

Comments on Doctrine & Covenants 136

This is the only canonized revelation from Brigham Young. Despite being from a different "author" the syntax and rhetorical style of the language is the same as that of the other sections of the Doctrine and Covenants. Thus indicating the true source of the revelation.

The primary message of this revelation is the members of the Church must "covenant and promise to keep all the commandments and statutes of the Lord our God...[and then]... walk in all the ordinances of the Lord" (v. 2-4). This theme appears in the introduction, conclusion (v. 42), and theological discussion which forms the main body of the text (v. 19-21, 23-29). These simple truths are the wisdom which the ignorant must learn by humbling themselves (v. 32).

The Church fears her enemies, those who are persecuting her, and they have become entirely too caught up in temporal things. Here, the Lord reminds them He is the Deliverer of Israel anciently (v. 22) and He is still Israel's Deliverer. But, He is Israel's deliverer because of the covenant, which covenant the Church must not break. If they break it, then the Lord will not be obliged to protect them temporally or eternally. He can deliver them just as he did ancient Israel from Egypt, but they have to be keeping the covenants in order to obtain the fullest blessings of His protection. So, the Lord reminds them where the real protection is, and how to get it.

1 THE word and will of the Lord concerning the Camp of Israel in their journeyings to the west: 2 Let all the people of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and those who journey with them, be organized into companies, with a covenant and promise to keep all the commandments and statutes of the Lord our God. 3 Let the companies be organized with captains of hundreds, captains of fifties, and captains of tens, with a president and his two counselors at their head, under the direction of the Twelve Apostles. 4 And this shall be our covenant--that we will walk in all the ordinances of the Lord.

v1-4 These verse from an introduction. Verse 1 identifies the text as the will of the Lord. These verses emphasize that those going West with the Church must keep the commandments of the Lord Their failure to keep them is the reason they are being driven out, cp. v. 21, 37.

5 Let each company provide themselves with all the teams, wagons, provisions, clothing, and other necessaries for the journey, that they can. 6 When the companies are organized let them go to with their might, to prepare for those who are to tarry. 7 Let each

company, with their captains and presidents, decide how many can go next spring; then choose out a sufficient number of able-bodied and expert men, to take teams, seeds, and farming utensils, to go as pioneers to prepare for putting in spring crops.

8 Let each company bear an equal proportion, according to the dividend of their property, in taking the poor, the widows, the fatherless, and the families of those who have gone into the army, that the cries of the widow and the fatherless come not up into the ears of the Lord against this people. 9 Let each company prepare houses, and fields for raising grain, for those who are to remain behind this season; and this is the will of the Lord concerning his people.

10 Let every man use all his influence and property to remove this people to the place where the Lord shall locate a stake of Zion. 11 And if ye do this with a pure heart, in all faithfulness, ye shall be blessed; you shall be blessed in your flocks, and in your herds, and in your fields, and in your houses, and in your families.

12 Let my servants Ezra T. Benson and Erastus Snow organize a company. 13 And let my servants Orson Pratt and Wilford Woodruff organize a company. 14 Also, let my servants Amasa Lyman and George A. Smith organize a company. 15 And appoint presidents, and captains of hundreds, and of fifties, and of tens. 16 And let my servants that have been appointed go and teach this, my will, to the saints, that they may be ready to go to a land of peace.

v5-16 The Lord commands them to organize companies. They are to choose out from among them a group of men who are skilled so they may leave immediately and prepare the way for others to follow (v. 5-7). The companies are to combine their efforts according to their means to support those who are in need and establish a means for those who are staying to subsist (v. 8-9). Everyone is to do everything within their power in purity of heart to get all of the people to where the Lord will have them (v. 10), and if they do this then they will be blessed greatly (v. 11). The Lord then gives a number of specific calls for leading companies and general rules of organization (v. 12-16).

The admonition in v. 10-11 echoes the previous calls for the Saints to practice the Law of Consecration, cf. D&C 42:30-39, D&C 51.

17 Go thy way and do as I have told you, and fear not thine enemies; for they shall not have power to stop my work. 18 Zion shall be redeemed in mine own due time.

19 And if any man shall seek to build up himself, and seeketh not my counsel, he shall have no power, and his folly shall be made manifest. 20 Seek ye; and keep all your pledges one

with another; and covet not that which is thy brother's. 21 Keep yourselves from evil to take the name of the Lord in vain, for I am the Lord your God, even the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob.

22 I am he who led the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; and my arm is stretched out in the last days, to save my people Israel.

