

Comments on Doctrine & Covenants 52

This revelation was attendant to a conference where the elders of the Church were summoned, per D&C 44. It deals largely with missionary labors, calls, and responsibilities.

Behold, thus saith the Lord unto the elders whom he hath called and chosen in these last days, by the voice of his Spirit-- 2 Saying: I, the Lord, will make known unto you what I will that ye shall do from this time until the next conference, which shall be held in Missouri, upon the land which I will consecrate unto my people, which are a remnant of Jacob, and those who are heirs according to the covenant.

v1-2 Open the section with a statement where the Lord informs them that He is telling them what to do. It also informs them to begin moving to Missouri, a land that has been consecrated to the people of Israel.

v2 Note natural Israel (i.e., "the remnant of Jacob") and adopted Israel (i.e., "those who are heirs according to the covenant") are addressed with regard to the lands of inheritance.

3 Wherefore, verily I say unto you, let my servants Joseph Smith, Jun., and Sidney Rigdon take their journey as soon as preparations can be made to leave their homes, and journey to the land of Missouri. 4 And inasmuch as they are faithful unto me, it shall be made known unto them what they shall do; 5 And it shall also, inasmuch as they are faithful, be made known unto them the land of your inheritance. 6 And inasmuch as they are not faithful, they shall be cut off, even as I will, as seemeth me good.

v3-6 Smith and Rigdon are called to go to Missouri. Note the rather strong language of v. 5-6. Given their relatively short stay at Kirtland and their labors there to establish themselves, they probably weren't too excited about leaving it all behind.

7 And again, verily I say unto you, let my servant Lyman Wight and my servant John Corrill take their journey speedily; 8 And also my servant John Murdock, and my servant Hyrum Smith, take their journey unto the same place by the way of Detroit.

v7-8 Wight and Corrill, and Murdock and Hyrum Smith also called to Missouri preaching along the way.

9 And let them journey from thence preaching the word by the way, saying none other things than that which the prophets and apostles have written, and that which is taught them by the

Comforter through the prayer of faith. 10 Let them go two by two, and thus let them preach by the way in every congregation, baptizing by water, and the laying on of the hands by the water's side. 11 For thus saith the Lord, I will cut my work short in righteousness, for the days come that I will send forth judgment unto victory.

12 And let my servant Lyman Wight beware, for Satan desireth to sift him as chaff. 13 And behold, he that is faithful shall be made ruler over many things.

14 And again, I will give unto you a pattern in all things, that ye may not be deceived; for Satan is abroad in the land, and he goeth forth deceiving the nations-- 15 Wherefore he that prayeth, whose spirit is contrite, the same is accepted of me if he obey mine ordinances. 16 He that speaketh, whose spirit is contrite, whose language is meek and edifieth, the same is of God if he obey mine ordinances. 17 And again, he that trembleth under my power shall be made strong, and shall bring forth fruits of praise and wisdom, according to the revelations and truths which I have given you. 18 And again, he that is overcome and bringeth not forth fruits, even according to this pattern, is not of me. 19 Wherefore, by this pattern ye shall know the spirits in all cases under the whole heavens. 20 And the days have come; according to men's faith it shall be done unto them.

21 Behold, this commandment is given unto all the elders whom I have chosen.

v9-21 Commandments to all Elders who are to preach (v. 21). Missionaries are to travel in pairs, preaching the Scriptures and baptizing as they go (v. 9-11). Lyman Wight is to be particularly careful as he goes, and is encouraged to be faithful (v. 12-13). The Elders are then told how they may determine who is genuinely receptive to their gospel message (v. 14-20).

v9 When preaching, stick to the Scriptures and follow the Spirit. The admonition is clearly intended to keep missionaries from straying off the gospel message.

v11 "cut my work short in righteousness", a paraphrase of KJV Romans 9:28.

Rom. 9:27-28

27 Though the number of the children of Israel
be as the sand of the sea,
a remnant shall be saved.

28 For he will finish the work,
and cut it short in righteousness:
because a short work will the Lord
make upon the earth.

