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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). 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 bee 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'] harts [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 speaches,” flattery, or any conduct that would diminish the soul of man, for a soul “unto salvation must streach 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 “dignifide Characters of the Cald and 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 infermities 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 greater 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,” 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, 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. 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 1854 from the 1840s Manuscript History of the Church, which had quoted the original 1839 letter as written by Joseph Smith. The full text of these letters has been published in the *History of the Church* from 1905 to the present.

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.
Revelations in Context: Letter from Liberty Jail

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


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, 1866. 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.

Joseph Smith’s March 20, 1839, Letter

Liberty Jail Clay County Mo
March 20th 1839.

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 excelancy the
Governer Lilburn W. Boggs in company with his fellow prisoners and
beloved Brethren Caleb Baldwin Lymon Wight Hyram 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 patience 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
night as indefatigable as the devil is in tempting and laying snares for the
people of God. Therefore dearly and beloved Brethren we are the more ready
and willing to lay claim to your fellowship and love. For our curc= [p. 1]
stances are calculated to awaken our spirits to a sacred rememberance 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 quatitude 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 compelled
to hear nothing but blasphemos oaths and witness a scen of blasphemy and
drunkeness and hypocrisy and debaucheries of evry description. And again
the cries of orphans and widdows would <not> have asended up to God. the
blood of inoent 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

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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 sorrowfull 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 forest that a man should be mangled for sport women be violated <robed> of all that they have their last morsel for subsistence and then be violated to gratify the hell[i]sh desires of the mob and finally left to perish with their helpless off[fl]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 peace for no other purpose than to gratify their spleen against the religon of god. They practise <these> things upon the saints who have done them no rong who are innocent and virtuous who loved the Lord their god and were willing to forsak 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 the eternnal heavens the rongs of thy people and of thy servants [p. 3] and thine ear be penetrated with their c[fl]yes yea O Lord how long shall they suffer these rongs and unlawfull oppressions before thine hart shall be softened towards them and thy bowsel be moved with compassion to-words them. O Lord God almity 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 bowsels 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 saints oh our God and thy servants will rejoyce in thy name for ever.

[D&C 121:3-6]

unit 2) Dearly and beloved Brethr[en] we see that peralas 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 turn <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 grievious yoak which is put upon us. We know that God will have our oppressors in derision that he hef <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, they have done us much harm <from> the begining they have of late acknowledged that the law was misconstrewed and tantalised 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 innocence will eventually come out triumphant 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 very hard our auger handles gave out and hindered us longer than we expected we applied to a friend and a very slight uncautious act gave rise to some suspiion 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 imprudence 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 hauns mill,³ and the extermating 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 tried 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 utterly refused we have examined the law and drawn the petitions oursevls 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 shearily 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 habita- tion 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 without<tt> information and when we read those letters they were to our <souls> sees as the gentle air, <is> refreshing but our joy was mingled with grief 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 provication can have but a little ideah how sweat [sweet] the voice of a friend is one token of friendship from any sorce whatever a wakens and calles into action evry sympathetick feeling it brings up in an instant evry thing that is pased it sesses [siez] the presant with a vivacity of lightning it grasps after the future with the fea<rr>ness of a tiger it retrogrades 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 soul 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 triumph over all thy foes thy friends do stand by the[e] and they shall hail the[e] again<rr> 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 transgression as they did Job and they <who> do these charge the[e] with transgression there hope shall be blasted and there prospects shall melt away as the hory frost melth 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 <selves> 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 transgression do it becaus they are the servants of sin
and are the children of disobedience themselves 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 themselves shall be disposed 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 drowned 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 thereoff for them all for there is a time appointed for <to> evry man [p. 9] according their <as his> work shall be [D&C 12:7–25]

