

Comments on Doctrine & Covenants 47

1 Behold, it is expedient in me that my servant John should write and keep a regular history, and assist you, my servant Joseph, in transcribing all things which shall be given you, until he is called to further duties. 2 Again, verily I say unto you that he can also lift up his voice in meetings, whenever it shall be expedient. 3 And again, I say unto you that it shall be appointed unto him to keep the church record and history continually; for Oliver Cowdery I have appointed to another office. 4 Wherefore, it shall be given him, inasmuch as he is faithful, by the Comforter, to write these things. Even so. Amen.

While primarily a section aimed at Whitmer personally, v. 4 does give some interesting insight into the documentation of scriptures. In v. 4 it states that inasmuch as he is faithful he is to "write these things" (i.e., both the revelations of God and the history of the Church) by the Holy Spirit. Thus, the scriptures and histories are ideally documented by inspiration. An inspired documentary would be preferable to an uninspired one, for obvious reasons.

Historical Material Pertaining to Doctrine & Covenants 47

John Whitmer was called to the Church Historian in the place of Oliver Cowdery. John wrote the history for some years, but became estranged from the Church, and was ultimately excommunicated from the Church on March 10, 1838 at Far West, MO (see History of the Church, vol. 3, pages 3-5). Upon excommunication, Whitmer refused to hand over the documents to the Church, rather passing them on to his nephew John C. Whitmer, and they ultimately came into the hands of the RLDS Church, which published their contents some time later.

It appears from the comments Whitmer makes himself in chapter 6 paragraph 1 (see below), from the rather scant historical record left, and from the Lord's admonition in D&C 69:7-8, that John was not zealous for the calling of Church Historian.

The first two excerpts below are first, Smith's brief comment on the revelation, and second, his rather pointed letter to Whitmer insisting he turn the documents in his possession over to the Church.

There are then three excerpts from Whitmer's written history itself. The first excerpt from the history identifies the author and start date. The second excerpt makes some comment upon his being called in this section of the D&C. The third excerpt is a lengthy one which reveals Whitmer's growing anger at the Church. There are portions of the text below with a strike line through it, reflecting that portion which Whitmer himself edited as he changed the contents as time went on. It is interesting to watch Whitmer's comments change over time as his obvious bitterness affected his writing.

Excerpt from History of the Church

The same day [March 8, 1831] that I received the foregoing revelation [D&C 46], I also received the following, setting apart John Whitmer as a historian, inasmuch as he is faithful:

[text of D&C 47 quoted]

(Joseph Smith, History of the Church, volume 1, page 166)

Excerpt from History of the Church

The following letter was sent to John Whitmer, in consequence of his withholding the records of the Church in the city of Far West, when called for by the clerk.

Mr. John Whitmer, Sir: We were desirous of honoring you

by giving publicity to your notes on the history of the Church of Latter-day Saints, after making such corrections as we thought would be necessary, knowing your incompetency as a historian, and that writings coming from your pen, could not be put to press without our correcting them, or else the Church must suffer reproach. Indeed, sir, we never supposed you capable of writing a history, but were willing to let it come out under your name, notwithstanding it would really not be yours but ours. We are still willing to honor you, if you can be made to know your own interest, and give up your notes, so that they can be corrected and made fit for the press; but if not, we have all the materials for another, which we shall commence this week to write.

Your humble servants,
JOSEPH SMITH, JUN.,
SIDNEY RIGDON,
Presidents of the whole Church of Latter-day Saints.

Attest: EBENEZER ROBINSON, Clerk.

