



Painting by Al Rounds, *Liberty Jail*

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## Lessons from Liberty Jail

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The year 1838 was a challenging year in the life of the Prophet Joseph Smith. It began with his hasty departure from Kirtland, Ohio, the evening of 12 January “to escape mob violence”<sup>ccix</sup>1 and ended with his incarceration in the dungeon of a crude but well-fortified jail in the town of Liberty, Missouri. These twelve months also saw the defections of several close and notable associates of the Restoration (including Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, Thomas B. Marsh, Orson Hyde, John Whitmer, and William W. Phelps) and an escalation of persecution against the Saints in Missouri that resulted in a continuing loss of property and life. There was very little, if any, respite for the Prophet, who desired to teach and write about the keys of the kingdom necessary to accomplish the work of God in this last dispensation—which keys he now held (see D&C 110). Zion may never have seemed further away.

Ironically enough, from this crucible of affliction, from the dimness of a dungeon cell, from the darkness of the winter months that saw some ten thousand homeless Saints flee the land God promised would be their Zion, emerged the light of eternal truth to bring comfort, perspective, instruction, and hope to the Prophet Joseph and the beleaguered Church of the late 1830s. Elder Neal A. Maxwell draws attention to a few of these ironies amidst the glorious truths emanating from Liberty Jail when he writes, “Herein we see Joseph testifying while suffering, learning while teaching, giving direction to the work while he was being tutored, giving blessings while being cursed, and proclaiming the United States Constitution to be ‘a glorious standard’ even while being grossly deprived of his own constitutional rights.”<sup>ccx2</sup>

Although very little physical light penetrated the dungeon cell that held a prophet of God, a tremendous amount of spiritual light burst forth from what B. H. Roberts called a “Prison-Temple,”<sup>ccxi</sup>3 not only to bless the Saints of Joseph’s day but also to span situation and time, bringing similar blessings to Church members facing challenges in the twenty-first century. These truths “illuminate for us, in ways probably unique in all of scripture, the challenges associated with deepening one’s discipleship.”<sup>ccxii</sup>4 After a brief discussion of important background to Doctrine and Covenants 121–23, a few of these lessons that “deepen discipleship” will be considered.

### **Setting and Context of Sections 121–23**

The revelations of Doctrine and Covenants 121–23 are actually excerpts from two letters dated 20 March 1839: one letter to “the church” in general and one to “Bishop Partridge” in particular.<sup>ccxiii</sup>5 Thus, as Elder Maxwell noted, we read the counsel of a prophet to the Saints even as we read the counsel of the Lord to a prophet. The portions of these letters that are now Doctrine and Covenants 121, 122, and 123 were selected by a committee of brethren headed by Orson Pratt, under the direction of President Brigham Young, as part of the preparation of a new edition of the Doctrine and Covenants that was eventually published in 1876.<sup>ccxiv</sup>6 Although reading the entire letters can provide some additional insight, we can also realize the inspiration obviously present in the process of determining which selections would be included in the scriptures.

By 20 March 1839, the Prophet Joseph Smith had been a prisoner for approximately four and a half months. He and his companions were initially delivered into the hands of the Missouri militia on 31 October and 1 November 1838. They were first taken to Independence, Missouri, arriving on 4 November, and then to Richmond on 9 November 1838. In Richmond, the prisoners were subjected to an extended hearing to determine if the prosecution had enough evidence to demonstrate “probable cause” for a future trial. Judge Austin King, a future governor of Missouri, presided as judge at this hearing, which the Prophet and his companions referred to as a “mock trial” since it seemed such a mockery of the whole process of justice. The prosecution paraded ex-Latter-day Saints in to testify, witnesses perjured themselves, and the defendants were publicly mocked. When the defense provided its witness list, the court used the list to arrest additional Saints.<sup>ccxv</sup>7