unit 3) and now beloved Brethren we say unto [you] that inasmuch 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 cruuble wherein we have been byred 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 alltogether sufficient to leave them without excuse and we think also that it will be a troyal of our faith equal to that of Abraham and that the ansiynts [ancients] will not have were off [whereo] to bost over us in the day of judgment as being called to pass through heavier afflications that we may hold an even weight in the balances with them but now after having suffered so grate a sacrificis 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 concerning 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 written heartofore we did not consider 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 nessisary [p. 10] to be considered 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 exty by commandment or thus saith the Lord we do not consider it binding, therefore our harts shall not be greaved if diferant arraignmentes should be entered into nevertheless we would sejest the propriety of being awar of an aspiring spirit which spirit has
oftentimes urged men to reject milder councils and has eventually by the means of bringing much death and sorrow upon the church we would say be aware of pride also for well and truly hath the wise man that pride goeth before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall and Again outward appearance is not always a Criterian for us to Judge our fellow man but the lips betray the haughty and over baring imaginations of the heart, by his words his deeds let him be scanned flattery also is a deadly poison a frank and open Rebucko 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 and heated imagination be aware of be cause the things of God Are of deep import and time and exparience and carful and ponderous and solom though 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 see in to and contemplate the consideration of the darkest abyss, and Expand upon the broad considerations of Eternal Expanse, he must commune with God. how much more dignifide and noble are the thoughts of God, than the vain imaginations of the human heart, none but fools, will trifil, with the souls of men, how vane and trifling, have been our spirits, our Conferences our Councils our private Meetings our pribate as well as public Conversations to low to mean to vulgar to condescending, for the dignifide Characters of the Caled and Chosen of God, according to the purposes of his word will from befo 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 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 dispensable ones of this earth. therefore We beseech of you bretheren that bear with those who do not feel themselves more worthy than yourselves, while we Exort one another, to a reffermation, with one another all. both old and young. teachers and taught both high and low rich and poor bond and free Male and female. Let honesty and sobriety, and candor and solemnity, and virtue, and pureness, and meekness, and simplicity, Crown our heads in every place, and in fine becum as little Children without mallice guile or

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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.
Hypokrisy: and now Brethren 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
unspakable 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 induced 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 stars 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 ordaind in the midst of the councyl of the eternal God of all other Gods
before this world was that should be reserved unto the finishing and the end
thereoff when <when> evry man shall enter into his eternal presants and into
his immortal 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 pros-
perity 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 gen-
eral 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 peradven-
ture 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 heav-
ens 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 knoleedge 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 afterwards 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 liyrs preasts theavs and murdererers
who are all alike tenacious 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 terible of the burning mountains and yet
shall mormonism stand. watter, fire, truth, and god are all the same truth is
Joseph Smith’s March 20, 1839, Letter

[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 beginning 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 ached and half scar to death Guards and jailors grining like some damned spirit lest an inoent man should make his escape to bring to light the damnable 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 remembrance I send this epistle to Emma that she may have the first perusal of it we feel to inquiere 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 perhaps it would not be amiss to mention Unkle John 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 virtuous 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 serveant love and do allways bear them in mind in all our prayers to the throne of God. It

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 wraught upon by the providence of God to do good unto his people. Governor Lucas also. We sejust [suggest] the ideah of praying fervently for all men who manifest any degree of sympathy for the suffering children of God. We We think that peradventure the United States surveyer <of the Iowa Territory> may be of grate benefit to the church if it be the will of God <to this end> if riotousness should be manifested as the girdle of our loins<>. It seems to be deeply impressed upon our minds that the saints ought to lay hold of every door that shall seem to be opened for the saints <unto them> to obtain foot hold on the Earth and be a making all the preparations that is within the power of posibles for the terrible storms that are now gathering 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 trasnacted 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 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> shall take into consideration 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 riotousness that are agreeable to the mind of God. and are properly affected one toward another and are carefull by all means to remem-ver 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 opplance while their brethren are groining in poverty and are under sore trials and temptations they cannot be benefiteed 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 condescend 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 true[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 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 almost all men as soon as they get a little authority as they suppose they will immedately 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 knowledge which shall ratly enlarge the soul without highpocracy and without guile reproving by betimes with sharpness when moved upon by the holy ghost and then showing forth afterwards an increas of love to ward him whom thou hast reproved 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 unsaeingly then shall thy confidence wax strong in the presents of God and the doctrines of the priesthood destell upon thy soul as the dews from heaven the Holy Ghost shall be thy constant companion and thy septer an unchangeing septer of ritiousness and truth and thy dominion shall be an everlastung <dominion> and without compulsory means it shall flow unto thee for ever 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 blessings constantly from under thy hand and thy people shall never be turned against thee by the testimony of traters and altho 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 fierce 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 brethern if thou art in perel amongst robbers if thou art in perel 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 altho but six years