23 Cease to contend one with another; cease to speak evil one of another. 24 Cease drunkenness; and let your words tend to edifying one another. 25 If thou borrowest of thy neighbor, thou shalt restore that which thou hast borrowed; and if thou canst not repay then go straightway and tell thy neighbor, lest he condemn thee. 26 If thou shalt find that which thy neighbor has lost, thou shalt make diligent search till thou shalt deliver it to him again. 27 Thou shalt be diligent in preserving what thou hast, that thou mayest be a wise steward; for it is the free gift of the Lord thy God, and thou art his steward. 28 If thou art merry, praise the Lord with singing, with music, with dancing, and with a prayer of praise and thanksgiving. 29 If thou art sorrowful, call on the Lord thy God with supplication, that your souls may be joyful.

30 Fear not thine enemies, for they are in mine hands and I will do my pleasure with them. 31 My people must be tried in all things, that they may be prepared to receive the glory that I have for them, even the glory of Zion; and he that will not bear chastisement is not worthy of my kingdom.

32 Let him that is ignorant learn wisdom by humbling himself and calling upon the Lord his God, that his eyes may be opened that he may see, and his ears opened that he may hear; 33 For my Spirit is sent forth into the world to enlighten the humble and contrite, and to the condemnation of the ungodly.

v17-33 A series of admonitions and counsel. The primary message here is "Don't worry about your enemies (v. 17-18, 22, 30-31), the real problem is your own selves (v. 19-21, 23-29)". The Lord had been admonishing the Saints for years to repent and, in general, they didn't. What sins did they persistently commit? Those listed in v. 19-21 and v. 23-29. Had they kept the Lord's commands their enemies would have had no power over them, even as the Lord told them earlier, cf. D&C 124:45-48.

v17 Compare v. 30, 34-40, and D&C 122:9.

v19 Self-promoters are warned off. Given the history at Nauvoo of prominent members apostatizing and promoting themselves against Joseph and the present conflict over who would be taking the lead in the Church, it is plain to see why the Lord is telling self-promoters they will be exposed.

v20-21 Doing evil after covenanting is taking the Lord's name in

vain, as also is entering into a covenant without real intent, cp. D&C 41:1, D&C 63:61-62.

v22 The hand of Providence is extended to modern Israel as it was extended anciently to Israel during the Exodus, for example the Miracle of the Quails both ancient and contemporary. But, the main thrust of this verse is to parallel the substance of v. 17-18 and v. 30-31. The Lord performed great miracles to get Israel out of Egypt, and will do the same for modern Israel.

v24 "Cease drunkenness", the Word of Wisdom (cf. D&C 89) was given some 14 years earlier and the people still were not generally observing it.

v26 A paraphrase from the Law of Moses, cf. Lev. 6:4, Deut. 22:3.

v27 All of our material possessions are the Lord's, and we are simply stewards over it. Thus we are to be diligent with it and obviously will be held accountable for what we did with it.

v31 Compare Mosiah 23:21-24, Mosiah 24:13-15.

v32 This verse is addressing those who are deliberately ignorant, or one who is ignoring. This person must "humble himself and call upon the Lord". As for the opening of the eyes and ears of this rebellious person, this theme is drawn from Isa. 6:9-10. Also compare D&C 131:6. The Lord is addressing those who do not or will not understand what He is saying in the preceding v. 17-31.

34 Thy brethren have rejected you and your testimony, even the nation that has driven you out; 35 And now cometh the day of their calamity, even the days of sorrow, like a woman that is taken in travail; and their sorrow shall be great unless they speedily repent, yea, very speedily. 36 For they killed the prophets, and them that were sent unto them; and they have shed innocent blood, which crieth from the ground against them.

37 Therefore, marvel not at these things, for ye are not yet pure; ye can not yet bear my glory; but ye shall behold it if ye are faithful in keeping all my words that I have given you, from the days of Adam to Abraham, from Abraham to Moses, from Moses to Jesus and his apostles, and from Jesus and his apostles to Joseph Smith, whom I did call upon by mine angels, my ministering servants, and by mine own voice out of the heavens, to bring forth my work; 38 which foundation he did lay, and was faithful; and I took him to myself. 39 Many have marveled because of his death; but it was needful that he should seal his testimony with his blood, that he might be honored and the wicked might be

condemned. 40 Have I not delivered you from your enemies, only in that I have left a witness of my name?

v34-40 The Lord explains why it was necessary for Joseph to die. The nation in general has rejected the Lord's Church and His prophet and have murdered him, so his blood will stand as an unambiguous testimony against them (v. 34-36). The people of the Church do not understand the necessity or context of Smith's martyrdom because they are not living the way they ought to (v. 37) according to the things Smith established (v. 38). The result is they do not understand, or marvel at or wonder over, his death as to how the Lord could have permitted such a thing and what the consequences of it will be for them. The Lord makes it clear it was necessary so that Joseph would be honored as a martyr and his enemies would be damned for murder (v. 39). He then also points out to them that He has delivered the Church from their enemies, even though the individuals Joseph and Hyrum were martyred (v. 40).