(Joseph Smith, History of the Church, volume 1, pages 15-16)

Excerpt from the Book of John Whitmer

THE BOOK OF JOHN WHITMER
KEPT BY COMMANDMENT

I shall proceed to continue this record, being commanded of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, to write the things that transpire in this Church (inasmuch as they come to my knowledge,) in these last days. It is now June the twelfth, one thousand eight hundred and thirty one years, since the coming of our Lord and Savior in the flesh. (John Whitmer, Book of John Whitmer, chapter 1, paragraph 1)

Excerpt from the Book of John Whitmer

I returned from Nelson, Ohio, where I and Lyman Wight had built a branch of the Church of Christ. I was appointed by the voice of the elders to keep the Church Record. Joseph Smith, Jr., said unto me you must also keep the Church history. I would rather not do it but observed that the will of the Lord be done, and if he desires it, I desire that he would manifest it through Joseph the Seer. And thus came the word of the Lord: [text of D&C 47 quoted]

Oliver Cowdery has written the commencement of the Church history, commencing at the time of the finding of the plates, up to June 12th, 1831. From this date I have written the things that I have written, and they are a mere sketch of the things that have transpired, they are however all that seemed to me wisdom to write many things happened that are to be lamented, because of the weakness and instability of man. The devil having a great hold on the hearts of the children of men, and the foolish traditions of our fathers, is to be lamented, for they count themselves the children of wisdom, and great knowledge, in consequence of which, the fulness of the gospel finds its way to but few of the hearts of this generation. Although their hearts must be penetrated, whether they will hear or whether they will forbear. (John Whitmer, Book of John Whitmer, chapter 6, paragraph 1-2)

Excerpt from the Book of John Whitmer

CHAPTER 19

And it came to pass that E. Partridge, Isaac Morley, John Corrill, and W. W. Phelps left Kirtland to fill their mission in Missouri, where they had left their families.

They arrived in Missouri in safety. But as soon as these men arrived at home the devil roared in this land and stirred the old Jackson County mob up to great anger, and the people in Clay County. The aforementioned brethren went in search of a place where the Church could settle in peace and found a country north of Ray County that would answer the purpose, providing the few scattered inhabitants that resided there were willing for the brethren to move there and enjoy their religion and constitutional rights, as well as the counties round about.

This move gave great uneasiness and the people of Clay County convened and some were determined to drive the brethren from the state; others were opposed, and finally we succeeded to get the consent of the people of Clay County and a majority of Ray to move into this place now Caldwell County.

Therefore commenced settling this place, Far West, in the summer of 1836; in August the first building was erected.

Some difficulties arose in the land of Kirtland, and dissensions took place which is to be feared will end in the misery of some precious souls.

Some difficulties have taken place in this county, Caldwell, but

are now all settled to the satisfaction of all parties as I believe.

T. B. Marsh and D. W. Patton have left for Kirtland, Ohio, to fill a mission in their apostolic capacity.

In the fall of 1838 (i.e., 1837) Joseph Smith, Jr., Sidney Rigdon came to Zion, on a visit to prepare a place for themselves and families.

The situation of the Church both here and in Kirtland is in an unpleasant situation in consequence of the reorganization of its authorities, which was not satisfactory to all concerned. And has terminated in the expulsion of some members, as also some temporal movements, have not proved satisfactory to all parties has also terminated in the expulsion of many members ~~among whom is W. W. Phelps and myself. Therefore, I close the history of the Church of Latter-day Saints, hoping that I may be forgiven of my faults, and my sins be blotted out and in the last day be saved in the Kingdom of God, notwithstanding my private situation, which I hope will soon be bettered and I find favor in the eyes of God, all men and his Saints. Farewell. March 1838.~~

CHAPTER 20 1837

In the fall of 1836, Joseph Smith, Jr., S. Rigdon and others of the leaders of the Church at Kirtland, Ohio, established a bank for the purpose of speculation, and the whole Church partook of the same spirit; they were lifted up in pride, and lusted after the forbidden things of God, such as covetousness, and in secret combinations, spiritual-wife doctrine, that is plurality of wives, and Gadianton bands, in which they were bound with oaths, etc., that brought division and mistrust among those who were pure in heart, and desired the upbuilding of the Kingdom of God.

