

1833: Expulsion from Zion Grant Underwood

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This chapter focuses on three moments in 1833 that make this year a milestone in the Prophet's life and in Church history. First we will go to February of 1833 and examine the Word of Wisdom, a revelation that has been as influential as any in this dispensation. We will next briefly consider the commencement of the building of the first temple. Then we will conclude with a traumatic moment, the expulsion from Zion, or Jackson County, Missouri.

The Word of Wisdom

Regarding the historical background of the Word of Wisdom, most of us have heard the Brigham Young account of Emma Smith being tired of chewing-tobacco stains, and that was indeed the genesis of the Word of Wisdom. I would like to enrich that background a little bit. Much less known is that the temperance movement—the movement to curb the excessive consumption of alcohol—and health reform in general were strong contributing factors. Just days before the first Latter-day Saint missionaries arrived in Ohio, the Kirtland Temperance Society was founded, and among its members were individuals with names like Morley and Lyman, who would become Latter-day Saints. Just weeks before what we know as the Word of Wisdom was received, the Kirtland Temperance Society succeeded in shutting down the Kirtland distillery. Add to that another interesting element: Joseph Smith subscribed to a non-Mormon periodical known as the American Revivalist and Rochester Observer, which had regular coverage about temperance, particularly about the relationship between temperance and the cholera epidemic that was under way. All of this then raises a question for us: Can we not broaden the background of the Word of Wisdom to include the temperance and health reform sentiment that was abroad in the land? [1]

What we have today as the first three verses of section 89 was initially an introductory statement, and it

was not until the 1870s that Elder Orson Pratt, on assignment from the First Presidency, put that beginning paragraph into verse form. The Prophet wrote the first verses as an introduction. Verse 4 then talks about the “evils and designs which do and will exist in the hearts of conspiring men.” One of the fascinating aspects of historical investigation is that we come to understand something about how they read those words and understood them. Hyrum Smith, for instance, targets the fact that there were enemy forces involved in producing many of these goods, and one could not be confident that they would not be adulterated or poisoned or contaminated in some way. And that is what many early Saints saw behind the phrase the “evils and designs which do and will exist in the hearts of conspiring men.”

As we move forward through the revelation, verses 5 and 6 say, “Inasmuch as any man drinketh wine or strong drink among you, behold it is not good, neither meet in the sight of your Father, only in assembling yourselves together to offer up your sacraments before him. And, behold, this should be wine, yea, pure wine of the grape of the vine, of your own make.” From the beginning, the Latter-day Saints had no trouble with wine as part of the sacrament. For dietary consumption at a meal, it was not acceptable, but for use in the sacrament it was. Indeed, many early journals give a glimpse of its common use. John Murdock, an ordinary elder, included a rather common expression in his diary; he said, “By my advice the sisters gathered currants and made wine for our communion.” [2] Even at this very early period, the Saints still used some of the terminology from their former faiths. They had not yet restricted themselves to the word sacrament; sometimes they would use the word communion or the phrase “Lord’s Supper,” and occasionally the word Eucharist. Elizabeth Ann Whitney wrote, “We had a very fine orchard and garden, all planned and arranged according to our own taste and skill, among other fruits we had a very great quantity of the red currants, from which we had ourselves manufactured wine of a very superior flavor and quality, although purely domestic, or homemade, this wine we had appropriated for the sacrament, and was the first wine used by our people for that purpose.” [3]

Years later Brigham Young said, “I anticipate the day

when we can have the privilege of using, at our sacraments pure wine, produced within our borders. I do not know that it would injure us to drink wine of our own make, although we would be better without it than to drink it to excess.” [4] True to Brother Brigham’s comment, Latter-day Saints attempted where they could and when they could to grow grapes and produce wine primarily for use in the sacrament. There was even the “Dixie Wine Mission” in southern Utah throughout the latter half of the 1800s. The First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve did not stop using wine in their weekly temple sacrament meetings until 1906.

What did the term pure wine mean? When Newel and Polly Knight visited Joseph Smith in the summer of 1830 and the occasion to partake the sacrament arose, the revelation we know as section 27 directed them, “Wherefore, a commandment I give unto you, that you shall not purchase wine neither strong drink of your enemies; wherefore, you shall partake of none except it is made new among you” (vv. 3–4). The Saints were focusing on contamination. They made it themselves so they could be sure that it did not have improper ingredients.

