

D&C 84-87

Lesson 17, Doctrine & Covenants, Adult Religion Class, Monday, 23 Jan 2017

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General Introduction

On 1 April, Joseph Smith and others left for Missouri, per commandment, arriving later that month. In Missouri, they held several conferences, worked through the implementations of the United Firm, and received a revelation (D&C 82) on 26 April that was directed to the group of Church leaders gathered in Missouri. Another revelation on 30 April (D&C 83) outlined the care women and children who had lost their husbands should receive under the Law of Consecration.

On 6 May, Joseph Smith started home in company with Sidney Rigdon and Newel K. Whitney. In Indiana, the horses on their stage bolted, and while attempting to jump from the stage, Whitney's leg was caught in the wheel and broken in several places. Joseph stayed with him in Greenville, Indiana, for several weeks until he was well enough to travel, while Sidney returned to Ohio. They were not back in Ohio until late June.¹ While in Indiana, Joseph wrote a letter to Emma (dated 6 June 1832), in which he wrote of how he spent his time:

I have visited a grove which is Just back of the town almost every day where I can be secluded from the eyes of any mortal and there give vent to all the feelings of my heart in meaditation and praiyr I have Called to mind all the past moments of my life and am left to mo[u]rn and Shed tears of sorrow for my folly in Sufering the adversary of my Soul to have so much power over me as he has <had in times past> but God is merciful and has fo[r]given my Sins and I r[e]joice that he Sendth forth the Comforter unto as many as believe and humbleeth themselves before him I was grieved to hear that Hiram [Hyrum Smith] had <lost> his little Child I think we Can in Some degree simpathise with him but we all must be reconciled to our lost and Say the will <of the Lord> be done.

After returning to Ohio, there were reported problems in Missouri as the brethren there were critical of the Prophet. Writing to William Phelps on 31 July 1832, Joseph stated:

we received a letter from broth[e]r John Carl [Corrill] b the hand of Broth [Sidney] Gilbert after we arived home from Indiana who had arived here before us, but what did it contain, it gave us this intelgence, that the Devel had been to work with all his inventive imagination to

reward us for our toils in travling from this country to Zion amidst a crooked & preverse generation laving our familys in affliction amidst of death upon the mercy of mobs & of brethren who you know sometimes are found to be u[n]stable unbeleiving, unmerciful & unkind and in this trying situation to keep[ing] the commandment of God we took our lives in our hands and traveled through evry combination of wickedness to your country for your salvation & for our travail & our toils, suffering and privations as I said before we learned by Broth Johns letter that the devel had set to work to reward us by stirring up your hearts (I mean those who were engaged in this wickedness) by raking up evry fault, which those eyes that are filled with beams could see in looking for motes in the eyes of those who are laboring with tender and <prayerful> hearts continually for there salvation, and not being content with bringing up those things which had be settled & forgiven & which they dare not bring to our faces but many with which we were charged with were absolutely false & could not come from any other sourse than the fath[e]r of all lies

On 12 September 1832, Joseph and Emma left Hiram, Ohio, where they had lived for a year with John and Elsa Johnson. They moved to Newel K. Whitney's store, which was consecrated Church property and a bishop's storehouse, as well as a store that still sold goods to the public. The Prophet was given two upstairs rooms, named "translating room," reflecting the still unfinished work on the Bible translation, and the "council room" for meetings and conferences. Most of the revelations received during this time happened in one of those rooms.

Toward the end of September, several elders returned to Kirtland from missions. Gathering with Joseph, they reported on their labors, and D&C 84 was received as part of that gathering. In that revelation, Newel Whitney was directed to go to New York City and Albany (D&C 84:114-115) to preach. Joseph Smith went with him, while Emma stayed home, awaiting the birth of their son. They were gone from early October to 6 November, returning home just after the birth of Joseph Smith III, the Smith's first child to live beyond childbirth. While in New York City, Joseph wrote home to Emma, saying:

¹ JSP, D2:195-257.

This day I have been walking through the most splended part of the city of New Y[ork]—the buildings are truly great and wonderful to the astonishing <of> t̄ eve[r]y beholder and the language of my heart is like this can the great God of all the Earth maker of all things magnificent and splended be displeased with man for all these great inventions...I returned to my room to meditate and calm my mind and behold the thoughts of home of Emma and Julia [Murdock, adopted daughter] rushes upon my mind like a flood and I could wish for [a] moment to be with them my breast is filled with all the feelings and tenderness of a parent and a Husband and could I be with you I would tell you many things...I hope God will give you strength that you may not faint I pray God to soften the hearts of those arou[n]d you to be kind to you and take <the> burden of[f] your shoulders as much as posable and not afflict you I feel for you for I know your state and that others do not but you must cumfort yourself knowing that god is your friend in heaven and that you have one true and living friend on Earth your Husband.

Leaders in Missouri continued to write letters to Kirtland that were critical of the Prophet. Based on D&C 84:74, 78-80, Sidney Rigdon called a council of high priests and they reprimanded those in Missouri. In Kirtland, Joseph's counselor, Jesse Gause, had left the Church and was excommunicated in December. The new counselor, Frederick G. Williams, was called in early 1833.

Continuing his work on the Bible back in Kirtland. In doing revisions on the already-completed translation of the New Testament, Joseph Smith had questions about the parable of the wheat and the tares, leading to D&C 86 on 6 December 1832. the Prophet also read newspaper accounts of a cholera epidemic spreading in the United States, a plague in India, and South Carolina contending against federal tariffs. These reports led to questions that precipitated D&C 87 on Christmas day, 1832.

Summary Chronology

- **Sun, 1 Apr 1832** – Joseph Smith and several others left Ohio for Missouri, arriving just before the end of the month.
- **Thu, 26 Apr 1832** – D&C 82 was received in Independence, Missouri.
- **Mon, 30 Apr 1832** – First meeting of the Literary Firm.
- **Mon, 30 Apr 1832** – D&C 83 was received in Independence, Missouri.
- **Wed, 6 Jun 1832** – Joseph Smith letter to Emma Smith, from Greenville, Indiana, to Kirtland, Ohio.
- **Tue, 31 Jul 1832** – Joseph Smith letter to William Phelps, from Hiram, Ohio, to Independence, Missouri.
- **Wed, 29 Aug 1832** – D&C 99 was received in Hiram, Ohio.
- **Summer 1832** – Joseph Smith starts first history, including account of the First Vision written in his own hand.
- **Sat 22 – Sun 23 Sep 1832** - D&C 84 received in Kirtland, Ohio.
- **Early Oct 1832** – Joseph Smith traveled to New York City with Newel K. Whitney. He wrote a letter to Emma Smith, from New York City to Kirtland, Ohio. A second letter was written on 13 Oct 1832 from and to the same locations.
- **Tue, 27 Nov 1832** – Joseph Smith letter to William W. Phelps, from Kirtland, Ohio, to Independence, Missouri. An extract from this letter became D&C 85.
- **Thu, 6 Dec 1832** – D&C 86 received in Kirtland, Ohio.
- **Tue, 25 Dec 1832** – D&C 87 was received in Kirtland, Ohio.

D&C 84 – On Priesthood and Preaching

Date and Location

Saturday and Sunday, 22-23 September 1832, at Kirtland, Ohio, probably Newel K. Whitney store.

