

# Changes in the Revelations, 1833 to 1835

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MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS accept as scripture the book of Doctrine and Covenants, a compilation of revelations received by the Prophet Joseph Smith. These revelations cover a variety of subjects and were received under different circumstances over a period of several years. Several revelations have been added to the book since it was published and accepted as scripture in 1835.

Because official Church statements and approved teaching materials emphasize an unchanging doctrine, it may be disconcerting to learn that numerous changes in the Doctrine and Covenants have been made between the time the revelations were received, their first publication, and later publications. This study will examine how these changes were made, how they can be justified, and how the modified revelations can still be considered scripture, the word of God. I will first discuss the history of the receipt and publication of the revelations, then describe the changes themselves and evaluate possible explanations for them.

## BACKGROUND OF THE REVELATIONS<sup>1</sup>

Joseph Smith, as prophet and leader of the restored church of Jesus Christ, received revelations to guide him and his followers as the Church grew from a handful of converts in upstate New York to

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<sup>1</sup> For detailed discussions of the history of the Book of Commandments and the Doctrine and Covenants, see Crawley 1972, Woodford 1974, Howard 1969, and Cook 1981.

thousands on the shores of the Mississippi River. These revelations dealt with such issues as the translation and publication of the Book of Mormon, the establishment of the Church, and restoration of lost doctrine. As with the epistles and instructions from leaders in the early Apostolic church, revelations to Joseph Smith circulated in manuscript form among Church members and believers; multiple copies of a single revelation were common. For example, a missionary might copy some of his favorite revelations to take on his journeys (Woodford 1974, 14). Newell K. Whitney was one early Church member who copied revelations; a collection of his manuscripts is now in the Brigham Young University library. Edward Partridge also had copies of certain revelations.

In July 1830, Joseph Smith and John Whitmer began to “arrange and copy” for publication the revelations received to date (HC 1:104). More than a year later, at the October/November 1831 conference of the Church in Hiram, Ohio, Church leaders decided that the revelations received by the Prophet should be prepared for publication as the Book of Commandments (HC 1:221–22). The conference appointed Joseph to prepare the revelations for publication and Oliver Cowdery to carry the revelations to Independence, Missouri, the site of the Church press. Joseph spent the next two weeks reviewing the revelations (HC 1:229, 235). During this period, a revelation (now D&C 70)<sup>2</sup> named Joseph Smith, Martin Harris, Oliver Cowdery, John Whitmer, Sidney Rigdon, and W. W. Phelps as “stewards over the revelations and commandments” (v. 3). This group became known as the “Literary Firm,” responsible for the temporal concerns related to the publication of the revelations. Cowdery and Whitmer left for Missouri in November 1831, followed by Smith and Rigdon in April 1832 (HC 1:266).

Unfortunately, few, if any, of the original copies of the revelations were available when the time came for publication. Even revelations recorded in an official journal, such as the Kirtland Revelation book, were usually secondary copies (Olson 1971, 336). However, these secondary copies, whether kept in official Church books or in personal records, were sometimes the only available copies (Woodford 1974, 9). Furthermore, the word-for-word accuracy of these secondary copies was not guaranteed as those who transcribed the revelations could have been copying from a copy, may not have cared about strict accuracy, or may not have had the literary skills necessary to make an accurate copy.

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<sup>2</sup> References to present-day editions are to the LDS edition, not the RLDS.

At a 30 April 1832 meeting in Missouri, the Literary Firm decided that W. W. Phelps, Oliver Cowdery, and John Whitmer should review and select revelations "as dictated by the Spirit" to be included in the Book of Commandments and "make all necessary verbal corrections" (Cannon and Cook 1983, 46). Thus the revelations were already being changed, even before their first publication. Note that responsibility for the changes was given to Phelps, Cowdery, and Whitmer, and not to Joseph Smith. Smith did warn Phelps in a letter, however, to "be careful not to alter the sense of any" of the revelations (Jessee 1984, 247).