This probable cause hearing lasted from 12 November to 29 November 1838. It was during this stay at Richmond that the Prophet Joseph Smith rebuked the prison guards in the incident made well known by the account of Parley P. Pratt.<sup>ccxvi</sup>8 At the conclusion of the hearing, the six prisoners (Joseph Smith, Hyrum Smith, Sidney Rigdon, Lyman Wight, Alexander McRae, and Caleb Baldwin) were charged with treason and murder and ordered to be held in the jail in Liberty, Missouri, where they were taken on 1 December 1838. Because the charge against Joseph and the others was for treason, the court refused to set bail. The Prophet Joseph later wrote his wife Emma about the Liberty Jail ordeal that “defies the pen, or tongue, or angels, to describe, or paint, to the human being what we experienced.”<sup>ccxvii</sup>9

Although a complete description “defies the pen,” some of the prisoners later recorded incidents that provide insight to the experience. For example, Hyrum Smith speaks of “poison . . . administered to us three or four times; the effect it had upon our system was that it vomited us almost to death, and then we would lay some two or three days in a torpid, stupid state, not even caring or wishing for life.”<sup>ccxviii</sup>10 Such descriptions lead us to marvel even more that anyone in that setting could be sensitive enough to receive the beautiful, peaceful, and sublime revelations we read in Doctrine and Covenants 121–23. Surely these revelations could be accomplished only

by a focused effort to follow the example of the Savior, who “being in an agony . . . prayed more earnestly” (Luke 22:44). It truly is a mark of mature discipleship when a person feels forsaken by God amid adversity of an indeterminable length and extreme degree yet still remains sensitive and faithful enough to hear the answers when they come, record them, and remain teachable enough to apply the lessons taught.

Because of the Prophet Joseph’s meekness and faithfulness in trial, we can become the beneficiaries of the lessons he learned. When we find ourselves in trials and adversity of varying types and degrees and when, like Joseph in Doctrine and Covenants 121:1–6, we ask a multitude of “Why?” “Where are You?” or “What is going on?” questions, we can turn to the answers he received and discover their timeless profundity. I will draw attention to some of these lessons, recognizing that they are only a handful of perhaps an infinite number of applications that can be made by the Spirit, who inspired the original writer of these priceless letters.

### **Lesson 1: Perspective (“There’s a Bigger Picture Here”)**

When the first group of Latter-day Saints arrived in Missouri to set up the “center place” (D&C 57:1–3) of Zion in the last dispensation, the Lord told the Prophet Joseph Smith that there were things “ye cannot behold with your natural eyes” concerning “glory which shall follow much tribulation” (D&C 58:3). The Lord reiterated this perspective-expanding promise at the time the Saints were driven from Jackson County in 1833 (see D&C 103:12–13). It should not surprise us, then, that as the Saints were being driven from the entire state in which they sought to establish Zion, the Lord once again taught them lessons about perspective.

Most trials seem to blind us to the eternal view of things and keep us focused only on the present difficulties and pain. In response to the Prophet’s questions (see D&C 121:1–6) in which he was, in reality, the voice for an entire church,<sup>ccxi</sup>11 we might summarize the general theme of the Lord’s answer as “There is a bigger picture here that you cannot see.” More specifically, the Lord expanded the Prophet’s and the Church’s perspectives by offering a bigger picture regarding (1) adversity itself, (2) the Saints’ enemies, and (3) God’s knowledge and power.

#### **The Bigger Picture regarding Adversity**

The first instance of the Lord’s expanding our vision of adversity occurs in Doctrine and Covenants 121:7–10 as a direct response to the pleadings of the Prophet in verses 1–6. It may be both interesting and helpful to note that in the original letter, these two sections of verses are separated by several paragraphs. A careful reading of the original letter helps us to see that the answer to our pleading may take a little time and pondering. This same passage in the letter also provides insight into actions and thoughts that might prepare us to hear and receive the voice of the Lord.

