

Comments on Doctrine & Covenants 34

Section 34 revolves around two parenthetical statements made in the text. Both of the parenthesis comment on aspects of the Savior's mission, and both serve to establish Orson Pratt's relationship with Him.

Verses 1-4 comment on the spiritual Fatherhood of the Lord. Verses 5-10 comment on the relative roles of the Lord and His sons. His sons are to warn the wicked of His Second Coming. Verses 11-12 form the conclusion.

1 MY son Orson, hearken and hear and behold what I, the Lord God, shall say unto you, even Jesus Christ your Redeemer; 2 The light and the life of the world, a light which shineth in darkness and the darkness comprehendeth it not; 3 who so loved the world that he gave his own life, that as many as would believe might become the sons of God. Wherefore you are my son; 4 And blessed are you because you have believed;

v1 The Lord speaks to Orson Pratt and identifies him as a spiritual son (v. 1), and then He explains how it is people can be his spiritual children (v. 2-4), because of His sacrifice (v. 2-3) and their acceptance of Him as their Redeemer (v. 4)

v2-3b These verses form the first parenthesis commenting on what it means to be a "son of God" and how sonship is achieved.

v3c-4 Orson is called the Lord's "son" because he believes in Him. Notice that after the parenthesis the statement "Wherefore" presents the conclusion drawn: "you are my son". This same pattern is used after the second parenthesis in v. 10a.

5 And more blessed are you because you are called of me to preach my gospel-- 6 To lift up your voice as with the sound of a trump, both long and loud, and cry repentance unto a crooked and perverse generation, preparing the way of the Lord for his second coming.

7 For behold, verily, verily, I say unto you, the time is soon at hand that I shall come in a cloud with power and great glory. 8 And it shall be a great day at the time of my coming, for all nations shall tremble. 9 But before that great day shall come, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon be turned into blood; and the stars shall refuse their shining, and some shall fall, and great destructions await the wicked.

10 wherefore, lift up your voice and spare not, for the Lord God hath spoken; therefore prophesy, and it shall be given by the power of the Holy Ghost.

v5-6 Given that Orson is His son, the Lord now calls him to

preach the gospel message of repentance. This is done to prepare the way for the upcoming Day of the Lord.

v6 "both long and loud", Orson ended up fulfilling this prediction with his considerable missionary efforts.

v7-9 These verses form the second parenthesis on the Day of the Lord. The material is similar to that presented in D&C 29:3-30. The elect are to call those who will listen out from the world so they may be spared the wrath of the Lord.

v10 Repeating the theme of v. 5-6, the Lord concludes the parenthetical comment with "Wherefore, lift up your voice". As people need to be warned, you are called to warn them. Note the "Wherefore", the pronouncement of the logical conclusion, is also used in v. 3c.

"therefore prophesy", meaning "testify" and not predict the future, see the comments on D&C 25:7

**11 And if you are faithful, behold, I am with you until I come--
12 And verily, verily, I say unto you, I come quickly. I am your Lord and your Redeemer. Even so. Amen.**

v11 The standard promise of support to the Lord's servants, cp. Matt. 28:20, D&C 30:11, D&C 68:6, D&C 108:8, D&C 112:15.

v12 The closing statement which repeats the themes from the preceding parenthesis in reverse order: "I come quickly", the subject of v. 7-9; "your Lord and your Redeemer", the subject of v. 2-3b.

Historical Material Pertaining to Doctrine & Covenants 34

Parley and Orson Pratt were some of the more zealous converts in the early Church who's efforts were noteworthy and fruitful. Aside from his missionary labors, which are considerable, his doctrinal legacy is that of being a prominent defender and chronicler of the First Vision. Many of the more obscure details of the First Vision known today are a result of Orson's initial tenacity in questioning Joseph concerning the matter and subsequently publishing them. A thorough, if not exhaustive, discussion of this matter appears in Milton V. Backman Jr's essay entitled "Defender of the First Vision" appearing in the New York volume of the series entitled Regional Studies in Church History published by BYU Department of Church History and Doctrine.

The first excerpt below is Joseph's brief comments on the revelation. The second set of excerpts are recollections by Orson Pratt concerning his conversion and the subsequent revelation. The third is the entry from Encyclopedia of Mormonism giving an overview of Orson's life and history with the Church.

