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Dean C. Jessee

John W. Welch

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Revelations in Context

Joseph Smith's Letter from Liberty Jail, March 20, 1839

Dean C. Jessee and John W. Welch

While Joseph Smith was incarcerated in Liberty Jail from December 1, 1838, to April 6, 1839, he wrote or dictated eight surviving letters. Four were addressed to Emma, his wife, and all of them display the sterling character of the Prophet Joseph under trials of the most extreme conditions imaginable. His letter of March 20, 1839, directed to “the church of Latter-day saints at Quincy Illinois and scattered abroad and to Bishop Partridge in particular,” is one of the most revealing and most significant letters ever written by a prophet of God in the dispensation of the fullness of times. Embedded in this lengthy letter, which was written in two parts on twenty-nine sheets of paper, are the words now contained in sections 121–23 of the Doctrine and Covenants. Reading the words of those revelations in their original context certainly enhances and heightens the impressive spiritual messages of those texts.

Dean Jessee published this important document in *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith* (1984).¹ Deseret Book Company and the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Latter-day Saint History have now combined their energies to produce a revised and corrected edition of this volume which will be off the press in the near future. Comments about the historical background of this letter can be found in that new volume.

Below is reproduced the entire text of this two-part letter. It has been transcribed literally, with spellings preserved as well as many other manuscript features, some of which are understandably rough, given the circumstances under which this epistle was drafted. The manuscript was written by Alexander McRae and Caleb Baldwin, who acted as scribes for Joseph Smith. In the typesetting below, Joseph's handwritten corrections appear in bold-faced type.

The manuscript has been segregated into two type sizes. The larger size is used to typeset all of the portions of this letter not found in the Doctrine and Covenants; the smaller size in block quotes displays the portions of the letter now found in sections 121–23. This format readily reveals the sequential context in which the scriptural words originally appeared in the epistle.

Before and after the six blocks of text which were taken from this letter to comprise the words of sections 121–23 are seven units of text that lead up

to and away from the canonized passages. In each case, these seven units add to our understandings of and sensitivities toward the meanings of the scriptures, as is highlighted in the new introductory analysis and additional commentary that follows.

Unit 1

The first of these noncanonical units introduces the letter in a high scriptural style which accentuates the contrast between sacred knowledge, virtue, and fellowship on the one hand and horrendous evil, suffering, and atrocity on the other hand. Phrases such as “prisoner for the Lord Jesus Christ’s sake” and “nothing therefore can separate us from the love of God” position Joseph in the apostolic tradition of Paul, who likewise suffered as a prisoner for Christ (Eph. 3:1; Philem. 1:1) and endured inseparable from the love of God (Rom. 8:35, 39). Joseph Smith’s tender love for his friends and his magnanimous quest and request that knowledge and virtue be multiplied upon the Saints are astonishing when juxtaposed against the jarring and shocking articulation of the wrongs he and the Saints had suffered. After reading Joseph’s bill of particulars against his captors and seeing his willingness to turn the demands of justice over to God for divine judgment, readers should be doubly impressed by the statement, “True it must needs be that offences come, but WO! to them by whom they come,” a scripture taken from words of Christ in the New Testament (Matt. 18:7), which leads directly into what is now the beginning of section 121, “O God, where art thou? And where is the pavilion that covereth thy hiding place?” The Prophet’s plaintive plea does not come out of nowhere. It grows out of extraordinary faith, hope, and love, as well as extreme affliction and injustice. The Prophet’s soul-rending petition then provides the text for the first six verses of section 121.

Unit 2

Between Doctrine and Covenants 121:6 and 7 originally stood a lengthy section that began by reflecting on the signs of the times and with the gushing of emotion as “the flood gates of [the prisoners’] hearts [had been] hoisted” as the efforts of the Prophet and his companions had been frustrated at every turn. The promise of peace that eventually comes in 121:7, “my son, peace be unto thy soul,” was not received without first wading through unimaginable grief poured out through the torrent of misfortune reported in this unit 2. Although he knew that the time would indeed come when “God will have our oppressors in derision,” Joseph’s confidence was still tested in the extreme. His lawyers were unfaithful, swayed by public opinion. Government officials were treacherous. These

men receive a scathing denunciation. An escape attempt by the prisoners had been frustrated, and their *pro se* self-representation in court had proven ineffectual. Nevertheless, Joseph was filled with a hope of better things; his mind turned towards home, finding consolation particularly in supporting words from friends. His description of the power of a friendly voice that dispels all grief “with a vivacity of lightning” is classic. Healed by the loving voice of a friend, enmity departed from the Prophet’s soul; his heart became “sufficiently contrite,” and only then could “the voice of inspiration” steal along and whisper the reassuring peaceful text that begins in Doctrine and Covenants 121:7.

Unit 3

Following Doctrine and Covenants 121:25 originally stood a third unit of text, a lengthy section explaining first that God “would have a tried people” and then giving counsel with respect to the management of Church affairs and properties. This unit begins by somberly assuring the Saints that the trial of their faith would be “equal to that of Abraham.” These Abrahamic allusions are rich and powerful. Perhaps Abraham’s faithfulness in paying tithes and dividing his property generously with his brother Lot led the Prophet to move from the sublime image of the sacrifice of Isaac to a discussion of the management of the mundane affairs of the household of God. The great patriarch Abraham could well serve as a model for the Saints as they sought a new location for settlement and as they tried to conduct their necessary business in righteousness and humility. In this segment of the letter, the Prophet Joseph instructs the Church regarding conferences, councils, the avoidance of undue influence through pride, “foul speeches,” flattery, or any conduct that would diminish the soul of man, for a soul “unto salvation must stretch as high as the utmost Heavens, and search in to and contemplate the lowest considerations of the darkest abyss” before Church meetings and conversations can be worthy of those “dignified Characters of the Chosen of God.” Only upon such conditions, while bearing with those who feel themselves less worthy, serving all people, “both high and low rich and poor,” with honesty and meekness, can the body of the Saints prepare the way for the blessing of the Lord. “If you do these things, and exercise fervent prayer, and faith,” the Prophet assured the Saints, then one can receive the beautiful promise that is articulated beginning in Doctrine and Covenants 121:26, “God shall give unto you knowledge by his Holy Spirit.”

