

Comments on Doctrine & Covenants 21

While the text of this section generally follows the pattern of an inverted parallelism, peaking on the latter half of v. 4, note the Lord's target audience alternates back and forth in an A-B pattern as follows:

- A - (v. 1-3) Smith
- B - (v. 4-6) Ecclesia
- A - (v. 7-8) Smith
- B - (v. 9) Ecclesia
- A - (v. 10-11a) Smith
- B - (v. 11b-12) Ecclesia

In doing so, the Lord endorses Smith as His servant and establishes the relationship and responsibilities between him and the ecclesia. He is to serve and lead them, and they are to listen to him when the Lord speaks through him.

1 Behold, there shall be a record kept among you; and in it thou shalt be called a seer, a translator, a prophet, an apostle of Jesus Christ, an elder of the church through the will of God the Father, and the grace of your Lord Jesus Christ, 2 Being inspired of the Holy Ghost to lay the foundation thereof, and to build it up unto the most holy faith. 3 which church was organized and established in the year of your Lord eighteen hundred and thirty, in the fourth month, and on the sixth day of the month which is called April.

v1-3 The Lord endorses Smith as His servant to establish His Church.

4 wherefore, meaning the church, thou shalt give heed unto all his words and commandments which he shall give unto you as he receiveth them, walking in all holiness before me; 5 For his word ye shall receive, as if from mine own mouth, in all patience and faith. 6 For by doing these things the gates of hell shall not prevail against you; yea, and the Lord God will disperse the powers of darkness from before you, and cause the heavens to shake for your good, and his name's glory.

v4-6 The ecclesia is directed to heed the words of Smith as though they were the Lord's own words, cp. D&C 1:38.

v4 As long as Smith is "walking in all holiness before [Him]" the Lord will give him "words and commandments which he shall give unto [the ecclesia]" and they "shall give heed unto all his words and commandments". As long as Smith is the authorized conduit of revelation for the Lord's Church the members of that

Church are obligated to listen to him.

This kind of conditional statement, where Smith is to walk in holiness before the Lord, is what apostates from the Church grasped at when excusing themselves from adhering to the Lord's commands. The accusation of him being a "fallen prophet" by various apostates was fairly common during his lifetime. But, even if Smith fell from the Lord's grace, that would not exempt the apostates from the Lord's commands through him or through other of His servants. So, the accusations leveled at Smith using this argument are just so much fault-finding in an attempt to excuse their own sins rather than repent. By their fruits ye shall know them.

v5 Compare John 5:45-47.

v6 "heavens to shake", the footnotes in the 1981 edition D&C provide a number of cross references, unfortunately those provided are a little bit confusing because they are addressing two different events that are related in time (i.e., they are both eschatological) but not so much in subject. The Joel 3:16 passage refers to the destruction meted out upon the wicked upon the Day of the Lord, where the Haggai 2:7 refers to the post-Day of the Lord gathering of all nations and their wealth to Zion/Jerusalem. In the latter case, the "wealth" is the literal physical wealth of the nations brought to rebuild Zion/Jerusalem as well as the figurative wealth which is scattered Israel and those who would worship the Lord, cf. Isa. 49:18, Isa. 60:10-14.

7 For thus saith the Lord God: Him have I inspired to move the cause of Zion in mighty power for good, and his diligence I know, and his prayers I have heard. 8 Yea, his weeping for Zion I have seen, and I will cause that he shall mourn for her no longer; for his days of rejoicing are come unto the remission of his sins, and the manifestations of my blessings upon his works.

v7-8 The Lord takes note of Smith's importuning for Zion, which is a classic intercessory servant theme.

v8 "his weeping for Zion", cp. D&C 121:1-6 and see the header for D&C 57.

9 For, behold, I will bless all those who labor in my vineyard with a mighty blessing, and they shall believe on his words, which are given him through me by the Comforter, which manifesteth that Jesus was crucified by sinful men for the sins of the world, yea, for the remission of sins unto the contrite heart.

v9 Those of the ecclesia who listen to Smith's inspired words

from the Lord and who assist in the work of bringing forth Zion will be blessed.

10 wherefore it behooveth me that he should be ordained by you, Oliver Cowdery mine apostle; 11 This being an ordinance unto you, that you are an elder under his hand, he being the first unto you,

v10-11a Smith is ordained to be the first elder and Cowdery is the second elder under Smith.

