

Comments on Doctrine & Covenants 97

This section employs classic OT covenant theology rhetoric. First, the Lord addresses those whom He favors (v. 1-5, 8-9), only briefly and disparagingly recognizing those not in His favor (v. 6-7), issues a commandment (v. 10-17), and then closes with covenant curse and blessing formula (v. 18-28).

1 VERILY I say unto you my friends, I speak unto you with my voice, even the voice of my spirit, that I may show unto you my will concerning your brethren in the land of Zion, many of whom are truly humble and are seeking diligently to learn wisdom and to find truth. 2 Verily, verily I say unto you, blessed are such, for they shall obtain; for I, the Lord, show mercy unto all the meek, and upon all whomsoever I will, that I may be justified when I shall bring them unto judgment.

3 Behold, I say unto you, concerning the school in Zion, I, the Lord, am well pleased that there should be a school in Zion, and also with my servant Parley P. Pratt, for he abideth in me. 4 And inasmuch as he continueth to abide in me he shall continue to preside over the school in the land of Zion until I shall give unto him other commandments. 5 And I will bless him with a multiplicity of blessings, in expounding all scriptures and mysteries to the edification of the school, and of the church in Zion.

6 And to the residue of the school, I, the Lord, am willing to show mercy; nevertheless, there are those that must needs be chastened, and their works shall be made known. 7 The ax is laid at the root of the trees; and every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit shall be hewn down and cast into the fire. I, the Lord, have spoken it.

8 Verily I say unto you, all among them who know their hearts are honest, and are broken, and their spirits contrite, and are willing to observe their covenants by sacrifice--yea, every sacrifice which I, the Lord, shall command--they are accepted of me. 9 For I, the Lord, will cause them to bring forth as a very fruitful tree which is planted in a goodly land, by a pure stream, that yieldeth much precious fruit.

v1-2 The people currently in Zion are a mix of good and bad. The bad among them are causing problems, resulting in their being subject to their enemies.

These two verses focus on the blessed condition of the humble and meek seekers of wisdom and truth that are in Zion, and they are told they shall obtain. The Lord's failure to address, and therefore ignore, the bad among them implies that He is turning His back on them, which is a covenant curse, cf. Deut. 31:17-18, Isa. 54:8.

v3-5 A specific case of one in whom the Lord is well pleased is held up as an example. Parley P. Pratt is endorsed as being in the Lord's favor. One would assume there were those among the attendees at the School of the Prophets which felt some other would have performed better in the role.

v6-9 A parable where the two groups in Zion are contrasted. Verses 6-7 directly address the wicked among Zion, i.e., specifically the contentious among the School of the Prophets (cp. D&C 95:10), and compares them to a tree which is ready to be cut down and burned (cp. Jacob 5:49). Verses 8-9 then addresses the honest and broken-hearted among Zion and compares them to a very fruitful tree (cp. John 15:16) planted by a pure stream (cp. Jer. 17:13, 1 Ne. 11:25).

10 Verily I say unto you, that it is my will that a house should be built unto me in the land of Zion, like unto the pattern which I have given you. 11 Yea, let it be built speedily, by the tithing of my people. 12 Behold, this is the tithing and the sacrifice which I, the Lord, require at their hands, that there may be a house built unto me for the salvation of Zion-- 13 For a place of thanksgiving for all saints, and for a place of instruction for all those who are called to the work of the ministry in all their several callings and offices; 14 That they may be perfected in the understanding of their ministry, in theory, in principle, and in doctrine, in all things pertaining to the kingdom of God on the earth, the keys of which kingdom have been conferred upon you. 15 And inasmuch as my people build a house unto me in the name of the Lord, and do not suffer any unclean thing to come into it, that it be not defiled, my glory shall rest upon it; 16 Yea, and my presence shall be there, for I will come into it, and all the pure in heart that shall come into it shall see God. 17 But if it be defiled I will not come into it, and my glory shall not be there; for I will not come into unholy temples.

v10-17 The Lord again issues a command for them to build a Temple (cp. D&C 95 for the previous re-issuing). In v. 12-14, note the blatant Temple liturgy themes. Verses 15-17 echo the admonitions in D&C 94:8-9 to keep the House undefiled, and also addresses the wicked among Zion. The presence of a Temple among the Lord's people is linked to blessings in classical OT covenant theology, cp. Lev. 26:11-12.

18 And, now, behold, if Zion do these things she shall prosper, and spread herself and become very glorious, very great, and

very terrible. 19 And the nations of the earth shall honor her, and shall say: Surely Zion is the city of our God, and surely Zion cannot fall, neither be moved out of her place, for God is there, and the hand of the Lord is there; 20 And he hath sworn by the power of his might to be her salvation and her high tower. 21 Therefore, verily, thus saith the Lord, let Zion rejoice, for this is Zion--THE PURE IN HEART; therefore, let Zion rejoice, while all the wicked shall mourn. 22 For behold, and lo, vengeance cometh speedily upon the ungodly as the whirlwind; and who shall escape it? 23 The Lord's scourge shall pass over by night and by day, and the report thereof shall vex all people; yea, it shall not be stayed until the Lord come; 24 For the indignation of the Lord is kindled against their abominations and all their wicked works. 25 Nevertheless, Zion shall escape if she observe to do all things whatsoever I have commanded her. 26 But if she observe not to do whatsoever I have commanded her, I will visit her according to all her works, with sore affliction, with pestilence, with plague, with sword, with vengeance, with devouring fire.