For example, Bishop Newel K. Whitney wrote in his account book, “Received of the church for wine, \$13.12. The church had two quarts wine, fourth proof.” [5] Now, this purchase was consistent with what was acceptable then. Bishop Whitney purchased wine and noted the price, quantity, and proof. The word proof means twice the percentage of alcohol; thus at fourth proof, this wine had only 2 percent alcohol, a very mild drink. Back then, it was not possible to prevent fermentation before Louis Pasteur devised his system and they had the possibility of pasteurized grape juice.

Let’s consider the historical use of the term sacrament. It was not uncommon in that day to consider marriage a sacrament, and part of the marriage custom of the time was to toast with a cup of wine. Indeed, the Saints partook of this custom, as did Joseph Smith. We have an account from his diary when he performed a wedding in January 1836 and afterward wrote, “We then partook of some refreshments, and our hearts were made glad with the fruit of the vine. This is according to the pattern set by our Savior Himself, and we feel disposed to patronize all the institutions of heaven.” [6]

The Savior himself graced the marriage in Cana of Galilee and turned the water into wine.

So when did water become part of the sacrament? People assume that the early members used water from the time section 27 was revealed onward. Not at all. The revelation merely allows but does not command the use of a beverage other than wine. Where wine had historically been required, the Lord now said it did not matter what they used, but water and wine were both used for many years. However, when the Saints arrived in the Great Basin and the Dixie wine mission could not service more than the local, regional population, water became more common for use in the sacrament.

The Word of Wisdom says, “Inasmuch as any man drinketh wine or strong drink among you, behold it is not good” (Doctrine and Covenants 89:5). At that point there were different types of alcoholic drinks: wine, often with a higher alcoholic content than the liquid that Bishop Whitney purchased; hard cider, a little less alcoholic; and beer, with the lowest alcohol of all (not like today’s beers). At that time, strong drinks were in a category by themselves. They were distilled liquors—whiskey, rum, gin, and brandy. Most of them had 40 percent or more alcohol content.

The Word of Wisdom mentions that strong drinks were for washing the body. The Saints did not have denatured alcohol; we use denatured alcohol today to clean wounds or to get an especially good cleanse. We read of a meeting in 1836 in which Oliver Cowdery records, “Met in the evening with bro. Joseph Smith, jr. at his house, in company with bro. John Corrill, and after pure water was prepared, called upon the Lord and proceeded to wash each other’s bodies, and bathe the same with whiskey, perfumed with cinnamon. This we did that we might be clean before the Lord for the Sabbath, confessing our sins and covenanting to be faithful to God. While performing this washing unto the Lord with solemnity, our minds were filled with many reflections upon the propriety of the same, and how the priests anciently used to wash always before ministering before the Lord.” [7] Because they did not have denatured alcohol, they added cinnamon to change the smell. When you understand the context, this was a beautiful and spiritual experience and shows that the

Saints used what was available to them at that time.

The Word of Wisdom next mentions the term hot drinks. Hyrum Smith made the famous statement some years later, “And again, ‘hot drinks are not for the body, or belly;’ there are many who wonder what this can mean; whether it refers to tea, or coffee, or not. I say it does refer to tea, and coffee.” [8] That statement from the Times and Seasons became the official interpretation of verse 9. Of course, there was then widespread agreement that drinks taken at an elevated temperature were harmful. That was a common idea from the time. And of growing concern to health reformers was the fact that tea and coffee were not beneficial to the body. Tea and coffee had not been a prominent topic in temperance campaigns because the American drink of choice at this time was whiskey, which was the most readily available. When the temperance people got Congress to remove the tariff on tea and coffee, it could compete with whiskey, a distilled liquor. An objective of the temperance movement was to remove whiskey from society, so they proposed tea and coffee as a milder replacement. Later, with passage of time, people began to see problems with tea and coffee as well. [9]

The Word of Wisdom talks about the benefit of herbs, saying, “All wholesome herbs God hath ordained for the constitution, nature, and use of man” (Doctrine and Covenants 89:10). What did the term herbs mean? Back then it included more than the grasses and numerous plants used for culinary purposes. Herbs were also widely used medicinally, and we have a number of “herb doctors” in the Church, including Dr. Frederick G. Williams and Dr. Willard Richards. They were not medical doctors but botanic physicians. This same type of practice is found in the Book of Mormon in which a brief passage mentions “the excellent qualities of the many plants and roots which God had prepared to remove the cause of diseases, to which men were subject by the nature of the climate” (Alma 46:40). The early Saints were very in tune with the idea of using herbs.