Unit 4

Between Doctrine and Covenants 121:32 and 33 is found a short unit that tells the Saints what holds them back from the marvelous blessings

promised in the intervening scriptural text. Briefly mentioned are the problems of ignorance, superstition, and bigotry. Like a mountain cloud-burst, however, violently cleansing the valleys and hills, the flood of refining trials will purify the body of the Church to be again “as clear as cristal and as pure as snow.” Following this vivid interlude, the absence of which a textual critic could hardly have even suspected without the full original in hand, comes the familiar query, “How long can rolling waters remain impure?” (D&C 121:33).

Unit 5

The next unit in the letter commences at the end of what is now verse 33 and runs through the end of part one and on into part two of the letter itself. It first heaps imprecations upon the governor of Missouri, Lilburn Boggs, but then its message shifts quickly to deliver the Prophet Joseph Smith’s powerful testimony of the truthfulness of Mormonism. He fervently attests that “it was by [God’s] voice that we were called to a dispensation of his gospel.” He testifies of the divine origin of the Book of Mormon. He then closes with intimate remembrances and soothing consolations, ending the first half of the letter, as Paul concluded his letters, with personal words of greeting and love, punctuated with a block of signatures.

The composition of unit 5 continued after the arrival of a letter from Bishop Edward Partridge. Never were words more gratefully received. A prospect of land in Iowa seemed to be “a whispering that the angels of heaven” had sent forth. Greatly heartened that the murders at Haun’s Mill and the death of Apostle David W. Patten would be vindicated and prove efficacious, the Prophet gave practical instructions that general conferences of the Church should be conducted with great “care and propriety” and that land dealings must be carefully transacted, especially to avoid all forms of self-aggrandizement. Worries, especially that high-mindedness might lead those in power to neglect bearing “the infirmities of the weak,” led Joseph directly into the penetrating discussion that begins, “Behold, there are many called, but few are chosen. And why are they not chosen?” (D&C 121:34).

Interestingly, the original letter contains no break between what is now the end of section 121 and the beginning of section 122. This contiguity notably raises some interesting interpretive possibilities. At the end of section 121, several sublime promises are extended to those who properly maintain influence and power by virtue of correct application of the priesthood principles: “Thy confidence [shall] wax strong, . . . thy scepter an unchanging scepter, . . . thy dominion shall be an everlasting dominion, . . . it shall flow unto thee forever and ever” (D&C 121:45–46). These blessings appear to be extended to all who follow the counsel of the preceding verses, which clearly seem to set forth general principles that apply to all holders

of power. Without interruption, the text of the letter then continues, “The ends of the earth shall inquire after thy name,” speaking in terms that one might think applied specifically to Joseph Smith. Especially when the tribulations that are mentioned—such as enemies tearing a six-year-old child from the arms of his father (D&C 122:6)—allude directly to the suffering of Joseph Smith, it appears that the intent of the text has shifted to addressing Joseph Smith alone. The climax of this passage, “Know thou, my son, that all these things shall give thee experience” (D&C 122:7), would however seem to have shifted back to a more general promise applicable to all who endure suffering and are sustained in the atoning depths of the Son of Man. The continuity of these passages, blending in and out of each other, raises the interesting possibility, however, that all of the second person pronouns in this text (*thee, thy, thou*) might refer both to Joseph Smith or Bishop Partridge as well as to all righteous Saints.

Unit 6

The assurance that “thy years shall not be numbered less” (D&C 122:9) leads into unit 6 of the letter, in which the Prophet turns attention to the gathering of the Saints and the conferences soon to be convened. Knowing that God will stand by his Saints forever and ever reassures the Prophet of his continuing leadership. Shifting from the most penetrating concerns about evil and suffering, having just reached bottom and learned that “all these things shall give thee experience and shall be for thy good” (D&C 122:7), the Prophet commences to give instructions concerning the business at hand, about cautiously avoiding the formation of large stock companies and not using financial tools and institutions without taking the appropriate time and having the necessary experience to prevent the reoccurrence of problems such as the Saints in Kirtland had previously encountered.

Unit 7

This practical advice flows directly into what is now section 123:1–17, instructing members of the Church to gather affidavits concerning the injuries they had suffered in Missouri. But that is not the end of the advice the Prophet gives to the Saints at that time. Unit 7 then counsels the Saints to avoid entering into worldly arrangements that carry with them covenants, oaths, and penalties enforced by secrecy. Prudent guidance is given on how the Saints should interact and deal with people of other faiths: “Our religion is between us and our God their religion is between them and their God”; nevertheless, a tie exists between the Saints and their God that enables them to conduct themselves “with grater liberality to word all others” than the others exercise toward one another. This elevated

counsel applies not only to relationships between individual members of the Church and others in society but also to the behavior of the Latter-day Saints with respect to governments. Here Joseph Smith strongly affirms his support for the Constitution of the United States as “a glorious standard” that protects all individuals equally in their “indefeasible rights” to worship God according to the dictates of their own conscience.

The letter then ends with a strong proclamation to the world that Latter-day Saints will hold on “untill death” to seven truths. This is the only known document in which Joseph Smith bears his personal testimony of these truths so directly. Reading these words gives listeners today a feeling for the way it must have sounded when the Prophet bore his own testimony. Joseph testifies: “God is true,” “the constitution of the united States is true,” “the Bible is true,” “the book of mormon is true,” “the book of covenants is true,” “Christ is true,” and “the ministering of angels sent from God is true.” Indeed, this testimony energizes all sections of this letter.

Early Publication History

Choice segments of this two-part letter were included in the Doctrine and Covenants for the first time in 1876. It remains unknown, however, what criteria Elder Orson Pratt and his Brethren used “to determine which portions of these letters were to be included,”² thereby leading to the canonization of those choice selections from among these many inspired and inspiring words.

