

## Comments on Doctrine & Covenants 32

In this revelation Parley P. Pratt is called to serve as a missionary to the Lamanite remnants along with some of the brethren called in previous revelations (cf. D&C 28, D&C 30).

1 AND now concerning my servant Parley P. Pratt, behold, I say unto him that as I live I will that he shall declare my gospel and learn of me, and be meek and lowly of heart. 2 And that which I have appointed unto him is that he shall go with my servants, Oliver Cowdery and Peter Whitmer, Jun., into the wilderness among the Lamanites. 3 And Ziba Peterson also shall go with them; and I myself will go with them and be in their midst; and I am their advocate with the Father, and nothing shall prevail against them. 4 And they shall give heed to that which is written, and pretend to no other revelation; and they shall pray always that I may unfold the same to their understanding. 5 And they shall give heed unto these words and trifle not, and I will bless them. Amen.

v1 "learn of me", i.e., be a disciple. The Greek word "mathetes", translated to "disciple" in the KJV, most literally translates to "learner".

"be meek and lowly of heart", Smith and Sjodahl make a comment which serves to illustrate the need for the Lord's admonition:

Parley P. Pratt was admonished to be meek and lowly of heart. In the year 1837, there were "jarrings and discord" in the Church at Kirtland, and he was overcome with that spirit. He even tried to turn John Taylor from the Prophet by pointing out to him what he regarded as Joseph's error. Elder Taylor rebuked him as a brother, and Parley P. Pratt went to the Prophet in tears and confessed his sin, whereupon the Prophet frankly forgave him, prayed with him, and blessed him. This was meekness. It was also manliness. Only a really strong character can possess true humility. (Hyrum M. Smith and Janne M. Sjodahl, Doctrine and Covenants Commentary, pages 170-171)

v2-3 The mission to the Lamanites is to commence in earnest, and the Lord will support them in their efforts.

v3 "nothing shall prevail against them", referring to Jesus'

advocacy for them before the Father and not necessarily mortal opposition.

v4-5 The Lord instructs them to give heed to the scriptures they have at their disposal and not to desire more. In such a time when the Lord was communicating so freely with the them, it would have been easy to desire revelation on every point from grand to small. However, the Lord is informing them that the old stuff is not simply dismissed or discounted in the presence of the new stuff. They shouldn't be seeking for more, rather they should be studying what they already have.

The second half of v. 4 also indicates they are to "pray always" over the meaning of the scriptures, and then it will be unfolded to them.

v4 "pretend", see comments on D&C 5:4.

## **Historical Material Pertaining to Doctrine & Covenants 32**

While the mission being referenced was to initiate work among the Lamanites, the majority of the success they had was among the white settlers and not Native Americans. The first excerpt is a historical summary by Woodford. The second excerpt from History of the Church recounts the conversion of Sidney Rigdon by the missionaries, and the third excerpt from History of the Church quotes a letter Cowdery wrote to the brethren at Kirtland. Then follows John Whitmer's contemporaneous recounting of the events, and Parley P. Pratt's autobiographical comments regarding his ministry to the Native Americans.

The final two excerpts are historical commentaries. The first identifies the individuals who were involved in the missionary party and recounts their declarations of faith and conviction concerning their imminent labors. The last offers a general summary of events.

This revelation was first published in the Kirtland edition of the Doctrine and Covenants in 1835. It was published in Times and Seasons, volume 4, number 11, page 172, dated April 15, 1843. It was published in the Millennial Star, volume 4, number 11, page 168, dated March 1844.

