

Comments on Doctrine & Covenants 64

This section compliments D&C 63's judgmental theme by presenting a theme of mercy and forgiveness. The text can be arranged as follows, with theory (v. 2-14) and practice (v. 15-32):

- Introductory summons (v. 1)
- On forgiving, the Theory (v.2-14)
 - The Lord's forgiving (v. 2-7)
 - The disciple's forgiving (v. 8-11)
 - The Church's role (v. 12-14)
- Various particulars, the Praxis (v. 15-32)
 - Parenthesis (v. 22-25)
- Conclusion (v. 34-43)

Particularly emphasized in this section are the condition of the ecclesia's hearts, cp. v. 11, 22, 34. In D&C 63:1, the Lord alleges their hearts are hardened.

1 Behold, thus saith the Lord your God unto you, O ye elders of my church, hearken ye and hear, and receive my will concerning you.

v1 A standard summons to the Elders of the Church to listen to what the Lord is saying.

2 For verily I say unto you, I will that ye should overcome the world; wherefore I will have compassion upon you. 3 There are those among you who have sinned; but verily I say, for this once, for mine own glory, and for the salvation of souls, I have forgiven you your sins. 4 I will be merciful unto you, for I have given unto you the kingdom. 5 And the keys of the mysteries of the kingdom shall not be taken from my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., through the means I have appointed, while he liveth, inasmuch as he obeyeth mine ordinances. 6 There are those who have sought occasion against him without cause; 7 Nevertheless, he has sinned; but verily I say unto you, I, the Lord, forgive sins unto those who confess their sins before me and ask forgiveness, who have not sinned unto death.

8 My disciples, in days of old, sought occasion against one another and forgave not one another in their hearts; and for this evil they were afflicted and sorely chastened. 9 wherefore, I say unto you, that ye ought to forgive one another; for he that forgiveth not his brother his trespasses standeth condemned before the Lord; for there remaineth in him the greater sin. 10 I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will forgive, but of you it is

required to forgive all men. 11 And ye ought to say in your hearts--let God judge between me and thee, and reward thee according to thy deeds.

12 And him that repenteth not of his sins, and confesseth them not, ye shall bring before the church, and do with him as the scripture saith unto you, either by commandment or by revelation. 13 And this ye shall do that God may be glorified--not because ye forgive not, having not compassion, but that ye may be justified in the eyes of the law, that ye may not offend him who is your lawgiver-- 14 Verily I say, for this cause ye shall do these things.

v2-7 The Lord's forgiveness of sinners.

v2 The Lord wants people to overcome their carnal natures and worldly influences of the ungodly, so He has compassion on them rather than immediately meting out justice.

"overcome the world", cp. 63:20.

v3 The Lord's desire is to have people repent. If He always dealt Justice when it was due, there wouldn't be anyone left to work with.

"for mine own glory", derivative of Isa. 48:9-11, also cp. Num. 11:14-20. Achieving His own long-term goals and upholding the sanctity of His name are two good reasons to forestall Justice at times. However, there have been and will again be times where people get so bad that the Lord has to clean house and start over from scratch, take Noah's Deluge and the Day of the Lord for examples.

v7 "who have not sinned unto death", presumably referring to sons of perdition. For a literal interpretation, see comments on D&C 42:81.

v8-11 Disciples forgiving each other. In D&C 63, the ancient apostles were held up as positive examples, here the ancient disciples are held up in a negative light (v. 8). The Lord then instructs the contemporary disciples to forgive each other (v. 9, cp. Matt. 6:12-15, Matt. 18:21-35). He states we are required to forgive everyone, and it is His responsibility to mete out Justice (v. 10, cp. Romans 12:19). The disciple should say in their heart, "Let God judge between me and thee", and dismiss the issue (v. 11).

v12-15 The Church's role in forgiveness. In those cases where unrepentant malefactors are in the Church, the offended persons are not to deal with the offender. The Church should administer justice so they may be justified in dealing with rebellious persons. In this case, the issue isn't that the Church is to be uncompassionate and unforgiving, the issue is that the offender is unrepentant. If the offender is repentant, then there is no need for the Church to get involved.

v12 "by commandment or by revelation", i.e., according to the Scriptures (commandment) or according to inspiration by the Holy Spirit (revelation), cp. D&C 63:22-23.

v14 "Verily I say, for this cause [that ye may be justified, v. 13] ye shall do these things [bring the unrepentant before the Church, v. 12]."