These texts were first published during Joseph Smith’s lifetime in *Times and Seasons* in May and July of 1840,³ with some passages being shortened and others reworded. Those changes spawned unwitting criticism from the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints in 1896, erroneously blaming the Salt Lake–based Church of changing the words of the Prophet after his death when a different version of these texts was published in the *Millennial Star* in 1855.⁴ In response to this criticism, Church Historian Franklin D. Richards correctly indicated that the challenged matter in the latter publication was drawn, virtually unedited, by the *Deseret News* in 1854⁵ from the 1840s Manuscript History of the Church, which had quoted the original 1839 letter as written by Joseph Smith.⁶ The full text of these letters has been published in the *History of the Church* from 1905 to the present.⁷

The 1854 publication of these materials in the *Deseret News* may have contributed, however, in a small way to the final selection of segments that were eventually included in the 1879 Doctrine and Covenants. Consistent with the paragraphing first introduced by the 1854 publication, all seven sections of text included in Doctrine and Covenants 121–23 end where paragraphs in the 1854 typesetting end, and except for the Doctrine and Covenants texts following units 2 and 3, all begin where paragraphs begin.

Dean C. Jessee (jesseed@byu.edu) is Senior Research Fellow at the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Latter-day Saint History at Brigham Young University. He earned his B.A. in art and German at Brigham Young University in 1956. He received an M.A. in Mormon history from Brigham Young University in 1959.

John W. Welch, who can be reached by email through BYU Studies (byu_studies@byu.edu), is the Robert K. Thomas Professor of Law at the J. Reuben Clark Law School at Brigham Young University. He has been educated at Brigham Young, Oxford, and Duke Universities and is the editor of *BYU Studies*, to which position he was appointed in December 1991.

Any deviations between this printing and the 2001 edition of *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith* are inadvertant.

1. Dean C. Jessee, comp., *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1984), 388–407. For a discussion of the letter's previous publications, see below.

2. Robert J. Woodford, *The Historical Development of the Doctrine and Covenants* (Ph.D. dissertation, Brigham Young University, 1974), 1567.

3. *Times and Seasons* 1 (May 1840): 99–104; (July 1840): 131–34. The second part of the March 20, 1839, letter was reprinted twice from this source in *Millennial Star* 1 (December 1840): 193–97; 5 (October 1844): 69–72.

4. *Millennial Star* 17 (January 27, 1855): 52–56; (February 10, 1855): 84–88. *The Saints' Herald* 43 (June 3, 1896): 354–59. The *Herald* contrasted “the kind and Christlike spirit” of the *Times and Seasons* version with “the boasting, railing spirit of the other” and noted that the *Times and Seasons* made “no mention” of a plurality of Gods whereas the version appearing in the *Millennial Star* referred to “the council of the Eternal God of all other Gods.” The *Millennial Star* version is, however, much closer to the original, which contains the questioned phrase now found in D&C 121:32.

5. *Deseret News [Weekly]*, January 26, 1854, 1; February 2, 1854, 1. The *Deseret News* may have quoted the first part of the letter from the Manuscript History of the Church, book C-1, pages 900–906, but the second part of the letter was not copied into that part of the history when it was compiled in 1845.

6. *Deseret Evening News*, June 27, 1896, 4. Church Historian Franklin D. Richards believed that the editorial changes to the original letter as it appeared in *Times and Seasons* had been made honorably by editors Ebenezer Robinson and Don Carlos Smith with the “full sanction of Joseph Smith.” He attributed the differences between the original letter and the version published in the *Times and Seasons* to space constraints in the newspaper and to the editors’ “prudence” in withholding potentially controversial statements and teachings from the general public because of prejudices.

7. Joseph Smith Jr., *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2d ed., rev., 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1971), 3:288–305. Elder Roberts utilized the *Millennial Star* version, following both of its parts and its paragraphing quite precisely, although dropping the first signature block at the end of the first part.

Joseph Smith's March 20, 1839, Letter

Liberty Jail Clay County Mo

March 20th 1839.

unit 1) To the church of Latterday saints at Quincy Illinois and scattered abroad and to Bishop Partridge in particular. your humble servant Joseph Smith Jr prisoner for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake and for the saints taken and held by the power of mobocracy under the exterminating reign of his excellency the Governor Lilburn W. Boggs in company with his fellow prisoners and beloved Brethren Caleb Baldwin Lymon Wight Hiram Smith and Alexander McRae send unto you all greeting. May the grace of God the father and of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ rest upon you all and abide with you for ever. May knowledge be multiplied unto you by the meorcy of God. And may faith and virtue and knowledge and temperance and patiance and Godliness and Brotherly kindness and charity be in you and abound that you may not be baron in anything nor unfrutefull. Forasmuch as we know that the most of you are well acquainted with the rongs and the high toned injustice and cruelty that is practiced upon us whereas we have been taken prisoners charged falsly with evry kind of evil and thrown into prison inclosed with strong walls surrounded with a strong guard who continually watch day and knight as indefatigable as the devil is in tempting and laying snayers for the people of God. Therefore dearly and beloved Brethren we are the more ready and willing to lay ~~claim~~ claim to your fellowship and love. For our curc= [p. 1] umstances are calculated to awaken our spirits to a sacred remembrance of evry thing and we think that yours are also and that nothing therefore can seperate us from the love of God. and fellowship one with another and that evry species of wickedness and cruelty practised upon us will only tend to bind our harts together and seal them together in love we have no need to say to you that we are held in bonds without cause neither is it needfull that you say unto us we are driven from our homes and smitten without cause we mutually understand that if the inhabitance of the state of Missouri had let the saints alone and had been as desirable of peace as they ware there would have been nothing but peace and quiatude in this <state> unto this day we should not have been in this hell surrounded with demonds if not those who are damned, they are those who shall be damned and where we are compeled to hear nothing but blasphemos oaths and witness a scen of blasphemy and drunkenness and hypocrisy and debaucheries of evry description. And again the cries of orphans and widdows would <not> have assended up to God. the blood of inocent women and children yea and of men also would not have cried to God against them <it> would <not> have stained the soyl of Missouri. but oh! the unrelenting hand the inhumanity and murderous

disposition of this people it shocks all nature it beggers and defies all discription. it is a tail of [p. 2] wo a lamentable tail yea a sorrifull tail too much to tell too much for contemplation too much to think of for a moment to much for human beings it cannot be found among the hethans it cannot be found among the nations where Kings and tyrants are inthroned it cannot be found among the savages of the wilderness yea and I think it cannot be found among the wild and ferocious beasts of the forist that a man should be mangled for sport women be ~~violated~~ <robed> of all that they have their last morsel for subsistance and then be violated to gratify the hell[i]sh desires of the mob and finally left to perish with their helpless of[f]spring clinging around their necks but this is not all after a man is dead he must be dug up from his grave and mangled to peaces for no other purpose than to gratify their spleen against the religeon of god. They practise <these> things upon the saints who have done them no rong who are inocent and virtuous who loved the Lord their god and were willing to forsaik all things for ~~his~~ <Christ> sake these things are awfull to relait but they are verily true it must needs bee that offences come, but WO! to them by whom they come.

