

CONCLUSION

We have only a minimal understanding of Joseph Smith's view of the revelatory process. The written manuscripts and printed texts imply that the words received in most of the revelations were uttered in the name of Jesus Christ. Yet circumstances in 1834-35 motivated church leaders to change a portion of the revelations. What the revisions demonstrate is a concern about the original wording. Events that did not unfold as proposed in the revelations indicated a need for revision. As priesthood ideas developed, changing the texts provided a way to revise original concepts to conform to an evolving theology.

The 1835 D&C committee consisted of Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery, Sidney Rigdon, and Frederick G. Williams, with the additional help of W. W. Phelps. This committee was not reluctant to alter Smith's revelations. The Book of Commandments and Revelations (BCR) was used after Phelps and John Whitmer arrived from Missouri. In fact, the Kirtland Revelations Book contains revisions in Smith's own hand. Smith's actions showed that he did not consider the earlier texts definitive. Textual revisions were inserted in about a third of the early revelations. When published, the revised texts appeared as the text given at the time and place where the original text was first received though most locations were omitted when printed in the 1835 D&C.

Since no record is known of the committee's reasons for making and arranging the textual revisions, we are left to examine the relevant material in order to understand the committee's reasons. Since the church leaders seemed to understand that the revelations were originally inspired, they undoubtedly considered the message to be the word and will of God as it came through Joseph Smith.

Most of the significant textual emendations occurred in preparing the 1835 D&C. The 1835 committee wanted to keep the message of the text alive and credible. Smith as an editor/manager was both accommodating the immediate past and presenting new insights to his followers. Except for the 1835 revision, the revelations afterwards followed for the most part the earliest known text. The events of 1834-35 that necessitated textual revisions--(1) a court case involving consecrated property, (2) the expulsion of church members from Jackson County, Missouri, (3) the failed redemption of Zion, and (4) the church's problems at Kirtland, Ohio—had passed.

To make significant changes and additions to any revelation was a serious matter. Since many of the revelations were given to individuals, one wonders if the 1835 committee received permission from those individuals to change the text. Besides this, many of the revelations had been copied by church members, and printed in the BC and the *Evening and the Morning Star*. The BCR was brought to Kirtland and not destroyed as previously thought. Only eighteen pages are currently missing.

Copies of the revelations had been made and preserved by faithful members. Other manuscripts of some of the revelations existed, so the committee had the basic wording of those early texts. Some of these collections were kept by the following members: Joseph Smith Jr., Oliver Cowdery, John Whitmer, Martin Harris, David Whitmer, Sidney Rigdon, Samuel H. Smith, Orson Hyde, Orson Pratt, Edward Partridge, Frederick G. Williams, Symonds Ryder, Ezra Booth, William E. McLellan, Zebedee Coltrin and W. W. Phelps.

One of the first ways to amend a previous revelation was to revoke the earlier instructions

with a new commandment.¹ When additional instructions were needed to clarify the law of the church,² revelations were directed to those needs and material was added to the previously written revelation. For the period from November 1831 to April 1832 this was the way to modify earlier instructions as will be seen in the following listing.³

November 11, 1831 “in addition to the church laws respecting church business” and “A few more words in addition to the laws of the church”

December 4, 1831 “The word of the Lord in addition to the law”

December 4, 1831 “A few words in addition to the laws of the kingdom”

April 30, 1832 “Verily thus saith the Lord in addition to the laws of the church”

The Articles and Covenants were published in the *Evening and Morning Star* reprint in January 1835. Prior to the revised text, it stated, “*With a few items from other revelations.*”⁴ There is no evidence that separate revelations were received either to fill in additional text or to revise wording.

The majority of textual revisions were made to revelations from the period of the translation of the Book of Mormon to the establishment of the Kirtland High Council (1828-34). Before February 1834, the highest ecclesiastical group in the Church of Christ was the presidency of the high priesthood organized in March 1832. This presidency of three high priests was called the First Presidency in 1835.

