

# A LETTER FROM LIBERTY JAIL

Dictated by Joseph Smith, Jr.  
20, 22 March 1839

Formatted by  
D. Lynn Johnson  
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## INTRODUCTION

On Friday, 30 November 1838, Joseph Smith, Hyrum Smith, Lyman Wight, Alexander McRae, Caleb Baldwin, and Sidney Rigdon were incarcerated in the jail at Liberty, Missouri, having been charged with treason against the state of Missouri.[1] They spent four and a half winter months in the dungeon, without heat, adequate food, beds or sanitary facilities. (Sidney was released before the end.) Meanwhile, the Saints were being violently driven from the state, suffering murder, rape, plundering and other crimes under the hands of the mobs. Many trusted early leaders had been excommunicated, including seven members of the quorum of the Twelve.[2]

Joseph's wife, Emma, wrote a heart-rending letter to him on 7 March, which he received on 19 March, along with letters from his brothers Don Carlos and William, and from Bishop Edward Partridge.[3] She told of the sufferings of her and the children as they were driven from their home, able to take little besides themselves, and of the sufferings of the others. The next day Joseph began dictating a letter "To the Church of Latter-day Saints at Quincy, and Scattered Abroad, and to Bishop Partridge in Particular",[4],[5] which was signed by all five prisoners and sent to Emma. She was to keep the original and have copies made for the Prophet's parents and the church.[6]

Orson Pratt, acting under the direction of Brigham Young, extracted portions of the letter for inclusion in the 1876 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants as sections 121, 122, and 123. This edition was accepted as scripture by the church in Conference in 1880.[7]

These sections contain some of the finest and best-loved counsel in all of scripture on adversity, unrighteous dominion, and the receipt of revealed knowledge by the saints. Although much less well known, the balance of the letter contains some choice nuggets, "left for us to mine out for ourselves." [8] The present project is presented to this end.

My discovery of the letter came in 1989 while studying Section 121 for the Sunday School Gospel Doctrine class. I had already reprinted the Doctrine and Covenants in a formatted form to show the parallel literary and conceptual patterns that are common to all books of scripture, and discovered that the breaks that occur in Section 121 in the letter agree with the major structures I had already found in that section.

It is imperative for the reader to understand that the formatted version presented herein is neither definitive nor necessarily unique, but merely represents one man's opinions. There often are alternative ways of presenting parallelism in scripture. Some people find the formatted versions beautiful or helpful in finding the meanings of scripture, and others find them distracting or confusing. If the latter is so, the reader is invited to disregard this document and read the letter in the History of the Church, Volume III, pages 289-305. In any event, one must not allow any discussion of the format to interfere in the least with consideration of what is written. The interested reader is invited to find improvements in the formatting, and surely will do so if an attempt is made.

In the pages that follow, the parallelisms are indicated by equal levels of indentation. Capital or lower case letters were added in front of the elements of the more extensive units to guide the eye. Within a given element, so marked by a letter, sub-elements are indicated by further indentation. No alphabetic letters are applied to some of the more compact units, but the parallelism is shown simply by indentation.

The most common parallel forms found in the scriptures are inverted parallel or chiasmus (element sequence ABCBA), and direct parallel (ABCABC). In the former, the turning point, C in this case, is the point of emphasis of the passage. This turning point may contain one, two, or more parallel elements. Often direct parallel structures contain a point of emphasis, in which case the element sequence is of the form ABCABCD, with the emphasis in D.

A third form can be thought of as random parallelism. Here, each element is repeated exactly once, except perhaps the turning point, but in no particular order. A particularly beautiful example is the prayer offered by Joseph Smith in the Liberty jail, recorded in 121:1-6. Here, the first part consists of questions to God. The turning point is a statement of the greatness and power of God, and the balance of the prayer is petitions that match the questions precisely. It is intriguing to note that the passage can be rearranged to read as a powerful

inverted parallel system. One can speculate about why it was not written as such. Perhaps the Prophet had discovered the fact that the Lord often uses parallelism, but hadn't noticed the inverted form. On the other hand, the prayer may have been given by revelation. The Lord's answer is in an inverted pattern, including the deepest unit discovered in the Doctrine and Covenants.

The fourth commonly occurring structural form in the scriptures is the list, where several related items are tabulated. The number of elements in these lists often bears interesting relationships to biblical number symbolism (See Appendix).[9]

One wonders why the Lord chose to couch so many of His revelations in these forms. Various scholars have speculated about this question, citing ease of memorization, poetic form, and so forth. Brown suggests that "Parallel form may have a greater influence on the human soul than we realize." [10] The following points might be considered:

- The Lord teaches by repetition in ways that don't appear to be repetitious. The matching elements of chiasmic or direct parallel structures support and help define each other, with the result that the meanings are made more clear without additional words of explanation. In fact, an understanding of the structure is an important aid in understanding the original intent of the author.
- One is almost forced to consider the scriptures more carefully, with more pondering in depth. New insights are gained, particularly when matching elements do not at first appear to match, but their placement is forced by the structure. Further consideration often reveals previously un-noticed relationships and deeper understanding.
- The context of a passage is more easily discerned.
- The language carries a power and impact that derives, in part, from the structure.
- The Lord uses these forms as patterns to help His children recognize the revealed scriptures.[11] They are difficult to imitate, yet the modern scriptures came forth when only a small handful of scholars were aware of the pattern.

It must be stated that the study of parallel forms in the scriptures is in an early state of development. It must be emphasized that there often is more than one way to represent a particular passage, and different people may prefer different forms. Above all, one must not lose sight of the messages of the scriptures through arguing the structure. Again, the work that follows is presented only as one man's view, and must not be considered as more than that.

One might wonder why chiasmus and other scriptural parallel forms appear in the parts of the Liberty Jail letter that were not canonized. The parts that are in the Doctrine and Covenants are clearly distinct from the rest of the letter in content and style. Yet, the voice of inspiration is evident in the Prophet's words. It is my opinion that most or all of the letter was written under the power of inspiration, some of it recorded in Brother Joseph's words, and some in the Lord's, but most of it flowing in the patterns that are so typical of the scriptures.

