

Section 101

On December 10, 1833, the morning mail brought Joseph Smith “the melancholy intelligence” that the Saints in Missouri were being exiled from the promised land.¹ He had already learned that leading citizens had mobbed the Saints, destroyed their press, and forced on them an ultimatum to leave the county. Joseph hoped, however, that the rule of law would prevail, that the Saints could get redress for the illegal acts against them, and that they would not have to leave the land they had legally purchased and occupied. The letter disappointed that hope.

The news depressed and bewildered Joseph. Why had the Lord let the Saints be driven from the promised land? Would they return? If so, how? It was the Lord who had told Joseph to consecrate Independence, Missouri, as Zion, a refuge and gathering place for the Saints. “Therefore I ask thee,” Joseph prayed, “in the name of Jesus Christ, to return thy people unto their homes . . . [and] that all the enemies of thy people, who will not repent and return unto thee be destroyed from off the face of that Land.”² Section 101 came a week later to answer these questions and Joseph’s prayer, though not as he had hoped.

The Lord explains that he will let the Saints be tried and chastened even as much as Abraham was if it will lead to their sanctification. They must choose to stop being

¹ “[Letterbook 1](#),” 70, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed November 11, 2020.

² Joseph Smith, Kirtland, Ohio, to Edward Partridge, William W. Phelps, John Whitmer, Algernon Sidney Gilbert, John Corrill, Isaac Morley and all Saints, Independence, Missouri, 10 December 1833, in Joseph Smith Letterbook 1, 70–75, in hand of Frederick G. Williams, CHL.

contentious, jealous, covetous, and lustful or there will be no Zion even if he rescues them. Then he promises emphatically that he will rescue them. “Notwithstanding their sins, my bowels are filled with compassion towards them. I will not utterly cast them off; and in the day of wrath I will remember mercy” (D&C 101:9).

Just a week earlier, Joseph felt like murmuring because “those who are innocent are compelled to suffer for the iniquities of the guilty; and I cannot account for this.”³ The Lord acknowledges the injustice in verse 41 and has his own “wisdom” in allowing it. From the Lord’s perspective, a potent dose of “trouble” can be useful. For when the Saints were well and good, they treated lightly the revelations to gather, to consecrate, to buy land and to build a temple. Now all of a sudden they “of necessity feel after me,” the Lord says (D&C 101:8).

Section 101 reaffirms that Zion will be established despite the Saints being driven. It prophesies the millennial day, when the pure in heart will inherit Zion, enmity will cease, Satan will be rendered powerless, the Lord will reveal all things, and death, like sorrow, will depart. With that perspective, the faithful, persecuted Saints can afford to “fear not even unto death; for in this world your joy is not full, but in me your joy is full” (D&C 101:36).

Beginning in verse 43, the Lord relates a parable to explain his will concerning how to get Zion back. It implies that the unfaithful Saints in Zion were bad stewards. Rather than building the temple as commanded, they second-guessed the Lord, used his money selfishly, and opened themselves to attacks that could have been prevented by obedience. “Ought ye not to have done even as I commanded you?” the nobleman of the parable asks the disobedient servants (D&C 101:53).

The nobleman’s plans for reclaiming his vineyard from enemies includes gathering an army of his servants, “the strength of mine house,” to go to battle (D&C 101:55–58). The nobleman promises to redeem his overrun vineyard and the servants ask when. “When I will,” comes the answer; “go ye straightway, and do all things whatsoever I have commanded you” (v. 60). The servants go and do as the nobleman commanded, “and after many days all things were fulfilled” (v. 62).

³ “[Letterbook 1](#),” 72, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed November 11, 2020.

Immediately following the parable, the Lord resumes as if he were the nobleman commanding his servants what to do, or, in the words of verse 43, “my will concerning the redemption of Zion.” He commands the Saints to obey sections 57, 63, and 86—that is, to continue the work of gathering by preaching the gospel, gaining converts, and gathering together to pool resources so they can systematically (not hastily or haphazardly) purchase land and build Zion legally. The Lord calls for wise men to be sent to purchase the lands, buy out the settlers of Jackson County, satisfy them for their land and resolve the controversies between them (D&C 101:73). There is no shortage of money among the Saints in the eastern branches, the Lord says. They have enough to buy the land if they are willing to consecrate it for Zion (v. 75).

In verse 76 the Lord calls for the Saints to continue to appeal to government for redress of their civil and property rights, like the biblical parable of the unjust judge who finally relented to an insistent woman’s pleas for justice. Similarly, the Saints are to petition for justice at the feet of every government official, including the president. “And if the president heed them not, then will the Lord arise and come forth out of his hiding place; and in his fury vex the nation” (D&C 101:89). The Saints are to pray for their government officials to be responsive and therefore escape the Lord’s vengeance.

The revelation closes with a command that the Saints not sell the storehouse nor any of the land they legally own. Though driven unjustly, they must not relent to their oppressors. They must not sell the promised land.

Section 101 explains why Zion was postponed. God could stop every mobbing and prevent every Saint from being lustful, covetous, and contentious. He chooses instead to put agency in his individual children. He gives them power to act and commandments to act upon. When they (or some of them) act disobediently to His commands, the blessings promised for obedience are not forthcoming. That’s how some of the Saints—and their enemies—postponed Zion. It is our fault, not God’s, that there is still no holy city in Jackson County, Missouri.

Section 101 promises an ultimate redemption of Zion, though its timing is dependent on the Saints’ decisions. In several places the Lord guarantees that Zion will come. In just as many he speaks ambiguously about when. *When* depends on what the Saints decide to do with the Lord’s commandments.