What about animal flesh and its consumption? The Word of Wisdom affirms it, as had several other revelations previously. “Flesh also of beasts and of the fowls of the air, I, the Lord, have ordained for the use of man with thanksgiving; nevertheless they are to be used

sparingly” (Doctrine and Covenants 89:12). Section 49 earlier said, “Whoso forbiddeth to abstain from meats, that man should not eat the same, is not ordained of God” (v. 18). And a few months later, another revelation said, “All things which come of the earth . . . are made for the benefit and the use of man, both to please the eye and to gladden the heart; yea, for food and for raiment, for taste and for smell, to strengthen the body and to enliven the soul. And it pleaseth God that he hath given all these things unto man; for unto this end were they made to be used, with judgment, not to excess” (Doctrine and Covenants 59:18–20).

The Word of Wisdom cautions against excessive use of meat: “Nevertheless, they are to be used sparingly” (Doctrine and Covenants 89:12). Putting this idea into historical context, what do we know about meat consumption in the 1830s? One study said the early American diet had the highest percent of meat consumption in the world: the average American probably consumed a full pound of meat every day. [10] Therefore, maybe “sparingly” means to go from a pound to a half or a quarter or even to use it occasionally. The phrase “And it is pleasing unto me that they should not be used, only in times of winter, or of cold, or famine” reflected the conventional realities of the day, given the technologies of preservation available at the time (v. 13). This practice would have been seen as wisdom by all who read it.

What about the use of grains? The Word of Wisdom says, “All grain is ordained for the use of man and of beasts, to be the staff of life” (Doctrine and Covenants 89:14). Latter-day Saints, particularly in the twentieth century, took a fancy to wheat. There was a period in the last half century where wheat consumption was especially common in Latter-day Saint households.

Also among the grains, the revelation talks about barley and its uses for mild drinks. Now, understand something about liquid consumption at the time. We have wonderful, clean, and pure water today, but many have served missions around the world and know that the Church advises the missionaries not to drink the water but to drink a soft drink instead. Americans in the 1830s did not drink much water. That was not the wisdom or the practice in Joseph Smith’s day. Given that fact, what were the alternatives? One alternative was a

mildly alcoholic beverage, and one of the best candidates was beer, which at the time had a low alcoholic content. This may have been envisioned in the phrase “mild drinks” (v. 17). For instance, Joseph Smith in his diary in March 1843 had his clerk record, “I told Theodore Turley that I had no objection to his building a brewery.” [11] When you think of how different beer was back then and the mild content and what the alternatives were, it was actually a service for Brother Turley to build his brewery.

What do we make of this? Well, it took time for such practices as the Word of Wisdom to catch on. President Joseph F. Smith made a statement that the Word of Wisdom “was not given, at that time, by way of commandment or restraint but by revelation.” [12] It was not really until the 1920s and 1930s that the Word of Wisdom was formalized and spelled out. [13] One can canvass the nineteenth century and find many great Saints who had a broader interpretation of what the Word of Wisdom was about compared to what we know it as today.

The Kirtland Temple

The Lord initially instructed the Saints in December 1832 to build a house to his name in that great revelation that we know as section 88. The revelation includes a command to institute a school of the prophets. The house of the Lord in Kirtland was not intended to be a temple like those we have today. It was essentially a meetinghouse and a schoolhouse. But months went by after the command to build the temple, and not a lot happened. However, beginning in May of 1833, there was some movement; a committee was appointed to gather funds. By early June they had prepared a circular, introducing themselves to the Saints as the individuals in charge of collecting funds. In this circular they wrote, “Unless we fulfill this command, viz.: establish an house, and prepare all things necessary whereby the Elders may gather into a school, called the School of the Prophets, and receive that instruction which the Lord designs they should receive, we may all despair of obtaining the great blessing that God has promised to the faithful of the Church of Christ.” [14] Shortly thereafter, Joseph received section 95, in which the Saints were chastened for having essentially let six months go by

without doing much. The revelation can also be seen as a reinforcer of this groundswell of interest and activity.