Circumstantial evidence indicates Smith and Cowdery were ordained to the Melchizedek Priesthood late May or Early June of 1829 by Peter, James, and John. The exact date is unknown because it was not recorded. D&C 27:12 establishes it occurred at some point previous to August, 1830.

that you might be an elder unto this church of Christ, bearing my name-- 12 And the first preacher of this church unto the church, and before the world, yea, before the Gentiles; yea, and thus saith the Lord God, lo, lo! to the Jews also. Amen.

v11b-12 Cowdery is called as preacher unto the Church.

v12 "to the Jews also", in all likelihood the term is referring to Jews as "mine ancient covenant people" (cf. 2 Ne. 29:5, 2 Ne. 30:2-4) rather than literally those of the lineage of Judah whom we call "Jews" today. Also note D&C 57:4 refers to the Lamanites as "Jews".

Historical Material Pertaining to Doctrine & Covenants 21

At the time the Church was officially incorporated there were six "official" members, as the number was limited (see Cook's comments below), but there were about fifty people present for this first meeting, composed of baptized members and friends.

Below are two historical commentaries, and comments by Smith and his mother Lucy Mack Smith. I extended Lucy's comments to cover some of the additional events surrounding the official start of the Church.

Excerpt from The Revelations of the Prophet Joseph Smith

The Church was officially organized on Tuesday, 6 April 1830, at Fayette, New York. The six charter members were Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery, Hyrum Smith, David Whitmer, Samuel H. Smith, and Peter Whitmer, Jr. The name of the new church was "The Church of Christ."

The state law under which the "Church of Christ" was incorporated was entitled "An Act to provide for the Incorporation of Religious Societies," passed 5 April 1813. The law, which stipulated that a certificate of incorporation be recorded with the county clerk, designated that "any number of discreet persons of their church...not less than three, nor exceeding nine" could "transact all affairs relative to the temporalities thereof."

On 3 May 1834 the name of the Church was changed to "The Church of the Latter Day Saints"; and on 26 April 1838, eight years after the Church's organization, the final designation of the Church was given by revelation: "The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints." Concerning the organization of the Church, Joseph Knight, Sr., wrote,

Now in the Spring of 1830, I went with my Team and took Joseph out to Manchester to his Father. When we was on our way he told me that there must be a Church formed But did not tell when.... I stayed a few Days wating for some Books to Be Bound. Joseph said there must Be a Church Biltup.... On the sixth Day of April 1830 he Begun the Church with six members and received the following Revelation Book of Covenants Page 177 [section 21]. They all kneeled down and prayed and Joseph gave them instructions how to Bild up the Church and exorted them to Be faithfull in all things for this is the work of God.

(Lyndon W. Cook, The Revelations of the Prophet Joseph Smith, pages 32-33)

Excerpt from The Prophet Joseph

Joseph and Oliver knew during 1829 that they would organize a church. Revelations that year told of "the rising up and the coming forth of my church" (D&C 5:14) and "the foundation of my church" (D&C 18:4). In 1829 Cowdery drafted a version of what became in 1830 the first manual for church government—now Doctrine and Covenants, section 20. Called "Articles of the Church of Christ," it was a revelation to Oliver, who is "called with the same calling as Paul," to "baptize those who repent." The revelation explained the method of baptism, the words to use when ordaining priests and teachers, and the sacrament prayer. The document was signed, "Behold I am Oliver I am an Apostle of Jesus Christ."

During 1829, Joseph and Oliver baptized and ordained others to the priesthood. David Whitmer, in old age, said that by August 1829, six elders had been ordained, the other four being himself, Samuel and Hyrum Smith, and Peter Whitmer. David said that "we preached, baptized, and confirmed members into the Church of Christ" during the next eight months. He added, "We were an humble happy people."

Preaching, converting, baptizing, ordaining, holding meetings of believers—these activities show that an informal church was in operation in 1829. Then, Whitmer said, in part because "the world had been telling us that we were not a regularly organized church, and had no right to officiate in the ordinance of marriage, hold church property, etc.," a more formal, legal entity needed to be formed. Sometime early in the spring of 1830, Joseph Smith told his friend Joseph Knight, Sr., that "there must be a church formed." Joseph received a revelation giving the exact date for this formal organizing to occur.

On April 6 more than fifty people met at the Whitmer house in Fayette to formally create the Church of Christ. By vote, Joseph Smith was sustained as First Elder and Oliver as Second Elder, and they ordained each other as such. Joseph and Oliver blessed bread and wine and administered the sacrament, then they laid hands on various members and bestowed the Holy Ghost. Joseph and Oliver ordained a few men to the priesthood. Father Joseph Knight reported that "Joseph gave them instructions how to Bild up the Church."

This meeting followed the blueprint given to Joseph Smith in Father Whitmer's chamber in June 1829, which outlined that at a future meeting of the baptized, the group must vote to sustain Joseph and Oliver to be ordained as First and Second Elders in the Church of Jesus Christ, vote to sustain Joseph and Oliver as their spiritual teachers, partake of the sacrament, allow Joseph and Oliver to ordain each other and then ordain others, and then

confer the gift of the Holy Ghost upon those baptized. (See D&C 18.)

