

Section 21

After more than a year of anticipation, Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery organized the Church of Jesus Christ on April 6, 1830, as the Lord commanded. At the organizational sacrament meeting, Joseph received section 21. In this revelation the Lord established the order of his Church. Elder Boyd K. Packer taught the relationship between order, ordaining, and ordinances. To ordain, he said, was the process of putting things in order. He defined an ordinance as a ceremony by which things are put in order.¹ Consider section 21 in that light.

The order the Lord intends is clear from what the revelation says and how it says it. Jesus reveals it to Joseph, who reveals it to the Saints. The Lord authorizes Oliver to ordain Joseph as the first or presiding elder, “this being an ordinance unto you” (D&C 21:10–11). Oliver is to be ordained as the second elder, again by an ordinance. The Savior leads his Church. Joseph speaks on his behalf. The Savior inspires Joseph to move the cause of Zion forward. The Saints sustain Joseph and Oliver as their leaders and give heed to their words as they heed the Savior’s. This ordained order requires “patience and faith” (D&C 21:5).

The first command in the revelation is to record these things. The acts of putting the Lord’s Church in its ordained order must be documented. Section 21 restored the Church of Jesus Christ. After nearly two millennia, duly authorized apostles were

¹Boyd K. Packer, “Ordinances,” BYU Devotional, February 3, 1980.

ordained and assigned by Jesus Christ to lead his church. Many people have “wished,” as one wrote, “I had lived in the days of the prophets or apostles, that I could have sure guides.” Others looked forward, waiting for the Lord to send new apostles.² Those hopes were realized on April 6, 1830. As Joseph put it, “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was founded upon direct revelation, as the true church of God has ever been, according to the scriptures.”³

² Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 17. Jeffrey R. Holland, “Prophets, Seers, and Revelators,” *Ensign* (November 2004): 6.

³ “Latter Day Saints,’ 1844,” p. 404, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed July 23, 2020.