O God where art thou and where is the pavilion that covereth thy hiding place how long shall thy hand be stayed and thine eye yea thy pure eye behold from ~~from~~ the eteernal heavens the rongs of thy people and of thy servants [p. 3] and thine ear be penetrated with their c[r]yes yea O Lord how long shall they suffer these rongs and unlawfull oppressions before thine hart shall be softened towards them and thy bowels be moved with compassion to-words them. O Lord God almighty maker of heaven earth and seas and of all things that in them is and who controleth and subjecteth the devil and the dark and benig[h]ted dominion of shayole. Streach forth thy hand let thine eye pierce let thy pavilion be taken up let thy hiding place no longer be covered let thine ear be inclined let thine hart be softened and thy bowels moved with compassion toward us let thine anger be kindle[d] against our enemis and in the fury of thine hart with thy sword avenge us of our rongs remember thy suffering saint[s] oh our God and thy servants will rejoyce in thy name for ever.
[D&C 121:1–6]

unit 2) Dearly and beloved Brethr[en] we see that peralass times have come as was testified of we may look then with most purfect assurance for the roling in of all those things that have been written and with more confidence than ever before lift up our eyes to the luminary of day and say in our harts soon thou wilt vail thy blushing face he that said let there be light, and there was light hath spoken this word, and again thou moon thou dimmer light thou luminary of night shall ~~truru~~ <turn> to blood we see that evry thing is fulfilling and the time shall soon come when the son of man shall [p. 4] desend in the clouds of <heaven.> our harts do not shrink neither are our spirits altogether broken at the grievous yoak which is put upon us. We know that God will have our oppressors in derision that he ~~laf~~ <will laugh> at their calamity and mock when their fear comith oh that we could be with you Brethren and unbosome our feeling to you we would tell [you] that we should have been at

<liberated> the time Elder Rigdon was on the writ of habeas corpus had not our own lawyers interpreted the law contrary to what it reads against <us> which prevented us from introducing our evidence before the mock court,¹ they have done us much harm <from> the begining they have of late acknowledged that the law was misconstrewed and tantalsed our feelings with it and have intirally forsaken us and have forfeited their oaths and their bonds and we have a come back on them for they are co-workers with the mob. As nigh as we can learn the publick mind has been for a long time turning in our favor and the majority is now friendly and the lawyers can no longer browbeat us by saying that this or that is a matter of publick oppinion for publick oppinion is not willing to brook it for it is begining to look with feelings of indignation against our oppresors and to say that the mormons were not in the fault in the least we think that truth honor and virtue and inocence will eventually come out tryumphant we should have taken a habeas corpus before the high Judge and escaped [p. 5] the mob in a summary way but unfortunatly for us the timber of the wall being verry hard our auger handles gave out and hindered us longer than we expected we applied to a friend and a verry slight uncautious act gave rise to some suspition and before we could fully succeed our plan was discovered we had evry thing in readiness but the last stone and we could have made our escape in one minute and should have succeeded admirably had it not been for a little imprudance or over anxiety on the part of our friend. The sheriff and jailor did not blame us for our attempt it was a fine breach and cost the county a round sum² but publick oppinion says that we ought to have been permitted to have made our escape that then the disgrace would have been on us but now it must come on the state. that there cannot be any charge sustained against us and that the conduct of the mob, the murders committed at hawns mill,³ and the exterminating order of the Governer, and the one sided rascally proceedings of the Legislature has damned the state of Missouri to all eternity I would just name also that Genl Atchison has proved himself to be as contemptible as any of them we have tryed for a long time to get our lawyers to

1. Reference is made to the January hearing at Liberty in which Sidney Rigdon obtained his freedom.

2. Joseph refers to their second unsuccessful jailbreak attempt of March 4.

3. Haun's Mill, a tiny Latter-day Saint community on Shoal Creek in Caldwell County, was attacked on October 30, 1838, by a large number of Missouri state militia under the command of Colonel Thomas Jennings. The attack, which left seventeen members of the community dead, was marked by acts of vicious cruelty. B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Century One*, 6 vols. (Provo, Utah: Corporation of the President, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1965) 1:480–83.

draw us some petitions to the supream Judges of this state. but they uterly refused we have examined the law and drawn the petitions ourselvs and have obtained abundance of proof to counter act all the testimony [p. 6] that was against us, so that if the supream Judge dose <not grant> us our liberty he has got to act without cause contrary to honor evidence law or justice sheerly to please the devil but we hope better things and trust that before many days God will so order our case that we shall be set at liberty and take up our habitation with the saints we received some letters last evening one from Emma one from Don C. Smith and one from Bishop Partridge all breathing a kind and consoling spirit we were much gratified with there contence we had been a long time withou<t> information and when we read those letters they were to our <souls> ~~soles~~ as the gentle air, <is> refreshing but our joy was mingled with greaf because of the suffering of the poor and much injured saints and we need not say to you that the flood gates of our harts were hoisted and our eyes were a fountain of tears but those who have not been inclosed in the walls of a prison without cause or provocation can have but a little ideah how sweet [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 [siezses] 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= [p. 7] 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

my son peace be unto thy soal thine advirsity and thy afflictions shall be but a small moment and then if thou indure it well God shall exalt the[e] on high thou shalt tryumph over all thy foes thy friends do stand by the[e] and they shall hail the[e] agai<n> with warm harts and friendly hands thou art not yet as Job thy friends do not contend again[st] the[e] neither charge the[e] with transgretion as they did Job and they <who> do ~~the w~~ charge the[e] with transgretion there hope shall be blasted and there prospects shall melt away as the hory frost melteth before the burning rays of the rising sun and also that God hath set to his hand and seal to change the times and season<s> and to blind their minds that they may not understand his marvilos workings that he may prove them also and take them in there own craftiness also because their harts are corrupt and the thing which they are willing to bring upon others and love to have others suffer may come upon them <selvs> to the verry utmost that they may be disappointed also and their hopes may be cut off and not many years hence that they and their pasterity shall be swept from under heaven saith God that not one of them [p. 8] is left to stand by the wall cursed are all those that shall lift up the heal against mine anointed saith the Lord and cry they have sined when they have not sined before me saith the Lord but have done that which was meat in min<e> eyes and which I commanded them but those who cry transgresion do it becaus they are the servants of sin