After writing the prayer that is now verses 1–6, the Prophet Joseph wrote more specifically about the unfortunate and unjust experiences of their confinement. The tone was one of discouragement. Then, he noted that “we received some letters” from Emma Smith, Don Carlos Smith, and Edward Partridge. He said that these letters breathed “a kind and consoling spirit” and that “when we read those letters they were to our [souls] . . . as the gentle air.” As they read, “the flood gates of our hearts were hoisted and our eyes were a fountain of tears.” And then they read these insightful and telling lines:

Those who have not been enclosed in the walls of a prison without cause or provocation can have but a little idea how sweet the voice of a friend is [and how] one token of friendship from any source whatever awakens and calls into action every sympathetic feeling. [Friendship] brings up in an instant everything that is passed; it seizes the present with a vivacity of lightning; it grasps after the future

with the fierceness of a tiger; [and] it retrogrades from one thing to another until finally all enmity, malice, hatred, and past differences, misunderstandings, and mismanagements be slain victims at the feet of hope. . . . When the heart is sufficiently contrite, . . . [then] the voice of inspiration steals along and whispers.<sup>ccxx</sup>12

It becomes apparent, then, that the kind and consoling words of friends and family who took time to write softened the Prophet's heart to the point that he could hear the Lord's voice respond to his initial pleading. From this we can observe a couple of additional lessons. First, we should appreciate the idea that we may never know the impact of our kind thoughts—spoken or written—to those in the midst of trials. Although our words may not be the answer to others' prayers, our kindness and care could be the catalyst that opens the heavens for them to hear God's answer directly. Second, it seems that the answer did not come to the Prophet until he cultivated a soft heart that allowed him to be sensitive to the Spirit. It was not until he ceased focusing on the injustices that the message of peace and hope came.

As the Prophet listened, the "voice of inspiration" offered a bigger picture of the present adversities:

- They would "be but a small moment" (D&C 121:7).
- If he endured them well, God would exalt him (D&C 121:8).
- Although many who were friends had turned against him, many more supported him—unlike Job who had all friends turn against him (see D&C 121:9–10; see also 122:2–3). Adversity seems to intensify the myopia of mortality. The length of our trial is unknown; we have difficulty seeing how we will ever overcome; and we often succumb to the temptation to focus on the few who are against us rather than the many who support us. By the power of the Spirit, we can know and feel that God has cared for us long before the present adversity and that His chief object is to put all our enemies under His (and our) feet.<sup>ccxxi</sup>13 We can sense the truth of what Elder Richard G. Scott taught when he said, "Your Father in Heaven and His Beloved Son love you perfectly. They would not require you to experience a moment more of difficulty than is absolutely needed for your personal benefit."<sup>ccxxii</sup>14 Furthermore, the Holy Ghost can open our eyes to the truth that "they that be with us are more than they that be with them" (2 Kings 6:16).

As important and enlightening as these perspectives on adversity were (and continue to be), the most profound and soul-shivering perspectives were yet to come in the second part of this epistle from Liberty. Elder Maxwell has reminded us that while these latter truths are "fundamental," they also constitute some of the "hard doctrines" of discipleship.<sup>ccxxiii</sup>15

After recounting a list of some of the most trying experiences we could imagine (some of which—such as the incident described in Doctrine and Covenants 122:6—were more descriptive than hypothetical for the Prophet Joseph),<sup>ccxxiv</sup>16 we learn that when we turn to God and put our trust in Him, "all" our adversities can "give [us] experience, and shall be for [our] good" (D&C 122:7). And then comes the perspective that, in effect, ends all discussion on the topic as we ponder the implications of our short answer to an immense question: "The Son of Man hath descended below them all. Art though greater than he?" (D&C 122:8).

Various Church leaders have expounded upon these sacred principles over the years. For example, consider the following from Elder Orson F. Whitney: "No pain that we suffer, no trial that we experience is wasted. It ministers to our education, to the development of such qualities as patience, faith, fortitude and humility. All that we suffer and all that we endure, especially when we endure it patiently, builds up our characters, purifies our hearts, expands our souls, and

makes us more tender and charitable, more worthy to be called the children of God . . . and it is through sorrow and suffering, toil and tribulation, that we gain the education that we come here to acquire and which will make us more like our Father and Mother in heaven.”<sup>ccxxv</sup> 17

Next, consider the following from President James E. Faust:

In the pain, the agony, and the heroic endeavors of life, we pass through a refiner’s fire, and the insignificant and unimportant in our lives can melt away like dross and make our faith bright, intact, and strong. In this way the divine image can be mirrored from the soul. It is part of the purging toll exacted of some to become acquainted with God. In the agonies of life, we seem to listen better to the faint, godly whisperings of the Divine Shepherd.

