

Section 25

In the summer of 1830 Emma Hale Smith was baptized near Colesville, New York, as a group of angry neighbors objected. Before she could be confirmed, the raging crowd drove her and other Saints into the Knight family's home for refuge. Then a constable arrested Joseph for preaching the Book of Mormon. Emma awaited the outcome for a few days at her sister's home, feeling that her "very heart strings would be broken with grief" as she witnessed her neighbors' hostility toward her husband.¹

It wasn't only Emma's confirmation that had been interrupted. Choosing to marry Joseph had disrupted the trajectory of Emma's life. As with so many women who came of age in her time and place, Emma was raised to aspire to middle-class respectability. Given her tumultuous married life thus far, she couldn't help but be concerned about her financial future.

Then in section 24 the Lord essentially guaranteed Joseph and Emma a modest living if the Saints would support them. They would have enough to enable him to devote his life to the Church but no guarantee of things of this world. All section 24 seemed to assure Emma was a life of hardship with a husband who belonged to the Church.

¹ "Some of the Remarks of John S. Reed, Esq., as Delivered before the State Convention," *Times and Seasons* 5 (1 June 1844): 549–52. Joseph Smith, Manuscript History 1838–1856, May 17, 1844, Book F-1, page. 48.

Up to that point, the Lord had only spoken to the men of the Church, though, like Emma, the women of the Church—Lucy Mack Smith, Mary Whitmer, Polly Knight, and many others—were just as much its backbone and as vital as a heartbeat. Then the Lord let Emma know that he could see through her eyes and gave her an opportunity to see through his.

The earliest manuscript of section 25 begins more intimately than the more formal, published version. “Emma my daughter in Zion,” the Lord says, “A Revelation I give unto you concerning my will Behold thy sins are for given thee & thou art an Elect Lady whom I have called.”² He reveals his will to this highly favored daughter, promising to preserve her life and place in Zion if she will be faithful and virtuous. This was no hollow promise to a woman living in a time of high maternal mortality rates who had nearly died shortly after her first child did.

The Lord’s command that Emma “murmur not because of the things which thou hast not seen” (D&C 25:4) is often assumed to refer to the Book of Mormon plates, but there is no basis for that conclusion. There were many things Emma did not see, and the Book of Mormon plates may not have been among them.

The revelation gives Emma a calling—or several, actually. “The office of thy calling shall be for a comfort unto *my servant*, Joseph Smith, Jun., *thy husband*’ (D&C 25:5, emphasis added). As this sentence suggests and one might expect, at times Emma felt as if she was in a tug-o-war with the Lord over Joseph. Still, she excelled at meekly comforting and consoling him.

Emma, the Lord said, was called to be Joseph's partner, his confidante, his strength; and he hers. The Lord commands her to go with Joseph when he goes, scribe for him when he has no other scribe (freeing Oliver Cowdery for other duties), and be ordained to expound scripture and exhort the church by the Spirit. Joseph is to lay hands on Emma to bestow the Holy Ghost, and she shall spend her time scribing and learning much in the process. She need not fear. Joseph will support her in this calling. That is his calling, and by doing it Joseph reveals whatever the Lord wills, according to the Saints' faith.

² “Revelation, July 1830–C [D&C 25],” p. 34, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed July 23, 2020.

Emma can see where all this is leading. “Lay aside the things of this world, and seek for the things of a better” (D&C 25:10), the Lord invited. Lay aside your telestial-world aspirations and feed your celestial ones.

The Lord also called Emma to select sacred hymns for the church. He delights in the heartfelt song. Thus Emma may be encouraged and rejoice and cleave to her covenants. Continue to be meek, the Lord commands her, and beware of pride. “Let thy soul delight in thy husband, and the glory which shall come upon him” (D&C 25:14). A crown of righteousness awaits Emma if she keeps these commandments continually.

Emma was confirmed and compiled the church’s first two hymnals in response to section 25, but the revelation is significant far beyond those accomplishments. It addresses Emma’s deepest fears and fondest hopes. This is the only revelation in the Doctrine and Covenants addressed to a woman. It shows that the Lord knew his daughter. He knew she was meek but could be proud. He knew that part of her wanted to complain because she had not seen some of the marvelous things others had seen. He knew she could be tempted by the things of this world. He invited her to sacrifice them for infinitely more. He knew before she knew that she was capable of scribing for Joseph, learning much, and teaching the Saints by the power of the Holy Ghost. He knew that these callings would cause Emma anxiety. He assured her that Joseph would support her. He knew that she needed Joseph. He knew that Joseph needed her, and he called her to comfort and sustain Joseph.

Section 25 oriented Emma’s life. Expecting twins, she forsook her unbelieving parents to obey its command to go with Joseph to Ohio, and she never saw them afterwards. A decade later Emma was elected by her sisters to preside over the Relief Society, which Joseph validated. He read the revelation to the sisters from the Doctrine and Covenants and said that Emma had been “orddain’d at the time, the Revelation was given to expound the scriptures to all; and to teach the female part of the community.” She was sustained in her calling by her husband and her sister Saints.³

A few weeks later Joseph was evading arrest on false charges. It was a depressing time of his life. There was tension between him and Emma over plural marriage,

³ “[Nauvoo Relief Society Minute Book](#),” p. 8, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed July 23, 2020.

straining their relationship. Emma went to great lengths to visit Joseph in that situation. His journal entry says, “Again she is here, even in the seventh trouble, undaunted, firm and unwavering, unchangeable, affectionate Emma.”⁴

In September 1843 Joseph sealed on Emma’s head the “crown of righteousness” the Lord promised in section 25. Then, just days before his death in 1844, Joseph invited Emma to write her own blessing. She thought of section 25 and penned her hopes that she would be able to obey its commands and receive its promised blessings.⁵ She clung to her covenants through Abrahamic tests. Emma understandably could have, and perhaps sometimes did, consider herself in competition with the Lord and others for Joseph’s time and attention. Section 25 assured her that however true that might be, she was the Lord’s highly favored daughter, that he expected more of her than she may have thought she could give, and that he would finally give her all she ultimately wanted.

⁴ “[Journal, December 1841–December 1842](#),” p. 164, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed July 23, 2020. See Job 5:19.

⁵ Carol Cornwall Madsen, “The ‘Elect Lady’ Revelation: The Historical and Doctrinal Context of Doctrine & Covenants 25,” in *The Heavens Are Open* (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1993): 211–18.