over here and make anything else my God, whether it be money, whether it be power or prestige, whether it be land, whether it be a number of possessions in any form, whatever they may be, brothers and sisters, those can give me a feeling of great pleasure, a feeling of great power for a season. Here's the grand irony. The land that Lemman Copley owned and would yet acquire, he becomes a very large – had a very large holding of land by the time he's going to die many years later, all that land, it's still in Ohio. You can go visit it today. You can walk on it. You can pick up the dirt that he owned. And that dirt is not a very good god. It's not a very merciful god. There's no safety in chasing any other thing in this life to fill the place in your heart that can only be filled by one person, by God. He is merciful to us and he can – he can help us when all of the prestige, all the money, all the land, all the whatever it is that we've sought after passes on to other people. His love and his mercy won't decay, it won't pass on, it will remain with us forever.

And so as we move forward in time in this historical setting, let's not forget the need for us in the 21st century to realize, oh, wait, it's really easy for me to point a finger of scorn at Lemman Copley and say, you dummy, what were you thinking? It's not this complicated. When, in fact, you realize that when you point a finger of accusation or scorn at somebody, you've actually got three pointing back at you, and the scriptures can become very reflective at that moment and say, seriously? Really, Tyler? You're going to be the ultimate judge of Lemman Copley and how dumb he was to break this covenant? What about the things that you're allowing your heart and mind to become attached to? Anything, it doesn't matter what it is. It doesn't matter what the cause is. If it's not God, it's not going to save me. It's not going to treat me like a God can treat me and preserve me and redeem me and bring me eternal joy.

So the consequence of this section, of this revelation, is God calls Newell Knight as an agent to support the Bishop Edward Partridge and say, you're headed westward, you're going to the western confines of the western borders of the United States which at that time was Missouri – Mississippi River, and where Kansas City today is, is where they went. At the time it was Jackson County, Independence, Missouri, and they headed out. It's a long journey. They'd already left New York just back in January – February, and now it's June, was it April? Okay, even worse. You've been in Ohio for two months, two or three months, and God's like, I'm going to send you another 842 miles further west to – back in the wilderness again. Far more wilderness.

And we'll pick up that story in a bit, but let's look again at another section that's similar to this one where, similar to section 53, is a man named William Phelps. He also was at that conference, and it's like, Lord, here am I, I am willing, and he wants to know and he asks Joseph Smith, what

does God have in store for me? And by the way, W. W. Phelps, William Wines Phelps, he wrote many of our – of our early hymns, *The Spirit of God Like A Fire Is Burning*², he's a great poet, and a very, *Praise to the Man*³, and a great thinker, yes. Look at verse 1: "Behold, thus saith the Lord unto you, my servant William, yea, even the Lord of the whole earth, thou art called and chosen; and after thou art called and chosen, and after thou hast been baptized by water, which if you do with an eye single to my glory, you shall have a remission of your sins and a reception of the Holy Ghost, or of the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands." You'll notice W. W. Phelps is coming to Joseph to see what can I do to build the kingdom? He's not even a member of the Church, and isn't it beautiful that the Lord says, yes, I have a work for you to accomplish. First, I need to get you onto the covenant path of this covenantal connection with me through the waters of baptism. Enter by the gate. There you go. There's no other way to do this and nobody gets a free pass. There is no back door into the presence of God. Even if you write amazing hymns that we still love today, it doesn't give you any special ability to bypass the gate called baptism.

So in section 56 we get this, what we've talked about it before, we're going to say it again, this seeming clash between agency and God's work and prophecy and the spirit of this prophet giving these callings, some would say, well, if he was really a prophet, he wouldn't have called people, he would have known they wouldn't have been able to fulfill the mission, so why call them? I hope you understand that God is respecting agency, hence the reason we would have Jesus himself calling Judas Iscariot to be an apostle back in the New Testament. Some would say, well, he should have known what Judas was ultimately going to do and not call him three years previously to be an apostle. This agency factor is huge, to give people every opportunity lest at the end they say, well, you didn't give me a shot. My life would have been different had I been given the opportunity. He's allowing us to work with him to shape not only our present, but ultimately our future, and in section 56 you get an interesting scenario where a couple of these missionaries who had been called either had refused to go or were unable to go for one reason or another, and so now there needs to be this little shuffling of assignments, and this is the mission president with the transfer board saying, okay, that isn't going to work out because of this or that other factor, and so moving some things around a little bit, and that bothers some people.

