

Comments on Doctrine & Covenants 127

A letter written by Smith while he was in seclusion to avoid arrest under false charges. The letter as it appears in the Doctrine & Covenants appears to be the complete text, not a selection, as was the case with D&C 121-123.

The text of the letter is well structured, with a long parenthetical comment in verse 1 explaining why he needs to separate himself from the ecclesia. Verses 2-3 continue the opening address, telling the audience the persecution is to be expected, before he turns to the main subject of the letter in v. 4-10, including two quotations of the Lord (v. 4, 6-9) concluding with v. 11-12. Given the main subject of vicarious ordinance work, it is clear Smith wants to spend more time teaching the ecclesia what he has learned on the matter, as it is a novel doctrine among the Christian sects.

1 FORASMUCH as the Lord has revealed unto me that my enemies, both in Missouri and this State, were again in the pursuit of me; and inasmuch as they pursue me without a cause, and have not the least shadow or coloring of justice or right on their side in the getting up of their prosecutions against me; and inasmuch as their pretensions are all founded in falsehood of the blackest dye, I have thought it expedient and wisdom in me to leave the place for a short season, for my own safety and the safety of this people. I would say to all those with whom I have business, that I have left my affairs with agents and clerks who will transact all business in a prompt and proper manner, and will see that all my debts are canceled in due time, by turning out property, or otherwise, as the case may require, or as the circumstances may admit of. when I learn that the storm is fully blown over, then I will return to you again.

v1 The persecutions faced by Smith are declared unjust. Despite this, Smith does not take advantage of the difficult circumstances to shirk his financial and business obligations.

2 And as for the perils which I am called to pass through, they seem but a small thing to me, as the envy and wrath of man have been my common lot all the days of my life; and for what cause it seems mysterious, unless I was ordained from before the foundation of the world for some good end, or bad, as you may choose to call it. Judge ye for yourselves. God knoweth all these things, whether it be good or bad. But nevertheless, deep water is what I am wont to swim in. It all has become a second nature to me; and I feel, like Paul, to glory in tribulation;

for to this day has the God of my fathers delivered me out of them all, and will deliver me from henceforth; for behold, and lo, I shall triumph over all my enemies, for the Lord God hath spoken it. 3 Let all the saints rejoice, therefore, and be exceedingly glad; for Israel's God is their God, and he will mete out a just recompense of reward upon the heads of all their oppressors.

v2-3 Smith glories in his tribulations by taking solace in knowing that the Lord will mete out Justice in the end.

4 And again, verily thus saith the Lord: Let the work of my temple, and all the works which I have appointed unto you, be continued on and not cease; and let your diligence, and your perseverance, and patience, and your works be redoubled, and you shall in nowise lose your reward, saith the Lord of Hosts. And if they persecute you, so persecuted they the prophets and righteous men that were before you. For all this there is a reward in heaven.

5 And again, I give unto you a word in relation to the baptism for your dead.

6 Verily, thus saith the Lord unto you concerning your dead: when any of you are baptized for your dead, let there be a recorder, and let him be eye-witness of your baptisms; let him hear with his ears, that he may testify of a truth, saith the Lord; 7 That in all your recordings it may be recorded in heaven; whatsoever you bind on earth, may be bound in heaven; whatsoever you loose on earth, may be loosed in heaven; 8 For I am about to restore many things to the earth, pertaining to the priesthood, saith the Lord of Hosts. 9 And again, let all the records be had in order, that they may be put in the archives of my holy temple, to be held in remembrance from generation to generation, saith the Lord of Hosts.

v4-9 These verses contains two quotations of the Lord wherein He speaks on the issue of Temple work. Verse 4 tells them to keep working on the Temple. Verses 6-9 emphasize the importance of record keeping. Verse 7 indicates that a heavenly record parallels the earthly record, cp. D&C 128:5-7.

v5 This verse, and the last two sentences of v. 4 appear to be an insertion by Smith in between two different quotations of the Lord. In both v. 4 and 6-9, the divine quotations are bracketed by "saith the Lord...saith the Lord of Hosts", making a clear indication of where the quotations start and end.

10 I will say to all the saints, that I desired, with exceedingly great desire, to have addressed them from the stand

on the subject of baptism for the dead, on the following Sabbath. But inasmuch as it is out of my power to do so, I will write the word of the Lord from time to time, on that subject, and send it to you by mail, as well as many other things.

v10 Smith is speaking again and states that if the conditions were favorable he would address the matter of vicarious baptisms for the dead at length. This statement is subsequently followed up a few days later by the letter appearing as D&C 128.

