

Comments on Doctrine & Covenants 11

This text is a revelation addressed to Hyrum Smith, Joseph's older brother. Hyrum married some three years earlier in 1826 and had moved out of the family home, but still lived nearby. It is plain from what is available of the history that Hyrum was aware the plates and Joseph's involvement with them, but how well acquainted with their contents or import is unclear.

Joseph had moved from Manchester, NY to Harmony, PA to translate with Oliver Cowdery acting as scribe. The majority of the translation was done out of the presence of Joseph's family.

Samuel and then Hyrum travel to see Joseph, and it is at this point they are both convinced of the sincerity of Joseph's endeavors. These two are early converts among Joseph's family. Joseph Smith Senior, their father, was not baptized until April 1830, about a year later.

The revelation informs Hyrum that he is not at present called to preach (v. 15), but is told to do those things that will invite the Spirit (v. 12) and study the Scriptures by that Spirit (v. 16-22) to prepare for future preaching (v. 21). Having been only recently fully acquainted with the pursuits of his younger brother, it is plain to see why Hyrum was not called to actively preach concerning it.

1 A great and marvelous work is about to come forth among the children of men. 2 Behold, I am God; give heed to my word, which is quick and powerful, sharper than a two-edged sword, to the dividing asunder of both joints and marrow; therefore give heed unto my word. 3 Behold, the field is white already to harvest; therefore, whoso desireth to reap let him thrust in his sickle with his might, and reap while the day lasts, that he may treasure up for his soul everlasting salvation in the kingdom of God. 4 Yea, whosoever will thrust in his sickle and reap, the same is called of God. 5 Therefore, if you will ask of me you shall receive; if you will knock it shall be opened unto you.

v1-10 is nearly identical to D&C 6:1-10, with the texts diverging significantly in the latter half on v. 10.

v1-5 These verses are derivative of D&C 4. However, this presentation is a bit more negative than that of section 4 as it presents the harvest more as a division theme with the substance of v. 2, 4.

v2 Here, the theme of John 7:47-48 is used with some very

graphic imagery. The word of the Lord is elsewhere compared to a sword in Isa. 49:2, Rev. 1:16. That it is a two-edged sword would appear to indicate that it cuts both ways as both the bearer and the one it is used against are judged according to the Lord's word. That it is sharper than a sword pushes a spiritual interpretation where the physical sword can destroy physical life, the Lord's word can cause physical and spiritual life or death.

6 Now, as you have asked, behold, I say unto you, keep my commandments, and seek to bring forth and establish the cause of Zion. 7 Seek not for riches but for wisdom; and, behold, the mysteries of God shall be unfolded unto you, and then shall you be made rich. Behold, he that hath eternal life is rich. 8 Verily, verily, I say unto you, even as you desire of me so it shall be done unto you; and, if you desire, you shall be the means of doing much good in this generation. 9 Say nothing but repentance unto this generation. Keep my commandments, and assist to bring forth my work, according to my commandments, and you shall be blessed.

v6-9 Hyrum is generally told to strive after the spiritual and reject the physical. If he does, he will accomplish much good among his peers.

v7 The Smith family had always been in financially difficult times, and their enemies made it all the more difficult on them. Concerns over these matters were sure to have been persistent, particularly with Hyrum having his own family with small children to take care of. There is nothing in the historical record suggesting Hyrum had problems with coveting material things.

10 Behold, thou hast a gift, or thou shalt have a gift if thou wilt desire of me in faith, with an honest heart, believing in the power of Jesus Christ, or in my power which speaketh unto thee; 11 For, behold, it is I that speak; behold, I am the light which shineth in darkness, and by my power I give these words unto thee. 12 And now, verily, verily, I say unto thee, put your trust in that Spirit which leadeth to do good--yea, to do justly, to walk humbly, to judge righteously; and this is my Spirit. 13 Verily, verily, I say unto you, I will impart unto you of my Spirit, which shall enlighten your mind, which shall fill your soul with joy; 14 And then shall ye know, or by this shall you know, all things whatsoever you desire of me, which are pertaining unto things of righteousness, in faith believing in me that you shall receive.

v10-14 The Lord instructs Hyrum on the gift that has been given him, and which he needs to cultivate. As Hyrum follows the Spirit in doing good works, it will enlighten his mind and teach him things pertaining to righteousness. Particularly note the gentle manner in which the Lord bears witness of Himself in v. 11 and then encourages Hyrum. Contrast this with the personal statements made to Cowdery (D&C 6) and Harris (D&C 3, 10) in earlier sections of the D&C.

v12-13 Herein is a formula for spiritual enlightenment. Do good works and maintain a godly walk (v. 12) and the Spirit will be with you to teach you the things of the gospel (v. 13). Naturally, study of the Scriptures facilitates this process per v. 21-22.