Brothers and sisters, maybe I'm just really simple, but I love the fact that a living Church, a living, breathing, growing organization led by Jesus Christ is adaptable, that it can move and adjust to the circumstances in which it finds itself.

Yeah, it's amazing verse 4: "I, the Lord, command and revoke, as it seemeth me good; and all this to be answered upon the heads of the rebellious, saith the Lord." Beautiful. God's in charge; he can do whatever he wants, and if you guys don't fulfill the commands, that's okay, I have other ways of getting things done. And it's interesting, he says, okay, Ezra Thayer, you were

² Phelps, William W. "The Spirit of God." *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints*, www.churchofjesuschrist.org/music/library/hymns/the-spirit-of-god?lang=eng.

³ Phelps, William W. "Praise to the Man." *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints*, www.churchofjesuschrist.org/music/library/hymns/praise-to-the-man?lang=eng.

supposed to go with Thomas B. Marsh. I'm going to revoke that, I'm going to give my commandment unto somebody else, Selah J. Griffin. Any relation? No relation to me. Okay. No relation.

And we'll point out, part of what's going on is Ezra Thayer is kind of caught up in the conflict over all these consecrated properties in Thompson, and there's just some difficulties there about his property, whether he can actually sell it or not, and even though he kind of gets rebuked here, in January of 1832 he gets called on another mission with Thomas B. Marsh and he goes. So God is super merciful and he gets like, okay, you're not ready right now, I guess I need to give you a little bit more runway to get up to speed, but there's this lesson for us that let's not be like Ezra Thayer in June or July of 1831, but maybe how he was in January of 1832.

There you go. I love that example. Now the Lord pronounces a couple of woes on some people in this section that's-- it's fascinating to look at the interplay between these two. Look at verse 16 and 17, the very first word of both, you could mark it, wo and wo. Okay look at verse 16: "Wo unto you rich men, that will not give your substance to the poor, for your riches will canker your souls; and this shall be your lamentation in the day of visitation, and of judgment, and of indignation: The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and my soul is not saved!" He's giving them a gentle reminder that if you keep allowing your money, your riches, whatever they may be, to be your God, they're going to canker your soul, and at the end of the summer when the harvest is brought in, your soul isn't going to be saved. You're going to be stuck.

Now look at verse 17: "Wo unto you poor men." Now that's interesting, the wo in 16 was to the rich men, 17 it's to the poor men. Some of you are thinking, well, how could he be pronouncing wo on the poor? Wo unto you poor men, there's a qualifier, it's not wo for being poor, it's wo unto you poor men who fit into a particular category, "whose hearts are not broken, whose spirits are not contrite, and whose bellies are not satisfied, and whose hands are not stayed from laying hold upon other men's goods, whose eyes are full of greediness, and who will not labor with your own hands!" Hmm. He's giving some qualifiers for that pronouncement of wo on both ends of the spectrum for very different reasons, but it's the same wo, it's the same word, the same cursing, so to speak, that's given to both of them.

Look at verse 18: "But blessed," don't you love that he doesn't leave you in a state of wo? "But blessed are the poor," what's the qualifier? "who are pure in heart, whose hearts are broken, and whose spirits are contrite, for they shall see the kingdom of God coming in power and great glory unto their deliverance; for the fatness of the earth shall be theirs." I love that that he gives them this hope, this promise.