At the meeting, a revelation was received which said Joseph should be called and recognized by the Church as "a seer, a translator, a prophet, an apostle of Jesus Christ, an elder." (D&C 21:1.) (Larry C. Porter and Susan Easton Black, *The Prophet Joseph*, pages 57-59)

Excerpt from History of the Church

Whilst the Book of Mormon was in the hands of the printer, we still continued to bear testimony and give information, as far as we had opportunity; and also made known to our brethren that we had received a commandment to organize the Church; and accordingly we met together for that purpose, at the house of Mr. Peter Whitmer, Sen., (being six in number,) on Tuesday, the sixth day of April, A. D., one thousand eight hundred and thirty. Having opened the meeting by solemn prayer to our Heavenly Father, we proceeded, according to previous commandment, to call on our brethren to know whether they accepted us as their teachers in the things of the Kingdom of God, and whether they were satisfied that we should proceed and be organized as a Church according to said commandment which we had received. To these several propositions they consented by a unanimous vote. I then laid my hands upon Oliver Cowdery, and ordained him an Elder of the "Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints;" after which, he ordained me also to the office of an Elder of said Church. We then took bread, blessed it, and brake it with them; also wine, blessed it, and drank it with them. We then laid our hands on each individual member of the Church present, that they might receive the gift of the Holy Ghost, and be confirmed members of the Church of Christ. The Holy Ghost was poured out upon us to a very great degree—some prophesied, whilst we all praised the Lord, and rejoiced exceedingly. Whilst yet together, I received the following commandment:

[text of section 21 quoted]

We now proceeded to call out and ordain some others of the brethren to different offices of the Priesthood, according as the Spirit manifested unto us: and after a happy time spent in witnessing and feeling for ourselves the powers and blessings of the Holy Ghost, through the grace of God bestowed upon us, we dismissed with the pleasing knowledge that we were now individually members of, and acknowledged of God, "The Church of Jesus Christ," organized in accordance with commandments and revelations given by Him to ourselves in these last days, as well as according to the order of the Church as recorded in the New Testament. Several persons who had attended the above meeting, became convinced of the truth and came forward shortly after, and

were received into the Church; among the rest, my own father and mother were baptized, to my great joy and consolation; and about the same time, Martin Harris and Orrin Porter Rockwell. (Joseph Smith, History of the Church, Vol. 1, pages 74-79)

Excerpt from History of Joseph Smith by His Mother

About the first of April of the same year in which the Book of Mormon was published, Joseph came again from Pennsylvania, preached to us several times. My husband and Martin Harris were baptized. When Mr. Smith came out of the water, Joseph stood upon the shore, and taking his father by the hand, he exclaimed, with tears of joy, "Praise to my God! that I lived to see my own father baptized into the true Church of Jesus Christ!" On April 6, 1830, the Church was organized.

Shortly after this, my sons were all ordained to the ministry, even Don Carlos, who was but fourteen years of age. Samuel was directed to take a number of the Books of Mormon, and go on a mission to Livonia, to preach, and make sale of the books, if possible. Whilst he was making preparations to go on this mission, Miss Almira Mack arrived in Manchester from Pontiac. This young woman was a daughter of my brother, Stephen Mack, whose history I have already given. She received the Gospel as soon as she heard it, and was baptized immediately, and has ever since remained a faithful member of the Church. (Lucy Mack Smith, History of Joseph Smith by His Mother, page 169)

In the summer after the Church was organized, my husband set out, with Don Carlos, to visit his father, Asael Smith. After a tedious journey, they arrived at the house of John Smith, my husband's brother. His wife Clarissa had never before seen my husband, but as soon as he entered, she exclaimed, "There, Mr. Smith, is your brother Joseph."

John, turning suddenly, cried out, "Joseph, is this you?"

"It is I," said Joseph; "is my father yet alive? I have come to see him once more, before he dies." (ibid., page 172)

Just before my husband's return, as Joseph was about commencing a discourse one Sunday morning, Parley P. Pratt came in, very much fatigued, He had heard of us at considerable distance, and had traveled very fast, in order to get there by meeting time, as he wished to hear what we had to say, that he might be prepared to show us our error. But when Joseph had finished his discourse, Mr. Pratt arose, and expressed his hearty concurrence in every sentiment advanced. The following day he was baptized and ordained. In a few days he set off for Canaan, N. Y. where his brother Orson resided, whom he baptized on the nineteenth of September, 1830. (ibid., page 176)

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