According to the 1835 revision of a revelatory message, Smith was told in March 1829 that he should be “ordained and go forth and deliver my words unto the children of men.”⁵ Mention was also made of three servants (witnesses) “whom I shall call and ordain, unto whom I will show these things.” The 1835 text stated, “And you must wait yet a little while; for ye are not yet ordained.”⁶ These additions relating to ordination were inserted into the revelation after the events occurred.

How do these revisions relate to the words “my” and “I” as God gave words of comfort in 1829? By retaining the March 1829 date in the 1835 version, the changes leave the impression that the altered text as now published was as Smith had originally received it. Like the three additions above, many of the revisions indicate that the added words are those of Jesus Christ. Readers accepted the 1835 work uncritically, thereby having part of their history rewritten.

Changes are sometimes made in one document but not in another. For example, the Articles and Covenants (June 1830) has “The Elders are to conduct the meetings according as they are led by the Holy Ghost” to which were added in 1835 the words “according to the commandments and revelations of God.”⁷ A March 1831 revelation also mentions that the elders of the church are “to conduct all meetings as they are directed and guided by the Holy Spirit.”⁸

¹ See document nos. 64, 66, 88; LDS D&C 56:4-6; 58:32; 75:6 and RLDS D&C 56:2; 58:6; 75:2.

² Document no. 47; LDS D&C 42:1-72; RLDS D&C 42:1-19 (February 9, 1831).

³ See documents nos. 81, 86, 101; LDS D&C 107:59; 72:9, 24; 83:1; and RLDS D&C 104:31; 72:3, 5; 82:1.

⁴ *Evening and Morning Star* (Kirtland reprint) 1 (June 1832):2, reprinted January 1835, emphasis in original.

⁵ 1835 D&C 32:2; LDS D&C 5:6-7; RLDS D&C 5:2.

⁶ 1835 D&C 32:3; LDS D&C 5:11, 17; RLDS D&C 5:3.

⁷ 1835 D&C 2:9; LDS D&C 20:45; RLDS D&C 17:9.

⁸ Document no. 53; LDS D&C 46:2; RLDS D&C 46:1.

Oliver Cowdery asked Newel K. Whitney, church bishop in Kirtland, for the original text of the law of the church.⁹ But when the revelation was republished, it appeared as an altered text.¹⁰ Cowdery editorialized:

Some have said, and still say, that this Church, "*has all things common.*" This assertion is meant, not only to falsify on the subject of property, but to blast the reputation and moral characters of the members of the same.

The church at Jerusalem, in the days of the apostles, had their earthly goods in common; the Nephites, after the appearance of Christ, held theirs in the same way; but each government was differently organized from ours, and could admit of such a course when ours cannot.¹¹

One problem here is how church members can obey a revised law given in 1835 as a "Revelation given February 1831." This could hardly be considered the same revelation since it required different actions of the members. The laws of the church, especially the law of consecration and stewardship, were now to reflect a proposed lifestyle after an 1833 lawsuit. The alterations in the text were not made because of transcription errors, but because of new circumstances. Rather than have members obey the old requirement, the law was changed due to the new conditions. These changes from early manuscripts and the BC text were made ostensibly because of typographical errors. But the changes were more substantive. The 1835 law of consecration was substituted for the original form of the law given in February 1831. The new language of the revelation made a difference in how the Saints were to follow the church law.

New insights and information inserted in the text of older revelations creates a problem. While some may consider that the new material brings the text up to date, others accept the revised text as though it were the text as originally given. When republished in the *Evening and Morning Star*, the text was said to follow the original, so members would not expect a text with changes. Did the additions and omissions make the texts better? Did the variants in the documents merely correct typographical errors and follow the original texts?

A revelation given in November 1831 said that the commandments "were given unto my Servents in their weakness after the manner of their Language that they might come to understanding." It also stated that the commandments are "true & faithfull." The message continued: "what I the Lord have spoken I have spoken & I excuse not myself & though the Heaven & 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."¹²

As the revelations were first given, the messages were presented in their own historical setting and time. Because of the changes, Smith's later views are now mixed in with earlier instructions and practices. This makes it difficult to understand if the revelations are words that come literally from God in the sense of God speaking directly to Smith. What we find is that Joseph Smith and his associates were responsible for altering the ideas in the revelations,

⁹ Cowdery to Whitney, February 4, 1835, Newel K. Whitney Collection, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah; reproduced in Chad J. Flake, "The Newell K. Whitney Collection," *BYU Studies* 11 (Summer 1971):325.

