

Comments on Doctrine & Covenants 55

A revelation directed specifically at William W. Phelps, at his request.

The text of this section can be arranged by subject as follows:

Introductory authority statement (v. 1a-e)

A - (v. 1f-i) Baptism and Holy Ghost, if your eye is single

B - (v. 2a-d) Ordained Elder by Smith to preach repentance

A - (v. 2e-3) Baptism and Holy Ghost, if they are contrite

B - (v. 4) Ordained to assist Cowdery with teaching children

Conclusion (v. 5-6), Phelps to travel with Smith and Rigdon, Coe also to travel, more later.

1 Behold, thus saith the Lord unto you, my servant William, yea, even the Lord of the whole earth, thou art called and chosen; and after thou hast been baptized by water, which if you do with an eye single to my glory, you shall have a remission of your sins and a reception of the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands; 2 And then thou shalt be ordained by the hand of my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., to be an elder unto this church, to preach repentance and remission of sins by way of baptism in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God. 3 And on whomsoever you shall lay your hands, if they are contrite before me, you shall have power to give the Holy Spirit. 4 And again, you shall be ordained to assist my servant Oliver Cowdery to do the work of printing, and of selecting and writing books for schools in this church, that little children also may receive instruction before me as is pleasing unto me.

v1-4 Note both "A" sections contain qualifying "if" statements (e.g., if you do with an eye single to my glory..., if they are contrite before me...) which are typically only implicit elsewhere in the D&C, but here they are made very explicit, suggesting Phelps needed some direct prompting.

Also note the "B" sections are complimentary as the first is aimed at adults Phelps is to preach repentance to, and the second is aimed at children Phelps is to assist in preparing primers for.

v4 Phelps was instrumental in the publication of various church periodicals and texts, including The Evening and Morning Star, the Book of Commandments, the first hymnal of selections by Emma, among others.

5 And again, verily I say unto you, for this cause you shall take your journey with my servants Joseph Smith, Jun., and Sidney Rigdon, that you may be planted in the land of your inheritance to do this work. 6 And again, let my servant Joseph Coe also take his journey with them. The residue shall be made known hereafter, even as I will. Amen.

v5 The latter half of the verse is a paraphrase from Amos 9, suggesting the same theme. The general subject of Amos 9 is the restoration of Israel, cp. D&C 52:2.

Historical Material Pertaining to Doctrine & Covenants 55

In D&C 52 the Lord commands several elders to travel to Missouri, some leaving as soon as a week later. While they were preparing to leave, W. W. Phelps arrived there in Kirtland, having traveled from Missouri.

Phelps was prominent in early Church history, was excommunicated over problems in Missouri, and subsequently rejoined and moved to Utah, dying there in full fellowship. Most prominent among his enduring legacy are the hymns he penned which are commonly sung to this day.

This section was first published in the Book of Commandments in 1833, pages 129-130. It was then published in the Kirtland edition Doctrine and Covenants in 1835, page 196. It was published in Times and Seasons, volume 5, number 4, page 433, dated February 15, 1844. It was published in the Millennial Star, volume 5, number 8, page 114, dated January, 1845.

Excerpt from History of the Church

About the middle of June, while we were preparing for our journey to Missouri, William W. Phelps and his family arrived among us "to do the will of the Lord," he said: so I inquired of the Lord concerning him and received the following:

[text of D&C 55 quoted]

(Joseph Smith, History of the Church, volume 1, pages 184-185)

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