In Romans 9:27-28 Paul is quoting the Septuagint (Greek) version of Isaiah 10:22-23, which is what the translators of the KJV

relied on instead of the Masorah (Hebrew):

KJV Isa. 10:22-23
22 For though thy people Israel
be as the sand of the sea,
yet a remnant of them shall return:
the consumption decreed
shall overflow with righteousness
23 For the Lord God of hosts shall make a consumption
even determined, in the midst of all the land.

Compare the KJV with the Jewish Publication Society (JPS)
translation, which uses the Masorah, of the same Isaiah passage:

22 Even if your people, O Israel,
Should be as the sands of the sea.
Only a remnant of it shall return.
Destruction is decreed;
Retribution comes like a flood!
23 For my Lord God of Hosts is carrying out
A decree of destruction upon all the land.

Thus the phrase "cut short in righteousness" is referring to the judgement the Lord is to meet out upon the wicked. He will "cut short", or "destroy" the wicked, in His righteousness. Similar use of the phrase appears in D&C 84:97 where plagues are poured out as a scourge upon the wicked. However, in D&C 109:59 the phrase may be used with a different meaning, one that agrees more with the theme of Matt. 24:22.

v12 This is a rather personal insertion as v. 9-21 is a more generalized statement to Elders (at the very least the six Elders of v. 3-8, and more broadly to all Elders in missionary service), and this one verse is particularly aimed at Wight.

In the more general sense one could interpret this as a warning that the adversary actively targets particular individuals for additional attention.

"sift him as chaff", cp. Isa. 30:28, Amos 9:9, Luke 22:31.

v14-19 Something of a parenthesis on the "by their fruits ye shall know them" theme, cp. Matt. 7:15-21, D&C 46:7-9, D&C 50:31-73.

v19 "know the spirits", not just discern deceiving spirits, but also to know who and what is inspiring mortals as v. 15-16 deal with people's behavior.

22 And again, verily I say unto you, let my servant Thomas B. Marsh and my servant Ezra Thayre take their journey also, preaching the word by the way unto this same land. 23 And again, let my servant Isaac Morley and my servant Ezra Booth take their

journey, also preaching the word by the way unto this same land. 24 And again, let my servants Edward Partridge and Martin Harris take their journey with my servants Sidney Rigdon and Joseph Smith, Jun. 25 Let my servants David Whitmer and Harvey Whitlock also take their journey, and preach by the way unto this same land. 26 And let my servants Parley P. Pratt and Orson Pratt take their journey, and preach by the way, even unto this same land. 27 And let my servants Solomon Hancock and Simeon Carter also take their journey unto this same land, and preach by the way. 28 Let my servants Edson Fuller and Jacob Scott also take their journey. 29 Let my servants Levi W. Hancock and Zebedee Coltrin also take their journey. 30 Let my servants Reynolds Cahoon and Samuel H. Smith also take their journey. 31 Let my servants wheeler Baldwin and william Carter also take their journey. 32 And let my servants Newel Knight and Selah J. Griffin both be ordained, and also take their journey.

33 Yea, verily I say, let all these take their journey unto one place, in their several courses, and one man shall not build upon another's foundation, neither journey in another's track. 34 He that is faithful, the same shall be kept and blessed with much fruit.

v22-34 Additional calls to go to Missouri, preaching along the way (v. 22-32). They are to spread out upon the land and cover as many different areas as possible (v. 33). The productive will be rewarded, (v. 34, cp. D&C 4:4).

Note the calls are always extended in pairs (cf. v. 10), as occurs also in v. 3, 7, and 8.

