

Comments on Doctrine & Covenants 37

This is the first revelation given to the modern Church to gather together. The command to gather is not attended by an explanation as to why. Rather, it is concluded with a statement that the council is "wisdom" and that everyone must "choose for himself". The explanation why they were to gather to Ohio appears in D&C 28:30-32. The Lord comments further on His command to gather together in D&C 38.

While Oliver Cowdery and John Whitmer did act as scribes for the "translation" of the Bible, Sidney Rigdon wrote the greatest amount.

This command to move was given December 1830, but Joseph and the other did not depart until late January 1831 and Joseph arrived on or around February 1.

1 Behold, I say unto you that it is not expedient in me that ye should translate any more until ye shall go to the Ohio, and this because of the enemy and for your sakes. 2 And again, I say unto you that ye shall not go until ye have preached my gospel in those parts, and have strengthened up the church whithersoever it is found, and more especially in Colesville; for, behold, they pray unto me in much faith.

3 And again, a commandment I give unto the church, that it is expedient in me that they should assemble together at the Ohio, against the time that my servant Oliver Cowdery shall return unto them. 4 Behold, here is wisdom, and let every man choose for himself until I come. Even so. Amen.

v1-2 The Lord speaks to Joseph and Sidney in specific. He tells them to stop "translating" the Bible and instead undertake moving themselves and the Church to Ohio (v. 1). But, they are not to leave without fortifying the various branches of the Church (v. 2).

v1 "because of the enemy", this subject is commented on in greater detail in the next section of revelation, cf. D&C 38:13, D&C 38:28, D&C 38:31-33.

v2 While Joseph and Sidney are to leave for Ohio because of their enemies (v. 1), they are not to flee in haste such that they abandon the other members of the Church.

v3-4 Here, the Lord speaks to the Church in general and, like Joseph and Sidney, they are told to gather to Ohio (v. 3). Let each person in the Church decide for themselves whether they will choose to listen to the Lord's command (v. 4).

v3 "against the time that my servant Oliver Cowdery shall return

unto them", Oliver Cowdery and others had left to go on missions "into the wilderness among the Lamanites" (cf. D&C 32:2, also cp. D&C 28:8).

v4 Clearly, not all would receive the command to move to Ohio.

Historical Material Pertaining to Doctrine & Covenants 37

The first is Joseph's brief comment on the revelation, the second is John Whitmer's historical account of the events surrounding the revelation, and the third is Lucy Mack Smith's historical account.

Lucy's account indicates the revelation comprising D&C 37 was instigated by a letter received from John Whitmer requesting Joseph's assistance in supporting the branch of the Church already established in Kirtland, Ohio. Curiously enough, John omits this from his record as well as the reason why he was asking for assistance. We can assume the reason for John's request is the strange spiritual manifestations occurring at Kirtland, which all three accounts below detail.

Excerpts from History of the Church

Soon after the words of Enoch were given, the Lord gave the following commandment:

[text of D&C 37 quoted]

(Joseph Smith, History of the Church, Vol. 1, page 139)

The latter part of January, in company with Brothers Sidney Rigdon and Edward Partridge, I started with my wife for Kirtland, Ohio, where we arrived about the first of February, and were kindly received and welcomed into the house of Brother Newel K. Whitney. My wife and I lived in the family of Brother Whitney several weeks, and received every kindness and attention which could be expected, and especially from Sister Whitney.

The branch of the Church in this part of the Lord's vineyard, which had increased to nearly one hundred members, were striving to do the will of God, so far as they knew it, though some strange notions and false spirits had crept in among them. With a little caution and some wisdom, I soon assisted the brethren and sisters to overcome them. The plan of "common stock," which had existed in what was called "the family," whose members generally had embraced the everlasting Gospel, was readily abandoned for the more perfect law of the Lord; and the false spirits were easily discerned and rejected by the light of revelation. (Joseph Smith, History of the Church, Vol. 1, 146-147)

Excerpts from Book of John Whitmer

Now after the Lord had made known what he wanted that his servant Sidney should do, he went to writing the things which the Lord showed unto his servant the Seer. The Lord made known, some of the hidden things of his kingdom; for he unfolded, the

prophecy of Enoch the seventh from Adam. After they had written this prophecy, the Lord spoke to them again and gave further directions:

[text of D&C 37 quoted]

After the above directions were received, Joseph and Sidney went to the several churches preaching and prophesying wherever they went, and greatly strengthened the churches that were built unto the Lord. Joseph prophesied saying: God is about to destroy this generation, and Christ will descend from heaven in power and great glory, with all the holy angels with him, to take vengeance upon the wicked, and they that know not God. Sidney preached the gospel and proved his words from the holy prophets: and so powerful were their words, that the people who heard them speak were amazed, and trembled, and knew not whereunto this thing would grow. The adversary of all righteousness being crafty, and beguiled the people, and stirred them up to anger against the words spoken, and has blinded their eyes, and is leading them down to darkness, misery and woe. This generation abounds in ignorance, superstition, selfishness, idolatry, and priestcraft, for this generation is truly led by priests, even hireling priests, whose god is the substance of this world's goods, which waxeth old and is beginning to fade away: who look for their hire every one from his quarter.

