

June 7–13, 2021

Doctrine and Covenants 63

“THAT WHICH COMETH FROM ABOVE IS SACRED”

Summary: *Doctrine and Covenants 63. Revelation given through Joseph Smith the Prophet, at Kirtland, Ohio, August 30, 1831. The Prophet, Sidney Rigdon, and Oliver Cowdery had arrived in Kirtland on August 27 from their visit to Missouri. Joseph Smith’s history describes this revelation: “In these infant days of the Church, there was a great anxiety to obtain the word of the Lord upon every subject that in any way concerned our salvation; and as the land of Zion was now the most important temporal object in view, I enquired of the Lord for further information upon the gathering of the Saints, and the purchase of the land, and other matters.” 1–6, A day of wrath will come upon the wicked; 7–12, Signs come by faith; 13–19, The adulterous in heart will deny the faith and be cast into the lake of fire; 20, The faithful will receive an inheritance upon the transfigured earth; 21, A full account of the events on the Mount of Transfiguration has not yet been revealed; 22–23, The obedient receive the mysteries of the kingdom; 24–31, Inheritances in Zion are to be purchased; 32–35, The Lord decrees wars, and the wicked slay the wicked; 36–48, The Saints are to gather to Zion and provide moneys to build it up; 49–54, Blessings are assured the faithful at the Second Coming, in the Resurrection, and during the Millennium; 55–58, This is a day of warning; 59–66, The Lord’s name is taken in vain by those who use it without authority.*

Supplemental Jewish and Holy Land Insights

How can I know the true signs from heaven?

With the cessation
of prophetic

revelation, Since the biblical times of the Children of Israel, Jews have resorted to physical signs from heaven. Phylacteries, *Mezuzah*, and the Sabbath Days are the objects they use to see the symbols of God’s covenant. The term “anoint thine eyes” is close to the biblical expression of keeping God’s word in front of you at all times. Jews remind themselves of this by binding leather phylacteries (*Tfillin*) on the arm and forehead as well as on all Jewish doorposts (*Mezuzah*). These are the words in the ‘Mezuzah’ and in the ‘*Tfillin*’: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when

thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates. **(Deuteronomy 6:4-9)** “There should be a mezuzah at the entrance to every home and on the doorpost of every living room within the home --- this of course excludes lavatories, bathrooms, storerooms and stables. It is also customary to place *mezuzot* at the entrances to synagogues and public buildings, including all government offices in Israel. In Israel a *mezuzah* must be put up immediately when a house is occupied by a Jew --- outside Israel after the householder has lived in the house for 30 days. If the house is later sold to Jews, the *mezuzot* must be left on the doorposts. Today the *mezuzah* represents one of Judaism’s most widely observed ceremonial

commandments.” (**Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.**) Latter-day Children of Israel, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, are instructed that signs from heaven can be recognized by their message of salvation. “And he that seeketh signs shall see signs, but not unto salvation.” (**Doctrine and Covenants 63:7**). Signs follow them that truly believe in the Lord. “. . . the gospel must be preached unto every creature, with signs following them that believe.” (**Doctrine and Covenants 58:64**).

How is the transfiguration a “chiasmus?”

In the New Testament, Matthew finds it important to relate the events of the transfiguration in a pattern that extends beyond geography or even chronological events. The following verses show the chiasmic teaching pattern of Matthew. The dialogue begins in the area of Caesarea Philippi, one of the northernmost towns in the land of Israel. “When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed [it] unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ. From that time forth began Jesus to show unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief

priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. (**Matthew 16:13-21**) Note that a promise of keys and a prophecy of three days is stated. This Gospel account is followed by the transfiguration. It happened six days later and, according to President Spencer W. Kimball, occurred on Mount Tabor about sixty-five miles south of Caesarea Philippi (a six-day journey by foot). There, the highest witness of Jesus as the Jehovah, Son of God, was given. President Spencer W. Kimball said about his experience at Mt. Tabor, “I felt I was on the highest place on this earth.” The following verses in (**Matthew 17:23**) the Apostle/Disciples were again instructed about three days, the atonement. Then, Simon Peter received the keys (**Matthew 18:18**)

What is the central point of this “chiasmus?”

In the above chiasmus, “three days” and “keys” are repeated in reverse as “keys” and “three days”. The center point is the Father’s witness of his first-born son, Jesus the Messiah, it is the message of salvation. The Father said, “This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased.” (**Matthew 17:5**) In 1989, Prophet and President Ezra Taft Benson gave a profound talk about removing “pride” and “proud” from our language. He taught that there is no justifiable use of the word “proud.” He gave an example for us to use “I am well pleased” instead. “I am convinced in my own mind that when the Savior took the three disciples up on the mount, which is spoken of as the “Mount of Transfiguration,” he there gave unto them the ordinances that pertain to the house of the Lord and that they were endowed. That was the only place they could go. That place became holy and sacred for the rites of salvation which were performed on that occasion.” (**Joseph Fielding Smith, Doctrines of Salvation, Vol.2, Pg.170**)

What instructions can help me better understand the transfiguration of earth and heaven?