v18-26 The covenant theology formula. At this time, the people in Missouri were suffering persecution, and therefore were seeking protection from the Lord (cp. D&C 98:11-22). The Lord informs them "if Zion do these things" (i.e., the substance of v. 10-17), then He pronounces the covenant blessing that she will be feared by her enemies, as opposed to the current situation (v. 18-20, cp. Lev. 26:6-8). And in order to do so, she must be "pure in heart", or in other words of one heart and one mind (v. 21, cp. Moses 7:18). However, if she does not do this, the Lord curses the wicked among Zion with the same fate as the wicked of the world (v. 22-26).

v18 Compare Joshua 1:7-9.

"very terrible", cp. D&C D&C 5:14, D&C 45:67-75. D&C 64:43.

v19 Compare Isa. 42:6, Zech. 2:10-12, Zech. 8:20-23.

v21 "Zion-the pure in heart", this phrase has led some to assume all that is required for Zion is for one individual to be pure in heart, leading them to say, "Where I am, Zion is." This definition is not Scriptural. The people of Zion are to be pure in heart, but considerably more is required to establish Zion. The scriptural definition of Zion is an exclusive corporate body of covenant people in a centrally gathered location. It is both a people (cf. Moses 7:18) and place (D&C 101:17-22, 63-75), not

one or the other.

v23 "the Lord's scourge", i.e., "sore affliction...devouring fire" (v. 26).

27 Nevertheless, let it be read this once to her ears, that I, the Lord, have accepted of her offering; and if she sin no more none of these things shall come upon her; 28 And I will bless her with blessings, and multiply a multiplicity of blessings upon her, and upon her generations forever and ever, saith the Lord your God. Amen.

v27-28 Conclusion of the section with a covenant benediction informing Zion that if she sins no more, then the Lord will bless her for many generations.

v28 "upon her generations for ever and ever", a better translation of the phrase "worlds without end", cp. D&C 76:112. This is tapping into the theme of Exod. 34:7, Deut. 5:9-10 where the Lord will bless thousands of generations of them that worship him.

Historical Material Pertaining to Doctrine & Covenants 97

This section was first published in the Kirtland edition Doctrine and Covenants in 1835, pages 208-210. It was published in Times and Seasons, volume 6, number 6, page 848, dated April 1, 1845. It was published in the Millennial Star, volume 14, number 32, pages 501-502, dated October 2, 1852.

Excerpt from Doctrine and Covenants Commentary

A brief statement of the condition of the Church at this time may be of some help to the younger students of these Revelations.

In Kirtland, the work on the Temple had commenced. On the 5th of June, 1833, George A. Smith hauled the first load of stone for that sacred building, and Hyrum Smith and Reynolds Cahoon began digging the trench for the walls, which they, later, finished. On the 6th it was decided, by a conference of High Priests, that the Building Committee should obtain stone, brick, lumber, etc., and begin building immediately. On the 23rd of July, the cornerstones were laid. The work was now being prosecuted with vigor, until the building was completed. It was dedicated on March 27th, 1836.

On the 25th of June, 1833, the First Presidency sent letters of instruction to William W. Phelps, Edward Partridge, and the brethren in Zion, and enclosed plans for the future city of Zion and its temples. The first city plat was to be one mile square, divided into blocks containing ten acres each, except the middle range of blocks, which were to contain fifteen acres each. All the blocks, except those containing schools and public buildings, were to be divided into half-acre lots, four by twenty rods each. The dwelling-houses were to stand twenty-four feet from the street. The plat would accommodate from eighteen to twenty thousand inhabitants. and they would need twenty-five buildings for schools and public worship. These buildings would be temples, and none would be less than eighty-seven feet by sixty-one. There were to be no barns or stables in the city, but these were to be situated on lands laid off for that purpose, on the north and south sides of the settlement. The farms would be situated east and west of the city, but the tiller of the soil, as well as the mechanic, merchant, and others, would live in the city. "When this square is thus laid off and supplied, lay off another in the same way," the Prophet wrote, "and so fill up the world in these last days" (Documentary History, Vol. 1:357).

What an admirable view of the future cities of the world! For this plan will certainly be adopted when civilization shall have advanced far enough to appreciate it. In such a city the farmer will enjoy every advantage of city life; and yet there will be no slums, and none of the disadvantages of the large cities, in which corrupt politicians, criminals, and dishonest business methods flourish.

Kirtland was growing, notwithstanding the opposition stirred up by apostates. Sidney Rigdon wrote, July 2nd:—"Doors are opening continually for proclaiming the gospel. The spirit of bitterness among the people is fast subsiding, and a spirit of inquiry is taking its place."