6. "Fierce" written over "fearce."
of age shall cling to thy garment and shall say my father O7 my father why cant you stay with us o my father what are the men going to do with you and if then he shall be thrust from the[e] by the sword and thou be dragged to prison and thine enemies prowl 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 murdere[r]s 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 verrv jaws of hell shall gap open her mouth wide after thee know thou my son that all these things shall give thee experience <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 gathering that they fall into the places of refuge and saftly 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 stock princepals <in property> or of large companies of firms untill the Lord shall signify it in a proper maner as it opens such a dreadfull field for the avercious and the indolent and corrupt hearted to pray upon the innocent <and virtious 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 <inncents and virtuous> 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 evils there are many teachers but perhaps not many fathers there are times coming when God will signify many things which are expedeant [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 suggest for your consideration the propriety of all the saints gathering up a knowledge 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 committee can be appointed to find out these things and to take statements and affidavits and also to gather up the libellous publications that are afloat and all that are in the magazines and in the Encyclopedia and all the libellous histories that are published and that are writing and by whom and present the whole concatenation of diabolically 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 hug as the last effort which is enjoined on us by our heavenly father before we can fully and completely claim that promise which 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 arm is an imperious duty that [p. 7] we owe to God to angels with whom we shall be brought to stand and also to ourselves to our wives and our children who have been made to bow down with great sorrow and care under the most damning hand of murder tyranny and oppression supported and urged on and upheld by the influence of that spirit which hath so strongly riveted the creeds of the fathers who have inherited lies upon their hearts of the children and filled the world with confusion and has been growing stronger and stronger and is now the very main spring of all corruption and the whole Earth groans under the wait of its iniquity. It is an iron yoke it is a strong band they are the very hand cuffs and chains and shackles and fetters of hell therefore it is an imperious duty that we owe not only to our own wives and children but to the widows and fatherless whose husbands and fathers have been murdered under its iron hand which dark and blackning deeds are enough to make hell itself shudder and to stand aghast and pail and the hands of the very devil palsy 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 subtle craftiness of men where by they ly in wait to deceive and only kept from the truth because they know not where to find it therefore that we should wait and dare out our lives in bringing to light all the hidden things of darkness where in we know them and they are truly manifest from heaven. These should then be [p. 8] attended to with great earnestness Let no man count them as small things for there is much which lieth in futurity pertaining to the saints which depends upon these things you know brethren that a very large ship is benefited very much by a very small helm in the time of a storme by being kept to one way with the wind and the waves therefore dearly beloved brethren let us cheerfully do all things that layeth in our power and then may we stand still with the utmost assurance 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 experience and sufferings 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 very moment you undertake to make it stronger by penal oaths and secrecy. Your humble servant or servants intend from hence forth to disabuse every 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 beginning to rear its head for fear of traitors or the consequences that shall flow by reprobating those who creep in unawares 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 admittance because of advantage it is expedient 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 brethren of the world who choose to differ with us in opinion and in matters of faith. Our religeon is between us and our God their religeon is between 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 enables 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 concern of life this principal guarantees to all parties sects and denominations and classes of religeon equal and coherent [and] indefeasible rights they are things that pertain to this life therefore all are alike interested they make our responsibilities one toward another in matters of corruptable things while the former principals do not destroy the latter but bind us stronger and make our responsibilities 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 privileged with the sweats of its liberty like the cooling shades and refreshment of wate of a greate rock in a thirsty and a weary land it is like a green tree under whose branches men from evry clime can be shielded from the burning rays of an inclemant sun. We brethren are deprived of the protection of this glorious principal by the cruelty of the cruel by those who only look for the time being for pasterage like the beasts of the field only to fill them> and forget that the mormons as well as the pr[e]bitareans and those of evry other class and discription have equal rights to pluck
joseph
joseph smith
joseph smith jr.
hyrum smith
lyman wight
caleb baldwin
alexander mcrae
mrs emma smith
quincy iii

<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 precious and delious 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 undevided[ed] heart <in the name of Jesus Christ> Amen.

joseph smith jr.
hyrum smith
lyman wight
caleb baldwin
alexander mcrae.
mrs emma smith
quincy iii

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.