Let us now consider the endowment as the early Saints understood it. The Lord says, “I gave unto you a commandment that you should build a house”—six months ago I gave you that commandment—“in the which house I design to endow those whom I have chosen with power from on high; for this is the promise of the Father unto you; therefore I command you to tarry, even as mine apostles at Jerusalem” (vv. 8–9). In the last chapter in Luke, the Lord tells the Apostles to tarry in Jerusalem until they are endowed with power from on high (see Luke 24:49). Luke, who is generally considered the author of Acts, continues the story at the beginning of Acts, indicating that the Apostles who had tarried in Jerusalem were gathered together to celebrate Pentecost. On that occasion there was a great outpouring of the Spirit that enabled the Apostles to powerfully preach the gospel and that included a dramatic display of the gift of tongues (see Acts 2:4).

This echo from Luke helps us understand what the endowment was for the earliest Saints. It was a reflection of that Pentecostal moment, of that special empowerment for the ministry. Many have discerned in the book of Acts a narrative pattern. An initial Pentecostal outpouring and empowerment is followed in subsequent chapters by the description of missionaries going out empowered with the Spirit and generating remarkable conversions. Thus early Latter-day Saints heard in the word endowment a promise of spiritual power, rather than a separate ceremony or a new sacred liturgy—not at this time, at least. The endowment was a spiritual empowerment enabling them to go out and preach.

That very vision is captured in the words of the house’s dedicatory prayer. The Prophet prays, “Let the anointing of thy ministers be sealed upon them with power from on high. Let it be fulfilled upon them, as upon those on the day of Pentecost; let the gift of tongues be poured out upon thy people, even cloven tongues as of fire, and the interpretation thereof. And let thy house be filled, as with a rushing mighty wind, with thy glory” (Doctrine and Covenants 109:35–37)—again a clear echo of Acts chapter 2 and its vision of the endowment as an empowering outpouring of the Spirit.

While the early Saints were in Missouri, the Prophet had Fredrick G. Williams draw up plans for what the Zion temple was to look like, and they sent them to Missouri. Interestingly, the temples in Missouri and Kirtland were basically the same design. The temple in Missouri was to be a bit larger, but the plans that have survived from the temple in Zion look to us today very much like plans for the Kirtland Temple. The irony here is that although none of the plans of the Kirtland Temple have survived, it was actually built; whereas the plans for the first temple in Zion have survived, but it never was built. Now, section 95 mentions a revealed “pattern” for the temple. This the First Presidency saw in vision, but we also know that what they saw was apparently a general pattern for how the temple was to be built. Architectural historians have found that minor construction details such as the molding were worked out by individual craftsman using commonly available carpentry manuals and were not laid out in the plans developed by Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, and Frederick G. Williams. The First Presidency defined the major elements of the Kirtland Temple design, but individual builders worked out structural and ornamental details to the best of their abilities. That is consistent with the Prophet’s declaration, “I teach them correct principles, and they govern themselves.” [15] In other words, I give the general guiding vision and allow my fellow servants to work out the details.

Expulsion from Zion

By the summer of 1833, there were more Saints in Zion than in northeastern Ohio. Still the whole Church was barely the size of a typical stake today. There were over a thousand Saints in Missouri, in the Jackson County area, having gathered to Zion. What were some of the tensions that led to difficulties? Why did this great dream unravel in the latter half of 1833? Let’s look first at internal factors and then comment briefly on external factors.

Internally, there had been a history of tensions between Church leaders in Zion and in Kirtland. Today’s Church leaders do not get very vigorous in their public exchanges, but these early brethren were young and inexperienced. Joseph was in his late twenties. Many of

the other Church leaders were in their early thirties. Petty arguments had occurred off and on from the fall of 1831 to the summer of 1833. Surviving letters show they were trying to work through their disagreements, but a lack of full harmony among the leadership seemed to persist. This gets reflected in a January 1833 letter, in fact the letter that accompanied the sending to Missouri of that great revelation known as the “Olive Leaf” (section 88). Joseph writes, “If Zion will not purify herself, so as to be approved of in all things, in His sight, He will seek another people.” He then tells the leaders, “Seek to purify yourselves, and also all the inhabitants of Zion, lest the Lord’s anger be kindled to fierceness. Repent, repent, is the voice of God to Zion; and strange as it may appear, yet it is true, mankind will persist in self-justification until all their iniquity is exposed, and their character past being redeemed, and that which is treasured up in their hearts be exposed to the gaze of mankind. I say to you (and what I say to you I say to all,) hear the warning voice of God, lest Zion fall, and the Lord swear in His wrath the inhabitants of Zion shall not enter into His rest. . . . This from your brother who trembles for Zion, and for the wrath of heaven, which awaits her if she repent not.” [16]

That was said in January—six months before trouble broke out in Jackson County—and that was not the only warning. Joseph had pleaded repeatedly with the leadership to reconcile themselves and to promote harmony throughout the Church.