and are the children of disobedience themselvs and those who swear false against my servants that they might bring them unto bondage and death. Wo unto them because they have offended my little ones they shall be severed from the ordinances of mine house their basket shall not be full their houses and their barnes shall famish and they themselvs shall be dispised by those that flattered them they shall not have right to the priesthood nor their posterity after them from generation to generation it had been better for them that a millstone had been hanged about their necks and they drownd in the depth of the see wo unto all those that discomfort my people and drive and murder and testify against them saith the Lord of host[s] a generation of viper[s] shall not escape the damnation of hell behold mine eye seeth and knoweth all their works and I have in reserve a swift judgement in the season thereof for them all for there is a time appointed ~~for~~ <to> evry man [p. 9] according ~~their~~ <as his> work shall be [D&C 121:7–25]

unit 3) and now beloved Brethren we say unto [you] that in asmuch as ~~good~~ <God> hath said that he would have a tried people that he would purge them as gold now we think that this time he has chosen his own crusible wherein we have been tryed and we think if we get through with any degree of safty and shall have kept the faith that it will be a sign to this generation altogether sufficient to leave them without excuse and we think also that it will be a tryal of our faith equal to that of Abraham and that the ansionts [ancients] will not have were off [whereof] to bost over us in the day of judgment as being called to pass through heavier afflictions that we may hold an even waight in the balances with them but now after having suffered so grate a sacrifis and having pased through so grate a seane of sorrow we trust that a Ram may be caught in the thicket speedily to releave the sons and daughters of Abraham from their ~~grate~~ <great> anxiety and to light up the lamp of salvation upon their countinances that they may hold ~~up~~ <on> now after having gone so far unto everlasting life. Now brethren conserning the places for the location of the saints we cannot counsyl you as we could if we were presant with you and <as> to the ~~thi~~ things that ware writen heartofore we did not concider them any thing verry binding therfore we now say once for all that we think it most proper that the general affairs of the church which are nesisary [p. 10] to be concidered while your humble servant remains in bondage s[h]ould be transacted by a general conferance of the most faithfull and the most respectable of the authorities of the church and a minute of those transactions may be kept and fo[r]warded from time to time to your humble servant and if there should be any corrections by the word ~~of the word~~ of the Lord they shall be f[r]eely transmitted and your humble servant will approve all ~~the~~ things what soever is acceptable unto God if any thing should have been sejusted [suggested] by us or any names mentioned expt by commandment or thus saith the Lord we do not concider it binding. therefore our harts shall not be greaved if diferant arraingsments should be entered into nevertheless we would sejest the propriety of being awar of an aspiring spirit which spirit has

oftentim~~es~~ urged men fo[r]wards to make foul speaches and influaance the church ~~and~~ to reject milder councils and has eventually <been> ~~by~~ the means of bringing much death and sorrow upon the church we would say be awar of pride also for well and truly hath the wise man s[a]id that pride goeth before distruction and a haughty spirit before a fall/⁴ and Again outward appearance is not always a Criterean for us to Judge our fellow man but the lips betray the haughty and over baring imm[a]ginations of the heart, by his words ~~by~~ <and> his deeds let him be scan<e>d [p. 11] flaterly [flattery] also is a deadly poison a frank an[d] open Rebuke provoketh a good man to Emulation and in the hour of trouble he will be your best friend, but on the other hand it will draw out all the corruption of a corrupt heart And lying and the poison of asps shall be under their tongues and they do cause the pure in heart to be cast in to prison because they want them out of thare way, A fanciful and flowely [flowery] and heated immagination be aware of be cause the things of God Are of deep import and time and expeariance and carful and pondurous and solom though[ts] can only find them out. thy mind O Man, if thou wilt lead a soul unto salvation must streach as high as the utmost Heavens, and sear[c]h in to and contemplate the ~~loest~~ <lowest> conside[r]ations of the darkest abyss, and Expand upon the broad considerations of Eternal Expanxe, he must commune with God. how much more dignifide and noble are the thoughts of God, than the vain immaginations of the human heart, none but fools, will triful, with the souls of men, how vane and trifling, have been our spirits, our Conferencs our Coun[c]ils our ~~private~~ Meetings our pri[v]ate as well as public Conversations to low to mean to vulgar [p. 12] to condecending, for the dignifide Characters of the Cald and Chosen of God, according to the purposes of his ~~word~~ will from befo[re] the foundation of the world. to hold the keys of the mistres [mysteries] of those things that have been kept hid from the foundation untill now, ~~for~~ <of> which som have tasted a little and which many of them are to be pored down from heaven upon the heads of babes, yea the weak obscure and dispizable ones of this earth. therefore We beseath of you bretheren that <you bear> ~~bare~~ with those [w]ho do not feel themselves more worthey than yourselves, while we Exort one another, to a reffermation, with one an[d] all. both old and young. teachers and taugh[t] both high and low rich and poor bond and free Male and female. Let honesty and sobriety, and cander and solemnity, and virtue, and pureness, and meekness, and simplisity, Crown our heads in every place, and in fine becum as little Children without mallice guile or ~~high~~

4. Excerpt for this segment of the manuscript to the end of page 13, written by Caleb Baldwin, the entire March 20 letter, with its continuation, is in the handwriting of Alexander McRae.

