

THE DOCTRINE & COVENANTS MADE HARDER

SCRIPTURE STUDY QUESTIONS

JAMES E. FAULCONER



Brigham Young University
Provo, Utah

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Wherever you look about you, in literature and life, you see the celebrated names and figures, the precious and much heralded men who are coming into prominence and are much talked about, the many benefactors of the age who know how to benefit mankind by making life easier and easier, some by railways, others by omnibuses and steamboats, others by the telegraph, others by easily apprehended compendiums and short recitals of everything worth knowing, and finally the true benefactors of the age who make spiritual existence in virtue of thought easier and easier. . . . You must do something, but inasmuch as with your limited capacities it will be impossible to make anything easier than it has become, you must, with the same humanitarian enthusiasm as the others, undertake to make something harder.

JOHANNES CLIMACUS
Concluding Unscientific Postscript

Lesson 18

Doctrine and Covenants 95; 109; 110

Doctrine and Covenants 95

Verses 1–2: Paraphrased, these verses seem to say: I love you, and I chasten those whom I love so that their sins can be forgiven. Chastisement is necessary for forgiveness of sins because it prepares a way for people to be delivered from temptation. How does chastisement help prepare us to be delivered from temptation? Is it important that people are delivered *from* temptation (passive voice)? Why must we be delivered from temptation for our sins to be forgiven? How does the Lord chastise us?

Verse 3: How had the Saints “not considered the *great* commandment” (emphasis added) with regard to the Lord’s command to build a temple? (See D&C 88:119–20 for the command to build the Kirtland Temple.)

Verse 4: Verses 1–5 are one long sentence. It is relatively easy to understand how the first three verses fit into the sentence grammatically, but it is not obvious how verse 4 is related to the rest of the sentence. Does it describe one of the purposes of the Kirtland Temple?

How is the missionary work initiated by the early apostles a way that the Lord pruned his vineyard? In other words, how are we to understand a gathering as a pruning?

What is the Lord talking about when he refers to “my strange act”? What meaning might “strange” have here? (Compare Isaiah 28:21.)

Verse 5: Verse 1 ends with a dash, as does verse 4. Does that suggest that verses 2–4 are a parenthetical remark and that the sentence proper consists of verses 1 and 5? Or, are the dashes unrelated to each other, with the first one marking off verse 1 from verses 2–4, and the second one marking off verse 5 from verse 4?

Would those who received this revelation have understood it to refer to specific people rather than to be a general claim? If you heard this as referring to specific people, what might you have thought?

Verse 6: This verse names the sin that those ordained but not chosen have committed, “walking in darkness at noon-day.” Considering the context in which this was given, can you say specifically what they had done that meant they were ignoring the light? Do we find ourselves ignoring the light? When?

Verse 7: What is “this cause,” the cause for which the Lord has commanded them to call a solemn assembly?

Why does the Lord speak here of fasting and mourning? Why are they fasting? For what are they mourning?

In the Old and New Testaments, fasting seems to have three purposes: as an act of penance (a sign of repentance), as an act of mourning (which is probably why it could also be an act of penance, mourning that one has sinned), and as a way of reinforcing prayer. I believe that we almost always

think of it as a way of reinforcing our supplications to God. This verse suggests that perhaps it ought also to still be a sign of mourning and penance for us. How would we make it that?

Verse 8: This is an early reference to the endowment. (See also D&C 38:32, 38; 43:16; 105:11; and 110:9.) In each case where the Lord promises the endowment, he speaks of being “endowed with power from on high.” Does that phrase refer only to a specific endowment that was given in Kirtland, or does it also apply to the endowment as we know it?

What “power from on high” was given in Kirtland? What power from on high is given us in our endowment?

Verse 9: What does it mean that the Saints were commanded to “tarry, even as mine apostles at Jerusalem” (compare Luke 24:49)?

Verse 10: Is the Lord naming two separate sins here, the failure to build the temple when commanded and the contentions that arose in the School of the Prophets, or is he naming two related sins? Or is he naming the same sin in two different ways?

