

Comments on Doctrine & Covenants 8

This section is for Oliver Cowdery, and discusses a gift addressed previously in section 6. It also introduces a new gift not previously noted.

1 OLIVER Cowdery, verily, verily, I say unto you, that assuredly as the Lord liveth, who is your God and your Redeemer, even so surely shall you receive a knowledge of whatsoever things you shall ask in faith, with an honest heart, believing that you shall receive a knowledge concerning the engravings of old records, which are ancient, which contain those parts of my scripture of which has been spoken by the manifestation of my Spirit. 2 Yea, behold, I will tell you in your mind and in your heart, by the Holy Ghost, which shall come upon you and which shall dwell in your heart. 3 Now, behold, this is the spirit of revelation; behold, this is the spirit by which Moses brought the children of Israel through the Red Sea on dry ground. 4 Therefore this is thy gift; apply unto it, and blessed art thou, for it shall deliver you out of the hands of your enemies, when, if it were not so, they would slay you and bring your soul to destruction. 5 Oh, remember these words, and keep my commandments. Remember, this is your gift.

v1-5 The first gift, the gift of the discernment of the meaning of the scriptures is reviewed and discussed, was previously mentioned in D&C 6:10-13.

v2 "I will tell you in your mind and in your heart", cp. D&C 9:8.

v3-4 While v. 1 more specifically references the gift as understanding the meaning of the scriptures, these two verses broaden the definition to a general gift of revelation that can deliver one from their enemies. The Lord cites Moses as delivering Israel and then states this same gift may deliver him personally from his enemies as well.

v5 This verse closes the review of his initial gift with an emphatic admonishment, "remember...remember..." suggesting Cowdery had not been using or developing this gift as ought to have been.

6 Now this is not all thy gift; for you have another gift, which is the gift of Aaron; behold, it has told you many things; 7 Behold, there is no other power, save the power of God, that can cause this gift of Aaron to be with you. 8 Therefore, doubt not, for it is the gift of God; and you shall hold it in your hands, and do marvelous works; and no power shall be able to take it away out of your hands, for it is the work of God. 9 And, therefore, whatsoever you shall ask me to tell you by that means, that will I grant unto you, and you shall have knowledge concerning it.

v6-9 then presents a new gift, the gift of Aaron. Just as Aaron was called to assist Moses, so is Cowdery called to assist Smith in a like manner, cp. D&C 28:3, D&C 124:95.

10 Remember that without faith you can do nothing; therefore ask in faith. Trifle not with these things; do not ask for that which you ought not. 11 Ask that you may know the mysteries of God, and that you may translate and receive knowledge from all those ancient records which have been hid up, that are sacred; and according to your faith shall it be done unto you. 12 Behold, it is I that have spoken it; and I am the same that spake unto you from the beginning. Amen.

v10-12 The section ends with a general statement admonishing Cowdery to ask in faith that he may exercise all of the gifts given to him. The statement "trifle not" was also used in D&C 6:12, and seems to indicate that Cowdery is not taking things as seriously as he ought to. For context, the term "trifle" also appears in and D&C 32:5, although not in reference to Cowdery, also cp. Mosiah 2:9.

Historical Material Pertaining to Doctrine & Covenants 8

We know very little of the historical context of this revelation. Smith only very briefly commented on it, and Cowdery, in his commenting on that time period, completely glossed over it. We might assume this is a result of Cowdery's unsuccessful attempt at translating, as detailed in D&C 9.

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. 853-854, July 15, 1842) and the Millennial Star (Vol. 3, No. 8, pg. 134-135, December, 1842).

Excerpt from History of the Church

Whilst continuing the work of translation, during the month of April, Oliver Cowdery became exceedingly anxious to have the power bestowed upon him, and in relation to this desire the following revelations were obtained: [text of D&C 8 follows] (Joseph Smith, History of the Church, Vol. 1, page 36)

Excerpt from Messenger & Advocate

Near the time of the setting of the sun, Sabbath evening, April 5th, 1829, my natural eyes, for the first time beheld this brother [Joseph Smith]. On Monday the 6th, I assisted him in arranging some business of a temporal nature, and on Tuesday the 7th, commenced to write the Book of Mormon. These were days never to be forgotten—to sit under the sound of a voice dictated by the inspiration of heaven, awakened the utmost gratitude of this bosom! Day after day I continued, uninterrupted, to write from his mouth, as he translated, with the Urim and Thummim, or, as the Nephites would have said, "Interpreters," the history, or record, called the Book of Mormon. (Oliver Cowdery, Messenger & Advocate, Vol. 1, page 14, October 1834)

Comparison of Original 1833 Text with Emended 1835 Version

In the original text, it reads as though Cowdery has some kind of device akin to Aaron's staff (see Exod. 7-8 for the various miracles performed with the rod, and see Num. 17:6-8 to see the ultimate fate of the rod) and this staff had some sort of revelatory power.

