

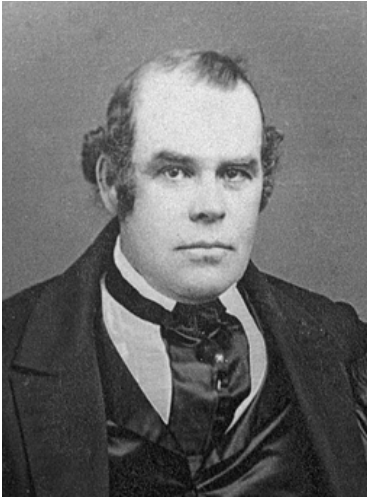
act relative to the land, by dividing it among the Saints and using the proceeds to fund the United Firm, called the “order” in verses 4 and 8 but “the Firm” in early manuscripts (see sections 70, 78, 82, and 92). The Lord says John Johnson “should become a member of the order” and use his financial resources and skills to pay the Church’s debts (Doctrine and Covenants 96:8).<sup>407</sup>

Bishop Whitney became steward of the farm and acted on the revelation’s instructions to divide it and to finance the Church’s publications with the proceeds. John Johnson moved from Hiram to Kirtland, joined the United Firm, became steward of the tavern, and tried to obey the revelation by paying the firm’s debts.<sup>408</sup>

## Section 97

Parley Pratt described Zion during the summer of 1833 as the opposition escalated: “Immigration had poured into the County of Jackson in great numbers; and the Church in that county now numbered upwards of one thousand souls.” He described how they industriously improved their situations by building homes and cultivating farms. He said that they observed the Sabbath according to section 59 but made no mention of building the temple described in section 84. “I devoted almost my entire time in ministering among the churches,” Parley wrote,

holding meetings; visiting the sick; comforting the afflicted, and giving counsel. A school of Elders was also organized, over which I was called to preside. This class, to the number of about sixty, met for instruction once a week. The place of meeting was in the open air, under some tall trees, in a retired place in the wilderness, where we prayed, preached and prophesied, and exercised ourselves in the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Here great blessings were poured out and many great and marvelous things were manifested and taught. . . . To attend this school I had to travel on foot, and sometimes with bare feet at that, about six miles. This I did once a week, besides visiting and preaching in five or six branches a week.



Photograph of Parley P. Pratt by C. R. Savage, ca. 1845.

Parley and his brethren wrote to Joseph, seeking the Lord's will concerning their school. While "thus engaged," Parley wrote, "and in answer to our correspondence with the Prophet, Joseph Smith, at Kirtland, Ohio, the following revelation was sent to us by him, dated August, 1833."<sup>409</sup>

Joseph Smith did not know when he received section 97 that the Saints in Zion had received an ultimatum from their antagonistic neighbors—stop obeying the revelations or we will force you to. In section 97, the Lord issues a counter ultimatum. "The ax is laid at the root of the trees," he says, "and every tree

that bringeth not forth good fruit shall be hewn down and cast into the fire. I, the Lord, have spoken it" (v. 7).<sup>410</sup>

Section 97 highlights the Lord's priorities for Zion. "I, the Lord, am well pleased that there should be a school in Zion, and also with my servant Parley P. Pratt, for he abideth in me" (v. 3). Right away, however, the Lord notices that there is no temple in Zion yet. He requires one to "be built speedily, by the tithing of my people," by obedience to the law of sacrifice set forth in section 97 (vv. 8–12). The temple—or, rather, the keeping of covenants required to build and worship in the temple—will be the salvation of Zion.

Section 97 is conspicuously full of if/then statements. It prophesies conditionally that *if* the saints obey the commandment to sacrifice to build a temple in Independence, *then* Zion will prosper and become great and immovable. She will escape her enemies "if she observe to do all things whatsoever I have commanded her" (v. 25). If not, Zion will be visited with sore afflictions. The future of Zion is in the hands of the Latter-day Saints. If the Saints want Zion as their

first priority, they will sacrifice to build it and keep it holy. In verse 27, the Lord gives Zion a second chance. If Zion has since been, at least temporarily, “moved out of her place,” it is because too few Latter-day Saints share the Lord’s priorities set forth in section 97 (v. 19).

Parley Pratt testified that the Lord poured forth the promised blessings of section 97 when he did as the revelation commanded regarding the school for the elders. “The Lord gave me great wisdom,” Parley wrote, “and enabled me to teach and edify the Elders, and comfort and encourage them in their preparations for the great work which lay before us. I was also much edified and strengthened.”

Parley also noted that “this revelation was not complied with by the leaders and Church in Missouri, as a whole.” As section 97 shows, the Saints in Zion were not unified, not all committed to keeping their covenants. Thus, “notwithstanding many were humble and faithful,” Parley noted, “the threatened judgment was poured out to the uttermost.”<sup>411</sup>

## Section 98

In the summer of 1833, Oliver Cowdery wrote from Independence, Missouri, to Church leaders in Kirtland, Ohio, informing them that opposition from the Saints’ Missouri neighbors was rising. By the time the letter arrived in Ohio, Bishop Partridge had been tarred and feathered in Missouri, the Church’s press there had been destroyed, and the Saints had been given an ultimatum to leave Jackson County or face escalating violence.

In Kirtland, Doctor Philastus Hurlbut had been excommunicated twice from the Church in a short period, and he thereafter “sought the destruction of the saints,” Joseph wrote, “and more particularly myself and family.”<sup>412</sup> Section 98 is the Lord’s prescription for peace and diplomacy amidst the strife and violence.<sup>413</sup>

Foreseeing the Saints’ emotional reactions to hostility and violence, the Lord prescribes “be comforted,” “rejoice,” “give thanks,” and