

Comments on Doctrine & Covenants 85

Verses 1-6 and 10-12 are Smith's comments, and v. 7-9 is a quote of the Lord. The section deals with keeping records of members of the ecclesia and eliminating the records of the apostates.

It is important to recall that having one's name cut off or forgotten in the Semitic tradition is one of the worst curses possible, cp. Exod. 17:14, Deut. 7:24, Deut. 32:26, Isa. 26:13-14, Ezek. 21:32.

While not explicitly stated, the parallel between heavenly and earthly records is implicit.

1 IT is the duty of the Lord's clerk, whom he has appointed, to keep a history, and a general church record of all things that transpire in Zion, and of all those who consecrate properties, and receive inheritances legally from the bishop; 2 And also their manner of life, their faith, and works; and also of the apostates who apostatize after receiving their inheritances. 3 It is contrary to the will and commandment of God that those who receive not their inheritance by consecration, agreeable to his law, which he has given, that he may tithe his people, to prepare them against the day of vengeance and burning, should have their names enrolled with the people of God. 4 Neither is their genealogy to be kept, or to be had where it may be found on any of the records or history of the church. 5 Their names shall not be found, neither the names of the fathers, nor the names of the children written in the book of the law of God, saith the Lord of Hosts.

v1-5 Smith indicates the clerk is to maintain membership records and a legal record of transactions of consecrated properties (v. 1). A general history of the Saints should also be kept, which includes a list of apostates with inheritances (v. 2). However, apostates are not to remain on any other records of the Church (v. 3-5).

v2 Smith's intentions must have been to maintain two separate sets of records, one for Church dealings and one for legal transactions of property. While apostates are to be removed from the Church records (v. 3-5), they are to remain on the legal record for land holdings.

v4-5 These verses are not referring to genealogy in the family history sense, they are referring to maintaining Church records of membership.

6 Yea, thus saith the still small voice, which whispereth through and pierceth all things, and often times it maketh my bones to quake while it maketh manifest, saying:

7 And it shall come to pass that I, the Lord God, will send one mighty and strong, holding the scepter of power in his hand, clothed with light for a covering, whose mouth shall utter words, eternal words; while his bowels shall be a fountain of truth, to set in order the house of God, and to arrange by lot the inheritances of the saints whose names are found, and the names of their fathers, and of their children, enrolled in the book of the law of God;

8 While that man, who was called of God and appointed, that putteth forth his hand to steady the ark of God, shall fall by the shaft of death, like as a tree that is smitten by the vivid shaft of lightning. 9 And all they who are not found written in the book of remembrance shall find none inheritance in that day, but they shall be cut asunder, and their portion shall be appointed them among unbelievers, where are wailing and gnashing of teeth.

10 These things I say not of myself; therefore, as the Lord speaketh, he will also fulfil. 11 And they who are of the High Priesthood, whose names are not found written in the book of the law, or that are found to have apostatized, or to have been cut off from the church, as well as the lesser priesthood, or the members, in that day shall not find an inheritance among the saints of the Most High; 12 Therefore, it shall be done unto them as unto the children of the priest, as will be found recorded in the second chapter and sixty-first and second verses of Ezra.

v6-12 Smith indicates the Lord has said to him (v. 6) that He will send "one mighty and strong" to establish the inheritances of the Saints (v. 7), while those who seek to correct the Lord (v. 8) will be separated out from the Saints and allotted the same rewards as unbelievers (v. 9). Smith indicates these words (i.e., v 7-9) are the Lord's words (v. 10). All those leaders of the Church who are cut off from the Church will not inherit the kingdom of God, but will be omitted from the book of life, even as they were anciently (v. 11).

v7 "one mighty and strong", in Robert J. Woodford's Historical Development of the Doctrine and Covenants, 1974, he includes the following statement on page 1083:

In light of the many claims made concerning the one mighty and strong in verse 7, the following is important in identifying Edward Partridge as that person:

At his [Edward Partridge's] funeral says mother Partridge John E. Page was speaking and referred to the revelation, predicting the raising up of one who should be mighty, who should divide the inheritance as to the saints, and said he did not know but the one should be Bishop Partridge. The Prophet Joseph Smith spoke up and said he was the one referred to. [from Edward Partridge Journal. Page 70]

This reading is problematic, as v. 7 is clearly threatening to

send someone else who is mighty and strong, because Partridge was not acting in that capacity. If the journal entry is accurate, which it very well may not be, it could be Smith saying after the fact that Partridge did rise up afterwards and fulfil the capacity he was ordained to, and was therefore that person.

Comments by Hyrum M. Smith and Janne M. Sjodahl, in their Doctrine and Covenants Commentary (pages 528-529) are as follows:

Who is this Mighty and Strong?

In an article over the signatures of Joseph F. Smith, John R. Winder, and Anthon H. Lund, First Presidency, published in the Deseret News, November 13, 1905, that question is comprehensively and clearly discussed. After having quoted in full the letter of the Prophet Joseph to William W. Phelps, the authors of the article say:

"It is to be observed first of all that the subject of this whole letter, as also the part of it subsequently accepted as a revelation, relates to the affairs of the Church in Missouri, the gathering of the Saints to that land, and obtaining their inheritances under the law of consecration and stewardship; and the Prophet deals especially with the matter of what is to become of those who fail to receive their inheritances by order or deed from the Bishop."

It is then pointed out that Edward Partridge, the Bishop of the Church, was the one "called and appointed to divide by lot unto the Saints their inheritances." But was Edward Partridge the one who, in 1832, was "putting forth his hand to steady the ark," and was threatened with falling "by the shaft of death like as a tree that is smitten by the vivid shaft of lightning"? In the article quoted, this question is answered in the affirmative. It is shown that Edward Partridge, though a worthy man, one whom God loved, at times arrayed himself in opposition to the Prophet, so strenuously that Ezra Booth made their differences an excuse for his apostasy. On the 26th of April, 1832, Partridge gave the Prophet the right hand of fellowship, and it was supposed that all

differences were settled, but afterwards he brought them up again. Edward Partridge was, when this Revelation was written, neglecting his own duty and putting "forth his hand to steady the ark"; hence the warning. Partridge repented, in part at least, but in March, 1833, the Lord again took occasion to say that He was "not well pleased with him" and others. In the midst of the troubles and persecution of Missouri, Partridge acted a most noble and self-sacrificing part, offering himself as one of five willing to suffer and be put to death by the mob, if by so doing they could secure freedom for the rest of the Saints. He bore persecution with meekness and dignity, and the Lord, in November, 1835, said He was well pleased with him. But that he was the man threatened with sudden and untimely death "there can be no question." But let us quote again:

"Now as to the 'one mighty and strong' who shall be sent of God, to 'set in order the house of God, and to arrange by lot the inheritances of the Saints'; who is he? What position will he hold in the Church? In what manner will he come to his calling? We draw attention first of all to the fact that this whole letter to William W. Phelps, as well as the part afterwards accepted as the word of the Lord, related to the affairs of the Church in Zion, Independence, Jackson County, Missouri: and inasmuch as through his repentance and sacrifices and suffering, Bishop Edward Partridge undoubtedly obtained a mitigation of the threatened judgment against him of falling 'by the shaft of death, like as a tree that is smitten by the vivid shaft of lightning,' so the occasion for sending another to fill his station-'one mighty and strong to set in order the house of God, and to arrange by lot the inheritance of the Saints'-may also be considered as having passed away and the whole incident of the prophecy closed."