There were external factors as well. The Saints came from the North, and under the Missouri Compromise, Missouri had been admitted to the Union as a slave state just a decade earlier. An article appeared in the Evening and Morning Star in July that proved to be the spark that lit the powder keg. It advised immigrating Saints to be careful about including free blacks among their companies because there were restrictions in Missouri. What actually appeared in print and was distorted by the Missourians, and the rumors spread that the Mormons were inviting free blacks into Missouri and that it would play havoc with their slaves. [17] The reality was that relatively few Jackson County citizens owned slaves, but this article riled everyone up. Days before trouble broke out, the Church issued an “extra,” trying

to assuage the angry feelings and clarify the situation. They were unable to do so, and a riot occurred a few days later. It resulted in the destruction of the printing press operation. Phelps and family were turned out of the building, and the printing press and shop were vandalized. Bishop Partridge was tarred and feathered, and an ultimatum was given to the Saints to leave within a matter of months.

Sadly, this kind of violence was not uncommon in antebellum America. Abraham Lincoln in 1837 decried “the increasing disregard for law which pervades the country; the growing disposition to substitute the wild and furious passions, in lieu of the sober judgement of Courts; and the worse than savage mobs, for the executive ministers of justice. . . . Whenever the vicious portion of population shall be permitted to gather in bands of hundreds and thousands, and burn churches, ravage and rob provision stores, throw printing presses into rivers, shoot editors, and hang and burn obnoxious persons at pleasure, and with impunity; depend on it, this government cannot last.” [18] By this quote, we learn that such vigilantism was business as usual in violent frontier America.

A couple of days after all this chaos in Independence, John Whitmer, one of the leaders in Zion, sat down and wrote a letter to report the disaster to Joseph. Missouri Church leaders dispatched Oliver Cowdery with the letter, and he hand-carried it to Kirtland. But Whitmer included a silver lining to the dark cloud: “Marvelous to tell in the midst of all the rage of persecution God is pouring out his Spirit upon his people so that most all on last thursday at the school [of the prophets] received the gift of tongues & spake & prophesied. The next day David [Whitmer, John’s brother] called his branch together and most of them received the gift.” “Many old things are coming to light,” continued Whitmer, “that had it not been for this gift would have remained in the dark & brought the wrath of God upon the inhabitants of Zion.” What a fascinating little glimpse at the emotionally charged and spiritually heightened environment of that time. He then concludes, “Our daily cry to God is to deliver thy people from the hand of our enemies send thy destroying angels, O God in the behalf of thy people that Zion may be built up.” [19]

A few days after Joseph Smith received Whitmer’s letter and heard additional firsthand reports from Oliver, he sat down and wrote a letter. It is a rare gem—in part because it is in the Prophet’s own hand. Joseph did very little writing in his own hand. The vast majority of his record, 95 percent-plus, is in the hand of scribes. But on August 18, 1833, after hearing about the disaster that had befallen his beloved Saints in Missouri, Joseph took pen in hand and wrote one of the longest letters in his own hand that we have. As part of it, echoing what John Whitmer had said, he petitioned the Lord with reference to “all those ungodly men who have committed those ungodly deeds . . . let thine anger be enkindled against them and <let> them . . . be consumed before thy face and be far removed from Zion.” [20] That is strong Old Testament-like rhetoric, but it was part of the background and mindset that early Saints grew up with and brought with them into the Church. They were not saying, “Let me do it, Lord,” but, “Please do it, Lord. It’s time to settle accounts. Let the wicked have their due. We know you can do it.”

