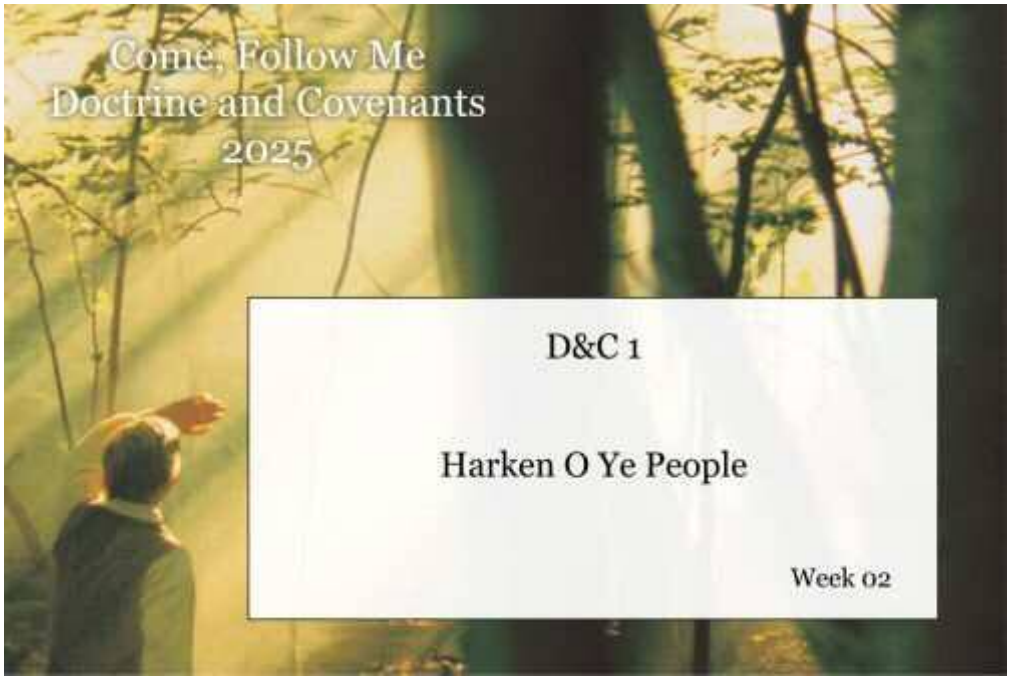

The first section of the Doctrine and Covenants is God's declaration to the world of the commencement of His work in the latter-days. He holds nothing back and is not at all timid in His statements to the world.

I was surprised as I read this section as to how much information it contains. I have taken the liberty of inserting the entire section so I can make my comments as I work my way through the body of the verses.

A couple of important things to consider as you read these verses: Joseph Smith was in his mid 20's. Those who were taught the gospel had to grapple with the idea that someone that young was the leader of a people who claimed to be the beginning of a worldwide church and have God's power and authority. Also, there were only roughly 300 members in April of 1831. Most wards have more than 500 members in today's church. These members weren't world leaders or great evangelists. They were farmers and trades people, the kind of people who truly qualify to be called the weak and simple of the earth. They were not socially influential, economically powerful, famous, or anything the world would consider remarkable and worthy of note.

Finally, notice how grandly God speaks of His church. As tiny as it currently is, He doesn't apologize for the spiritual vistas and He paints of their future. God truly sees where the church is going to be in the end, and He speaks at its beginning with that world view to its fledgling members. This would be both intimidating and something

that could offer them courage in their humble beginning circumstances. Within the next decade more than two thousand new members will be added to their ranks.

I think it's important that we see both the humble beginnings of the new church, as well as its future glory God is helping them visualize in his words. Try reading these verses first as someone who is part of a church with more than 17 million members, a church bigger than more than 130 countries around the world. Then read it with the perspective of someone who is only one of 300 members in the whole world. If you are a shop keeper and just newly baptized these verses could have you shaking in your boots with their grand vision of purpose.

Section 1 commentary

> 1 Hearken, O ye people of my church, saith the voice of him who dwells on high, and whose eyes are upon all men; yea, verily I say: Hearken ye people from afar; and ye that are upon the islands of the sea, listen together.

The Lord sees the end from the beginning. He addresses the church here knowing they will publish the revelations He has given the prophet and that those revelations will be taken to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people before Christ returns. God's words here are as powerful and certain as any revelation ever given to mankind.

> 2 For verily the voice of the Lord is unto all men, and there is none to escape; and there is no eye that shall not see, neither ear that shall not hear, neither heart that shall not be penetrated.

This is still in the future. We have, as a church, made great inroads towards this end, but we haven't arrived yet.

> 3 And the rebellious shall be pierced with much sorrow; for their iniquities shall be spoken upon the housetops, and their secret acts shall be revealed.

It is my opinion that this is referencing a technology yet to be invented, though we are inching closer and closer to it with today's Internet.

> 4 And the voice of warning shall be unto all people, by the mouths of my disciples, whom I have chosen in these last days.
>
> 5 And they shall go forth and none shall stay them, for I the Lord have commanded them.

