

Comments on Doctrine & Covenants 137

Approximately four years after the revelation of D&C 76, Smith has an additional revelation about the celestial kingdom. Chronologically, this section would fall between D&C 108 and 109. The revelation is a mix of Smith's observations and recounting of the vision (v. 1-6, 10) with a quotation of the Lord (v. 7-9).

The occasion of the vision was Joseph, Jr. giving his father, Joseph, Sr, an anointing and blessing as part of a Kirtland Temple era early Endowment ceremony. Smith, Sr. then in turn blesses Joseph, Jr., as well as others present. In the vision, Joseph sees his deceased older brother in heaven with Adam and Abraham. Joseph also sees his father and mother, who at that time were not deceased, in heaven as well.

The larger context is given in v. 6, namely the gathering of Israel. Smith sees Father Adam, the first of all mankind, and then sees Abraham, the originator of the covenant with Israel. Intervening history is then skipped through to Joseph Smith, Sr. and Lucy Mack Smith and then Alvin, in that order. Joseph Sr. and Lucy were included in the vision to illustrate the family lineage connections that result in Alvin being redeemed as part of the covenant with Israel (cf. 2 Ne. 3:15).

The connection of D&C 137 to the content of D&C 138 is the present text explains the why and D&C 138 explains how proxy Temple work is part of the Lord's plan. Underlying this is the implicit necessity of Temple worship in Church theology. Reviewing the preceding revelations on the subject are instructive:

D&C 124:29-36 Ecclesia told to perform baptisms for the dead in Temples, to stem the contemporary ad hoc practices that had arisen. This discussion is purely practical, no theological explanation of purpose.

D&C 127:5-12 Ecclesia told to keep records in a deliberate fashion. Again, discussion is purely practical, no theological discussion on purpose.

D&C 128:18 This section does have a robust discussion of the Scriptural and theological basis for baptism for the dead, but it is presented from the mortal side, meaning how it impacts us now, and the Abrahamic Covenant is only

obliquely implied, never directly addressed.

With the present text, the Lord's side, the eternal side, of the theology is clearly presented as part of the Abrahamic Covenant. The following section D&C 138 then discusses how it happened and continues to work on the post-mortal side, outside of our view.

This section could be seen as addressing some of the classical problems of [Christian soteriology](#), most notably, "What happens to those who die without accepting Jesus Christ?" (Tangentially it addresses matters of Divine Sovereignty and human free will which have divided Christianity for centuries, e.g., [Calvinism](#), [Arminianism](#), and [Molinism](#).) But, that is not the main theological issue being addressed here. The main issue is the importance and necessity of the salvation of the dead as part of the covenants made to Abraham. Alvin is part of literal Israel, and as such, is covered by the promises made to Abraham, and, therefore, needs to be redeemed.

1 THE heavens were opened upon us, and I beheld the celestial kingdom of God, and the glory thereof, whether in the body or out I cannot tell. 2 I saw the transcendent beauty of the gate through which the heirs of that kingdom will enter, which was like unto circling flames of fire; 3 Also the blazing throne of God, whereon was seated the Father and the Son. 4 I saw the beautiful streets of that kingdom, which had the appearance of being paved with gold.

v1-4 These verses describe the brightness and brilliance of this kingdom. The various statements describing things as being like fire blazing forth is typical scriptural rhetoric meant to convey the objects are brilliantly luminous, cp. Exod. 3:2, Deut. 4:11, 2 Kings 2:11, Ezek. 1:4.

5 I saw Father Adam and Abraham; and my father and my mother; my brother Alvin, that has long since slept; 6 And marveled how it was that he had obtained an inheritance in that kingdom, seeing that he had departed this life before the Lord had set his hand to gather Israel the second time, and had not been baptized for the remission of sins.

v5 Smith indicates he sees a number of people in the celestial kingdom including Adam, Abraham, and his father, mother and older brother, Alvin.

Both Adam and Abraham clearly would have been deceased and

resurrected at this point, and Alvin was deceased (November 19, 1823) but neither of his parents were deceased at this point in time (Joseph Smith Sr. deceased September 14, 1840, Lucy Mack Smith deceased May 14, 1856). The vision must be a future prediction intended to convey a doctrinal principal, as opposed to present the current reality.

v6 Smith is surprised to see Alvin there, as he was not a child when he died (Alvin was 26 per JS-H 1:4) and had not been baptized previous to his death.