"If, however, there are those who will still insist that the prophecy concerning the coming of 'one mighty and strong' is still to be regarded as relating to the future, let the Latter-day Saints know that he will be a future Bishop of the Church who will be with the Saints in Zion, Jackson County, Missouri, when the Lord shall establish them in that land; and he will

also be blessed with the spirit and power of his calling, that he will be able to set in order the house of God, pertaining to the department of the work under his jurisdiction; and in righteousness and justice he will 'arrange by lot the inheritances of the Saints.' He will hold the same high and exalted station that Edward Partridge held."

The above quoted statement suggests the "one mighty and strong", if forced into an eschatological reading, which they do not forward, is some future bishop of Zion.

This reading problematic, given the rhetoric of the verse. It is more likely the Lord is speaking of Himself in the 3rd person (the Lord refers to Himself in the 3rd person elsewhere, cp. D&C 49:5-7) and referring to the Second Advent. This "one mighty and strong" holds a scepter of political rulership (suggesting lineage of David through Judah, cf. Gen. 49:10, Hebr. 1:8, D&C 106:6), utters eternal words like a fountain of truth (suggesting transcendent inspiration, cf. John 6:68, John 7:38, D&C 84:43-44), is clothed in light (suggesting an exalted condition, cf. 3 Ne. 11:8-11, D&C 138:30), and is come to set in order the House of God and disburse inheritances (suggesting a theme of the re-establishment of natural Israel). While it might be possible to attribute some of these qualities to prominent prophets, there is only One individual who can safely be attributed all qualities listed.

Overall, I see the dichotomy in v. 7-8 of the two characters to be a deliberate set of extremes, one being overwhelming good, and one being overwhelmingly bad. I see this as a rhetorical device, and not intended as a literal statement or a prediction or prophesy of some future mortal person.

Smith was referred to as "one mighty among them" in 2 Ne. 3:24 with respect to the one who would assist the Lord in bringing forth the record of Joseph ben Jacob to the remnants of Joseph through Lehi.

v8 People who seek to counsel God, or who deliberately disregard His rules and regulations because they think they know better are cut off.

v12 These people searched for their genealogical records in an attempt to qualify themselves to administer in the Priesthood. However, none was found, and they were excluded from doing so.

This will be the case with persons who are cut off from the
ecclesia.

Historical Material Pertaining to Doctrine & Covenants 85

The text of D&C 85 is an excerpt from a letter written by Smith to Phelps regarding the duties of the clerk in charge of Church records. The letter was prompted by Phelps' query regarding the questionable conduct of Bishop Partridge. The letter is included in full below. For a lengthy discussion of the entire conflict between leadership in Kirtland and the leadership in Missouri, see Matthew C. Godfrey's ["Seeking after Monarchal Power and Authority": Joseph Smith and Leadership in the Church of Christ, 1831-1832.](#)

This section was first published in the Evening and Morning Star, volume 1, number 8, page 61, dated January, 1833. It was then published in the Evening and Morning Star Kirtland reprint, volume 1, number 8, pages 121-122, dated April, 1836. It was published in the Times and Seasons, volume 5, number 19, pages 673-674, dated October 15, 1844. It was published in the Millennial Star, volume 14, number 18, pages 184-285, dated June 26, 1852. It was published in the 1876 edition Doctrine and Covenants, pages 275-277.

Excerpt from Sacred Truths of the Doctrine and Covenants

At the time of this revelation (1832) the headquarters of the church was in Kirtland, Ohio. Bishop Edward Partridge was in Missouri and was responsible for organizing the saints there and administering the law of consecration in their behalf. William W. Phelps had been assigned to assist the Bishop in his duties. In the exercise of his office, Bishop Partridge had exceeded his authority on occasion. He had not always functioned in accordance with the instructions given him by the Prophet Joseph Smith, and therefore, was not in harmony with the Lord at that time.

Sensing this problem, Brother Phelps had written to Joseph Smith and sought his counsel on the matter. This revelation is an extract of an inspired letter written by Joseph Smith in answer to the concerns of Brother Phelps. (L. G. Otten and C. M. Caldwell, Sacred Truths of the Doctrine and Covenants, volume 2, page 81)

Excerpt from Evening and Morning Star

THE GATHERING.

