

Comments on Doctrine & Covenants 57

This revelation was in response to three specific questions, "When will the wilderness blossom as the rose? When will Zion be built up in her glory, and where will thy Temple stand, unto which all nations shall come in the last days?". It is interesting to note the Lord only directly answers one of the three questions, the last one. The two "When" questions are skirted, presumably because they have already been answered.

On the first "When" question, regarding the Lamanites, cp. D&C 49:24-25, 3 Ne. 20-21, Eth. 13:6-8. The D&C and 3 Ne. references both present pre-Day of the Lord times. The Ether reference is difficult to place in time because of mixed chronology in the surrounding text. The Lamanites blooming reference appears to be a paraphrase of Isa. 35:1-2 made to target Ephraim in the New World rather than Judah being re-established in the Old World. For this kind of acontextual selective paraphrasing compare the 3 Ne. 20:32-45 compound of selective quotes from Isa. 52 and 54, which in context are blatantly referring to Judah, but in 3 Ne. they are applied to the remnant of Joseph in the New World.

The second "When" of Zion's establishment the Lord hints at in this section (v. 2) as they are to begin laying its foundation, but He does not state when they will accomplish their task. Implied and explicit commands to establish Zion had previously been issued by the Lord and the Church had been having problems keeping them, cp. D&C 54. Thus, the Lord is implicitly saying, "It is up to you to establish Zion. I have already told you what to do, and you are not doing it."

1 Hearken, O ye elders of my church, saith the Lord your God, who have assembled yourselves together, according to my commandments, in this land, which is the land of Missouri, which is the land which I have appointed and consecrated for the gathering of the saints. 2 Wherefore, this is the land of promise, and the place for the city of Zion. 3 And thus saith the Lord your God, if you will receive wisdom here is wisdom. Behold, the place which is now called Independence is the center place; and a spot for the temple is lying westward, upon a lot which is not far from the courthouse. 4 Wherefore, it is wisdom that the land should be purchased by the saints, and also every tract lying westward, even unto the line running directly between Jew and Gentile; 5 And also every tract bordering by the prairies, inasmuch as my disciples are enabled to buy lands. Behold, this is wisdom, that they may obtain it for an everlasting inheritance.

v1-5 The Lord instructs those Elders who have remained faithful to gather to Independence, Missouri and start purchasing lands to establish their inheritance in Zion.

v2 Despite the failure to establish Zion at that time, D&C 101:17-20 indicates Independence, MO is still the place it is to be founded at some future time.

v4 "the land should be purchased", cp. D&C 48:4, D&C 63:27-31.

"between Jew and Gentile", as indicated by the footnotes the term "Jew" is in reference to those who are natural Israel and "Gentile" are in reference to those who are not. This same loose definition of "Jew" is used by Nephi, cp. 2 Ne. 29:5, 2 Ne. 30:2, 2 Ne. 33:8.

6 And let my servant Sidney Gilbert stand in the office to which I have appointed him, to receive moneys, to be an agent unto the church, to buy land in all the regions round about, inasmuch as can be done in righteousness, and as wisdom shall direct. 7 And let my servant Edward Partridge stand in the office to which I have appointed him, and divide unto the saints their inheritance, even as I have commanded; and also those whom he has appointed to assist him. 8 And again, verily I say unto you, let my servant Sidney Gilbert plant himself in this place, and establish a store, that he may sell goods without fraud, that he may obtain money to buy lands for the good of the saints, and that he may obtain whatsoever things the disciples may need to plant them in their inheritance. 9 And also let my servant Sidney Gilbert obtain a license--behold here is wisdom, and whoso readeth let him understand--that he may send goods also unto the people, even by whom he will as clerks employed in his service; 10 And thus provide for my saints, that my gospel may be preached unto those who sit in darkness and in the region and shadow of death.

v6-10 Gilbert and Partridge are to establish the physical means whereby the Saints may establish themselves in the region without being defrauded by any local miscreants. The Lord wants His people to operate practically, legally and fairly, cp. D&C 58:21, D&C 63:27.

11 And again, verily I say unto you, let my servant William W. Phelps be planted in this place, and be established as a printer unto the church. 12 And lo, if the world receive his writings--behold here is wisdom--let him obtain whatsoever he can obtain in righteousness, for the good of the saints. 13 And let my servant Oliver Cowdery assist him, even as I have commanded, in whatsoever place I shall appoint unto him, to copy, and to correct, and select, that all things may be right before me, as it shall be proved by the Spirit through him.

v11-13 Phelps and Cowdery to establish a printing house, cp. D&C 55:4.

14 And thus let those of whom I have spoken be planted in the land of Zion, as speedily as can be, with their families, to do those things even as I have spoken. 15 And now concerning the gathering--Let the bishop and the agent make preparations for those families which have been commanded to come to this land, as soon as possible, and plant them in their inheritance. 16 And unto the residue of both elders and members further directions shall be given hereafter. Even so. Amen.

v14-16 Let the people gather in to Missouri with their families, and those who are already there are to prepare for their arrival.

v14 One would assume those being referred to in v. 14 are those spoken of in D&C 52:3-34.

Historical Material Pertaining to Doctrine & Covenants 57

Excerpt from History of the Church

On the 19th of June, in company with Sidney Rigdon, Martin Harris, Edward Partridge, William W. Phelps, Joseph Coe, Algernon S. Gilbert and his wife, I started from Kirtland, Ohio, for the land of Missouri, agreeable to the commandment before received, wherein it was promised that if we were faithful, the land of our inheritance, even the place for the city of the New Jerusalem, should be revealed. We went by wagon, canal boats, and stages to Cincinnati, where I had an interview with the Rev. Walter Scott, one of the founders of the Campbellites, or Newlight church.¹⁶ Before the close of our interview, he manifested one of the bitterest spirits against the doctrine of the New Testament (that "these signs shall follow them that believe," as recorded in Mark the 16th chapter,) that I ever witnessed among men. We left Cincinnati in a steamer, and landed at Louisville, Kentucky, where we were detained three days in waiting for a steamer to convey us to St. Louis. At St. Louis, myself, Brothers Harris, Phelps, Partridge and Coe, went by land on foot to Independence, Jackson county, Missouri, where we arrived about the middle of July, and the rest of the company came by water a few days later.