Into every life there come the painful, despairing days of adversity and buffeting. There seems to be a full measure of anguish, sorrow, and often heartbreak for everyone, including those who earnestly seek to do right and be faithful. The thorns that prick, that stick in the flesh, that hurt, often change lives which seem robbed of significance and hope. This change comes about through a refining process which often seems cruel and hard. In this way the soul can become like soft clay in the hands of the Master in building lives of faith, usefulness, beauty, and strength. For some, the refiner’s fire causes a loss of belief and faith in God, but those with eternal perspective understand that such refining is part of the perfection process.<sup>ccxxvi</sup> 18

Finally, consider the following from Elder Maxwell: “Therefore, how can you and I really expect to glide naively through life, as if to say, Lord, give me experience, but not grief, not sorrow, not pain, not opposition, not betrayal, and certainly not to be forsaken. Keep from me, Lord, all those experiences which made Thee what Thou art! Then let me come and dwell with Thee and fully share Thy joy!”<sup>ccxxvii</sup> 19

One of the most convincing witnesses of the truth of these principles came from the Prophet Joseph Smith himself: “For my part I think I never could have felt as I now do if I had not suffered the wrongs that I have suffered.”<sup>ccxxviii</sup> 20 This simple statement reveals how Joseph’s perspective on adversity had been expanded, providing hope that these truths can make a difference for all of us.

### **A Bigger Picture Regarding Our Enemies**

As Elder Maxwell has noted on more than one occasion, irony is “the crust on the bread of adversity.”<sup>ccxxix</sup> 21 Surely the Prophet Joseph and the faithful Saints noted the irony in the fact that although they were trying to live the gospel and establish Zion, they were also the ones experiencing the deep suffering. Meanwhile, the wicked seemed to prosper, possessing the land of Zion and the properties of the Saints. In response to such irony, the Lord again showed them the bigger picture in D&C 121:11–25, proclaiming the ultimate consequences of those who oppose God’s work.

Although the curses are quite strong in these verses, there is no indication that they are imminent. Rather, they will occur “in the season thereof” at the “time appointed” (D&C 121:24–25). We cannot lose sight of the fact that the doctrine related to God’s judgment never indicates that this world provides all the rewards and punishments. The people in Malachi’s day had a lack of understanding concerning the bigger picture of God’s plan that caused some of them to murmur before the Lord about the prosperity of the wicked. Teaching the positive side of this doctrine, the Lord said to the Israelites: “Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them

that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not” (Malachi 3:16–18).

We should also keep in perspective that just as we learned in pondering the lessons of adversity, God’s chief interest is the salvation of His children—including our enemies. We all ought to rejoice that judgments are not made immediately after sinning and that history demonstrates—as difficult as it might have been to consider at the time—the wisdom in God’s long-suffering.

Within two years, two men (Elders Orson Hyde and W. W. Phelps), whom the Prophet at one point in his jail stay called “ill bred” and “whose hearts are full of corruption,”<sup>ccxxx22</sup> returned to full fellowship. And when these men returned, the foremost person to extend the hand of fellowship was the teachable Prophet Joseph, whose heart and perspective had been expanded in the Liberty Jail.<sup>ccxxxi23</sup> Over the years, Joseph had come to know the nature of God in significant ways that gave room in his soul for such actions.

### **A Bigger Picture Regarding God’s Knowledge, Power, and Love**

After the discussion of judgments that will come to the enemies of God’s work and preceding in time Doctrine and Covenants 121:26–33, which speaks most directly about God’s power and knowledge, the Prophet wrote a few paragraphs not included in the Doctrine and Covenants. In one of these paragraphs not found in the scriptures, but leading up to Doctrine and Covenants 121:26, he wrote: “The things of God are of deep import, and time and experience and careful and ponderous and solemn thoughts can only find them out. Thy mind, oh man, if thou wilt lead a soul unto salvation, must stretch as high as the utmost heavens, . . . search into and contemplate the lowest considerations of the darkest abyss, and expand upon the broad considerations of eternal expanse, [and] he must commune with God. How much more dignified and noble are the thoughts of God than [are] the vain imaginations of the human heart. None but fools will trifle with the souls of men.”<sup>ccxxxii24</sup>