D&C 85.7

THERE is a great anxiety manifested to learn how the church of Christ prospers, since it commenced settling in the western part of the state of Missouri. To satisfy this inquiry, and more especially to publish the truth upon this great subject, that none may be deceived by flying reports, we shall endeavor to give all the information in our possession. Since the gathering commenced, which is a little over a year, the number of the disciples which have come from the east, and which have been baptized in this region, is 465
 Children and those not members, about 345
 Total 810

This little flock, which is now enjoying the glorious privileges and blessings of the everlasting gospel, preparatory to the second coming of the Savior, have, as it were, almost simultaneously come together from New England, New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Tennessee and Missouri, to worship God and keep his commandments, on the land of their inheritance.-So far, the disciples have been highly favored; coming, as most of them have, from different climates, and changing, as is necessarily the case, their modes of living, undergoing the troubles and hardships of a long and tedious journey, and planting themselves down without the conveniences and even necessities, which most of them have been used to, it is certainly a matter of great joy, if not a miracle, that they are generally so healthy, so industrious, so thriving, and more than all, so contented to love the Lord and their neighbors as themselves. Reports, to be sure, have been circulated, that so many were moving in, that a famine must succeed, and some starve to death; perhaps a few believed so, but in the joyful language of the Psalmist we can exclaim: We have been young, and now are old; yet have we not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread. The great consolation is, the promises of the Lord never fail; nor is his store-house ever empty. Virtue, honesty, diligence, industry, economy, and patience, added to that pure religion, and undefiled before God and the Father: To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world, bring about the purposes of God, in their eternal salvation, and blesses the contrite soul with a sweet consolation and a prospect before it, that the world, with all its alluring, but vanishing appearances, can neither give nor take. We admit that the flowing together of so many saints has the appearance of a meeting of strangers; but as they already begin to grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord, the world may witness that it is the preparation of Israel

to meet his God. As the prophet said, Zion is a wilderness, but with faithful hearts raised to God, the wilderness will soon blossom as the rose, and, as the prospect brightens, we look forward with joy to the day when Zion shall arise and put on her beautiful garments and become the joy of the world.

Amid all things, for it is appointed for all once to die, twelve persons have died since the emigration commenced to this land: that is, nine here, and three upon the way. There have been solemnized six marriages.

[...]

TO THE SAINTS.

THE Lord has said, Blessed are they who have come up to this land with an eye single to my glory, according to my commandments. Brethren, have you all done so? Have you fulfilled the commandment, which saith: Behold I the Lord have appointed a way for the journeying of my saints, and behold this is the way: That after they leave the canal, they shall journey by land, inasmuch as they are commanded to journey and go up unto the land of Zion; and they shall do like unto the children of Israel, pitching their tents by the way? Have you all fulfilled the law of the church, which saith: Behold thou shalt consecrate all thy properties, that which thou hast, unto me, with a covenant and deed that cannot be broken; and they shall be laid before the bishop of my church? And also the commandment which saith: It is wisdom in me, that my servant Martin should be an example unto the church, in laying his money before the bishop of the church; and also, this is a law unto every man that cometh unto this land to receive an inheritance? and he shall do with his moneys according as the law directs. Brethren, have you all kept the commandments thus far? If you have the Lord will keep you from danger. Let each look to these great queries, and ask himself the question, HAVE I? (William W. Phelps, The Evening and Morning Star, volume 1, number 6, November 1832, pages 45-46)

Excerpt from History of the Church

In answer to letters received from the brethren in Missouri, I wrote as follows:

KIRTLAND, Nov. 27th, 1832.

