

# Section 52

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Acting on section 44’s commandment to convene a conference, Joseph promised the priesthood leaders a blessing if they would come humbly and faithfully. “Therefore,” John Whitmer wrote, “the elders assembled from the East, and the West, from the North and the South.”<sup>1</sup> Joseph presided over the series of priesthood meetings from June 3–5, 1831. He and others prophesied at the conference, rebuked the devil, and ordained the first high priests in the Church. The next day he received section 52, which he described as “Directions to the Elders of the Church of Christ.”<sup>2</sup>

Section 52 gives the Saints knowledge—and therefore power—to discern devilish counterfeits from the Lord’s power. Satan tried mightily to deceive the Saints from the time missionaries first arrived in Ohio through the priesthood meetings just prior to section 52. He mimicked spiritual gifts and convinced many people they were under the influence of the Holy Ghost. Joseph taught that “some, by a long face and sanctimonious prayers, and very pious sermons, had power to lead the minds of the ignorant and unwary.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “John Whitmer, *History, 1831–circa 1847*,” p. 27, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed September 30, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> “*Revelation, 6 June 1831 [D&C 52]*,” p. 87, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed July 30, 2020.

<sup>3</sup> “*History, 1838–1856, volume C-1 [2 November 1838–31 July 1842]*,” p. 872, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed September 30, 2020.

The fact that someone speaks well or is overwhelmed with emotion is not evidence that their actions are acceptable to God. Section 52 adds important criteria for discerning: Do those overcome with emotion regain their composure and teach wise, restored truth? Do those who pray, whose attitude seems Christian, obey the ordinances Jesus has established in his Church and kingdom? Do they follow the revealed order of the Savior's Church? Do excellent speakers obey Christ's ordinances? Christ does not accept the sanctimonious prayers or pious sermons of those who are unwilling to obey his ordinances and neither should the Saints. The knowledge in section 52 empowers the Saints to separate satanic imitations from the Lord's power.

Section 52 is exciting. This is the first revelation to identify Missouri as the location of Zion, the Saints' inheritance. It calls twenty-eight men to travel to Missouri for a conference at which the Lord will reveal more specifically the location for New Jerusalem. The Saints received section 52 with great anticipation, and many went to great lengths to obey its commands.

Joseph and others the Lord called to travel with him left Kirtland, Ohio, in mid-June and arrived in Independence, Missouri, about a month later. Most of the others who were called followed, taking different routes and making converts along the way, as section 52 commanded. The Lord fulfilled his section 52 promise to reveal more about Zion (see section 57).

Section 52 draws the battle lines for a culture war. Missouri, it says, is the place the Lord chose for the Saints' inheritance. In 1831, however, Missouri was inhabited by people the Lord called "enemies" (verse 42). The Lord's straightforwardness makes some readers squeamish. It doesn't sound to them like their idea of Jesus Christ. If so, just keep reading the scriptures until the sentimental image of Jesus is replaced by the actual Christ whose voice dominates the Doctrine and Covenants. He sees things as they are and will be and speaks the truth. He knows who are his friends and who are his enemies. He demonstrates this knowledge in section 52 and elsewhere in the Doctrine and Covenants. We come to know him by hearing his voice.