Times of great trial occur often when we think about things of “deep import.” They become times to reflect on what we know about God and provide opportunities to exercise greater faith in Him. In Kirtland, Ohio, in the winter of 1834–35, members of the School of the Prophets were taught about “three things . . . necessary in order that any rational and intelligent being may have faith in God unto life and salvation.” Second on this list was “a correct idea of his character, perfections, and attributes.”<sup>ccxxxiii25</sup> Doctrine and Covenants 121:26–33 is laden with reminders of what God is able and willing to do for His Saints. We ought to ask ourselves, If the things in these verses are true (and they are!), how should I view my present adversity? As George Q. Cannon reminds us: “No matter how serious the trial, how deep the distress, how great the affliction, [God] will never desert us. He never has, and He never will. He cannot do it. It is not His character. . . . We have found that God. We have made Him our friend, by obeying His Gospel; and He will stand by us. We may pass through the fiery furnace; we may pass through deep water; but we shall not be consumed nor overwhelmed. We shall emerge from all these trials and difficulties the better and purer for them, if we only trust in our God and keep His commandments.”<sup>ccxxxiv26</sup>

When these truths are truly written in our hearts, the promise of Doctrine and Covenants 122:9 if we “hold on” and “fear not what man can do” since God has promised to be with us “forever and ever” because by Him our “days are known” and our “years shall not be numbered less” offers tremendous hope and comfort. Then, as we continue to increase our vision of the nature and

character of God and of His promises, we will increase our faith and find peace, strength, and growth—even in the midst of some of the most perplexing “whys” of life.

## **Lesson 2: Empathy and Leadership (“It Really Hurts to Be the Victim of the Misuse of Power”)**

Doctrine and Covenants 121:34–46 contains one of the greatest commentaries on power and leadership found in scripture. President Gordon B. Hinckley called it the “unequivocal word of the Lord concerning His divine authority.”<sup>ccxxxv</sup>27 In it the Lord describes both the ways we misuse power and cut ourselves off from Him as the source of ultimate power as well as the ways we can righteously use power to influence others for good. So why speak to the Prophet Joseph on this matter? Had he misused power? The Prophet might even have been tempted to say, “Why are you telling me about this? Talk to the people who have so abused their positions of power and authority!”

But, of course, those who “gratify their pride” and “exercise control [and] dominion [and] compulsion” upon the Saints do not usually listen to the kinds of communication from God received by the Prophet Joseph in the Liberty Jail. So were the principles outlined in the latter portion of section 121 given so that Joseph could call the offenders to repentance—if they do not listen to God, might they listen to Joseph? Perhaps. It is more likely, however, that Joseph is one of many who, after having experienced the abuse of power, took the opportunity to reflect on the way offenders have used power in their relationships with others. Unfair and undeserved circumstances in life can cause the teachable to turn inward, providing opportunities to exercise the “Lord, is it I?” principle (see Matthew 26:22).

After three and a half months in Liberty Jail, which occurred after an equally miserable one-month stay in the jail at Richmond and the traitorous deliverance into the hands of his enemies, the Prophet Joseph was prepared to hear the Lord say, in effect: “It really feels awful to be the victim of the misuse of power, doesn’t it? This can be a reminder for *you* to make a commitment to never misuse your authority—for you are now keenly aware of just how much it hurts. And while you are so attuned to the hurt, let me explain the principles that govern power and prevent their misuse.” How meek of Joseph to be receptive to such a message and then seek to implement it the rest of his days! And how timely the advice! It is unlikely that Joseph knew what the Lord surely did: that the Prophet would soon experience a time when these principles would be put to the test as he enjoyed, during the Nauvoo period, unprecedented opportunities to exercise power and authority as prophet, president, mayor, commanding general, and candidate for president of the United States.<sup>ccxxxvi</sup>28

Combined with what we learned as the Lord expanded our perspective on our enemies, this lesson can help all of us change the focus from “Why me?” and an obsession with obtaining justice *right now* to more of “What can I learn?” or “What area of my life can I strengthen?” or “What can I do to emerge from this experience so I am more like the Savior?”