¹⁰ *Evening and Morning Star* (Kirtland reprint) 1 (July 1832):30-31, reprinted February 1835.

¹¹ *Evening and Morning Star* (Kirtland reprint) 1 (August 1832):48, reprinted March 1835, emphasis in original.

¹² Document no. 76; LDS D&C 1:24, 37-38; RLDS D&C 1:5, 7-8.

commandments, and instructions, so these documents seem more like directives to the church than direct words from the Divine.

That a number of Smith's revelations were altered means that revelations were changed without regard to the integrity of the original text. For example, the role of Adam in LDS theology is an important topic.¹³ When the revised revelations appeared in the 1835 D&C, the identification of Adam as Michael was introduced into the canon. Sidney Rigdon wrote, referring to the book of Daniel, "for who could the ancient of days be but our father Adam? surely none other: he was the first who lived in days, and must be the ancient of days."¹⁴ The 1835 D&C included additional material concerning Adam: "and also with Michael, or Adam, the father of all, the prince of all, the ancient of days."¹⁵ It had been established by September 1835 when the D&C was printed and bound that Michael¹⁶ was the name of Adam and was the ancient of days.¹⁷ Additional wording to what is now LDS D&C 78 and RLDS D&C 77 indicated that Michael held the "keys of salvation under the counsel and direction of the Holy One."¹⁸ Joseph Smith taught by August 8, 1839 that "the Keys have to be brought from heaven whenever the Gospel is sent.—When they are revealed from Heaven it is by Adam[']s Authority."¹⁹

On January 21, 1836 Smith reported that he received visions and revelations while in a meeting. Warren Parrish recorded in Joseph Smith's journal that Smith "saw father Adam, and Abraham and Michael and my father and mother, my brother Alvin that has long since slept."²⁰ Smith's father was at this meeting and his mother was probably at home in Kirtland. Smith and other early church members understood that Michael and Adam referred to the same person. Yet the original text of this vision indicates that Joseph Smith saw Adam and Michael as separate beings. In LDS D&C 137:5 the text now reads, "I saw Father Adam and Abraham; and my father and my mother; my brother Alvin, that has long since slept." This deletion of "and Michael" is important since Adam and Michael are supposed to refer to the same personage.

To understand the reason why the words "and Michael" are not in current editions of the D&C, we need to know about the revelation's textual history. Clearly, Smith said he saw in vision "Adam, ... and Michael." This entry was recopied into the Manuscript History by Willard Richards in 1843.²¹ Then the Manuscript History, Book B-1, was later recopied into the duplicate history, Book B-2.²² The vision was first published in Salt Lake City in the *Deseret News* issue

¹³ See Rodney Turner, "The Position of Adam in Latter-day Saint Scripture and Theology," M.A. thesis, Brigham Young University, 1953.

¹⁴ "Millen[n]ium," *The Evening and the Morning Star* 2 (May 1834):154, Kirtland, Ohio.

¹⁵ 1835 D&C 50:2; LDS D&C 27:11; RLDS D&C 26:2.

¹⁶ See Dan. 10:13, 21; 12:1; Jude 1:9; Rev. 12:7.

¹⁷ See Dan. 7:9, 13, 22.

¹⁸ LDS D&C 78:16; RLDS D&C 77:3.

¹⁹ Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph* (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, 1980), 8. See Joseph Smith et al., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1959), 3:386.

²⁰ Joseph Smith Journal, 136, January 21, 1836, CHL; Jessee, *Journals, Volume 1*:167-68. See also document no. 140, also T. B. H. Stenhouse, *The Rocky Mountain Saints* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1873), 63-64; and Cook, *Revelations of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 303.

²¹ Manuscript History, Book B-1:695, CHL.