So our final section for today, section 57 finds us with the prophet Joseph and the different groups that have been commanded to make their way west to Jackson County, Missouri, on the far end – far western end of Missouri. This is the first revelation given by the Lord to the prophet in Zion, Jackson County, and he's asking questions of the Lord about the building up of Zion here, and you'll notice it says in verse 3: "Thus saith the Lord your God, if you will receive

wisdom here is wisdom. Behold, the place which is now called Independence is the center place; and a spot for the temple is lying westward, upon a lot which is not far from the courthouse." So there's a little bluff, a little bit to the west of the courthouse, that's where you're going to build your temple. This is the gathering place.

Keep in mind many of these elders had come on this mission expecting to find this Garden of Eden-like place because of all the promises of building up Zion. When they arrive in Independence, this is – this is a rundown frontier town that – rundown is probably the wrong way to put it because it's being built up – but it's got some pretty rough citizens that have come here. Keep in mind, this is the very edge of civilization as they know it at the time, and you've got – you've got a pretty interesting crowd coming out to this frontier region. This is the jumping off point. Independence, Missouri, is the sending off out into the Oregon Trail, the California migrations, everything down into the southwest originally started in Independence as that jumping off point to go further west out into the frontier.

And now you have this huge influx of missionaries coming in, looking around saying, really? I'd rather not build up Zion here. And the Lord's saying, this is wisdom in me. You may not be seeing what I know, but trust me, this is where I want you to build Zion, build a temple just a little bit to the west. Oh, and by the way, verse 4: "It is wisdom that the land should be purchased by the saints, and also every tract lying westward, even unto the line running directly between Jew and Gentile." So we know who the Gentiles are. Who are the Jews? This would be a way to refer to the Native Americans, many of these tribes that have been sent west of the Mississippi by President Andrew Jackson's, what they called the Indian Removal Act of 1830 where they've driven so many tribes of Indians west of the Mississippi, and so that's the dividing line between Jew and gentile because they're a part of the House of Israel from the saints' perspective.

And he's going to give more direction about how to begin this establishment of Zion in Independence, but I want to focus on just the main point in verse 8: "Again, verily I say unto you, let my servant Sidney Gilbert plant himself in this place, and establish a store, that he may sell goods without fraud, that he may obtain money to buy lands for the good of the saints, and that he may obtain whatsoever things the disciples may need to plant them in their inheritance." He keeps using this word plant. So Sidney Gilbert is assigned that, W. W. Phelps is going to set up the print shop where they're going to print the newspaper, the *Star*; they're going to print the first hymnbook and the commandments that have been received by Joseph. They're going to plant themselves here.

Now it's interesting because two years later in 1833 there's going to be this expulsion from Jackson County where they have to move north. God knew that. He knows the future, but he still invites them to plant themselves and to do what they can to produce fruit. That's what plants do, is they grow and they produce either beauty or a fruit, and he's asking them to do that in this place here in Independence.

Now some of you would probably be asking at this point, wait a minute, if they're going to be leaving in 1833, why ask them to put so much effort into building, whether it be the store and the printing press and their houses and the lands and cultivating it and buying all of this stuff that's going to end up being lost into the hands of the mobs? Why do that? And, brothers and sisters, if all we can see was this life, if we had eternity blinders on our eyes – we couldn't see before nor anything after – that question would be unanswerable. We'd say, yeah, that it makes zero sense. But with an eternal perspective, we still can't fully answer that question because God knows things that we don't, but we can at least give God the benefit of the doubt to say, huh, perhaps it wasn't about them building the physical kingdom at that time. Those prophecies, we're told, will be fulfilled, but they just weren't to be fulfilled yet at that time like the people thought they should have been.

Perhaps that was another round of opportunity for the Lord to test them, to try them, to build them, to help them work on building – constructing this house, that at the end of the day is going to be given to them. Maybe it wasn't about building log cabins and stores. Maybe building Zion is a lot more than just the physical stuff that does have to take place someday. Those prophecies all have to be fulfilled. But perhaps the real thing that God is building is disciples of Christ with the characters – or the characteristics and attributes of Christ that become more and more a part of us. He, it turns out, is the master builder, and he is helping to build our faith and our character so that we begin with Zion individually and then outwardly with our neighbors and collectively with the Church and with the whole world eventually, and we leave that with you in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen. Know that you're loved.

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