

Comments on Doctrine & Covenants 33

1 Behold, I say unto you, my servants Ezra and Northrop, open ye your ears and hearken to the voice of the Lord your God, whose word is quick and powerful, sharper than a two-edged sword, to the dividing asunder of the joints and marrow, soul and spirit; and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

v1 This introduction is an authority statement similar to those revelations preceding it, cp. 12:2, 14:2. However, the last couple of lines are novel and quite vivid.

2 For verily, verily, I say unto you that ye are called to lift up your voices as with the sound of a trump, to declare my gospel unto a crooked and perverse generation. 3 For behold, the field is white already to harvest; and it is the eleventh hour, and the last time that I shall call laborers into my vineyard. 4 And my vineyard has become corrupted every whit; and there is none which doeth good save it be a few; and they err in many instances because of priestcrafts, all having corrupt minds.

5 And verily, verily, I say unto you, that this church have I established and called forth out of the wilderness. 6 And even so will I gather mine elect from the four quarters of the earth, even as many as will believe in me, and hearken unto my voice. 7 Yea, verily, verily, I say unto you, that the field is white already to harvest; wherefore, thrust in your sickles, and reap with all your might, mind, and strength.

8 Open your mouths and they shall be filled, and you shall become even as Nephi of old, who journeyed from Jerusalem in the wilderness. 9 Yea, open your mouths and spare not, and you shall be laden with sheaves upon your backs, for lo, I am with you. 10 Yea, open your mouths and they shall be filled, saying: Repent, repent, and prepare ye the way of the Lord, and make his paths straight; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand; 11 Yea, repent and be baptized, every one of you, for a remission of your sins; yea, be baptized even by water, and then cometh the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost. 12 Behold, verily, verily, I say unto you, this is my gospel;

v2-12 Note the repeated imagery of one calling out (v. 2, 5, 8) and of harvest (v. 3-4, 7, 9). The image of harvesting, one common to the NT (cf. Matt. 9:37-38, Matt. 13:39, John 4:35), is employed in the context of missionary work.

In these verses the missionaries are told to lift up their voices (v. 2). However, it is the Lord who has called forth the elect out from the wilderness (v. 5) by filling His servant's opened mouths with His word (v. 8). Here is the formula for successful missionary work. While the missionaries must "lift up [their] voices" and "open [their] mouths", the servants must humble themselves so they may be conduits for the Lord's word,

and if they do then the elect will hear them, because the elect will know the Lord's truth when they hear it from His servants.

Also note the parallel made between Nephi of old in v. 8 and current corrupt generation in v. 2-4. Lehi and Nephi had to leave Jerusalem because their generation was very much like described in v. 2-4. Then Nephi was frequently forced to reprimand Laman and Lemuel on their journey because they were wicked as those described in v. 2-4. Even as Nephi was called to rail against people he knew were wicked, so are the contemporary missionaries called to rail against those who pervert religion for their own gain. Just as the Lord supported Nephi, so will He support His contemporary servants.

v2-4 The times of the Gentiles (cf. D&C 45:25-30) has come in and the Gentiles have corrupted the gospel. The missionaries must therefore search out the few honest and pure in heart from among the corrupted churches of the world.

v3, 7 Similar to previous statements, cp. D&C 4.

v4-6 Note the dichotomy drawn between the corrupted vineyard and those who believe and are drawn out of the world.

Verses 5-6 make use of distinctions between the called and the chosen, cp. D&C 121:34. The Church (Greek: ekklesia) is ideally composed of the chosen, also called "elect" in the KJV (Greek: eklekton). The chosen are to call (Greek: kaleo), and those who will listen are the called (Greek: kleton). Ideally, the called will also be chosen. The result is an implied play on words:

My chosen (eklekton) are established,
Draw the called (kleton) out of the world.

v4 On this verse, cp. Ps. 14:3-4, and especially the JST on Ps. 14:3-4. Also cp. Micah 3, Zech. 11, Zech. 13:7-9, Ezek. 34. Isa. 56:9-12, Jer. 12:10. Contrast these with John 10, Isa. 40:11, Jer. 17:16, Gen. 49:24.

v8-11 These verses contain a triple repeat, a superlative, declaration that they should "open [their] mouths".

v8 "even as Nephi of old", Nephi lectured and straightened his brothers frequently during their meandering departure from Jerusalem, cf, 1 Ne. 3:15-21, 1 Ne. 16:1-4, 1 Ne. 16:22, 1 Ne. 17:18-55, 1 Ne. 18:10. The filling of the mouth as was Nephi clearly has reference to 2 Ne. 1:27, as follows:

And it must needs be that the power of God must be with him, even unto his commanding you that ye must obey. But behold, it was not he, but it was the Spirit of the Lord which was in him, which opened his mouth to utterance that he could not shut it.

