

## Revelations through Joseph Smith

Revelation is usually thought of as the imparting of truth to men and women by Deity. How this wisdom has been communicated between heaven and earth and how it is different from ordinary human thought remains a mystery. For instance, Joseph Smith was accompanied by scribes who sometimes recorded his most casual observations. For Smith, revelation seemed to come from day-to-day experience, from interactions with other people, and from the study of biblical texts.

In the early years of his life, Smith was a treasure seer who divined where precious things were hidden. As he acquired a prophetic mantle, he used the same methods, including seer-stone gazing, to produce his church's foundational scripture, the Book of Mormon, and his first fifteen revelations.<sup>1</sup>

Smith began his ministry in 1828 at age twenty-two by dictating the content of the gold plates to his scribes: Reuben Hale, his wife Emma Smith, and Martin Harris. The words of Joseph Smith's first revelation contain no first-person emphasis. The language is matter of fact and relates directly to the subject at hand: the lost manuscript pages of the dictated Book of Mormon text. However, in April 1829, one of Smith's revelations to another scribe, Oliver Cowdery, uses the first person: "Behold I am Jesus Christ" and "Verily, verily, I say unto you."<sup>2</sup>

While Smith did not comment on the manner in which he perceived God's mind, the linguistic idiosyncrasies are his own. Whether he believed that the ideas or the words themselves were God's is not completely known. Expressions that are borrowed from the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible seem to highlight the importance of the message.

Joseph Smith frequently revised the revelations in accordance with his developing theology. God's word, relayed through fallible prophets, was neither inerrant nor static in Smith's view—so as the need arose, he revised the Bible and his own autobiography as well as the revelations.

On April 6, 1830, the day the church was organized, a revelation referred to Smith's authority as spokesman: "For his word ye shall receive, as if from mine own mouth."<sup>3</sup> One early disciple, Parley P. Pratt, wrote about the process of revelation:

After we had joined in prayer in his [Smith's] translating room, he dictated in our presence the following revelation:—(Each sentence was uttered slowly and very distinctly, and with a pause between each, sufficiently long for it to be recorded, by an ordinary writer, in long hand. This was the manner in which all of his written revelations were dictated and written. There was never any hesitation, reviewing, or reading back, in order to keep the run of the subject; neither did any

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<sup>1</sup> See Dean C. Jessee, ed., *The Papers of Joseph Smith: Autobiographical and Historical Writings* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 1:287, 289, 292, 294.

<sup>2</sup> Marquardt, *Joseph Smith Revelations*, 32. The words "Verily, verily, I say unto you" are in the Gospel of John (KJV) and in the Book of Mormon. The shorter wording "verily I say unto you" is in the New Testament Gospels.

<sup>3</sup> Marquardt, *Joseph Smith Revelations*, 61; BC 22:5; LDS D&C 21:5; RLDS D&C 19:2.

of these communications undergo revisions, interlinings, or corrections. As he dictated them so they stood, so far as I have witnessed; and I was present to witness the dictation of several communications of several pages each. This inquiry was made and the answer given in May, 1831.)<sup>4</sup>

William E. McLellin was the scribe for Smith's October 1831 revelation and for David Whitmer's September 1847 illumination. McLellin wrote of the revelatory process:

I, as scribe, have written revelations from the mouth of both the Revelators, Joseph Smith and David Whitmer. And I have been present many times when others wrote for Joseph; therefore I speak as one having experience. The scribe seats himself at a desk or table, with pen, ink and paper. The subject of enquiry being understood, the Prophet and Revelator enquires of God. He spiritually sees, hears and feels, and then speaks as he is moved upon by the Holy Ghost, the "thus saith the Lord," sentence after sentence, and waits for his amanuenses to write and then read aloud each sentence. Thus they proceed until the revelator says Amen, at the close of what is then communicated.<sup>5</sup>

Note that McLellin has each sentence read aloud by the scribe while Pratt states that there was no reading back. Many of the manuscripts do not have punctuation marks, perhaps indicating they were dictated too rapidly to have been read back and corrected. In any case, the revelations were written as nearly as possible as Smith spoke them.

The early manuscripts have crossed-out words with substituted words above the lines that appear to have been written near the time of the first composition. The orthography is unique for each particular scribe. Smith, on the other hand, was responsible for the content of every message. Many of the revelations are explicitly attributed to God, as illustrated by the following salutations:

thus saith the Lord (OT; BOM; 1830-43)  
 saith the Lord (OT; NT; BOM; 1830-43)  
 Verily thus saith the Lord (1831-43)  
 Behold thus saith the Lord (NT; BOM; 1831-38)  
 verily I say unto you (NT; BOM; 1829-43)  
 Verily, verily, I say unto you (NT; BOM; 1829-43)  
 I am God (OT; BOM; 1829-33)  
 I am Alpha and Omega (NT; BOM; 1830-43)  
 Listen to the voice (NT; 1830-32)  
 I the Lord have spoken it (OT; 1831-33)  
 Behold I am Jesus Christ (BOM; 1829-31)  
 listen to the words of Jesus Christ (1829)  
 give heed unto my word (1829)

In a revelation received on January 25, 1832, the wording commences: "Verily verily I say unto you I who speak even by the voice of my spirit even Alpha and Omega your Lord and

<sup>4</sup> *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*, 48. See LDS and RLDS D&C 50.

<sup>5</sup> William E. McLellin, ed., *The Ensign of Liberty* 1 (August 1849):98.

your God" and continues "behold this is the will of the Lord your God concerning you even so Amen."<sup>6</sup> Joseph Smith stated that this utterance was a "commandment of Jesus Christ."<sup>7</sup> In another revelation, he dictated, "These are the words of Alpha & Omega even Jesus Christ."<sup>8</sup> William W. Phelps underscored Smith's role as God's voice in a song, a portion of which reads: "The commandments to the church,\ Which the saints will always search,\ (Where the joys of heaven perch,)\ Came through him from Jesus Christ."<sup>9</sup>

A peculiarity in the revelations is that, when there are minor differences between the original and subsequent versions, the meaning has usually remained the same. Theological and historical revisions are more apparent. The most drastic alterations were made in 1835, when the texts were amended, added to, excised, and in some cases assigned different historical settings. About a third of the texts from July 1828 to April 23, 1834 were revised. Among other emendations, the changes softened language, reinterpreted economic matters, added offices existing at the time of revision, and inserted references to priesthood restoration.

The earliest prophetic statements were addressed to individuals as a comfort or chastisement or to the church regarding organizational issues. Economic ideals, religious expectations, and millennial warnings were also prominent features. Missionaries were called to preach to the world for the last time.

The majority (53.7 percent) of the commandments, revelations, and instructions were received in Kirtland and Hiram, Ohio (1831-38), as doctrines, ordinances, and authority structures were solidified. From the revelations, it becomes clear that dissent was common and forgiveness was often offered to those who transgressed.

