

Comments on Doctrine & Covenants 4

Overall, this section presents a clear set of requirements for those who are to be involved in the missionary work spoken of in D&C 5:6.

Verses 1, 4, 7 appear in sections 11, 12, and 14 as a standard opening and closing. In doing so, the same themes from this section are forwarded to those.

1 NOW behold, a marvelous work is about to come forth among the children of men. 2 Therefore, O ye that embark in the service of God, see that ye serve him with all your heart, might, mind and strength, that ye may stand blameless before God at the last day. 3 Therefore, if ye have desires to serve God ye are called to the work; 4 For behold the field is white already to harvest; and lo, he that thrusteth in his sickle with his might, the same layeth up in store that he perisheth not, but bringeth salvation to his soul; 5 And faith, hope, charity and love, with an eye single to the glory of God, qualify him for the work. 6 Remember faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, brotherly kindness, godliness, charity, humility, diligence. 7 Ask, and ye shall receive; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. Amen.

v1 The coming forth of the Book of Mormon is called a "marvelous work" paraphrasing Isaiah 29:14 and 1 Nephi 14:7. While I consider the Book of Mormon to be a fulfillment in part of Isa. 29, I consider it more of the penultimate fulfillment. For a lengthy discussion of Isa. 29 and Nephi's usage of it, see my comments on Isa. 29.

v2 This verse indicates that one must serve with all their might, mind and strength so as to be found blameless before God. Entering into the service without strong convictions would appear to be a precarious position, cf. Luke 14:25-35.

v3 The desire to do the work may result in a calling from the Lord, but remember the qualifiers in v. 5. This is not a blanket calling where anyone who wants to do the work is automatically called. The message is those with the desire will be called, if it is expedient to the Lord. For example, Hyrum had wanted to do the work of preaching, but the Lord did not extend that call, but gave him another calling, cf. 11:15.

v4 presents a dualistic theme where the individual laboring in the work saves others, but also themselves. Compare D&C 11:3 for a similar statement.

The harvest theme is one common throughout the scriptures for the gathering in and sifting out of people. While the presentation here is positive, that of salvation, there is also the implicit negative theme of wheat versus chaff. Oftentimes in the scriptures the harvest theme is presented as a mainly negative one, cf. Isa. 28:23-29, Matt. 24:40-41.

v5 Aside from the desire to serve, noted in v. 3, the individual must have strong religious convictions and not be a self-promoter. The person must be there to forward the work of the Lord, not to promote themselves. This selflessness and devoutness qualifies the person in addition to their willingness.

v6 Aside from the hard labors and full exertions required of the servant in v. 2, the servant must also live and embody the gospel by cultivating and emulating the ideal characteristics of the saint. Hard work without a soft heart is not what the Lord wants.

The text as it appears in the Book of Commandments include an "&c." where in the 1835 Kirtland edition of the Doctrine & Covenants and all subsequent editions the list is expanded and apparently harmonized with 2 Peter 1:5-7. See below for a parallel comparison of the two sets of text.

v7 This verse echoes Matt. 7:7, especially see the JST Matt. 7:12-17 where the theme is made more plainly revelatory. Also compare James 1:5. The idea here is that children of men will not ask and do not want to receive additional revelation from God per Isa. 28-29. The result is God will astound them with a marvelous work and a wonder that will result in the division of the goats from the sheep.

Historical Material Pertaining to Doctrine & Covenants 4

The first excerpt is a historical overview. The second is Smith's own brief introduction to the revelation. The third is Lucy Mack Smith's, Joseph's mother, recollection of the trip to visit Joseph and Emma wherein the text of D&C 4 was received but curiously enough she does not mention it at all.