Strangely enough, some of the revelations were first published in an anti-Mormon context, just as excerpts from the Book of Mormon had been (HC 1:75-76, note). Ezra Booth, who left the Church in 1831, wrote a series of letters that were published in the Ravenna, Ohio *Ohio Star* between October and December 1831 (HC 1:216-17 and notes; Rowley 1983). These letters contained phrases and entire verses from several of the revelations; one (the current D&C 28) was published in its entirety in letter number 8. These letters were later included in E. D. Howe's 1834 *Mormonism Unveiled*.

Printing of the Book of Commandments on the Church's press in Independence had progressed to chapter sixty-five when on 20 July 1833, a mob of from three to five hundred men "collected, and demanded the discontinuance of the Church printing establishment in Jackson county, the closing of the store, and the cessation of all mechanical labors" (HC 1:390). The mob tore down the printing house, destroyed the press, and scattered the completed pages of the Book of Commandments. However, many printed sheets were rescued by Church members who quickly gathered at the scene; and, from those rescued sheets, a few hundred copies of the unfinished book were bound. These books in makeshift bindings were used by the Saints until 1835, when the Church once again printed the revelations.

Less than a year after the destruction of the press in Missouri, Church leaders in Ohio planned again to publish the revelations. Because the initial printing was generally unavailable to Church members, leaders decided to print the entire text again with additional revelations. The High Council of the Church in Ohio met 24 September 1834 and decided that a committee composed of Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery, Sidney Rigdon, and Frederick G. Williams, the presiding elders of the Church, would "arrange the items of doctrine," include selections from the Bible and Book of Mormon, and add the revelations that had been received to that date. These items were to be published in a "Book of Covenants" (HC 2:165). This com-

mittee was much the same as the Literary Firm which had published the Book of Commandments.

The “Book of Covenants,” when finally published as the Doctrine and Covenants, did not include items from the Bible and Book of Mormon as originally planned. Instead, the committee added the “Lectures on Faith” and “arranged” the revelations, which included revising the revelations as they were originally published.

At the general church conference of 17 August 1835, members voted to accept the Doctrine and Covenants, still in the process of being printed, as scripture (HC 2:243–51). Before the vote, the leaders of each of the priesthood quorums of the Church bore testimony, and a written statement by the Twelve was read, all affirming the truthfulness of the revelations printed in the book. Joseph Smith and Frederick G. Williams were absent from this meeting but did sign a letter addressed to Church members, recommending the book to them. There is no record at this time of any discussion of textual changes in the revelations, although David Whitmer later recalled that some of the brethren eventually expressed concerns about the changes (Whitmer 1887, 61).

#### TEXTUAL CHANGES: ONE EXAMPLE

Editions of the Doctrine and Covenants after 1835 sometimes included minor changes to the text of the revelations, but the number of textual changes between the 1833 and 1835 editions was fifteen times the number in all editions from 1835 to 1921 (Petersen 1955, 119). Because Joseph Smith was on the committee that “arranged” the revelations for publication and signed the committee’s letter recommending the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants to the members of the Church, we can assume that he was responsible for the 1833–35 changes, or at least knew and approved of them, even if they originated with other members of the committee. But even if this is so, did he have the right to change revelations from God?

The answer lies partly in one’s conception of revelation or scripture. If revelation is the “words of God”—that is, if God dictated the revelation word for word in English to Joseph Smith, who had them written exactly as dictated—then changing a single word or even a punctuation mark would be altering God’s word.

If, on the other hand, revelation is the “word of God”—if God revealed thoughts or intentions to Joseph Smith, who then verbalized and interpreted them and dictated them to a scribe—Joseph could have changed the words to better describe what God had placed in his mind. This conception of revelation would allow some changes, and

could allow additions as well, given the possibility that God might inspire the prophet to expand on an existing revelation.

