

Comments on Doctrine & Covenants 15 and 16

Unlike sections 11, 12, and 14, these two sections do not start with a standard opening address as in 14:1-5. There are two possibilities as to why this is the case. First, as all three were brothers living together, the general statement of 14:1-5 might be a general address to all three of them. Thus, the divisions between these three sections are effectively arbitrary. Smith's comments regarding the revelations suggest as much, as follows, "through the means of the Urim and Thummim, and obtained for them in succession the following revelations" (HofC, Vol. 1, page 49). While there are three revelations, they are obtained in succession, apparently one right after the other.

The second possibility is the persons being addressed in sections 15 and 16 are ready and therefore called to preach, whereas those addressed in sections 11, 12, and 14 were either preparing to preach or were not called directly to preach. The current audience being more prepared, presumably having stronger convictions, requires less general introduction. For example, note the manner in which John and Peter Jr. are addressed is quite different from that of David. Where the Lord addresses John and Peter Jr. as "my servants" He admonishes David to obtain a witness of Himself (cf. 14:7).

The contents of these revelations, aimed at John Whitmer and Peter Whitmer Jr., is identical with the exception of the name of the person addressed in the first verse.

1 Hearken, my servant John, and listen to the words of Jesus Christ, your Lord and your Redeemer. 2 For behold, I speak unto you with sharpness and with power, for mine arm is over all the earth.

v1-2 These verses open with an authority statement rather than a general admonition as was the case with D&C 11, 12, 14. This indicates the recipients are already acquainted with the Lord and less in need of general admonition, spiritual witnesses and so forth, as was seen in 14:6-11.

v1 "Hearken, my servant", such an address is not lightly given by the Lord, cp. 51:1, 69:1, 70:1, 81:1.

3 And I will tell you that which no man knoweth save me and thee alone-- 4 For many times you have desired of me to know that which would be of the most worth unto you. 5 Behold, blessed are

you for this thing, and for speaking my words which I have given you according to my commandments. 6 And now, behold, I say unto you, that the thing which will be of the most worth unto you will be to declare repentance unto this people, that you may bring souls unto me, that you may rest with them in the kingdom of my Father. Amen.

v3-6 Just as Smith was questioning what he should do regarding religion and God's will, John Whitmer was as well. John also appear to have prayed in private to God concerning his will for them (v. 3-4) as did Smith. For which thing the Lord was well pleased and revealed His will to them (v. 5). In consequence of their desires and prepared condition, the Lord calls them to preach repentance to the people.

Historical Material Pertaining to Doctrine & Covenants 15 & 16

Below is an excerpt of Joseph Smith's comments on the origin of the revelation. See also D&C 14 for additional background.

This section was first published in the Book of Commandments in 1833 on page 33, then in the Doctrine & Covenants in 1835 on pages 170. It was published the Times & Seasons, volume 3, number 20, page 885, dated August 15, 1842. It was published in the Millennial Star, volume 3, number 10, page 165, dated February 1843.

Excerpt from History of the Church

Shortly after commencing to translate, I became acquainted with Mr. Peter Whitmer, of Fayette, Seneca county, New York, and also with some of his family. In the beginning of the month of June, his son, David Whitmer, came to the place where we were residing, and brought with him a two-horse wagon, for the purpose of having us accompany him to his father's place, and there remain until we should finish the work. It was arranged that we should have our board free of charge, and the assistance of one of his brothers to write for me, and also his own assistance when convenient. Having much need of such timely aid in an undertaking so arduous, and being informed that the people in the neighborhood of the Whitmers were anxiously awaiting the opportunity to inquire into these things, we accepted the invitation, and accompanied Mr. Whitmer to his father's house, and there resided until the translation was finished and the copyright secured. Upon our arrival, we found Mr. Whitmer's family very anxious concerning the work, and very friendly toward ourselves. They continued so, boarded and lodged us according to arrangements; and John Whitmer, in particular, assisted us very much in writing during the remainder of the work.

In the meantime, David, John and Peter Whitmer, Jun., became our zealous friends and assistants in the work; and being anxious to know their respective duties, and having desired with much earnestness that I inquire of the Lord concerning them, I did so, through the means of the Urim and Thummim, and obtained for them in succession the following revelations:

[text of D&C 14, 15, and 16 follows]

(Joseph Smith, History of the Church, Volume 1, page 49]

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.