Joseph expressed himself quite emotionally in this letter, and remember, we are not getting him filtered through a clerk here. This is right out of his mind, unedited, onto the paper: “Dear Brotheren in fellowship and towards you and with a broken heart and a contrite spirit I take the pen to address you but I know not what to say to you and the thought this <of> letter will be so long coming to you my heart faints within me I feel to exclaim O Lord let the desire of my heart be felt and realized this moment and teach you all things thy servent would communicate to would you my Brotheren.” [21] We sense Joseph’s frustration when he writes about his letter taking a long time to arrive. Two to three weeks was typical. Oliver raced to Ohio as fast as he could, but it took him ten days to get there. Joseph knew that this riot in Missouri broke out in late July. He wrote on August 18, and the Saints were not going to see it before the first of September, almost six weeks after the tragedy. Think how much pain and suffering they endured before hearing the first consoling word from their prophet. Think about that in contrast to our quick response to disasters today and our nearly instantaneous system of communication.

Hear a bit more from his letter: “Now what shall I say to comfort your hearts well I will tell you that you have my whole confidence yea there is not one doubt in not one place in me but what is filled with perfect confidence and love for you.” Imagine what such words would have meant to the Saints when they finally arrived. “And this affliction is sent upon us not for your sins but for the sins of the church.” [22] Here was a gentle prophet, spreading around responsibility. He could have accused them. He had written them numerous letters before warning them in no uncertain terms to repent and shape up, telling them that God would have a new people if they did not rise to the occasion. But in this case he shares ownership of the problem. We all contributed to it, he says. We all had our pettiness. We here in Kirtland did not respond to the Lord’s pleas to gather money to buy all the property we should have. We did not work through our own shortcomings. Then he adds, “God has suffered it not for your sins but that he might prepare you for a greater work that you might be prepared for the endowment from on high we cast no reflections upon you.” Notice how he takes a positive view of what their afflictions will lead to—an endowment from on high. The Saints are improved through the refiner’s fire. “We have had the word of the Lord that you shall [be] delivered from your danger and again flourish in spite of hell.” [23]

He reiterates this later in his letter: “I verily know that he will speedily deliver Zion for I have his immutable covenant that this shall be the case but God is pleased to keep it hid from mine eyes the means how exactly the thing will be done.” [24] Is that not beautiful? Joseph Smith has felt the whispering of the Spirit that all will be well, but he cannot yet discern how it will happen. “The church in Kirtland,” he continued, “concluded with one accord to die with you or redeem you and never at any time have I felt as I now feel that pure love and for you my Brethren the worm and Zeal for you[r] safety that we can scarcely hold our spirits but wisdom I trust will keep us from madness and desperation and the power of the Gospel will enable us to stand.” [25] Don’t you love Joseph Smith? I love his passion, his feeling, his pathos. What a glimpse! Do you not sense a wonderful, loving, frustrated prophet here? It is like what

you would probably write to your loved ones, to your family, were they taken hostage in some foreign country or caught in some disaster in another land. You would be driven to “madness and desperation” to be here and unable to bail them out. Those Missouri Saints were not just so many membership statistics for Joseph Smith—they were his brothers and sisters.

He finishes the letter with a few equally wonderful lines: “Now I conclude by telling you that we wait the Command of God to do whatever he please and if shall say go up to Zion and defend thy Brethren by we fly and we count not dear our lives dear to us I am your Brother in Christ. Joseph Smith Jr.” [26] A passionate prophet was ready to lay down his life for his beloved Saints. It brings to my mind a couple of statements in the revelation given on the day the Church was organized, section 21. The Savior says of the Prophet, “His prayers I have heard. Yea, his weeping for Zion I have seen” (vv. 7–8). Do we feel this way about the people around us? Do we have that kind of love and devotion? When was the last time we shed a tear for some of our flock? Brother Joseph sets a great example.

Another aspect of this turmoil in Missouri is that it takes place in the context of millennial, end-time expectation. Here is the setting. When the Saints, rather than simply start packing their bags, begin to seek legal redress, the Missourians are riled. By late October they take up arms and drive the Saints from their homes, across the Missouri River, into Clay County. The expulsion is essentially complete by the end of the first week in November. Then just a few days after that event, but before Joseph knows they have been driven out, on November 13, a remarkable Leonid meteor shower occurred, one that is well known in all books on astronomical history, a phenomenon seen all across the United States. Many contemporary sketches and paintings were made of this famous meteor shower that coincides with this crisis moment. Given their scriptural background, the tension of the times, and their pronounced millennialism, we are not surprised that Joseph writes as follows, again in his own hand, “Nothing of note transpired from the 4th of November until this day in the morning at 4 o’clock I was awoken by Brother Davis knocking at door saying Brother Joseph

