

# The Rich Man, Lazarus, and Doctrine & Covenants 104:18

*Steven C. Harper*

No revelation more emphatically sets forth the law of consecration than Doctrine and Covenants 104:13–18. The scriptures have long declared the first principle of consecration—“the earth is the Lord’s” (Exodus 9:29). Section 104 affirms that principle with crystal clarity: “I, the Lord, stretched out the heavens, and built the earth, my very handiwork; and all things therein are mine” (D&C 104:14). In decreeing the doctrines of stewardship and accountability over the abundance of the earth, the Lord requires that the rich share with the poor: “If any man take of the abundance which I have made, and impart not his portion, according to the law of my gospel, unto the poor and the needy, he shall, with *the wicked*, lift up his eyes in hell, being in torment” (104:18, 1981 edition, emphasis added).

This potent passage in Doctrine and Covenants 104 obviously draws on the New Testament story of Lazarus and the rich man in Luke 16:19–31, especially verse 23. In the Savior’s story as recorded in Luke, the rich man had “fared sumptuously” in life while a “beggar named Lazarus” waited in vain for some of his table scraps. When the two men died, angels carried Lazarus into Abraham’s bosom while the rich man went to hell. “And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments,” ironically begging Lazarus to relieve his suffering. Section 104:18 evokes this story and applies it to Latter-day Saints.

An interesting detail in the three earliest manuscripts of Doctrine and Covenants 104 (one of which was recently published in *BYU Studies*<sup>1</sup>) links this revelation more closely to this New Testament passage than has previously been noticed. For example, the text in the manuscript that the Joseph Smith Papers Project has termed Revelation Book 2, often called the Kirtland Revelation Book, says that if one does not share

In an article for the *Ensign* recently posted online, Elder Marlin K. Jensen, Church Historian and Recorder, announced that the Joseph Smith Papers will soon publish the Book of Commandments and Revelations, the earliest manuscript book of Joseph Smith's revelations.<sup>1</sup> The Book of Commandments and Revelations became the repository for transcribed texts of Joseph's revelations no later than early 1831. Its more than two hundred pages are full of the earliest known copies of many of the revelations now in the Doctrine and Covenants, written largely in the handwriting of John Whitmer, who was called as Joseph's transcriber (D&C 47). Among other heretofore unknown texts, the book contains a revelation on securing a copyright for the Book of Mormon in Canada. Some early Latter-day Saints wrote of this revelation, but the Book of Commandments and Revelations contains the only known text of it. Many of the known revelations can be dated more specifically with the information in the Book of Commandments and Revelations. Moreover, Whitmer often provided a short historical introduction to the revelations that enables us to better understand why the texts were revealed in the first place. A list of contents at the end of the book restores lost knowledge. With these pieces of the documentary record, we can learn when section 20 was revealed, where the Church was organized, what questions prompted section 29, and more about the mysterious James Covill of sections 39 and 40.

It is exciting that this rich document will soon become available to the public as part of the Joseph Smith Papers, Revelations and Translations Series. Upcoming issues of *BYU Studies* will feature several painstaking studies of the Book of Commandments and Revelations by the scholars who have edited it.

—Steven C. Harper, document editor

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1. Marlin K. Jensen, "The Joseph Smith Papers: The Manuscript Revelation Books," *Ensign*, forthcoming in print, available online by going to lds.org, then click "Gospel Library," click "Magazines," click "Ensign," click "The Joseph Smith Papers: The Manuscript Revelation Books."

according to the Lord’s law, “he shall with *Dives* lift up his eyes <in hell> being in torment”<sup>2</sup> (fig. 1).

*Dives* is the Latin word for *rich*, *opulent*, *wealthy*.<sup>3</sup> In Greek, the story of Lazarus and the rich man begins in Luke 16:19 with the words “*Anthrōpos de tis ēn plousios*,” which the King James translation renders naturally as “There was a certain rich man.” The Latin Vulgate Bible translated this clause verbatim as “*Homo quidam erat dives*.”<sup>4</sup> Although the Greek word *plousios* and the Latin word *dives* both clearly mean “rich,” in the

Middle Ages the word *dives* came to be used as the proper name of the rich man in this story, due largely to the asymmetry of the parable—the poor man’s name is specified while the rich man is unnamed.<sup>5</sup> In the English language, *Dives* occurs as a proper name for the parable’s rich man as early as 1393, when it appeared in the “Summoner’s Tale” in Geoffrey Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*.<sup>6</sup> It continued to be used as a proper name through the nineteenth century, as in William Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair* in 1848.<sup>7</sup>

When the Church first published this revelation as section 98 in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants, the name “*Dives*” in the manuscript was replaced with the phrase “the wicked” in the printed version. This editorial change, made under the supervision of the First Presidency and Presiding Elders of the Church, clarified that although it may indeed be difficult for the rich to enter heaven (see Matthew 19:24), it is wickedness and not riches per se that will keep them out.

Just as the presence of *Dives* in the earliest manuscripts clearly links Doctrine and Covenants 104 to Luke 16, the use of “the wicked” makes the essential meaning of both texts unmistakable. The unrighteous rich in Zion who, like the rich man in Christ’s story in Luke 16, do not impart of their substance to the poor will some day have great cause to regret that wickedness.

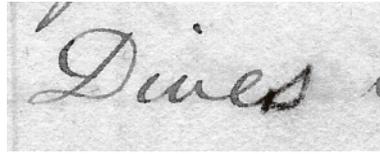


FIG. 1. Detail from the Book of Commandments and Revelations, page 193. *Dive* is in the handwriting of John Whitmer, and the final *s* in red pencil appears to be in the handwriting of William Phelps. Manuscript in the Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, © Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

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1. Max H Parkin, "Joseph Smith and the United Firm: The Growth and Decline of the Church's First Master Plan of Business and Finance, Ohio and Missouri, 1832–1834," *BYU Studies* 46, no. 3 (2007): 43. The word *Dives* was incorrectly transcribed as *Diveles* in the transcription Dr. Parkin used for his article.
2. Kirtland Revelation Book, 102, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City.
3. P. G. W. Glare, ed., *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), s.v. *dives*.
4. Jerome, Vulgate Bible, Bible Foundation and On-Line Book Initiative, ftp.std.com/obi/Religion/Vulgate.
5. Henry J. Cadbury, "A Proper Name for Dives (Lexical Notes on Luke–Acts VI)," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 81, no. 4 (1962): 399–400.
6. Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957), 95, line 1877. The passage reads, "Lazar and dives lyveden diversly, and divers gerdon hadden they therby."
7. William Makepeace Thackeray, *Vanity Fair* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1969), 658. The passage, in chapter 57, reads, "There must be classes—there must be rich and poor,' Dives says, smacking his claret—(it is well if he even sends the broken meat out to Lazarus sitting under the window)."