The Prophet Joseph learned a precious lesson by asking these kinds of questions. We now become the beneficiaries as we have access to Doctrine and Covenants 121:34–46 and can carefully study its contents and consequently implement the principles in our lives. Much has been said and written on this passage, and much more ought to be said and written on it. These are truly glorious principles and ideas. Having identified this general lesson, however, I will leave it to others—but most particularly to the Holy Ghost—to expand and expound whole discourses on these great truths. I memorized these verses years ago in hopes that the doctrine I memorized would then show up in my behavior. I have long since realized that while memorizing the passage has greatly benefited me (particularly by giving the Holy Ghost a better

pulpit from which to preach), the acquisition of the principles into my character is the continuing quest of a lifetime—enhanced by occasional opportunities to bump into their use and misuse.

### **Lesson 3: God Does Fulfill His Promises (“My Word Shall Not Pass Away”)**

Over the dates of 21–22 of September 1823, the Prophet Joseph Smith heard on four different occasions that “God had a work for me to do; and that my name should be had for good and evil among all nations, kindreds, and tongues, or that it should be both good and evil spoken of among all people” (Joseph Smith—History 1:33). Given what we have seen nearly 180 years later, it is difficult to grasp just how incredible that prophecy seemed when the Prophet Joseph dared put it in the history of the Church in 1838—let alone in 1823 when it was given. How often did Joseph wonder and ponder over this remarkable promise through the incredible ups and down of his relatively short ministry? It does not seem too difficult to imagine him sitting in the gloomy dungeon of the Liberty Jail thinking over this prophecy, looking for a ray of hope like a young soldier in a foxhole looking for comfort in a patriarchal blessing.<sup>ccxxxvii</sup><sup>29</sup>

Although we do not know for sure about all the doubts and wonderings of the Prophet in jail, we do know that the Lord saw fit to reinforce Moroni’s prophecy of fifteen years earlier: “The ends of the earth shall inquire after thy name, and fools shall have thee in derision, and hell shall rage against thee; while the pure in heart, and the wise, and the noble, and the virtuous, shall seek counsel, and authority, and blessings constantly from under thy hand. And thy people shall never be turned against thee by the testimony of traitors. And although their influence shall cast thee into trouble, and into bars and walls, thou shalt be had in honor; and but for a small moment and thy voice shall be more terrible in the midst of thine enemies than the fierce lion, because of thy righteousness; and thy God shall stand by thee forever and ever” (D&C 122:1–4).

The ways we are now able to witness the fulfillment of these companion prophecies ought to strengthen the faith and hope of the whole Church and every individual in it. It is difficult to imagine an hour when the potential fulfillment of these prophecies seemed dimmer than it would have been at the time when Joseph languished in the dark dungeon of the Liberty Jail. John Taylor later spoke of this time and said: “We were driven out of Missouri. . . . I know some men who thought the work was at an end. I remember a remark made by Sidney Rigdon—I suppose he did not live his religion—I do not think he did—his knees began to shake in Missouri, and on one occasion he said, ‘Brethren, every one of you take your own way, for the work seems as though it has come to an end.’”<sup>ccxxxviii</sup><sup>30</sup>

Although anyone might have said and written what Joseph did about himself in his history and in the Doctrine and Covenants, only a true prophet of God could be right about it! Surely these were prophecies inspired by God and not derived from the mind of man. From these and many other prophecies, we can know at this point in this dispensation that God does indeed have power to bring to pass prophecy and fulfill all His words and promises.

