

Section 90

There is nothing in the historical records to tell us what problem(s) section 90 resolved—nothing but the revelation itself.¹ In such cases it is extra important to read it carefully. It is full of financial instructions. It is safe to conclude that Joseph was concerned about the expensive commands the Lord had given to buy land in Missouri, establish a storehouse, print the revelations, and gather Israel to Zion.

The revelation was given, at least in part, to answer Joseph’s prayers for forgiveness, mentioned in verse 1, which also says that prayers of Joseph’s brethren that have reached the Lord’s ears. It seems that those brethren were Sidney Rigdon, who had been serving as Joseph’s counselor, and Frederick Williams, who just a few weeks earlier received a revelation through Joseph that he was “called to be a Councillor & scribe unto my Servent Joseph.”² The Lord refers “again” to these “brethren” by name in verse 6.

Section 90 blesses those who bear the keys of the kingdom, the authority to exercise the priesthood to govern the church of Jesus Christ. It grants them the oracles—the revelations to govern the Church—and commands the Saints not to take them lightly.

¹ “Revelation, 8 March 1833 [D&C 90],” p. [1], The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed October 9, 2020.

² Revelation 5 January 1834 [1833], Frederick G. Williams Papers, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

The revelation takes the next step in forming what section 81 called the “Presidency of the High Priesthood,” or what became known by 1835 as the First Presidency.³ The Lord forgives Sidney Rigdon and Frederick Williams and makes them equal with Joseph in holding the keys of the kingdom. Verse 9 nevertheless clarifies that Joseph presides over his counselors, who preside over the earth and are commanded by the Lord to spread the gospel and gather Israel in anticipation of His coming.

Beginning in verse 13, the Lord gives the Presidency their day-to-day duties: to finish revising the Old Testament, to preside over the Church and the School of the Prophets (see section 88), to receive revelations as needed, to study and learn all they can, and to preside over and set the Church in order.

Verses 13 through the end include the kind of revelation needed to set the Church in order. Here the Lord micromanages his affairs with specific instructions about a variety of people, property, and finances. Joseph and his counselors are reprovved for their pride and directed to be better. The Church is to provide a home for Frederick Williams, who had consecrated his farm to obey the same revelation that called him to be a counselor to Joseph. Joseph’s parents are to live on Frederick’s farm, Sidney to remain where he lives, and the bishop to find an agent both faithful and wealthy enough to help pay the Church’s debts.

The Lord refers to the United Firm’s covenant (section 82) in verse 24, which is itself a covenant. In verse 25 he counsels Joseph’s father to conserve his financial resources by not assuming responsibility for more people than he can afford in his advancing years. Vienna Jacques, a converted Bostonian who had gathered with the Saints and consecrated her considerable wealth, is promised an inheritance in Zion for her faithfulness.

Not so with William McLellin, whom the Lord rebukes after he forsook two mission calls and circumvented the law of consecration to purchase two lots on Main Street in Independence, Missouri (see sections 66, 75, and 85).⁴ The Lord also reprovved Church leaders in Zion who were badgering Joseph to come to Missouri to live.

³ “[Revelation, 15 March 1832 \[D&C 81\]](#),” p. 18, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed October 9, 2020.

⁴ William McLellin to relatives, August 4, 1832, typescript, Community of Christ Archives, Independence, Missouri.

Ten days after the revelation, a council of high priests convened. Joseph ordained Sidney Rigdon and Frederick Williams “by the laying on of hands to be equal with him in holding the Keys of the Kingdom and also to the Presidency of the high Priesthood.”⁵

The pressures of building Zion weighed on Joseph. One can hear subtextually that Joseph did not know how to resolve some pressing problems, but the Lord did. He coached Joseph how to cope, strategize, delegate, prepare, and press forward. The revelation reassured Joseph that the keys were his forever and he would receive revelations as needed. Section 90 treated Joseph’s anxiety, uncertainty, and stress. Zion “shall not be removed out of her place. I, the Lord, have spoken it” (D&C 90:37). If the Lord was so cool and confident in Zion, Joseph could be too. He would need that reassurance. Things in Zion were about to get much worse.

⁵ “[Minutes, 18 March 1833](#),” p. 16, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed October 9, 2020; “[License for Frederick G. Williams, 20 March 1833](#),” p. [1], The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed October 9, 2020.