

Comments on Doctrine & Covenants 86

Section 86 interprets the parable of the wheat and the tares (cf. Matt. 13:24-43) and places the contemporary recipients of the revelation into its context.

The text can be outlined as follows:

Introduction (v. 1)

Parable interpreted (v. 2-7)

 Historical portion of the parable (v. 2-3)

 Eschatological portion of the parable (v. 4-7)

Recipients placed in the parable (v. 8-11)

The historical context suggests what the Lord is talking about is the necessity of the ecclesia to make sure they are on the right side of the wheat and tares. As the ecclesia at Missouri are having problems, the Lord is telling them to straighten up, or risk being driven into the wilderness, per v. 3.

1 Verily, thus saith the Lord unto you my servants, concerning the parable of the wheat and of the tares:

2 Behold, verily I say, the field was the world, and the apostles were the sowers of the seed; 3 And after they have fallen asleep the great persecutor of the church, the apostate, the whore, even Babylon, that maketh all nations to drink of her cup, in whose hearts the enemy, even Satan, sitteth to reign--behold he soweth the tares; wherefore, the tares choke the wheat and drive the church into the wilderness.

4 But behold, in the last days, even now while the Lord is beginning to bring forth the word, and the blade is springing up and is yet tender-- 5 Behold, verily I say unto you, the angels are crying unto the Lord day and night, who are ready and waiting to be sent forth to reap down the fields; 6 But the Lord saith unto them, pluck not up the tares while the blade is yet tender (for verily your faith is weak), lest you destroy the wheat also. 7 Therefore, let the wheat and the tares grow together until the harvest is fully ripe; then ye shall first gather out the wheat from among the tares, and after the gathering of the wheat, behold and lo, the tares are bound in bundles, and the field remaineth to be burned.

v1 An introductory statement identifying the speaker and the subject.

v2-7 The interpretation of the parable. The interpretation presents both a historical (v. 2-3) and an eschatological, or latter-days, interpretation (v. 4-7).

Verses 2-3 present the sowers of the wheat seeds as the ancient apostles and the sower of the tares as worldly Babylon, headed by Satan.

Verses 4-7 state the blade is again springing forth in the last days (v. 4), with the restoration of the ancient church. The angels are ready to harvest the wheat (v. 5), but the adversary is once again on the scene sowing tares in the field (v. 6). Thus, the Lord has the angels wait until the harvest is fully ripe to sort out the wheat and tares and subsequently burn the tares (v. 7). Compare D&C 101:64-75.

v3 This verse contains paraphrases from John's Revelation. Of particular interest is that the "church" is presented as being driven into the wilderness. In Revelation, the figure driven into the wilderness is a woman, and commentators have been wrangling over who this woman represents. Here the woman is plainly identified as the ancient church. It is also worthwhile to note the JST/IV on Rev. 12 presents the woman as the church as well.

In historical context, this section is generally referring to the difficulties the Missouri branch of the Church is having in general and their specific failure to start building the Temple the Lord told them to start on. Note the rhetorical connection of this verse to D&C 88:94. The Lord is warning the ecclesia the adversary is working to thwart them.

v7-11 "therefore", this word is used four times in these verses as logical conclusions the Lord makes. He interprets the parable and explicitly spells out what the takeaway message is. The wheat and tares are to be separated and bound in preparation for burning, and the bearers of the Priesthood are to assist in this work. Note the final "therefore" in v. 11 is a conditional blessing to those who remain faithful. The Church at this time is experiencing problems in Missouri over the gathering to and establishment of Zion and building of the Temple.

v7 The order of wheat first then tares reverses the order appearing in Matt. 13:30. The IV/JST also reverses the order. However, in the present text, the field is left to be burned where in the Matt. 13 passage, in both the KJV and the IV/JST, the bundles of tares are burned. These are subtle differences in the text, which lend themselves to considerable speculation for eschatological interpretations.

"until the harvest is fully ripe", the reference to being fully ripe refers to the ripeness in iniquity of the tares and

not the ripeness of the wheat, cp. 2 Ne. 28:6, Jacob 5:58, Alma 10:19, Ether 2:9, D&C 18:6, D&C 29:9.

"the field...to be burned", as indicated in v. 2 the field is the world. On what the "burn[ing]" is cp. 2 Ne. 26:4-6, and also comments on D&C 87.

8 Therefore, thus saith the Lord unto you, with whom the priesthood hath continued through the lineage of your fathers-- 9 For ye are lawful heirs, according to the flesh, and have been hid from the world with Christ in God-- 10 Therefore your life and the priesthood have remained, and must needs remain through you and your lineage until the restoration of all things spoken by the mouths of all the holy prophets since the world began. 11 Therefore, blessed are ye if ye continue in my goodness, a light unto the Gentiles, and through this priesthood, a savior unto my people Israel. The Lord hath said it. Amen.

v8-11 These verses cast the latter-day Priesthood holders in the role of the ancient apostles, and are to prepare for the Day of the Lord, cp. D&C 65:2-5.

v8-10 The text states they are heirs to the Priesthood by lineage and this right is to continue through their lineage until the "restoration of all things", i.e., the restoration of Israel and fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant with the Day of the Lord, cf. D&C 45:25. Presumably at that point the lineage-based covenant associated with Abraham will cease, returning the human race to the pre-Abrahamic style universal covenants.