BROTHER WILLIAM W. PHELPS:-I say brother, because I feel so from the heart, and although it is not long since I wrote a letter unto you, yet I feel as though you would excuse me for writing this, as I have many things which I wish to communicate. Some things which I will mention in this letter, which are lying with great weight on my mind. I am well, and my family also; God grant that you may enjoy the same, and yours, and all the brethren and sisters who remember to inquire after the commandments of the Lord, and the welfare of Zion and such a being as myself; and while I dictate this letter, I fancy to myself that you are saying or thinking something similar to these words:-"My God, great and mighty art Thou, therefore show unto Why servant what shall become of those who are essaying to come up unto Zion, in order to keep the commandments of God, and yet receive not their inheritance by consecrations, by order of deed from the Bishop, the man that God has appointed in a legal way, agreeably to the law given to organize and regulate the Church, and all the affairs of the same."

Brother William, in the love of God, having the most implicit confidence in you as a man of God, having obtained this confidence by a vision of heaven, therefore I will proceed to unfold to you some of the feelings of my heart, and to answer the question.

Firstly, it is the duty of the Lord's clerk, whom He has appointed, to keep a history, and a General Church Record of all things that transpire in Zion, and of all those who consecrate properties and receive inheritances legally from the Bishop; and also their manner of life, their faith, and works and also of the apostates who apostatize after receiving their inheritances. It is contrary to the will and commandment of God, that those who receive not their inheritance by consecration, agreeably to His law, which he has given, that He may tithe His people, to prepare them against the day of vengeance and burning, should have their names enrolled with the people of God; neither is their genealogy to be kept, or to be had where it may be found on any of the records or history of the Church; their names shall not be found neither the names of the fathers, nor the names of the children written in the book of the law of God, saith the Lord of hosts. Yea, thus saith the still small voice, which whispereth through and pierceth all things, and oftentimes it maketh my bones to quake while it maketh manifest, saying: and it shall come to pass, that I, the Lord God, will send one mighty and strong, holding the sceptre of power in his hand,

clothed with light for a covering, whose mouth shall utter words, eternal words; while his bowels shall be a fountain of truth, to set in order the house of God, and to arrange by lot the inheritances of the Saints, whose names are found, and the names of their fathers, and of their children enrolled in the book of the law of God: while that man, who was called of God, and appointed, that putteth forth his hand to steady the ark of God, shall fall by the shaft of death, like as a tree that is smitten by the vivid shaft of lightning; and all they who are not found written in the book of remembrance, shall find none inheritance in that day but they shall be cut asunder, and their portion shall be appointed them among unbelievers, where are wailing and gnashing of teeth. These things I say not of myself; therefore, as the Lord speaketh, He will also fulfil. And they who are of the High Priesthood, whose names are not found written in the book of the law, or that are found to have apostatized, or to have been cut off from the Church; as well as the lesser Priesthood, or the members, in that day, shall not find an inheritance among the Saints of the Most High; therefore it shall be done unto them as unto the children of the priest, as will be found recorded in the second chapter, and sixty-first and sixty-second verses of Ezra.

Now, Brother William, if what I have said is true, how careful men ought to be what they do in the last days, lest they are cut short of their expectations, and they that think they stand should fall, because they keep not the Lord's commandments; whilst you, who do the will of the Lord and keep His commandments, have need to rejoice with unspeakable joy, for such shall be exalted very high, and shall be lifted up in triumph above all the kingdoms of this world; but I must drop this subject at the beginning [of it].

Oh, Lord, when will the time come when Brother William, Thy servant, and myself, shall behold the day that we may stand together and gaze upon eternal wisdom engraven upon the heavens, while the majesty of our God holdeth up the dark curtain until we may read the round of eternity, to the fulness and satisfaction of our immortal souls? Oh, Lord, deliver us in due time from the little, narrow prison, almost as it were, total darkness of paper, pen and ink;-and a crooked, broken, scattered and imperfect language.

I have obtained ten subscribers for the Star. Love for all the brethren.

Yours in bonds. Amen.

JOSEPH SMITH, JUN.

(Joseph Smith, History of the Church, volume 1, pages 297-299)

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.