~~poekrichy~~ Hypokrisy: and now Bretheren after your tribulations if you do these things, and exercise fervent prayer, and faith in the sight of God

Always he shall give unto you knowledge/ [p. 13] by his holy spirit yea by the unspeakable gift of the holy-Ghost that has not been revealed since the world was untill now which our fathers have wated with anxious expectation to be revealed in the last times which their minds were pointed to by the Angels as held in reserve for the fullness of their glory a time to come in the which nothing shall be with held whither there be one god or many gods they shall be manifest all thrones and dominions principalities and powers shall be revealed and set forth upon all who have indured valiently for the gospel of Jesus Christ and also if there be bounds set to the heavens or to the seas or to the dry land or to the sun moon or starrs all the times of their revolutions all their appointed days month[s] and years and all the Days of their days, months and years, and all their glories laws and set times shall be reveald in the days of the dispensation of the fullness of times according to that which was ordained in the midst of the counsyl of the eternal God of all other Gods before this world was that should be reserved unto the finishing and the end thereof ~~when~~ <when> evry man shall enter into his eternal presants and into his imortal rest [D&C 121:26–32]

unit 4) but I beg leave to say unto you Brethren that ignorance supe[r]stition and bigotry placing itself where it ought not is often times in the way of the prosperity of this church [p. 14] like the torant of rain from the mountains that floods the most pure and christle stream with mire and dirt and filthyness and obscures evry thing that was clear before and all hurls along in one general deluge but time tethers <**wethers**> tide and notwithstanding we are roled in for the time being by the mire of the flood the next surge peradventure as time roles on may bring us to the fountain as clear as cristal and as pure as snow while all the filthiness flood wood and rubbish is left is left and purged out by the way.

How long can rowling watters remain impure what power shall stay the heavens as well might man streach forth his puny arm to stop the Missouri River in its dicread cours or to turne it up stream as to hinder the Almighty from pooring down knoledge from <heaven> upon the heads of the Latter day saints [D&C 121:33]

unit 5) what is Boggs or his murderous party but wimbling willows upon the shore to catch the flood wood as well might we argue that watter is not watter because the the mountain torants send down mire and riles the cristle stream altho afterwords ren<d>ers it more pure than before or that fire is not fire because it is of a quenchable nature by pooring on the flood, as to say that our cause is down because runegadoes lyers preasts theavs and murderers who are all alike tenatious of their crafts and creeds have poord [p. 15] down from their spiritual wickednes in high places and from their strong holds of the divi[ne] a flud of dirt and mire and filthiness and vomit upon our heads no God forbid hell may poor forth its rage like the burning lavy of mount vesuvias or of Etna or of the most terrible of the burning mountains and yet shall mormonism stand. watter, fire, truth, and god are all the same truth is

[as] mormonism God is the author of it he is our shield it is by him we received our birth, it was by his voice that we were called to a dispensation of his gospel in the begining of the fullness of times it was by him we received the book of mormon and it was by him that we remain unto this day and by him we shall remain if it shall be for our glory and in his almighty name we are determined to indure tribulation as good soldiers unto the end but brethren we shall continue to offer further reflections in our next epistle you will learn by the time you have read this and if you do not learn it you may learn it that walls and <iron> doors <and screaming hinges> ~~is only calcu~~ and half scard to death Guards and jailors grining like some damned spirit lest an inocent man should make his escape to bring to light the damnible deeds of a murderous mob is cal[c]ulated in its verry nature to make the sole of an honest man feel stronger than the powers of hell. But we must bring our epistle to a close [p. 16]. we send our respects to Fathers, Mothers, wives, and children, Brothers, and Sisters. we hold them in the most sacred rememberance ~~I send this epistle to Emma that she may have the first perusal of it~~ we feel to inquire after Elder Rigdon if he has not forgotten us it has not been signified to us by his ~~pen~~ scrawl. Brother George W Robinson also and Elder Cahoon we remember him but would like to jog his memory a little on the fable of the [bear] and the two friends who mutually agreed to stand by each other and prehaps it would not be amis to mention Unkle John⁵ and various others, a word of consolation and a blessing would not come amiss from any body while we are being so closly whispered by the Bair but we feel to excuse evry body and evry thing. Yea the more readily when we contemplate that we are in the hands of a wors[e] than a Bair for the Bair would not pray upon a dead carcus. Our respects and love and fellowship to all the virtious saints we are your Brethren and fellow sufferers and prisoners of Jesus Christ for the gospels sake and for the hope of glory which is in us. Amen.

Joseph Smith Jr

Hyrum Smith

Lyman Wight

Caleb Baldwin

Alexander McRae. [p. 17]

Continued to the church of Latter-day-saints.

We continue to offer further reflections to Bishop Partridge and to the church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day-saints whom we love with ferveant love and do allways bear them in mind in all our prayers to the throne of God. It

5. In June 1838, Reynolds Cahoon was named first counselor and John Smith president of a stake organized at Adam-ondi-Ahman, Missouri. Joseph Smith Jr., *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2d ed., rev., 7 vols (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1971), 3:38.

still seems to bear heavily in our minds that the church would do well to secure to themselves the contract of the Land which is proposed to them by Mr Isaac Galland. and <to> cultivate the friendly feelings of that gentleman in as much as <he> he shall prove himself to be a man of honor and a friend to humanity. We really think that his letter breaths that kind of spirit if we can judge correctly. and Isaac Van Allen Esqr. the attorney General of Iowa Territory that peradventure such men may be wrought upon by the providence of God to do good unto his people. Governer Lucas also. We sejust [suggest] the ideah of praying fervently for all men who manifest any degree of sympothy for the suffering children of God. ~~we~~ We think that peradventure the United States survayer <of the Iowa Territory> may be of grate benefeit to the church if it be the will of God <to this end> if ritiousness should be manifested as the girdle of our loin<s> It seems to be deeply impressed upon our minds that the saints ought to lay hold of evry door that shall seem to be opened for ~~the saints~~ <unto them> to obtain foot ~~hol~~ hold on the Earth and be a making all the preperations that is within the power of posibles for the terrible storms that are now gethering in the heavens with darkness and gloominess and thick darkness as spoken of by the prophets who [p. 1] cannot be now of a long time lingering. For there seems to be a whispering that the angels <of he<a>ven> who have been intrusted with the council of these matters for the last days have taken council together and among the rest of the general affairs that have to be trasnsacted in there hono[r]able council <they> have taken cognisance of the testimony of those who were murdered at Hawns mills and also those who were martered ~~wi~~ with D. W. Patten. and <else where and> have pased some desisions peradventure in favor of <the saints and>those who were called to suffer without cause. These desisions will be made known in there time and <they will> ~~shal~~ take into concideration all those things that offend. We have a fervant desire that in your general conferances that evry thing should be discused with a grate deal of care and propriety lest you grieve the holy spirit which shall be poured out at all times upon your heads when you are exercised with those principals of ritiousness that are agreeable to the mind of God. and are properly affected one toward another and are carefull by all means to remember those who are in bondage and in heaviness and in deep aflection for your sakes and if there are any among you who aspire after their own aggrandisement and seek their own oppulance while their brethren are groning in poverty and are under sore trials and temptations they cannot be benefeited by the intersesions of the holy spirit which maketh intersesion for us day and knight <with gronings that cannot be uttered>. We ought at all times to be verry carefull that such highmindedness never have place in our harts but condesend to men of low estate [p. 2] and with all long suffering bare the infermities of the weak.