Setting

Having relocated from Hiram, Ohio, to Kirtland on 12 September 1832, settling into the upstairs rooms at the Whitney store, Joseph Smith continued his work on the Bible

translation and other Church business. At the end of the month, several elders who had been out preaching returned to Kirtland. While reporting on their efforts collectively to the Prophet and each other, the men prayed together. After the prayer, Joseph Smith stood up and received a revelation, which he dictated to his scribe, Frederick G. Williams.²

It appears that the dictation of the revelation began late in the day, Saturday, 22 September and continued well past

² Harper, *Making Sense*, 294. Harper drew on a recollection of one participant to conclude that Joseph dictated it to Oliver

Cowdery, but Cowdery does not appear to have been in Kirtland at this time. See *JSP*, D2:292n32.

midnight, providing what is now verses 1-102. There is a clear pause between verses 102 and 103, indicating the brethren stopped and went home. Returning early the next morning, the revelation and dictation continued, finishing up with verses 103-120.

The notion of “priesthood” had been with the Church since Joseph and Oliver were ordained by John the Baptist in May 1829, but the understanding of priesthood was very much in development in September 1832. They recognized that authority from God was required to administer the ordinances of baptism or to give the gift of the Holy Ghost, but it was not clear how priesthood played into Church leadership or organization, or how the various priesthood offices in place in the Church already related to each other.

These questions being on the Prophet’s mind could be related to his Bible translation work. Having completed the main effort on the New Testament in July 1832, where he was exposed to priesthood concepts in Hebrews, he was now back working through Genesis and Exodus, which portrays Moses, Aaron, and others with authority to act in God’s name. Moses and Aaron had different authority, not just tasks, in the record; how does that relate to latter-day priesthood offices and authority?

Picking up on the missionary reports, the brethren must also have wanted to know more about missionary efforts in the future, how they should go out, who should go, and when? Perhaps as they shared their experiences, they recognized the very different ways each had gone about preaching the gospel; was there a preferred way to do this from the Lord?³

The other topic that comes through clearly is the temple. Land for a temple had already been dedicated and purchased in Missouri, but would that be the only temple? How does the temple relate to their other efforts of missionary work, gathering, consecration, and the New Jerusalem?

This revelation is deep and broad, covering many topics in ways never revealed before. It is the voice of the Lord teaching his people in expansive language and ideas, inviting them to join him in a latter-day adventure to save the world.

Documents and Publication

The oldest copy is from the Newel K. Whitney papers (about 23 Sep 1832). Other copies include RB2 (about Sep 1832) and RB1 (late 1832). It was first published as Section 4 in the 1835 and then 1844 Doctrine and Covenants.

³ Revelation, 22-23 September 1832 [D&C 84], *JSP*, D2:289-292.

Outline

- New Jerusalem and the temple (1-5)
- Priesthood lines (6-17)
- The greater priesthood (18-25)
- The lesser priesthood (26-32)
- Oath and covenant of the priesthood (33-44)
- The Spirit of Christ (45-53)
- Testify and preach (54-76)
- How missionaries should work (77-91)
- Fate of those who reject the message (91-97)
- The song of the redemption of Zion (98-102)
- How to build up the Church (103-120)

Commentary

New Jerusalem and the temple (1-5)

1 ***Joseph Smith, Jun., and six elders.*** That may have been the number in the room when the revelation started, but in a note that is not in the printed version in the middle of v. 42, it notes the presence of “Eleven high Priests save one.”⁴ Assuming the elders stayed, that makes Joseph Smith plus seventeen others (6 elders and 10 high priests).

2 ***the restoration of his people.*** The Lord’s people have been scattered through apostasy and persecution; now they are being gathered or restored to the covenants of their fathers.

2 ***Mount Zion, which shall be the city of New Jerusalem.*** While “Zion” and “New Jerusalem” have been equated before (Moses 7:62), “Mount Zion” and “New Jerusalem” are only given as equivalent terms here and D&C 133:56, which was given the previous November.

3 ***city shall be built, beginning at the temple lot.*** Independence, Missouri was designated as the center place of the New Jerusalem in D&C 57:3, which also called out the location of the temple lot.

4 ***built by the gathering of the Saints.*** Members of the Church were called to gather to Missouri, under the direction of the Prophet and with letters of recommendation by the bishop (D&C 72). It was that careful, inspired effort of gathering that would build Zion up.

4 ***which temple shall be reared in this generation.*** The term “generation” can have several meanings, one of which is a dispensation.⁵ In other words, the temple will be built sometime before the Millennium. Interestingly, there is a temple in nearby Kansas City now, about ten miles from the dedicated temple lot.

⁴ Revelation, 22-23 September 1832 [D&C 84], *JSP*, D2:297.

⁵ McConkie and Ostler, *Revelations*, 588.

5 *an house shall be built unto the Lord, and a cloud rest upon it.* As it did in the tabernacle in the days of Moses, a cloud resting on the temple indicates the presence of the Lord (Exodus 40:34-36). This was fulfilled when the temple was dedicated in Kirtland in 1836.

Priesthood lines (6-17)

6 *And the sons of Moses.* This section starts grammatically awkwardly, it would seem, because it begins to tell us something about the sons of Moses but quickly starts talking about priesthood ordinations. However, it does come back to the “sons of Moses” in v. 31, potentially making verses 6-30 a parenthetical remark.

Another alternative is that the period at the end of verse 5 should not be there. In other words, both the house will be filled with the glory of God, and the sons of Moses. Then it begins explaining priesthood ordinations.

6 *his father-in-law, Jethro.* Jethro (also called Reuel) is mentioned in the Bible as a priest, and Moses does marry one of his daughters (Exodus 2:16-21; 3:1; 18:2). But the Bible has no information about this ordination, and the rest of the names in verses 7-12 cannot be identified with anyone in the Bible. In other words, this information is new and unique, but the point is that Moses can trace his priesthood back to God himself (through Esaias), as can Abraham (through Adam).

12 *Esaias received it under the hand of God.* It probably doesn't mean to be literally ordained by God's hands on his head, but rather through an authorized servant.⁶ The parallel with Melchizedek and Abraham is important (v. 14). In the JST, Abraham was blessed by Melchizedek, and we learn here that Abraham was ordained by him. So likewise Esaias was blessed by Abraham, which probably also means ‘received the priesthood from him.’

14 *Abraham received the priesthood from Melchizedek.* Joseph Smith had learned much about Melchizedek from his translation of Genesis 14, including that he blessed Abraham, did miraculous things, and was a high priest after the order of Enoch, which was after the order of the Son of God.⁷ Now he learned that Melchizedek also gave the high priesthood to Abraham.

16 *from Enoch to Abel.* Fascinatingly, the priesthood is traced back not to Seth, who was Enoch's direct ancestor (Genesis 5:5-24), but to Abel, Seth's older but murdered brother. Since we have no other details, we don't know if Abel ordained Seth's children before he died or what the scenario might be, but that puts Abel's mission in a new light.

⁶ Robinson and Garrett, *A Commentary*, 3:28-29.

17 *priesthood continueth in the church of God in all generations.* Whenever the church of God is on the earth, the priesthood will always be there as well. The two exist together “in all generations” and “without beginning of days or end of years.”

The greater priesthood (18-25)

18 *a priesthood also upon Aaron and his seed.* Aaron's priesthood is different from the priesthood “after the holiest order of God.” Here is it inserted for comparison; more on that starting in v. 26.

18 *text note:*

NKW: throughout all the generations of the Jews

2013: throughout all their generations

19 *this greater priesthood administereth the gospel.* To administer the gospel is to have authority to perform sacred ordinances that bind men and women to God through covenants.

19 *the key of the mysteries of the kingdom, even the key of the knowledge of God.* Mysteries are things known only by revelation, of which the knowledge of God is one. Without the higher priesthood, there is no way to truly know God.