15 Behold, I, the Lord, was angry with him who was my servant Ezra Booth, and also my servant Isaac Morley, for they kept not the law, neither the commandment; 16 They sought evil in their hearts, and I, the Lord, withheld my Spirit. They condemned for evil that thing in which there was no evil; nevertheless I have forgiven my servant Isaac Morley. 17 And also my servant Edward Partridge, behold, he hath sinned, and Satan seeketh to destroy his soul; but when these things are made known unto them, and they repent of the evil, they shall be forgiven. 18 And now, verily I say that it is expedient in me that my servant Sidney Gilbert, after a few weeks, shall return upon his business, and to his agency in the land of Zion; 19 And that which he hath seen and heard may be made known unto my disciples, that they perish not. And for this cause have I spoken these things. 20 And again, I say unto you, that my servant Isaac Morley may not be tempted above that which he is able to bear, and counsel wrongfully to your hurt, I gave commandment that his farm should be sold. 21 I will not that my servant Frederick G. Williams should sell his farm, for I, the Lord, will to retain a strong hold in the land of Kirtland, for the space of five years, in the which I will not overthrow the wicked, that thereby I may save some.

22 And after that day, I, the Lord, will not hold any guilty that shall go with an open heart up to the land of Zion; for I, the Lord, require the hearts of the children of men. 23 Behold, now it is called today until the coming of the Son of Man, and verily it is a day of sacrifice, and a day for the tithing of my people; for he that is tithed shall not be burned at his coming. 24 For after today cometh the burning--this is speaking after the manner of the Lord--for verily I say,

tomorrow all the proud and they that do wickedly shall be as stubble; and I will burn them up, for I am the Lord of Hosts; and I will not spare any that remain in Babylon. 25 Wherefore, if ye believe me, ye will labor while it is called today.

26 And it is not meet that my servants, Newel K. Whitney and Sidney Gilbert, should sell their store and their possessions here; for this is not wisdom until the residue of the church, which remaineth in this place, shall go up unto the land of Zion. 27 Behold, it is said in my laws, or forbidden, to get in debt to thine enemies; 28 But behold, it is not said at any time that the Lord should not take when he please, and pay as seemeth him good. 29 Wherefore, as ye are agents, ye are on the Lord's errand; and whatever ye do according to the will of the Lord is the Lord's business.

30 And he hath set you to provide for his saints in these last days, that they may obtain an inheritance in the land of Zion. 31 And behold, I, the Lord, declare unto you, and my words are sure and shall not fail, that they shall obtain it. 32 But all things must come to pass in their time. 33 Wherefore, be not weary in well-doing, for ye are laying the foundation of a great work. And out of small things proceedeth that which is great.

v15-32 Note in these particulars, the theme of repentance and forgiveness appears throughout and the messages are more positive than the particulars of D&C 63:38-58, and repentance is stressed over condemnation.

v15-17 The three noted here are apparently the same referred to in v. 6.

v22-25 A parenthesis that has its theme in common with that of D&C 63:48, particularly cp. v. 23. As indicated in v. 21, some are to stay in Kirtland for a time so that others may be saved. However, after that time all are to gather to Missouri and those who do with a willing heart will be held guiltless.

v24 The "burning" of the Day of the Lord. As the verse indicates, this is "speaking after the manner of the Lord". As Nephi was familiar with this manner, see his explanation of what this "burning" (2 Ne. 26:4-6).

v30-33 Again, the Lord emphasizes they are laying the foundation for Zion, cp. 58:7, 63:35.

v31 "my words are sure and shall not fail", a classical authority statement by the Lord. In Isaiah 41 and 46, the Lord holds court by summoning the nations and compares Himself to

their idols. Throughout the text, the Lord shows that only He has the power to make predictions and fulfil them and to save and destroy the nations of the earth as He sees fit. Also cp. Isa. 55:10-11 and comments on D&C 63:5 above.

v32 While all of the Lord's words shall be fulfilled, they also have their appointed time. And, these appointed times are as He sees fit, not as we see fit.

34 Behold, the Lord requireth the heart and a willing mind; and the willing and obedient shall eat the good of the land of Zion in these last days. 35 And the rebellious shall be cut off out of the land of Zion, and shall be sent away, and shall not inherit the land. 36 For, verily I say that the rebellious are not of the blood of Ephraim, wherefore they shall be plucked out.

37 Behold, I, the Lord, have made my church in these last days like unto a judge sitting on a hill, or in a high place, to judge the nations. 38 For it shall come to pass that the inhabitants of Zion shall judge all things pertaining to Zion. 39 And liars and hypocrites shall be proved by them, and they who are not apostles and prophets shall be known. 40 And even the bishop, who is a judge, and his counselors, if they are not faithful in their stewardships shall be condemned, and others shall be planted in their stead.