Some of the revelations were not only for a specific recipient but were specifically withheld from the public. Martin Harris was instructed in March 1830: "And I command you, that you preach nought but repentance; and show not these things, neither speak these things unto the world, for they can not bear meat, but milk they must receive."<sup>10</sup> Almost a year later in March 1831 the church was told:

& now I say unto you keep these things from going abroad unto the world that ye may accomplish this work in the eyes of the people & in the eyes of your enemies that they may not know your works untill ye have accomplished the thing which I have commanded you.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Marquardt, *Joseph Smith Revelations*, 184; LDS D&C 75:1, 12; RLDS 75:1-2.

<sup>7</sup> Smith to W. W. Phelps, July 31, 1832, CHL. See Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 270.

<sup>8</sup> Marquardt, *Joseph Smith Revelations*, 201; LDS D&C 81; RLDS D&C 80 (March 15, 1832).

<sup>9</sup> *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* 2 (October 1835): 208; *A Collection of Sacred Hymns, for the Church of the Latter Day Saints*, 33-34.

<sup>10</sup> BC 16:22. For the 1835 D&C, the instruction to Harris deleted "neither speak these things," while adding "until it is wisdom in me," to read: "show not these things unto the world until it is wisdom in me; for they cannot bear meat now, but milk they must receive." 1835 D&C 44:2. See LDS D&C 19:21-22; RLDS D&C 18:2.

<sup>11</sup> Manuscript in CHL. After the words "keep these things from going abroad unto the world," six words were added for the BC: "until it is expedient in me." BCR, 76; BC 48:68; LDS D&C 45:72; RLDS D&C 45:15. The manuscript written by Edward Partridge does not contain these words nor does a copy made by William E. McLellin. See Jan Shipps and John W. Welch, eds.,

At the November 1, 1831, church conference, a revelation authorized publication of the Book of Commandments: "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."<sup>12</sup> Originally the commandments were to be kept from the world—"& for this cause these commandments were given; they were commanded to be kept from the world in the day that they were given, but now [November 1831] are to go forth unto all flesh."<sup>13</sup> Realizing that some of the revelations were not intended for the world underscores the importance of the early texts. Joseph Smith, together with a few associates, selected the revelations from the handwritten manuscripts for canonization.

Individual followers of Joseph Smith's revelations believe them to be God's word but are often ignorant of the original text. The originals are not only generally the most authentic and uncontaminated, but they also best represent the milieu of and open a window on human consciousness for that particular time and place. Yet so little thought is given today to the original texts because, in part, they are assumed to have been unchanged. They are considered sacrosanct—beyond scholarship. If church leaders made changes, they must have had good reason. This chapter outlines the history of the original texts. The details of this historical setting help explain how and why the texts were subsequently changed.

On April 6, 1830, at Manchester, New York, a revelation regarding Joseph Smith Jr., and the Church of Christ declared: "Wherefore meaning the Church thou shalt give heed unto all his [Joseph Smith's] words & commandments which he Shall give unto you as he receiveth them wa[l]king in all holyness before me."<sup>14</sup> This emphasis in heeding Smith's words "as he receiveth them" underscores the importance of understanding their historical context and original import. Unfortunately, for the majority of the documents, there appears to be no extant original manuscripts as the revelations were first recorded. However, we have the next best thing: handwritten copies and early printed editions. By examining these texts, one can often reconstruct the original wording.

Many of these documents were printed by William W. Phelps and Company in 1832 and 1833 in Independence, Missouri. They appeared in the Mormon periodical *The Evening and the Morning Star*. Before that, in July 1830, at Harmony, Pennsylvania, the revelations were arranged and copied with the assistance of John Whitmer. These included what became Book of Commandments chapters 2-27.<sup>15</sup> In early 1831 John Whitmer became church historian and also copied revelations into a manuscript record known as the Book of Commandments and Revelations. The retained volume was preserved and recently published in 2009 by the Church Historian's Press in Salt Lake City.

In a revelation dictated at Fayette, New York, in September 1830, Joseph Smith was likened to Moses in his prophetic primacy: "no one shall be appointed to Receive

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*The Journals of William E. McLellin 1831-1836* (Provo, Utah: BYU Studies/Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 240.

<sup>12</sup> BCR, 127; BC 1:7; LDS D&C 1:38; RLDS D&C 1:8.

<sup>13</sup> BCR, 120; LDS D&C 133:60; RLDS D&C 108:11 (November 3, 1831).

<sup>14</sup> BCR, 28; BC 22:4; LDS D&C 21:4; and RLDS D&C 19:2.

<sup>15</sup> See Manuscript History, Book A-1:50, written in 1839, CHL; Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith* 1:319.

commandments & Revelations in this Church excepting my Servent Joseph for he Receiveth them even as Moses."<sup>16</sup>

Another revelation, in June 1831 in Kirtland, stated that William W. Phelps, a recent convert but not yet baptized, should be "ordained to assist my servent Oliver [Cowdery] to do the work of Printing."<sup>17</sup> The instructions for Phelps were: "let my servent William . . . be established as a Printer unto the Church. . . . And let my servent Oliver assist him even as I have commanded in Whatsoever place I shall appoint unto him to copy & to correct & select" the writings to be published.<sup>18</sup> Land was to be purchased at Independence, Missouri, the new Zion, "for the house of the Printing."<sup>19</sup>

During the first half of November in Hiram, Ohio, a series of church conferences were held. Three of these dealt with printing the revelations. On November 1, it was voted that 10,000 copies of the revelations should be published in a book known as the Book of Commandments. As stated in the minutes: "br[other] Oliver Cowdery made a request desiring the mind of the Lord through this conference of Elders to know how many copies of the Book of commandments it was the will of the Lord should be published in the first edition of that work. Voted that there be ten thousand copies struck."<sup>20</sup> The preface to the manuscript was then received which began: "Behold this is mine authority & the authority of my servents and my preface unto the Book of my Commandments which I have given them to Publish unto you O inhabitants of the Earth."<sup>21</sup>

In the afternoon "a number of the brethren arose and said that they were willing to testify to the world that they knew that they [the revelations] were of the Lord."<sup>22</sup> A revelation was received which said: "& now I the Lord give unto you a testimony of the truth of those commandments which are lying before you."<sup>23</sup> The next day "the brethren then arose in turn and bore witness to the truth of the Book of Commandments."<sup>24</sup> On November 3 Joseph Smith received a revelation designated as the "Appendix."<sup>25</sup> And at an November 8 meeting, it was "Resolved by this conference that Br[other] Joseph Smith Jr correct those errors or mistakes

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<sup>16</sup> BCR, 40; BC 30:2; LDS D&C 28:2; RLDS D&C 27:2.

<sup>17</sup> BCR, 91; BC 57:5; LDS D&C 55:4; RLDS D&C 55:2.

<sup>18</sup> BCR, 94; LDS D&C 57:11, 13; RLDS D&C 57:5.

<sup>19</sup> BCR, 96; BC 59:49; LDS D&C 58:37; RLDS D&C 58:7.