Some might argue that the occurrence of chiasmus in the portions of the letter between the recognized revelations indicates that the Prophet Joseph was familiar with this style of writing, and therefore it appears in his personal writings as well as in all of the scriptures that came forth through him. While it may not be easy to rule this out completely, the fact remains that it is extremely difficult to write in meaningful patterns, particularly the inverted pattern of chiasmus. It would be even more difficult to dictate patterned text, which is precisely what Joseph Smith did in Liberty Jail. If he did any of it on his own, he would have to be considered extremely gifted.

After spending literally hundreds of hours investigating chiasmus and other parallelism in the four Standard Works, I have come to the inescapable conclusion that the Spirit is the source of the patterns, as well as the content. The Liberty Jail letter is no exception.

## References

1. History of the Church, Vol III, (1948) p. 214.
2. Robert J. Woodford, "Letters From Liberty Jail", *Hearken, O Ye People*, Randall Book Co., 1984, pp. 219-220.
3. Dean C. Jesse, ed., *The Personal Writings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1971, pp. 388-389.
4. History of the Church, Volume III, pp. 289-305.
5. Jesse, op. cit., pp. 389-407.
6. Jesse, op. cit., pp 408-409.
7. Woodford, op. cit. p. 220.
8. Keith W. Perkins, "Trials and Tribulations: The Refiner's Fire", *The Capstone of Our Religion*, Salt Lake City, Bookcraft, 1989, pp. 145-161.
9. E. W. Bullinger, *Number in Scripture*, Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1981; Reproduction of first edition published 1894.
10. Wade Brown, *The God-Inspired Language of the Book of Mormon*, Clackamas, OR: Rainbow Press, p. 51, 1988.
11. Doctrine and Covenants 52:14.

## NOTE

The version of the letter found in History of the Church differs from the original manuscript in a few places. The text presented herein follows the transcript in the Joseph Smith Papers, accessed May 15, 2017. <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/the-papers/documents/1839>



Liberty Jail  
Liberty, Clay County, Missouri  
March 20, 1839

To the Church of Latter-day Saints at Quincy, Illinois, and Scattered Abroad, and to Bishop Partridge in Particular:

I<sub>1</sub> Your humble servant, Joseph Smith, Jun., prisoner for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the Saints, taken and held by the power of mobocracy, under the exterminating reign of his excellency, the governor, Lilburn W. Boggs, in company with his fellow prisoners and beloved brethren, Caleb Baldwin, Lyman Wight, Hyrum Smith, and Alexander McRae, send unto you all greeting.

May  
the grace of God the Father, and of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,  
rest upon you all, and abide with you forever.

May  
knowledge  
be multiplied unto you by the mercy of God. And

may  
faith and  
virtue, and  
knowledge and  
temperance, and  
patience and  
godliness, and  
brotherly kindness and  
charity  
be in you and abound, that you may not be barren in anything, nor unfruitful.

A a For inasmuch as we know that the most of you are well acquainted with the wrongs and the high-handed injustice and cruelty that are practiced upon us;

b whereas we have been taken prisoners charged falsely with every kind of evil,

B and thrown into prison, enclosed with strong walls,

C surrounded with a strong guard,

D who continually watch day and night as indefatigable as the devil is in tempting and laying snares for the people of God:

I<sub>2</sub> Therefore, dearly beloved brethren, we are the more ready and willing to lay claim to your fellowship and love. For our circumstances are calculated to awaken our spirits to a sacred remembrance of everything, and we think that yours are also, and that nothing therefore can separate us from the love of God and fellowship one with another; and that every species of wickedness and cruelty practiced upon us will only tend to bind our hearts together and seal them together in love.[1]

A b We have no need to say to you that  
we are held in bonds  
without cause,  
neither is it needful that you say unto us,  
We are driven from our homes and smitten  
without cause.

a We mutually understand that if the inhabitants of the state of Missouri had let the Saints alone, and had been as desirable of peace as they were, there would have been nothing but peace and quietude in this state unto this day;[2]

B we should not have been in this hell,

C surrounded with demons (if not those who are damned, they are those who shall be damned)

- D and where we are compelled to hear nothing but blasphemous oaths, and witness a scene of blasphemy, and drunkenness and hypocrisy, and debaucheries of every description. And again, the cries of orphans and widows would not have ascended up to God.
- A The blood of innocent women and children, yea, and of men, would not have cried unto God against them, it would not have stained the soil of Missouri.
- B But oh! the unrelenting hand!  
The inhumanity and murderous disposition of this people!
- C It shocks all nature;  
it beggars and defies all description;  
it is  
    a tale of woe;  
    a lamentable tale; yea  
    a sorrowful tale;  
        too much to tell;  
        too much for contemplation;  
        too much to think of for a moment;  
        too much for human beings;  
it cannot be found among the heathens;  
it cannot be found among the nations where kings and tyrants are enthroned;  
it cannot be found among the savages of the wilderness; yea, and I think  
it cannot be found among the wild and ferocious beasts of the forest--
- B that a man should be  
    mangled for sport!  
Women be  
    robbed of all that they have--their last morsel for subsistence,  
    and then be violated to gratify the hellish desires of the mob,  
    and finally left to perish with their helpless offspring clinging around their necks.  
But this is not all. After a man is dead,  
    he must be dug up from his grave and mangled to pieces, for no other purpose than to gratify  
    their spleen against the religion of God.
- A They practice these things upon the Saints, who have done them no wrong, who are innocent and virtuous; who loved the Lord their God, and were willing to forsake all things for Christ's sake.

These things are awful to relate, but they are verily true. It must needs be that offenses come, but woe unto them by whom they come.