20 *in the ordinances thereof, the power of godliness is manifest.* Meaning in the ordinances and covenants of the higher priesthood, the power of God to change a person to an eternal and exalted being is manifest. Without it, this power is not known among mankind (v. 21).

22 *without this no man can see the face of God, even the Father, and live.* This doesn't just refer to a visitation to man on the earth but to our ability to “see the face of God” throughout the eternities. To be in the celestial kingdom, as D&C 76 explained, is to be with God and thus see his face. That is not possible without the ordinances of the priesthood and the power of godliness to make us celestial beings.

23 *this Moses plainly taught.* Exodus recounts how Moses attempted to bring the people into the presence of God but that because of their wickedness, they could not see the face of God. The Lord told Moses that “neither shall there be any sinful man at any time, that shall see my face and live” (JST Exodus 34:20).

24 *they should not enter into his rest.* Because of their willful disobedience, the house of Israel were not allowed to enter the Lord's presence and receive “the fulness of his glory.”

25 *he took Moses out of their midst.* Deuteronomy is enigmatic about Moses' death; it states that he “died there in

⁷ See JST changes in the Appendix in the LDS Bible for Genesis 14.

the land of Moab” but that the Lord “buried him” so that “no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day.” Fortunately, the Book of Mormon is more clear, indicating that Moses was “taken up by the Spirit,” or “the Lord took Moses” (Alma 45:19), which we understand means he was translated.

25 and the Holy Priesthood also. Not only was Moses removed but with him went the higher priesthood, at least from the general population in Israel. See JST Exodus 34:1-2: “I will take away the priesthood out of their midst.”

The lesser priesthood (26-32)

26 the lesser priesthood continued. The priesthood referred to in verse 18 is now covered in more detail, with the Lord explaining that it holds “the key of the ministering of angels and the preparatory gospel.” In D&C 76, the Prophet learned that those in the telestial kingdom would receive “the administering of angels who are appointed to minister for them” (D&C 76:88). Therefore the lesser priesthood can only bring a person to that level, but not into the celestial realm where God and Christ dwell.

26 the preparatory gospel. JST Exodus 34:2 calls it “the law of a carnal commandment” (also v. 27); Paul calls it “our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ.” The lesser priesthood and the law that goes with it can prepare us for the ordinances of the higher priesthood, but it cannot administer those ordinances.

27 the gospel of repentance and of baptism, and the remission of sins. This is the realm of the preparatory priesthood, to lead us to repent, be forgiven of our sins, and make our first covenant with the Lord through baptism.

27 until John. John the Baptist’s role it was to prepare the people for the Messiah, which is the role of the Aaronic priesthood itself.

28 baptized while he was yet in his childhood. Not an infant but at the right time, eight years of age.

28 text note:

The original text read, “baptised while he was yet in ~~his~~ the ~~mothers~~ womb” but Joseph Smith corrected it before the first publication in 1835 to read as it does today.

28 ordained by the angel of God at the time he was eight days old. “Ordained” doesn’t always mean a priesthood ordination in the 1830s. It can mean ‘set apart’ or ‘blessed.’ John had great blessings pronounced upon him when he was eight days old by his father, Zacharias (Luke 1:67-79). This verse indicates that an angel also offered a blessing on the baby at the same time, pronouncing that it was John’s calling “to overthrow the kingdom of the Jews, and to make straight the way of the Lord...to prepare them for the coming of the Lord.”

29 the offices of elder and bishop are necessary appendages. The “high priesthood” at this time is equal to the office of high priest, thus an elder is an appendage or ‘sub-category’ in the high priesthood with specific responsibilities. Likewise, a bishop receives his authority and acts under the direction of the leaders of the high priesthood. In that day, it was Joseph Smith; today that is the stake president who is the president of the high priesthood for his stake.

30 teacher and deacon are necessary appendages belonging to the lesser priesthood. The ‘fulness’ of the lesser priesthood is in the office of priest, so the offices of teacher and deacon are appendages to that office.

31 an acceptable offering and sacrifice in the house of the Lord. As the sons of Aaron were charged with offering sacrifices acceptable to God in the tabernacle and temple under the Law of Moses, so the sons of Moses (holders of the higher priesthood) are charged with performing duties in the temple today which are acceptable to the Lord.

32 whose sons ye are. So we don’t miss the point when talking about “sons of Moses and of Aaron,” the Lord is referring to holders of the higher or Melchizedek priesthood as well as holders of the lesser or Aaronic priesthood—today. Men holding both priesthoods are called “to build up my church.”

Oath and covenant of the priesthood (33-44)

33 faithful unto obtaining...magnifying...sanctified. There are three requirements given to become “the sons of Moses and of Aaron and the seed of Abraham,” which also equates to “the elect of God.” First, we must obtain both priesthoods. Second, we must magnify or enlarge our callings in that priesthood. Third, we must be sanctified (made holy) by the Holy Spirit unto the resurrection of our bodies in their glorified state.

35 receive me. To “receive” something in scripture is to fully embrace it, to make it a significant part of our lives. We cannot receive the priesthood without also receiving the Lord into our lives.

37 he that receiveth me receiveth my Father. A paraphrase of John 13:20.

38 all that my Father hath shall be given unto him. If we fully receive the servants of God, Christ himself, and the Father, we are promised everything God can give us will be ours. See D&C 76:94-95.

39 the oath and covenant which belongeth to the priesthood. An oath is a promise made, such as an oath of loyalty or a promise of behavior. A covenant is also a promise but with potential reciprocation; there are blessings that can go with covenants. The priesthood is both—an oath that originates with the Father, giving us confidence that if we

do what he has asked, he will certainly keep his covenant, and a covenant, which is the promise of all that the Father has.⁸

40 **which he cannot break.** Just weeks before, Joseph and others had learned the Lord's promise: "I, the Lord, am bound when ye do what I say" (D&C 82:10).

41 **shall not have forgiveness.** Once the oath and covenant of the priesthood is assumed by a man, if he breaks it, he cannot be forgiven of sins. This is not a punishment per se but a natural consequence, since the power of godliness is only manifest through the priesthood and its ordinances.

42 **wo unto all those who come not unto this priesthood.** This is not a loss of agency but again, if we do not receive the priesthood—referring to men and women who all must be transformed by the power of godliness—then we cannot enter into the presence of God, which certainly is a "wo."

42 **text note:**

In the middle of this verse in the manuscripts, it reads as follows: "...who are present this day viz the 23^d. day of September AD 1832 Eleven high Priests save one by by mine own voice..." The addition of the date and who was there has been interpreted as the break in the text between days.⁹ But the date fits in with the context and the note about the high priests can be who the "you" is in that verse. None of the printed versions of the revelation ever used this.¹⁰

43 **beware concerning yourselves.** Or, be aware of your actions. Having taken on the priesthood, we are fully accountable for how we exercise it.

43 **give diligent heed to the words of eternal life.** The words of eternal life are found in the scriptures, in the revelations of the Lord to us, and in the voice of the Spirit that prompts us to action and change. Nephi put it this way: "feast upon the words of Christ; for behold, the words of Christ will tell you all things that ye should do" (2 Nephi 32:3).

44 **live by every word that proceedeth forth from the mouth of God.** See Deuteronomy 8:3.

The Spirit of Christ (45-53)

45 **whatsoever is truth is light, and whatsoever is light is Spirit.** Truth, light, and Spirit are all intertwined, linked in definition and activity. The Lord always speaks the truth, which means his word always bring light—physical light, to be sure, but metaphorically understanding, faith, hope, and more—which light always comes through the power of the Holy Spirit.

45 **the Spirit of Jesus Christ.** This does not refer to the pre-existent condition of the Savior but to the Holy Ghost,

which is the Spirit sent by Christ and sent by the Father, the Spirit of God.