Verse 11: The Lord promises that if they are obedient they will have the power to build the temple. Does this suggest anything about why they had not built the temple earlier? What reasons might they have given for not building it?

Verse 12: How is the absence of the Father’s love connected to walking in darkness? Is his love the same as the Holy Ghost?

Verses 13–14: The Lord says: Do not build the house after the manner of the world because I do not ask you to live after the manner of the world. How is not living like the world related to not building like the world? Can you explain what the Lord is saying here?

Verse 17: Orson Pratt said that *Ahman* meant “God” in Adamic. Perhaps *Ahman* is a transliteration of the Hebrew that we pronounce “amen.” Isaiah 65:16 describes God as “God Amen,” though most translators translate *amen* as “truth” in that verse. Revelation 3:14 refers to Christ as “the Amen.” Why might the Lord identify himself in this particular revelation by the name “Son Ahman”?

Alphus is the first letter of the Greek alphabet (though, oddly, *alphus* is the Latin pronunciation of the name of that letter), and *omegus* is the last letter of the Greek alphabet (with the same oddity of using the Latin name rather than the Greek). In Revelation 1:11, Jesus identifies himself as “Alpha and Omega, the first and the last.” What does it mean to say that he is first and last? Why does he identify himself (paraphrasing) in this verse as “the first, in other words, the last”? That does not mean the same as “the first and the last.” What do we make of that difference?

Doctrine and Covenants 109

This section is the dedicatory prayer for the Kirtland Temple, received by revelation. Oliver Cowdery’s journal tells us that he, Sidney Rigdon, Warren Cowdery, and William Parrish assisted Joseph Smith in writing the prayer. What might that teach us about how revelation can come?

How can a prayer be received by revelation? By committee? If prayer is communication with the Lord, how can he tell us what to say to him (see Romans 8:26)?

In 1831 the Lord told the Saints he would retain an interest in Kirtland for five years (D&C 64:21). Thus, anyone who remembered that earlier revelation and believed it also had to believe that the dedication was the beginning of the end for Kirtland. What would you think of building a temple only to abandon it?

Verses 1–3: What do these verses tell about why the Saints built the temple?

Verse 4: We usually talk about receiving salvation, but this verse talks of salvation being administered. What is the difference? What does it mean to administer salvation?

What does it mean for the Lord to accept a temple?

Verse 5: What purpose was the Kirtland Temple to serve? How is that different from temples today? How is that the same?

Verses 7–9: How do these verses describe the Kirtland Temple? For example, how was it a house of learning and study? Is there any similarity between these particular purposes of the Kirtland Temple and the purposes of temples today?

How would a temple make our incomings, outgoings, and salutations be in the Lord's name? What does it mean to say they are in his name?

Verses 10–13: Were you to sum up what the Saints are asking for here, what would you say?

When we ask the Lord for his grace, what are we asking for? What does it mean for something to be done to the Lord's honor?

What promises might they expect to be fulfilled? (Footnote 11a is helpful.)

What does it mean for the Lord's glory to rest on something?

What does it mean for something to be dedicated to the Lord? What does *dedicated* mean? *Sanctified*? *Consecrated*?

What does it mean for the Lord's presence to be in a place? Can that presence be in more than one place at a time? How might those entering the Kirtland Temple feel the Lord's power?

Verses 14–19: Once again there is the mention of study in the temple. The School of the Prophets was in the upper rooms of the Kirtland Temple. Is that what this verse is referring to? If so, why was that school so important to the Church?

Look in a history book to see if you discover what kinds of things were taught in the School of the Prophets. How were those things important to the Church? Today is there anything similar to the School of the Prophets? Is the temple still a house of study? How so?

What does it mean to be prepared to obtain every needful thing?

How is the temple a house of prayer? A house of fasting? A house of faith? How is it a house of glory?

Compare verses 7–9 to verses 14–19. Why this repetition? Sometimes scripture repeats things to “frame” what occurs between the repetitions. Is that happening here? If so, what gets “framed” and what does that framing do?