7 Thus came the voice of the Lord unto me, saying: All who have died without a knowledge of this gospel, who would have received it if they had been permitted to tarry, shall be heirs of the celestial kingdom of God; 8 Also all that shall die henceforth without a knowledge of it, who would have received it with all their hearts, shall be heirs of that kingdom; 9 For I, the Lord, will judge all men according to their works, according to the desire of their hearts.

v7-9 The Lord explains to Smith that those who are without the law, but are such that they would have accepted it in mortality had it been presented to them, inherit celestial glory.

Naturally, we assume all of the post-mortal proselyting and vicarious ordinance work is implicit. However, at this point Alvin's vicarious work had not been performed, yet he still had access to celestial glory. One would assume those who have to wait for their vicarious ordinance work to be performed in order to enter into celestial glory are those who are presently of terrestrial quality, see comments D&C 76:71-80.

10 And I also beheld that all children who die before they arrive at the years of accountability are saved in the celestial kingdom of heaven.

v10 Smith additionally notes little children who die unaccountable automatically gain entry into celestial glory, cp. Moroni 8:8, D&C 29:46, D&C 74:7. We would presume Smith saw many of these people, perhaps as children, in the kingdom of heaven, maybe even his own children.

Unfortunately, Smith offered no additional details as to what prompted this statement.

Historical Material Pertaining to Doctrine & Covenants 137

This section was first added to the Pearl of Great Price in 1976, and then into the 1981 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants.

Excerpt from History of the Church

At early candle-light I met with the Presidency at the west school room, in the Temple, to attend to the ordinance of anointing our heads with holy oil; also the Councils of Kirtland and Zion met in the two adjoining rooms, and waited in prayer while we attended to the ordinance. I took the oil in my left hand, Father Smith being seated before me, and the remainder of the Presidency encircled him round about. We then stretched our right hands towards heaven, and blessed the oil, and consecrated it in the name of Jesus Christ.

We then laid our hands upon our aged Father Smith, and invoked the blessings of heaven. I then anointed his head with the consecrated oil, and sealed many blessings upon him. The Presidency then in turn laid their hands upon his head, beginning at the oldest, until they had all laid their hands upon him, and pronounced such blessings upon his head, as the Lord put into their hearts, all blessing him to be our Patriarch, to anoint our heads, and attend to all duties that pertain to that office. The Presidency then took the seat in their turn, according to their age, beginning at the oldest, and received their anointing and blessing under the hands of Father Smith. And in my turn, my father anointed my head, and sealed upon me the blessings of Moses, to lead Israel in the latter days, even as Moses led him in days of old; also the blessings of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. All of the Presidency laid their hands upon me, and pronounced upon my head many prophecies and blessings, many of which I shall not notice at this time. But as Paul said, so say I, let us come to visions and revelations.

[text of D&C 137 quoted]

I saw the Twelve Apostles of the Lamb, who are now upon the earth, who hold the keys of this last ministry, in foreign lands, standing together in a circle, much fatigued, with their clothes tattered and feet swollen, with their eyes cast downward, and Jesus standing in their midst, and they did not behold Him. The Savior looked upon them and wept.

I also beheld Elder M'Lellin in the south, standing upon a hill, surrounded by a vast multitude, preaching to them, and a

lame man standing before him supported by his crutches; he threw them down at his word and leaped as a hart, by the mighty power of God. Also, I saw Elder Brigham Young standing in a strange land, in the far south and west, in a desert place, upon a rock in the midst of about a dozen men of color, who appeared hostile. He was preaching to them in their own tongue, and the angel of God standing above his head, with a drawn sword in his hand, protecting him, but he did not see it. And I finally saw the Twelve in the celestial kingdom of God. I also beheld the redemption of Zion, and many things which the tongue of man cannot describe in full.

Many of my brethren who received the ordinance with me saw glorious visions also. Angels ministered unto them as well as to myself, and the power of the Highest rested upon us, the house was filled with the glory of God, and we shouted Hosanna to God and the Lamb. My scribe also received his anointing with us, and saw, in a vision, the armies of heaven protecting the Saints in their return to Zion, and many things which I saw. (Joseph Smith, History of the Church, volume 2, pages 379-381)

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