Behold there are many called but few are chosen. And why are they not chosen? Because their hearts are set so much upon the things of this world and aspire to the honors of men that they do not learn this one lesson. that the rights of priesthood are inseparably connected with the powers of heaven and that the powers of heaven cannot be controled nor handled only upon the principals of righteousness that they may be confered upon us it is tru[e] but when we undertake to cover our sins ~~to~~ or to gratify our pride or vaine ambition or to exercise controle or dominion or compulsion upon the souls of the children of men in any degree of unritiousness behold the heavens with draw themselves the spirit of the Lord is grieved and when it has withdrawn amen to the priesthood or the authority of that man behold <ere> he is aware ~~he is aware~~ he is left unto himself to kick against the pricks to persecute the saints and to fight against God. We have learned by sad experiance that it is the nature and disposition of almos<t> all men as soon as they get a little authority as they suppose they will imediatly begin to exercise unritious dominion hence many are called, but few are chosen. No power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood, only by persuasion by long suffering, by gentleness and meekness and by love unfaigned, by kindness [p. 3] by pure kno<w>ledge which shall g<e>rately enlarge the soul without highpocracy and without guile reproving ~~by~~ betimes with ~~shar~~ sharpness when moved upon by the holy ghost and then sho<w>ing forth afterwords an increas of love to ward him whom thou hast reprovod lest he esteem the[e] to be his enemy that he may know that thy faithfulness is stronger than the cords of death thy bowells also being full of charity to ward all men and to the household of faith and virtue garnish thy thoughts unseasingly then shall thy confidence wax strong in the presants of God and the doctrines of the priesthood destell upon thy soul as the dewes from heaven the Holy Ghost shall be thy constan<t> companion and thy septer an unchanging septer of ritiousness and truth and thy dominion shall be an everlasting <dominion> and without compulsory means it shall flow unto thee for eve[r] and ever the ends of the Earth shall inquire after thy name and fools shall have thee in derision and hell shall rage against thee while the pure in heart and the wise and the noble and the virtuous shall seak council and authority and blesings constantly from under thy hand and thy people shall never be turned against <thee> by the testimony of traters and altho<ugh> their influence shall cast the[e] into trouble and into barrs and walls thou shalt be had in honor and but for a small moment and thy voice shall be more terrible in the midst of thine enemies than the fierce⁶ Lion because of thy ritiousness and thy God shall stand by the[e] for ever [p. 4] and ever. If thou art called to pass through tribulation if thou art in perel among false brethren if thou art in perel amongst robbers if thou art in peral by land or by sea if thou art accused with all maner of false accusations if thine enemies fall upon the[e] if they tear the[e] from the society of thy father and mother and brethren and sisters and if with a drawn sword thine enemies tear the[e] from the bosom of thy wife and of thine off springs and thine elder ~~one~~ <son> altho<ugh> but six years

6. "Fierce" written over "fearce."

of age shall cling to thy garmont and shall say my father O⁷ my father why cant you stay with us o my father what are the men agoing to do with you and if then he shall be thrust from the[e] by the sword and thou be draged to prison and thine enemies prowle around the[e] like wolves for blood of the Lamb and if thou shouldest be cast into the pit and or into the hand of murderers and the sentance of death pased upon <thee> if thou be cast into the deep if the bilowing surge conspire against thee if the fearse wind become thine enemy if the heavens gether blackness and all the elements combine to hedge up thy way and above all if the verry jaws of hell shall gap open her mouth wide after thee know thou my son that all these things shall give thee experiance <**and shall be for thy good**> The son of man hath desended below them all art thou gr<e>ater than he <**therefore**> hold on thy way and the priesthood shall remain with thee <**for**> their bounds are set they cannot pass thy days [p. 5] are known and thy years shall not be numbered less therefore fear not what man can do for God shall be with you for ever and ever [D&C 121:34–122:9]

unit 6) <**now Brotheren**> I would sejest for the concideration of the co<n>ferance of its being carefully and wisely understood by the council or conference that our brethren scattered abroad ~~that~~ <who> understand the spirit of the gethering that they fall into the places of refuge and safty that God shall open unto them betwean Kirtland and Far West Those from the East and from the West and from far countries let them fall in some where betwean those <two> bounderies in the most safe and quiet places they can find and let this be the presant understanding untill God shall open a more effectual door for us for further conciderations. And again we <further> sejest for the concideration of the council that there be no organizations of large bodies upon common ~~sto~~ stock princepals <**in property**> or of large companies of firms ~~firm~~ untill the Lord shall signify it in a proper maner as it opens such a dredfull field for the avericious and the indolent and corrupt hearted to pray upon the inocent <**and virtuous and honest**> we have reason to believe that many things were introduced among the saints before God had signified the times and not withstanding the principles and plans may have been good <~~innocent and virtitous~~> yet aspiring men or in other words men who had not the substance of Godliness about them perhaps undertook to handle edge tools children you know are fond of tools while they are not yet able to use them. Time and experiance however is the only safe remedy against such ~~people~~ evils there are many teachers but perhaps not many fathers there are times coming when God will signify many things which are expediant [p. 6] for the well being of the saints but the times have not yet come but will come as fast as there can be found place and reception for them