Governments have tried to silence the Lord's people in one way or another many times, but they cannot stop the testimony of a pure heart from being shared either by example or by words. The Lord never wastes words. Once He proclaims that something will happen, it is more sure than the rising of the next sun.

> 6 Behold, this is mine authority, and the authority of my servants, and my preface unto the book of my commandments, which I have given them to publish unto you, O inhabitants of the earth.
>
> 7 Wherefore, fear and tremble, O ye people, for what I the Lord have decreed in them shall be fulfilled.

The "them" referred to in verse seven could be the commandments God had given His servants or it could be referring to the servants of the Lord themselves. What do you think? You might want to come back and visit this verse after reading further down these verses, because God elaborates further on what His servants are going to accomplish in this dispensation and how it will be done.

> 8 And verily I say unto you, that they who go forth, bearing these tidings unto the inhabitants of the earth, to them is power given to seal both on earth and in heaven, the unbelieving and rebellious;
>
> 9 Yea, verily, to seal them up unto the day when the wrath of God shall be poured out upon the wicked without measure—
>
> 10 Unto the day when the Lord shall come to recompense unto every man according to his work, and measure to every man according to the measure which he has measured to his fellow man.

This dispensation is different from all other previous dispensations. All those sent out to preach the gospel were primarily Melchizedek priesthood holders. The covenants of the gospel revealed to Joseph Smith are almost all Melchizedek priesthood covenants, the high priesthood. This gives priesthood power to both men and women, something that has never existed on earth on this scale. The more people who join the church, the greater that power and influence grows.

Reread verse 10. Look at it as a ministering brother or sister. The measure of our service to one another is the same measure by which God will reward us when we are judged. The Book of Mormon clearly teaches that the judgment is a restoration, a

reward according to how we have behaved toward others. This verse seems to be saying the same thing.

> 11 Wherefore the voice of the Lord is unto the ends of the earth, that all that will hear may hear:

This is an important lesson for us to internalize. Just because someone hears the words of the restoration doesn't mean they listen or "give ear" to what they hear. We can all physically hear the words, but if we don't internalize them and act on them then we haven't really "listened" have we? In the scriptural sense, listening requires action not just passive reception of the sound.

> 12 Prepare ye, prepare ye for that which is to come, for the Lord is nigh;
>
> 13 And the anger of the Lord is kindled, and his sword is bathed in heaven, and it shall fall upon the inhabitants of the earth.
>
> 14 And the arm of the Lord shall be revealed; and the day cometh that they who will not hear the voice of the Lord, neither the voice of his servants, neither give heed to the words of the prophets and apostles, shall be cut off from among the people;
>
> 15 For they have strayed from mine ordinances, and have broken mine everlasting covenant;

Sorry, I'm interrupting this in the middle of the sentence, because I have a different point to make about the next verse. To "be cut off" is a punishment that usually God is responsible for. The sins we commit to be cut off are often private ones that are very offensive to the Lord, and only when we refuse to repent of those sins does He cut us off from among His people. To be cut off can include such things as the withdrawal of His Spirit, receiving curses, or even losing our promised blessings because we violated our covenants of obedience. Being cut off is the state reserved for those who refuse to "hear the voice of the Lord, neither the voice of his servants."

> 16 They seek not the Lord to establish his righteousness, but every man walketh in his own way, and after the image of his own god, whose image is in the likeness of the world, and whose substance is that of an idol, which waxeth old and shall perish in Babylon, even Babylon the great, which shall fall.

Read verse 10 as a description of today's world. Anything is worthy of our time, adoration, respect, worship, or efforts, except the Lord's gospel message and His

prophets. The people of the world show God's servants no respect, and won't listen to them. For this reason God states His course of action in the following verses.

> 17 Wherefore, I the Lord, knowing the calamity which should come upon the inhabitants of the earth, called upon my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., and spake unto him from heaven, and gave him commandments;
>
> 18 And also gave commandments to others, that they should proclaim these things unto the world; and all this that it might be fulfilled, which was written by the prophets—

All priesthood holders, when they are missionary age are expected to serve the Lord on a mission as part of their priesthood duty. Today we have more ways to serve than ever before. I believe that in today's church these young men and senior couples are who qualify as "And also gave commandments to others, that they should proclaim these things unto the world."

> 19 The weak things of the world shall come forth and break down the mighty and strong ones, that man should not counsel his fellow man, neither trust in the arm of flesh—
>
> 20 But that every man might speak in the name of God the Lord, even the Savior of the world;
>
> 21 That faith also might increase in the earth;
>
> 22 That mine everlasting covenant might be established;
>
> 23 That the fulness of my gospel might be proclaimed by the weak and the simple unto the ends of the world, and before kings and rulers.

God proclaimed these things to the world in order to fulfill that which was written by the prophets of old. And what are those things they said would happen? It is that the weak things of the world would break down the mighty and strong ones, that every person might speak in the name of God, that faith might increase in the earth, that God's everlasting covenant might be established, and that the fulness of God's gospel might be proclaimed by the weak and simple unto the ends of the world.