For a person who holds the word-for-word view of revelation, textual changes in a revelation could certainly be disturbing. For example, Lyman Wight, an early Church member, was so affected by such changes that he wrote, "The book of Doctrine and Covenants was a celestial law; and the Book of Commandments . . . was a celestial law" (HC 2:481; Cannon and Cook 1983, 111).

David Whitmer, one of the Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon and a member of the Literary Firm, was also disturbed by the changes made between publications of the Book of Commandments and the Doctrine and Covenants. In a book he wrote after leaving the Church, *Address to All Believers in Christ*, Whitmer complains about the changes: "In the winter of 1834 they saw that some of the revelations in the Book of Commandments had *to be changed*, because the heads of the church had gone too far, and had done things in which they had already gone ahead of some of the former revelations" (Whitmer 1887, 56; emphasis in original). In other words, according to Whitmer, Church leaders made changes in Church doctrine and organization, then changed the existing revelations to agree with and to authorize the new Church organization. Whitmer cites specifically the addition of the office of high priest in the Melchizedek Priesthood to the Articles and Covenants, what is now section 20 of the Doctrine and Covenants.

To illustrate the kinds of changes that were actually made to these early revelations, I will compare three versions of the revelation we now know as Doctrine and Covenants 5 (see Table 1). The first column includes the text of the oldest existing manuscript of the revelation, written by Newell K. Whitney for his own personal use.<sup>3</sup> The second column includes the revelation as it was first published in the 1833 Book of Commandments. The third column is the revelation as published in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants. Words that have been deleted from one version to the next appear in italics; words in bold type were added to the previous version. A substitution of a word will appear in italics in the first column and bold in the next.

I have chosen this particular revelation as an example because (1) a manuscript version of it was readily available, (2) the revelation is short enough to work easily with, and (3) it contains an unusually large number of changes. In addition, I will point out other examples

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<sup>3</sup> The text of the Whitney manuscript is published here by permission of the Department of Special Collections and Manuscripts, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.

of notable changes made between 1833 and 1835 in the discussion that follows.

**Manuscript in Newell K. Whitney collection, Brigham Young University Library**

Behold I say unto you that my servant *hath* desired a witness that my servant Joseph *hath* got the things which he has testified that he *hath* got

and now Behold this shall you say unto him the Lord am God I have given these things unto *him* & I have commanded him that he should stand as a witness of these things

nevertheless I have caused him that he should enter into A covenant with me that he should not show them except I command him & he has no power over them except I grant it unto him

& he has a gift to translate the Book & I have commanded that he shall pretend to no other gift for I will grant unto him no other gift

**1833 Book of Commandments, Section 4**

1. Behold, I say unto you, that my servant **Martin** has desired a witness *from my hand*, that my servant Joseph *has* got the *things* of which *he has* testified, and borne record that *he has* received of me.

2. And now, behold, this shall you say unto him:— I the Lord am God, and I have given these things unto **my servant Joseph**, and I have commanded *him* that *he should* stand as a witness of these things,

*nevertheless* I have caused *him* that *he* should enter into a covenant with me, that *he* should not show them except I command *him*, and *he has* no power over them except I grant it unto *him*;

and *he has* a gift to translate the *book*, and I have commanded *him* that *he shall* pretend to no other gift, for I will grant *him* no other gift.

**1835 Doctrine and Covenants, Section 32**

1. Behold I say unto you, that as my servant **Martin Harris** has desired a witness at my hand, that **you**, my servant **Joseph Smith, jr.** have got the **plates** of which **you have** testified and borne record that **you have** received of me:

and now behold, this shall you say unto him, **He who spake unto you said unto you**, I the Lord am God, and have given these things unto you, my servant **Joseph Smith, jr.** and have commanded **you** that **you shall** stand as a witness of these things,

**and** I have caused **you** that **you** should enter into a covenant with me that **you** should not show them except to **those persons to whom** I command **you**; and **you have** no power over them except I grant it unto **you**.