<sup>20</sup> "The Conference Minutes and Record Book of Christ's Church of Latter Day Saints" (known as the "Far West Record"), 15, manuscript in possession of LDS Church. See Cannon and Cook, *Far West Record*, 27.

<sup>21</sup> BCR, 125; BC 1:2; LDS D&C 1:6; RLDS D&C 1:2.

<sup>22</sup> Cannon and Cook, *Far West Record*, 27. David Whitmer wrote fifty-five years later that he objected to the printing of the revelations. See *An Address To All Believers in Christ*, 54-55. It appears that Whitmer went along with the consensus of the conference. Both Whitmer and William E. McLellin were present when the testimony to the revelations was given at the church conference but neither signed it. BCR, 121.

<sup>23</sup> BCR, 115; 1835 D&C 25:2; LDS D&C 67:4; RLDS D&C 67:2.

<sup>24</sup> Cannon and Cook, *Far West Record*, 28. Compare Manuscript History, Book A-1:162-63; Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith* 1:367-68.

<sup>25</sup> "Having given, in a previous number, the Preface to the book of Commandments now in press, we give below the close, or as it has been called, the Appendix." *The Evening and the Morning Star* 1 (May 1833): 1 [89].

which he may discover by the holy Spirit while reviewing the revelations & commandments & also the fulness of the scriptures."<sup>26</sup>

On November 12, it was made known with regard to Oliver Cowdery's trip to Independence, Missouri, that "it is not wisdom in me, that he should be intrusted with the commandments & the moneys which he shall carry unto the Land of Zion, except one go with him, who will be true & faithfull; wherefore I the Lord willeth that my Servent John (Whitmer) Should go with my servent Oliver."<sup>27</sup> Subsequently Cowdery and Whitmer were commissioned: "Voted that Joseph Smith jr. be appointed to dedicate & consecrate these brethren & the sacred writings & all they have entrusted to their care, to the Lord: done accordingly."<sup>28</sup>

On the same day Joseph Smith Jr., Martin Harris, Oliver Cowdery, John Whitmer, Sidney Rigdon, and William W. Phelps were made "stewards over the revelations & commandments which I have given unto them, & which I shall hereafter give unto them," to manage the publishing business and receive the benefits thereof.<sup>29</sup>

Whitmer and Cowdery left Ohio on November 20 and arrived in Independence on January 5, 1832.<sup>30</sup> They carried with them the manuscript Book of Commandments and Revelations that was to be used as a basis for the proposed printed volume. Cowdery wrote to Smith: "We expect soon to be ready to print and hope that brother Martin [Harris] can supply with paper."<sup>31</sup>

"Shall we procure the paper required of our breatheren [brethren] in thus [their] letter and carry it with us or not and if we do what moneys shall we use for that purpose[?]" Smith asked God in Hiram, Ohio, on March 20, 1832. The answer was:

It is expedient saith the Lord unto you that the paper shall be purchased for the printing of the book of the Lord[']s commandments and it must needs be that you take it with [you] for it is not expedient that my servant Martin [Harris] should as yet go up unto the land of Zion. [L]et the purchase be made by the Bishop of [if] it must needs be by hire; let whatsoever is done be done in the name of the Lord.<sup>32</sup>

The next month Smith and counselors Jesse Gause and Sidney Rigdon traveled to Independence, bringing paper with them for publishing *The Evening and the Morning Star* and the Book of Commandments. At a council of the Literary Firm on April 30, it was "Ordered by the Council that three thousand copies of the book of Commandments be printed the first edition." Phelps, Cowdery, and Whitmer were "appointed to review the Book of Commandments & select for printing such as shall be deemed by them proper, as dictated by the Spirit & make all

<sup>26</sup> Cannon and Cook, *Far West Record*, 29.

<sup>27</sup> BCR, 122; 1835 D&C 28:1; LDS D&C 69:1-2; RLDS D&C 69:1.

<sup>28</sup> Cannon and Cook, *Far West Record*, 32.

<sup>29</sup> BCR, 124; 1835 D&C 26:1; LDS D&C 70:3; RLDS D&C 70:1.

<sup>30</sup> Westergren, *From Historian to Dissident*, 102. Regarding the date of November 20, Richard P. Howard has written: "it appears to have been originally 20; but later was made into 10 by someone making a wide old 1 covering all but the presumed tail of the 2." Howard to Marquardt, February 6, 1981.

<sup>31</sup> Oliver Cowdery to Joseph Smith, January 28, 1832, CHL. See Cannon and Cook, *Far West Record*, 238.

<sup>32</sup> Marquardt, *Joseph Smith Revelations*, 206-207.

necessary verbal corrections."<sup>33</sup> Copies of revelations, received since November 1831, were brought to Independence by the presidency of the High Priesthood. These included the vision of the three degrees of glory and a revelation to Jesse Gause as Smith's counselor which were copied by John Whitmer into the BCR.<sup>34</sup>

*The Evening and the Morning Star* was published for the first time in June 1832. On the first page, under the title "Revelations" appeared "The Articles and Covenants of the Church of Christ." In the July issue, Smith and Rigdon's "Vision" of the three degrees of glory was published. Each issue from June 1832 to July 1833 had either a complete revelation or a portion of a revelation, most of which were subsequently published in the Book of Commandments.<sup>35</sup> The printing of "A Book of Commandments, for the Government of the Church of Christ" commenced, but was a slow project.<sup>36</sup> Type was set on sheets of thirty-two pages each, sixteen pages per side, to be folded into signatures as follows:

Sheet A pages	1-32	Title page and BC 1:1 to 12:5
Sheet B pages	33-64	BC 12:5 to 29:40
Sheet C pages	65-96	BC 29:40 to 45:6
Sheet D pages	97-128	BC 45:6 to 56:3
Sheet E pages	129-160	BC 56:4 to 65:47 <sup>37</sup>

On Saturday, July 20, 1833, citizens of Jackson County, Missouri, met at the court house in Independence and formed a committee to ask the Mormons to shut down the printing office and leave the county.<sup>38</sup> When the latter proved unwilling to do so, the non-Mormon community voted to demolish the printing office. On that day nearly four hundred individuals went to the residence and printing house of W. W. Phelps and Company, threw the press from the upper story, scattered the type, and destroyed most of the building.<sup>39</sup>

The mob thus succeeded in stopping publication of the *Evening and the Morning Star*, the Book of Commandments, and the *Upper Missouri Advertiser*. The last verse on sheet E of the Book of Commandments read: "For verily I say that the rebellious are not of the blood of

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<sup>33</sup> Cannon and Cook, *Far West Record*, 46.

<sup>34</sup> BCR, 128-140.

<sup>35</sup> Peter Crawley, "A Bibliography of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in New York, Ohio, and Missouri," *Brigham Young University Studies* 12 (Summer 1972):477-78; also Affidavit of W. W. Phelps, September 28, 1832. On this same press, Phelps also printed the *Upper Missouri Advertiser*, a weekly newspaper.