7. Capital “O” written over small “o.”

And again we would ~~sejest~~ <suggest> for your consideration the propriety of all the saints gethering up a knoledge of all the facts and sufferings and abuses put upon them by the people of this state and also of all the property and amount of damages which they have sustained both of character <&> personal injuries as well as real property and also the names of all persons that have had a hand in their oppressions as far as they can get hold of them and find them out. And perhaps a committe can be appointed to find out these things and to take statements and affidafeits and also to gether up the libilous publications that are a float and all that are in the magazines and in the Insi-clopedias and all the libillious histories that are published and that are writing and by whom and present the whole concatination of diabolicality rascality and nefarious and murderous impositions that have been practiced upon this people that we may not only publish to all the world but present them to the heads of the government in all there dark <and hellish> hugh as the last effort which is injoined on us by our heavenly father before we can fully and completely claim that promise which ~~she~~ shall call him forth from his hiding place and also that the whole nation may be left without excuse before he can ~~let fall that which the~~ send forth the power of his mighty arme it is an imperios duty that [p. 7] we owe to God to angels with whom we shall be braught to stand and also to ourselves to our wives and our children who have been made to bow down with greaf sorrow and care under the most damning hand of murder tyronny and appression supported and urged on and upheld by the influance of that spirit which hath so strongly rivited the creeds of the fathers who have inhereted lies upon ~~their~~ <the harts of the> children and filled the world with confusion and has been growing stronger and stronger and is now the verry main spring of all corruption <~~the corrup-tion~~ in <the> world.> and the whole Earth grones under the wait of its iniquity. It is an iron yok it is a strong band they are the verry hand cuffs and chains and shackles and <fettters> of hell therefore it is an imperious duty that we owe not only to our own wives and children but to the widdow and fatherless whose husbands and fathers have been murdered under its iron hand which dark and blackning deeds are enough to make hell itse<l>f shud-der and to stand aghas[t] and pail and the hands of the verry devile ~~palsy~~ <tremble> and palsy and also it is an imperious duty that we owe to all the rising generation and to all the pure in heart which there are many yet on the Earth among all sects parties and denominations who are blinded by the suttle craftiness of men where by they ly in wait to decieve and only kept from the truth because they know not where to find it therefore that we should waist and ware out our lives in bringing to light all the hidden things of darkness where in we kno<w> them and they are truly manifest from heaven. These should then be [p. 8] attended to with greate earnestness Let no man count them as small things for there is much which lieth in futurity petaining to the saints which depends upon ~~these~~ things you know brethren that a verry large ship is benefeited verry much by a verry small helm in the time of a storne by being kept work ways with the wind and the waves therefore dearly beloved brethren let us chearfully do all things that layeth in our power and then may we stand still with the utmost asurance to see the salvation of God and for his arm to be revealed. [D&C 123:1–17]

unit 7) And again I would further sejest the impropriety of the organization of bands or companies by covenant or oaths by penalties or secrecies but let the time past of our experiance and suferings by the wickedness of Doctor Avard

suffise and let our covenant be that of the everlasting covenant as is contained in the Holy writ. and the things that God hath revealed unto us. Pure friendship always becomes weakened the verry moment you undertake to make it stronger by penal oaths and secrecy. Your humble servant or servants intend from hence forth to disap<p>robate ev<e>ry thing that is not in accordance with the fullness of the gospel of Jesus Christ and is not of a bold and frank and an upright nature they will not hold their peace as in times past when they see iniquity begining to rear its head for fear of traitors or the consequences that shall flow by reprovng those who creap in unawairs that they may get something to destroy the flock we believe that the experience of the saints in times past has been sufficient that they will from henceforth be always ready to obey the truth without having mens persons in adm= [p. 9] ration because of advantage it is expediant that we should be awair of such things. and we ought always to be awair of those prejudices which sometimes so strongly presented themselves and are so congenial to human nature against our neighbors friends and bretheren of the world who choose to differ with us in opinion and in matters of faith. Our religeon is betwean us and our God their religeon is betwean them and their God there is a tie ~~which belongs~~ from God that should be exercised to wards those of our faith who walk uprightly which is peculiar to itself but it is without prejudice but gives scope to the mind which inables us to conduct ourselves with grater liberality to word all others <that are not of our faith> than what they exercise to wards one another these principal[s] approximate nearer to the mind of God because it is like God or God like There is a principal also which we are bound to be exercised with that is in common with all men such as governments and laws and regulations in the civil conserns of life this principal garentees to all parties sects and demominations and clases of religeon equal ~~and~~ ~~[-]~~ coherent [and] indefeasible rights they are things that pertain to this life therefore all are alike interested they make our responceibilities <things> one toward another in matters of corruptable <things> while the former principals do not distroy the latter but bind us stronger and make our responceibilities not only one to another but unto God also hence we say that the constitution of the Unit[ed] States is a glorious standard it is founded [in] the wisdom of God it is a heavenly banner it is to all those who are priviledged with the sweats of its liberty like the cooling shades and refresh= [p. 10] ing watters of a greate rock in a thirsty and a weary land it is like a gr<e>ate tree under whose branches men from evry clime can be shielded from the burning raies of an inclemant sun. We bretheren are deprived of the protection of this glorious principal by the cruelty of the cruele by those who only look for the time being for pasterage like the beasts <of the field only to fill them<selves>> and forget that the mormons as well as the pr[e]sbitareans and those of evry other class and discription have equal rights to ~~pluck~~

<partake of> the fruit of the great tree of our national liberty but notwithstanding we see what we see and we feel what [we] feel and know what we know yet that fruit is no les presious and delisious to our taist we cannot be weaned from the milk nether can we be drawn from the breast neither will we deny our relegeon because of the hand of oppresion but we will hold on untill death we say that God is true that the constitution of the united States is [true]⁸ that the Bible is true that the book of [mor]m[on] is true that the book of covenants [is] tru[e] that Christ is true that the ministering [angels sen]t forth from God are true and [that we know] that we have an house not made [with hands] eternal in the heavens, whose [builder and m]aker is God a consolation [which our opp]resers cannot feel when for[tune, or fate, sh]all lay its iron hand on them [as it has on us] now we ask what is man [remember breth]ren that time and chance hape[neth to all men] we shall continue our reflect[ions in our nex]t We subscribe ourselves your sin[cere friends and] bretherin in the bonds of the ever= [p. 11] lasting gospel prisoners of Jesus Christ for the sake of the gospel and the saints. we pronounce the blesing of heaven upon the heads of the [✠] the saints who seek to serve God with an undevid[ed] heart <in the name of Jesus Christ> Amen.

Joseph Smith Jr,
 Hyrum Smith
 Lyman Wight
 Caleb Baldwin
 Alexander McRae.
 Mrs Emma Smith
 Quincy Ill

8. A portion of page 11 has disintegrated. The restoration of the missing text comes from an extant copy of the second part (continuation) of the letter. The copy was written by Alexander McRae and signed by the five occupants of the jail.