Notwithstanding the corruptions and abominations of the times, and the evil spirit manifested towards us on account of our belief in the Book of Mormon, at many places and among various persons, yet the Lord continued His watchful [p.189] care and loving kindness to us day by day; and we made it a rule wherever there was an opportunity, to read a chapter in the Bible, and pray; and these seasons of worship gave us great consolation.

The meeting of our brethren, who had long awaited our arrival, was a glorious one, and moistened with many tears. It seemed good and pleasant for brethren to meet together in unity. But our reflections were many, coming as we had from a highly cultivated state of society in the east, and standing now upon the confines or western limits of the United States, and looking into the vast wilderness of those that sat in darkness; how natural it was to observe the degradation, leanness of intellect, ferocity, and jealousy of a people that were nearly a century behind the times, and to feel for those who roamed about without the benefit of civilization, refinement, or religion; yea, and exclaim in the language of the Prophets: "When will the wilderness blossom as the rose? When will Zion be built up in her glory, and where will Thy temple stand, unto which all nations shall come in the last days?" Our anxiety was soon relieved by receiving the following:

[text of D&C 57 quoted]

(Joseph Smith, History of the Church, volume 1, pages 188-189)

Excerpt from the Book of John Whitmer

There was much trouble and unbelief among those who call themselves disciples of Christ: some apostatized, and became enemies to the cause of God, and persecuted the Saints.

Now after the elders that were commanded to go to Missouri had arrived, they held a conference upon that land according to revelation given in a preceding commandment. And thus they rejoiced together upon the land of Zion. And offered their sacraments and oblations unto the Lord, for his mercy and goodness which endureth for ever.

When they had held their sacrament meetings, and the laying of the foundation of the City, and cornerstone of the temple, the Lord gave commandments to return. (John Whitmer, Book of John Whitmer, chapter 9, paragraphs 1-3)

Excerpt from Regional Studies in LDS Church History

Meanwhile, following the close of the June conference, Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, and 28 other elders had been called to take their journey to Jackson County, Missouri, where the next conference of the Church was to be convened (D&C 52). Newel Knight's initial assignment to go with these missionaries was withdrawn and he was directed instead to lead the whole Colesville Branch to Jackson County (D&C 56:6-7).

The Prophet and a company comprised of Sidney Rigdon, Martin Harris, Edward Partridge, William W. Phelps, Joseph Coe, Algernon Sidney Gilbert, and Gilberts wife, Elizabeth, left Kirtland for Missouri in advance of the Colesville Branch on 19 June 1831. Joseph now had the added burden of hurrying on his journey to Jackson County in order to make arrangements for the location of the Colesville Saints. Newel Knight and the Colesville members were to follow, using, however, a somewhat varied route over portions of the distance. William W. Phelps remembered 18 June, instead of the 19th, as the departure date for the Prophet's party and meticulously traced the route they followed in a letter directed to the editor of his old Canandaigua, New York newspaper, the Ontario Phoenix.

From St. Louis the Prophet, Phelps, Harris, Partridge, and Coe went ahead on foot to Independence, while the remainder of the company, Sidney Rigdon, and others came by steamer within a few days.

When Joseph and his companions reached Independence on 14 July, they were greeted by the missionaries to the Lamanites and several Saints who had been converted by them. The Prophet expressed his personal joy at this reunion: "The meeting of our

brethren, who had long awaited our arrival, was a glorious one, and moistened with many tears. It seemed good and pleasant for brethren to meet together in unity." But Joseph's sentiments of that moment were not without some apprehensions as he confided, "Our reflections were many, coming as we had from a highly cultivated state of society in the east, and standing now upon the confines or western limits of the United States, and looking into the vast wilderness of those that sat in darkness; how natural it was to observe the degradation, leanness of intellect, ferocity, and jealousy of a people that were nearly a century behind the times."

Joseph said that after viewing the country and prayerfully seeking direction from God, "He manifested himself unto me, and designated to me and others, the very spot upon which he designed to commence the work of the gathering, and the upbuilding of an holy city, which should be called Zion." Joseph dated the revelation confirming this fact as being received on 20 July 1831 (D&C 57). Missouri was the place intended by the Lord for the gathering of the Saints, and Independence was to be the City of Zion and the center place. A site for a temple was situated to the west of the Independence courthouse. The Saints were commanded to buy every tract of land lying west of that city to the line separating the state of Missouri and the Unorganized Indian Territory (D&C 57:4-5).

Ezra Booth provided a valuable description of Independence, the center place, as it appeared to him in July 1831. He observed, "It is a new Town, containing a courthouse, built of brick, two or three merchant stores, and fifteen or twenty dwelling houses, built mostly of logs hewed on both sides; and is situated on a handsome rise of Ground, about three miles south of the Missouri river, and about twelve miles east of the dividing line between the U.S. and the Indian Reserve." Once in Missouri the Prophet was in a position to turn his full attention to making preparations for relocating the Newel Knight company then en route from Ohio. (Arnold K. Garr and Clark V. Johnson, *Regional Studies in LDS History: Missouri*, pages 283-286, from an essay by Larry C. Porter entitled "The Colesville Branch in Kaw Township, Jackson County, Missouri, 1831 to 1833")

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