

## Comments on Doctrine & Covenants 123

See comments on D&C 121 for background on this text.

This excerpt from the letter is a single continuous block appearing considerably after the text quoted in D&C 122. Smith is speaking, and is instructing the Church to keep a detailed historical record regarding the various persecutions and tribulations they have been subjected to.

1 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; 2 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; 3 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. 4 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; 5 And all that are in the magazines, and in the encyclopedias, and all the libelous histories that are published, and 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-- 6 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.

v1-6 A detailed history (v. 1) of material damages suffered (v. 2) and the names of perpetrators (v. 3), and libelous publications (v. 4-5e) is to be compiled and published to all the world to both expose the wicked and to leave the indifferent without excuse (v. 5f-6).

7 It is an imperative duty that we owe to God, to angels, with whom we shall be brought to stand, and also to ourselves, to our wives and children, 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, and the whole earth groans under the weight of its iniquity. 8 It is an iron yoke, it is a strong band; they are the very handcuffs, and chains, and shackles, and fetters of hell. 9 Therefore it is an imperative duty that we owe, not only to our own wives and children, but to the widows and fatherless, whose husbands and fathers have been murdered under its iron hand; 10 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 to tremble and palsy.

11 And also it is an imperative duty that we owe to all the rising generation, and to all the pure in heart-- 12 For 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 who are only kept from the truth because they know not where to find it--

v7-12 Smith cites four reasons why the task spoken of in v. 1-6 should be taken up:

1. For God and angels who will participate in the Judgement (v. 7, cp. D&C 128:8);
2. for those currently suffering (v. 7-8);
3. for those who were martyred and those left widows and orphans by the martyrdom (v. 9-10);
4. for those blinded by the craftiness of men who are kept from the truth only because they know not where to find it (v. 11-12).

Overall, the reasons come down to doing it for the sake of our own people (v. 7-10) and for those who are not of the Church but who want to know the truth (v. 11-12).

13 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-- 14 These should then be attended to with great earnestness. 15 Let no man count them as small things; for there is much which lieth in futurity, pertaining to the saints, which depends upon these things.

16 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. 17 Therefore, dearly beloved brethren, let us cheerfully do all things that lie in our power; and then may we stand still, with the utmost

assurance, to see the salvation of God, and for his arm to be revealed.

v13-17 Smith further encourages them to vigorously undertake the task of exposing the evil's perpetrated against them (v. 13-14). None should mistake this task as being a "small thing", meaning both "insignificant" and "petty", as in a task designed to be childishly vindictive as an exercise in fault-finding. Rather, it is a serious work of great future importance (v. 15).

Smith then offers a common sense parable of the great utility of just a small helm (representing the truth, per v. 12) on a ship in the midst of a storm (representing the persecutions, per v. 7-8) to illustrate the importance of the task (v. 16). Smith then concludes by encouraging the Saints to cheerfully do all that was in their power, and by so doing they would see the salvation of God (v. 17).

## **Historical Material Pertaining to Doctrine & Covenants 123**

This section was first published Times and Seasons, volume 1, number 9, pages 131-134, dated July, 1840. It was published in the Millennial Star, volume 1, number 8, pages 193-197, dated December, 1840. It was published in the Desert News, volume 4, number 5, page 17, dated February 2, 1854. It was first published in the Doctrine and Covenants in 1876, pages 389-391.

### **Excerpt from Journal of Erastus Snow**

In the month of February [1839], I, in company with several others, went to Liberty. I took a load of furniture to sell and at supper time when the jailer went into the jail, we by his permission, went in to see the presidency and after they had eaten their suppers while we were about to go out, President Hyrum Smith attempted to effect his escape but was detected by the jailer and the guards and the doors were locked upon us all and the town raised by the cry of the jailer and firing a gun by the guards. They were very much enraged and supposing that we attempted to liberate the prisoners, some threatened to burn the jail and all in it and others were for blowing it up with powder and a third part were for taking us out and hanging us up without judge or jury and others remonstrated against the whole, but we heard it all and commended ourselves to God and went to sleep and the Lord set division among them so that we were not injured by them. We were kept there about a week and taken out and tried before the court. I pled my own cause and was discharged and others were bound over. They proved nothing against them, yet to please the rabble and keep down the mob, the judges bound them over, for we made no attempt to release the prisoners, though we had it in our hearts to seize the jailer and guards when we got out, but Brother Smith, attempting to go out before we did, we were suspected and defeated.