- A O God, where art thou?**
- B And where is the pavilion that covereth thy hiding place?**
- C How long shall thy hand be stayed,**
- D and thine eye, yea thy pure eye, behold from the eternal heavens the wrongs of thy people and of thy servants,**
- E and thine ear be penetrated with their cries?**
- F Yea, O Lord, how long shall they suffer these wrongs and unlawful oppressions,**
- G before thine heart shall be softened toward them, and thy bowels be moved with compassion toward them?**



**H O Lord God Almighty,  
maker of  
heaven,  
earth, and  
seas, and of  
all things that in them are, and  
who controllest  
and subjectest  
the devil, and  
the dark and benighted dominion of Sheol--**

**C stretch forth thy hand;**

**D let thine eye pierce;**

**B let thy pavilion be taken up; let thy hiding place no longer be covered;**

**E let thine ear be inclined;**

**G let thine heart be softened, and thy bowels moved with compassion  
toward us.**

**F Let thine anger be kindled against our enemies; and, in the fury of thine  
heart, with thy sword avenge us of our wrongs.**

**A Remember thy suffering saints, O our God; and thy servants will rejoice in thy name  
forever. (121:1-6)**

A Dearly and beloved brethren, we see that perilous times have come, as was testified of. We may look, then, with most perfect assurance, for the fulfillment of all those things that have been written, and with more confidence than ever before,

B lift up our eyes to the luminary of day, and say in our hearts, Soon thou wilt veil thy blushing face. He that said "Let there be light," and there was light, hath spoken this word. And again, Thou moon, thou dimmer light, thou luminary of night, shalt turn to blood.

A We see that everything is being fulfilled;

B and that the time shall soon come when the Son of Man shall descend in the clouds of heaven.

C Our hearts do not shrink, neither are our spirits altogether broken by the grievous yoke which is put upon us. We know that God will have our oppressors in derision; that He will laugh at their calamity, and mock when their fear cometh.[3]

A O that we could be with you, brethren, and unbosom our feelings to you!

B We would tell, that we should have been liberated at the time Elder Rigdon was, on the writ of habeas corpus,

C had not our own lawyers interpreted the law, contrary to what it reads, against us; which prevented us from introducing our evidence before the mock court. They have done us much harm from the beginning. They have of late acknowledged that the law was misconstrued, and tantalized our feelings with it, and have entirely forsaken us, and have forfeited their oaths and their bonds; and we have a comeback on them, for they are co-workers with the mob.

D As nigh as we can learn, the public mind has been for a long time turning in our favor, and the majority is now friendly; and the lawyers can no longer browbeat us by saying

that this or that is a matter of public opinion, for public opinion is not willing to brook it; for it is beginning to look with feelings of indignation against our oppressors, and to say that the "Mormons" were not in the fault in the least. We think that truth, honor, virtue and innocence will eventually come out triumphant.

- E We should have taken a habeas corpus before the high judge and escaped the mob in a summary way; but unfortunately for us, the timber of the wall being very hard, our auger handles gave out, and hindered us longer than we expected; we applied to a friend, and a very slight incautious act gave rise to some suspicions, and before we could fully succeed, our plan was discovered; we had everything in readiness, but the last stone, and we could have made our escape in one minute, and should have succeeded admirably, had it not been for a little imprudence or overanxiety on the part of our friend. The sheriff and jailer did not blame us for our attempt; it was a fine breach, and cost the county a round sum;
- D but public opinion says that we ought to have been permitted to have made our escape; that then the disgrace would have been on us, but now it must come on the state; that there cannot be any charge sustained against us; and that the conduct of the mob, the murders committed at Haun's Mills, and the exterminating order of the governor, and the one-sided, rascally proceedings of the legislature, have damned the state of Missouri to all eternity. I would just name also that General Atchison has proved himself as contemptible as any of them.
- C We have tried for a long time to get our lawyers to draw us some petitions to the supreme judges of this state. But they utterly refused.
- B We have examined the law, and drawn the petitions ourselves, and have obtained abundance of proof to counteract all the testimony that was against us, so that if the supreme judge does not grant us our liberty, he has to act without cause, contrary to honor, evidence, law or justice, sheerly to please the devil, but we hope better things and trust before many days God will so order our case, that we shall be set at liberty and take up our habitation with the Saints.
- A We received some letters last evening--one from Emma, one from Don C. Smith, and one from Bishop Partridge--all breathing a kind and consoling spirit. We were much gratified with their contents. We had been a long time without information; and when we read those letters they were to our souls as the gentle air is refreshing, but our joy was mingled with grief, because of the sufferings of the poor and much injured Saints.

And we need not say to you that  
the floodgates of our hearts were hoisted  
and our eyes were a fountain of tears,

but those who have not been enclosed in the walls of prison without cause or provocation, can have but little idea how sweet the voice of a friend is; one token of friendship from any source whatever

awakens and calls into action every sympathetic feeling;  
it brings up in an instant everything that is passed;  
it seizes the present with the vivacity of lightning;  
it grasps after the future with the fierceness of a tiger;  
it retrogrades from one thing to another,  
until finally all  
enmity,  
malice and  
hatred, and  
past differences,  
misunderstandings and  
mismanagements  
are slain victims at the feet of hope;[4]

and when the heart is sufficiently contrite, then the voice of inspiration steals along and whispers,

- A** My son, peace be unto thy soul; thine adversity and thy afflictions shall be but a small moment;
- B** And then, if thou endure it well, God shall exalt thee on high; thou shalt triumph over all thy foes.
- C** Thy friends do stand by thee,  
and they shall hail thee again with warm hearts and friendly hands.  
Thou art not yet as Job;
- C** thy friends do not contend against thee,  
neither charge thee with transgression,  
as they did Job.[5]
- B** And they who do charge thee with transgression, their hope shall be blasted,
- A** and their prospects shall melt away as the hoar frost melteth before the burning rays of the rising sun;[6]
- A** And also that God hath set his hand and seal  
to change the times and seasons, and  
to blind their minds,  
that they may not understand his marvelous workings;  
that he may prove them also  
and take them in their own craftiness;  
Also because their hearts are corrupt  
and the things which they are willing to bring upon others,  
and love to have others suffer,  
may come upon themselves to the very utmost  
That they may be disappointed also, and their hopes may be cut off;
- B** And not many years hence,
- C** that they and their posterity
- D** shall be swept from under heaven, saith God, that not one of them is left to stand by the wall.
- E** Cursed are all those that shall lift up the heel against mine anointed,
- F** saith the Lord,
- G** and cry they have sinned when they have not sinned before me, saith the Lord,  
but have done that which was meet in mine eyes,  
and which I commanded them.  
But those who cry transgression  
do it because they are the servants of sin,  
and are the children of disobedience themselves.  
And those who swear false against my servants,
- H** that they might bring them into bondage and death--
- I** Wo unto them; because they have offended my little ones
- J** they shall be severed from the ordinances of mine house.