**And you have** a gift to translate the **plates**; and **this is the first gift that I bestowed upon you**, and I have commanded that **you** should pretend to no other gift **until my purpose is fulfilled in this**; for I will grant **unto you** no other gift until it is finished.

and verily I say unto you that woe shall come unto the Inhabitants of the Earth if they will not hearken unto my words for

3. *And* verily I say unto you, that woe shall come unto the inhabitants of the earth, if they will not hearken unto my words, for,

2. Verily I say unto you, that woe shall come unto the inhabitants of the earth if they will not hearken unto my words: for **hereafter you shall be ordained and go forth and deliver my words unto the children of men.**

Behold if they will not believe my words they would not believe my *servants* if it were possible that he could show them all things

behold, if they will not believe my words, they would not believe my **servant Joseph**, if it were possible that *he* could show them all things.

Behold if they will not believe my words, they would not believe **you**, my servant Joseph, if it were possible that **you** could show them all **these things which I have committed unto you.**

O ye unbelieving ye stiffnecked generation

O *ye* unbelieving, *ye* stiffnecked generation, **mine anger is kindled against you!**

O **this** unbelieving and stiffnecked generation, mine anger is kindled against **them.**

Behold I have reserved the things which have *been* spoken of which I have intrusted to my servant for a wise purpose in me & it shall be made known unto future generations

4. Behold, **verily I say**, I have reserved *the* things of *which I have spoken*, which I have intrusted to my servant, for a wise purpose in me, and it shall be made known unto future generations:

3. Behold verily, I say **unto you**, I have reserved **those** things which I have entrusted **unto you**, my servant **Joseph**, for a wise purpose in me, and it shall be made known unto future generations;

but *for* this generation shall have my *word*

But this generation shall have my **words**,

but this generation shall have my **word through you**;

yea & the testimony of three of my servants shall go forth with my *word* unto this Generation

*yea and* the testimony of three of my servants shall go forth with my **words unto this generation**;

**and in addition to your testimony** the testimony of three of my servants, **whom I shall call and ordain, unto whom I will show these things: and they shall go forth with my words that are given through you,**

yea three shall know of surety that *those* things are true

yea, *three* shall know of a surety that **these** things are true,

yea, **they** shall know of a surety that these things are true: **for from heaven will I declare it unto them:**

for I will give them power that they may Behold & view these things as they are

& to none else will I grant this power among this generation

& the testimony of three Witnesses will I send forth & my word

& behold whosoever believeth in my word *him* will I visit with the manifestation of my spirit & they shall be Born of me

& their testimony Shall also go forth & thus if the People of this generation harden not their hearts I will work a reformation among them & I will put down all lieings & deceivings & Priestcraft & envyings & strifes & Idolatries and sorceries & all manner of Iniquities & I will establish my Church *yea even the church which was taught by my Disciples* & now if this generation do harden their hearts against my words Behold I deliver them up unto Satan for he reigneth & hath much Power at this time for he hath got great hold upon the hearts of the People of this generation & *how far from the iniquities of Sodom and Gomorrah do they come at this time* & Behold the Sword of justice

*for* I will give them power, that they may behold and view these things as they are,

and to none else will I grant this power, to receive **this same testimony** among this generation.

And the testimony of three witnesses will I send forth *and* my word,

and behold, whosoever believeth *in my word*, **them** will I visit with the manifestation of my Spirit, and they shall be born of me,

*and their testimony shall also go forth.*  
 5. *And thus, if the people of this generation harden not their hearts, I will work a reformation among them, and I will put down all lyings, and deceivings, and priestcrafts, and envyings, and strifes, and idolatries, and sorceries, and all manner of iniquities, and I will establish my church, like unto the church which was taught by my disciples in the days of old.*  
 6. *And now if this generation do harden their hearts against my word, behold I will deliver them up unto satan, for he reigneth and hath much power at this time, for he hath got great hold upon the hearts of the people of this generation: and not far from the iniquities of Sodom and Gomorrah, do they come at this time: and behold the sword of justice hangeth*

I will give them power that they may behold and view these things as they are;

and to none else will I grant this power, to receive this same testimony, among this generation, **in this, the beginning of the rising up, and the coming forth of my church out of the wilderness—clear as the moon and fair as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners.**

And the testimony of three witnesses will I send forth of my word;

and behold whosoever believeth **on my words** them will I visit with the manifestation of my Spirit and they shall be born of me, even of water and of the Spirit.

