

Comments on Doctrine & Covenants 77

This section comments on and interprets some obscure passages in John's Revelation. In Revelation, John draws heavily on the Old Testament Prophets, so some of the comments in this section can additionally be used in interpreting the respective Prophets, particularly Ezekiel.

There are a couple of underlying messages from this sections. First, the Lord wants Smith and the Church to study and understand the Bible. Smith brought these questions up as he was "translating" the Bible. The Lord wanted Smith to study and understand the Bible, and even explained what some of the difficult passages meant.

Second, Smith needed assistance with interpreting difficult Biblical texts, and the Lord wanted him to be able to interpret them correctly, so he assisted Smith and the Church particular passages. The result is we now know how to read and interpret these difficult passages in John's Revelation and in the book of Ezekiel.

The Lord doesn't rebuff Smith's questions, or deflect and tell him to not worry about it. The Lord responds with specific answers to specific questions, not nebulous or tangential discussion on other topics.

1 Q. What is the sea of glass spoken of by John, 4th chapter, and 6th verse of the Revelation?

A. It is the earth, in its sanctified, immortal, and eternal state.

v1 The clarity and translucency of glass is used symbolically to represent a sanctified state. Compare Ezek. 1:22.

2 Q. What are we to understand by the four beasts, spoken of in the same verse?

A. They are figurative expressions, used by the Revelator, John, in describing heaven, the paradise of God, the happiness of man, and of beasts, and of creeping things, and of the fowls of the air; that which is spiritual being in the likeness of that which is temporal; and that which is temporal in the likeness of that which is spiritual; the spirit of man in the likeness of his person, as also the spirit of the beast, and every other creature which God has created.

3 Q. Are the four beasts limited to individual beasts, or do they represent classes or orders?

A. They are limited to four individual beasts, which were shown to John, to represent the glory of the classes of beings in their destined order or sphere of creation, in the enjoyment of their eternal felicity.

v2-3 Compare the four angels described in Ezek. 1, 10. There are some minor differences between the two accounts. The verses present the four beasts, one of which was man, as exalted beings. From this it is safe to assume that animals as well as humans are resurrected and exalted.

4 Q. What are we to understand by the eyes and wings, which the beasts had?

A. Their eyes are a representation of light and knowledge, that is, they are full of knowledge; and their wings are a representation of power, to move, to act, etc.

v4 The eyes represent the ability to see and perceive heavenly wisdom. The wings represent the ability to act in a manner that is supernatural, when compared to human acts. Compare Ezek. 1:11 and 1:18.

5 Q. What are we to understand by the four and twenty elders, spoken of by John?

A. We are to understand that these elders whom John saw, were elders who had been faithful in the work of the ministry and were dead; who belonged to the seven churches, and were then in the paradise of God.

v5 These are the Church of the Firstborn, the redeemed of the Lord.

6 Q. What are we to understand by the book which John saw, which was sealed on the back with seven seals?

A. We are to understand that it contains the revealed will, mysteries, and the works of God; the hidden things of his economy concerning this earth during the seven thousand years of its continuance, or its temporal existence.

v6 The will of God for the earth. This indicates God has plans and is very deliberate about things concerning His creation. He lays out His will and makes sure it is done.

Also note the 7000 years are applied to its "temporal existence" or the post-Fall. No mention is made of how long it existed prior to the Fall, only that the temporal existence is to be 7000 years.

7 Q. What are we to understand by the seven seals with which it was sealed?

A. We are to understand that the first seal contains the things of the first thousand years, and the second also of the second thousand years, and so on until the seventh.

v7 Each seal is for 1000 of the 7000 years, for a total of 7 seals. This goes against the common, not universal, Christian

reading that the 7 seals deal with the 7 years of tribulation preceding the Second Advent.