<sup>36</sup> *The Evening and the Morning Star* 1 (December 1832):8 [56] and 1 (May 1833):1 [89]. On December 1, 1832 Joseph Smith recorded in his journal: "wrote and corrected revelations &c." Joseph Smith Journal, 3, CHL; Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith* 2:4. This is reflected in the Kirtland Revelations Book, pp. 13-15.

<sup>37</sup> John McDonnell to the Editor, *Saints Herald* 124 (December 1833):44.

<sup>38</sup> Warren A. Jennings, "Factors in the Destruction of the Mormon Press in Missouri, 1833," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 35 (Winter 1967):57-76.

<sup>39</sup> Petition dated September 28, 1833 in *The Evening and the Morning Star* (Kirtland, Ohio) 2 (December 1833):114; *History of the Church* 1:412. See also *Times and Seasons* 1 (December 1839):18; *History of the Church*, 1:390, footnote.

Ephraim."<sup>40</sup> The Mormons' press was later used when "Davis and Kelly" took it to Liberty, Missouri, to publish the *Upper Missouri Enquirer*.<sup>41</sup>

Sheets of the unfinished Book of Commandments were salvaged from the wreckage of the office and collected as they blew about the streets of Independence. From these sheets a small number of copies of the book were assembled, though the five printed sheets (160 pages) represented only a portion of the anticipated final work.<sup>42</sup> The few copies thus assembled were used by church members in reading and studying Smith's revelations.<sup>43</sup> Though the books had different title pages and bindings, they constituted "the first book printed in the immense territory between St. Louis and the Pacific coast."<sup>44</sup>

By October plans were underway to get another press to publish the revelations at church headquarters in Kirtland. Frederick G. Williams wrote, "The book of commandments were [sic] nearly half finished at the time of the riot but were destroyed with the press and will probably be reprinted here as we have sent to New York for a press."<sup>45</sup> Although only a small number of copies of the printed Book of Commandments survived, the five printed sheets were an invaluable source used in preparing the Doctrine and Covenants along with the BCR and KRB. Beside these two manuscript records, there are early manuscript copies of revelations in the papers of Newel K. Whitney, the bishop at Kirtland. These copies were written as early as 1831-32 and are among the earliest extant. It is possible that a number of the Whitney manuscripts were the original texts for some of the revelations.<sup>46</sup>

The Kirtland Revelations Book contains manuscript copies of revelations, begun in late 1832, with all but nine pages recorded by August 18, 1834. The texts were copied months or years after they were first received onto this manuscript book. Some of these revelations were corrected at a later date in Smith's handwriting.

Other manuscripts, books, or journals that contain copies of Smith's revelations and were written by early church members include William E. McLellan's journal and manuscripts, 1831-32; Zebedee Coltrin's journal containing two documents copied in Independence on January 12,

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<sup>40</sup> BC 65:47 (page 160). For a photo of the last page used for Sheet E, see BCR, 111, in Robin Scott Jensen, Robert J. Woodford, and Steven C. Harper, eds., *Revelations and Translations: Manuscript Revelation Books, Facsimile Edition* (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2009), 194.

<sup>41</sup> Manuscript History, Book A-1:412; *History of the Church* 1:470.

<sup>42</sup> Peter Crawley and Chad J. Flake, *Notable Mormon Books 1830-1857* (Provo, Utah: Friends of the Brigham Young University Library, 1974), 6. See also Peter Crawley, "Joseph Smith and A Book of Commandments," *The Princeton University Library Chronicle* 42 (Autumn 1980):18-32.

<sup>43</sup> Elden J. Watson, comp., *The Orson Pratt Journals*, 38, April 2, 1834; *The Evening and the Morning Star* (Kirtland, Ohio) 2 (August 1834):184, an Appeal dated July 1834; also Lectures on Theology, "Lecture Third," 1835 D&C, 36, 42. See also John Whitmer's Account Book, CHL.

<sup>44</sup> "Missouri History Not Found in Textbooks," *Missouri Historical Review* 44 (October 1949):94; extract from an article by John Edward Hicks and published in the *Kansas City Star*, July 1, 1949.

<sup>45</sup> Williams to John Murdock, Kirtland, Ohio, October 10, 1833, Joseph Smith Letterbook 1:62, CHL.

<sup>46</sup> Chad J. Flake, "The Newell K. Whitney Collection," *Brigham Young University Studies* 11 (Summer 1971):325.



1832; the "Book of Commandments, Laws and Covenants" designated "Book A," made in 1832; "Book B" containing revelations copied by June 12, 1833; and "Book C" made in 1834.<sup>47</sup> The BCR and KRB their handwritten changes in the texts were church manuscript books and contain corrections and notations indicating that certain documents were to be included in the Doctrine and Covenants.

With the destruction of the church's press in Independence, a council of the United Firm met in Kirtland on September 11, 1833. Frederick G. Williams, Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, and Newel K. Whitney, along with Oliver Cowdery (who was a "delegate to represent the residue of the said firm residing in Independence") conceived of having two publications printed by Williams. These were to be titled "The Latter day Saints messenger and advocate" and "the Star formerly published in Jackson County, Missouri." Cowdery was designated the editor for both periodicals. The expectation was that publication would eventually be transferred back to Independence.<sup>48</sup>

On April 19, 1834, in the "wilderness" at Norton, Ohio, Cowdery and Rigdon were commissioned to assist each other "in arranging the church covenants which are to be soon published."<sup>49</sup> A conference of elders would be held at Norton two days later. Soon afterward, a revelation dated April 23 appointed the United Firm's Kirtland printing office under Williams and Cowdery to print "the revelations which I have given unto you, & which I shall hereafter, fro[m] time to time, give unto you."<sup>50</sup> Also they were instructed to secure copyrights, "that others may not take the blessings away from you which I have confer[r]ed upon you."<sup>51</sup> At a high council meeting held on September 24:

The council then proceeded to appoint a committee to arrange the items of the doctrine of Jesus Christ for the government of the church of Latter-Day Saints . . . Brother Samuel H. Smith then nominated brethren Joseph Smith Junr., Oliver Cowdery, Sidney Rigdon and Frederick G. Williams, to compose said committee which was seconded by brother Hyrum Smith. The Counsellors then gave their vote, which was also agreed to by the whole conference. The council then decided

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<sup>47</sup> Earl E. Olson, "The Chronology of the Ohio Revelations," *Brigham Young University Studies* 11 (Summer 1971):332-35. See also Robert J. Woodford, "The Historical Development of the Doctrine and Covenants," (Ph.D. diss., Brigham Young University, 1974), 98-106.

<sup>48</sup> Kirtland Council Minute Book, 24, CHL. This book contains minutes of meetings, conferences, ordinations, and blessings for the period December 3, 1832 to November 27, 1837. See also Manuscript History, Book A-1:345; *History of the Church* 1:409; Lyndon W. Cook, *The Revelations of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Provo, Utah: Seventy's Mission Bookstore, 1981), 114-15.

