

Section 102

Joseph Smith convened councils to arbitrate and adjudicate Church decisions, especially disciplinary decisions. These councils were called as needed, according to the law of the Church revealed in February 1831 (D&C 42). By 1834 experience and Church growth revealed the need for standing councils to deal with complex issues. On February 17, 1834, Joseph told a group of priesthood leaders that he “would show the order of councils in ancient days as shown to him by vision.”

Joseph explained that “Jerusalem was the seat of the Church Council in ancient days.” He said that

the apostle, Peter, was the president of the Council and held the keys of the Kingdom of God on the earth [and] was appointed to this office by the voice of the Savior and acknowledged in it by the voice of the Church. He had two men appointed as Counsellors with him, and in case Peter was absent, his counsellors could also transact business alone.

Joseph explained that church councils operated on different principles of jurisprudence than secular courts. “It was not the order of heaven in ancient councils to plead for and against the guilty as in our judicial courts (so called) but that every councilor when he arose to speak, should speak precisely according to evidence and according to the teaching of the Spirit of the Lord.”

Clerks kept minutes of Joseph's teachings on how the council should be organized. They record that "many questions have been asked during the time of the organization of the Council and doubtless some errors have been committed, it was, therefore, voted by all present that Bro. Joseph should make all necessary corrections by the Spirit of inspiration hereafter." Joseph began that job the next day, February 18, and the following day an even larger gathering of priesthood holders and general members met to review and consent to the new "constitution of the high council of the Church of Christ." The minutes Joseph refined were subsequently canonized in the Doctrine and Covenants and are currently found in section 102.

At the February 19 meeting, Joseph then laid hands on his two counselors and blessed them with "wisdom to magnify their office, and power over all the power of the adversary." He then laid hands on the twelve men called as high counselors and set them apart. He blessed them with "wisdom and power to counsel in righteousness upon all subjects that might be laid before them." He also prayed that they might be delivered from those evils to which they were most exposed and that their lives might be prolonged on the earth. Then, in the name of Jesus Christ, Joseph gave his counselors and the high council a charge to "do their duty in righteousness and in the fear of God." They signified their acceptance of Joseph's charge by raising their right hands. Joseph pronounced the council organized "according to the ancient order, and also according to the mind of the Lord."¹

Section 102 restores the ancient order of church councils. The organization of the high council also went far toward establishing a stake of Zion in Kirtland, an ecclesiastical jurisdiction drawn on imagery from Isaiah 33:20 and 54:2 and applied to the Church in a May 1833 revelation (D&C 94:1; 96:1). Moreover, these minutes provided for other standing high councils to be established, as well as temporary councils to be organized beyond Zion and her stakes.

The Church's first high council went to work immediately. As specified in the minutes, the counselors drew numbers 1–12, with even numbers responsible to prevent insult and injustice against the accused person and the odd-numbered counselors responsible to ensure the interests of the Church. Ezra Thayer charged Curtis Hodges, an elder, with preaching too loudly and unclearly and demanding that he was justified

¹ "[Minutes, 17-18 February 1834](#)," 29–31, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed November 11, 2020.

in doing so when corrected. Curtis said he was not guilty. Witnesses confirmed “that bro. Hodges was guilty of hollowing so loud that he, in a measure, lost his voice.” Oliver Cowdery, who had drawn number 1, summarized the Church’s case against Curtis. Joseph Coe, who had drawn number 2, summarized the case for Brother Hodge “but could say but few words.” Ezra restated his accusations and Curtis restated his pleas.

In other words, the case, which was not considered complicated, was conducted exactly as section 102 specifies, including the ruling of Joseph Smith, president of the council. He announced

that the charges in the declaration had been fairly sustained by good witnesses, also, that bro. H[odges]. ought to have confessed when rebuked by bro Thayer also that if he had the spirit of the Lord at the meetings when he hollowed, he must have abused it, and grieved it away. All the council agreed with the decision.

Brother Hodges then confessed, acknowledging that he could now see his error and would repent.²

Not all high council hearings are this straightforward but, remarkably, the specific instructions set forth in section 102 continue to guide the standing high councils of the church in each stake of Zion.

²“[Minutes, 19 February 1834](#),” 38, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed November 11, 2020.