That Moroni’s promises to the Prophet Joseph have been fulfilled is difficult to dispute. To the many who have witnessed their fulfillment, however, I add one of my own. While working in the Central Office of CES as a curriculum designer in the mid-1990s, I was on an assignment with Nelson Dibble that took us to the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. Before leaving, we were instructed by Church security concerning some of the things we should and should not do, places and situations we should avoid, and so forth. We were Americans and representatives of a Christian church that actively proselytized, which were two very big strikes against us. In fact, on the day we arrived, there had been an anti-Western protest that resulted in violence against some British journalists. Furthermore, we learned that seeking to convert someone from Islam is a crime punishable by death.<sup>ccxxxix</sup><sup>31</sup> Those who were already Christian are essentially

disenfranchised—almost none own property, they go to separate and definitely unequal schools, and they can obtain employment only in menial labor kinds of work. When one of our branch presidents tried to order copies of the Doctrine and Covenants for his members, the parcel was intercepted at customs, he was questioned, and the books were not allowed into the country. At the time we met with the branch in Islamabad, only one copy of the Doctrine and Covenants was available among all the native Pakistani members of that branch.

We never entirely let our guard down while in the country, and yet we were still a little shocked when our taxi driver, without stopping, burst through a police roadblock on our way to the town of Taxila. As I sat in the seat wondering if we would be chased down, he assured us that he had done us a great favor. He explained that most of the police officers were corrupt and that had we stopped and had they learned we were Americans, they would have trumped up some charge and hassled us until we had bribed our way out of our fix. He really had done us a favor since I was not well equipped to offer much of a bribe!

Our purpose in driving to Taxila was to visit the branch and meet with the members in a “family home evening.” These family home evenings were programs designed by the missionary couple assigned to Taxila (for literacy and member support, not proselyting) to teach the members more about their church. The branch had been in existence approximately six months at the time we were there and had about forty members. The month prior to our coming, the members devoted an evening to learning about the pioneers and the trek west and so forth. These events reminded us that in spite of the challenges of being Church members in that country, these pioneering members exhibited considerable evidence of tremendous faith and hope.

On the evening we visited, the missionaries had put together a special program entitled “This Is Your Life, Joseph Smith.” The room in the house where we met was decorated with stock pictures from the Church depicting various people and events related to the Prophet Joseph Smith. Various members of the branch were assigned to be characters and read their “parts” from the history of the Church. The readings were interspersed with narration by the missionary couple and the singing of pertinent hymns (“Oh, How Lovely Was the Morning,” “Praise to the Man,” and so forth). I was the only one present who could read a little music and find the notes on the little portable keyboard they brought with them, so I became the accompanist.

The program progressed quite well. The members were sincere and sought to do their parts well. In spite of my rough keyboard playing, the singing was spirited. At one point, a young man age fourteen stood up and said in English with a thick accent, “My name is Joseph Smith.” Then after a short pause, he recounted the story of the First Vision. As he spoke, I was riveted to his testimony, and the Spirit once again bore witness to me of the truthfulness of this account. I opened my scriptures and found the account of the “obscure boy” of fourteen in upstate New York. I then turned the page and read the prophecy of Moroni in verse 33, and the power of being in the presence of the literal fulfillment of prophecy filled my whole soul. I thought, “I’m listening to one obscure boy of fourteen telling us about another obscure boy of fourteen, separated by time and space and culture but connected by the prophecy of which I was now seeing dramatic and memorable fulfillment.” Given what I had learned and experienced in my brief encounter with the place, I would have had a difficult time coming up with a more unlikely “nation” or “kindred” or “people” where I would be sitting in a meeting for the purpose of praising the name of the Prophet Joseph Smith than the rural part of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan!

I had a video camera, and I taped the program. I have thought since that time, “If only I could have taken this tape and showed it to the Prophet Joseph in March of 1839 as he struggled in the

Liberty Jail!” I realize, however, that “the unspeakable gift of the Holy Ghost” (D&C 121:26) brought knowledge more powerful and more memorable to the Prophet Joseph and taught him then, the Church then and now, and the whole world today that if anyone will hear them, lessons to confirm faith, bring hope, speak peace to the soul, and help “hold on [the] way” (D&C 122:9) during darkest days and challenging hours are there for anyone to learn.

