

Doctrine and Covenants 121

"There Are Many Called, but Few Are Chosen"

Have you ever felt discouraged? Have you ever prayed for help in a difficult situation? On 27 October 1838 Lilburn W. Boggs, governor of Missouri, issued the infamous extermination order, which read, in part: "The Mormons must be treated as enemies and must be exterminated or driven from the state, if necessary for the public good" (in History of the Church, 3:175). Four days later the Prophet Joseph Smith and several Church leaders were betrayed into the hands of a Missouri state militia at Far West, Missouri. The Prophet wrote that Colonel Hinkle, a member of the Church and a leading officer who was supposed to defend the Saints, "stated that the officers of the militia desired to have an interview with me and some others, hoping that the difficulties might be settled without having occasion to carry into effect the exterminating orders which they had received from the governor. I immediately complied with the request, and ... went into the camp of the militia. But judge of my surprise, when, instead of being treated with that respect that is due from one citizen to another, we [the Prophet and his companions] were taken as prisoners of war, and treated with the utmost contempt. ... I cannot begin to tell the scene which I there witnessed. The loud cries and yells of more than one thousand voices, which rent the air and could be heard for miles, and the horrid and blasphemous threats and curses which were poured upon us in torrents, were enough to appall the stoutest heart. In the evening we had to lie down on the cold ground, surrounded by a strong guard, who were only kept back by the power of God from depriving us of life. ...

"The militia went into the town, and without any restraint whatever, plundered the houses, and abused the innocent and unoffending inhabitants and left many destitute" (History of the Church, 3:188–91).



Liberty Jail

For the next several weeks the Prophet Joseph Smith and his companions were abused and insulted, forced to march long distances in cold weather, and on 1 December 1838 they were

imprisoned in Liberty Jail in Missouri. These men had not been convicted of any crime; nevertheless, they were held in the jail for several months under terrible conditions.

"Between 20 March and 25 March 1839, the Prophet Joseph dictated a lengthy communication that was signed by all the prisoners (actually there were two letters, although the Prophet identified the second as a continuation of the first). President Joseph Fielding Smith wrote of this correspondence: 'This is one of the greatest letters that was ever penned by the hand of man. In fact it was the result of humble inspiration. It is a prayer and a prophecy and an answer by revelation from the Lord. None other but a noble soul filled with the spirit of love of Christ could have written such a letter. Considering [their sufferings], it is no wonder that the Prophet cried out in the anguish of his soul for relief. Yet, in his earnest pleading, there breathed a spirit of tolerance and love for his fellow man.' (Church History and Modern Revelation, 2:176.)" (The Doctrine and Covenants Student Manual [Religion 324 and 325], 295–96).



Doctrine and Covenants sections 121–23 were taken from the letters the Prophet Joseph Smith dictated while in Liberty Jail. They were first included in the 1876 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants.



Understanding the Scriptures

Doctrine and Covenants 121

Pavilion (v. 1, 4)—Tent or canopy

Penetrated (v. 2)—Hear the pleadings

Adversity (v. 7)—Trials, hardship

Hoar frost (v. 11)—White frost, frozen dew

Anointed (v. 16)—Appointed to serve

Severed (v. 19)—Cut off

Vipers (v. 23)—Poisonous snakes

Aspire to (v. 35)—Desire, covet

Gratify (v. 37)—Satisfy

Disposition (v. 39)—Tendency

Unfeigned (v. 41)—Genuine, sincere

Guile (v. 42)—Deceit

Reproving (v. 43)—Correcting gently with kindly intent

Betimes (v. 43)—Early, promptly

Sharpness (v. 43)—Clarity

Esteem (v. 43)—Consider, regard

Bowels (v. 45)—Heart (in the scriptures, *bowels* is often used to symbolize the center of one's emotions)

Garnish (v. 45)—Beautify, adorn

Distil (v. 45)—Come down gradually

Scepter (v. 46)—Staff, symbol of authority

Doctrine and Covenants 121:3—What "Unlawful Oppressions"?

