

Section 33

Some sections of the Doctrine and Covenants highlight the working relationship between personal revelation and prophetic revelation. Section 33 is one of those. Before it was revealed to Joseph, the Lord revealed himself personally to Ezra Thayer, a builder who had employed Joseph before. When he heard Hyrum Smith preach in autumn 1830, Ezra

thought every word was pointed to me. God punished me and riveted me to the spot. I could not help myself. The tears rolled down my cheeks, I was very proud and stubborn. There were many there who knew me, I dare not look up. I sat until I recovered myself before I dare look up. They sung some hymns and that filled me with the Spirit. When Hyrum got through, he picked up a book and said, “Here is the Book of Mormon.”

I said, “Let me see it.” I then opened the book, and I received a shock with such exquisite joy that no pen can write and no tongue can express. I shut the book and said, “What is the price of it?”

“Fourteen shillings” was the reply.

I said, “I’ll take the book.” I opened it again, and I felt a double portion of the Spirit, that I did not know whether I was in the world or not. I felt as though I was truly in heaven. Martin Harris rushed

to me to tell me that the book was true. I told him that he need not tell me that, for I knew that it is true as well as he.

At home later, Ezra had a vision in which a man brought him a roll of paper and a trumpet, telling him to blow it. Ezra visited Joseph a week after he heard Hyrum preach. “I told him what had happened, and how I knew the book was true,” Ezra wrote. “He then asked me what hindered me from going into the water.”¹ Parley Pratt baptized Ezra Thayer and two others that day, including Northrop Sweet, who was married to a niece of Martin Harris.

Personal revelation prepared these converts for the work. Prophetic revelation to them through Joseph called them to the work.

Oliver Cowdery delivered section 33 to Ezra, who realized then that the roll of paper in his vision “was the revelation on me and Northrop Sweet.” Oliver handed it to him and said, “Here is a revelation from God for you, now blow your trumpet.” Ezra protested, “I never blowed a trumpet.” Oliver assured him, “You can.”²

Would Ezra and Northrop blow their trumpets as the revelation commanded? Would they let their fears, their lack of refinement and education, keep them from boldly opening their mouths as Nephi did? The revelation’s reference to Nephi, with whom Ezra and Northrop had just become familiar as they studied the Book of Mormon, must have helped them understand that they were being asked to speak the truth boldly to an antagonistic audience—but that they would have success. They could speak as powerfully as Nephi, the Lord assured them, on the condition that they would simply be willing to preach the gospel.

Northrop Sweet chose not to become as Nephi. He did not endure long in his calling. He sought a greater one and thought he received a revelation that he should be a prophet. He left the Church and started his own. This is one of several revelations whose promises went unfulfilled because the free agents to whom the Lord declared his will chose to disregard it. Opposed by his wife and others, Ezra Thayer preached

¹ “Testimony of Brother E. Thayer Concerning the Latter Day Work,” *Saints’ Herald* 3 (October 1862): 79–80, 82–84.

² “Testimony,” 79–80, 82–84.

the Book of Mormon powerfully but only briefly. He maintained his faith in Joseph Smith for a lifetime, though after Joseph's death he, too, left the Church. He was often distracted by business and economic concerns. A revelation one *cannot* obey is the Lord's responsibility. A revelation the recipients *will not* obey is their responsibility.