Remember that we are who God is referring to. We are the weak and simple of the earth. We speak in the name of God when we bear our testimony, give blessings, and do His work through our ministrations to others. We can do this because all of us have made covenants through His priesthood and have the gift of the Holy Ghost that

enables us to speak as one sent from God to others. That is a big responsibility! These verses are referring to every member of the church, not just a select few.

> 24 Behold, I am God and have spoken it; these commandments are of me, and were given unto my servants in their weakness, after the manner of their language, that they might come to understanding.
>
> 25 And inasmuch as they erred it might be made known;
>
> 26 And inasmuch as they sought wisdom they might be instructed;
>
> 27 And inasmuch as they sinned they might be chastened, that they might repent;
>
> 28 And inasmuch as they were humble they might be made strong, and blessed from on high, and receive knowledge from time to time.
>
> 29 And after having received the record of the Nephites, yea, even my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., might have power to translate through the mercy of God, by the power of God, the Book of Mormon.
>
> 30 And also those to whom these commandments were given, might have power to lay the foundation of this church, and to bring it forth out of obscurity and out of darkness, the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth, with which I, the Lord, am well pleased, speaking unto the church collectively and not individually—

Again, sorry for interrupting the sentence. In verses 24-30 the Lord is listing the reasons why He gave us the these commandments to go forth and declare His words. These verses list the blessings we will receive because we participate in sharing the gospel with others. Our errors hold us back in our progression. Those who declare His words to others will learn of their errors so they can fix them. When we seek wisdom He will instruct us. When we sin, like a father to his children He will chasten us or encourage us to do better, "that [we] might repent." And by His own promises, those who take their weaknesses to the Lord will be made strong and blessed from on high, receiving knowledge from time to time. What a wonderful package of blessings!

Verses 29-30 specifically state that by the mercy of God Joseph Smith was given the power to translate the Book of Mormon, and that those to whom these commandments are given (us) will have the power or ability to bring the church out of obscurity. That is exactly what the members of the church have been doing for the last 200 plus years.

> 31 For I the Lord cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance;

> 32 Nevertheless, he that repents and does the commandments of the Lord shall be forgiven;
>
> 33 And he that repents not, from him shall be taken even the light which he has received; for my Spirit shall not always strive with man, saith the Lord of Hosts.

Note that the Lord doesn't say that the fence sitter, the person who is unwilling to fully commit to discipleship and obedience to God's commandments, will be forgiven of their sins. The only people to be forgiven are those who repent and keep the commandments. That takes deliberate commitment.

> 34 And again, verily I say unto you, O inhabitants of the earth: I the Lord am willing to make these things known unto all flesh;
>
> 35 For I am no respecter of persons, and will that all men shall know that the day speedily cometh; the hour is not yet, but is nigh at hand, when peace shall be taken from the earth, and the devil shall have power over his own dominion.

Since the days of Abraham the people of the Lord pretty much kept to themselves. Proselyting was not a priority. The Lord wanted them to keep to themselves in order to strengthen their numbers and keep them from the sins of the world. In this dispensation that has been reversed. Instead of being an exclusive people, everyone is invited to come and partake of God's goodness and blessings. He will give all worthy males His priesthood in order to bless their lives and their families and keep them safe from the teachings of the world. This is the first time since the days of Noah that all covenant makers are required to reach out to others outside the covenants and invite them in. This is the gathering. It is happening on both sides of the veil at the same time. Our temple work is the link between us and our ancestors. The Lord has reserved us for this day and age so we can help Him gather ancient Israel and all the world into the family of Abraham, the home and source of God's covenants with His children.

> 36 And also the Lord shall have power over his saints, and shall reign in their midst, and shall come down in judgment upon Idumea, or the world.
>
> 37 Search these commandments, for they are true and faithful, and the prophecies and promises which are in them shall all be fulfilled.
>
> 38 What I the Lord have spoken, I have spoken, and I excuse not myself; and though the heavens and the earth pass away, my word shall not pass away, but shall all be fulfilled, whether by mine own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the same.

Imagine having so much power that anything you say is brought to pass as a given, without hesitation. God has that power. He doesn't waste or mince words. Anything He speaks is guaranteed to happen, for the universe obeys Him without exception. He, Himself just said in verse 38 that whether His words are spoken by Himself or one of His servants, in His mind it is the same thing. When the prophet speaks the word of the Lord to us we can take that as absolute truth, for the Lord will honor the words of His prophet.

> 39 For behold, and lo, the Lord is God, and the Spirit beareth record, and the record is true, and the truth abideth forever and ever. Amen.

Final thoughts

Reading this revelation as a member of the new church would have been both exhilarating and daunting. There were probably a few back then who knew the names of every member of the church. Today with almost 18 million members scattered across the globe in many dozens of countries, we are lucky if we know most of the members of our own congregation.

The commandments are the same for us as they were for the early Saints. The blessings are identical for us as they were for them, but we have even more opportunities to serve than they did, so our excuses are fewer. Christ is at the center of his church. He has called us to account in this revelation, and has spelled out the consequences of our obedience and those of our disobedience. We have been told, but are we listening?

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