Joseph Smith, Jr., S. Rigdon, and Hyrum Smith moved their families to this place, Far West, in the spring of 1838. As soon as they came here, they began to enforce their new organized plan, which caused dissensions and difficulties, threatenings and even murders. Smith called a council of the leaders together, in which council he stated that any person who said a word against the heads of the Church, should be driven over these prairies as a chased deer by a pack of hounds, having an illusion to the Gideonites, as they were termed, to justify themselves in their wicked designs. Thus on the 19th of June, 1838, they preached a sermon called the salt sermon, in which these Gideonites understood that they should drive the dissenters, as they termed those who believed not in their secret bands, in fornication,

adultery or midnight machinations. Therefore they commenced suing at the law of the land by attachment for debts which they knew were paid, and justly paid, according to the laws of God and the land, and thus foreswore themselves in these things. Joseph Smith, Jr., S. Rigdon and Hyrum Smith were the instigators, and George W. Robinson, the prosecutor against David Whitmer, Lyman E. Johnson, Oliver Cowdery, F. G. Williams, W. W. Phelps and myself. They had threatened us, to kill us, if we did not make restitutions to them, by upholding them in their wicked purposes and designs. After they had instituted the foregoing suits Oliver Cowdery, D. Whitmer, L. E. Johnson and myself went to Clay County to obtain legal council, to prepare to overthrow these attachments which they had caused to be issued against us, which we were abundantly able to do by good and substantial witnesses.

But to our great astonishment, when we were on our way home from Liberty, Clay County, we met the families of Oliver Cowdery and L. E. Johnson, whom they had driven from their homes, and robbed them of all their goods, save clothing, bedding, etc.

While we were gone, Jo. and Rigdon and their band of Gadiantons kept up a guard, and watched our houses, and abused our families, and threatened them, if they were not gone by morning, they would be drove [driven] out, and threatened our lives, if they ever saw us in Far West.

After they had driven us and our families, they commenced a difficulty in Daviess County, adjoining this county, in which they began to rob and burn houses, etc. etc., took honey which they, (the Mormons) called sweet oil, and hogs which they called bear, and cattle which they called buffalo. Thus they would justify themselves by saying, "We are the people of God, and all things are God's; therefore, they are ours." The old inhabitants were not slack in paying them in their own coin. Thus war and bloodshed commenced and the result was the Church was driven from this land, the pure in heart and innocent, as well as the more wicked, save a few dissenters who were left here to fulfill some of the former commandments.

Now, before the Church left, Joseph Smith, Jr., Sidney Rigdon, H. Smith, P.P. Pratt, Lyman Wight and Amasa Lyman were delivered up to General Lucas and General Clark, and the rest of the officers of the government, and were ordered out by the governor of this state to stop the difficulties between the citizens and the Mormons. Smith and those others were tried by those officers for treason, etc., but found that they were not legally authorized to execute them after having found them guilty of many breaches of the law of the land, they put them in the hand of civil officers

of the government, to be tried by the law of the land, and were committed to jail; but before the trial came on, which was named to some of the counties of this state, where the people were not so much prejudiced against them, as they were moved from Clay County to the county where they were to be tried, they hired the guard to let them go, etc., which they did and informed their brethren that an angel had delivered them from the guard; when in fact money hired those base and corrupt men, who let them go; and this through the wickedness of those to whom their safe-keeping were committed, these men escaped the justice of the law of the land which they had transgressed, and went unpunished at this time.

CHAPTER 21

Now after Smith and those who were with him were let go, they speedily went to Illinois to a place which Smith named Nauvoo, where they built a city which they called Nauvoo, and began to build up a broken and scattered people, sending forth many elders and priests, etc., to proclaim to the nations of the earth, the suffering of the saints and also the gospel in great haste. And many received the gospel, and gathered to Nauvoo, and built a city. Smith received a commandment to build a house unto the name of the Lord which they speedily commenced, but did not complete it before the wicked rose up and murdered Joseph and Hyrum Smith. Now, the Mormons (as they were called by those who did not believe in the Book of Mormon) found great favor in the eyes of the governor and congress of Illinois, so that the Mormons had a charter granted for the city of Nauvoo, in which they organized themselves according to their own desires.