As for being heirs by lineage, Smith was apparently natural Israel by birth (cf. 2 Ne. 3:11-15), but many others surely were not. For those that were not natural Israel by birth, they are made covenant Israel by adoption, cf. Isa. 56:1-7. This adoption is achieved by obtaining and upholding the Priesthood covenants, cp. D&C 84:33-34. Thus, the heavy emphasis on the connection between the Priesthood and the status as heirs.

These verses also imply they are in a good position, or in other words they are the wheat and not the tares.

v9 "hid from the world with Christ in God", this is a paraphrase of Col. 3:3, so the context of Col. 3:1-11 is invoked. The interpretation is those being addressed in the revelation are dead as to things of the world and alive unto God through Christ (i.e., born again). That they are "hid" means that the world is not perceiving them and when Christ is revealed they will be

with him.

v11 After they are identified as those of the covenant, the Lord admonishes them to "continue in my goodness", meaning they are to endure to the end. They are also to be a light to the nations, and a savior to natural Israel, Isa. 42:6-7, Isa. 49:5-6, Isa. 51:4-5. Thus, they are to be like the ancient apostles and go and be sowers of the seed so the nations and Israel may come unto the Lord.

Historical Material Pertaining to Doctrine & Covenants 86

This section was first published in the Kirtland edition Doctrine and Covenants in 1835, page 99. It was published in Times and Seasons, volume 5, number 20, page 688, dated November 1, 1844. It was published in the Millennial Star, volume 14, number 19, pages 295-296, dated July 3, 1852.

Excerpt from History of the Church

On the 6th of December, 1832, I received the following revelation explaining the parable of the wheat and tares:

[text of D&C 86 quoted]

(Joseph Smith, History of the Church, volume 1, page 300)

Excerpt from The Revelations of the Prophet Joseph Smith

That the reception of section 86 was closely connected with the inspired translation of the Bible is affirmed by a statement in Joseph Smith's journal: "December 6th translating and received a revelation explaining the Parable the Wheat and the Tears &c." (Lyndon W. Cook, The Revelations of the Prophet Joseph Smith)

Excerpt from Historical Development of the Doctrine and Covenants

Even though these three sections are separated in this study, an introduction to all of them is important because of their connection to one another. December 1832 must have been one of the most awesome periods in the life of the Prophet as he viewed future events related to the wars and destruction prior to the second coming. In Section 86 he saw the eventual separation of the wheat and tares as prophesied by the Savior. Later, he had revealed to him the extent of the wars that would cover the earth prior to the second coming of Christ. He was also commanded to write and have published much of what he understood would happen. Accordingly, he wrote Mr. N.E. Seaton, the editor of a newspaper the name of which now cannot now be ascertained, and warned:

And now I am prepared to say by the authority of Jesus Christ, that not many years shall pass away before the United States shall present such a scene of bloodshed as

has not a parallel in the history of our nation; pestilence, hail, famine, and earthquake will sweep the wicked of this generation from off the face of the land, to open and prepare the way for the return of the lost tribes of Israel from the north country. The people of the Lord, those who have complied with the requirements of the new covenant, have already commenced gathering together to Zion, which is in the state of Missouri; therefore I declare unto you the warning which the Lord has commanded to declare unto this generation, remembering that the eyes of my Maker are upon me, and that to him I am accountable for every word I say, wishing nothing worse to my fellow-men than their eternal salvation; therefore, "Fear God, and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgement is come." Repent ye, repent ye, and embrace the everlasting covenant, and flee to Zion, before the overflowing scourge overtake you, for there are those now living upon the earth whose eyes shall not be closed in death until they see all these things, which I have spoken, fulfilled. Remember these things; call upon the Lord while He is near, and seek Him while He may be found, is the exhortation of your unworthy servant.

[Signed] Joseph Smith, Jun.

Joseph later recorded in his history that he had seen in visions the end of this nation and the breaking up of the government if it continued to disregard the rights of the citizens. Elder Grant also recorded the extent of the visions by Joseph Smith concerning these matters. He wrote:

The Prophet stood in his own house when he told several of us of the night the visions of heaven were opened to him, in which he saw the American continent drenched in blood, and he saw nation rising up against nation. He also saw the father shed the blood of the son, and the son shed the blood of the father; the mother put to death the daughter, and the daughter the mother; and natural affection forsook the hearts of the wicked; for he saw that the Spirit of God should be withdrawn from the inhabitants of the earth, in consequence of which there should be blood upon the face of the whole earth, excepts among the people of the Most High. The Prophet gazed upon the scene his vision presented, until his heart sickened, and he besought the Lord to close it up again.

Not all of these things were necessarily seen during December 1832, but enough was revealed in order for Joseph to respond with these two revelations and the latter cited above, plus a portion of a later revelation (See Section 130).

Then at the end of the month, as though the Lord sought to comfort Joseph's heart, he revealed Section 88, which Joseph identified as, "The Olive Leaf" plucked from the Tree of Paradise, or the Lord's message of peace to His saints. Thus hope was given the members of the Church that they could escape much of the future turmoil if they would live righteously.

(Robert J. Woodford, 1974, Historical Development of the Doctrine and Covenants, pages 1094-1095)

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