Given the context of the surrounding material in D&C 33 is that of missionary work, one would wonder if the phrase "you shall become even as Nephi of old" has reference to missionary work as well in addition to implied inspiration. However, given his lack of success among his immediate family and his being entirely detached from gentile nations, it seems more likely that this phrase is intended only to distinguish Nephi#1 from the other BofM persons named Nephi.

v12 "this is my gospel", referring to the description in v. 10-11.

and remember that they shall have faith in me or they can in nowise be saved; 13 And upon this rock I will build my church; yea, upon this rock ye are built, and if ye continue, the gates of hell shall not prevail against you. 14 And ye shall remember the church articles and covenants to keep them. 15 And whoso having faith you shall confirm in my church, by the laying on of the hands, and I will bestow the gift of the Holy Ghost upon them. 16 And the Book of Mormon and the holy scriptures are given of me for your instruction; and the power of my Spirit quickeneth all things.

v12f-16 contains a lengthy "and" list of various admonitions relative to their calling. The "and" is used eight times to highlight individual items:

and remember that they shall have faith in me or they can in nowise be saved;

And upon this rock I will build my church; yea, upon this rock ye are built,

and if ye continue, the gates of hell shall not prevail against you.

And ye shall remember the church articles and covenants to keep them.

And whoso having faith you shall confirm in my church, by the laying on of the hands,

and I will bestow the gift of the Holy Ghost upon them.

And the Book of Mormon and the holy scriptures are given of me for your instruction;

and the power of my Spirit quickeneth all things.

17 wherefore, be faithful, praying always, having your lamps trimmed and burning, and oil with you, that you may be ready at the coming of the Bridegroom-- 18 For behold, verily, verily, I say unto you, that I come quickly. Even so. Amen.

v17-18 These verses form the conclusion by drawing on the parable of the Ten Virgins (cf. Matt. 25:1-13).

Continuing the Day of the Lord theme from D&C 29:9-30 and its connection to the necessity of warning the peoples of the earth (cf. D&C 29:7-8), the use of the parable as a concluding theme fits well. Also cp. D&C 63:54.

"coming of the Bridegroom", cp. D&C 65:3, 88:92, 133:10, 19.

Historical Material Pertaining to Doctrine & Covenants 33

The first quote is Smith's very brief comment on the revelation, which addresses more generally the availability of personal revelation rather than specifically touching on details of the text. The second quotation summarizes the conversion and subsequent Church life of Ezra Thayre. The last set of quotations recount Northrop Sweet's brief membership in the Church and affiliation with its first apostate offshoot.

The revelation was given in October, which would be the end of the harvest season in New York. The repeated use of the harvest imagery in the text may have been deliberately intended to coincide with this and therefore reinforce their call. Given the end of the literal harvest, they would be free to pursue their Church labors of the spiritual harvest.

Excerpt from History of the Church

The Lord, who is ever ready to instruct such as diligently seek in faith, gave the following revelation at Fayette, New York:

[text of D&C 33 quoted]

(Joseph Smith, History of the Church, Vol. 1, page 126)

Excerpt from Who's Who in the Doctrine and Covenants

Ezra Thayre

[Referenced in:] D&C 33; 52:22; 54: Introduction; 56:5, 8-9; 75:31

Birth: 14 October 1791, Randolph, Windsor County, Vermont. Son of Ezra Thayer and Charlotte French.

Ezra Thayre (or Thayer), a bridge, dam, and mill builder in the Palmyra, New York, area, wrote of his conversion to the Book of Mormon through the preaching of Hyrum Smith:

When Hyrum began to speak, every word touched me to the inmost soul. I thought every word was pointed to me. God punished me and riveted me to the spot. I could not help myself. The tears rolled down my cheeks, I was very proud and stubborn. There were many there who knew me, I dare not look up. I sat until I recovered myself before I dare look up. They sung some hymns and that filled me with the Spirit. When Hyrum got through, he picked up a book and said, "here is the Book of Mormon." I said, let me see it. I then opened the book, and I received a shock with such exquisite joy that no pen can write and no tongue can express. I shut the

book and said, what is the price of it? "Fourteen shillings" was the reply. I said, I'll take the book. I opened it again, and I felt a double portion of the Spirit, that I did not know whether I was in the world or not. I felt as though I was truly in heaven. Martin Harris rushed to me to tell me that the book was true. I told him that he need not tell me that, for I knew that it is true as well as he. [complete excerpt from The Saints Herald inserted, July 1862]

Ezra was baptized in October 1830 by Parley P. Pratt. After his baptism he experienced opposition from friends and family, but the appearance of an angel and other signs from heaven convinced him of the correctness of his religious choice. A few days after Ezra's baptism the Prophet Joseph Smith received a revelation directing him and Northrop Sweet to serve a mission (see D&C 33:1-2). Ezra accepted this directive as a revelation from God. En route from New York to Ohio he preached at several houses and baptized many into the Church.