Joseph Fielding Smith states of this revelation:

This section [4] was given through the Prophet Joseph Smith to his father, Joseph Smith, Sen., at Harmony, Pennsylvania, February, 1829. Joseph Smith, Sr., was the first person to believe the story of the Prophet and encouraged him to continue faithful to the teachings of the angel.... In February, 1829, he came to his son, the youthful prophet, and asked to know by revelation the will of the Lord. This section of the Doctrine and Covenants is the result of that humble inquiry. (Joseph Fielding Smith, Church History and Modern Revelation 1947, Vol. 1, page 33)

He states the revelation was at the request of Joseph Smith Sr., which is apparently based on Smith's comment in History of the Church, noted below, where he says he received the revelation for his father. Unfortunately, there is no additional context given for what prompted it. Fielding Smith's supposition above is apparently without contemporaneous corroboration.

From Lucy Mack Smith's writings, it is plain both she and Joseph Smith, Sr. were concerned about Joseph Smith, Jr. after the loss of the 116 pages, and having not heard from him for two months, they went to visit him to see how he was doing. If Smith, Sr. had concerns over the standing of Smith, Jr. as a result of losing the 116 pages, then this revelation would make it clear the work was continuing and Smith, Jr. was not expelled from the Lord's work. The revelation is looking forward, not back, and saying whoever is willing to work needs to be good in and of themselves. If Smith, Sr. was harboring any ill feelings towards Smith, Jr., faulting him over the events, or equivocating over committing, this revelation would have put the onus on Smith, Sr. to get himself right with the Lord to be qualified for the work.

The first publication of the text was in the Book of Commandments in 1833, then in the 1835 Kirtland edition of the

Doctrine & Covenants.

Excerpt from Revelations of the Prophet Joseph Smith

After Joseph Smith had received section 3 (in July 1828), the plates and Urim and Thummim were again taken from him. Desiring to obtain them again, the Prophet continued his "supplication to God, without cessation," and on 22 September 1828 he had the "joy and satisfaction" of again receiving the Urim and Thummim and the plates.

Joseph Smith did not immediately proceed to translate the plates, however, but "went to laboring with [his] hands upon a small farm" that he had purchased from Isaac Hale to provide for his family. The farm, consisting of about thirteen acres, was deeded to Joseph Smith on 25 August 1830 for \$200.

Speaking of the Prophet's dire circumstances during the winter of 1828, Joseph Knight, Sr., wrote,

Now he Could not translate But little Being poor and nobody to write for him But his wife and she Could not do much and take Care of her house and he Being poor and no means to But work. His wifes father and familey ware all against him and would not h[e]lp him. He and his wife Came up [to Colesville] to see me the first of the winter 1828 and told me his Case. But I was not in easy Circumstances and I did not know what it mite amount to and my wife and familey all against me about helping him. But I let him have a pair of shoes and three Dollars in money to help him a little.

In early 1829, Joseph and Emma received a visit from the Prophet's father, and possibly other members of the Smith family. The call provided an opportunity for the Manchester Smiths to meet the Hales (Joseph's in-laws), to learn of the progress of the Book of Mormon translation, and to give moral support to their son. During the visit, section 4 was received for Joseph Smith, Sr., the Prophet's father. (Lyndon R. Cook, *The Revelations of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, page 10)

Excerpt from History of the Church

[After having the plates and Urim and Thummim returned to me] I did not, however, go immediately to translating, but went to laboring with my hands upon a small farm which I had purchased of my wife's father, in order to provide for my family. In the

month of February, 1829, my father came to visit us, at which time I received the following revelation for him:

[text of D&C 4 quoted]

(Joseph Smith, History of the Church, Vol. 1, page 28)

Excerpt from History of Joseph Smith by his Mother

For nearly two months after Joseph returned to his family, in Pennsylvania, we heard nothing from him, and becoming anxious about him, Mr. Smith and myself set off to make him a visit. When we came within three-quarters of a mile of the house, Joseph started to meet us, telling his wife, as he left, that father and mother were coming. When he met us, his countenance wore so pleasant an aspect, that I was convinced he had something agreeable to communicate with regard to the work in which he was engaged. When I entered, the first thing which attracted my attention was a red morocco trunk, lying on Emma's bureau, which Joseph shortly informed me contained the Urim and Thummim, and the plates. And, in the evening, he gave us the following relation of what had transpired since our separation:

"On leaving you," said Joseph, "I returned immediately home. Soon after my arrival, I commenced humbling myself in mighty prayer before the Lord, and, as I was pouring out my soul in supplication to God, that if possible I might obtain mercy at his hands and be forgiven of all that I had done contrary to his will, an angel stood before me, and answered me, saying, that I had sinned in delivering the manuscript into the hands of a wicked man, and, as I had ventured to become responsible for his faithfulness, I would of necessity have to suffer the consequences of his indiscretion, and I must now give up the Urim and Thummim into his (the angel's) hands.