And you must wait yet a little while; for ye are not yet ordained—and their testimony shall also go forth unto the condemnation of this generation if they harden their hearts against them: for a desolating scourge shall go forth among the inhabitants of the earth, and shall continue to be poured out, from time to time, if they repent not, until the earth is empty, and the inhabitants thereof are consumed away, and utterly destroyed by the brightness of my coming.



doth hang over their heads & if they persist in the hardness of their hearts the time cometh that it must fall upon them

over their heads, and if they persist in the hardness of their hearts, the time cometh that it must fall upon them.

Behold I tell you these things even as I also told the People of the destruction of Jerusalem & my word shall be verified at this time as it hath hitherto been verified

Behold I tell you these things even as I also told the people of the destruction of Jerusalem, and my word shall be verified at this time as it hath hitherto been verified.

Behold, I tell you these things even as I also told the people of the destruction of Jerusalem, and my word shall be verified at this time as it hath hitherto been verified.

& now I command my Servant Joseph that he repenteth & walketh more uprightly before me & yield to the persuasions of men no more

7. And now I command my servant Joseph to repent, and walk more uprightly before me, and yield to the persuasions of men no more;

4. And now I command you, my servant Joseph, to repent and walk more uprightly before me, and yield to the persuasions of men no more;

& that he be firm in keeping the commandments which I have commanded him & if he doeth this Behold I grant unto him Eternal life even if he should be slain

and that he be firm in keeping the commandments wherewith I have commanded him; and if he doeth this, behold I grant unto him eternal life, even if he should be slain.

and that you be firm in keeping the commandments wherewith I have commanded you, and if you do this, behold I grant unto you eternal life, even if you should be slain.

And now I speak again concerning the man that desireth the Witness

8. And now I speak again concerning the man that desireth a witness:

5. And now again I speak unto you, my servant Joseph, concerning the man that desires the witness:

Behold I say unto him he exalteth himself & doth not humble himself sufficiently before me I will grant unto him no such views but if will go out & bow down before me and humble himself in mighty prayer & faith in the sincerity of his heart then will I grant unto him a view of the things which he desireth to view

behold I say unto him, he exalteth himself and doth not humble himself sufficiently before me, but if he will go out and bow down before me, and humble himself in mighty prayer and faith, in the sincerity of his heart, then will I grant unto him a view of the things which he desireth to know:

Behold I say unto him he exalts himself and does not humble himself sufficiently before me: but if he will bow down before me, and humble himself in mighty prayer and faith, in the sincerity of his heart, then will I grant unto him a view of the things which he desires to see.

& then *shall he* say unto the People of this generation Behold I have seen the things & I know of a surety that they are true for I have seen them & they have been shown unto me by the Power of God

and then **he shall** say unto the people of this generation, behold I have seen the things and I know of a surety that they are true, for I have seen them, *and* they have been shown unto me by the power of God **and not of man.**

And then he shall say unto the people of this generation, behold I have seen the things **which the Lord has shown unto Joseph Smith, jr.** and I know of a surety that they are true, for I have seen them: for they have been shown unto me by the power of God and not of man.

& I command him that he shall say no more unto them except I have seen them & they have been shown unto me by the Power of God & these are the words which he shall say

And I command him that he shall say no more unto them, **concerning these things, except he shall say,** I have seen them, and they have been shown unto me by the power of God.