v34 "the nation", this would be translated to Hebrew as "ha goyim", which term is translated to both "nation" and "Gentiles" in the KJV. The former rendition being more literal physical and the latter having obvious spiritual connotations. The latter reading would be supported by the Exodus theme from v. 22 where they are likened to Israel fleeing from the Egyptians, who were Gentiles.

v35 "like a woman that is in travail", a Semitism for great agony referring to the pain a woman experiences at childbirth, cp. Isa. 13:8, Isa. 66:7, Micah 4:10, John 16:21. The imagery is interesting because their physical suffering is likened to birth pains because they are wicked, however if they would repent and be born again (cf. John 3) spiritually (which in itself would be spiritually trying) they would not have to endure this physical suffering.

v37 The Lord again tells them they are not living the commandments that have been handed down by His prophets through the ages. Only when they live all the things they have been taught will they be able to behold the fulness of His glory.

"ye are not yet pure", cp. v. 31.

v40 The Lord is pointing out to the Church that He has delivered them from their enemies and it is only Joseph and Hyrum who were killed. The question in the mind of the Church being addressed here is "If Joseph and Hyrum were murdered, are we next?"

The fears of the Church members would range from the self-

deprecating "Are we so wicked the Lord will not protect us and we will die like Joseph and Hyrum?" all the way to the fault-finding apostate "Joseph and Hyrum were wicked and that is why the Lord allowed them to be killed". Perhaps in such a time of turmoil some were even questioning their belief in God at all.

The Lord wants the Church to set aside all of their irrational fears of temporal enemies and focus on the concrete reality of His previously delivering them, and his continuing efforts to deliver them.

The historical record indicates there were attempts by the Church's enemies at Nauvoo to massacre all of the inhabitants and not just Joseph and Hyrum (cf. B. H. Roberts, Comprehensive History of the Church, Volume 2, pages 309-310 and 475). These attempts were always foiled, and the Lord is pointing this out to them.

41 Now, therefore, hearken, O ye people of my church; and ye elders listen together; you have received my kingdom. 42 Be diligent in keeping all my commandments, lest judgments come upon you, and your faith fail you, and your enemies triumph over you. So no more at present. Amen and Amen.

v41-42 Closing admonition to be faithful, and beware of judgements that would fall upon them as a result of disobedience.

v42 "So no more at present", the Lord indicates He isn't going to be revealing any more at the present time, cp. D&C 132:66.

Historical Material Pertaining to Doctrine & Covenants 136

Below are three excerpts, placed in roughly chronological order. The first details the events that forced the Saints from Nauvoo. The second recounts the events that surrounded the revealing of the text of section 136. The last is a summation that indicates it was Joseph's intent some time before the exodus from Nauvoo to establish the Saints out West in the Rocky Mountains.

Excerpt from History of Utah

Brigham Young succeeded Joseph Smith as leader of the Latter-day Saints. Sidney Rigdon claimed the leadership. It was to secure it that he came from Pittsburgh on learning of the Prophet's death. Being his first counselor in the Presidency, though Joseph, distrusting his fidelity, had long since virtually cast him off, Elder Rigdon believed, or affected to believe that this entitled him to the succession. A small fraction of the Saints felt likewise.

But the hearts of the people, as a rule, were not with Sidney...Sidney's claim, though plausible, was not valid according to Church policy. The First Presidency to which he had belonged was no more. Death had dissolved that council. The Prophet in life had taught that "where he was not there was no First Presidency over the Twelve." [HC 2:374.] Next in order stood the Twelve the Apostles with Brigham Young as their President. Instinctively the people turned to Brigham, for they loved and trusted him, and by that "right divine," no less than of seniority and succession in the Priesthood, he became their President and spiritual guide.

Sidney Rigdon, after his rejection by the Saints, returned to Pittsburgh. Soon afterward he was excommunicated....

In January, 1845, the Legislature of Illinois, yielding to long-continued popular pressure, repealed the Nauvoo charter....