come git and see the signs in the heavens and I arose and beheld to my great Joy the stars fall from heaven yea they fell like hail stones a literal fulfillment of the word of God as recorded in the holy scriptures and a sure sign that the coming of Christ is close at hand Oh how marvellous are thy works Oh Lord and I thank thee for thy mercy unto me thy servant Oh Lord save me in thy kingdom for Christ sake Amen.” [27] What a wonderful, intimate peek at the Prophet! One sees here his natural and understandable private reflections and expectations. Remember this was not a canonized revelation or carefully deliberated policy statement; this was Joseph Smith the man, reacting as any of us might under the circumstances of those difficult days. It is a perfectly understandable expression from a devout, impassioned twenty-eight-year-old.

Because the Prophet had faith that Zion would be restored, that August letter reminded the Saints it was “the will of the Lord” that “not one foot of land the purchased should given to the enemies of God or sold to them but if any is sold let it be sold to the church.” [28] The idea of holding on to the Jackson County property occurs in several other letters the Prophet wrote later on. For instance, on December 5 he wrote, “Retain your lands, even unto the uttermost.” [29] As an August 1834 “Appeal” published in the Evening and Morning Star put it, for the Saints to sell their land “would amount to a denial of their faith, as that land is the place where the Zion of God shall stand.” [30]

In early December, after finally hearing of the expulsion, the Prophet wrote, “It is your privilege to use every lawful means in your power to seek redress for your grievances, but,” he adds poignantly, “it will be impossible for us to render you any temporal assistance, as our means are already exhausted, and we are deeply in debt, and know of no means whereby we shall be able to extricate ourselves.” The Church in Ohio was also in quite a predicament. “The inhabitants of this country threaten our destruction, and we know not how soon they may be permitted to follow the example of the Missourians.” [31] Days later and just a week before reviewing what is now Doctrine and Covenants 101, Joseph wrote as follows to his brethren in Missouri:

I cannot learn from any communication by the spir-

it to me that Zion has forfeited her claim to a celestial crown notwithstanding the Lord has caused her to be thus afflicted; except it may be some individuals who have walked in disobedience and forsaken the new covenants; all such will be made manifest by their works in due time. I have always expected that Zion would suffer sore affliction from what I could learn from the commandments which have been given. but I would remind you of a certain clause in one which says that after much tribulation cometh the blessing. by this and also others, and also one received of late, I know that Zion, in the own due time of the Lord will be redeemed, but how many will be the days of her purification, tribulation and affliction, the Lord has kept hid from my eyes; and when I enquire concerning this subject the voice of the Lord is, Be still, and know that I am God! all those who suffer for my name shall reign with me, and he that layeth down his life for my sake shall find it again. [32]

This expression sets the stage for a fascinating glimpse at how revelations sometimes came together in the mind of the Prophet. “Now there are two things of which I am ignorant,” Joseph writes in this same letter, “and the Lord will not show me—perhaps for a wise purpose in himself. I mean in some respects, and they are these, Why God hath suffered so great calamity to come upon Zion; or what the great moving cause of this great affliction is. These two things and again by what means he will return her back to her inheritance. . . . These two things brethren, are in part kept back they are not plainly [shewn unto me].” [33] Why God had “suffered so great calamity to come upon Zion” is the question, the distress of soul, that had been on the Prophet’s mind since August. One week later, it is finally answered in what becomes Doctrine and Covenants 101, verses 2 and 7: “I, the Lord, have suffered the affliction to come upon them, wherewith they have been afflicted, in consequence of their transgressions; . . . They were slow to hearken unto the voice of the Lord their God; therefore, the Lord their God is slow to hearken unto their prayers, to answer them in the day of their trouble.”

Toward the end of section 101 is a description about importuning the government authorities. It provides a good example of how thoughts in the Prophet’s mind build toward revelation. In his letter to the Saints in

Missouri the week before, recording Doctrine and Covenants 101, Joseph had written: “Pray to God day and night to return you in peace and in safety to the Lands of your inheritance and, when the Judge fails you, appeal unto the Executive, and when the Executive fails you, appeal unto the President, and when the President fails you, and all laws fail you and the humanity of the people fails you, and all things else fails you but God alone, and you continue to weary him with your importunings, as the poor woman the unjust Judge, he will not fail to execute Judgment upon your enemies and to avenge his own elect that cry unto him day and night.” [34]