Excerpt from History of the Church

In the fore part of November, Orson Pratt, a young man nineteen years of age, who had been baptized at the first preaching of his brother, Parley P. Pratt, September 19th (his birthday), about six weeks previous, in Canaan, New York, came to inquire of the Lord what his duty was, and received the following answer:

[text of D&C 34 quoted]
(Joseph Smith, History of the Church, Vol. 1, pages 127-128)

Excerpts from Journal of Discourses

For about one year before I heard of this Church, I had begun seriously in my own mind to inquire after the Lord. I had sought him diligently--perhaps more so than many others that professed to seek him. I was so earnest and intent upon the subject of seeking the Lord, when I was about eighteen years of age, and from that until I was nineteen, when I heard this Gospel and received it, that I did not give myself the necessary time to rest. Engaged in farming and labouring too by the month, I took the privilege, while others had retired to rest, to go out into the fields and wilderness, and there plead with the Lord, hour after hour, that he would show me what to do--that he would teach me the way of life, and inform and instruct my understanding. It is true I had attended, as many others have done, various

meetings of religious societies. I had attended the Methodists, I had been to the Baptists, and had visited the Presbyterian meetings. I had heard their doctrines and had been earnestly urged by many to unite myself with them as a member of their churches; but something whispered to not do so. I remained, therefore, apart from all of them, praying continually in my heart that the Lord would show me the right way.

I continued this for about one year; after which, two Elders of this Church came into the neighbourhood. I heard their doctrine, and believed it to be the ancient Gospel; and as soon as the sound penetrated my ears, I knew that if the Bible was true, their doctrine was true. They taught not only the ordinances, but the gifts and blessings promised the believers, and the authority necessary in the church in order to administer the ordinances. All these things I received with gladness. Instead of feeling, as many do, a hatred against the principles, hoping they were not true, fearing and trembling lest they were, I rejoiced with great joy, believing that the ancient principles of the Gospel were restored to the earth--that the authority to preach it was also restored. I rejoiced that my ears were saluted with these good tidings while I was yet a youth, and in the day, too, of the early rising of the kingdom of God. I went forward and was baptized. I was the only individual baptized in that country for many years afterward. I immediately arranged my business and started off on a journey of two hundred and thirty miles to see the Prophet. I found him in the house of old father Whitmer, in Fayette, Seneca County, State of New York,--the house where this Church was first organized, consisting of only six members. I also found David Whitmer, then one of the three witnesses who saw the angel and the plates.

I soon became acquainted with all the witnesses of the Book of Mormon, with the exception of Oliver Cowdery and Peter Whitmer, who had started westward, and whose acquaintance I formed a few months afterward. I heard their teachings, saw their course of conduct, saw their earnestness, their humility, and diligence in prayer, and their faithfulness in warning one another and in warning their neighbours. (Orson Pratt, Journal of Discourses, Vol. 7, pages 177-179, July 10, 1859)

I can recollect, twenty-nine years ago this present autumn, that I went into the chamber of father Whitmer, in whose house the Lord manifested himself in the organization of this church, consisting of six members. I went into that chamber with the Prophet Joseph Smith, to inquire of the Lord; and he received a revelation for my benefit, which was written from the mouth of the Prophet by John Whitmer, one of the witnesses of the Book of Mormon. I was then only about nineteen years of age, and was desirous to know what my duty was. The Lord commanded in this

revelation that I should preach his Gospel. I thought that was a very great and important calling, and I felt altogether incompetent unless the Lord qualified me by his Spirit.

Among other things contained in this revelation, the Lord gave me a command in these words:--"Therefore lift up thy voice and prophesy and it shall be given by the power of the Holy Ghost." I thought to myself, that unless the Lord shall pour out his Spirit upon me more fully than anything I ever yet have experienced, I never can perform these duties acceptably in his sight.

To prophesy without the Holy Ghost--to reveal--was something I dare not do. I would rather have had my head severed from my body than to have been guilty of so great a crime. Indeed, there is one of the most awful denunciations pronounced upon that man who undertakes to prophesy in the name of the Lord, without the Holy Ghost to inspire him. Such a man in ancient days was to be cut off from the midst of Israel.

I felt, therefore, the importance of those sayings; and truly, when I looked at the magnitude and importance of the command given to me to prophesy by the power of the Holy Ghost, I felt oftentimes to tremble and shrink, for fear I never should be able to fulfil and accomplish so great a work. (Orson Pratt, Journal of Discourses, Vol. 7, page 312, September 18, 1859)