46 **the Spirit giveth light to every man.** The Holy Spirit works with us in two ways: all people born on earth are guided by it in the basic issues of right and wrong, and with promptings to bring them closer to God. We often refer to this as the light of Christ, a phrase found in the Book of Mormon (Alma 28:14; Moroni 7:18-19) but not fully associated with this concept until D&C 88:7. Once someone has entered into a baptismal covenant, they are commanded to receive the Holy Ghost and if they keep that commandment are given a greater portion of light and truth that continues to grow until they steadily but certainly forgiven of sins, sanctified, and perfected (v. 47).

48 **the Father teacheth him of the covenant.** By the voice of the Spirit, we learn of and learn to keep sacred and eternal covenants that bring us unto God.

48 **not for your sakes only.** We are not given these truths just to benefit ourselves, though we certainly should benefit. But we are to share them with "the whole world" that they can receive the same blessings. This is why priesthood brethren are obligated to serve a mission and share the gospel their whole lives.

49 **the whole world lieth in sin.** See D&C 49:20, which is the only other time this phrase is used.

49 **under darkness and under the bondage of sin.** Being sinful which means rejecting the light of God through his Spirit, darkness and the consequences of sinful choices weigh heavily on the world.

50 **they come not unto me.** We can know with certainty if someone is laboring in the darkness or enjoying some light in their life: if they do not come to the Lord, they are "under the bondage of sin."

52 **not acquainted with my voice.** See Matthew 7:21-22, where many claim to know Christ but he declares, "I never knew you," which the JST changes to "ye never knew me." Some will not know him at all and others will think they know him, but they are listening to a false voice that pretends to be Christ. In reality they do not know him.

53 **sin and darkness.** Closing the loop on v. 49, we are again counseled that we can distinguish between the righteous and the wicked not by their goodness but by how much they repent.

⁸ Robinson and Garrett, *A Commentary*, 3:44-48.

⁹ So Robinson and Garrett, *A Commentary*, 3:24.

¹⁰ Revelation, 22-23 September 1832 [D&C 84], *JSP*, D2:297. Note 60 on that page lists the ten high priests attending

Testify and preach (54-76)

54 *treated lightly the things you have received*. By not fully embracing the light, truth, calling, and covenants we have made, our minds are made dark.

55 *brought the whole church under condemnation*. This does not apply to just a few apostates or lazy people—the entire church stands condemned of this sin, in one way or another (also v. 56).

57 *remember the new covenant, even the Book of Mormon and the former commandments*. The condemnation upon the Church is forgiven until full repentance is given relative to how the Book of Mormon and “former commandments” in the Bible are treated.

57 *not only to say, but to do*. It isn’t enough to read and even talk about the scriptures; we must do what is in them for those efforts to do us any good.

58 *bring forth fruit meet for their Father’s kingdom*. Worthy priesthood holders must manifest acceptance of and living the oath and covenant of the priesthood, or else “a scourge and judgment” will be their fate.

60 *hear my words, which are my voice*. Though Joseph Smith is speaking to a scribe who is writing, the words are those of the Lord himself.

61 *I will forgive you of your sins*. The Lord is always merciful in offering forgiveness. Our responsibility is to “remain steadfast,” pray, and bear testimony to others.

62 *go ye into all the world*. This revelation is a call to greater missionary efforts, to not just preach to states in and around Missouri and Ohio, but to carry the message to the entire world. See Mark 16:15 and Matthew 28:19-20.

63 *you are mine apostles*. Not members of the Quorum of the Twelve (which doesn’t exist yet) but people called and sent with authority, the meaning of the term “apostle.”

63 *ye are my friends*. Jesus referred to people as his “friends” in Luke 12:4 and especially John 15:14. It is a designation borne of kindness and love. Of course, it was in “the house of my friends” that the servant in Zechariah 13:6 was wounded.

64 *as I said unto mine apostles*. This specific commission is not found in the New Testament though the evidence of its truth is replete in Acts and the writings of Paul.

65 *these signs shall follow them that believe*. The list of signs that follows in vv. 66-72 echoes others found in scripture which include healings, protection, and other “wonderful works” (v. 66).

73 *they shall not boast*. As priesthood holders perform these signs, they should not brag about them or share them with the world in general, because the benefit is private.

74 *shall be damned*. Echoing back to vv. 49-52, those who keep not the basic commandments are condemned by the Lord.

75 *in force from this very hour*. Now that we have been taught, we are immediately accountable.

76 *your brethren in Zion for their rebellion against you*. As mentioned in the introduction, Joseph Smith continued to face criticism from some of the leaders in Missouri. Because of that, they are condemned together with those with evil hearts doing evil works.

How missionaries should work (77-91)

77 *I shall call you friends*. See v. 63.

78 *not to have purse or scrip*. Jesus sent the missionaries out without “purse or scrip” in early New Testament times (Luke 10:4), meaning no money bag and no knapsack. They were to rely on the kindness of others to see to their needs. He now sends out the missionaries with the same charge, because “the laborer is worthy of his hire” (v. 79).

80 *faithful in all things*. This verse makes great promises to those who are faithful in declaring the gospel: they will not be mentally or physically weary, and even the loss of a single hair will be noticed. They will neither go hungry nor thirsty.

81 *take ye no thought for the morrow*. See Matthew 6:34 and 3 Nephi 13:34. While many of the following phrases are found in the New Testament, some are not, and most are only found here in D&C 84 in all of the Doctrine and Covenants.

82 *consider the lilies*. See Matthew 6:28; Luke 12:27; 3 Nephi 13:28.

83 *knoweth that you have need*. See Matthew 6:8, 32; Luke 12:30; 3 Nephi 13:8, 32.

84 *let the morrow take thought*. Also Matthew 6:34 and 3 Nephi 13:34.

85 *what ye shall say*. See Luke 12:11.

85 *treasure up in your minds*. See Ether 3:21; D&C 6:20; 38:30

87 *reprove the world of all their unrighteous deeds*. “Say nothing but repentance” has been the call since before the Church was organized (D&C 6:9; 11:9; also 18:14; 34:6).

88 *I will go before your face. I will be on your right hand and on your left*. Compare 1 Kings 22:19 and 2 Corinthians 6:7. Most of the time when the scriptures mention “the right hand and the left,” it is in the context of staying on the straight path and not veering off to either side. In this case, the Lord promises to keep us on that path and protect us from going off in the wrong direction, with even angels all around us to bear us up.

89 ***the same will feed you.*** Those who are prepared to receive the gospel message will also be willing to feed and clothe and finance the missionaries.

90 ***shall in nowise lose his reward.*** Those who generously assist the missionaries will likewise be blessed.

Fate of those who reject the message (91-97)

91 ***you may know my disciples.*** A true disciple of Christ will be generous and support the missionaries, as described. Those who are not true disciples will turn them away.

92 ***go away from him alone.*** The missionaries were instructed to wash their feet in pure water as a testimony against someone who rejects them. But they are to do it in private, not as a public show of rejection which would raise animosity and anger.

94 ***search diligently and spare not.*** Missionary work must be thorough, going back to make sure everyone has the opportunity to hear or reject.

96 ***to scourge them for the wickedness.*** D&C 45 already spoke of the day when the wicked would suffer for their lack of repentance (also v. 97).

The song of the redemption of Zion (98-102)

98 ***all shall know me, who remain.*** The scourges and plagues of vv. 96-97 will take many away. Those who are left shall be compelled to know Christ in his coming to set up his earthly kingdom and shall sing a “new song,” which is captured in vv. 99-102 and is a song that will be sung as the Millennium begins.

