

Sections 71 and 73

Ezra Booth was a talented Methodist preacher who visited Joseph Smith at his home in Kirtland in 1831 with his wife, John and Elsa Johnson, and some others. An early history of Disciples of Christ in northern Ohio reported that

Mrs. Johnson had been afflicted for some time with a lame arm, and was not at the time of the visit able to lift her hand to her head. The party visited Smith partly out of curiosity, and partly to see for themselves what there might be in the new doctrine. During the interview, the conversation turned on the subject of supernatural gifts, such as were conferred in the days of the apostles. Some one said, "Here is Mrs. Johnson with a lame arm; has God given any power to men now on the earth to cure her?" A few moments later, when the conversation had turned in another direction, Smith rose, and walking across the room, taking Mrs. Johnson by the hand, said in the most solemn and impressive manner: "*Woman, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, I command thee to be whole,*" and immediately left the room.¹

¹ A.S. Hayden, *Early History of the Disciples in the Western Reserve, Ohio* (Cincinnati: Chase and Hall, 1875), 250.

Ezra Booth and the Johnsons joined the Church. They knew God had restored the New Testament gift of healing to Joseph Smith. Knowing that God worked through Joseph, however, is not the same as being converted by the Savior's gospel. Ezra went with Joseph and many others to Missouri in the summer of 1831. He judged everything Joseph said and did with a jaundiced eye. He found fault with Joseph's personality and prophecies. Then, casting himself as a public servant, Ezra wrote nine letters against Joseph that were published in the *Ohio Star* newspaper.²

Ezra's letters claimed that Joseph's revelations were false and that Zion in Missouri was a scam. Ezra justified his failures to do what the revelations commanded and persuaded himself, and perhaps others, that Joseph was "quite dictatorial" and no prophet after all. What about that nagging miracle Ezra had witnessed? The fact that Elsa Johnson was healed could not be denied, even by Joseph's most outspoken antagonists. So a subsequent history explained that the "infinite presumption" of Joseph Smith gave Elsa Johnson a "sudden mental and moral shock—I know not how better to explain the well attested fact—electrified the rheumatic arm—Mrs. Johnson at once lifted it up with ease, and on her return home the next day she was able to do her washing without difficulty or pain."³

Ezra's letters raised public consciousness of Joseph Smith and the restoration.⁴ In section 71, the Lord called Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon to take a break from revising the Bible to take advantage of the opportunity Ezra gave them to declare the gospel in the area and set the record straight.

Joseph and Sidney enjoyed obeying this revelation. "Knowing now the mind of the Lord," Joseph wrote, "that the time had come that the gospel should be proclaimed in power and demonstration to the world, from the scriptures, reasoning with men as in days of old, I took a journey to Kirtland, in company with Elder Rigdon, on the 3d day

² "History, 1838–1856, volume A-1 [23 December 1805–30 August 1834]," p. 153, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed June 5, 2020.

³ A.S. Hayden, *Early History*, 250.

⁴ Wesley Perkins to Jacob Perkins, February 11, 1832, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

of December to fulfill the . . . Revelation.”⁵ Sidney Rigdon replied to Ezra Booth in the pages of the *Ohio Star* and invited him to meet publicly.⁶ For nearly six weeks Joseph and Sidney

continued to preach in Shalersville, Ravenna, and other places, setting forth the truth; vindicating the cause of our Redeemer: showing that the day of vengeance was coming upon this generation like a thief in the night: that prejudice, blindness, and darkness, filled the minds of many, and caused them to persecute the true church, and reject the true light: by which means we did much towards allaying the excited feelings which were growing out of the scandalous letters then being published.⁷

Since Ezra Booth, many others have wielded weapons against the restored gospel. The Lord’s policy, as stated in Section 71, is to “let them bring forth their strong reasons against the Lord.” Such opposition facilitates agency and fulfills prophecy. It compels people to consciously choose whether to believe in Joseph Smith’s testimony, and it honors Moroni’s unlikely promise to the obscure, teenage Joseph that his “name should be had for good and evil among all nations . . . or that it should be both good and evil spoken of among all people” (Joseph Smith—History, 1:33).

In section 73, the Lord told the elders to continue preaching the good news while Joseph and Sidney returned to revising the Bible and preaching locally as best they could.⁸

⁵ “[History, 1838–1856, volume A-1 \[23 December 1805–30 August 1834\]](#),” p. 176, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed June 5, 2020.

⁶ Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Knopf, 2005), 599 fn. 2; Richard S. Van Wagoner, *Sidney Rigdon: A Portrait of Religious Excess* (Salt Lake City: Signature, 1994), 111.

⁷ “[History, 1838–1856, volume A-1 \[23 December 1805–30 August 1834\]](#),” p. 179, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed June 5, 2020.

⁸ “[Revelation, 10 January 1832 \[D&C 73\]](#),” p. [1], The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed June 5, 2020.