### **Excerpt from Historical Development of the Doctrine And Covenants**

Prior to this revelation, two elders, Oliver Cowdery and Peter Whitmer, Jr., were called as missionaries to the Lamanites. These men were to wait until after the covered of September 26-28, 1830 before going on their way. During the conference, several elders wondered if the number of missionaries to go on this particular mission might be increased. One gets the feeling from reading the account in the History of the Church that others were anxious to be included in this unique and adventuresome journey. Finally, Joseph Smith inquired of the Lord concerning the matter, and Section 32 was given. In the revelation, two more missionaries, Parley P. Pratt and Ziba Peterson, were called. Before these brave young men left, they signed a statement in which they covenanted to do the work of the Lord. Since this statement is dated October 17, 1830, they started quite late in the season to travel on foot to Missouri. Peter Whitmer wrote:

In the year 1830 the word of the Lord came unto me by the Prophet Joseph Smith on the tenth month, saying: Peter, though shalt go with thy Brother Oliver to the Lamanites. We started on the same month to the west to the tribe of Buffalo, and there we declared the Book of Mormon...

Years after their mission, Parley P. Pratt, in a report to Bishop Edward Hunter, the Presiding Bishop of the Church, recalled:

After this he enquired of the Lord and received a revelation, appointing me a mission to the west, in a company with Oliver Cowdery, Peter Whitmer, and Ziba Peterson. We started this mission in Octr. 1830.

An interesting sidelight to this mission is the way Church members assisted those who were called to make the journey. Without such help it may have been impossible for at least some of them to go. Lucy Mack Smith recorded one such unselfish act of service:

Soon after which, a revelation was given, commanding Parley P. Pratt, Ziba Peterson, Peter Whitmer, and Oliver Cowdery, to take a mission to Missouri, preaching by the way. As soon as this revelation was received, Emma Smith, and several other sisters, began to make arrangements to furnish those who were set apart for this mission, with the necessary clothing, which was no easy task, as the most of it had to be manufactured out of raw material.

(Robert J. Woodford, The Historical Development of the Doctrine and Covenants, BYU PhD Dissertation, 1974, page 445)

#### **Excerpts from History of the Church**

During this conference, which continued three days, the utmost harmony prevailed, and all things were settled satisfactorily to all present, and a desire was manifested by all the Saints to go forward and labor with all their powers to spread the great and glorious principles of truth, which had been revealed by our Heavenly Father. A number were baptized during the conference, and the word of the Lord spread and prevailed.

At this time a great desire was manifested by several of

the Elders respecting the remnants of the house of Joseph, the Lamanites, residing in the west-knowing that the purposes of God were great respecting that people, and hoping that the time had come when the promises of the Almighty in regard to them were about to be accomplished, and that they would receive the Gospel, and enjoy its blessings. The desire being so great, it was agreed that we should inquire of the Lord respecting the propriety of sending some of the Elders among them, which we accordingly did, and received the following:

[text of D&C 32 quoted]

Immediately on receiving this revelation, preparations were made for the journey of the brethren therein designated, to the borders of the Lamanites, and a copy of the revelation was given them. They bade adieu to their brethren and friends, and commenced their journey, preaching by the way, and leaving a sealing testimony behind them, lifting up their voice like a trump in the different villages through which they passed. They continued their journey until they came to Kirtland, Ohio, where they tarried some time, there being quite a number in that place and vicinity who believed their testimony, and came forward and obeyed the Gospel. Among the number was Mr. Sidney Rigdon, and a large portion of the church over which he presided.

Previous to this, Elder Parley P. Pratt had been a preacher in the same church with Mr. Rigdon, and resided in the town of Amherst, Loraine county, in Ohio, and had been sent into the state of New York on a mission, where he became acquainted with the circumstances of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, and was introduced to Joseph Smith, Jun., and other members of the Church. The belief that there were many in the church with which he had formerly been united, who were honest seekers after truth, induced Elder Pratt; while on his journey to the west, to call upon his friends, and make known the great things which the Lord had brought to pass.

