

# Section 51

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In the spring of 1831 Bishop Edward Partridge had a problem. It was his job to organize and settle the Saints who were gathering from New York to Ohio. Leman Copley was a member of the United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing when he converted to the restored gospel in Ohio. He offered to let the Colesville, New York, Saints settle on some of his 759 acres in Thompson.<sup>1</sup> Bishop Partridge asked Joseph how to organize the immigrant Saints. Joseph asked the Lord, who gave Section 51, "A revelation given to the Bishop at Thompson Ohio May 20<sup>th</sup> 1831 concerning the property of the Church."<sup>2</sup>

This revelation begins to implement the law of consecration. Initially it instructed Bishop Partridge to obtain a deed from Leman Copley for his land "if he harden not his heart." Copley returned to his former faith, however, and rescinded his offer for the gathering Saints to settle on his land. He did not give consent to Bishop Partridge obtaining the title to it.<sup>3</sup> When Section 51 was first published in 1835, its instructions

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<sup>1</sup> Geauga County Tax Records 1832, 230; Dean C. Jessee, editor, *The Papers of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1989), 1:480; Dean C. Jessee, editor, "Joseph Knight's Recollection of Early Mormon History," *BYU Studies* 17:1 (1976).

<sup>2</sup> "Revelation, 20 May 1831 [D&C 51]," p. 86, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed July 30, 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Newel and Joseph Knight sources.

about Bishop Partridge obtaining a deed to Copley's land were long since irrelevant and were omitted from the published version.<sup>4</sup>

The Saints who had gathered on Copley's property were told by the Lord to gather to Missouri instead (section 54). Bishop Partridge implemented section 51 in Missouri. He purchased hundreds of acres and established a storehouse to supply the needs of the Saints. He was sued by a fellow named Bates who had donated fifty dollars to purchase land and then decided he wanted it back.<sup>5</sup> The suit was granted, apparently on the grounds that the bishop did exactly what section 51 originally said: he purchased the land in his own name and then leased parts of it to individual stewards while he remained, on behalf of the Lord, the legal owner.

Bishop Partridge must have felt like the law of the land prohibited him from carrying out section 51. Joseph wrote to Bishop Partridge in Missouri in May 1833 to counsel him what to do, explaining much of section 51 in the process. Bates had expected something tangible in return for his fifty dollars.<sup>6</sup> Joseph assured the bishop that he remained bound by the law of the Lord to receive consecrated property to purchase inheritances for the poor. Joseph emphasized that such offerings were legal and in no way coerced. "Any man has a right . . . agreeable to the laws of our country, to donate, give or consecrate all that he feels disposed to give." Joseph counseled the bishop to ensure that all offerings were legal by making sure that donors understood they were giving money freely for the poor, not in exchange for anything temporal. "This way no man can take advantage of you in law," Joseph wrote.

He also counseled the bishop to apply section 51 by deeding pieces of land to Saints as their "individual property." Joseph called this "private stewardship," not ownership. Bishop Partridge issued several such deeds based on section 51. (See the Titus Billings example below.) When section 51 was first published in 1835, much of verse 5 was added to keep folks like Bates from suing the Lord's bishop. Joseph wrote to Bishop

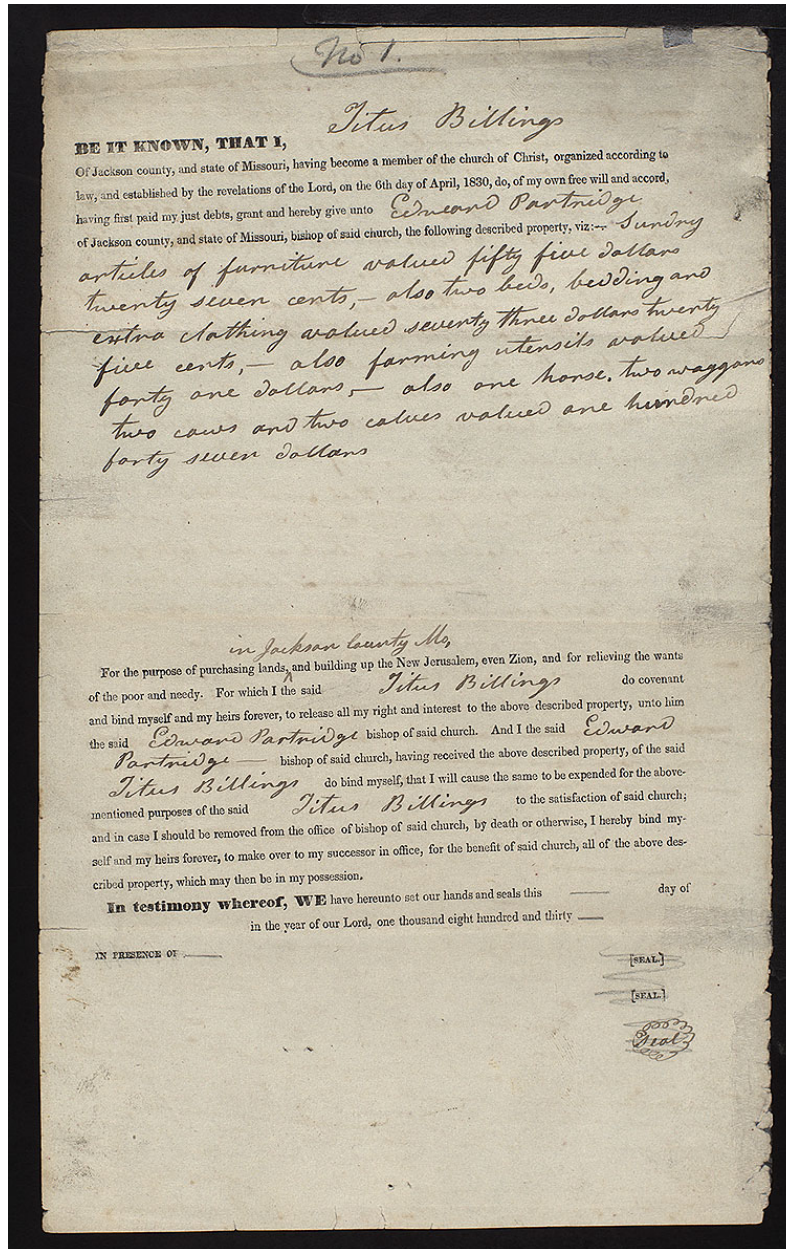
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<sup>4</sup> Compare "[Revelation, 20 May 1831 \[D&C 51\]](#)," p. 86, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed July 30, 2020, with "[Doctrine and Covenants, 1835](#)," p. 150, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed July 30, 2020.