8 Q. What are we to understand by the four angels, spoken of in the 7th chapter and 1st verse of Revelation?

A. We are to understand that they are four angels sent forth from God, to whom is given power over the four parts of the earth, to save life and to destroy; these are they who have the everlasting gospel to commit to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people; having power to shut up the heavens, to seal up unto life, or to cast down to the regions of darkness.

v8 Four angels are to go to the four corners of the earth to provide the means for the sifting of the righteous from the wicked on the Day of the Lord. These four may also be the same as those referred to as the destroying angels, D&C 61, D&C 89:2. There may be more than exactly four, as "four" could be figurative based upon the four corners of the earth.

Assuming the Ezekiel's and John's beasts are one and the same, and following Ezekiel's description of the four cherubim (four creatures like a man but with 4 different faces), these four might be the same as the four referred to in v. 2-3.

9 Q. What are we to understand by the angel ascending from the east, Revelation 7th chapter and 2nd verse?

A. We are to understand that the angel ascending from the east is he to whom is given the seal of the living God over the twelve tribes of Israel; wherefore, he crieth unto the four angels having the everlasting gospel, saying: Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads. And, if you will receive it, this is Elias which was to come to gather together the tribes of Israel and restore all things.

v9 A fifth angel bearing the keys to the gathering of natural Israel makes sure they are gathered and sealed before the great destruction of the Day of the Lord. One of the major themes of the book of Isaiah is the connection of the gathering of Israel and the Day of the Lord. The redemption of Old Jerusalem and the Day of the Lord are equated.

"sealed...in their foreheads", cp. Isa. 44:5, Zech. 14:5, Rev. 14:1, D&C 133:18.

"Elias", apparently this somewhat mysterious character referred to in D&C 27:6, D&C 110:12.

10 Q. What time are the things spoken of in this chapter to be accomplished?

A. They are to be accomplished in the sixth thousand years, or the opening of the sixth

seal.

v10 The dispensing of the gospel to the four corners of the earth and the gathering of Israel are to take place in the 6th 1000 years.

11 Q. What are we to understand by sealing the one hundred and forty-four thousand, out of all the tribes of Israel--twelve thousand out of every tribe?

A. We are to understand that those who are sealed are high priests, ordained unto the holy order of God, to administer the everlasting gospel; for they are they who are ordained out of every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, by the angels to whom is given power over the nations of the earth, to bring as many as will come to the church of the Firstborn.

v11 These 144,000 are natural Israel gathered out and sealed up to the Lord. Given its connection to the statements in v. 8-10, one would assume this event is pre-Day of the Lord and is in reference to mortals.

12 Q. What are we to understand by the sounding of the trumpets, mentioned in the 8th chapter of Revelation?

A. We are to understand that as God made the world in six days, and on the seventh day he finished his work, and sanctified it, and also formed man out of the dust of the earth, even so, in the beginning of the seventh thousand years will the Lord God sanctify the earth, and complete the salvation of man, and judge all things, and shall redeem all things, except that which he hath not put into his power, when he shall have sealed all things, unto the end of all things; and the sounding of the trumpets of the seven angels are the preparing and finishing of his work, in the beginning of the seventh thousand years--the preparing of the way before the time of his coming.

v12 In the beginning of the 7th 1000 years, the earth will be purged of iniquity and cleansed for the Millennium, or the 1000 years of peace. The purging of wickedness from the earth on the Day of the Lord is a common theme in the OT Prophets, cp. Joel 1-3.

"on the seventh day...formed man out of the dust", this verse states that man was created on the 7th day, not the 6th day, as is the common Judeo-Christian reading on Gen. 1-2. This follows the PoGP accounts of the creation which state the first 6 days were for the physical creation and preparation of the earth, but no living things were created until the 7th day. See comments on Gen. 1 for a lengthy discussion of the Creation accounts.

13 Q. When are the things to be accomplished, which are written in the 9th chapter of Revelation?

A. They are to be accomplished after the opening of the seventh seal, before the coming of Christ.

v13 The events surrounding the terrible armies described in Rev. 9 occur after the opening of the 7th seal, but before the Day of the Lord.

14 Q. What are we to understand by the little book which was eaten by John, as mentioned in the 10th chapter of Revelation?