Since I came home, I have contrasted the present condition of myself and this people with what existed when I first became acquainted with this gospel. Then we were a little handful of people--there were, perhaps, not a hundred persons in all the States who had received the truth. I received it about five months after the organization of this Church, and, although but a boy, was immediately called to the ministry. In my inexperience I went forth, with gladness of heart, to bear my humble testimony to what I knew to be true. You may ask me if I had a knowledge before I commenced preaching this gospel. I answer, yes. I went forth from a farming occupation in the eastern part of the State of New York, and traveled alone between two hundred and three hundred miles, for the purpose of beholding the Prophet Joseph Smith. I found him in Fayette, Seneca County, New York, at the house of father Whitmer, where this Church was organized with only six members. In that house I found not only Joseph, the Prophet, but David Whitmer, John Whitmer, Christian Whitmer, and many of those witnesses whose names are recorded in the Book of Mormon. Those were happy days to me. To see a prophet of the living God, to look on a man whom the Lord had raised up to bring forth one of the most glorious records that ever saluted the ears of mortal man, was to me almost equal to beholding the face of an holy angel! Yet, when I took that journey, and first beheld his countenance, I did not certainly know that he was a prophet. I

believed him to be such because of the purity of the doctrine that I had heard preached which he had brought forth. I knew it was a scriptural doctrine, agreeing in every respect with the ancient gospel. For although but a boy, I had already become acquainted, in some measure, with the doctrines of the various religious sects of the day, but none of them satisfied me, none of them seemed to coincide with the word of God. I stood aloof from all, until I heard this, when my mind became fully satisfied that God had raised up a people to proclaim the gospel in all its ancient beauty and simplicity, with power to administer in its ordinances. That was a great satisfaction, so far as faith was concerned, but still I sought for a knowledge. I felt as though I was not qualified to stand before the people, and tell them that the Book of Mormon was a divine revelation, and that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God, unless I had a stronger testimony than that afforded by ancient prophets. However great my assurance might be, it seemed to me, that to know for myself, it required a witness independent of the testimony of others. I sought for this witness. I did not receive it immediately, but when the Lord saw the integrity of my heart and the anxiety of my mind--when He saw that I was willing to travel hundreds of miles for the sake of learning the principles of the truth, He gave me a testimony for myself, which conferred upon me the most perfect knowledge that Joseph Smith was a true prophet, and that this book, called the Book of Mormon, was in reality a Divine revelation, and that God had once more, in reality, spoken to the human family. What joy this knowledge gave me! No language that I am acquainted with could describe the sensations I experienced when I received a knowledge from Heaven of the truth of this work. (Orson Pratt, Journal of Discourses, Vol. 12, pages 85-86, August 11, 1867)

I well recollect, when I was but about nineteen years old--forty-four years last fall--that believing Joseph Smith to be a Prophet, and being led by the Spirit, I went a journey of two hundred miles to visit him. I well recollect the feelings of my heart at the time. He inquired of the Lord and obtained a revelation for your humble servant. He retired into the chamber of old Father Whitmer, in the house where this Church was organized in 1830. John Whitmer acted as his scribe, and I accompanied him into the chamber, for he had told me that it was my privilege to have the word of the Lord; and the Lord in that revelation, which is published here in the Book of Doctrine and Covenants, made a promise which to me, when I was in my youth, seemed to be almost too great for a person of as humble origin as myself ever to attain to. After telling in the revelation that the great day of the Lord was at hand, and calling upon me to lift up my voice among the people, to call upon them to repent and prepare the way of the Lord, and that the time was near when

the heavens should be shaken, when the earth should tremble, when the stars should refuse their shining, and when great destructions awaited the wicked, the Lord said to your humble servant--"Lift up your voice and prophesy, and it shall be given by the power of the Holy Ghost." This was a particular point in the revelation that seemed to me too great for me ever to attain to, and yet there was a positive command that I should do it. I have often reflected upon this revelation, and have oftentimes inquired in my heart--"Have I fulfilled that commandment as I ought to have done? Have I sought as earnestly as I ought to obtain the gift of prophecy, so as to fulfill the requirement of heaven?" And I have felt sometimes to condemn myself because of my slothfulness, and because of the little progress that I have made in relation to this great, heavenly, and divine gift. I certainly have had no inclination to prophesy to the people unless it should be given to me by the inspiration and power of the Holy Ghost; to prophesy out of my own heart is something perfectly disagreeable to my feelings, even to think of, and hence I have oftentimes, in my public discourses, avoided, when a thing would come before my mind pretty plain, uttering or declaring it for fear that I might get something out before the people in relation to the future that was wrong. But still, notwithstanding all this, there is one thing that I have endeavored to do, and that is, to inform my mind as far as I could by reading what God has revealed to both ancient and modern Prophets, in relation to the future, and if I have not had many important prophecies and revelations given directly to myself, I certainly have derived great advantage and great edification from reading and studying that which God has revealed to others; and hence most of my prophesying throughout my life, so far, has been founded upon the revelations given to others. (Orson Pratt, Journal of Discourses, Vol. 17, page 292, February 7, 1875)

Excerpt from Encyclopedia of Mormonism

As a member of the first Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of the modern dispensation, Orson Pratt participated in almost every phase of the Church's history from 1830 until his death in 1881. As a missionary, editor, pioneer, and pamphleteer, he was one of the most influential leaders of the Church in the nineteenth century.