<sup>49</sup> Joseph Smith Journal, 76-79, handwriting of Oliver Cowdery; Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith* 2:31-32. See also Manuscript History, Book A-1:460; *History of the Church* 2:50-51.

<sup>50</sup> Marquardt, *Joseph Smith Revelations*, 258; 1835 D&C 98:10; LDS D&C 104:58; RLDS D&C 101:10. Compare LDS D&C 104:58 with LDS D&C 70:3; RLDS D&C 70:1.

<sup>51</sup> Marquardt, *Joseph Smith Revelations*, 258 from "Book of Commandments, Law and Covenants; Book C." See also KRB, 105 and BCR, 196. The copyright wording was not included in the 1835 D&C after 98:10; LDS D&C 104:59; RLDS 101:10.

that said committee, after arranging and publishing said book of covenants, have the avails [royalties] of the same.<sup>52</sup>

The council thus sustained Cowdery and Rigdon who had been appointed four months previously at Norton.

In the September 1834 issue of the *Evening and the Morning Star*—printed in Kirtland—a "Prospectus for Re-printing the First and Second Volumes of The Evening and the Morning Star" appeared. According to the editor, Oliver Cowdery, the twenty-four numbers were to be reprinted with corrections of typographical errors:

There are many typographical errors in both volumes, and especially in the last, which we shall endeavor carefully to correct, as well as principle, if we discover any.—It is also proper for us to say, that in the first 14 numbers, in the Revelations, are many errors, typographical, and others, occasioned by transcribing manuscript; but as we shall have access to originals, we shall endeavor to make proper corrections.<sup>53</sup>

Whether or not this was Cowdery's initial intent, careful study shows that if any original manuscripts (previous to 1835) were used, their exact wording was not adhered to. *The Evening and the Morning Star*, reprinted in Kirtland between January and June 1835 under the title *Evening and Morning Star*, altered the texts, deleted previously published material, and inserted editorial comments by Cowdery. For instance, in the January 1835 reissue for June 1832, the following remarks concerning Smith's revelations were added:

On the revelations we merely say, that we were not a little surprised to find the previous print so different from the original. We have given them a careful comparison, assisted by individuals whose known integrity and ability is uncensurable. Thus saying we cast no reflections upon those who were entrusted with the responsibility of publishing them in Missouri, as our own labors were included in that important service to the church, and it was our unceasing endeavor to have them correspond with the copy furnished us. We believe they are now correct. If not in every word, at least in principle. For the special good of the church we have also added a few items from other revelations.<sup>54</sup>

When Oliver Cowdery started with the reprint, he may have had manuscript copies of a few revelations. He had his own copy of the 1833 BC and the KRB. On February 4, 1835 Cowdery wrote to Bishop Newel K. Whitney requesting the original manuscript known as the Law of the Church:

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<sup>52</sup> Kirtland Council Minute Book, 76. See also Manuscript History, Book B-1:556-57; *History of the Church* 2:165.

<sup>53</sup> Prospectus dated September 26, 1834, Kirtland, Ohio, in *The Evening and the Morning Star* 2 (September 1834):192. The prospectus was dated two days after the September 24, 1834, high council meeting.

<sup>54</sup> *Evening and Morning Star* (Kirtland reprint) 1 (June 1832):16, reprinted January 1835.

Bishop Whitney:

Will you have the kindness to send us, by the bearer, the original copy of the Revelation given 12 elders Feb. 1831 called "The Law of the Church"? We are preparing the old Star for re-printing, and have no copy from which to correct, and kno[w] of no other beside yours.

Your Ob't Serv't.

Kirtland, Feb. 4, 1835. Oliver Cowdery.<sup>55</sup>

It is not known if Cowdery received the original from Whitney. But the revised, expanded text contained material anachronistic to the original 1831 setting. Oliver Cowdery wrote in the March reprint: "Those who read this paper will see that it contains items of covenant of deep interest to the church of the saints, and as they have frequently been ridiculed in consequence of certain items contained in the one setting forth their faith on the subject of bestowing temporal gifts for the benefit of the poor, it is a matter of joy to us to be able to present this document according to the original."<sup>56</sup> Cowdery's statement that he was presenting the February 9, 1831 revelation, "according to the original," makes sense only, if by "original," he meant another text prepared for the typesetter for the forthcoming Doctrine and Covenants.

The changes in many of the revelations reflected later theology, modifications in church government, recognition of former discrepancies, and sensitivity to criticism engendered by the originals. In reconstructing the events of 1835, it may be helpful to know something about the key players, specifically members of the First Presidency.

Joseph Smith Jr., was the prophet through whom the revelations came. The Doctrine and Covenants revelations or other documents are believed to have been originally dictated by him. Smith's own handwriting appears in the entry of a December 4, 1831, revelation copied into the Kirtland Revelations Book. Corrections for a number of sections previously recorded in 1832 are in his hand, as well. He blessed Sidney Rigdon and Oliver Cowdery for their work in arranging the revelations and was the presiding officer both of the Kirtland High Council and of the church.

Smith, and evidently Rigdon, assembled seven Lectures on Faith for use in the elders' school during the winter of 1834-35. These were "delivered before a Theological class" in Kirtland.<sup>57</sup> In January 1835 Smith was engaged "in preparing the Lectures on Theology for publication in the Book of Doctrine and covenants, which the committee appointed last September were now compiling."<sup>58</sup> The preface to the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants, drafted by the committee, said: "The first part of the book will be found to contain a series of Lectures as

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<sup>55</sup> Newel K. Whitney Collection, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University. See photo of letter in Flake, "The Newell K. Whitney Collection," *Brigham Young University Studies* 11 (Summer 1971):325.

<sup>56</sup> *Evening and Morning Star* (Kirtland reprint) 1 (August 1832): 48, reprinted March 1835.

<sup>57</sup> Alan J. Phipps, "The Lectures on Faith: An Authorship Study" (M.A. thesis, Brigham Young University, 1977); Leland H. Gentry, "What of the Lectures on Faith," *BYU Studies* 19 (Fall 1978): 5-19; and Noel B. Reynolds, "The Case for Sidney Rigdon as Author of the *Lectures on Faith*," *Journal of Mormon History* 32 (Fall 2005):1-41. See also Richard S. Van Wagoner, Steven C. Walker, and Allen D. Roberts, "'The Lectures on Faith': A Case Study in Decanonization," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 20 (Fall 1987):71-77.