How to build up the Church (103-120)

103 ***And again, verily, verily.*** This is likely where the break was between the two sessions that captured this revelation. The “Amen” at the end of the song coupled with this phrase that sounds like a restart makes it sound like a new section.

103 ***receive money by gift, that they should send it.*** If a man was serving a mission, having left a family behind, and someone gave him a gift (presumably more than he needed to sustain himself), it should be sent back to his family.

104 ***send it up unto the bishop in Zion.*** If a missionary does not have a family and receives a gift of surplus funds, he should send it to Edward Partridge for use in the storehouse.

105 ***give unto any of you a coat.*** If the missionary were to get a tangible gift, such as a coat, then he could keep the new coat but should give his old to the poor, so both lives are blessed.

106 ***take with him him that is weak.*** Companions should be matched so that a strong one can support a weak one, so that the weak one can become a strong one.

107 ***those who are ordained unto the lesser priesthood.*** As an example of the principle in v. 106, holders of the Melchizedek priesthood are counseled to have Aaronic priesthood holders go ahead of them and make appointments for their preaching, and even have them preach if the more experienced member cannot make it.

108 ***the way that mine apostles...built up my church.*** This is the same pattern used in the meridian of time church.

109 ***let not the head say unto the feet it hath no need.*** From 1 Corinthians 12:21 and the only time this metaphor is used in the Doctrine and Covenants, it demonstrates that all are of value in the Lord’s kingdom.

111 ***the high priests should travel.*** High priests, elders, and priests were called to “travel” or serve missions away from home, which deacons and teachers were to stay back with the established congregations and minister to them.

112 ***Newel K. Whitney, also should travel.*** The bishop had not yet been called on to travel, being rather an office that focus on temporal needs close to home. In an expansion of his calling, he was to travel in the immediate area and search out the poor to provide assistance to them.

113 ***also employ an agent.*** Bishop Partridge in Missouri had an agent to help him, Sidney Gilbert. Now Bishop Whitney in Ohio was told to do the same thing.

114 ***let the bishop go unto the city of New York.*** Not only was he to expand his ministry to the local poor, but he was called on a preaching mission to New York City, Albany, and Boston to warn them to repent and avoid the coming desolation.

116 ***trust in me.*** Part of the reason for having the bishop do this is indicated here: he would learn to trust the Lord and gain greater confidence.

117 ***go ye forth as your circumstances shall permit.*** This was directed at the other men with Joseph when the revelation was received, but applied broadly to those priesthood holders who could take time to go preach. They should just go and do good as much as they could.

118 ***I will rend their kingdoms.*** The Lord not only promised to be with and support them but promised that judgments and signs of the Second Coming will help them in their work, humbling many and getting the attention of all.

119 ***ye cannot see it now.*** Things were already rolling forth to impact the work, even if the brethren could not yet see it.

120 ***I am Alpha and Omega.*** The Lord’s common self-identification in the Doctrine and Covenants, occurring thirteen times.

Results

Five years to the day after Moroni's last visit to Joseph Smith, he received another revelation that expanded on doctrines Moroni had taught him about priesthood, ordinances, binding families together, and preparing for the Second Coming. D&C 84 took all the things Joseph Smith had been learning from previous revelations, the translation of the Bible, and the changing circumstances of a new Church, and brought them together into a marvelous package that call everyone with a priesthood ordination to a higher standard of action.

As a result of this revelation (see v. 76), a council of high priests in Ohio rebuked some of the leaders in Missouri.

Bishop Newel K. Whitney took a trip to New York, Albany, and Boston, preaching the gospel and acquiring needed items for the storehouse.

Though not immediate, temples were later built by those who heeded the message of this revelation and covenants were made and kept that blessed many lives. Missionaries went out preaching, testing the Lord's promises and growing their own faith. And perhaps most importantly, the increased understanding of the priesthood continued to unfold, resulting in a refinement of Church government and organization, leading finally to Twelve Apostles, Seventies, and millions of priesthood holders mentoring other priesthood holders, growing the kingdom with time and experience.

D&C 85 – Letter to William W. Phelps on Consecration

Date and Location

27 November 1832, at Kirtland, Ohio.

Setting

Joseph Smith had left for New York City with Newel K. Whitney, who was traveling per D&C 84:114-115. They returned on 6 November 1832, just hours after the birth of his son, Joseph Smith III. Later that month, on 27 November, he wrote a letter to William W. Phelps in Missouri, probably in response to a (now lost) letter that Phelps had sent him. In the letter, he chastised some of the Missouri brethren, praised Phelps' efforts (a reversal of his criticism from the 31 July letter), and answered questions about people coming to Missouri without consecrating their properties. He also discussed keeping proper records of consecration and Church history, which was John Whitmer's calling. Having recently started his own history and keeping a journal, Joseph was especially sensitive at this time to keeping good records.

An excerpt from this letter was published in Phelps's newspaper in Missouri, *The Evening and the Morning Star* in January 1833, very soon after he had received the letter from the Prophet. Though the contents of this letter were not otherwise published in Joseph's lifetime, Orson Pratt determined it was worth including in his updated Doctrine and Covenants in 1876, where it became Section 85.

In introducing the content that became D&C 85, Joseph wrote in the letter:

I fancy to myself that you are saying or thinking something simmler to these words my God great and mighty art thou therefore shew unto thy servant what shall becom of all these who are assaying [trying] to come up

unto Zion in order to keep ~~this~~ the commandments of God and yet receive not there inherance by consecration by order or deed from the bishop the man that God has appointed in a legal way agreeable to the law given to organiz[e] and regulate the church and all the affairs of th[e] same; Bro Wm in the love of God having the most implicit confidence in you as a man of God having obtained this confidence by a vision of heavn therefore I will procede to unfold to you some of the feelings of my heart and procede to answer the question[.]

Documents and Publication

The oldest copy is in Joseph Smith Letterbook (about 27 Nov 1832). It was first published in *The Evening and the Morning Star* (Jan 1833), then as Section 85 in the 1876 Doctrine and Covenants.

Outline

- Duties of the clerk (1-2)
- Don't keep names of the unconsecrated (3-5)
- Consecration administered by revelation (6-8)
- Names in the books (9-12)

Commentary

Duties of the clerk (1-2)

1 *the Lord's clerk*. In this case, John Whitmer, who was Church historian (D&C 47) but also clerk responsible for recording Church membership and other records, including who has participated in consecration.

1 *legally from the bishop*. D&C 42 and subsequent sections (especially D&C 72) set up the system whereby members could "legally" receive an inheritance from the

bishop after their have entered into the covenant of consecration. The bishop in Missouri was Edward Partridge.

2 *life, their faith, and works.* Whitmer's history was to include details about not just conferences and decisions but how Saints lived their daily lives and manifested their faith by their actions.

2 *also of the apostates.* Keeping a record of those who pulled out of consecration after they had already committed to it was especially important. At this time, it was probably for rescinding preaching certificates and such but later, after various law suits forced some changes to the process of consecration, in order to return properties accurately after people left living the Law.

Don't keep names of the unconsecrated (3-5)

3 *that he may tithes his people.* Tithing did not have the meaning it has today (and won't for several years). It appears to refer to offerings in general at this time.¹¹

3 *their names enrolled with the people of God.* Those who did not correctly consecrate their properties when they came to Missouri and receive an inheritance of the bishop were not to have their names recorded in Church records in the same way as members who had done all that correctly.

4 *Neither is there genealogy to be kept.* Not family history as we think of it, but simply records of their families.¹² In other words, the decision not to consecrate impacted the whole family (see also v. 5).