Now, according to the best information I could get, they, the leaders, protested against spiritual wife system and Gadianton bands and their wickedness publicly, but I will show hereafter that they did not do as did the Lamanites in the days of the Nephites, when they were convinced of the incorrect traditions of their fathers, for when they were one converted, they remained so until the day of their death.

As soon as the Lord gave Smith and the Church favor in the eyes of the people among whom they lived, and began to prosper them and many began to gather to Nauvoo, Smith and the leaders began to exercise their hatred to those whom he called his enemies. He hired a man by the name of Porter Orin Rockwell (who was one of the Gadianton band of whom I heretofore spoke) to go and murder a man by the name of L. W. Boggs who had been elected governor by the people of the state of Missouri but was not governor at the time Smith sent him to commit this crime. Boggs resided at

Independence, the place appointed for the land of Zion, yea, the new Jerusalem; so Rockwell went to Independence, and at night he went to the house of Boggs and shot him through the window; but he did not kill him, only wounded him severly, but he recovered. Rockwell was caught and put to jail, and I believe he was tried by a jury of inquest, but was not sufficient testimony to condemn him, though it is a well-known fact that he was hired by Smith to kill Boggs.

Now the foregoing I have given to show that the secret band did still exist among the leaders of the Church, even in Smith, the prophet and seer and revelator. Had it not been upheld by him, the Church would not have suffered in the way it did. For example, look at the children of Israel in the days of King Saul; for his transgression of the kingdom was rent from him and given to another more worthy; and the children of Israel suffered much in consequence thereof.

Now, as I said before, the Lord began to prosper them in Nauvoo and as soon as they began to prosper they began to be lifted up in pride, and behaved vilely towards the people in Hancock County, Illinois, in which county Nauvoo is situated, as also to the people in the counties round about, so that the people began to threaten them again and raised mobs to drive the Saints, (as they called themselves) from their homes. The Mormons at the same time would steal from them many things; and indeed the Mormons would justify themselves in this wicked way saying, "We are the Lord's, and the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof; therefore these things are ours." Also, "God has said by the mouths of the prophets that he would consecrate the riches of the Gentiles to the house of Israel, and we are the house of Israel, etc. etc." "Now," say they, "when these things are placed before our eyes, go, and God is not intending to give it himself, but you are agents, and these things are before you, go and help yourselves," etc.

Now, these scriptures would they quote to excuse themselves that they might steal and rob their neighbors, according to their wicked desires, lusting after those things which were forbidden them in the scriptures.

After the Mormons had their city chartered by the state legislature they had all their officers, and when any stole, they would flee to Nauvoo to seek protection; and behold they were protected and upheld, so that the guilty would not be punished according to the law of the land. Now, had the leaders been willing to bring the guilty to justice, they could not have escaped, but must have been punished; but here is the bad effect of secret combinations,

such as have ever destroyed the Church of God, because those who were leaders in the Church were partakers of these Cain institutions, which were handed down by the devil.

In the meanwhile, the Twelve were preaching in England and elsewhere and built up many Churches; the gathering continued, and many who were born again and came to Nauvoo and beheld the things that were there conducted sickened in their hearts; others were pleased with the things, for in their hearts; others were pleased with the things, for they were pleasing to the carnal mind, especially where an assurance was held forth for their protection by the prophet of God. Others denied the faith, for they knew that these things were contrary to the words of God and withdrew themselves.

Now there has been much said and published by the mobbers of Illinois and Missouri that are without a shadow of truth as also by the people of Nauvoo.

Now, Smith wrote many revelations concerning himself, as you will see by reading the Book of Covenants printed at Kirtland, Ohio, in which we read that the keys of the kingdom of God should not be taken from him until Christ should come, on condition that he should not transgress. But if he should transgress, they should be taken, and another be appointed in his stead, and that this should be all the power that he should have to appoint another in his stead.