41 For, behold, I say unto you that Zion shall flourish, and the glory of the Lord shall be upon her; 42 And she shall be an ensign unto the people, and there shall come unto her out of every nation under heaven. 43 And the day shall come when the nations of the earth shall tremble because of her, and shall fear because of her terrible ones. The Lord hath spoken it. Amen.

v34-43 The section concludes with a discussion of who will inherit Zion (v. 34-36), and what Zion is to be (v. 37-43).

v34-36 This section of text presents an antithesis where v. 31 represents the humble follower of the Lord who inherits Zion (cp. D&C 63:20-21), and v. 35-36 present the rebellious who will be cut off with no inheritance (cp. D&C 63:17-18). To be cut off with no inheritance implies you and all of your progeny are completely wiped out such that there are none left to inherit land.

v36 "not of the blood of Ephraim", a seemingly literalistic description that is surely figuratively spiritual as the description in v. 34 would be those who are of the "blood of

Ephraim". Such a descriptor applied to a group that certainly contains Gentiles shows how willing the Lord is to extend the covenant with Israel to non-Israelites if they are worthy.

v37-43 Zion is to be a judge (v. 37-40), it shall be glorious (v. 41), it shall be an ensign (v. 42), it shall be terrible (v. 43).

v39-40 Following up on the subject of D&C 63:1-6, hypocrites within the Church, regardless of position, shall be removed and replaced. Given this context it is plain that in order for Zion to act as a judge those in Zion, particularly her leaders, must be just.

As the Lord is no respecter of persons (cp. D&C 1:35, D&C 38:16), people have no claim to leniency based upon social standing or status within the Church (cp. D&C 58:20-21, see also Isa. 3:2-3). All are required to repent and be just.

v41-43 Verse 42 is derivative of Isaiah's descriptions of Zion. However, Isaiah's descriptions of Zion taken in context refer to old Jerusalem after the Day of the Lord. Rather, we would apply the 3 Ne. 20-22 description of the Zion of New Jerusalem (taken along with Moroni's comments in Ether 13), which selectively quotes a great deal from Isaiah and reinterprets it to apply to lineage of Ephraim in an eschatological setting as opposed to Judah in a Millennial setting.

v43 "because of her terrible ones", the descriptor of "terrible" is probably based upon KJV Song of Solomon 6:10 as it is employed in D&C 5:14. The Jewish Publication Society (JPS) translation of Songs 6:10 renders it "awesome" rather than "terrible", and indicates the meaning of the Hebrew is obscure. In any case, one of the standard covenant benedictions is your enemies will run away from you because the Lord is with you (cf. Lev. 26:7-8), this is what is being referenced.

Historical Material Pertaining to Doctrine & Covenants 64

This section was published first in the Book of Commandments, pages 157-160, 1833. It was then published in the Kirtland edition Doctrine and Covenants in 1835, pages 145-147. It was published in Times and Seasons, volume 5, number 7, pages 480-481, dated April 1, 1844. It was published in the Millennial Star, volume 5, number 11, pages 161-162, dated April, 1845.

Excerpt from History of the Church

The early part of September was spent in making preparations to remove to the town of Hiram, and renew our work on the translation of the Bible. The brethren who were commanded to go up to Zion were earnestly engaged in getting ready to start in the coming October. On the 11th of September I received the following:

[text of D&C 64 quoted]

On the 12th of September, I removed with my family to the township of Hiram, and commenced living with John Johnson. Hiram was in Portage county, and about thirty miles southeasterly from Kirtland, From this time until the forepart of October, I did little more than prepare to re-commence the translation of the Bible. (Joseph Smith, History of the Church, volume 1, pages 211-215)

Excerpt from Book of John Whitmer

Soon after this, the time of holding the General Conference drew near; and Joseph the Seer, and Sidney the Scribe, moved from Kirtland, Ohio, to Hiram, Portage County, and continued the translation of the New Testament.

On the twenty-fifth day of October, 1831, the elders assembled together at Irenus Burnett's in the township of Orange and county of Cuyahoga, Ohio. Twelve high priests; seventeen elders; five priests; and three teachers. At which conference were ordained one elder and fourteen priests, the names of whom you will find recorded in the conference minute book. (John Whitmer, Book of John Whitmer, chapter 10, paragraphs 2-3)

Excerpt from History of Joseph Smith, by his Mother

I shall now return to the month of September, 1831. Joseph, at this time, was engaged in translating the Bible, and Sidney Rigdon was writing for him. About the first of this month, Joseph came to the conclusion to remove himself and clerk, as well as their families, to the before-mentioned town of Hiram, in order to expedite the work. They moved to the house of Father John Johnson, and lived with him in peace until the following March... (Lucy Mack Smith, History of Joseph Smith, by his Mother, chapter 41, page 218)

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