35 And again, I say unto you, let my servants Joseph wakefield and Solomon Humphrey take their journey into the eastern lands; 36 Let them labor with their families, declaring none other things than the prophets and apostles, that which they have seen and heard and most assuredly believe, that the prophecies may be fulfilled. 37 In consequence of transgression, let that which was bestowed upon Heman Basset be taken from him, and placed upon the head of Simonds Ryder. 38 And again, verily I say unto you, let Jared Carter be ordained a priest, and also George James be ordained a priest. 39 Let the residue of the elders watch over the churches, and declare the word in the regions round about them; and let them labor with their own hands that there be no idolatry nor wickedness practised. 40 And remember in all things the poor and the needy, the sick and the afflicted, for he that doeth not these things, the same is not my disciple.

v35-40 Instructions given for those not called to go to Missouri.

v36 Similar in content to v. 9, they are to stick to the Scriptures.

v39 There shall be no priestcraft in the Church.

v40 This verse reiterates the substance of D&C 40:30-55.

41 And again, let my servants Joseph Smith, Jun., and Sidney Rigdon and Edward Partridge take with them a recommend from the church. And let there be one obtained for my servant Oliver Cowdery also.

v41 Various Church leaders are told to travel with recommends.

42 And thus, even as I have said, if ye are faithful ye shall assemble yourselves together to rejoice upon the land of Missouri, which is the land of your inheritance, which is now the land of your enemies. 43 But, behold, I, the Lord, will hasten the city in its time, and will crown the faithful with joy and with rejoicing. 44 Behold, I am Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and I will lift them up at the last day. Even so. Amen.

v42-44 The concluding verses return to the subject of going to Missouri and indicates that the Lord will be assisting in the work of establishing them there, and then close with a benediction on the faithful.

Historical Material Pertaining to Doctrine & Covenants 52

Three contemporaneous quotes detailing the events of the conference follow, and a brief historical summary.

Excerpt from History of the Church

On the 3rd of June, the Elders from the various parts of the country where they were laboring, came in; and the conference before appointed [e.g., D&C 44], convened in Kirtland; and the Lord displayed His power to the most perfect satisfaction of the Saints. The man of sin was revealed, and the authority of the Melchizedek Priesthood was manifested and conferred for the first time upon several of the Elders. It was clearly evident that the Lord gave us power in proportion to the work to be done, and strength according to the race set before us, and grace and help as our needs required. Great harmony prevailed; several were ordained; faith was strengthened; and humility, so necessary for the blessing of God to follow prayer, characterized the Saints.

The next day, as a kind continuation of this great work of the last days, I received the following:

[text of D&C 52 quoted]

(Joseph Smith, History of the Church, volume 1, pages 175-177)

Excerpt from the Book of John Whitmer

June 3, 1831, a general conference was called, and a blessing promised, if the elders were faithful, and humble before him. Therefore, the elders assembled from the East and the West, from the North and the South. And also many members. Conference was opened by prayer and exhortation by Joseph Smith, Jr., the Revelator. After the business of the Church was attended to according to the covenants. The Lord made manifest to Joseph that it was necessary that such of the elders as were considered worthy, should be ordained to the High Priesthood.

The spirit of the Lord fell upon Joseph in an unusual manner. And prophesied that John the Revelator was then among the ten tribes of Israel who had been led away by Salmanasar King of Israel [should be Assyria], to prepare them for their return, from their long dispersion, to again possess the land of their fathers. He prophesied many more things that I have not written. After he had prophesied he laid his hands upon Lyman Wight [and ordained him] to the High Priesthood after the Holy Order of God. And the spirit fell upon Lyman, and he prophesied, concerning the coming of Christ, he said that there were some in the congregation that should live until the Savior should descend from heaven, with a shout, with all the holy angels with him. He said the coming of the Savior should be, like; the sun rising in

the east, and will cover the whole earth, so with the coming of the Son of man be, yea, he will appear in his brightness and consume all before him. And the hills will be laid low, and the valleys be exalted; and the crooked be made straight; and the rough smooth. And some of my brethren shall suffer martyrdom, for the sake of the religion of Jesus Christ, and seal the testimony of Jesus with their blood.

He saw the heavens opened, and the Son of man sitting on the right hand of the Father. Making intercession for his brethren, the Saints. He said that God would work a work in these last days that tongue cannot express, and the mind is not capable to conceive. The glory of the Lord shone around.