Pratt was born September 19, 1811, at Hartford, Washington County, New York. At the age of eighteen he began seeking a religious experience, and within a year he had been taught the gospel by his brother Parley P. Pratt, who had himself recently joined the Church. On his nineteenth birthday, Orson was baptized into the Church by his brother.

Orson Pratt spent his first years in the Church on a variety

of short-term missions in the eastern United States and Canada. He also attended the School of the Prophets in Kirtland, Ohio, marched to Missouri with Zion's Camp in 1834, was ordained one of the Standing High Council in Missouri (July 1834), and in February 1835 was chosen as a member of the newly organized Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

From 1839 to 1841 he participated in the very successful mission of the Twelve to the British isles, spending much of his time in Scotland. At Edinburgh in September 1840, he published his first missionary tract, A[n] Interesting Account of Several Remarkable Visions. An important pamphlet, it contained the first public recording of Joseph Smith's first vision and also summarized basic LDS beliefs, a list that bears some resemblance to the 1842 Articles of Faith in the Wentworth Letter of Joseph Smith.

Orson Pratt's return to America in 1841 thrust him into a maelstrom of rumors and gossip in Nauvoo: that the Prophet Joseph Smith was teaching plural marriage. His reactions to the situation led to his excommunication in August 1842. However, after several months of seeking the truth regarding both Joseph Smith's revelations and the newly introduced practice of plural marriage, Pratt accepted both with such assurance that he spent the rest of his life in their defense. He was reinstated in the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in January 1843.

Following Joseph Smith's death in 1844, Pratt supported the right and responsibility of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles to preside over the Church. In 1847 he was a member of the Pioneer Company traveling to the Great Basin. On July 21 of that year he and Erastus Snow were the first of that company to enter the Salt Lake Valley. Several days later he preached the first sermon there. His journals are an important source for pioneer history.

From 1848 to 1851 Pratt presided over the Church in Europe. In addition to his many responsibilities regarding proselytizing, immigration, and editing the LDS millennial star, he wrote and published sixteen pamphlets in defense of LDS doctrines. These include his treatises Divine Authority, or the Question, Was Joseph Smith Sent of God? (1848); The Kingdom of God (1848-1849); and Divine Authenticity of the Book of Mormon (1850-1851).

When he returned to Salt Lake City, Elder Pratt was assigned by President Brigham Young to publicly preach a sermon announcing the doctrine of plural marriage at a special missionary conference in August 1852. Following the meetings he was assigned by Brigham Young to publish in Washington, D.C., a periodical in defense of plural marriage. The twelve-month run of The Seer in 1853 provides the most detailed defense of the doctrine in LDS literature.

In 1856, again presiding over the European Mission, Elder Pratt produced additional pamphlets on specific gospel

principles. Eight tracts were issued separately, then bound together in 1857 under the title Tracts by Orson Pratt... After Brigham Young's death in 1877, Pratt was assigned by John Taylor to help prepare new editions of the modern LDS scriptures. He had provided much of the critical work for the 1876 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants, and he did the same for the 1879 edition of the Book of Mormon (dividing it into chapters and verses and adding references), and for the 1879 American edition of the Pearl of Great Price.

Throughout his life Orson Pratt pursued his strong interest in mathematics and astronomy. In 1866 he published his major mathematical work, *New and Easy Method of Solution of the Cubic and Biquadratic Equations*, and in 1879 issued *Key to the Universe*. In these works and in various lectures to many early LDS audiences, he was a positive force in the scientific education of the American pioneers. By the time his last scientific work was published, he was suffering from diabetes. He preached his last public discourse on September 18, 1881, and died on October 3 in Salt Lake City. He had married seven wives and fathered forty-five children.

Elder Pratt's greatest impact upon the Church came through his precisely written theological studies. Within each work he moved carefully from one axiom to the next, developing his position with the same exactness he used in presenting a mathematical proof. His concern for definitiveness and his ability to simplify, to reduce things to their lowest common denominator, made his written works valuable to missionaries defending the faith in mission fields throughout the world.

Orson Pratt's religious pamphlets grew out of a missionary context. Their importance lies partly in the extended arguments and "proofs" for the central tenets of LDS theology. In most of his writing, however, he was an elaborator, a systematizer, and a popularizer of LDS thought, rather than an innovator or an originator. In almost every area he learned the substance either directly from the Prophet Joseph Smith or indirectly from his dynamic and visionary older brother Parley, also an LDS apostle and author. Orson Pratt was at his best in developing the ideas of others and expanding them into fully elaborated statements. (Encyclopedia of Mormonism, entry for "Pratt, Orson", pages 1114-1115)

Copyright © 2013 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.