The first house at which they called in the vicinity of Kirtland, was Mr. Rigdon's, and after the usual salutations, they presented him with the Book of Mormon, stating that it was a revelation from God. This being the first time he had ever heard of, or seen, the Book of Mormon, he felt very much surprised at the assertion, and replied that he had the Bible which he believed was a revelation from God, and with which he pretended to have some acquaintance; but with respect of the book they had presented him, he must say that he had considerable doubt. Upon this, they expressed a desire to investigate the subject, and argue the matter. But he replied,

"No, young gentleman, you must not argue with me on the subject; but I will read your book, and see what claims it has upon my faith, and will endeavor to ascertain whether it be a revelation from God or not."

After some further conversation they expressed a desire to lay the subject before the people, and requested the privilege of preaching in Mr. Rigdon's chapel, to which he readily consented. The appointment was accordingly published, and a large and respectable congregation assembled. Oliver Cowdery and Parley P. Pratt severally addressed the meeting. At the conclusion, Mr. Rigdon arose, and stated to the congregation that the information they had that evening received was of an extraordinary character, and certainly demanded their most serious consideration; and as the Apostle advised his brethren to "prove all things, and hold fast that which is good," so he would exhort his brethren to do likewise, and give the matter a careful investigation, and not turn against it without being fully convinced of its being an imposition, lest they should, possibly, resist the truth.

A few miles from Mr. Rigdon's home in Mentor, at the town of Kirtland, lived a number of the members of his church. They lived together and had all things common from which circumstance has risen the idea that this was the case with the Church of Jesus Christ. To that place the Elders immediately repaired, and proclaimed the Gospel unto them, with considerable success; for their testimony was received by many of the people, and seventeen came forward in obedience to the Gospel.

While thus engaged, they visited Mr. Rigdon occasionally, and found him very earnestly reading the Book of Mormon, -praying to the Lord for direction, and meditating on the things he heard and read; and after a fortnight from the time the book was put into his hands, he was fully convinced of the truth of the work, by a revelation from Jesus Christ, which was made known to him in a remarkable manner, so that he could exclaim, "Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto me, but my Father which is in heaven." Accordingly he and his wife were both baptized into the Church of Jesus Christ; and, together with those who had been previously admitted to baptism, made a little branch of the Church, in this section of Ohio, of about twenty members.

This much accomplished, the brethren bound for the borders of the Lamanites, bade an affectionate farewell to the Saints in Kirtland and vicinity; and, after adding one of their new converts to their number-Dr. Frederick G. Williams-they went on their way rejoicing. (Joseph Smith, History of the Church, Vol.

1, pages 118-126)

From Parley P. Pratt, who during the spring had returned from his mission of last fall, we had verbal information; and from letters from the still remaining Elders we had written intelligence; and as the mission to Western Missouri and the gathering of the Saints to that place was the most important subject which then engrossed the attention of the Church, I will here insert the copy of a letter, received about this time from that section, dated at Kaw Township, Missouri, May 7, 1831:

Our Dearly Beloved Brethren:-I have nothing particular to write as concerning the Lamanites; because of a short journey which I have just returned from, and in consequence of which I have not written to you since the 16th of last month. Brother Ziba Peterson and myself went into the county east, which is Lafayette, about forty miles; and, in the name of Jesus, we called on the people to repent, many of whom are. I believe, earnestly searching for truth, and if sincerely, I pray they may find that precious treasure, for it seems to be wholly fallen in the streets, and equity cannot enter.

The letter we received from you informed us that the opposition was great against you. Now, our beloved brethren, we verily believe that we also can rejoice that we are counted worthy to suffer shame for His name; for almost the whole country, consisting of Universalists, Atheists, Deists, Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, and other professed Christians, priests and people; with all the devils from the infernal pit are united, and foaming out their own shame [against us]. God forbid that I should bring a railing accusation against them, for vengeance belongeth to Him who is able to repay; and herein, brethren, we confide.