Consecration administered by revelation (6-8)

6 *thus saith the still small voice.* The reference is to 1 Kings 19:11-12, where Elijah doesn't hear the voice of the Lord in a great wind or an earthquake or a fire, but in a still small voice. The phrase is also used in 1 Nephi 17:45, as Nephi explained to his brothers how God had communicated with them. This is the only time it is used in the Doctrine and Covenants.

6 *maketh my bones to quake.* While no other scriptural reference speaks of bones quaking, Jeremiah 20:9 and Lamentations 1:13 speak of fire in the bones that is related to the word of the Lord.

7 *one mighty and strong.* The phrase comes from Isaiah 28:2; this is the only time it is used in any other scripture, though there are many examples of people and the Lord being called mighty or strong.

¹¹ McConkie and Ostler, *Revelations*, 616.

¹² Robinson and Garrett, *A Commentary*, 3:73.

¹³ Robinson and Garrett, *A Commentary*, 3:73-74.

¹⁴ Harper, *Making Sense*, 305. Interestingly, Robinson and Garrett quote the same First Presidency letter as Harper but only the part that says it will not be a president of the Church, past, present, or future, ignoring the part Harper quotes that specifically

One commentary argues well that this is Christ himself (and indeed, the language is very Christ-like with a scepter, power, light, and truth),¹³ but Harper notes that many had speculated about it, leading to a 1905 First Presidency letter that said it was either Bishop Edward Partridge (whom the Lord had chosen to implement consecration) or "a future bishop of the church who will be with the Saints in Zion."¹⁴ Perhaps like many scriptures, this could be fulfilled in both Christ and his called representative.

8 *putteth forth his hand to steady the ark of God.* The story is from 2 Samuel 6:6-7, where Uzzah took hold of the ark to keep it from falling and the Lord "smote him there for his error; and there he died." His death brought fear upon David who dared not move the ark for a time.

The reference here is not to any action taken by anyone in that day, but only a warning to "those in high standing to beware."¹⁵

Names in the books (9-12)

9 *book of remembrance.* Though a book by this name is referred to in Malachi 3:16, 3 Nephi 24:16, and Moses 6:5, the likely meaning is as a synonym to "book of the law of God" in v. 5 and the "book of the law" in v. 11.

9 *their portion shall be appointed them among unbelievers.* Those who chose not to participate in consecration and receive an inheritance from the bishop would be judged with unbelievers and sent to a place where they would wail and gnash their teeth.

10 *I say not of myself.* Though Joseph was writing the letter, he wanted to be clear to Phelps that he was speaking by the inspiration of God and not just his own thoughts. Sometimes prophets speak as men and other times as prophets, so it's helpful to know which is which.

11 *to have apostatized, or to have been cut off.* Whether they hold the "High Priesthood" or the "lesser priesthood" or are "members," those who apostatize or are excommunicated will not have access to any Church properties or the storehouse, as will others who remain faithful.

12 *the children of the priest.* The reference is to Ezra 2:61-62, where priests who had married out of the covenant and had children. These children were considered "polluted" and were not allowed to exercise priesthood duties. So will it be done to those who are not faithful in living the covenant of consecration.

identifies the figure as either Bishop Partridge or a future bishop. McConkie and Ostler quote the largest portion of the letter but only the part explaining how it could be fulfilled in Partridge, skipping the part that it could be a future bishop.

¹⁵ Letter to William W. Phelps, 27 November 1832, *JSP*, D2:320n161, which quotes a letter from Oliver Cowdery specifically explaining this passage.

Results

The same day he wrote this letter to Phelps, Joseph Smith purchased a small, bound book in which to keep his first journal, “to keep a minute account of all things that come under my observation &c.”¹⁶ With his history started just a few months earlier, he was setting the example of recording keeping taught here to Phelps and John Whitmer. Even so, Joseph struggled with writing. It is in this letter to Phelps from which D&C 85 is taken, that he penned the phrase (a prayer, really) that describes his frustration with trying to express the things of God in the language of man: “Oh Lord God deliver us in thy due time from the little narrow prison almost as it were total darkness of paper pen

and ink and a crooked broken scattered and imperfect language.”¹⁷

Interestingly, in 1841, the Prophet started a later journal which he called the “Book of the Law of the Lord,” taking the name from this letter. At that time, Willard Richards was the clerk, responsible for historical, financial, and membership information, just as clerks do today. Joseph made sure that the names of faithful Saints were also included in the book, including their virtues and characteristics. Those who willingly give themselves and their possessions to God’s cause will forever be recorded in similar books, on earth and in heaven (Revelation 20:12).

D&C 86 – The Wheat and the Tares

Date and Location

Thursday, 6 December 1832, at Kirtland, Ohio.

Setting

The parable of the wheat and the tares in Matthew 13 was first recorded in the Bible translation effort in April or May 1831, and was written fundamentally as it stands in the King James Version. Shortly after that, John Whitmer made a copy of the first New Testament manuscript and kept the wording exactly the same. After the work on the New Testament was completed in July 1832, they went back to finish the Old Testament, which they had stopped in March 1831 in Genesis 24. But at the same time, Joseph was going back through the New Testament translation, making some edits and further corrections until 2 February 1833. When they made extensive edits that couldn’t be written between the lines of the text on the manuscript, they would write it on a separate piece of paper and pin it to the page at the appropriate location. This they did with the parable of the wheat and the tares, pinning on a paper that changed Matthew 13:30 to reverse the order of the gathering—“first the wheat into my barns, and the tares are bound in bundles to be burned.

In his new journal, Joseph Smith wrote in his own hand, “December 6th translating and received a Revelation explaining the Parable the wheat and the tears [tares] &c.” The revelation was D&C 86, which includes the same reversal of order as the pinned note. Both the pinned note and the revelation are in the handwriting of Sidney Rigdon,

which is significant because Frederick G. Williams was the main translation scribe at this time. Rigdon was helping with the New Testament revision only. The language of Joseph’s journal entry gives the impression of cause and effect: “translating and received a Revelation.” It is reasonable, then, that like D&C 76 and similar experiences, the inspired change to the New Testament was first made, which they pondered upon or asked the Lord for more details, resulting in this revelation.¹⁸

Documents and Publication

The oldest copy is in RB2 (between 22 Jan and about 27 Feb 1833). Other copies include Sidney Gilbert notebook (12 Jun 1833) and RB1 (late 1833). It was first published as Section 6 in the 1835 and then 1844 Doctrine and Covenants.

Outline

- The parable interpreted (1-7)
- The priesthood will continue (8-11)

Commentary

The parable interpreted (1-7)

1 *concerning the parable of the wheat and of the tares.*

The original parable is found in Matthew 13:36-43.

2 *the field was the world.* This is the explanation Jesus gave to the disciples in Matthew 13:38.

¹⁶ Letter to William W. Phelps, 27 November 1832, *JSP*, D2:316, quoting from the journal in *JSP*, J1:9.

¹⁷ Letter to William W. Phelps, 27 November 1832, *JSP*, D2:320.

¹⁸ David A. LeFevre, “The Education of a Prophet: The Role of the New Translation of the Bible in the Life of Joseph Smith,” in

Craig James Ostler, Michael Hubbard MacKay, and Barbara Morgan Gardner, *Foundations of the Restoration: Fulfillment of the Covenant Purposes* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center and Deseret Book, 2016), 111.

2 ***the apostles were the sowers of the seed.*** In Matthew 13:37, Jesus said the sower was “the Son of man,” a title which he used to refer to himself. Both would be accurate, depending on the time period, with Jesus being the sower of the good seed during his mortal mission (when he explained the parable in Matthew 13) and the apostles after he was resurrected and commissioned them to take the gospel to the world (Matthew 28:19-20).