Verses 20–21: How are these verses related to each other?

Verses 22–23: What does it mean to be armed with the Lord’s power?

What does it mean for the Lord’s name to be upon his servants?

What does it mean for his glory to be round about them? For his angels to have charge over them?

To whom does *they* in the phrase “that they may know that this is thy work” refer? To the Saints or to the people in the world?

Verses 24–33: What is the theme of these verses?

To whom does “the people that shall worship, and honorably hold a name and standing in this thy house” refer? Is it the Church as a whole or some group within the Church?

What does it mean to “hold a name and standing” in the temple?

The Lord has said that Kirtland will be held for five more years. This prayer comes in that fifth year. How, then, can we make sense of what is being prayed for? What does it mean for this people (the people referred to in verse 24) to be established for eternity? Does it help to think about the more general question of what it means to establish a thing?

Of what might the writers have been thinking when writing verses 25–33? This prayer comes almost exactly two years after Zion’s Camp. How might that experience have changed the Saints’ understanding of what these verses mean?

Verse 34: How is it relevant that all people sin?

Verse 35: What does it mean to seal the anointing of the Lord’s ministers? What are they asking for?

Verses 36–37: In the evening, after the two dedicatory sessions, Joseph Smith gathered some brethren to teach them about the washings and anointings. Here is what Joseph recorded in his journal:

Brother George A. Smith arose and began to prophesy, when a noise was heard like the sound of a rushing mighty wind, which filled the Temple, and all the congregation simultaneously arose, being moved upon by an invisible power; many began to speak in tongues and prophesy; others saw glorious visions; and I beheld the Temple was filled with angels, which fact I declared to the congregation. The people of the neighborhood came running together (hearing an unusual sound within and seeing a bright pillar of light like a pillar of fire resting upon the Temple), and were astonished at what was taking place. This continued until the meeting closed at eleven p.m. (*History of the Church*, 2:428)

Why would these particular ordinances be greeted with such spectacular heavenly signs?

Verse 38: What is “the testimony of the covenant”? What does it mean to put a testimony on someone?

What does it mean to seal up the law (compare Isaiah 8:16 in context and 2 Nephi 18:16)? How does preaching the gospel do that?

Verses 39–46, 54–58: What is the point of these verses? How would you sum them up in your own words?

Verses 47–53: What is the Saints’ attitude toward their persecutors? Do you think it has changed from what it was before Zion’s Camp?

Verse 59: For what are they asking here?

Verses 60–67: About whom are they praying in these verses? Who, for example, are the children of Jacob? How do you know the answer to that question?

Verses 68–73: The prayer is for the President of the Church, and the presidents of the Church, and for the whole Church. Who are Joseph’s “immediate connections” (verse 70)? What is being asked for them?

Who are “the presidents” (verse 71)?

Why are “all the poor and meek of the earth” included in the prayer for the whole Church (verse 72)?

What does the image at the end of verse 73 convey? (We’ve seen it before in D&C 5:14.) What does it mean to shine forth fair as the moon? As clear as the sun? What do you make of the fact that the last half of this verse is a quotation from the Song of Solomon (Song of Solomon 6:10)?

What does it mean to describe one's beloved as "terrible as an army with banners," in other words, "awe-inspiring as bannered hosts"? How does that description apply in this context?

Verse 72: If the Lord knows everything, why would we ask him to remember us and his church? The Prophet Joseph Smith prays that the Lord will remember various people so that the kingdom will fill the whole earth. How will the Lord's remembrance of these particular groups of people help bring about the filling of the earth with his kingdom?

Each of the next verses (73–76) begins with *that*, indicating that the content of those verses will come if the Lord remembers the people mentioned here. Can you explain how the content of each of those verses is related to the Lord's remembrance?

Here the Prophet prays that the Lord will remember his church, the families and relatives of the members of the church, the sick and afflicted in those families, and all the poor and meek of the earth. And his prayer suggests that the Lord's remembrance is connected to our salvation. In the sacrament prayer, we pray that we will remember the body and blood of Jesus Christ, and it is obvious that doing so has to do with our salvation. How are these two kinds of remembrance related?