I am lately informed of another tribe of Lamanites, who have abundance of flocks of the best kinds of sheep and cattle; and they manufacture blankets of a superior quality. The tribe, is very numerous; they live three hundred miles west of Santa Fe, and are called Navashoes. Why I mention this tribe is because I feel under obligations to communicate to my brethren any information concerning the Lamanites

that I meet with in my labors and travels; believing, as I do, that much is expected from me in the cause of our Lord; and doubting not that I am daily remembered before the throne of the Most High by all my brethren, as well by those who have not seen my face in the flesh as by those who have.

We begin to expect our brother Parley P. Pratt soon; we have heard from him only when he was at St. Louis. We are all well, bless the Lord; and preach the Gospel we will, if earth and hell oppose our way-for we dwell in the midst of scorpions-and in Jesus we trust. Grace be with you all. Amen.

OLIVER COWDERY.

P. S.-I beseech Brother Whitney to remember and write, and direct to me, Independence, Jackson County, Missouri.

(Joseph Smith, History of the Church, Vol. 1, pages 182-184)

**Excerpt from Book of John Whitmer**

I shall proceed to continue this record, being commanded of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, to write the things that transpire in this Church (inasmuch as they come to my knowledge,) in these last days. It is now June the twelfth, one thousand eight hundred and thirty one years, since the coming of our Lord and Savior in the flesh. Not many days after my brethren, Oliver Cowdery, Peter Whitmer, Jr., Parley P. Pratt, and Ziba Peterson: received a commandment of the Lord, through Joseph Smith, Jr., to take their journey to the Lamanites and preach the Gospel of our Lord and Savior, among them, and establish the Church of Christ among them. They journeyed as far west as the state of Ohio, and through the divine influences of the Holy Spirit, by the assistance of the Lord, they built a branch of the Church, in Geauga Co., state of Ohio, which consisted of about one hundred and thirty members.

And now it came to pass, that before they proceeded, on their journey from this place, there was a man whose name was Sidney Rigdon, he having been an instrument in the hand of the Lord of doing much good. He was in search of truth, consequently he received the fullness of the gospel with gladness of heart, even the Book of Mormon, it being what he was in search after,



notwithstanding it was some days before he obtained a witness from the Lord, of the truth of his work. After several days the Lord heard his cries, and answered his prayers, and by vision showed to him that this emanated from Him and must remain, it being the fullness of the gospel of Jesus Christ, first unto the Gentiles and then unto the Jews. (John Whitmer, [Book of John Whitmer](#), page 1)

**Excerpt from the Autobiography of Parley Parker Pratt**

It was now October, 1830. A revelation [D&C 32:1-3] had been given through the mouth of this Prophet, Seer and Translator, in which Elders Oliver Cowdery, Peter Whitmer, Ziba Peterson and myself were appointed to go into the wilderness, through the western States, and to the Indian territory. Making arrangements for my wife in the family of the Whitmers, we took leave of our friends and the church late in October, and started on foot.

After travelling for some days we called on an Indian nation at or near Buffalo; and spent part of a day with them, instructing them in the knowledge of the record of their forefathers. We were kindly received, and much interest was manifested by them on hearing this news. We made a present of two copies of the Book of Mormon to certain of them who could read, and repaired to Buffalo. (Parley P. Pratt, *Autobiography of Parley Parker Pratt*, page 35)

**Excerpt from The Revelations of the Prophet Joseph Smith**

Section 28 mentioned that Oliver Cowdery was to "go unto the Lamanites and preach my gospel." In section 30 Peter Whitmer, Jr., was told to take his "journey with your brother Oliver... [and] build up my church among the Lamanites." As these two brethren were preparing to leave for the West, it was asked if others could accompany them on this mission. In response to this request, Joseph Smith inquired of the Lord and received section 32. As indicated in the revelation, Parley P. Pratt and Ziba Peterson were to accompany Oliver Cowdery and Peter Whitmer, Jr. These fearless missionaries, who departed after 17 October 1830, signed their names to the following statements:

Manchester, New York, Oct.17, 1830

I Oliver, being commanded by the Lord God, to go forth

unto the Lamanites, to proclaim glad tidings of great joy unto them, by presenting unto them the fullness of the Gospel, of the only begotten Son of God; and also, to rear up a pillar as a witness where the temple of God shall be built, in the glorious new Jerusalem; and having certain brothers with me, who are called of GOD TO ASSIST ME, whose names are Parley, and Peter and Ziba, do therefore most solemnly covenant with God that I will walk humbly before him, and do this business, and this glorious work according as he shall direct me by the Holy Ghost; ever praying for mine and their prosperity, and deliverance from bonds, and from imprisonment, and whatsoever may befall us, with all patience and faith. Amen

Oliver Cowdery

We, the undersigned, being called and commanded by the Lord God, to accompany our brother Oliver Cowdery to go to the Lamanites and to assist in the above mentioned glorious work and business, we do, therefore, most solemnly covenant before God, that we will assist him faithfully in this thing, by giving heed to all his words and advise, which is, or shall be given him by the spirit of truth, ever praying with all prayer and supplication, for our and his prosperity, and our deliverance from bonds, and imprisonments and whatsoever may come upon us, with all patience and faith. Amen.

Signed in the presence of Joseph Smith jun.,

David Whitmer Parley P. Pratt

Ziba Peterson

Peter Whitmer

This preaching effort, known as the "Lamanite mission," significantly extended the western boundaries of Mormonism. Although the purpose of the mission was to take the Book of Mormon message to the American Indians situated west of Missouri, ironically, its success was in the Western Reserve among whites. (Lyndon W. Cook, The Revelations of the Prophet

Joseph Smith, pages 44-45)

**Excerpt from Joseph Smith-Seeker of Truth, Prophet of God**

At the September, 1830, conference of the young Church, missionary work really began. Four elders, Oliver Cowdery, Parley P. Pratt, Peter Whitmer, Jr., and Ziba Peterson, were called to go westward into the Indian Country to tell the red men that a book about their ancestors had been revealed. They were also in a sense an exploring party, for already the Prophet foresaw the need of a gathering place of the Saints.

These missionaries left in the fall of 1830. On the way they stopped at Kirtland, Ohio, and the neighboring villages. There they preached the newly restored gospel with astonishing results. In Kirtland and neighborhood were hundreds of settlers who were seekers after truth. Alexander Campbell and his flock were there. Some of these, Lyman Wight, Isaac Morley, and Titus Billings, belonged to a group which attempted to have all things in common. There also Parley P. Pratt presented to Sidney Rigdon, his old friend and teacher, a copy of the Book of Mormon.

Before long several persons applied for baptism. Sidney Rigdon, a Campbellite writer and eloquent preacher, entered the waters of baptism. Branches were organized. The field there seemed fertile for the preaching of the restored gospel. The missionaries spent several weeks in the Kirtland territory to expound the gospel to interested listeners.

However, the missionaries had been called to go to the Indian territory. Winter was coming. So about November 1st, they left the congenial Kirtland area and moved westward. On the way they proselyted and left copies of the Book of Mormon here and there.

Then the winter of 1830-31, the severest in the memories of men, descended upon them. The Mississippi River was frozen over, and the usual carriage or riding travel was impossible. But despite the weather, and under great suffering, they walked through snow and over ice for three hundred miles.

At last they reached Independence, Missouri. Since they had disposed of all their copies of the Book of Mormon, Parley P. Pratt was selected to return for a new supply.

Meanwhile, under restrictions set up by the Indian agents, the missionaries had little access to the Indians. But they preached long and loud to the Missouri settlers. To support themselves they did such work as was available. They set up a

tailor shop in Independence; some of their patrons became defenders of the Latter-day Saints later when persecution raged.

All in all this mission bore rich fruit.  
(John A. Widtsoe, Joseph Smith-Seeker After Truth, Prophet of God, pages 135-137)

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