At a Mormon settlement called Morley, a few miles from Nauvoo, a band of incendiaries, on the night of September 10th, began operations. Deliberately setting fire to the house of Edmund Durfee they turned the inmates out of doors and threatened them with death if they did not at once leave the settlement. Durfee they subsequently killed. The mob continued its nefarious work until Morley was in ashes, and its people homeless. Green Plains and Bear Creek, localities also settled by the Saints, were next visited by the house-burners, and in like manner devastated. Such scenes continued for a week, during which nearly two hundred houses, shops and sheds were destroyed and the people driven away. A hundred and thirty-five teams went out from Nauvoo to bring in the homeless refugees, with what grain had been saved

from the flames.

Intense excitement now reigned, not only at Nauvoo, and in the out-lying Mormon settlements that nightly anticipated attack, but throughout Hancock County. Non-Mormons not of the radical class disapproved of these deeds of vandalism, and Sheriff Backenstos, of Carthage to his honor be it said did everything in his power to quell the riots and punish the guilty parties. He first issued a proclamation, demanding that they desist. This order they ignored. He then called upon the posse comitatus the power of the county to assist him in dispersing the rioters. But there was no response. Finally he applied to the Mormons for a posse, which was furnished him, and he proceeded at once against the house-burners.

In the encounters that ensued two mobocrats were killed.... The Mormon settlements around Nauvoo were now evacuated, the people fearing pillage and massacre, gathering into the city for protection.

At this juncture Governor [Thomas] Ford put forth his hand to restore order.... The result was an agreement by the Latter-day Saints to leave Illinois; the exodus to begin in the spring. The demand came from a meeting of representatives of nine counties of the State, assembled at Carthage....

Pursuant to the terms of the agreement, which satisfied General Hardin and his associate commissioners, and appeased for a time the anti-Mormons, preparations went forward all during the fall and winter for the spring exodus. Houses and land in and around Nauvoo were sold, leased or abandoned. Wagons by hundreds were purchased or manufactured, and horses, mules, oxen, riding draft and pack animals in general procured in large numbers. Clothing, bedding, provisions, tents, tools, household goods, family relics and camp equipage composed the lading, wherewith animals and vehicles were packed and loaded until little or no room remained.

At length, all being ready for a start, on the 4th of February, 1846, the exodus of the Mormons from Illinois began.... By the middle of February a thousand souls, with their wagons, teams and effects had been landed on the Iowa shore.

Sugar Creek, nine miles westward, was made the rendezvous and starting point of the great overland pilgrimage. Here the advance companies pitched their tents, and awaited the coming of their leaders. The weather was bitter cold, the ground snow-covered and desolate as to have dismayed souls less trustful in Providence, less inured to hardship and suffering than they. It was February 5th that the first camp formed on Sugar Creek. That night a bitter night, nine wives became mothers; nine children were born in tents and wagons in that wintry camp. How these tender babes, these sick and delicate women were cared for under such conditions, is left to the imagination of the sensitive

reader. How these Mormon exiles, outcasts of civilization, carrying their aged, infirm and helpless across the desolate plains and prairies, were tracked and trailed thereafter by the nameless graves of their dead, is a tale which though often attempted, has never been and never will be fully told....

At various points between the Mississippi and the Missouri the Mormons founded temporary settlements, or, as they called them, "traveling stakes of Zion," fencing the land, building log cabins, and putting in crops for their own use or for the benefit of their people who came after them. Two of these "stakes" were named Garden Grove and Mount Pisgah; the former on the east fork of Grand River, one hundred and forty-five miles from Nauvoo, and the latter near the middle fork of the Grand, twenty-seven miles farther west. Mount Pisgah was on the Pottawatomie Indian lands.

A thousand west-bound wagons of the Saints were now rolling over the prairies of Iowa....

Some of the Mormons had early crossed to the west side of the [Missouri] river, constructing a ferry-boat for that purpose, and settled, by permission of the Indians Omahas upon the lands set apart for their use by the Federal Government....

As the season advanced the settlers on the west side were instructed to congregate in one place, and a site being chosen for that purpose they there founded their celebrated Winter Quarters. This place is now Florence, Nebraska, five miles above the city of Omaha.... Garden Grove and Mount Pisgah were still inhabited; their numbers now swelled by the refugees from Nauvoo. Here in these humble prairie settlements, surrounded by Indians, hopeful and even happy, though enduring much sickness and privation, which resulted in many deaths, the pilgrim Mormons passed the winter of 1846-7.... "The word and will of the Lord concerning the Camp of Israel in their journeyings to the West," was issued by President Young at Winter Quarters [Iowa] on the 14th of January 1847. A few paragraphs of this manifesto the first of its kind, penned by the Prophet's successor will convey some idea of the nature of the preparations for the continued exodus: [Sec. 136:2-11, 20-31, quoted.]