Even without my experience in Pakistan, I have come to know that Joseph Smith Jr. is everything he said he was. Chief among the evidence of his prophetic mission is the incredible perspectives, insights, doctrines, and influences of the Spirit emanating from his writings in the Liberty Jail as found in Doctrine and Covenants 121–23. When the world as a whole receives these precious writings, with their attendant lessons, they will have profound direction for some of nearly universal perplexities of life in mortality.

### Notes

1. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2d ed., rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1948), 3:1; hereafter cited as *HC*.
2. Neal A. Maxwell, *But for a Small Moment* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1986), 1.
3. B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1930–65), 1:521; hereafter cited as *CHC*.
4. Maxwell, *But for a Small Moment*, 2.
5. Dean C. Jessee and John W. Welch, “Revelations in Context: Joseph Smith’s Letter from Liberty Jail, March 20, 1839,” *BYU Studies* 39, no. 3 (2000): 125; spelling in original.
6. See Jessee and Welch, “Revelations in Context,” 125–45.
7. See *CHC*, 1:499.
8. See Parley P. Pratt Jr., ed., *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1938), 179–80.
9. “To Emma Smith, April 4, 1839,” *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, comp. and ed. Dean C. Jessee (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1984), 425; style elements have been modernized.
10. Lucy Mack Smith, *History of Joseph Smith by His Mother, Lucy Mack Smith* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1958), 283.
11. In the full letter, the Prophet Joseph seemed more concerned about the trials of the Saints than he did about his own situation. I believe it was the plight of the Saints—not his own—that led him to the poignant prayer in D&C 121:1–6.
12. Jessee and Welch, “Revelations in Context,” 135; style elements have been modernized. See what is now D&C 121:7–25.
13. See Doctrine and Covenants 76:106; see also Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 297.
14. Richard G. Scott, in Conference Report, October 1995, 19; or *Ensign*, November 1995, 17.
15. Neal A. Maxwell, *All These Things Shall Give Thee Experience* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1979), 4.
16. Joseph was, in fact, torn from his wife and family as described in this verse. Joseph III was the little boy. Lyman Wight wrote that when the militia allowed the prisoners to return to their homes for a few personal items before the trip to Independence, Joseph “was taken out of the wagon and permitted to go into the house, but not without a strong guard, and not permitted to speak with his family but in the presence of his guard and his

- eldest son, Joseph, . . . hanging to the tail of his coat, crying father, is the mob going to kill you? The guard said to him, ‘you damed little brat, go back, you will see your father no more’” (*Times and Seasons*, 15 July 1843, 4:268).
17. As cited in Spencer W. Kimball, *Faith Precedes the Miracle* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1972), 98.
  18. James E. Faust, in Conference Report, April 1979, 77; or *Ensign*, May 1979, 53.
  19. Neal A. Maxwell, in Conference Report, April 1991, 117; or *Ensign*, May 1991, 88.
  20. Jessee, *Personal Writings*, 387.
  21. Neal A. Maxwell, in Conference Report, October 1997, 30; or *Ensign*, November 1997, 23; also in Conference Report, April 1989, 76; or *Ensign*, May 1989, 62.
  22. Jessee, *Personal Writings*, 381.
  23. See *HC*, 4:162–64 for the letter the Prophet Joseph wrote to William W. Phelps in response to Phelps’s request to return.
  24. Jessee and Welch, “Revelations in Context,” 137; style elements have been modernized.
  25. Joseph Smith, *Lectures on Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 38.
  26. George Q. Cannon, in *Collected Discourses*, comp. Brian H. Stuy (Burbank, California: B. H. S. Publishing, 1988), 2:185.
  27. Gordon B. Hinckley, “Personal Worthiness to Exercise the Priesthood,” *Ensign*, May 2002, 52.
  28. Thanks to my home teacher, Dave Channer, for helping me see this in historical context.
  29. For an account of an Apostle doing this very thing, see Bruce C. Hafen, *A Disciple’s Life: The Biography of Neal A. Maxwell* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2002), 102–16.
  30. John Taylor, in *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter-day Saints’ Book Depot, 1854–86), 11:25.
  31. At the time, approximately one million Christians resided in Pakistan. They are permitted to switch to any denomination they wish—which is how converts are obtained. At the time, about three hundred members of the Church resided in Pakistan.