

Comments on Doctrine & Covenants 69

1 HEARKEN unto me, saith the Lord your God, for my servant Oliver Cowdery's sake. It is not wisdom in me that he should be entrusted with the commandments and the moneys which he shall carry unto the land of Zion, except one go with him who will be true and faithful. 2 Wherefore, I, the Lord, will that my servant, John Whitmer, should go with my servant Oliver Cowdery; 3 And also that he shall continue in writing and making a history of all the important things which he shall observe and know concerning my church; 4 And also that he receive counsel and assistance from my servant Oliver Cowdery and others.

5 And also, my servants who are abroad in the earth should send forth the accounts of their stewardships to the land of Zion; 6 For the land of Zion shall be a seat and a place to receive and do all these things.

7 Nevertheless, let my servant John Whitmer travel many times from place to place, and from church to church, that he may the more easily obtain knowledge-- 8 Preaching and expounding, writing, copying, selecting, and obtaining all things which shall be for the good of the church, and for the rising generations that shall grow up on the land of Zion, to possess it from generation to generation, forever and ever. Amen.

v1-8 Cowdery and Whitmer are called to travel together. Cowdery's responsibility is to deliver the money and commandments entrusted to him (v. 1). Whitmer's responsibility is to gain some firsthand knowledge of the various branches of the Church and their environs so he may write a history of them for the benefit of the rising generation (v. 2-4, 7-8).

Notwithstanding Whitmer's travels, the various branches are to report on their stewardship to Zion which is now the central point of administration (v. 5-6).

v1 "the moneys", funds solicited from members of the Church and dedicated to the purchase of land in Missouri, to build up Zion.

v3 John Whitmer was originally called to act as the Church Historian in D&C 47. Here he is being prodded to act in that capacity. John, by his own admission, was not particularly zealous for the calling. See the historical material for D&C 47, and not the rather brief comment he makes in his history, excerpted below, for the events surrounding his and Cowdery's travels to Missouri.

v5-6 Whitmer's travels among the branches of the Church are not to take the place of their own responsibilities for reporting to the leadership of the Church. Whitmer is not to act as a traveling secretary or accountant for the Church, his travels are intended to collect historical material, not regulate or

administrate the Church.

v7-8 The Lord gives John instructions on how to go about creating the history he has been commissioned to write.

v7 "that he may more the easily obtain knowledge", this is referring to the task at hand of writing a history. While Whitmer would certainly learn as he went, per v. 4, the primary purpose presented here is for him to gather firsthand information for the writing of the history.

Historical Material Pertaining to Doctrine & Covenants 69

Oliver Cowdery is assigned a traveling companion, John Whitmer, for his journey to Missouri to take the text of the revelations to be published as the Book of Commandments. Cowdery was also carrying a considerable amount of money for buying land in Missouri. Owing to the long, difficult, and potentially hazardous mission, the additional companionship necessary.

The revelation was first published in the Kirtland edition Doctrine and Covenants in 1835, page 155. It was published in the Times and Seasons, volume 5, number 9, pages 512, dated May 1, 1844. It was published in the Millennial Star, volume 14, number 8, page 113, dated April 15, 1852.

Excerpt from History of the Church

The Book of Commandments and Revelations was to be dedicated by prayer to the service of Almighty God by me; and after I had done this, I inquired of the Lord concerning these things, and received the following:

[text of D&C 69 quoted]

My time was occupied closely in reviewing the commandments and sitting in conference, for nearly two weeks; for from the first to the twelfth of November we held four special conferences. In the last which was held at Brother Johnson's, in Hiram, after deliberate consideration, in consequence of the book of revelations, now to be printed, being the foundation of the Church in these last days, and a benefit to the world, showing that the keys of the mysteries of the kingdom of our Savior are again entrusted to man; and the riches of eternity within the compass of those who are willing to live by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God-therefore the conference voted that they prize the revelations to be worth to the Church the riches of the whole earth, speaking temporally. The great benefits to the world which result from the Book of Mormon and the revelations which the Lord has seen fit in His infinite wisdom to grant unto us for our salvation, and for the salvation of all that will believe, were duly appreciated; (Joseph Smith, History of the Church, volume 1, pages 234-236)

Excerpt from Book of John Whitmer

About this time it was in contemplation for Oliver Cowdery to go to Zion and carry with him the revelations and commandments; and I also received a revelation to go with him. We left Ohio on the 20th of November, 1831, and arrived in Zion, Missouri, January 5, 1832.

When we arrived at Zion we found the Saints in as good situation as we could reasonably expect.

January 23, 1832, held a conference in Zion, attended to the business of the Church, and licensed ten elders to go and preach the gospel. (John Whitmer, Book of John Whitmer, chapter 10, paragraphs 4-6)

Excerpt from Sacred Truths of the Doctrine & Covenants

One of the major items of business brought before the conference of November 1831 was the preparing for publication of the Book of Commandments.

After the conference had voted to accept the revelations selected for publication, the prophet Joseph Smith received two revelations. One pertained to the transporting of these revelations to Missouri for printing (see D&C Section 69) and the other concerned custodial responsibility for the revelations in their printed form (see D&C Section 70)

Because of the nature of the subject matter in these two revelations, we will discuss the content of both of them in this chapter under two topics.

By the voice of the conference, Oliver Cowdery was assigned to carry the revelations from Ohio to Missouri for printing. (See HC, Vol. 1, p. 229) The Lord also assigned John Whitmer to accompany Oliver on his journey (See D&C 69:1-2) John Whitmer was reminded by the Lord that his calling as church historian (see D&C Section 47) should not be neglected while on this journey. (See D&C 69:3-8)

In this commandment [Section 69] the Lord declared that it was not wisdom that Oliver Cowdery should make the journey alone. The journey was about one thousand miles and through a sparsely settled country. There were many dangers on the way. The revelations were considered to be priceless and then, besides, Oliver carried with him sums of money to assist in the work in Missouri. John Whitmer was therefore appointed to accompany Oliver... (CHMR, Vol. 2, p. 21)

It must not be understood from the first paragraph of this revelation that Oliver Cowdery was untrustworthy,

and therefore it was necessary that a companion be provided for him. The fact was that much of the journey between Kirtland and Independence, or Zion, was through a sparsely settled country, the western portion of it through a frontier country where there is always a gathering, more or less, of lawless people; and it was at considerable risk that a person traveled through such a country, especially when alone and carrying money with him. It was wisdom, then, for the sake of Oliver Cowdery, and to insure the safety of the money and the sacred things he was to carry with him, that one should go with him that would be a true and faithful companion, hence the appointment of John Whitmer. (HC, Vol. 1, p. 234, Footnote)

It is significant that one man's journey from one geographical area to another was important enough to call forth a revelation from the Lord. Why? Because he was being entrusted with the revelations of the Savior given to a latter-day prophet of God. This was a sacred trust. It was not to be taken lightly. This mission was to be accomplished under the direction of the Lord. (L. G. Otten and C. M. Caldwell, Sacred Truths of the Doctrine & Covenants, pages 342-343)

Copyright © 2025 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.