11 I now close my letter for the present, for the want of more time; for the enemy is on the alert, and as the Savior said, the prince of this world cometh, but he hath nothing in me. 12 Behold, my prayer to God is that you all may be saved. And I subscribe myself your servant in the Lord, prophet and seer of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Joseph Smith.

v11-12 Closing salutation.

Historical Material Pertaining to Doctrine & Covenants 127

This section was first published in Times and Seasons, volume 3, number 22, pages 919-920, dates September 15, 1842. It was published in Desert News, volume 5, number 41, page 321. It was published in the Millennial Star, volume 19, number 50, pages 790-791, dated December 12, 1857. It was first published in the Doctrine and Covenants in 1844, pages 418-420.

Excerpt from Elders' Journal

Question 16th. If the Mormon doctrine is true what has become of all those who have died since the days of the apostles.

Answer. All those who have not had an opportunity of hearing the gospel, and being administered to by an inspired man in the flesh, must have it hereafter, before they can be finally judged. ([Joseph Smith, Elder' Journal, May 1838, page 43](#))

Excerpt from History of the Church

I have one remark to make respecting the baptism for the dead to suffice for the time being, until I have opportunity to discuss the subject at greater length all persons baptized for the dead must have a recorder present, that he may be an eyewitness to record and testify of the truth and validity of his record. It will be necessary, in the Grand Council, that these things be testified to by competent witnesses. Therefore let the recording and witnessing of baptisms for the dead be carefully attended to from this time forth. [Sec. 128:2-5.] If there is any lack, it may be at the expense of our friends; they may not come forth. (Joseph Smith, History of the Church, volume 5, page 141)

Excerpt from Millennial Star

Springfield, Illinois,
January 3, 1843

President Joseph Smith has this day received a full and complete discharge from all his bonds and difficulties, touching the case of Missouri, in the case of Lilburn W. Bogg's attempted assassination, having undergone a patient and laborious investigation by the circuit court of the United States, now in session in this place, Judge Pope presiding. It was decided that

all the proceedings against the Mormon Prophet were illegal, and that the case should never be revived again.

Joseph is in good health and fine spirits, and are all rejoicing that righteousness has prevailed throughout all the deliberations of the court, consequently Joseph is again free and ready to attend to his Master's business. The Saints rejoice, and the heavens are glad, that truth has not entirely left the earth, and that the kingdom is at hand.

Yours in the gospel,
W. Richards

(Willard Richards, Millennial Star, volume 3, page 190, March 1843)

Excerpt from Revelations of the Prophet Joseph Smith

Sections 127 and 128 consist of two letters dictated by Joseph Smith on Thursday, 1 September, and Tuesday, 6 September, 1842. These two letters, written in the hand of William Clayton, were addressed to "all the Saints in Nauvoo" at a time when the Prophet was making few public appearances because of threats of unlawful arrest. Governor Carlin of Illinois, responding to a demand from the governor of Missouri, issued a warrant for Joseph Smith's arrest as an accessory before the fact in an assault with intent to kill Lilburn W. Boggs, ex-governor of Missouri. Having been arrested but temporarily released on 8 August 1842, the Prophet remained "in retirement" to avoid reapprehension. It was not until 5 January 1843 that Joseph Smith was formally discharged from this arrest.

The letters concern themselves with salvation for the dead, a subject of much interest and discussion in 1842. Baptism for the dead was first publicly announced on 15 August 1840 at the funeral of Seymour Brunson. Immediately after the announcement of the new doctrine, Church members began performing proxy baptisms in the Mississippi River and in local streams. While those administering these vicarious ordinances in 1840 were not without authority, the actions were not recorded; consequently the baptisms were later repeated. On 3 October 1841 Joseph Smith declared, "There shall be no more baptisms for the dead, until the ordinances can be attended to in the Lord's House.... For thus saith the Lord." Baptisms for the dead in the Nauvoo Temple were first performed on Sunday, 21 November 1841. With few exceptions, endowments and sealings for the dead were first administered in the St. George, Utah, Temple.

On 31 August 1842, while addressing members of the Female Relief Society in Nauvoo, Joseph Smith remarked that "a few things had been manifested to him...respecting the baptism for the dead." Although he desired to wait "until he had opportunity to discuss the subject to greater length," the Prophet emphasized that "all persons baptiz'd for the dead must have a Recorder present, that he may be an eye-witness to testify of it. "Sections 127 and 128 both give special attention to the matter of having witnesses and recorders for the work of the dead. (Lyndon W. Cook, Revelations of the Prophet Joseph Smith)

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