**K** Their basket shall not be full,  
**K** their houses and their barns shall famish and  
**K** they themselves shall be despised by those that  
flattered them.

**J** They shall not have right to the priesthood, nor  
their posterity after them from generation to  
generation. It had been better for them that a  
millstone had been hanged about their necks, and  
they drowned in the depth of the sea.

**I** Wo unto all those that discomfort my people,

**H** and drive, and murder,

**G** and testify against them,

**F** saith the Lord of Hosts;

**E** a generation of vipers shall not escape the damnation of hell.

**D** Behold, mine eyes seeth and know all their works, and I have in reserve a swift  
judgment in the season thereof,[7]

**C** for them all;

**B** For there is a time appointed to every man,

**A** according as his works shall be. (121:7-25)

**A** And now, beloved brethren, we say unto you, that inasmuch as God hath said that He would have a tried  
people, that He would purge them as gold, now we think that this time He has chosen His own crucible,  
wherein we have been tried; and we think if we get through with any degree of safety, and shall have kept  
the faith, that it will be a sign to this generation, altogether sufficient to leave them without excuse;

**B** and we think also, it will be a trial of our faith equal to that of Abraham,

**C** and that the ancients will not have whereof to boast over us in the day of judgment, as being  
called to pass through heavier afflictions;[8]

**B** that we may hold an even weight in the balance with them;

**A** but now, after having suffered so great sacrifice and having passed through so great a season of sorrow,  
we trust that a ram may be caught in the thicket speedily, to relieve the sons and daughters of Abraham  
from their great anxiety, and to light up the lamp of salvation upon their countenances, that they may hold  
on now, after having gone so far unto everlasting life.

Now, brethren, concerning the places for the location of the Saints we cannot counsel you as we could if we  
were present with you; and as to the things that were written heretofore, we did not consider them anything very  
binding, therefore we now say once for all, that we think it most proper that the general affairs of the Church,  
which are necessary to be considered, while your humble servant remains in bondage, should be transacted by  
a general conference of the most faithful and the most respectable of the authorities of the Church, and a minute  
of those transactions may be kept, and forwarded from time to time, to your humble servant; and if there should  
be any corrections by the word of the Lord, they shall be freely transmitted, and your humble servant will  
approve all things whatsoever is acceptable unto God. If anything should have been suggested by us, or any

names mentioned, except by commandment, or thus saith the Lord, we do not consider it binding; therefore our hearts shall not be grieved if different arrangements should be entered into.

Nevertheless we would suggest the propriety of being aware of an aspiring spirit, which spirit has often times urged men forward to make foul speeches, and influence the Church to reject milder counsels, and has eventually been the means of bringing much death and sorrow upon the Church.

We would say, beware of pride also; for well and truly hath the wise man said, that pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.

And again, outward appearance is not always a criterion by which to judge our fellow man; but the lips betray the haughty and overbearing imaginations of the heart; by his words and his deeds let him be judged.

Flattery also is a deadly poison.

A frank and open rebuke provoketh a good man to emulation; and in the hour of trouble he will be your best friend; but on the other hand, it will draw out all the corruptions of corrupt hearts, and lying and the poison of asps is under their tongues; and they do cause the pure in heart to be cast into prison, because they want them out of their way.

A fanciful and flowery and heated imagination beware of; because the things of God are of deep import;  
and time,  
and experience,  
and careful and ponderous and solemn thoughts  
can only find them out.

A Thy mind, O man! if thou wilt lead a soul unto salvation,

B must stretch as high as the utmost heavens, and search into and contemplate the lowest considerations of the darkest abyss, and expand upon the broad considerations of Eternal Expanse--

C thou must commune with God.

C How much more dignified and noble are the thoughts of God,

B than the vain imaginations of the human heart!

A None but fools will trifle with the souls of men.

How vain and trifling have been

our spirits,  
our conferences,  
our councils,  
our meetings,  
our private as well as public conversations--  
too low,  
too mean,  
too vulgar,  
too condescending

for the dignified characters of the called and chosen of God,  
according to the purposes of His will,  
from before the foundation of the world!

We are called  
to hold the keys

of the mysteries of those things that have been kept hid from the foundation of the world until now.

Some have tasted a little of these things, many of which are to be poured down from heaven upon the heads of babes; yea, upon the weak, obscure and despised ones of the earth.

Therefore we beseech of you, brethren, that you bear with those who do not feel themselves more worthy than yourselves, while we exhort one another to a reformation with

one and all,  
both old and young,  
teachers and taught,  
both high and low,  
rich and poor,  
bond and free,  
male and female;

let

honesty, and  
sobriety, and  
candor, and  
solemnity, and  
virtue, and  
purity, and  
meekness, and  
simplicity

    crown our heads in every place; and in fine, become as little children, without  
    malice,  
    guile or  
    hypocrisy.

And now, brethren, after your tribulations, if you do these things, and exercise fervent prayer and faith in the sight of God always,

**A He shall give unto you knowledge by his Holy Spirit,  
yea, by the unspeakable gift of the Holy Ghost,  
that has not been revealed since the world was until now;  
Which our fathers have waited with anxious expectation to be revealed in the last times,  
which their minds were pointed to by the angels,**

**B<sub>1</sub> as held in reserve**

**B<sub>2</sub> for the fulness of their glory;**

**C A time to come in the which nothing shall be withheld,  
whether there be one God or many gods,  
they shall be manifest.**

**D<sub>1</sub> All  
    thrones and  
    dominions,  
    principalities and  
    powers,**

**D<sub>2</sub> shall be revealed and set forth upon all who have endured valiantly for the  
gospel of Jesus Christ.**

**D<sub>1</sub> And also,  
    if there be bounds set  
    to the heavens or  
    to the seas, or  
    to the dry land, or  
    to the sun, moon, or stars--  
All the times of their revolutions,**

**all their appointed  
days,  
months, and  
years, and  
all the days of their  
days,  
months, and  
years, and  
all their  
glories,  
laws, and  
set times,**

