



dc 37.¹⁻⁴— meditation

¹Behold, I say unto you that it is not expedient in me that ye should translate any more until ye shall go to the Ohio, and this because of the enemy and for your sakes.

²And again, I say unto you that ye shall not go until ye have preached my gospel in those parts, and have strengthened up the church whithersoever it is found, and more especially in Colesville; for, behold, they pray unto me in much faith.

³And again, a commandment I give unto the church, that it is expedient in me that they should assemble together at the Ohio, against the time that my servant Oliver Cowdery shall return unto them. ⁴Behold, here is wisdom, and let every man choose for himself until I come. Even so. Amen.

For nearly a century and a half the church did not know what to think of or do with Joseph Smith's "translation" of the Bible—"translation" being in quotes because it was nothing like a traditional translation where one goes from one language to another. For years I took heat as a carried an old black hardcover copy of the "translation" printed by Herald Press—the press for the, then, RLDS. As a result of several factors, the church accepted limited use of the "Joseph Smith Translation" (JST) in the late 1970's by including some of the alterations Joseph made to the King James Bible in its new LDS Bible version.

The insightfulness and utility of changes found in the JST is uneven. Some changes seem silly and petty. Some evince a decidedly doctrinaire, dogmatic and polemical spirit. Some are just plain mistaken or unnecessary, indicating, it seems, Joseph's own misunderstanding of archaic King James era English. Then, there are those that are not only insightful and utilitarian, but downright world shaping.

"Now what," one may ask, "does all this have to do Doctrine and Covenants 37? Let me explain.

Joseph began his work of "translation"—I'll stop putting quotes around this word from here on out—sometime in late spring, early summer of 1830. As he worked on Genesis during December of that year, Joseph received what he called, "Extracts from the Prophecy of Enoch," which today comprise portions of Moses 6 and all of Moses 7. According to the *History of the Church*, "Soon after the words of Enoch were given, the Lord gave the following [Section 37] commandment."¹ This notice is important for understanding not only the significance of DC 37, but of much of what follows in the Doctrine and Covenants.

In my view, Doctrine and Covenants 37 is inseparably linked to Joseph's work of translation and especially to the insights he gleaned into the man Enoch and his success in transforming his society. These insights procured through his translation work in early Genesis shaped, I believe, Joseph's perception of himself and expanded his vision of the purpose to which God had called him. Joseph was called to do far more than establish a new, even restored religion. He was to transform society just as Enoch had.

¹ Vol. 1, p. 139

The “Extracts from the Prophecy of Enoch,” had described society as Enoch had transformed it.

“And the Lord called his people ZION, because they were of one heart and one mind, and dwelt in righteousness; and there was no poor among them.”²

We have briefly examined this passage in its own meditation. For now, we will only say that, as we understand it, being of “one heart and one mind” is about more than some form of emotional and intellectual conformity. Dwelling in “righteousness” is about more than observing some long and complicated list of legalistic performances. And having a society in which “there [are] no poor” is accomplished by something other than everyone “putting their shoulder to the wheel.” Unity, righteous, and the absence of poverty are all the same thing. No society can pronounce itself unified or righteous if there are poor living in it.

There were no poor in Zion because everyone looked at others as beings bound and connected to them. If someone struggled to provide for themselves and/or their family due, for example, to physical or emotional sickness or handicap, poor life management skills, accidents, age, being orphaned or being the child of someone with the previous challenges, society felt the need, nay, the desire to necessarily jump in and help. Everyone treated others as they would want to be treated in the same situation. Acting in this way and after this form of unity and human connectedness is what it means to be righteous. To be unified and righteous is to assure that there are no poor.

Anyway, it was immediately upon reading of Enoch’s transformed society—its unity, righteousness, and absence of poverty—that Joseph was commanded to “go to the Ohio.” No doubt, the recent conversion of many in Kirtland played a role in the selection of Ohio as a gathering place. However, just as important in its selection was the fact that it was on the borders of civilization. Here, outside of nation, the people would have space—both temporal and intellectual—to reshape society, especially its economy, in ways that conformed to those of Enoch’s Zion.

To this point, one could count the number of times Zion had been mentioned in the Doctrine and Covenants with the fingers of two hands. But always as an abstraction and without detail as to what it meant and how it was procured. From here on out, the nitty-gritty details of Zion and upon what principles it was to be established multiply exponentially.

I believe that because of his translation work, and especially the insights he gleaned into the man Enoch and his successes in transforming his society, Joseph Smith perceived himself and his call differently than before. His vision was expanded. He was, he felt, to duplicate Enoch’s work. He was to reintroduce Zion and its principles to a society that had willfully departed far, far from them—best evidenced by the proliferation of the poor. This new perception of himself consumed much of the rest of his life, while this expanded vision dominated the approximate center third of the Doctrine and Covenants.

Joseph might have learned of a different kind of society and discovered the expansiveness of God’s plans for him in some other way. But God chose to educate Joseph through scripture study and the insights that the scriptures can infuse into a willing and open mind. In addition to the mind-expanding ideal of Zion, there is, then, another message to be found in Joseph’s ongoing education. There is deep import and tremendous potential in serious, concentrated, consistent, and anticipatory scripture study. It is likely that if we are to assist in society’s transformation and create one after the principles of Zion, we will need to engage in our own version of scripture translation—translating it from paper or screen to heart.

² Moses 7.¹⁸

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

(edition: October 24, 2024)