"This I did as I was directed, and as I handed them to him, he remarked, 'If you are very humble and penitent, it may be you will receive them again; if so, it will be on the twenty-second of next September.'"

Joseph then related a revelation which he received soon after the angel visited him. A part of which is as follows:

[text of D&C 3:5-15 quoted]

For the sake of brevity, I have omitted part of this revelation, but the reader will find it in the Doctrine and Covenants,

section 3:5-16.

I will now return to Joseph's recital.

"After the angel left me," said he, "I continued my supplications to God, without cessation, and on the twenty-second of September, I had the joy and satisfaction of again receiving the Urim and Thummim, with which I have again commenced translating, and Emma writes for me, but the angel said that the Lord would send me a scribe, and I trust his promise will be verified. The angel seemed pleased with me when he gave me back the Urim and Thummim, and he told me that the Lord loved me, for my faithfulness and humility."

A few months after Joseph received them, he inquired of the Lord, and obtained the following revelation:

[quotes text of D&C 10:1-13]

While on this visit, we became acquainted with Emma's father, whose name was Isaac Hale; also his family, which consisted of his wife, Elizabeth; his sons, Jesse, David, Alva, Isaac Ward, and Reuben; and his daughters, Phebe and Elizabeth.

They were an intelligent and highly respectable family. They were pleasantly situated, and lived in good style, in the town of Harmony, on the Susquehannah river, within a short distance of the place where Joseph resided.

The time of our visit with them, we passed very agreeably, and returned home relieved of a burden which was almost insupportable, and our present joy far overbalanced all our former grief. (Lucy Mack Smith, History of Joseph Smith by his Mother, pages 133-137)

1833 Book of Commandments

iii

1 Now, behold,
a marvelous work
is about to come forth
among the children of men,
therefore,
O ye that embark
in the service of God,
see that ye serve him
with all your heart,
might, mind and strength,
that ye may stand blameless
before God at the last day:
Therefore, if ye have desires
to serve God,
ye are called to the work,
for behold,
the field is white
already to harvest,
and lo, he that thrusteth
in his sickle
with his might,
the same layeth up in store
that he perish not,
but bringeth salvation
to his soul,
and faith, hope, charity,
and love,
with an eye single
to the glory of God,
qualifies him for the work.

2 Remember

temperance, patience,

humility, diligence, &c.,
ask and ye shall receive,
knock and it shall be
opened unto you: Amen.

1981 Doctrine & Covenants

Section 4

1 NOW behold,
a marvelous work
is about to come forth
among the children of men.
2 Therefore,
O ye that embark
in the service of God,
see that ye serve him
with all your heart,
might, mind and strength,
that ye may stand blameless
before God at the last day.
3 Therefore, if ye have
desires to serve God
ye are called to the work;
4 For behold
the field is white
already to harvest;
and lo, he that thrusteth
in his sickle
with his might,
the same layeth up in store
that he perisheth not,
but bringeth salvation
to his soul;
5 And faith, hope, charity
and love,
with an eye single
to the glory of God,
qualify him for the work.
6 Remember
faith, virtue, knowledge,
temperance, patience,
brotherly kindness,
godliness, charity,
humility, diligence.
7 Ask, and ye shall receive;
knock, and it shall be
opened unto you. Amen.

Copyright © 2021 by S. Kurt Neumiller <kurt.neumiller@gmail.com>. All rights reserved. No part of this text may be reproduced in any form or by any means for commercial gain without the express written consent of the author. Digital or printed copies may be freely made and distributed for personal and public non-commercial use.