

Section 58

Joseph Smith, Bishop Edward Partridge, and others were disappointed when they arrived in Independence, Missouri. They anticipated a thriving branch but found few converts. They thought the village was “nearly a century behind the times.”¹ The Lord had said in section 57 that Independence was the site for New Jerusalem, but culturally speaking it was far from the promised land. The Lord had given Bishop Partridge the job of turning the place into Zion and the Bishop despaired. It would require unconquerable optimism in the face of discouraging circumstances.

A few days after Joseph’s arrival in Independence, Sidney Rigdon, Isaac Morley, Ezra Booth, Sidney and Elizabeth Gilbert, and the Saints from Colesville, New York, arrived as well. Joseph received section 58 as “a Revelation given to the Elders who were assembled on the land of Zion Direction what to do.”²

“The revelation implied that the enjoyment of Zion lay in the future.”³ Three times in its first four verses the revelation prophesied “much tribulation” before the establishment of Zion. The revelation tempers the Saints’ zeal even as it promises a fulfillment of the prophecies of a promised land.

¹ “[History, 1838–1856, volume A-1 \[23 December 1805–30 August 1834\]](#),” p. 127, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed September 2, 2020.

² “[Revelation, 1 August 1831 \[D&C 58\]](#),” p. 94, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed September 2, 2020.

³ Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Knopf, 2005), 164.

The revelation launches into a grand vision of Zion preparing a feast to which all nations shall be invited. “First, the rich and the learned, the wise and the noble; And after that cometh the day of my power; then shall the poor, the lame, and the blind, and the deaf, come in unto the marriage of the Lamb, and partake of the supper of the Lord, prepared for the great day to come” (D&C 58:10–11). These first few called to Zion have the privilege of laying its foundation and testifying of its potential. Their calling is to pioneer, to say as Martin Luther King Jr. did, “I’ve seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the promised land!”⁴

Section 58 functions like a map that shows how to get from where we are to Zion. It is a seldom-used map and some have wandered in the wilderness for years, not understanding the Lord’s directions or preferring their “own way” (D&C 1:16). Those to whom the Lord spoke specifically in section 58 understood it and acted it out as commanded.

Bishop Partridge repented of his unbelief and blindness. Ezra Booth, by contrast, left the Church and criticized Edward Partridge for gullibly continuing to believe in Zion.⁵ It is not remarkable that Edward despaired that Zion would be established. That was entirely reasonable given the evidence before his eyes. The Lord called those eyes blind and invited the bishop to see what Joseph could see. “I see it, and it will be so,” Joseph said of Zion.⁶

The remarkable fact is that the intelligent, capable, prosperous Edward Partridge was willingly reoriented by section 58. He followed it precisely. He wrote home to Lydia that his great desire to return home was surpassed by his calling. He told her of section 57’s command that his family join him in Zion (D&C 57:14) and section 58’s instructions to rely on personal revelation to arrange for the move as best they could (D&C 58:24–26).⁷ Edward prepared Lydia for what she could expect when she joined

⁴ Martin Luther King Jr., April 3, 1968, Mason Temple (Church of God in Christ Headquarters), Memphis, Tennessee.

⁵ Booth thought that Joseph was too prone to joking and then again too easily irritated and provoked, that his revelations were “something short of infallible,” the products of “his own weak mind.” Ezra Booth in *Ohio Star* (November 24, 1831).

⁶ Ezra Booth in *Ohio Star* (November 24, 1831).

⁷ Edward Partridge to Lydia Partridge, August 5, 1831, Emily Partridge Papers, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

him in Missouri. “We have to suffer and shall for some time, many privations here which you and I have not been much used to for years.” He knew very well that his devotion to Zion would mean an eternal farewell to his extended family and friends “unless they should be willing to forsake all for the sake of Christ, and be gathered with the saints of the most high God.”⁸

Edward Partridge humbly acknowledged his important calling, his shortcomings, and his inadequacies. “You know I stand in an important station,” he confided to Lydia, “and as I am occasionally chastened I sometimes fear my station is above what I can perform to the acceptance of my Heavenly Father. I hope you and I may conduct ourselves as at last to land our souls in the heave of eternal rest. Pray that I may not fall.”⁹ Lydia did pray and she packed up their five daughters and made the difficult trek to Missouri to join Edward as commanded.¹⁰ Falteringly, perhaps, but none have given more to Zion than Lydia and Edward Partridge.

“Martin Harris was the first man that the Lord called by name to consecrate his money, and lay the same at the feet of the Bishop in Jackson County” (D&C 58:35–36). He willingly did it; he knew the work to be true; he knew that the word of the Lord through the Prophet Joseph was just as sacred as any word that ever came from the mouth of any Prophet from the foundation of the world. He consecrated his money and his substance, according to the word of the Lord. What for? As the revelation states, as an example to the rest of the Church.¹¹

Sidney Rigdon drafted the description of Zion section 58 commanded, but the Lord rejected it and commanded him to try again (D&C 58:50; 63:55–56). Sidney dedicated Zion on August 2 as commanded in verse 57. The Saints held the conference called for in verse 58. Edward Partridge prayed, Sidney Rigdon charged the Saints to obey the law of consecration, Ziba Peterson confessed his sins, and Joseph exhorted the Saints to obey the commands they had received and reaffirmed the promised blessings for

⁸ Quoted in Scott H. Partridge, “Edward Partridge in Painesville, Ohio,” *BYU Studies* 42:1 (2003): 64.

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¹⁰ Scott H. Partridge, “Edward Partridge in Painesville, Ohio,” *BYU Studies* 42:1 (2003): 64–65.

¹¹ Orson Pratt, *Journal of Discourses*, 18:160–61.

doing so. The elders who had not yet arrived were shown section 58 when they did and obeyed verses 61–63 precisely.

Meanwhile, verse 64 continues to motivate Saints who still live in the anxious space section 58 creates between the time-consuming requirements to preach the gospel globally and build Zion in the face of the imminent coming of Christ. If Joseph's question "when will Zion be built up in her glory" is not yet fully answered, at least the Church's history since section 58 reveals how the revelation has worked itself out. The elders have gone forth to gather the righteous—first the rich, whose consecrations have put the Church on a firm financial footing Edward Partridge could only dream of. In the last century we began to see the gospel blessings extended to more impoverished populations. Perhaps we are beginning to witness what the Lord called "the day of my power," the day when his resources are distributed evenly among his faithful, consecrated Saints and all come to Zion to "partake of the supper of the Lord, prepared for the great day to come" (D&C 58:11).

Section 58 puts Edward Partridge in charge of beginning to get the feast on the table and sends the elders to every nation under heaven to invite the Lord's children to come for supper.