Because of the abominations that are abroad in the world, it is hard for those who receive the fullness of the gospel, and come into the new and everlasting covenant, to get clear of the traditions of their forefathers: and are to be made to believe the commandments that came forth in these last days for the upbuilding of the kingdom of God, and the salvation of those who believe. (John Whitmer, Book of John Whitmer, chapter 1, paragraphs 5-7)

After Joseph and Sidney returned from Colesville to Fayette. The Lord manifested himself to Joseph the Revelator and gave commandment for me to go to Ohio, and carry the commandments and revelations, with me, to comfort and strengthen my brethren in that land. The disciples had increased in numbers about three hundred. But the enemy of all righteousness had got hold of some of those who professed to be his followers, because they had not sufficient knowledge to detect him in all of his devices. He took a notion to blind the minds of some of the weaker ones, and made them think that an angel of the Lord appeared to them and showed them writings on the outside cover of the Bible, and on parchment, which flew through the air, and on the back of their hands, and many such foolish and vain things--others lost their strength, and some slid on the floor, and such like maneuvers, which proved greatly to the injury of the cause.

The Lord also worked, and many embraced the work, and the

honest in heart stood firm and immovable. It was very necessary that this people should have instructions, and learn to discern between the things of God and the works of Satan. For the inhabitants of the earth knew nothing of the working of the spirit of the Lord, in these days. (John Whitmer, Book of John Whitmer, chapter 1, paragraphs 11-12)

Excerpt from History of Joseph Smith by His Mother

The latter part of the same month, Joseph received a letter from John Whitmer, desiring his immediate assistance at Kirtland in regulating the affairs of the church there. Joseph inquired of the Lord, and received a commandment to go straightway to Kirtland with his family and effects; also to send a message to Hyrum to have him take that branch of the Church [i.e., the Colesville branch], over which he presided, and start immediately for the same place. And my husband was commanded, in the same revelation, to meet Hyrum at the most convenient point, and accompany him to Kirtland. Samuel was sent on a mission, into the same region of country, while I, and my two sons, William and Carlos, were to be left till the ensuing spring, when we were to take the remainder of the branch at Waterloo, and move also to Kirtland.

It was but a short time till Joseph and Emma were on their way, accompanied by Sidney Rigdon, Edward Partridge, Ezra Thayre, and Newel Knight. When they were about starting, they preached at our house on Seneca River; and, on their way, they preached at the house of Calvin Stoddard, and likewise at the house of Preserved Harris. At each of these places, they baptized several individuals into the Church.

On Joseph's arrival at Kirtland, he found a church consisting of nearly one hundred members, who were, in general, good brethren, though a few of them had imbibed some very erroneous ideas, being greatly deceived by a singular power, which manifested itself among them in strange contortions of the visage, and sudden, unnatural exertions of the body. This they supposed to be a display of the power of God. Shortly after Joseph arrived, he called the church together, in order to show them the difference between the Spirit of God, and the spirit of the devil. He said, if a man arose in meeting to speak, and was seized with a kind of paroxysm that drew his face and limbs in a violent and unnatural manner, which made him appear to be in pain; and if he gave utterance to strange sounds, which were incomprehensible to his audience, they might rely upon it, that he had the spirit of the devil. But, on the contrary, when a man speaks by the Spirit of God, he speaks from the abundance of his heart--his mind is filled with intelligence, and even should he be excited, it does not cause him to do anything ridiculous or

unseemly. He then called upon one of the brethren to speak, who arose and made the attempt, but was immediately seized with a kind of spasm, which drew his face, arms, and fingers in a most astonishing manner.

Hyrum, by Joseph's request, laid hands on the man, whereupon he sank back in a state of complete exhaustion. Joseph then called upon another man to speak, who stood leaning in an open window. This man also attempted to speak, but was thrown forward into the house, prostrate, unable to utter a syllable. He was administered to, and the same effects followed as in the first instance.

These, together with a few other examples of the same kind, convinced the brethren of the mistake under which they had been laboring; and they all rejoiced in the goodness of God, in once more condescending to lead the children of men by revelation, and the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Soon after my husband and Joseph left for Kirtland, William, being one of the teachers, visited the church; and calling upon each family, he remained with them until each individual belonging to the house had prayed in his hearing.

When the brethren considered the Spring sufficiently open for traveling on the water, we all began to prepare for our removal to Kirtland. We hired a boat of a certain Methodist preacher, and appointed a time to meet at our house, for the purpose of setting off together; and when we were thus collected, we numbered eighty souls. The people of the surrounding country came and bade us farewell, invoking the blessing of heaven upon our heads. (Lucy Mack Smith, History of Joseph Smith by His Mother, pages 193-195)

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