²² Manuscript History, Book B-2:618, CHL.

of September 4, 1852. At this time the words "and Michael" were dropped.²³ One reason for this is that President Brigham Young in April 1852 proclaimed that Adam was Michael (Joseph Smith had taught the same) and that Adam was God.²⁴ The original journal entry was probably thought to be in error and the two words were dropped. This vision, which appeared as part of the "History of Joseph Smith" or "Life of Joseph Smith," was later reprinted in the *Millennial Star*. The LDS *History of the Church* was edited by B. H. Roberts from the *Millennial Star* and published in 1904.²⁵

In 1976, at a meeting of the First Presidency and Council of the Twelve Apostles in the Salt Lake temple, leaders voted to add the January 1836 vision to the official canon as part of the PGP. Later, in 1979, the church announced that the vision would be removed from the PGP and added as section 137 to the planned 1981 D&C. Thus the deletion of words can impact theology.

Additional problems can be created when textual emendations are considered important enough to add to an earlier document. One concern is how the revised text would be interpreted when considered in the milieu from which it emerged. Adding ideas, phrases, and commentary to documents considered inspired of God creates a misunderstanding of the historical setting and theological development of the early church.

With careful examination, we have developed a better appreciation of the early history of the Saints and their need for receiving instructions from their founding prophet. We can see things that they could not such as the historical problems caused by changing revelations. Doctrinal teachings of another period now in revised form show us that theological concerns are present whenever we attempt to explain or justify these changed revelations.

The benefits of having the early texts of the revelations are, first, that they help in understanding the historical situation at the time the original revelation was received. Second, they enable us to appreciate better the development of both the revelator Joseph Smith and the early LDS church. Smith's revelations show the development of a new religious movement and illuminate the changing nature of its founding prophet. From his early beginnings as he dictated the Book of Mormon, Smith showed concern for the religious heritage he shared with other Christian denominations.

Photographs are meant to document experience, but they are not the experience itself. Revelations are much the same. They are meant to express words and thoughts believed to have been revealed or inspired by Deity. In almost all cases, they were written down as Joseph Smith dictated them to the person acting as his scribe. The scribe tried to write the words correctly as spoken by Smith. What the scribe wrote became the original text. Other persons made copies of the original text. Differences in copies were mostly minor errors. The BCR manuscript book contains copies from the originals or early manuscripts. When the revelations were prepared for publication, there were many minor differences between the original texts and the manuscripts. Most of these variants had no impact on the meaning of the text.

The textual history of the revelations as a living document shows them changing and

²³ "Life of Joseph Smith," *Deseret News* 2 (September 4, 1852):1, Great Salt Lake City, Utah Territory. Manuscript History, Book B-2, was used for printing the "Life of Joseph Smith" entry of January 21, 1836 in the *Deseret News*. The *Deseret News* contains the edited version.

²⁴ Sermon delivered by Brigham Young on April 9, 1852, *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (Liverpool, Eng.: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1854-86), 1:50-51. For further discussion, see David John Buerger, "The Adam-God Doctrine," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 15 (Spring 1982):14-58.

²⁵ *History of the Church*, 2:380.

growing. Every stage of the development provides us with valuable insights. However, the earliest texts are essential in uncovering the original intentions and meanings of the revelations and of the historical circumstances surrounding them. A better text leads to a greater appreciation of the early history of the Restoration movement. The same applies to the texts of the revelations. The early texts preserve historical accuracy and help to uncover original meaning.

As Smith perceived the divine will, he revealed additional ordinances and doctrines that set Mormonism apart from American Christian churches. Many ideas had their roots during the years of thought and reflection before the Nauvoo, Illinois period of church and priesthood development.

Some of Smith's projects—the Nauvoo temple for the priesthood, the Nauvoo House for his family—were monumental tasks requiring obedience. There are fewer explicit revelations during this period since the church president's instructions were inspired guidance by those privileged to hear them.

Smith's private teachings remained private. He felt a need to have members keep secret instructions regarding temple-related ordinances, including plural marriage. The revelation on marriage of July 12, 1843 is a long treatise on the subject by the prophet.

Smith's revelations do not tell the full impact of the prophet's leadership, but they do show his growing desire to experience the divine will in times of need. With the death of Smith on June 27, 1844, his memory has been preserved by the disciples of this new religious movement.