3 ***after they have fallen asleep.*** Or, after the apostles have all died (except John; see D&C 7).

3 ***the apostate, the whore, even Babylon...even Satan.*** Most of these names come from images in the book of Revelation (chapter 17) and 1 Nephi 13-14. “Apostate” is not a name applied to Satan in any other verse of scripture except this one.

3 ***he soweth the tares.*** Agrees with Matthew 13:39.

3 ***drive the church into the wilderness.*** Satan’s sowing of the wicked tares is tied to Revelation 12:1-6, where John saw the church driven in the wilderness (see also D&C 33:5).

4 ***behold, in the last days.*** With this, the parable is seen to have two applications; first, to the first-century church and second, to the latter-day church.

4 ***the Lord is beginning to bring forth the word.*** The Church is not yet three years old at this time, meaning that the blade of the wheat “is springing up and is yet tender” and vulnerable.

5 ***the angels are crying...ready and waiting.*** Even though the Church is young and the good news of the restoration barely getting started, the angels in heaven are so anxious for the blessings of the Second Coming that they are crying out to the Father, asking to be released to gather up the wicked and hasten the end.

6 ***pluck not up the tares.*** The Lord, however, is holding back the reaping angels so that the tender, young wheat is not destroyed by their efforts. The reason for patience is clear: “for verily your faith is weak.”

7 ***grow together until the harvest is fully ripe.*** To give the Church a chance to succeed, the Lord patiently tolerates great wickedness in the world as well. A premature harvest would do much more damage than good (v. 6).

7 ***the tares are bound in bundles.*** So Matthew 13:30 for the tares; bundling them makes them easy for transport to the place of burning. The difference is the order, with the wheat being gathered first in the last days.

The priesthood will continue (8-11)

8 ***Therefore.*** In verses 8-11, there are four “therefore”s. Each one applies what was just presented, expanding the interpretation step by step to the final verse.

8 ***the priesthood hath continued through the lineage of your fathers.*** The priesthood was lost to man on earth, or else there would have been no need for a restoration. This phrase thus has two potential meanings. Perhaps it refers to the right of certain families to hold the priesthood, referring to the family of Abraham.¹⁹

The other possibility is that “your fathers” have nothing to do with direct genealogy but is a reference to those who held the priesthood before—such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, John the Baptist, Peter, James, and John. This usage of the term “fathers” is in the Old Testament (e.g., Exodus 3:15) as well as the New (e.g., Matthew 23:30; Luke 1:55). The recently received D&C 84:14-15, 31-34 used similar language, as will the yet-to-be-revealed Abraham 1:26, 31.

9 ***hid from the world.*** Referring back to the image of the church in the wilderness (v. 3), this explains where the priesthood was all those years.

10 ***your life and the priesthood have remained.*** The wheat is being preserved as the harvest is delayed until it is the best time for the harvest.

10 ***until the restoration of all things.*** Quoting Acts 3:21, this is another indication of the tenderness of the Church—the restoration was just beginning in 1832 and there was yet—and still is yet—more to come until “all things” have been restored.

11 ***continue in my goodness, a light unto the Gentiles.*** See Isaiah 42:6; 49:6; 60:3. D&C 45:9 promised that a light would “break forth” among the Gentiles. That light is represented by the priesthood holders of the last days.

11 ***a savior unto my people.*** See Obadiah 1:21 and Isaiah 63:8. There is only one Savior, but priesthood holders administering the covenants of exaltation can be saviors to others.

Results

The changes to the parable align with other revelations Joseph Smith had already received related to the gathering and the fate of the wicked at the Second Coming (see D&C 133:12-14, for example). However, an earlier revelation specifically mentioning the wheat and the tares had maintained the same KJV order—first tares, then wheat (D&C 63:54). Like D&C 76, this revelation represented expanded

¹⁹ So Robinson and Garrett, *A Commentary*, 3:81 and McConkie and Ostler, *Revelations*, 622.

understanding, a progression in the way the Prophet understood the scriptures and the last days.

It also demonstrates Joseph's willingness to consider new ideas and new interpretations, something that others struggled with as the restoration continued to unfold. Those who were humble and teachable, like Joseph Smith, could receive more light and knowledge; those who were stuck in

the past, stumbled on some information and sometimes turned away. It is the same today as we continued to learn and grow in our understanding of Church history and doctrine. To continue to learn and grow, we must be open, teachable, and even eager to learn more, unafraid to set past notions and understandings aside for greater light and knowledge.

D&C 87 – Prophecy on War

Date and Location

Tuesday, 25 December 1832, at Kirtland, Ohio.

Setting

On 21 December 1832, several articles were published in the *Painesville Telegraph* that told of a cholera epidemic in the United States and other parts of the world, a plague ongoing in India killing up to 200 people a day, and an objection raised in South Carolina related to a tariff imposed by the federal government. The South Carolina convention referenced in the article advocated the right to nullify the law or pull out of the Union if the federal government tried to enforce the tariff upon them. With Painesville only ten miles from Kirtland, it was likely that Joseph Smith read these articles with a few days, causing him to ponder this news on Christmas day. He would also have been aware of the violent slave uprising in August of 1831, led by a slave named Nat Turner, that resulted in dozens of white and slave deaths. Many were predicting additional uprisings in the future.²⁰

Brigham Young, who was not present when this prophecy was received, taught in Utah that it came as a result of brethren pondering the question of slavery, and that a voice revealed D&C 87 to Joseph as a result.²¹

Documents and Publication

The oldest copy is in the Newel K. Whitney papers (about 25 Dec 1832). Other copies include RB2 (between 22 Jan and about 27 Feb 1833), RB1 (early 1833), and Sidney Gilbert notebook (about June 1833). It was first published in the Pearl of Great Price in England in 1851, then as Section 87 in the 1876 Doctrine and Covenants.

²⁰ Revelation, 25 December 1832 [D&C 87], *JSP*, D2:328-329.

²¹ Revelation, 25 December 1832 [D&C 87], *JSP*, D2:330n224; Robinson and Garrett, *A Commentary*, 3:85. See also D&C 130:12-13.

Outline

- Prophecy of war between the states (1-4)
- Warning for the last days (5-8)

Commentary

Prophecy of war between the states (1-4)

1 ***the wars that will shortly come to pass***. Though many focus on the Civil War anticipated in this text, the prophecy speaks of “wars” that are coming, beginning with the war between the states.

1 ***beginning at the rebellion of South Carolina***. Immediate events (see Setting) involved a ‘rebellion’ of sorts in South Carolina. Later when the Civil War itself began, it also began at South Carolina, with a state convention declaring on 20 December 1860, almost 28 years to the day from this revelation, that for them, the Constitution was “hereby repealed; and that the union now subsisting between South Carolina and other States, under the name of ‘The United States of America’ is hereby dissolved.” The vote was 169 to zero.²²

1 ***the death and misery of many souls***. The Civil War was the costliest ever fought by the United States, in terms of lives lost, people injured, or property damage done.²³

2 ***war will be poured out upon all nations***. It is difficult today not to find a nation that has not been impacted by war in some way in recent years.

3 ***the Southern States shall be divided against the Northern***. South Carolina's concerns in 1832 had nothing to do with slavery so there was no reason to draw a line between North and South, yet this is exactly what happened in 1860.

3 ***call on other nations***. The South did call on several nations in Europe for support during the Civil War.

²² E. B. Long with Barbara Long, *The Civil War: Day by Day* (New York: Da Capo Press, Inc., 1971), 13.