<sup>58</sup> Manuscript History, Book B-1:563, written in 1843, CHL; *History of the Church* 2:180.

delivered before a Theological class in this place, and in consequence of their embracing the important doctrine of salvation, we have arranged them into the following work."<sup>59</sup>

Oliver Cowdery had been Smith's close associate since April 1829 and a number of early revelations are in his handwriting. Although he was not in Ohio when many of the revelations were originally given, he copied a few of them into the BCR and KRB. He was set apart in April 1834 to assist Rigdon in compiling the book of covenants and was publicly selected for the committee on September 24. On December 5, 1834, he was ordained an assistant president to Smith and thus became a member of the First Presidency. As a member of the Doctrine and Covenants committee, his name appears on the preface to the 1835 edition. He edited the newspapers at Kirtland, including the *Messenger and Advocate*, until June 1835. At this time, he relinquished the paper to church historian John Whitmer. Cowdery also edited the reprint of the *Evening and Morning Star* and, in February 1835, the short-lived community-oriented *Northern Times*. As one of the three witnesses to the Book of Mormon, he helped select the first twelve apostles of the church. In addition, he served on the Kirtland High Council.

Sidney Rigdon was a noted religious personality in his own right before joining with the Mormons. He became closely associated with Joseph Smith soon after they first met in December 1830. In March 1832 Sidney was ordained a counselor to Smith. Since he was one of Smith's scribes, his handwriting also appears in early manuscript revelations. Along with Cowdery, he was set apart to assist in compiling the book of covenants. He also worked on the Lectures on Faith, wrote theological articles for church publications, and, as a member of the First Presidency, attended Kirtland High Council meetings.

Frederick G. Williams was a scribe whose work started in July 1832 at a time when Rigdon for a short period was out of harmony with the church. In the winter of 1832-33, Williams was made a counselor to Smith. Most of the Kirtland Revelations Book is in his handwriting. As a member of the First Presidency, he was also involved in Kirtland High Council meetings.

Although not a member of the revision committee, William W. Phelps, former editor of the *Evening and the Morning Star*, came to Kirtland in mid-May 1835 "and assisted the Committee in compiling the Book of Doctrine and Covenants."<sup>60</sup> The next month he copied revelations into his diary and compared documents for the Doctrine and Covenants. Phelps's handwritten additions and notations can be found in the BCR. With his experience in operating a press, he also worked at the printing office on the Doctrine and Covenants and the *Northern Times*.

As members of the First Presidency of the church, and especially as members of the committee in whose charge the revelations were placed, these men were responsible for the 1835 publication. A preface prepared by this committee guaranteed that as presiding elders they had "carefully selected" and "compiled" the *Doctrine and Covenants of the Church of the Latter Day Saints*. The copyright was obtained on January 14, 1835.<sup>61</sup>

On August 17 a general assembly was called in Kirtland. The term "general assembly" usually meant a gathering "of the several [priesthood] quorums which constitute the spiritual

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<sup>59</sup> 1835 D&C, [iii].

<sup>60</sup> Manuscript History, Book B-1:592; *History of the Church* 2:227.

<sup>61</sup> Woodford, "The Historical Development of the Doctrine and Covenants," 48.

authorities of the church."<sup>62</sup> But in this meeting all members, both male and female, were invited to vote. One of the purposes was to determine if the Doctrine and Covenants then in press would be approved.

The minutes are recorded in the Kirtland Council Minute Book, and a printed version was published in the August 1835 issue of the *Messenger and Advocate* with an abbreviated version in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants. Some errors in the minutes were noticed too late to be corrected as they "escaped the eye of the proof reader" and were listed at the end of the book (xxv) as "Notes to the Reader."<sup>63</sup> The Kirtland Council Minute Book contains the following:

This Committee having finished said Book according to the instructions given them, it was deemed necessary to call the general assembly of the Church to see whether the book be approved or not by the Authoroties [Authorities] of the church, that it may, if approved, become a law unto the church, and a rule of faith and practice unto the same.<sup>64</sup>

The presiding officers, Cowdery and Rigdon, were of course members of the committee that had prepared the Doctrine and Covenants. Smith and Williams were in Michigan, and all of the newly ordained apostles were absent on a mission.<sup>65</sup> Why such an important meeting did not occur previous to Smith's and Williams' departure is not known. Cowdery and Rigdon "proceeded to organize the whole assembly," including at least 118 priesthood members, into their respective quorums and non-priesthood groups.

Since not all twelve members of the Kirtland High Council could attend the assembly, eight substitutes stood in their place. In the Missouri High Council as well, there were only three regular members present; four had been appointed apostles. Thus, nine other priesthood holders served as substitutes for the Missouri council for the general assembly. The seven presidents of the Seventy were represented by four regular members with three substitutes to fill this quorum. The bishop of Kirtland was present with his two counselors. Edward Partridge, bishop from Zion, was absent, but his position was represented by John Corrill. Other substitutes filled in for absentees among the elders's, priests's, teachers's, and deacons's presidencies.

In the morning session, ordinations and blessings took place. In the afternoon there was a vote on the Doctrine and Covenants. President Cowdery "in behalf of the committee"<sup>66</sup> "arose

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<sup>62</sup> Marquardt, *Joseph Smith Revelations*, 269; 1835 D&C 3:11; LDS D&C 107:32; RLDS D&C 104:11 (April [28-30], 1835).

<sup>63</sup> The minutes were deleted from the 1844 Nauvoo edition of the D&C. The assembly minutes were first printed in RLDS D&C in the 1894 edition. In the 1911 RLDS edition, the minutes were numbered section "108A"; and in the 1970 RLDS D&C, they were moved to the Introduction (9-12). They were subsequently removed and are not included in the 1990 RLDS edition.

<sup>64</sup> Kirtland Council Minute Book, 98.

<sup>65</sup> The manuscript history for the August 17, 1835 General Assembly states that Smith and Williams were "absent on a visit to the Saints in Michigan." The words "Joseph absent" are in the side margin (Manuscript History, Book B-1:600). Later the manuscript describes the Michigan trip as a "mission" (Book B-1:606). The printed version changes the word "mission" to "visit." See *History of the Church* 2:243, 253.

<sup>66</sup> *Messenger and Advocate* 1 (August 1835): 161.

with the Book of Doctrine and Covenants, (284 pages) contain[ing] the faith, articles and covenants of the Latter Day Saints."<sup>67</sup> President Rigdon then "explained the manner by which they intended to obtain the voice of the assembly for or against said book."<sup>68</sup> William W. Phelps commented on the book and said:

he had examined it carefully, that it was well arranged and calculated to govern the church in righteousness, [and] if followed would bring the members to see eye to eye. And further that he had received the testimony from God, that the Revelations and commandments contained therein are true.

John Whitmer testified "that he was well acquainted with the work & knew it to be true and from God."<sup>69</sup> John Smith, "taking the lead of the high council in Kirtland," stated "that the lectures were judiciously arranged and compiled, and were profitable for doctrine."<sup>70</sup>

Voting took place as John Smith presented the following: "That they would receive the Book as the rule of their [their] faith & practice and put themselves under the guidance of the same and also that they were satisfied with the committee that were chosen to compile it, as having discharged their duty faithfully." Levi Jackman "said that he had examined as many of the revelations contained in the book as were printed in Zion, & firmly believes them as he does the Book of Mormon or the Bible and also the whole contents of the Book." Neither set of minutes stated that Jackman actually compared the new document with the Book of Commandments or any other record. The First Presidency and two high councils voted in favor of the book and the committee.