Verse 74: Why is the Church said to be adorned as a bride? (Compare passages such as Isaiah 49:18, 61:10, 62:5; and Revelation 21:2.) To what does this allude? What will it mean for the heavens to be unveiled?

What does it mean for the mountains to flow down, the valleys to be exalted, and the rough places to be made smooth? How will that fill the earth with the Lord's glory?

This is a paraphrase of Isaiah 40:4–5. How does this verse connect this part of the temple dedicatory prayer to the prayer in section 65?

Verse 75: What is the Prophet describing in this verse? What is he praying for? If it is something that has been promised already, why pray for it?

Verse 76: What does it mean to have pure garments? Why do you think sin is so often portrayed as blood stains on our clothing? What particular sin might this image allude to, and why is that particular sin a type for all other sins? Why are garments used as a symbol of purity? Is there a difference between having pure garments and robes of righteousness? If so, what is that difference?

What does it mean for us to have palms in our hands? To what event in the Savior's life does that phrase refer?

What does it mean to reap eternal joy for all our sufferings?

Doctrine and Covenants 110

Some background for the revelation that follows: The Kirtland Temple was dedicated on 27 March 1836. This revelation was received on 3 April, the same year, during a sacrament meeting in the temple. At that meeting, the Twelve administered the sacrament, and the First Presidency and perhaps also other presidents distributed it to the congregation. After the sacrament had been blessed

and passed, Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery went to the pulpit at the west end of the temple (there were pulpits at each end, the one at the east for the Aaronic Priesthood officers and that at the west for the Melchizedek Priesthood), and they had the curtains (called “veils”) that partitioned it off from the rest of the temple dropped. Then they bowed in silent prayer. This vision came to them after their prayers.

Verses 1–3: What does this description suggest to us about appearances of the Lord?

Verse 4: Why does the Lord choose these descriptions of himself on this occasion?

Are the four clauses of this verse parallel: “I am the first and the last”; “I am he who liveth”; “I am he who was slain”; and “I am your advocate with the Father”? Does the order in which they occur teach us anything?

Verse 5: What sins might Joseph and Oliver have needed forgiveness for? Compare this to D&C 29:3, also given to Joseph and Oliver. Does the repetition of this forgiveness teach us anything about the Savior? About ourselves? About our leaders?

Verses 6–7: What does it mean to say that the Lord has accepted the temple? What does it mean to say that his name will be there? How did he manifest himself in mercy to the members there?

Verse 8: Does this answer the question of how the Lord was to manifest himself in mercy?

Verses 9–10: Notice that verse 9 says that the endowment has already been given in this house. To what might the Lord have been referring? (Since the endowment as we know it was not given until the Church was in Nauvoo, it does not refer to that.)

Compare verses 7–10 to the dedicatory prayer (section 109). How do these verses answer that prayer?

Verses 11–16: In their *Doctrine and Covenants Commentary*, Hyrum Smith (a later Hyrum Smith, not Joseph Smith's brother) and Janne M. Sjodahl say: "Elias was the representative of the Patriarchal dispensation; Moses, of the Mosaic, and Elijah of the dispensation preparatory to the coming of the Lord. Each delegated part of his authority to the Prophet Joseph" (p. 727). Do you think this comment is helpful? Can you think of a scriptural or prophetic basis for their comment? (See the notes for D&C 27:6 in the lesson 9 materials for more on Elias and Elijah.)

Verse 11: Who is Israel in this case? (Compare D&C 133:13 and 26.) Why would Moses rather than another prophet have had the keys of the gathering of Israel?

Verse 12: What does "the dispensation of the gospel of Abraham" mean? This seems to be the only place in scripture where the phrase appears.

Verses 13–16: Is Elijah's appearance on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:3) related to this appearance? What curse would have come if Elijah had not come to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to the fathers?

Verse 16 begins with *therefore*: the keys of the kingdom are committed into the hands of Joseph Smith *because* Elijah came to turn hearts. Can you explain this?