**D<sub>2</sub> shall be revealed in the days of the dispensation of the fulness of times--**

**C According to that which was ordained in the midst of the Council of the Eternal God of all other gods before this world was,**

**B<sub>1</sub> that should be reserved unto the finishing and the end thereof,**

**B<sub>2</sub> when every man shall enter  
into his eternal presence and  
into his immortal rest. (121:26-32)**

But I beg leave to say unto you, brethren, that ignorance, superstition and bigotry placing itself where it ought not, is oftentimes in the way of the prosperity of this Church; like the torrent of rain from the mountains, that floods the most pure and crystal stream with mire, and dirt, and filthiness, and obscures everything that was clear before, and all hurls along in one general deluge; but time weathers tide; and notwithstanding we are rolled in the mire of the flood for the time being, the next surge peradventure, as time rolls on, may bring to us the fountain as clear as crystal, and as pure as snow; while the filthiness, floodwood and rubbish is left and purged out by the way.[9][10]

**A a How long can rolling waters remain impure?**

**b What power shall stay the heavens?**

**a As well might man stretch forth his puny arm to stop the Missouri river in its decreed course, or to turn it up stream,**

**b as to hinder the Almighty from pouring down knowledge from heaven upon the heads of the Latter-day Saints. (121:33)**

**A What is Boggs or his murderous party, but wimbling willows upon the shore to catch the floodwood?**

**B a As well might we argue that water is not water,**

**b because the mountain torrents send down mire and roil the crystal stream, although afterwards render it more pure than before;**

**a or that fire is not fire,**

**b<sub>1</sub> because it is of a quenchable nature, by pouring on the flood;**

**b<sub>2</sub> as to say that our cause is down because renegades, liars, priests, thieves and murderers, who are all alike tenacious of their crafts and creeds,**

**C have poured down,**

- D from their spiritual wickedness in high places, and from their strongholds of the devil, a flood of dirt and mire and filthiness and vomit upon our heads.
- E No! God forbid.
- D Hell
- C may pour forth
- B
  - b<sub>1</sub> its rage like the burning lava of mount Vesuvius, or of Etna, or of the most terrible of the burning mountains;
  - b<sub>2</sub> and yet shall “Mormonism” stand.
  - a Water, fire, truth and God are all realities. Truth is “Mormonism.”
- A God is the author of it. He is our shield.
  - It is by Him
    - we received our birth.
  - It was by His voice
    - that we were called to a dispensation of His Gospel in the beginning of the fullness of times.
  - It was by Him
    - we received the Book of Mormon; and
  - it is by Him
    - that we remain unto this day;
  - and by Him
    - we shall remain,
      - if it shall be for our glory; and in His Almighty name we are determined to endure tribulation as good soldiers unto the end.

But, brethren, we shall continue to offer further reflections in our next epistle. You will learn by the time you have read this, and if you do not learn it, you may learn it, that  
 walls and  
 irons,  
 doors and  
 creaking hinges, and  
 half-scared-to-death guards and jailers,  
 grinning like some damned spirits, lest an innocent man should make his escape to bring to light the damnable deeds of a murderous mob,  
 are calculated in their very nature to make the soul of an honest man feel stronger than the powers of hell.

But we must bring our epistle to a close. We send our respects to fathers, mothers, wives and children, brothers and sisters; we hold them in the most sacred remembrance.

We feel to inquire after Elder Rigdon; if he has not forgotten us, it has not been signified to us by his pen scrawl. Brother George W. Robinson also; and Elder Cahoon, we remember him, but would like to jog his memory a little on the fable of the bear and the two friends who mutually agreed to stand by each other. And perhaps it would not be amiss to mention uncle John [Smith], and various others. A word of consolation and a blessing would not come amiss from anybody, while we are being so closely whispered by the bear. But we feel to excuse everybody and everything, yea the more readily when we contemplate that we are in the hands of persons worse than a bear, for the bear would not prey upon a dead carcass.

Our respects and love and fellowship to all the virtuous Saints. We are your brethren and fellow-sufferers, and prisoners of Jesus Christ for the Gospel’s sake, and for the hope of glory which is in us. Amen. (signed by all)

ca 22 March 1839

We continue to offer further reflections to Bishop Partridge, and to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, whom we love with a fervent love, and do always bear them in mind in all our prayers to the throne of God.



It still seems to bear heavily on our minds that the Church would do well to secure to themselves the contract of the land which is proposed to them by Mr. Isaac Galland, and to cultivate the friendly feelings of that gentleman, inasmuch as he shall prove himself to be a man of honor and a friend to humanity; also Isaac Van Allen, Esq., the attorney-general of Iowa Territory, and Governor Lucas, that peradventure such men may be wrought upon by the providence of God, to do good unto His people. We really think that Mr. Galland's letter breathes that kind of a spirit, if we may judge correctly. Governor Lucas also. We suggest the idea of praying fervently for all men who manifest any degree of sympathy for the suffering children of God.

We think that the United States Surveyor of the Iowa Territory may be of great benefit to the Church, if it be the will of God to this end; and righteousness should be manifested as the girdle of our loins.

It seems to be deeply impressed upon our minds that the Saints ought to lay hold of every door that shall seem to be opened unto them, to obtain foothold on the earth, and be making all the preparation that is within their power for the terrible storms that are now gathering in the heavens, "a day of clouds, with darkness and gloominess, and of thick darkness," as spoken of by the Prophets, which cannot be now of a long time lingering, for there seems to be a whispering that the angels of heaven who have been entrusted with the counsel of these matters for the last days, have taken counsel together; and among the rest of the general affairs that have to be transacted in their honorable council, they have taken cognizance of the testimony of those who were murdered at Haun's Mills, and also those who were martyred with David W. Patten, and elsewhere, and have passed some decisions peradventure in favor of the Saints, and those who were called to suffer without cause.

These decisions will be made known in their time; and the council will take into consideration all those things that offend.