~~God, knowing all things, prepared a man whom he visited by an angel of God and showed him where there were some ancient records hid, and also put in his heart to desire of faith to grant him power to establish a stake to Zion in Wisconsin Territory, whose name is James J. Strang. Now at first Smith was unfavorably disposed to grant him this request, but being troubled in spirit and knowing from the things that were staring him in the face that his days must soon be closed, therefore he enquired of the Lord and behold the Lord said Appoint James J. Strang a prophet, seer and revelator unto my Church, for thou shalt thereby do a mention thy cup is bitter etc. Shortly after the appointment of Strang, the mob gathered and took by stratagem Joseph and Hyrum Smith and conveyed them to Carthage, the seat of justice in and for the county of Hancock (Caldwell has been stricken out in favor of Hancock) as if to try them by the law of the land for their crimes, they murdered them and thus the Lord's anointed fell by the brutal hand of man and they are gone the way of all the earth and Strang reigns in the place of Smith, the author and proprietor of the Book of Mormon.~~

As I have before stated that Joseph Smith had left Kirtland, Ohio, with the camp of the saints so called to go to Jackson County to redeem Zion, and received a revelation that God would redeem it in his own time, etc. On his way to Missouri, or Zion, he was frequently heard to say that he had a duty to perform, and that was, he has to appoint another in his stead, to wit, David Whitmer.

After the camp dispersed at Fishing River, Smith and F. G. Williams came to Clay County together with many others who scattered in Clay County and elsewhere, Smith called a conference at the house of Lyman Wight, three miles west of Liberty, in which conference the most of the official members belonging to Zion were present, where Smith organized the high council of Zion, as I said in a former chapter, in which David Whitmer was ordained president of Zion, and John Whitmer and W. W. Phelps his counselors. Here at the same time, he ordained David Whitmer prophet, seer and revelator and translator.

CHAPTER 22

Now from this time forth, which was in July, 1834, Smith seemed to be in doubt whereinto this thing would grow, and began to upbraid D. Whitmer, and abuse him as his natural custom to do unto those whom he feared, lest they should become great in the sight of God or man; therefore, he harangued the conference and sought to destroy the confidence of the people present in David Whitmer, on whom he had bestowed all the gifts and power that he had himself received by inspiration, by the laying on his hand according to the order of heaven.

After Smith's return to Kirtland, Ohio, and after his ordering the first elders of the Church to go to Ohio, there to receive their endowments from on high, he hastened the finishing of the house at Kirtland which was commenced before he had gone to Zion to redeem her. He from this time began to be lifted up in the pride of his eyes, and began to seek riches and the glory of the world; also sought to establish the ancient order of things, as he and his counsellors, Rigdon and Hyrum Smith, pleased to call it. Therefore, they began to form themselves into a secret society which they termed the brother of Gideon, in the which society they took oaths that they would support a brother right or wrong, even to the shedding of blood. Thus those who belonged to this society were bound to keep it a profound secret, never to reveal, but ever to conceal these abominations from all and every person except those who were of the same craft. But these things could not be kept a secret, in consequence of betrayers who fell from their faith and revealed their secrets.

Thus things were carried on by secret plots and midnight machinations, which society was beginning to be established in Kirtland, Ohio, in the fall of 1836. The formation of these things together with adultery, wickedness and abominations which grew and multiplied in the heads and members of the Church of Christ of Latter-day Saints brought Joseph Smith and his brother, Hyrum, to an untimely end, as also the scattering of the Church, and the Twelve who assumed the authority of leading the Church, were scattered from Nauvoo and suffered great afflictions. As also James J. Strang who also professes to be appointed Seer, Revelator, Prophet and successor of him, Joseph; also Sidney Rigdon he drew a portion after him.

Now it came to pass that the Twelve of whom Brigham is leader in

(Here the Whitmer record ends at the bottom of page 96. It was in this condition when it came into the hands of the Reorganized Church.)

(John Whitmer, Book of John Whitmer, chapters 19-22)

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