At the conference these were ordained to the high priesthood, namely, Lyman Wight, Sidney Rigdon, John Murdock, Reynolds Cahoon, Harvey Whitlock and Hyrum Smith [they] were ordained by Joseph Smith, Jr., except Sidney Rigdon.

The following by Lyman Wight by commandment. Parley P. Pratt, Thomas B. Marsh, Isaac Morley, Edward Partridge, Joseph Wakefield, Ezra Thayer, Martin Harris, Ezra Booth, who denied the faith, Harvey Whitlock denied the faith, also Joseph Wakefield, Joseph Smith, Sen., Joseph Smith, Jr., [and] John Whitmer. The bishop then proceeded and blessed the above named and others by the laying on of hands. Isaac Morley and John Correll [Corrill] were ordained as bishop's counsellors to Edward Partridge.

Joseph Smith, Jr., prophesied the day previous that the man of sin should be revealed. While the Lord poured out his spirit upon his servants, the devil took a notion, to make known his power, he bound Harvey Whitlock and John Murdock so that they could not speak, and others were affected but the Lord showed to Joseph the Seer, the design of the thing, he commanded the devil in the name of Christ and he departed to our joy and comfort.

Therefore a part of the revelation given at Fayette, New York, was fulfilled. The churches of the state of New York had moved to Ohio, with their wives and their children, and all their substance, some purchased farms others rented, and thus they situated themselves as convenient as they could. The day being now far spent and the conference was adjourned. (John Whitmer, Book of John Whitmer, chapter 7, paragraphs 2-8)

Excerpt from Autobiography of Parley Parker Pratt

On the sixth of June, 1831, a general conference was convened at Kirtland, consisting of all the Elders, far and near, who could be got together. In this conference much instruction was given by President Smith, who spake in great power, as he was moved by the Holy Ghost; and the spirit of power and of testimony rested down upon the Elders in a marvelous manner. Here also were some strange manifestations of false spirits, which were

immediately rebuked.

Several were then selected by revelation, through President Smith, and ordained to the High Priesthood after the order of the Son of God, which is after the order of Melchizedek. This was the first occasion in which this priesthood had been revealed and conferred upon the Elders in this dispensation, although the office of an Elder is the same in a certain degree, but not in the fullness. On this occasion I was ordained to this holy ordinance and calling by President Smith.

After these things, and the business of the conference was over, myself and Orson Pratt were appointed by revelation to perform a mission together, through the Western States, and to meet the brethren I had left in Jackson County, Missouri; and many others also who were sent in a similar manner, two and two through the Western States, and who were all appointed to meet in Jackson County, Missouri, and hold the next conference. (Parley P. Pratt, Autobiography of Parley Parker Pratt, page 53)

Excerpt from Doctrine & Covenants Commentary

On June 3, 1831, the elders who had been laboring in the country, in different parts, met in Kirtland, to attend the Fourth General Conference of the Church, which convened by a Revelation (Sec. 44).

Though the Church was only fourteen months old at this time, there were about two thousand attendants at the Conference. Among the elders present was Parley P. Pratt, who had returned from his mission to the Lamanites (See Sec. 32:2), to report his labors, while Oliver Cowdery, Ziba Peterson, and Peter Whitmer, Jr., his fellow-laborers in that Mission, remained in Missouri.

The Conference convened, probably on the third day of June, and lasted for three days. As had been promised in a Revelation (Sec. 44), the Spirit of the Lord was manifested in mighty power. The special office of High Priest was bestowed upon several Elders, this being done for the first time in the Church. The power of the adversary was also manifested. Two brethren, Harvey Whitlock and John Murdock, were "bound," so that they could not speak, and others were similarly affected, but the Prophet rebuked the adversary in the name of Jesus Christ, and the evil spirit departed. Lyman Wight, after having been ordained a High Priest, prophesied of the coming of the Lord and testified that he saw the heavens opened and the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Father. (Hyrum M. Smith and Janne M. Sjodahl, Doctrine & Covenants Commentary, pages 302-303)

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.