The Saints in Missouri, on the 6th of April, 1833, celebrated the third anniversary of the organization of the Church, by a conference at the Ferry, on Big Blue River, a stream a few miles west of Independence. At this time the gospel had been preached in nearly all the States of the Union, and many flourishing branches had been organized. The Saints were contemplating the future of Zion with joy.

In the month of July, however, a mob in Jackson County, led by a Rev. Pixley, began to move against the Saints. This clergyman had published false stories about them, in order to create a hostile sentiment. He carried from house to house a tract, entitled, "Beware of False Prophets," calculated to excite violence against the Church. This was followed by the publication of a manifesto calling for a mass meeting at Independence on the 20th of July, 1833, in which to decide on a course to pursue against the Saints. That the politicians of Jackson County eagerly embraced the opportunity of utilizing the adverse sentiment created by religious bigots, is evident from the signatures affixed to the manifesto. The most prominent names are those of political office-holders, such as jailers, justices of the peace, judges, a postmaster, a constable, a colonel, a judge of the court, an Indian agent, and others. In this manifesto the Saints were falsely accused of having invited negroes and mulattoes to become "Mormons" and settle in Missouri; also to have declared that they would, sooner or later, "have possession of our lands for an inheritance." The first of these charges was without any foundation whatever; the second, seemingly, had a foundation of truth, but it was only half a truth and therefore served the same purpose as a falsehood. The Saints had been promised land in Missouri for an inheritance, but only by purchase; nobody was to be injured.

On the 20th of July, the mass meeting convened. Inflamed by

falsehood strewn broadcast by religious fanatics and political office-seekers, the meeting demanded the discontinuance of the printing office, the closing of the store, and the cessation of all mechanical labor. When the brethren refused to comply with this law-defying dictum, the mob broke down the printing establishment, seized Edward Partridge and Charles Allen, daubed them with tar from head to foot and covered them with feathers, on the public square. Others were frightened from their homes by threats and yells. On the 23rd, the very same day on which the corner stones of the Kirtland Temple were laid, the brethren in Missouri, in order to prevent bloodshed, signed an agreement with the mob leaders to leave the country before the 1st of April, 1834. The brethren immediately sent Oliver Cowdery to Kirtland to report to the First Presidency. He arrived there early in September, 1833.

The Revelation in Sec. 97 was received before the arrival in Kirtland of Oliver Cowdery, and, consequently, before the Prophet knew any particulars of the storm of persecution that raged in the land of Zion. (Hyrum M. Smith and Janne M. Sjodahl, Doctrine and Covenants Commentary, pages 608-610)

Excerpt from The Revelations of the Prophet Joseph Smith

A letter from Joseph Smith and others to Church leaders in Jackson County, Missouri, explains the setting in which section 97 was received:

Having received br Oliver's letter of July 9th as well as one from the breatheren composing the school in Zion according to your request we now answer them both in one letter as relates to the school in Zion according to your request we enquired of the Lord and send this letter the communication which we received from the Lord concerning the school in Zion. It was obtained August 2 and reads thus [section 97].

(Lyndon W. Cook, The Revelations of the Prophet Joseph Smith)

Excerpt from Autobiography of Parley Parker Pratt

It was now the summer of 1833. Immigration had poured into the County of Jackson in great numbers; and the Church in that county now numbered upwards of one thousand souls. These had all purchased lands and paid for them, and most of them were

improving in buildings and in cultivation. Peace and plenty had crowned their labors, and the wilderness became a fruitful field, and the solitary place began to bud and blossom as the rose.

They lived in peace and quiet; no lawsuits with each other or with the world; few or no debts were contracted; few promises broken; there were no thieves, robbers, or murderers; few or no idlers; all seemed to worship God with a ready heart. On Sundays the people assembled to preach, pray, sing, and receive the ordinances of God. Other days all seemed busy in the various pursuits of industry. In short, there has seldom, if ever, been a happier people upon the earth than the Church of the Saints now were.

In the latter part of summer and in the autumn, I devoted almost my entire time in ministering among the churches; holding meetings; visiting the sick; comforting the afflicted, and giving counsel. A school of Elders was also organized, over which I was called to preside. This class, to the number of about sixty, met for instruction once a week. The place of meeting was in the open air, under some tall trees, in a retired place in the wilderness, where we prayed, preached and prophesied, and exercised ourselves in the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Here great blessings were poured out, and many great and marvelous things were manifested and taught. The Lord gave me great wisdom, and enabled me to teach and edify the Elders, and comfort and encourage them in their preparations for the great work which lay before us. I was also much edified and strengthened. To attend this school I had to travel on foot, and sometimes with bare feet at that, about six miles. This I did once a week, besides visiting and preaching in five or six branches a week.

While thus engaged, and in answer to our correspondence with the Prophet, Joseph Smith, at Kirtland, Ohio, the following revelation [D&C 97] was sent to us by him, dated August, 1833:

[text of D&C 97 quoted]

This revelation was not complied with by the leaders and Church in Missouri, as a whole; notwithstanding many were humble and faithful. Therefore, the threatened judgment was poured out to the uttermost, as the history of the five following years will show. (Parley P. Pratt, Autobiography of Parley Parker Pratt, pages 75-77)

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