A We have a fervent desire that in your general conferences everything should be discussed with a great deal of care and propriety,

B lest you grieve the Holy Spirit,

C which shall be poured out at all times upon your heads,

D<sub>1</sub> when you are exercised with those principles of righteousness that are agreeable to the mind of God, and are properly affected one toward another,

D<sub>2</sub> and are careful by all means to remember, those who are in bondage, and in heaviness, and in deep affliction for your sakes.

D<sub>1</sub> And if there are any among you who aspire after their own aggrandizement, and seek their own opulence,

D<sub>2</sub> while their brethren are groaning in poverty, and are under sore trials and temptations,

C they cannot be benefited by the intercession

B of the Holy Spirit, which maketh intercession for us day and night with groanings that cannot be uttered.

A We ought at all times to be very careful that such high-mindedness shall never have place in our hearts; but condescend to men of low estate, and with all long-suffering bear the infirmities of the weak.

**A Behold, there are many called, but few are chosen. And why are they not chosen?**

**B Because their hearts are set so much upon the things of this world, and aspire to the honors of men, that they do not learn this one lesson--**

**C That the rights of the priesthood**

are inseparably connected with  
the powers of heaven, and that  
the powers of heaven  
cannot be controlled nor handled only upon the principles of righteousness.

That they may be conferred upon us, it is true;

D but when we undertake  
to cover our sins, or  
to gratify our pride, *or* {our} vain ambition, or  
to exercise  
control or  
dominion or  
compulsion  
upon the souls of the children of men, in any degree of  
unrighteousness,

C behold, the heavens withdraw themselves;  
the Spirit of the Lord is grieved;  
and when it is withdrawn,  
Amen to the priesthood or the authority of that man.  
Behold, ere he is aware, he is left unto himself,  
to kick against the pricks,  
to persecute the saints, and  
to fight against God.

B We have learned by sad experience that it is the nature and disposition of almost all men, as soon as they get a little authority, as they suppose, they will immediately begin to exercise unrighteous dominion.

A Hence many are called, but few are chosen.

A No power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood,  
only by  
persuasion, by  
long-suffering, by  
gentleness and  
meekness, and by  
love unfeigned; by  
kindness, by  
pure knowledge,[11]  
which shall greatly enlarge the soul  
without hypocrisy, and  
without guile--

B Reproving betimes with sharpness, when moved upon by the Holy Ghost;

C and then showing forth afterwards an increase of love

B toward him whom thou hast reprov'd, lest he esteem thee to be his enemy;

A That he may know that thy faithfulness is stronger than the cords of death.

Let thy bowels also be full of charity towards all men, and to the household of faith, and let virtue garnish thy thoughts  
unceasingly;  
then shall thy confidence wax strong in the presence of God;  
and the doctrine of the priesthood

shall distil upon thy soul as the dews from heaven.  
The Holy Ghost shall be thy constant companion,  
and thy scepter an unchanging scepter of righteousness and truth; and thy dominion  
shall be an everlasting dominion,  
and without compulsory means it shall flow unto thee  
forever and ever. (121:34-46)

- A The ends of the earth shall inquire after thy name,
- B and fools shall have thee in derision, and hell shall rage against thee;
- C<sub>1</sub> While  
the pure in heart, and  
the wise, and  
the noble, and  
the virtuous,
- C<sub>2</sub> shall seek  
counsel, and  
authority, and  
blessings  
constantly from under thy hand.
- C<sub>1</sub> And thy people
- C<sub>2</sub> shall never be turned against thee by the testimony of traitors.
- B And although their influence shall cast thee into trouble, and into bars and walls,
- A 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;
- A and thy God shall stand by thee forever and ever.
- B If thou art called to pass through tribulation;
- C if thou art in peril among false brethren;  
if thou art in peril among robbers;  
if thou art in peril by land or by sea;
- D If thou art accused with all manner of false accusations;
- E if thine enemies fall upon thee; if they tear thee from the society of thy father  
and mother and brethren and sisters; and if with a drawn sword
- F thine enemies tear thee from the bosom of thy wife, and of thine  
offspring, and thine elder son, although but six years of age, shall cling  
to thy garments, and shall say,
- G My father, O my father, why can't you stay with us?
- G O, my father, what are the men going to do with you?
- F and if then he shall be thrust from thee
- E by the sword,
- D and thou be dragged to prison,

**C and thine enemies prowl around thee like wolves for blood of the lamb;  
And if thou shouldst be cast into the pit, or into the hand of murderers, and the  
sentence of death passed upon thee;  
if thou be cast into the deep; if the billowing surge conspire against thee;**

**B if the fierce winds become thine enemy;  
if the heavens gather blackness, and all the elements combine to hedge up the way; and above  
all,  
if the very jaws of hell shall gape open her mouth wide after thee,[12]**

**A know thou, my son, that all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good.  
The Son of Man hath descended below them all. Art thou greater than he?  
Therefore, hold on thy way, and the priesthood shall remain with thee;  
for their bounds are set, they cannot pass.  
Thy days are known, and  
thy years shall not be numbered less;  
therefore, fear not what man can do,  
for God shall be with you forever and ever. (122:1-9)**

Now, brethren, I would suggest for the consideration of the conference, its being carefully and wisely understood by the council or conferences that our brethren scattered abroad, who understand the spirit of the gathering, that they fall into the places and refuge of safety that God shall open unto them, between Kirtland and Far West. Those from the east and from the west, and from far countries, let them fall in somewhere between those two boundaries, in the most safe and quiet places they can find; and let this be the present understanding, until God shall open a more effectual door for us for further considerations.

And again, we further suggest for the considerations of the Council, that there be no organization of large bodies upon common stock principles, in property, or of large companies of firms, until the Lord shall signify it in a proper manner, as it opens such a dreadful field for the avaricious, the indolent, and the corrupt hearted to prey upon the innocent and virtuous, and honest.

A We have reason to believe that many things were introduced among the Saints

B before God had signified

C the times;

D and notwithstanding the principles and plans may have been good, yet aspiring men, or in other words, men who had not the substance of godliness about them, perhaps undertook to handle edged tools.

E Children, you know, are fond of tools, while they are not yet able to use them.

D Time and experience, however, are the only safe remedies against such evils. There are many teachers, but, perhaps, not many fathers.