However, there is no historical record suggesting Cowdery had any such device or what the device was used for. The 1835 version emends the text such that the gift is that of Aaron and the explicit references to the rod are omitted. These two things taken together suggests that while the 1833 account reads quite literally, it should be read figuratively instead. The figurative reading would be along the lines of Cowdery being called to "bear the rod" as did Aaron, and while Aaron bore a literal rod in his station Cowdery only does so figuratively.

Aaron was Moses' assistant and performed considerable miracles in that capacity at the Lord's command. The rod was employed in these various miracles, but nobody reads the text of Exod. 7-8 as the rod being some sort of magical device by which the miracles are performed. It is plain the miracles are the work of the Lord, and the rod is simply a symbolic device. In both versions of the present text, faith in the Lord's work is emphasized as the key element (v. 4 in the 1833 version, v. 10 in the 1835 version), so that is the main point being addressed.

Just as Aaron performed great miracles to assist Moses in the Lord's work, so too may Cowdery perform great miracles in assisting Smith in the Lord's work.

1833 Book of Commandments

1 Oliver,
verily, verily I say unto you,
that assuredly
as the Lord liveth,
which is your God and
your Redeemer,
even so sure
shall you receive a
knowledge of whatsoever things
you shall ask in faith,
with an honest heart,
believing that you shall
receive a knowledge
concerning the engravings

1835 Doctrine & Covenants

1 OLIVER Cowdery,
verily, verily, I say unto you,
that assuredly
as the Lord liveth,
who is your God and
your Redeemer,
even so surely
shall you receive a
knowledge of whatsoever things
you shall ask in faith,
with an honest heart,
believing that you shall
receive a knowledge
concerning the engravings

of old records,
which are ancient, which
contain those parts
of my scripture
of which have been spoken,
by the manifestation
of my Spirit;
yea, behold I will tell you
in your mind and
in your heart
by the Holy Ghost,
which shall come upon you and
which shall dwell
in your heart.
2 Now, behold this is
the Spirit of revelation: --
behold this is the Spirit
by which Moses
brought the children of Israel
through the Red sea
on dry ground:
therefore, this is thy gift;
apply unto it and
blessed art thou,
for it shall deliver you
out of the hands
of your enemies,
when, if it were not so,
they would slay you and
bring your soul to destruction.
3 O remember, these words
and keep my commandments.
Remember this is your gift.
Now this is not all,
for you have another gift,
which is the gift of
working with the rod:
behold it has told you
things:
behold there is
no other power
save God,
that can cause
this rod of nature,
to work

of old records,
which are ancient,
which contain those parts
of my scripture
of which has been spoken
by the manifestation
of my Spirit.
2 Yea, behold, I will tell you
in your mind and
in your heart,
by the Holy Ghost,
which shall come upon you and
which shall dwell
in your heart.
3 Now, behold, this is
the spirit of revelation;
behold, this is the spirit
by which Moses
brought the children of Israel
through the Red Sea
on dry ground.
4 Therefore this is thy gift;
apply unto it, and
blessed art thou,
for it shall deliver you
out of the hands
of your enemies,
when, if it were not so,
they would slay you and
bring your soul to destruction.
5 Oh, remember these words, and
keep my commandments.
Remember, this is your gift.
6 Now this is not all thy gift;
for you have another gift,
which is the gift of
Aaron;
behold, it has told you
many things;
7 Behold, there is
no other power,
save the power of God,
that can cause
this gift of Aaron
to be with you.

in your hands,

for it is the work of God;
and therefore whatsoever
you shall ask me to tell you
by that means,
that will I grant unto you,
that you shall know.

4 Remember that without faith
you can do nothing.

Trifle not with these things.
Do not ask
for that which you ought not.
Ask that you may know
the mysteries of God, and
that you may translate

all those ancient records,
which have been hid up,
which are sacred, and
according to your faith
shall it be done unto you.

5 Behold it is I
that have spoken it,
I am the same which spake
unto you from the beginning: --
Amen.

8 Therefore, doubt not,
for it is the gift of God; and
you shall hold it
in your hands, and
do marvelous works; and
no power shall be able
to take it away
out of your hands,
for it is the work of God.

9 And, therefore, whatsoever
you shall ask me to tell you
by that means,
that will I grant unto you,
and you shall have knowledge
concerning it.

10 Remember that without faith
you can do nothing;
therefore ask in faith.

Trifle not with these things;
do not ask
for that which you ought not.

11 Ask that you may know
the mysteries of God, and
that you may translate and
receive knowledge from
all those ancient records
which have been hid up,
that are sacred; and
according to your faith
shall it be done unto you.

12 Behold, it is I
that have spoken it;
and I am the same that spake
unto you from the beginning.
Amen.

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