

Comments on Doctrine & Covenants 7

This section deals with the translation of John the Beloved from a mortal condition to a condition other than mortal. Note the first several verses are similar in content to the events surrounding the translation of the Three Nephites in 3 Ne. 28. Verse 6 indicates what the roles and responsibilities, at least in part, of translated persons.

1 AND the Lord said unto me: John, my beloved, what desirest thou? For if you shall ask what you will, it shall be granted unto you. 2 And I said unto him: Lord, give unto me power over death, that I may live and bring souls unto thee. 3 And the Lord said unto me: Verily, verily, I say unto thee, because thou desirest this thou shalt tarry until I come in my glory, and shalt prophesy before nations, kindreds, tongues and people.

v1-3 The resurrected Jesus asks John Beloved what he would like (v. 1), and John responds he wishes he would not die (v. 2) and the Lord grants it to him so he may promote His work (v. 3).

4 And for this cause the Lord said unto Peter: If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? For he desired of me that he might bring souls unto me, but thou desiredst that thou mightest speedily come unto me in my kingdom. 5 I say unto thee, Peter, this was a good desire; but my beloved has desired that he might do more, or a greater work yet among men than what he has before done. 6 Yea, he has undertaken a greater work; therefore I will make him as flaming fire and a ministering angel; he shall minister for those who shall be heirs of salvation who dwell on the earth. 7 And I will make thee to minister for him and for thy brother James; and unto you three I will give this power and the keys of this ministry until I come.

v4-7 The resurrected Jesus speaks with Peter concerning the promise made to John Beloved. Peter's interest is coming into the Kingdom quickly (v. 4). This is a good thing, but John's desire to continue the Lord's work is a better desire (v. 5). Thus, John Beloved will be a minister and servant preaching the gospel to men (v. 6), while Peter will be made a minister and servant to John and James (v. 7).

v7 As the leader among the three, Peter is called to be the minister and servant to John and James, cp. Matt. 20:26.

8 Verily I say unto you, ye shall both have according to your desires, for ye both joy in that which ye have desired.

v8 The quotation concludes with Jesus speaking to both John and Peter. This verse remarks on the different desires of John and Peter contrasted in v. 4.

Historical Material pertaining to Doctrine & Covenants 7

The historical accounts do not inform us what specifically prompted the question between Smith and Cowdery as to whether John was dead or translated, only that it arose. It is possible it was a result of the reference to John in 1 Ne. 14:19-27, as they were in the first month of the translation of the Book of Mormon.

This revelation was first published in the Book of Commandments in 1833, and then in the Kirtland edition of the Doctrine & Covenants in 1835. It was subsequently published in the Times and Seasons (Vol. 3, No. 18, pg. 853, July 15, 1842) and the Millennial Star (Vol. 3, No. 8, pg. 134, December, 1842). According to Woodford (1972) "the Times and Seasons is the earliest account that indicates this revelation was a translation of an ancient parchment. Joseph Smith was the editor of the Times and Seasons when this revelation was published as part of the his history; therefore, this additional item concerning the revelation is an authentic description of its origin. The earlier versions, all manuscripts, contain no mention of the parchment."

Excerpt from History of the Church

During the month of April I continued to translate, and he [Cowdery] to write, with little cessation, during which time we received several revelations. A difference of opinion arising between us about the account of John the Apostle in the New Testament, as to whether he died or continued to live, we mutually agreed to settle it by the Urim and Thummim and the following is the word which we received:

Revelation, given to Joseph Smith, Jun., and Oliver Cowdery, in Harmony, Pennsylvania, April, 1829, when they desired to know whether John, the beloved disciple, tarried on earth or died. Translated from parchment, written and hid up by himself. (Joseph Smith, Jr., History of the Church, Vol. 1, Ch. 4, pg. 35-36; and also appearing in Times and Seasons, Vol. 3, No. 18, July 15, 1842, page 853)

Excerpt from Doctrine and Covenants Commentary

The prophet Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery, one day,

discussed this passage of the Scriptures, and expressed different views on the meaning of it. In order to come to unity of faith on that question, the Prophet inquired of the Lord and received this Revelation.

The question might be asked, whether the Prophet had actually seen the parchment written and hidden by John, or a copy of it; if so, where and when did he obtain it, and what became of it?

The history of the Prophet does not furnish information on these subjects. But it is not necessary to suppose that the Prophet had St. John's parchment, or a copy of it, before him, when he received this Revelation. It was the contents of the document that were revealed. It was just as easy for the Spirit of the Lord to communicate the contents of that record to the Prophet, without the actual presence of it, as it would have been to enable him to understand the language in which John wrote it, whether Greek or Aramaean, which languages neither Joseph nor Oliver could have read, except by special divine interposition, even if they had had the manuscript before them. The miracle would have been practically the same. (Hyrum M. Smith and Janne M. Sjodahl, Doctrine and Covenants Commentary, page 40)

Comparison of Original 1833 Text with Emended 1835 Version

The text of the 1835 version clarifies some ambiguities (v. 2 the power is "power over death"), discusses the ministry of a translated being such as John (v. 3, 6), and also briefly discusses Peter's ministry as the head of the Presidency (v. 7).

We know the revelation occurred in April 1830, which was the first month of translation of the Book of Mormon. From this we might conclude the 1835 version is in part emended with comments inspired by or derived from the 3 Ne. account of the translation of the three Lehites, which would have been translated after this revelation was received.

1833 Book of Commandments

1 And the Lord said unto me,
John my beloved,
what desirest thou?

and I said
Lord, give unto me power

that I may
bring souls unto thee.--
And the Lord said unto me:
Verily, verily
I say unto thee,
because thou desiredst this,
thou shalt tarry
till I come in my glory:

2 And for this cause,
the Lord said unto Peter:--
If I will that he tarry
till I come,
what is that to thee?
for he desiredst of me that

1835 Doctrine & Covenants

1 AND the Lord said unto me:
John, my beloved,
what desirest thou?
For if you shall ask
what you will,
it shall be granted unto you.

2 And I said unto him:
Lord, give unto me power
over death,
that I may live and
bring souls unto thee.
3 And the Lord said unto me:
Verily, verily,
I say unto thee,
because thou desirest this
thou shalt tarry
until I come in my glory,
and shalt prophesy
before nations,
kindreds,
tongues and
people.

4 And for this cause
the Lord said unto Peter:
If I will that he tarry
till I come,
what is that to thee?
For he desired of me that

he might bring souls unto me:
but thou desiredst that
thou might speedily
come unto me in my kingdom:
I say unto thee, Peter, this
was a good desire,
but my beloved

has undertaken
a greater work.

3 Verily I say unto you,
ye shall both have
according [t]o your desires,
for ye both joy in that
which ye have desired.

he might bring souls unto me,
but thou desiredst that
thou mightest speedily
come unto me in my kingdom.

5 I say unto thee, Peter,
this was a good desire;
but my beloved
has desired that he
might do more, or
a greater work yet
among men than
what he has before done.

6 Yea, he has undertaken a
greater work;
therefore I will make him
as flaming fire and
a ministering angel;
he shall minister for those
who shall be heirs of salvation
who dwell on the earth.

7 And I will make thee
to minister for him and
for thy brother James; and
unto you three
I will give this power and
the keys of this ministry
until I come.

8 Verily I say unto you,
ye shall both have
according to your desires,
for ye both joy in that
which ye have desired.

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