
Laws of the Land

D&C 98:5

Seventeen days after Latter-day Saints were mobbed in Jackson County, the Prophet Joseph Smith received a revelation counseling them to “bear it patiently and revile not against them, neither seek revenge” (D&C 98:23). Instead, the faithful were to seek within the framework of the Constitution of the United States redress for wrongs suffered. The reason for having the Saints look to the Constitution was explained by Joseph Smith: “The Constitution of the United States is a glorious standard; it is founded in the wisdom of God. It is a heavenly banner. . . . I am the greatest advocate of the Constitution of the United States there is on the earth.”¹ The principles of the Constitution would enable the Saints to right the wrongs suffered in Missouri.

Since the days of Joseph Smith, succeeding presidents of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have turned to the US Constitution and extolled the principles of the Constitution and writers of that “glorious standard.”² For example, President Wilford Woodruff declared that “those men who laid the foundation of this American government were the best spirits the God of heaven could find on the face of the earth. They were choice spirits . . . [and] were inspired of the Lord.”³ Heber J. Grant stated,

I counsel you, I urge you, I plead with you, never, so far as you have voice or influence, permit any departure from the principles of government on which this nation was founded, or any disregard of the freedoms which, by the inspiration of God our Father, were written into the Constitution of the United States.⁴

¹ Joseph Fielding Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1977), 147.

² Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 147.

³ Wilford Woodruff, Conference Report, April 1898.

⁴ Heber J. Grant, Conference Report, October 1944.

President David O. McKay said, “Next to being one in worshipping God there is nothing in this world upon which this church should be more united than in upholding and defending the Constitution of the United States.”⁵

But of all the presidents of the Church, none has spoken more often or in more urgent tones about the US Constitution than Ezra Taft Benson. President Benson understood the great importance of the Constitution, having served in the US cabinet of President Dwight D. Eisenhower. He said,

The Constitution of the United States has served as a model for many nations and is the oldest constitution in use today. ... Only in this foreordained land, under its God-inspired Constitution and the resulting environment of freedom, was it possible to have established the restored church. It is our responsibility to see that this freedom is perpetuated so that the Church may more easily flourish in the future. ...

I have faith that the Constitution will be saved as prophesied by Joseph Smith. It will be saved by the righteous citizens of this nation who love and cherish freedom. It will be saved by enlightened members of this Church—among others—men and women who understand and abide the principles of the Constitution.

I reverence the Constitution of the United States as a sacred document. To me its words are akin to the revelations of God, for God has placed His stamp of approval upon it. I testify that the God of heaven sent some of His choicest spirits to lay the foundation of this government, and He has now sent other choice spirits to help preserve it.

Unfortunately, we as a nation have apostatized in various degrees from different Constitutional principles as proclaimed by the inspired founders. We are fast approaching that moment prophesied by Joseph Smith when he said: “Even this nation will be on the very verge of crumbling to pieces and tumbling to the ground, and when the Constitution is upon the brink of ruin, this people will be the staff upon which the nation shall lean, and they shall bear the Constitution away from the very verge of destruction.”⁶

⁵ David O. McKay, Conference Report, October 1939.

⁶ Martha Jane Knowlton Coray, Manuscript, July 19, 1840, in Ezra Taft Benson, “Our Divine Constitution, General Conference, October 1987.