William Phelps again arose and "read the written testimony of the 12 Apostles in favor of the Book and the Committee who compiled it."<sup>71</sup> Other leaders stated, as they passed the book to each other, that they knew the book was true and were satisfied with it and the committee that compiled it. Votes of the different priesthood quorums were taken, all in the affirmative. Thomas Gates "took the Book and expressed his satisfaction with it, and also called a vote of all the members present, both male & female, & They gave a decided voice in favor of it & also of the committee."<sup>72</sup> The *Messenger and Advocate* minutes stated: "The several authorities, and the general assembly, by a unanimous vote accepted of the labors of the committee."<sup>73</sup>

After this vote of confidence, Phelps read an article on marriage. It was voted upon and accepted. Cowdery then read an article on governments and laws in general. This was accepted as well. Both articles were "ordered to be printed in said book, by a unanimous vote."<sup>74</sup> After a hymn and prayer, the assembly was dismissed by Rigdon, having accepted the book as a whole

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<sup>67</sup> Kirtland Council Minute Book, 103. This 284-page book included articles on "Marriage" and "Of Governments and Laws in General," minutes of the General Assembly, Index, Contents, and "Notes to the Reader."

<sup>68</sup> *Messenger and Advocate* 1 (August 1835):161.

<sup>69</sup> Kirtland Council Minute Book, 103.

<sup>70</sup> *Messenger and Advocate* 1 (August 1835):161.

<sup>71</sup> Kirtland Council Minute Book, 104.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>73</sup> *Messenger and Advocate* 1 (August 1835):162.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.* 1 (August 1835):162-63.

but not having voted on the individual revelatory documents. Don H. Compier commented about this manner of canonizing the Doctrine and Covenants:

It was the work of the committee—not the specific content of the Book of Doctrine and Covenants—that was considered by the quorums of the church on August 17, 1835. Their unanimous acceptance of the book that had not yet been published was in effect a decision to include the forthcoming publication in the church's canon of scripture. It is interesting to note that their action thus "canonized" not only Smith's revelations (selected and worded as he chose) but also non-revelatory material, namely the "Lectures on Faith" and the articles on government and marriage.<sup>75</sup>

The following accounts reflect the attitudes of the people present at the general assembly. Ira Ames wrote twenty-three years later: "I was present at a General Assembly of the Church on the 17th August 1835 to accept the Book of Doctrine & Covenants as our rule of faith. And gave my vote as president of the Priests Quorum. See D&C page 257 1st Edition."<sup>76</sup> Ebenezer Robinson worked in the printing office after his arrival in Kirtland in May 1835, though he was not a member of the church until October. He recorded fifty-three years later:

On the 17th day of August, 1835, a general assembly of the church convened in the lower part of the temple, to hear the report of the compiling committee of said book, and determine, by vote, whether they "accepted and acknowledged it as the doctrine and covenants of their faith.["]

After the only two members of the committee, who were present, viz: Oliver Cowdery and Sidney Rigdon, had reported, several official members of the church, Presidents of quorums, arose, one after another, and testified to the truth of the book, and they and their quorums "accepted and acknowledged it as the doctrine and covenants of their faith." Afterwards the question was put to the whole assembly and carried, unanimously.

We attended that meeting, and noticed that a majority of those voting did so upon the testimony of those who bore record to the truth of the book, as they had neither time or opportunity to examine it for themselves. They had no means of knowing whether any alterations had been made in any of the revelations or not.

Neither Joseph Smith jr. [n]or Frederick G. Williams, were present at this general assembly, as they had gone to Michigan.<sup>77</sup>

In September 1835 copies of the book arrived from the binder in Cleveland. William W. Phelps wrote: "We got some of the Commandments from Cleveland last week."<sup>78</sup> Wilford Woodruff received a copy on September 23 "as A Present from O[liver] Cowdery."<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> "Canonization in the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints," *Restoration Studies III* (Independence, Missouri: Herald Publishing House, 1986), 179.

<sup>76</sup> Journal and Record of the Life & Family of Ira Ames, CHL.

<sup>77</sup> Ebenezer Robinson, ed., "Items of Personal History of the Editor," *The Return* 1 (June 1889):88-89, Davis City, Iowa.

There is no indication that anyone realized that the texts of some of the revelations had been revised, deleted, or enlarged. The revelations were accepted in their altered form without comment, apparently in the belief that they were identical to those originally given to the Saints. There was no explanation made by the committee, either in the preface or within the text of the revelations, as to why alterations had been made. Based on Oliver Cowdery's editorial comments, it seems that revelatory texts differing from those that had been previously published were changed without regard to the earlier documents.

Seven years later Joseph Smith read proof sheets with William W. Phelps in Nauvoo, Illinois, for a new edition of the Doctrine and Covenants.<sup>80</sup> In September 1844, two months after Smith's murder, the second edition was referenced in the *Times and Seasons* showing that it was available by that time.<sup>81</sup> This edition had eight additional sections, including two pre-1835 revelations; God's word to Smith in 1837, 1838, and 1841; two letters of 1842; and a testimonial regarding the martyrdom of the prophet and his brother Hyrum on June 27, 1844.

In the majority of church histories the primary source of Smith's revelations quoted and referred to is the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants. The two major churches (LDS Church and Community of Christ) have published their own retrospective updated editions of the Doctrine and Covenants. The texts of the revelations received prior to 1835 are based upon that publication.

It is a well-established canon of textual criticism that, in order to uncover the original text, one must follow the earliest and best manuscripts available.<sup>82</sup> In biblical textual criticism, the text critic works with versions from various scribes in attempting to determine which reading is closest to the original. Among the most significant conventions are assumptions that the shortest reading is probably closest to the original, since a scribe more often adds than takes away, and that the most difficult reading is probably nearest to the original wherever this rule can reasonably be applied. The possibility of transcription errors such as dittography must be kept in mind, as well.

In applying these principles to the revelations given by Joseph Smith, we must apply two distinctly different approaches to the texts themselves. The first involves comparing the various versions of the printed texts. Instead of peeling back layers of scribal variations, as one would do with biblical texts in an attempt to restore the original, the critic here peels back various layers of editing in an attempt to restore the original text of the revelation. The second approach is much

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<sup>78</sup> Phelps to Sally Phelps, September 16, 1835; as cited in Bruce A. Van Orden, ed., "Writing to Zion: The William W. Phelps Kirtland Letters (1835-1836)," *Brigham Young University Studies* 33 (1993):566.

<sup>79</sup> Kenney, *Wilford Woodruff's Journal* 1:43.

<sup>80</sup> Joseph Smith, Journal, kept by Willard Richards, February 14, 1843, CHL. See *History of the Church* 5:273.

<sup>81</sup> *Times and Seasons* 5 (September 2, 1844):636. The 1844 edition was printed in Nauvoo, church headquarters.