<sup>5</sup> "The Elders Stationed in Zion to the Churches Abroad," *The Evening and the Morning Star* 2:14 (July 1822): 109.

<sup>6</sup> Painesville, Ohio *Telegraph* April 26, 1833, printed in Cook, 135.

Partridge that the revelation in D&C 51:5 was given so “that rich men cannot have power to disinherit the poor by obtaining again that which they have consecrated.”<sup>7</sup>



*Titus Billings consecration deed.*

<sup>7</sup> “Letter to Edward Partridge, 2 May 1833,” p. [1], The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed July 30, 2020.



No 2

**BE IT KNOWN, THAT I,** *Edward Partridge*  
 Of Jackson county, and state of Missouri, bishop of the church of Christ, organized according to law, and established  
 by the revelations of the Lord, on the 6th day of April, 1830, have leased, and by these presents do lease unto  
*Titus Billings* of Jackson county, and state of Missouri, a member of said church,  
 the following described piece or parcel of land, being a part of section No. *three* township No. *forty nine*  
 range No. *thirty two* situated in Jackson county, and state of Missouri, and is bounded as follows, viz:— *beginning*  
*eighty rods E. from the S. W. corner of S. Sec. thence N. one*  
*hundred and sixty rods, thence E. twenty seven rods 25 cts. thence S.*  
*one hundred and sixty rods thence W. twenty seven rods 25 cts.*  
*to the place of beginning containing twenty seven 1/2 acres*  
*be the same more or less subject to roads and highways*

And also have loaned the following described property, viz:— *Sundry articles of furniture*  
*valued fifty five dollars twenty seven cents, — also two beds,*  
*bedding and clothing valued seventy three dollars twenty*  
*five cents, — also sundry farming utensils valued forty*  
*one dollars, — also one horse, two cows, two calves and*  
*two waggons valued one hundred and forty seven dollars.*

TO HAVE AND TO HOLD the above described property, by him the said *Titus Billings*  
 to be used and occupied as to him shall seem meet and proper. And as a consideration for the use of the above described  
 property, I the said *Titus Billings* do bind myself to pay the taxes, and also to  
 pay yearly unto the said *Edward Partridge* bishop of said church, or his successor in office,  
 for the benefit of said church, all that I shall make or accumulate more than is needful for the support and comfort  
 of myself and family. And it is agreed by the parties, that this lease and loan shall be binding during the life of the  
 said *Titus Billings* unless he transgress, and is not deemed worthy by the author-  
 ity of the church, according to its laws, to belong to the church. And in that case I the said *Titus*  
*Billings* do acknowledge that I forfeit all claim to the above described leased and loaned property, and  
 hereby bind myself to give back the leased, and also pay an equivalent for the loaned, for the benefit of said  
 church, unto the said *Edward Partridge* bishop of said church, or his successor in office.  
 And further, in case of said *Titus Billings* or family's inability in consequence of in-  
 firmity or old age, to provide for themselves while members of this church, I the said *Edward Partridge*  
 bishop of said church, do bind myself to administer to their necessities out of any funds in my  
 hands appropriated for that purpose, not otherwise disposed of, to the satisfaction of the church. And further, in case  
 of the death of the said *Titus Billings* his wife or widow, being at the time a member  
 of said church, has claim upon the above described leased and loaned property, upon precisely the same conditions  
 that her said husband had them, as above described; and the children of the said *Titus Billings*  
 in case of the death of both their parents, also have claim upon the above described property, for  
 their support, until they shall become of age, and no longer, subject to the same conditions yearly that their parents  
 were: provided however, should the parents not be members of said church, and in possession of the above described  
 property at the time of their deaths, the claim of the children as above described, is null and void.

In testimony whereof, **WE** have hereunto set our hands and seals this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_  
 in the year of our Lord, one thousand eight hundred and thirty \_\_\_\_\_

IN PRESENCE OF \_\_\_\_\_

[SEAL.]  
 [SEAL.]

Edward Partridge consecration deed.