C There are times coming

B when God will signify

A many things which are expedient for the well-being of the Saints; but the times have not yet come, but will come, as fast as there can be found place and reception for them.

**A And again, we would suggest for your consideration the propriety of all the saints gathering up a  
knowledge of all  
- the facts, and  
- sufferings and**

- abuses put upon them by the people of this State; And also of all
- the property and
- amount of damages which they have sustained, both of character and personal injuries, as well as real property;
- And also the names of all persons that have had a hand in their oppressions, as far as they can get hold of them and find them out.[13]

And perhaps a committee can be appointed

- to find out these things, and
- to take statements and affidavits; and also
- to gather up the libelous publications that are afloat; And all that are in the magazines, and in the encyclopedias, and all the libelous histories that are published, and that are writing, and by whom,
- and present the whole concatenation of diabolical rascality and nefarious and murderous impositions that have been practised upon this people--  
That we may not only publish to all the world, but present them to the heads of government in all their dark and hellish hue, as the last effort which is enjoined on us by our Heavenly Father, before we can fully and completely claim that promise which shall call him forth from his hiding place; and also that the whole nation may be left without excuse before he can send forth the power of his mighty arm.

**B<sub>1</sub>** It is an imperative duty that we owe

**B<sub>2</sub>** to God,  
to angels, with whom we shall be brought to stand, and also  
to ourselves,  
to our wives  
and our children,

**B<sub>3</sub>** who have been made to bow down with  
grief,  
sorrow, and  
care,  
under the most damning hand of  
murder,  
tyranny, and  
oppression,  
supported and  
urged on and  
upheld  
by the influence of that spirit which hath so strongly  
riveted the creeds of the fathers, who have inherited lies,  
upon the hearts of the children, and filled the world with  
confusion, and has been growing stronger and stronger,  
and is now the very mainspring of all corruption in the  
world, and the whole earth groans under the weight of its  
iniquity.  
It is an iron yoke,  
it is a strong band;  
they are the very  
handcuffs, and  
chains, and  
shackles, and  
fettors  
of hell.[14]

- B<sub>1</sub> Therefore it is an imperative duty that we owe,**
- B<sub>2</sub> not only to our own wives and children,  
but to the widow and fatherless,**
- B<sub>3</sub> whose husbands and fathers have been murdered under its iron hand;  
Which dark and blackening deeds are enough to make hell itself  
shudder, and to  
stand aghast and pale,  
and the hands of the very devil tremble and palsy.**

- B<sub>1</sub> And also it is an imperative duty that we owe**
- B<sub>2</sub> to all the rising generation, and  
to all the pure in heart--**
- B<sub>3</sub> Which there are many yet on the earth among all  
sects,  
parties, and  
denominations,  
who are blinded by the subtle craftiness of men,  
whereby they lie in wait to deceive, and  
only kept from the truth  
because they know not where to find it--**

- A a Therefore, that we should waste and wear out our lives in bringing to light all the hidden things of darkness, wherein we know them; and they are truly manifest from heaven--**
- b These should then be attended to with great earnestness.**
- c Let no man count them as small things;**
- d for there is much which lieth in futurity, pertaining to the saints, which depends upon these things.**
- c You know, brethren, that a very large ship is benefited very much by a very small helm in the time of a storm, by being kept workways with the wind and the waves.**
- b Therefore, dearly beloved brethren, let us cheerfully do all things that lie in our power;**
- a and then may we stand still, with the utmost assurance, to see the salvation of God, and for his arm to be revealed. (123:1-17)**

And again, I would further suggest the impropriety of the organization of bands or companies, by covenant or oaths, by penalties or secrecies; but let the time past of our experience and sufferings by the wickedness of Doctor Avard suffice and let our covenant be that of the Everlasting Covenant, as is contained in the Holy Writ and the things that God hath revealed unto us. Pure friendship always becomes weakened the very moment you undertake to make it stronger by penal oaths and secrecy.

Your humble servant or servants, intend from henceforth to disapprobate everything that is not in accordance with the fullness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and is not of a bold, and frank, and upright nature. They will not hold their peace--as in times past when they see iniquity beginning to rear its head--for fear of traitors, or the consequences that shall follow by reproving those who creep in unawares, that they may get something with which to destroy the flock. We believe that the experience of the Saints in times past has been sufficient, that they will from henceforth be always ready to obey the truth without having men's persons in admiration because of advantage. It is expedient that we should be aware of such things; and we ought always to be aware of those prejudices which sometimes so strongly present themselves, and are so congenial to human nature, against our

friends, neighbors, and brethren of the world, who choose to differ from us in opinion and in matters of faith. Our religion is between us and our God. Their religion is between them and their God.

There is a love from God that should be exercised toward those of our faith, who walk uprightly, which is peculiar to itself, but it is without prejudice; it also gives scope to the mind, which enables us to conduct ourselves with greater liberality towards all that are not of our faith, than what they exercise towards one another. These principles approximate nearer to the mind of God, because it is like God, or Godlike.

A There is a principle also, which we are bound to be exercised with, that is, in common with all men, such as governments, and laws, and regulations in the civil concerns of life.

B This principle guarantees to all parties, sects, and denominations, and classes of religion, equal, coherent, and indefeasible rights; they are things that pertain to this life; therefore all are alike interested; they make our responsibilities one towards another in matters of corruptible things, while the former principles do not destroy the latter, but bind us stronger, and make our responsibilities not only one to another, but unto God also.

C Hence we say, that the Constitution of the United States is a glorious standard;  
- it is founded in the wisdom of God.  
- It is a heavenly banner;  
- it is to all those who are privileged with the sweets of its liberty, like the cooling shades and refreshing waters of a great rock in a thirsty and weary land.  
- It is like a great tree under whose branches men from every clime can be shielded from the burning rays of the sun.

B We, brethren, are deprived of the protection of its glorious principles, by the cruelty of the cruel, by those who only look for the time being, for pasturage like the beasts of the field, only to fill themselves; and forget that the "Mormons," as well as the Presbyterians, and those of every other class and description, have equal rights to partake of the fruits of the great tree of our national liberty.