<sup>82</sup> For text-critical methods, see Kurt and Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament: An Introduction to the Critical Edition and to the Theory and Practice of Modern Textual Criticism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans/E.J. Brill, 1987); Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); and Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart, Ger.: German Bible Society, 1994).



like biblical text criticism. It involves examining the various extant scribal manuscripts of Joseph Smith's revelations and comparing them in an attempt to uncover the text of the revelation as Smith originally received it. Applying these principles to Smith's revelations allows us to re-establish the original text and to better understand the revelations in the context in which they were originally given.

The history of Joseph Smith, in a passage compiled in 1839, recalled a time in 1830 when Oliver Cowdery suggested a change in the Articles and Covenants of the church. Joseph Smith replied, asking Cowdery: "By what authority he [Cowdery] took upon him to command me [Smith] to alter, or erase, to add or diminish to or from a revelation or commandment from Almighty God."<sup>83</sup> Yet it appears that for the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants, Smith and Cowdery were both involved in this sort of editing.

On July 31, 1832, Smith wrote a letter to William W. Phelps concerning copies of the commandments and of the vision of the three degrees of glory. Joseph Smith wrote:

I will send them to you as soon as possible [possible], but I will exhort you to be careful not to alter the sense of any of them for he that adds or diminishes to the prop[h]ecies must come under the condemnation writ[t]en therein.<sup>84</sup>

Indeed, this understanding of the unalterable nature of the revelatory text is found in the Book of Commandments. There it says concerning lost Book of Mormon manuscript pages: "I will confound those who have altered my words."<sup>85</sup>

In recent years there has been a growing willingness on the part of some writers to admit the existence of variant readings of the early revelations.<sup>86</sup> Some of this openness responds to the criticisms of some early rank-and-file members who harbored grievances against church leaders, including charges of textual revision. Warren Parrish, a one-time scribe and confidant of Joseph Smith, wrote on March 13, 1838: "On comparing the first and second edition of the book of covenants, which Smith claims to have received by direct revelation from heaven, there is a wide difference; whole sentences altered; language and meaning essentially different, which shows that they have no confidence in themselves. Any man that would add to or diminish from John's revelations, God said, should be cursed; has the Lord given Joseph more liberty than he did his

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<sup>83</sup> Manuscript History, Book A-1:51. See Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith* 1:260, 320. See also *Times and Seasons* 4 (February 15, 1843):108 and *History of the Church* 1:105.

<sup>84</sup> Smith to Phelps, July 31, 1832, CHL. See Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 273. The vision of three glories was published in the July 1832 issue of *The Evening and the Morning Star*, as Phelps already possessed a copy.

<sup>85</sup> BC 9:10; LDS D&C 10:42; RLDS D&C 3:9.

<sup>86</sup> See, for example, Robert J. Woodford, "How the Revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants Were Received and Compiled," *Ensign* 15 (January 1985):27-33; Melvin J. Petersen, "Preparing Early Revelations for Publication," *ibid.*, 15 (February 1985):14-20; Marlin K. Jensen, "The Joseph Smith Papers: The Manuscript Revelation Books," *Ensign* 39 (July 2009):47-51; Gerrit Dirkmat, "Great and Marvelous are the Revelations of God," *ibid.*, 43 (January 2013):45-49; Robert J. Woodford, "Introducing A Book of Commandments and Revelations, A Major New Documentary 'Discovery,'" *Brigham Young University Studies* 48, no. 3 (2009):7-17; and Grant Underwood, "Revelation, Text, and Revision: Insight from the Book of Commandments and Revelations," *ibid.*, 67-84.

beloved disciple?"<sup>87</sup> William Harris, also a former member who left the church, published a book in 1841, *Mormonism Portrayed*, in which he addressed textual changes: "Let me digress for one moment, and ask why this alteration? It does appear to have been done by command of God, but purports to be the same revelation as was first published."<sup>88</sup>

This important point has both historical and theological ramifications. Jonathan B. Turner in his 1842 book also dealt with changes in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants:

It would have been well for the world if Smith's divinity, instead of giving him a pair of stone spectacles, had given him a divine printer, and a divine press, and such types that he might have been enabled to fix the meaning of his inspired revelations, so that it would be possible to let them stand, at *least two years*, without abstracting, interpolating, altering, or garbling, to suit the times. But the ways of Smith's providence are indeed mysterious. We will not pretend to judge.<sup>89</sup>

Jonathan Turner further declared: "The revelations in the Book of Covenants cannot be understood without carefully comparing them with the history and position of the Mormon church at the time they were given."<sup>90</sup>

As far as is known, Joseph Smith made no response to these specific charges. He did state in Nauvoo that "there is no error in the revelations which I have taught."<sup>91</sup> It is not certain if he meant by this the original text, the 1835 revisions, or his teachings about the revelations. In any event, the earliest text is preferred over the revised 1835 text for clarity and historical consistency, and the earliest revelatory text is best understood when used in conjunction with contemporary letters and journals of the persons involved.<sup>92</sup>

Some copies of revelations received by Joseph Smith after the publication of the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants were copied into three records kept of Smith's activities. The manuscript books include the Joseph Smith journal for part of 1835-36, the Scriptorium Book of Joseph Smith for 1838, and the Book of the Law of the Lord containing revelatory documents of 1841-42.

As mentioned previously, a second edition was being prepared before Smith's death. In 1876 a new edition of the LDS Doctrine and Covenants was expanded by adding twenty-five documents originating with Joseph Smith. In the 1981 edition, a vision given to Smith in the Kirtland, Ohio was published. If need be, about thirty-seven additional revelations could be included becoming part of the Doctrine and Covenants.

Even though some of the wording in Joseph Smith's revelatory documents claimed to be the words of Christ, for Smith that did not mean that they were infallible. Since Joseph Smith

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<sup>87</sup> "Mormonism," *Waldo Patriot* 1 (May 4, 1838):1, Belfast, Maine.

<sup>88</sup> William Harris, *Mormonism Portrayed* (Warsaw, IL: Sharp & Gamble, Publishers, 1841), 29. Thomas C. Sharp helped prepare this work for publication.

<sup>89</sup> J[onathan]. B. Turner, *Mormonism in All Ages*, 226; emphasis his.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 244.

<sup>91</sup> Report by Thomas Bullock of a discourse delivered on May 12, 1844, in 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, Brigham Young University, 1980), 369.

<sup>92</sup> For examples of textual revisions see Marquardt, *Joseph Smith Revelations*.

was able to change his revelations, he could change his story of the gold plates. New ideas could be incorporated, always working on the religious tone of the narrative.

The alteration of revelations presents a historical problem for those trying to follow the line of thought of Smith. As mentioned above, as new wording was incorporated into the text there are some who consider these new ideas as originally given at the time of the reception rather than alterations made at a later time. Since the revelations imply that the words are given directly from Christ, those documents that were changed indicate that Joseph Smith did not take them very seriously.