The transfiguration may have been a special temple-like endowment for Peter, James, and John. "The Savior took Peter, James, and John upon a high mountain and there he, with Moses and Elias, conferred upon these apostles the keys of the priesthood. At that time many things pertaining to the earth and its inhabitants were revealed to these apostles, for the earth was transfigured before them as it will appear when it receives its glory. The Lord consecrated and made holy the mountain top, instead of taking the apostles to the temple in Jerusalem, because the temple had become a "den of thieves," having fallen into the hands of apostate Jews who did not worship the true and living God." (Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation, Vol.2, Pg.233*)

The season when the transfiguration occurred was the 'go-to-the-temple' holiday of *Sukkoth*. "When Elijah came to the Prophet Joseph Smith, he was not a translated being, He was a resurrected being. He had received his resurrection, and he came to Joseph Smith just as did Peter, James, and John, and gave to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery--as he did to Peter, James, and John at the transfiguration--the keys of sealing power, so that the work now, not only for the living but also for the dead, may be done. Since the same ordinances are required for the dead as for the living, these keys also pertain to the salvation of the dead." (Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation, Vol.2, Pg.119*)

What could be the meanings of "huts" or "booths" in the transfiguration account?

There are traditions of going to the temple at *Sukkoth*, as noted in Jewish writings. They are often called "foot festivals," that is, "going to the temple." "In the Torah there are three festivals that are known as

(*regalim*), foot festivals or pilgrim festivals. These are *Passover*, *Shavuot* and *Sukkot*. On each of them every male Jew was expected to make a pilgrimage to the Temple in Jerusalem." "Interestingly, the rededication of the Temple and the re-celebration of *Sukkot* paralleled the consecration of Solomon's Temple, which was also an eight-day dedication ceremony held on the festival of *Sukkot*." (Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.) There are two of the holiest convocations the Children of Israel were commanded to keep. The spring convocation is *Pesach* (Passover) and *Sukkoth* is in the fall. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have convocations called General Conference, also in spring and fall. "*Sukkot* (Hebrew for "huts" or "tabernacles"), a seven-day festival beginning on the 15th day of the month of *Tishrei*, which falls in September or October. (In the Diaspora an extra eighth day is celebrated.) One of its main observances is living temporarily in huts, called *sukkot*, resembling those in which the Children of Israel dwelt during their forty years in the wilderness after the Exodus from Egypt." "This holiday was also the occasion for the consecration of the Temple built by Solomon and every seventh year on *Sukkot*, the Torah was read by the king before the assembled people. In his vision of the end of days, the prophet Zechariah foretells that all the nations of the world will assemble for the festival of *Sukkot* in Jerusalem to worship God." "The *sukkah* is a structure with at least three walls, made of any material. It must be at least ten handbreadths in height, and in area at least seven handbreadths square. The roof covering, or *sekhakh*, is usually leafy branches, and these must be arranged so that there is more covered than open space." "In present-day Israel, as in other countries, Jews construct *sukkot* in their gardens, on the sidewalks, and on the roofs and balconies of their houses, just as they did at the time of the return from the

Babylonian exile, as described in the Book of Nehemiah: "So the people went forth . . . and made themselves booths, everyone upon the roof of his house, and in their courts, and in the courts of the house of God . . . and there was very great gladness." (**Nehemia 8:14-17**) "When a family performs the *mitzvah* of the *sukkah* joyfully, they are said to be visited in the *sukkah* by seven "guests of the festival" (the *ushpizin*) who are present in spirit. Each day it is customary to invite and welcome one of these seven guests - -- Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, (Joseph), Moses, Aaron and David --- by an appropriate recitation." (**Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.**)

What can I do to emphasize the spiritual aspects of truthfulness?

"Then what is religion? James declares: 'Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this: To visit the fatherless and widows in their afflictions, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.' This may be interpreted as meaning that a person who is religious is thoughtful to the unfortunate and has an

inner spirit that prompts to deeds of kindness and to the leading of a blameless life; who is just, truthful; who does not, as Paul says, think more highly of himself than he ought to think; who is affectionate, patient in tribulation, diligent, cheerful, fervent in spirit, hospitable, merciful; and who abhors evil and cleaves to that which is good. The possession of such a spirit and feeling is a true sign that a person is naturally religious." (**Joseph Fielding Smith, Gospel Doctrine, p.121**) "While prophets urged men to be just, the rabbis of the Talmud went into detail about what justice means in commercial life: employer-employee relationships, duties of workers to employers; legitimate prices, fair weight and measure; fair contracts; fair and unfair competition; the spoken word as a binding contract. The laws are infused with fairness in spirit as well as in fact. It is recognized that in a ruthless business world of mixed peoples, honest dealings are difficult, but the Jew should know and retain his ideals." (**Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.**)