A But notwithstanding we see what we see, and feel what we feel, and know what we know, yet that fruit is no less precious and delicious to our taste; we cannot be weaned from the milk, neither can we be drawn from the breast; neither will we deny our religion because of the hand of oppression; but we will hold on until death.

We say

that God is true;  
that the Constitution of the United States is true;  
that the Bible is true;  
that the Book of Mormon is true;  
that the Book of Covenants is true;  
that Christ is true;  
that the ministering angels sent forth from God are true, and  
that we know that we have an house not made with hands eternal in the heavens,  
whose builder and maker is God; a consolation which our oppressors cannot feel, when fortune,  
or fate, shall lay its iron hand on them as it has on us.  
Now, we ask, what is man?  
Remember, brethren, that time and chance happen to all men.

We shall continue our reflections in our next.

We subscribe ourselves, your sincere friends and brethren in the bonds of the everlasting Gospel, prisoners of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the Gospel and the Saints.

We pronounce the blessings of heaven upon the heads of the Saints who seek to serve God with undivided hearts, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Joseph Smith, Jun., Hyrum Smith, Lyman Wight, Caleb Baldwin, Alexander McRae.

## Notes

1.  $I_1$  and  $I_2$  each introduce the two parts of a complex direct parallel structure. It is very rare to find two parts of a parallel structure separated by a block of text of any sort.
2. This form of parallelism, **Aab Aba**, is rarely found.
3. This is an example of the form **A B A B C**, with the emphasis on **C**, which is common in all four standard works.
4. The Prophet unbosoms his feelings from **A** to here.
5. Each line of each **C** is similar to the corresponding line in the other and they are indented the same to indicate this parallelism.
6. The hoar frost lasts but a small moment before the burning rays of the rising sun.
7. “Swift judgment” is parallel to “swept from under heaven.”
8. In contrast, Sidney Rigdon said that Christ’s sufferings “were a fool compared with this”; he was never again the leader he had been. See Keith W. Perkins, “Trials and Tribulations: The Refiner’s Fire”, *The Capstone of Our Religion* (Salt Lake City, Bookcraft, 1989), pp. 147.
9. Woodford identifies this floodwood and and rubbish with apostates. See Robert J. Woodford, “Letters From Liberty Jail”, *Hearken, O Ye People* (Randall Book Co., 1984), p. 223.
10. One wonders why this paragraph appears here in the letter instead of after the following passage. Its content fits very well with the material about Boggs, etc. Also, the break in the revelation would not have occurred had it been placed there.
11. There are seven elements in this list. Seven, to the Hebrew, signified spiritual perfection. The chiasm was suggested by Robert McCuan, Round Rock, TX, 31 January 2012.
12. There are 15 “if” statements. This number can be considered to be three fives. Five is the number of grace and mercy, and three signifies Divine perfection, completeness, and is also the covenantal number. “Fifteen, therefore, specially refers to acts wrought by the energy of Divine grace.” (Bullinger, Number in Scripture, p. 257.)
13. Six is the number of evil.
14. Notice the parallels between the three groupings that are indented similarly.



## Appendix—selected Lists in the Liberty Jail Letter

### Page **Three** (Complete)

- 1 May grace, knowledge, and eight characteristics...
- 2 It...
- 2 A tale
- 2 robbed, violated, left to perish
- 7 Time, experience, thoughts
- 7 Careful, ponderous, solemn (thoughts)
- 8 Malice, guile, hypocrisy
- 8 Sun, moon, stars
- 9 Days, month, years (twice)
- 9 Glories, laws, set times
- 12 To cover, gratify, exercise
- 12 Control, dominion, compulsion
- 12 To kick, persecute, fight
- 13 Counsel, authority, blessings
- 15 Grief, sorrow, care
- 15 Murder, tyranny, oppression
- 15 Supported, urged, upheld
- 15 It is (they are) iron yoke, strong band, handcuffs...
- 16 Sects, parties, denominations

### **Four** (World, man, creation)

- 2 too much to tell, for contemplation, to think of, for human beings
- 2 It cannot be found among heathens, nations, savages, beasts
- 3 Heaven, earth, seas, all things in them
- 7 Too low, mean, vulgar, condescending
- 8 Thrones, dominions, principalities, powers
- 8 To the heavens, seas, dry land, heavenly bodies
- 10 Dirt, mire, filthiness and vomit
- 13 Pure in heart, wise, noble, virtuous

- 15 Find, take, gather, present
- 15 Handcuffs, chains, shackles, fetters
- 17 Parties, sects, denominations and classes of religion
- 17 It is founded in the wisdom of God, a heavenly banner, like cooling shades, like a great tree

**Five** (Mercy, grace)

- 1 Joseph, Caleb, Lyman, Hyrum and Alexander
- 2 Hand, eye, ear, heart, bowels
- 3 Hand, eye, ear, heart, bowels
- 4 Awakens, brings up, seizes, grasps, retrogrades
- 7 Our spirits, conferences, councils, meetings, conversations
- 9 Renegades, liars, priests, thieves and murders
- 10 It is by Him (His voice): birth, called, received Book of Mormon, remain, shall remain
- 15 To God, angels, ourselves, wives, children

**Six** (Evil, man without God)

- 4 Enmity, malice, hatred, past differences, misunderstandings, mismanagements
- 5-6 Curses on persecutors: severed from temple, baskets not full, houses perish, barns perish, despised, not have right to priesthood
- 7 Beware of: an aspiring spirit, pride, false outward appearance, flattery, corrupt hearts, fanciful imagination
- 10 Walls, irons, doors, creaking hinges, guards, jailers
- 14-15 Facts, sufferings, abuses, property, amount of damages, names of oppressors

**Seven** (Spiritual perfection)

- 8 One and all, (seven pairs, each of which includes everyone)
- 12 Persuasion, long-suffering, gentleness, meekness, love unfeigned, kindness, pure knowledge

**Eight** (New beginnings)

- 1 Characteristics to be in the saints and abound
- 8 Characteristics to crown their heads in the reformation
- 17 We say...

**Fifteen** (Acts wrought by the energy of Divine grace)

13-14 If...

Note: Number definitions after E. W. Bullinger, *Number in Scripture*, Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1981; reproduction of first edition published 1894.