Then, seven days later, he dictated these words in Doctrine and Covenants 101: “Let [the Saints] importune at the feet of the judge; and if he heed them not, let them importune at the feet of the governor; and if the governor heed them not, let them importune at the feet of the president; and if the president heed them not, then will the Lord arise and come forth out of his hiding place, and in his fury vex the nation; and in his hot displeasure, and in his fierce anger, in his time, will cut off those wicked, unfaithful, and unjust stewards, and appoint them their portion among hypocrites and unbelievers, even in outer darkness” (vv. 86–91). Isn’t that interesting? You see that same image from Luke, the parable of the importuning widow and similar verbiage from the letter included in the revelation.

The Saints continued to seek redress, though ultimately to no avail, and they continued to reflect on the meaning of the expulsion from Zion. A few years later, these words appeared in the Church’s newspaper:

Many are ready to cry out against the Saints, and murmur against the dealings of God with his people. But from only once reading of those paragraphs, it will be seen, that in scarcely a single instance has the commands of God been heeded. The Saints have neglected the necessary preparation beforehand; they have not sent up their wise men with money to purchase land, but the rich have generally staid back and with held their money, while the poor have gone first and without money. Under these circumstances what could be expected but the appalling scene that now presents itself? The Lord always chastises his people, the people to

whom he gives immediate revelation, more quickly, and apparently more severely for their transgressions, than he does those who disregard all revelation. We do hope the saints here and elsewhere; will learn humility, wisdom and obedience by the things which their brethren in the West now have to suffer. [35]

That is a worthy invitation for us to embrace as we conclude our discussion of important events in 1833. May we draw inspiration from the example of how the Prophet dealt with these very challenging moments, and may we, too, grow in humility, wisdom, and obedience.

Notes

- 1 On temperance, see Ian Tyrell, *Sobering Up: From Temperance to Prohibition in Antebellum America* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979). For health reform, see Stephen Wissenbaum, *Sex, Diet, and Debility in Jacksonian America: Sylvester Graham and Health Reform* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980).
- 2 John Murdock, *Journal*, August 11, 1833, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.
- 3 Elizabeth Ann Whitney, “A Leaf from an Autobiography,” *Woman’s Exponent* 7 (month? 1878), 51.
- 4 Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses* (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1854–86), 10:300.
- 5 Newel K. Whitney, *Account Book*, August 2, 1835, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.
- 6 Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2nd ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1957), 2:369.
- 7 Quoted in Leonard J. Arrington, “Oliver Cowdery’s Kirtland, Ohio, ‘Sketch Book,’” *BYU Studies* 12, no. 4 (Summer 1972): 416.
- 8 Hyrum Smith, “The Word of Wisdom,” *Times and Seasons*, June 1, 1842, 800.
- 9 See William J. Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979). A contemporaneous publication warning about tea and coffee was William A. Alcott, *Tea and Coffee: Their Physical, Intellectual Effects on the Human System* (New York, 1839).
- 10 Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic*, 113.
- 11 Smith, *History of the Church*, 5:300.

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- 12 Joseph F. Smith, in Conference Report, October 4, 1908, 4.
- 13 See Thomas G. Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 250–71.
- 14 Joseph Fielding Smith, *Life of Joseph F. Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1938), 48–49.
- 15 Quoted by John Taylor, in *Millennial Star*, November 15, 1851, 339.
- 16 Smith, *History of the Church*, 1:316–17.
- 17 See Newel G. Bringhurst and Darron T. Smith, *Black and Mormon* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 2004), 14.
- 18 Quoted in Christopher Waldrep, *Lynching in America: A History in Documents* (New York: NYU, 2006), 58, 66.
- 19 John Whitmer to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery, July 29, 1833, Church History Library.
- 20 Dean C. Jessee, ed., *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, rev. ed. (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and Brigham Young University Press, 2002), 308.
- 21 Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 308.
- 22 Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 310.
- 23 Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 310–11.
- 24 Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 308–9.
- 25 Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 309.
- 26 Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 311–12.
- 27 Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 27–28.
- 28 Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 311.
- 29 Smith, *History of the Church*, 1:455.
- 30 *Millennial Star*, August 1834, 183.
- 31 Smith, *History of the Church*, 1:450.
- 32 Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 329.
- 33 Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 329.
- 34 Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 330–31.
- 35 *Messenger and Advocate*, September 1836, 379.