Ezra was present at the fourth general conference of the Church, held in Kirtland, where he was ordained a high priest. Four days later, on 7 June 1831, the Prophet received a revelation calling Ezra to serve a mission with Thomas B. Marsh (see D&C 52:22). He failed to serve this mission. The reason for this failure seems to have been his role in the controversy over Lemah Copley's consecrating his farm for an inheritance of the Saints and later breaking that agreement. An exact determination of Ezra's transgressions is difficult; however, "it is evident that selfishness and rebellion" were the root of his problems. The Lord revealed:

My servant Ezra Thayre must repent of his pride, and of his selfishness, and obey the former commandment which I have given him concerning the place upon which he lives.

And if he will do this, as there shall be no divisions made upon the land, he shall be appointed still to go to the land of Missouri;

Otherwise he shall receive the money which he has paid, and shall leave the place, and shall be cut off out of my church, saith the Lord God of hosts. (D&C 56:5, 8-10.)

Apparently Ezra repented, for on 25 January 1832 he was again appointed to serve a mission with Thomas B. Marsh (see D&C 75:31). He was faithful to this charge. One year later he was appointed to negotiate the purchase of land in Kirtland for the Church, including 103 acres of the Peter French Farm. On this

land the Kirtland Temple was built.

Ezra is most remembered for bringing the first case before a high council, in Kirtland. He preferred charges against Elder Curtis Hodges Sr. on 19 February 1834, claiming that Hodges erred in spirit and erred in loud speaking and unclear articulation. Viewing Brother Hodges's behavior as "unbecoming in an Elder in this Church," he requested a hearing before the council. Elder Hodges pleaded not guilty to the charges. Reputable elders substantiated Ezra's complaint. "Brother Story testified that Elder Hodges talked so loud at a prayer meeting that the neighbors came out to see if some one was hurt." The decision of the council was that Hodges was guilty.

Following the decision Ezra volunteered to march with Zion's Camp. On 16 May 1834 as the camp approached Dayton, Ohio, the Prophet "felt much depressed in spirit" and told his traveling companions "there had been a great deal of bloodshed in that place" at some time. Soon Ezra, George A. Smith, and others who were riding with the Prophet arrived at a sixty-foot-high mound that contained human bones. On 29 May 1834, when the horses became ill and some died because of the moldy corn they had eaten, Ezra concocted a home remedy he called his "18x24" formula. Most of the animals recovered after taking it. When the camp arrived at Fishing River on 22 June 1834, Ezra was attacked with the cholera. Lucy Mack Smith explained his process of recovery: "He went to the river and commenced dipping himself, and finding that it helped him, he continued until he was quite restored."

Ezra's Church membership was suspended in May 1835 for impropriety, based on a complaint signed by Oliver Granger. In September that year the Prophet Joseph Smith wrote of his love for Ezra: "This day my soul has desired the salvation of Brother Ezra Thayer."

Apparently the complaint was settled. Ezra moved to Missouri and resided in Adam-ondi-Ahman, where he served on the high council. After the Saints were expelled from Missouri, Ezra moved to Rochester, New York. On 9 July 1840 Heber C. Kimball wrote to the Prophet about staying one night with Ezra in Rochester, "He was glad to see me, and inquired much about you and the rest of the brethren: he seemed to be firm in the faith of the gospel and has much love for his brethren." Jonathan Crosby had a differing opinion of Ezra's faithfulness. He had found him in Rochester also, and said, "He treated us well, but was dead spiritually."

After the Martyrdom Ezra refused to follow the leadership of the Quorum of the Twelve. He was living in Michigan in 1860 and was a high priest in the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. (Susan Easton Black, *Who's Who in the Doctrine and Covenants*, pages 319-321).

Excerpts Regarding Ezra Thayre

Ezra Thayre and Northrop Sweet came in the Church at the time of the preaching of the Lamanite missionaries. In October, 1830, they were called by revelation to enter the ministry and hearken to the voice of the Lord, 'whose word is quick and powerful, sharper than a two-edged sword, to the dividing asunder of the joints and marrow.' It was not long after this that Northrop Sweet left the Church and, with some others, formed what they called 'The Pure Church of Christ,' an organization that soon came to its end. (Joseph Fielding Smith, Church History and Modern Revelation Vol. 1, page 152)

The first [schismatic group] was known as the Pure Church of Christ, founded in 1831 by Wycam Clark, Northrop Sweet, and others. Asserting that Joseph Smith was a false prophet, Clark claimed that he was the true leader of the Church. The group held only two or three meetings and died out. (Encyclopedia of Mormonism, entry under the heading "Schismatic Groups", page 1265)

When the newly formed church failed to prosper, Northrop moved from Kirtland to Lake County, Ohio. He remained a resident of Ohio until about 1845, when he moved to Batavia, Michigan. He was living with his son Hezekiah in Bethel, Michigan, in 1880 at the age of seventy-eight. (Susan Easton Black, Who's Who in the Doctrine and Covenants, pages 312)

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