While the Prophet Joseph Smith and other Church leaders were in prison at Liberty, Missouri (see the introduction to D&C 121 in this study guide), "over 8,000 Saints crossed from Missouri east into Illinois to escape the extermination order [issued by Governor Lilburn W. Boggs]. They were forced to leave in the cold of winter, and although Brigham Young, the President of the Quorum of the Twelve, directed them and gave them every possible assistance, they suffered greatly" (*Our Heritage: A Brief History of*

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints [1996], 51).



Doctrine and Covenants 121:7—The Benefits of Adversity

"There can be a benefit from adversity in one's life, as Elder James E. Faust [then a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles] said: 'In the pain, the agony, and the heroic endeavors of life, we pass through a refiner's fire, and the insignificant and the 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.' (In Conference Report, Apr. 1979, p. 77; or *Ensign*, May 1979, p. 53.)

"Some erroneously believe that their afflictions are punishments from God, but there is a great difference between the source of tribulation and the uses of tribulation: 'Unfortunately, some of our greatest tribulations are the result of our own foolishness and weakness and occur because of our own carelessness or transgression' (James E. Faust, in Conference Report, Apr. 1979, p. 78; or *Ensign*, May 1979, p. 54). Other afflictions are the result of the frailty and corruptibility of the mortal body, which is subject to disease and malfunction. Still other causes lie in the means chosen by the wicked in their misuse of agency. ...

"... Referring to the imprisonment and other terrible injustices suffered by Joseph Smith, President Brigham Young said that the Prophet progressed toward perfection more in thirty-eight years because of the severe tribulation through which he successfully passed than he would have been able to do in a thousand years without it (see *Journal of Discourses*, 2:7)" (*Doctrine and Covenants Student Manual*, 296).

Doctrine and Covenants 121:34–36—Called and Chosen

After quoting the first part of Doctrine and Covenants 121:34, President Harold B. Lee said: "This suggests that even though we have our free agency here, there are many who were foreordained before the world was, to a greater state than they have prepared themselves for here. Even though they might

have been among the noble and great, from among whom the Father declared he would make his chosen leaders, they may fail of that calling here in mortality" (in Conference Report, Oct. 1973, 7; or *Ensign*, Jan. 1974, 5).

Doctrine and Covenants 121:38—What Does it Mean to "Kick against the Pricks"?

A prick, or a goad, is a pointed stick, sometimes tipped with iron, that is used to drive cattle. In a gospel sense, to "kick against the pricks" is to resist or rebel against God's commandments or spiritual impressions, which encourage us to progress in the right direction.

Studying the Scriptures

Do two of the following activities (A–D) as you study Doctrine and Covenants 121.

A Words of Comfort for the Prophet

1. In your own words, write the questions the Prophet Joseph Smith asked the Lord in Doctrine and Covenants 121:1–3.
2. What was happening that might explain why the Prophet felt so sad for the Saints? (see the introduction to D&C 121 in this study guide and the "Understanding the Scriptures" section for help, if needed).
3. In your own words, write what the Lord said to comfort the Prophet in verses 7–10.
4. How might what the Lord said in verses 7–10 help you feel better about the trials and difficulties you have to face?

B Explain the Consequences

At times it may seem that the wicked are not punished for persecuting the faithful. From your reading of Doctrine and Covenants 121:11–25, explain what the consequences will be for those who fight against God and His servants. Look especially for how the following words or phrases might be used in your answer: *blind*, "may come upon themselves," *swept*, *severed*, *despised*, *priesthood*, *millstone*.



For those who persecute the Lord's servants, "it had been better for them that a millstone had been hanged about their necks, and they drowned in the depth of the sea" (D&C 121:22).

C Number the Promises

In Doctrine and Covenants 121:26–33, the Lord promised blessings for the faithful. Number them in your scriptures, and write about one that is important to you.

D Scripture Mastery—Doctrine and Covenants 121:34–36

Doctrine and Covenants 121:34–46 describes what a priesthood holder must do to honor his priesthood and use it effectively. As you study these verses, answer the following questions:

1. Why are some "chosen" and others are not?
2. What is the relationship between the "rights of the priesthood" and the "powers of heaven"?
3. What is the principle upon which the powers of heaven are controlled?
4. What would cause a priesthood holder to lose the power of the priesthood?
5. What methods must a righteous priesthood holder use to properly influence others?
6. What blessings are promised to those who righteously use the priesthood?