Agreeable to these instructions the Saints went to work with a will, and as spring opened all was life, bustle and stir at their camps on the Missouri, and at their other settlements on the prairies of Iowa. (Orson F. Whitney, History of Utah, volume 1, pages 233-299)

Excerpt from Revelations of the Prophet Joseph Smith

After the Saints' exodus from Nauvoo in 1846, Mormon settlements soon spanned the state of Iowa and dotted the west bank of the Missouri River in Nebraska. Section 136 was received by Brigham Young in January 1847 after Church leaders had

discussed and deliberated upon the "best manner of organizing companies for emigration." On Thursday, 14 January 1847, members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles met at Heber C. Kimball's dwelling, where

President Young proposed that letters be written to instruct brethren how to organize companies for emigration.... President Young commenced to give the Word and Will of God concerning the emigration of the Saints and those who journeyed with them. At 4:30 P.M. the council adjourned.

At seven, the Twelve met at Elder Benson's. President Young continued to dictate the word and will of the Lord. Council adjourned at ten P.M., when President Young retired with Dr. Richards to the Octagon and finished writing the same.

At a meeting of the Twelve Apostles and the Winter Quarters high council on 16 January 1847, the following discussion transpired:

Present of the Twelve

Brigham Young H.C. Kimball Willard Richards
present of the [High] Council
George W Harris President Reynolds Cahoon C.P.
Lott Ezra Chase Daniel Russel Alonzo Eldrige Thomas
Grover Isaac Morley Winslow Farr
Council was opened by Prayer by G.W. Harris
The mind & will of God as written by the Twelve of the
14th of January 1847 was read by Dr. Richards
Co[uncilo]r Reynolds Cahoon moved that the com-
munication be received as the mind & will of God as it
purports. Second by Isaac Morley
Co[uncilo]r A Eldrige approved it Come to his un-
derstanding
Co[uncilo]r Morley approved it
Co[uncilo]r Cahoon said it was the same voice as all
other righteous come from.
Co[uncilo]r Farr Said it reminded him of the first
reading of the Book of Mormon, he was perfectly
satisfied that it was from the Lord
Co[uncilo]r Lott perfectly satisfied it give peace
Co[uncilo]r D. Russel feels as he did the first M[ormon]
sermon he ever head says that it is true & glories in them
& means to stand & sustain all these things
Co[uncilo]r Chase is perfectly satisfied
President Harris was so well satisfied that he wanted to

say Amen at once

Co[uncilo]r Grover felt that it was the voice of the spirit has the same confidence as he has in every thing we have called revelation.

Vote found to be unanimous

Horrace S. Eldrige... says he felt to receive it as the word & will of the Lord & that it would prove our salvation if carried out. Hosea Stout the Clerk says if there is any thing in Mormonism that is the voice of the Lord to this people & means to live up to it.

Alter much conversation & the second reading of the word & will the council adjourned.

During the rest of the month of January 1847, the revelation was presented to members of the church in Nebraska and Iowa, where it was approved unanimously. (Lyndon W. Cook, Revelations of the Prophet Joseph Smith, pages 297-300)

Excerpt from Conference Report

In 1847 the Latter-day Saints, under the leadership of President Brigham Young began to fulfill the prediction of the Prophet Joseph who had declared, two years before his death, that the Saints would "become a mighty people in the midst of the Rocky Mountains" [see the full quotation below]. In the book of Doctrine and Covenants there is a revelation entitled "The Word and Will of the Lord," to a people encamped upon the Missouri river, who had left civilization behind, who had been driven from their homes and were making preparation to cross the great plains and mountains and settle in this then empty and desolate land. That "Word and Will of the Lord" commanded the people of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to organize themselves into companies of hundreds, fifties, and tens preparatory to the long and wearisome ox-team journey to Salt Lake Valley. (Orson F. Whitney, Conference Report, October 1916, pages 54-55)

[Saturday, 6.—Passed over the river to Montrose, Iowa, in company with General Adams, Colonel Brewer, and others, and witnessed the installation of the officers of the Rising Sun Lodge Ancient York Masons, at Montrose, by General James Adams, Deputy Grand-Master of Illinois. While the Deputy Grand-Master was engaged in giving the requisite instructions to the Master-elect, I had a conversation with a number of brethren in the shade of the building on the subject of our persecutions in Missouri and the constant annoyance which has followed us since we were driven from that state. I prophesied that the Saints would continue to suffer much affliction and would be driven to the Rocky

Mountains, many would apostatize, others would be put to death by our persecutors or lose their lives in consequence of exposure or disease, and some of you will live to go and assist in making settlements and build cities and see the Saints become a mighty people in the midst of the Rocky Mountains. (Joseph Smith, History of the Church, volume 5, page 85)]

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