

Comments on Doctrine & Covenants 52

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

The section is well structured with the Lord addressing different sets of Elders (v. 3, 7-11, 22-38) and telling them what His expectations are (v. 4-6, 13-21, 39-40). The center of v. 14-21 is the definition what the Lord expects of the Elders, or missionaries at that time, and should be considered the primary focus of this revelation in specific and of missionaries in general.

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

Below are three contemporaneous quotes detailing the events of the conference, and two historical summaries.

This section was first published in the Book of Commandments in 1833, pages 123-127. It was then published in the Kirtland edition Doctrine and Covenants in 1835, pages 192-195. It was published in Times and Seasons, volume 5, number 3, pages 416-418, dated February 1, 1844. It was published in the Millennial Star, volume 5, number 7, pages 98-99, dated December, 1844.

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)

Excerpt from Historical Development of the Doctrine and Covenants

Elder Levi Hancock said this revelation was given during the evening of the Sixth of June, and in later years Joseph Smith recorded that it was received, "by an heavenly vision."

In this revelation, thirty-two elders, including Joseph Smith, were called to travel two by two as missionaries to Missouri. After their arrival, the fifth conference of the Church would be held in that land, and the Lord would reveal to them the place of their inheritance, or the New Jerusalem as it is called. Many of these elders made journal entries about their mission calls. Of these, two have been selected as examples of the feelings and experiences these men shared. Elder Levi Hancock related the kinds of sacrifices he personally had to make in order to be obedient to this revelation:

Next held meeting - At night a revelation came from Joseph for many Elders to go to Missouri and preach by the way. Among the number was my name with Zebide Coltrin - This was a trial indeed. I had not thought of being called upon to go so far. I had little money to be sure. But I had spent the most of it for other Elders. I had traveled

with - I began to think all I must not look back - I just hired a Room and had my tools and furniture there and I knew some People would be disappointed All these things together with a promise to a young Lady wrought on my mind all manner of impressions - But when I would think of the old Jack and the man of sin who had been revealed before us I found myself harnessed I said I will let all thing go and do as I am told in the revelation As soon as I formed this conclusion I felt better. I was determined to do the best I could and immediately started -

The other selection is the account of Samuel H. Smith and Reynolds Cahoon. Their experiences along the way are somewhat typical to the others who made the same trip:

On their way they called on Wm. E. McLellin and preached the gospel to him and a large assembly, in a room which he procured. William being troubled about the things he heard, closed up his business and proceeded after the brethren to Missouri, where he was baptized before they arrived. This was the McClellan who afterwards became one of the Twelve Apostles. On their route to Missouri they preached the gospel, traveling without purse or scrip, and enduring much for the want of food and rest. When they started for Missouri, about fifty brethren set out for the same place, and when they all arrived they met on the spot for the Temple in Jackson county, and dedicated the ground unto God. Brother Smith and Cahoon spent several days in Jackson county, attended several meetings and were with Joseph when he received several revelations.

One of the assigned elders in this revelation failed to respond to his mission call. This was Ezra Thayre, who delayed so long in starting, that his companion, Thomas B. Marsh requested the Prophet assign him another elder. Joseph made this a matter of prayer and received Section 56 of the D&C, in which Selah J. Griffin was appointed in Ezra Thayre's place.

One other person mentioned in this revelation, Simonds Ryder, also had difficulty with his assignment. The story told of him is that since the "Spirit" that motivated Joseph Smith to call him to do work couldn't spell his name correctly, perhaps it also erred in making the call. Such reason eventually caused Simonds Ryder to leave the Church. As the Text Analysis of this section shows, it was not just a case of substituting the letter

"i" for "y" in his last name, but a number of other variations occurred: Symonds Rider, Simonds Rider, and Simmonds Rider. His attitude appears a little "stuffy" at this point since Selah J. Griffin is named Sealy Griffin (as also Ezra Booth became Ezra Pooth and Solomon Humphrey became Solomon Umphrey) in this same revelation. Similarly Leman Copley's name was for many years spelled Lemon Copley, but William E. McLellin and Emer Harris are still waiting for their names to be spelled correctly in the D&C (Robert J. Woodford, Historical Development of the Doctrine and Covenants, BYU PhD dissertation, April 1974)

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