A. We are to understand that it was a mission, and an ordinance, for him to gather the tribes of Israel; behold, this is Elias, who, as it is written, must come and restore all things.

v14 Because of the wording it is difficult to determine if John is being identified as the same "Elias" as in v. 9, or if the angel who gave John the book to eat is Elias and therefore John is "Elias" in the same sense John Baptist is "Elias" in that they are forerunners. We know John Beloved took part in the restoration of the Melchizedek Priesthood, so he obviously has acted in some capacity in the spirit of Elias. However, the original Elias is the one holding the full set of keys to the Abrahamic Priesthood, one would therefore presume the full set of keys pertaining to the dispensation of Abraham, which started the lineage-based covenant of Israel (the subject of v. 9). For this reason, it is safe to assume v. 9 is referring to the original Elias, and this verse is saying the angel who gave John the mission was the original Elias and his eating the book meant his, John's, becoming part of the spirit and mission of Elias to restore Israel.

15 Q. What is to be understood by the two witnesses, in the eleventh chapter of Revelation?

A. They are two prophets that are to be raised up to the Jewish nation in the last days, at the time of the restoration, and to prophesy to the Jews after they are gathered and have built the city of Jerusalem in the land of their fathers.

v15 These two witnesses, or two prophets, are intimately involved in the events immediately preceding the Day of the Lord. The identity of these two is a point of speculation. Cross reference with Zech. 4:12-14 suggests the two are the so-called latter-day David and Temple High Priest (cp. Zech 3:8-9). This has become a point of contention as these two prophets are performing miracles that apparently require some

kind of Priesthood authority. LDS commentators are understandably loathe to attribute Priesthood authority outside of the LDS Church, so much so that B.R. McConkie insists in his Doctrinal New Testament Commentary the two must be apostles, probably of the Quorum of the 12. However, D&C 68:16-21 indicates that those firstborn sons of Aaron possess "keys" (D&C 68:17) by birthright even to this day. What exactly these keys entitle them to outside of the confines of the LDS Church is unclear as D&C 68 does not comment on it. If these keys entitle them to ministering of angels, then the angels could be the ones performing the various miraculous acts at their behest, cf. the shutting up of the heavens referenced in both Rev. 11:6 and v. 8 of this section.

Historical Material Pertaining to Doctrine & Covenants 77

The text of this section was first published in Times and Seasons, volume 5, number 14, dated August 1, 1844. It was published in the Millennial Star, volume 14, number 9, pages 132-133, dated April 24, 1852. It was eventually published in the Doctrine and Covenants in 1876, pages 253-258.

Excerpts from History of the Church

About the first of March, in connection with the translation of the Scriptures, I received the following explanation of the Revelation of St. John:

[text of D&C 77 quoted]

(Joseph Smith, History of the Church, volume 1, page 253)

While at dinner, I remarked to my family and friends present, that when the earth was sanctified and became like a sea of glass, it would be one great urim and thummim, and the Saints could look in it and see as they are seen. (Joseph Smith, History of the Church, volume 5, page 279)

I suppose John saw beings there of a thousand forms, that had been saved from ten thousand times ten thousand earths like this, -- strange beasts of which we have no conception: all might be seen in heaven. The grand secret was to show John what there was in heaven. John learned that God glorified Himself by saving all that His hands had made, whether beasts, fowls, fishes or men; and He will glorify Himself with them.

Says one, 'I cannot believe in the salvation of beasts.' Any man who would tell you that this could not be, would tell you that the revelations are not true. John heard the words of the beasts giving glory to God, and understood them. God who made the beasts could understand every language spoken by them. The four beasts were four of the most noble animals that had filled the measure of their creation, and had been saved from other worlds, because they were perfect; they were like angels in their sphere. We are not told where they came from, and I do not know; but they were seen and heard by John praising and glorifying God. (Joseph Smith, History of the Church, volume 5, pages 343-44)

It is not only necessary that you should be baptized for your dead, but you will have to go through all the ordinances

for them, the same as you have gone through to save yourselves. There will be 144,000 saviors on Mount Zion, and with them an innumerable host that no man can number. (Joseph Smith, History of the Church, volume 6, page 365)

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