15 Behold, I command you that you need not suppose that you are called to preach until you are called. 16 wait a little longer, until you shall have my word, my rock, my church, and my gospel, that you may know of a surety my doctrine. 17 And then, behold, according to your desires, yea, even according to your faith shall it be done unto you. 18 Keep my commandments; hold your peace; appeal unto my Spirit; 19 Yea, cleave unto me with all your heart, that you may assist in bringing to light those things of which has been spoken--yea, the translation of my work; be patient until you shall accomplish it. 20 Behold, this is your work, to keep my commandments, yea, with all your might, mind and strength. 21 Seek not to declare my word, but first seek to obtain my word, and then shall your tongue be loosed; then, if you desire, you shall have my Spirit and my word, yea, the power of God unto the convincing of men. 22 But now hold your peace; study my word which hath gone forth among the children of men, and also study my word which shall come forth among the children of men, or that which is now translating, yea, until you have obtained all which I shall grant unto the children of men in this generation, and then shall all things be added thereto.

v15-22 Hyrum is informed his current calling is to learn more about the gospel, and not to preach. After he has firmly established himself, he may preach if he desires. But now his calling is to keep the commandments and to assist Joseph in bringing forth the Book of Mormon.

v19 "be patient until you shall accomplish it", the "it" is referring to the "assist[ance] in bringing to light those things which has been spoken", and not the "translation of my work" which was Joseph's calling.

v22 "my word which hath gone forth", referring to the Bible, cf. 1 Ne. 13:38.

23 Behold thou art Hyrum, my son; seek the kingdom of God, and all things shall be added according to that which is just. 24 Build upon my rock, which is my gospel; 25 Deny not the spirit of revelation, nor the spirit of prophecy, for wo unto him that denieth these things; 26 Therefore, treasure up in your heart until the time which is in my wisdom that you shall go forth.

v23-26 A general conclusion to Hyrum summarizing what has previously been said. Note again the admonition to seek spiritual treasure over physical treasure repeated from v. 7.

v25 Hyrum is warned against rejecting the work of his younger brother. We know from Lucy Mack Smith's recounting of events that Hyrum was involved in protecting the plates from Joseph's enemies as well as being well acquainted with Harris' loss of the 116 page manuscript. So, even though he had moved out of the family home, Hyrum was aware of Joseph's activities. But, apparently there were some few lingering doubts.

27 Behold, I speak unto all who have good desires, and have thrust in their sickle to reap. 28 Behold, I am Jesus Christ, the Son of God. I am the life and the light of the world. 29 I am the same who came unto mine own and mine own received me not; 30 But verily, verily, I say unto you, that as many as receive me, to them will I give power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on my name. Amen.

v27-30 A general conclusion to all people informing them that all who have good desires are to assist in the Lord's work. Those who do accept Christ, and assist in the work will be the children of God.

Historical Material Pertaining to Doctrine & Covenants 11

Joseph and Oliver had received the Aaronic Priesthood from John Baptist on May 15, 1829 and baptized one another. Joseph's brother Samuel visited later that month and was baptized on May 25th. Then, at some point before the end of May, Hyrum came and visited as well, apparently prompted by Samuel's visit, and Joseph obtained this revelation for him. Hyrum was not baptized during the initial visit as was Samuel. He was baptized the following month by Joseph, June 1829, after Joseph and Oliver had moved into the Whitmer home in Fayette, NY, in the Finger Lakes region, northwest of Seneca Lake.

This section was published first in the Book of Commandments on pages 28-30 in 1833, then in the Kirtland edition Doctrine & Covenants on pages 167-168 in 1835. It was published in Times and Seasons, volume 3, number 19, pages 866-867 on August 1, 1842 and in the Millennial Star, volume 3, number 9, pages 149-150, January 1843.

Excerpt from History of the Church

After a few days [of translation without interruption], however, feeling it to be our duty, we commenced to reason out of the Scriptures with our acquaintances and friends, as we happened to meet with them. About this time my brother Samuel H. Smith came [from Manchester, NY] to visit us [at Harmony, PA]. We informed him of what the Lord was about to do for the children of men, and began to reason with him out of the Bible. We also showed him that part of the work which we had translated, and labored to persuade him concerning the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which was now about to be revealed in its fulness. He was not, however, very easily persuaded of these things, but after much inquiry and explanation he retired to the woods, in order that by secret and fervent prayer he might obtain of a merciful God, wisdom to enable him to judge for himself. The result was that he obtained revelation for himself sufficient to convince him of the truth of our assertions to him; and on the twenty-fifth day of that same month [of May, 1829] in which we had been baptized and ordained, Oliver Cowdery baptized him; and he returned to his father's house, greatly glorifying and praising God, being filled with the Holy Spirit.

Not many days afterwards, my brother Hyrum Smith came to us to inquire concerning these things, when at his earnest request, I inquired of the Lord through the Urim and Thummim, and

received for him the following:

[text of D&C 11 follows]

(Joseph Smith, History of the Church, Volume 1, pages 44-45)

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