²³ James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (London: Oxford University Press, 1988), xix.

3 they shall also call upon other nations. The key to this passage is to determine who “they” is. From the flow of the text, many have concluded that it refers to the “other nations” on whom the South will call. In other words, it is a later event, when these nations of Europe will call for help, which is just what happened in both world wars of the 20th century, resulting in war being “poured out upon all nations.”

4 slaves shall rise up against their masters. This may not refer to the Civil War, which did not see many slave uprisings. Rather, in the context, it refers to events that will happen during or after the other wars when nations will call on other nations. In a broad context, “slavery” can refer to many human conditions, not limited to the type of slavery we typically envision from our own history in the United States.²⁴

Warning for the last days (5-8)

5 the remnants who are left of the land shall marshal themselves. Shifting gears to events that will come “after many days,” the prophesy now speaks of “the remnants,” which likely speaks of the tribes of Israel who will battle with the Gentiles in the last days (see Micah 5:8; 3 Nephi 20:10-20; D&C 3:17-20).²⁵

6 famine, and plague, and earthquake, and the thunder of heaven, and the fierce and vivid lightning. Besides the wars that people will bring upon themselves, the Lord will also call them to repentance using natural means, that they might feel his “chastening hand.” See D&C 29 and 45.

6 a full end of all nations. This will happen with the Second Coming and Christ becoming king of the whole earth.

7 the cry of the saints...shall cease to come up. Several passages in Revelation portray the blood of the righteous being consumed by the wicked, and in one case crying unto the Lord for vengeance (Revelation 6:9-10). This is found

several times in the Book of Mormon as well (2 Nephi 26:3; 28:10; 3 Nephi 9:11; Mormon 8:23, 27; Ether 8:22).

7 the Lord of Sabaoth. Used twice in the New Testament, this is the first use of this title in the Doctrine and Covenants. “Sabaoth” is a Hebrew word that means ‘hosts’ or ‘armies’ (and is so translated in the Old Testament, with “Lord of hosts” occurring 245 times) but has no relation to the Sabbath, though the words are similar in English.

8 stand ye in holy places. This phrase is unique to the Doctrine and Covenants and was first used in D&C 45:32. This second reference likely brought the two main gathering locations of the Church to the minds of the early members, Missouri and Ohio. However, we understand “holy places” today broadly, including “our temples, our chapels, our homes, and the stakes of Zion.”²⁶

Results

Ten days after Christmas 1832, Joseph Smith wrote a letter to a paper in Rochester, New York, which was published. In that letter, he warned the United States of challenges ahead, according to what he had learned in D&C 87. At other times in his life, he instructed people on the coming wars and difficulties, even specifically telling converts from South Carolina to leave the state ahead of events that were coming.

Long after Joseph Smith’s death, when the civil war began, newspapers picked up this prophecy and published it, asking the question, “Have we not had a prophet among us?”²⁷ The details of what he prophesied and what happened were very striking to those in the middle of the events, as they are to us today. Pity more in the country didn’t answer that question in the positive and explore in more than a passing interest the life and mission of Joseph Smith, the Prophet.

²⁴ McConkie and Ostler, *Revelations*, 624; Robinson and Garrett, *A Commentary*, 3:89.

²⁵ Revelation, 25 December 1832 [D&C 87], *JSP*, D2:330n225; McConkie and Ostler, *Revelations*, 624-625; Robinson and Garrett, *A Commentary*, 3:90.

²⁶ Robinson and Garrett, *A Commentary*, 3:92, quoting President Ezra Taft Benson.

²⁷ Robinson and Garrett, *A Commentary*, 3:86.

Images

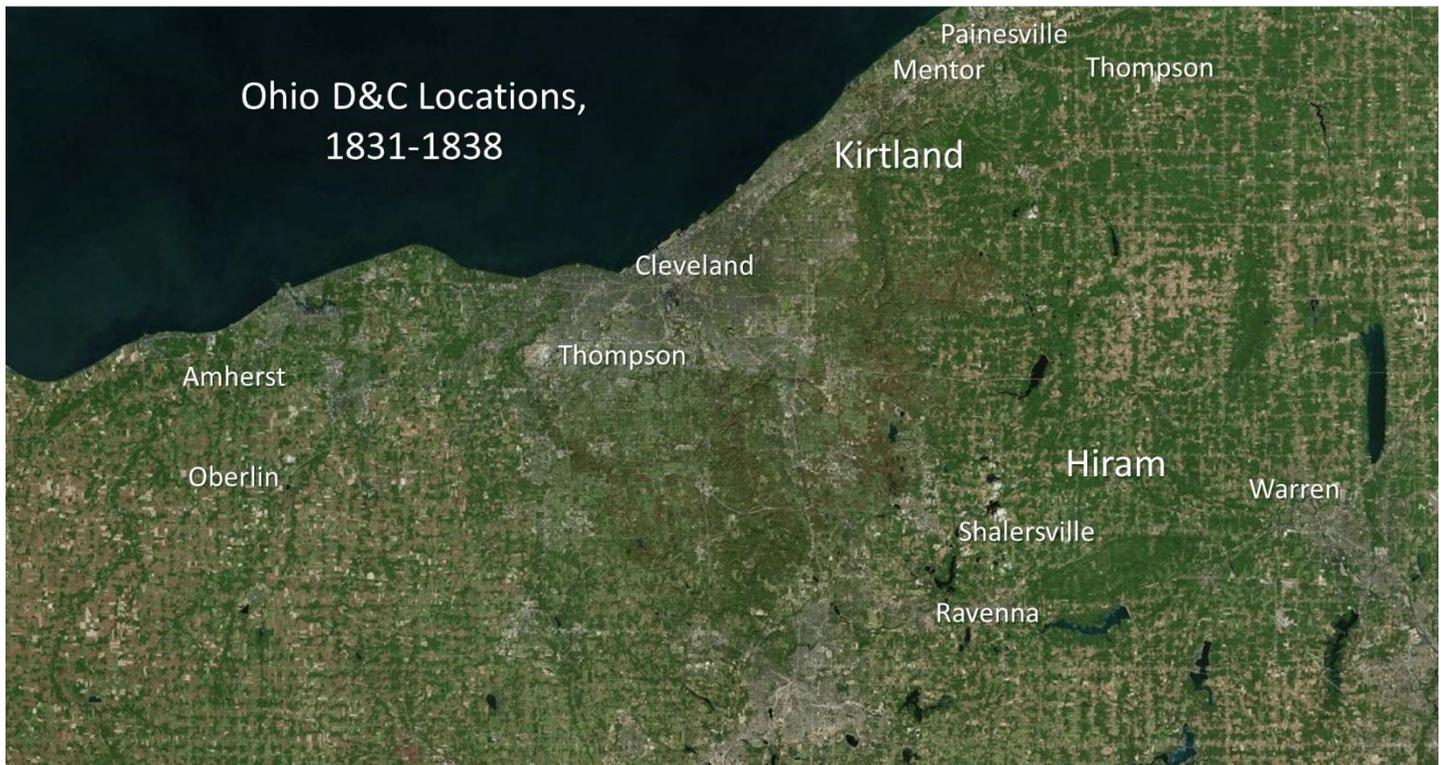


Image #1: Church history sites in the area around Kirtland, Ohio, 1831-1838.

Works Consulted

For text notes:

RB1 – Revelation Book 1, from *JSP*, MRB:8-405.

RB2 – Revelation Book 2, from *JSP*, MRB:407-665.

EMS – *The Evening and the Morning Star*, June 1832-May 1833, from *JSP*, R2:202-299.

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