

Section 59

The August 7, 1831, revelation “instructing the saints how to keep the Sabbath and how to fast and pray” begins with the Lord’s blessings on the Colesville, New York, Saints, the first group to gather to Zion at his command. Those who live shall inherit the earth, while those who die receive a crown, as Polly Knight, the matriarch of the Colesville Saints, did the day the revelation came to Joseph.¹

The revelation then reiterates the law of consecration, which is simply the two great commandments, in which *all* and *love* are the key words. Then follows a review of the Decalogue—the ten commandments—to which the Lord adds commands to thank God in all things and to offer him a broken heart. He gives a specific logic for observing the Sabbath day: “That thou mayest more fully keep thyself unspotted from the world, thou shalt go to the house of prayer and offer up thy sacraments upon my holy day” (D&C 59:10). The Sabbath is for offering oblations—that is, time, talents, and material resources—for the establishment of Zion. It is a day of fasting and prayer, or in other words, rejoicing and prayer (D&C 59:14).

The Lord makes a covenant with the Saints in Zion: if they will keep the commandments thankfully and cheerfully yet soberly, he will give them the fulness of

¹ “[Revelation Book 1](#),” p. 98, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed September 5, 2020; “[History, 1838–1856, volume A-1 \[23 December 1805–30 August 1834\]](#),” p. 139, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed September 5, 2020.

the earth—its plants and animals “for food and for raiment, for taste and for smell, to strengthen the body and to enliven the soul” (D&C 59:19).

Obedience to Section 59 results in consecration: the free offering of all the Saints have for all God has. It is a countercultural revelation, because when Joseph arrived in Independence, Missouri, it was settled by “the basest of men” who reveled in “Sabbath breaking, horseracing, and gambling.”² “The only indications of its being Sunday,” one observer reported, was “the unusual gambling and noise and assemblies around taverns.”³

Section 59 tells the Saints to behave completely differently from the world in which they are now living in order to keep themselves unsoiled by it. More recently, President Gordon B. Hinckley observed how Latter-day Saints are forsaking the command to be countercultural, to be Zion in the midst of Babylon, by observing the Sabbath and the other commandments. President Hinckley declared that “the Sabbath of the Lord is becoming the play day of the people.” He emphasized,

Our strength for the future, our resolution to grow the Church across the world, will be weakened if we violate the will of the Lord in this important matter. He has so very clearly spoken anciently and again in modern revelation. We cannot disregard with impunity that which He has said.⁴

More recently, President Russell M. Nelson evoked and applied section 59 on Sabbath observance asking, “What sign will you give to the Lord to show your love for Him?”⁵

Joseph’s first impression of Zion was negative, but the revelation changed his mind. It revealed aesthetics. Verses 16–20 rejoice in the created world, the “good things which come of the earth,” freely given by a sharing God to “please the eye and gladden the heart . . . to strengthen the body and enliven the soul.” It pleases “that he hath given all these things unto man” to use, to share, to enjoy. What displeases him is

² “[Church History](#),” 1 March 1842, p. 708, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed September 5, 2020.

³ Quoted in “[Historical Introduction](#),” “Revelation Book 1,” p. 98, The Joseph Smith Papers.

⁴ Gordon B. Hinckley, “[Look to the Future](#),” General Conference October 1997.

⁵ Russell M. Nelson, “[The Sabbath is a Delight](#),” General Conference April 2015.

when mere mortals ungratefully *take* his creation for granted, abuse rather than use his resources, and usurp the creation “to excess.”

Section 59 reveals the owner of the created world and invites his heirs in Zion to see themselves as stewards into whose hands the creation has been trusted and who will be accountable to the Creator for what they do with it. “The land became beautiful in Joseph’s eyes.”⁶ He later wrote about it in terms—beautiful, rich and fertile, fruitful, delightful, one of the most blessed places on the globe—that reflect the Lord’s aesthetics revealed in Section 59.

⁶ Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Knopf, 2005), 163.