Before we left Liberty, the merchants and lawyers and influential men agreed that for ten thousand dollars worth of land, they would set the prisoners free but after we had come home to Far West and signed over our lands and got other Saints to do it enough to make up that amount to redeem our brethren, they would not do as they agreed and set them free for fear of the mob and though the Lord accepted our offering, yet we did not accomplish our object. In the meanwhile, the Mormons were moving out of the state according to the governor's order and their agreement with the militia in the fall.

And I, with the rest, prepared to move to the state of Illinois with my wife and friends. But I did not wish to leave the presidency in confinement. Therefore, I resolved with others to tarry until we saw our brethren liberated. The first day of April [1839], I started (by the request of the prisoners) to the city of Jefferson to see the judges of the supreme court, to lay their cases before them and to obtain from them a writ of habeas corpus to bring the prisoners before them to be re-examined by them. I saw the judges but they would do nothing about it. I went to the office of the secretary of state and obtained a copy of an act of the legislature respecting the change of venue, which the prisoners needed. I rode on horseback to Jefferson and back in 7 1/2 days, a distance of 165 miles.

The following week I went to Plattsburgh to do some business and make preparation for starting to Illinois and did start with my father's folks and some other families on the 15th of April [1839], and crossed the Mississippi River and landed in Quincy, Illinois on the 27th, about 200 miles from Far West. The prisoners were taken from Liberty to Daviess County, and were there indicted by the Grand Jury and changed the venue to Boone County, and while on the way to Boone County, they bribed the guard and got away on the 16th of April and landed in Quincy before I did.

They accompanied Bishop Knight to Commerce, 50 miles north of Quincy on the river where the bishop made a purchase of land and also on the other side of the river in Iowa Territory. The presidency returned in time to attend the General Conference held in Quincy on the 4th of May [1839], at which time I was appointed by the conference one of three committees to collect the libelous publications of all kinds that had been published against the Saints and to insert and refute them in a church history which should be compiled by us. After the conference, the presidency moved to Commerce and I left my family in Quincy and started the 7th of May [1839] and went to Commerce to make some preparations for moving.

I obtained a cabin for my family in Montrose in Iowa Territory. I was absent from him three weeks and boarded with President J. Smith, Jr. and planted a garden and about four acres of land and then returned to Quincy. [I] stayed one day in Quincy, then rode to Pike County and obtained some affidavits from some brethren respecting circumstances that transpired in Missouri which we wished to publish.

Thence, I went to Greene County [Illinois] and through Scott on the east side of the Illinois River to transact some

business for my mother-in-law. I returned on the northern road by Philips' ferry and reached Quincy the 8th of June [1839], having traveled about 200 miles. On the 10th [June 1839], I started with my family and with my brother's team, landed at Montrose on the 12th and moved into the house with my brother-in-law, J. [Joseph] B. Noble. Elder Robert B. Thomson [Thompson], one of the committee also moved up to Commerce about the same time. I attended to my garden and crop that I had planted and made preparations to leave my wife in a comfortable situation while I should be engaged in the work assigned me by the General Conference.

President J. Smith, Jr. counseled that Elder Almon Babbitt (the other committee) and myself as our circumstances admitted, should travel and preach and gather in our travels what publications we could and send to Elder Thomson who should be writing and compiling the history which should be subject to our inspection; also, that when we could get donations, to assist us in defraying the expenses of the work, we should do so. (Erastus Snow, *Journal of Erastus Snow*, pages 47-50, as appearing in *Writings of Early Latter-day Saints*, edited by Milton V. Backman)

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