And I **the Lord** command him, **my servant Martin Harris,** that he shall say no more unto them concerning these things, except he shall say I have seen them, and they have been shown unto me by the power of God:

9. And these are the words which he shall say.

and these are the words which he shall say.

but if he deny this he *shall* break the covenant which he *hath* covenanted with me & Behold he is condemned

—But if he deny this, he **will** break the covenant which he **has before** covenanted with me, and behold he is condemned.

But if he deny this he will break the covenant which he has before covenanted with me, and behold he is condemned.

& now except he humble himself & acknowledge unto me the things *which* he *hath* done *that is* wrong & covenant with me that he will keep my commandments & exercise faith in me Behold I say unto him he shall have no such views for I will grant unto him no *view* of which I have spoken

And now except he humble himself and acknowledge unto me the things **that** he **has** done, **which are** wrong, and covenant with me that he will keep my commandments, and exercise faith in me, behold I say unto him, he shall have no such views, for I will grant unto him **no views of the things** of which I have spoken.

And now except he humble himself and acknowledge unto me the things that he has done which are wrong, and covenant with me that he will keep my commandments, and exercise faith in me, behold, I say unto him, he shall have no such views; for I will grant unto him no views of the things of which I have spoken.

& if this be the case I command him that he shall do no more nor trouble me more concerning this matter

And if this be the case, I command him that he shall do no more, nor trouble me **any** more concerning this matter.

And if this be the case I command **you, my servant Joseph,** that **you shall say** unto him, that he shall do no more, nor trouble me any more concerning this matter.

& if this be the case Behold I say unto you Joseph when thou hast translated a few more pages & then shalt thou stop for a season even until I command thee again then thou mayest translate

10. And if this be the case, behold I say unto *you*, Joseph, when thou hast translated a few more pages, **thou shalt** stop for a season, even until I command thee again: then thou mayest translate **again**.

6. And if this be the case, behold I say unto **thee** Joseph, when thou hast translated a few more pages thou shalt stop for a season, even until I command thee again: then thou mayest translate again.

& except thou do this Behold thou shalt have no more gift & I will take away the things which I have entrusted with thee

And except thou do this, behold thou shalt have no more gift, and I will take away the things which I have intrusted with thee.

And except thou do this, behold thou shalt have no more gift, and I will take away the things which I have intrusted with thee.

& now because I foresee the lying in wait to destroy thee yea I foresee that if my Servant humbleth not himself & receive a witness from my hand that he will fall into transgression

11. And now, because I foresee the lying in wait to destroy thee: Yea, I foresee that if my servant humbleth not himself, and receive a witness from my hand, that he will fall into transgression;

And now because I foresee the lying in wait to destroy thee: yea, I foresee that if my servant **Martin Harris** humbleth not himself, and receive a witness from my hand, that he will fall into transgression;

& there are many that lie in wait to destroy thee from off the face of the Earth & for this cause that thy days may be prolonged I have given unto *you* these commandments

and there are many that lie in wait to destroy thee from off the face of the earth: And for this cause, that thy days may be prolonged, I have given unto **thee** these commandments;

and there are many that lie in wait to destroy thee from off the face of the earth: and for this cause, that thy days maybe prolonged, I have given unto thee these commandments;

yea for this cause I have said stop & stand still untill I command thee & I will provide means whereby thou mayest accomplish the thing I have commanded thee

yea, for this cause I have said, stop and stand still until I command thee, and I will provide means whereby thou mayest accomplish the thing **which** I have commanded thee;

yea, for this cause I have said, stop and stand still until I command thee, and I will provide means whereby thou mayest accomplish the thing which I have commanded thee;

& if thou art faithful in keeping my commandments *ye shall* be lifted up at the last day

and if thou art faithful in keeping my commandments, **thou shalt** be lifted up at the last day: — **Amen**.

and if thou art faithful in keeping my commandments, thou shalt be lifted up at the last day. Amen.

In analyzing the three versions of this revelation, I have categorized the changes as either simple or substantive. Simple changes are those which were made for ease of reading (such as changes in punctuation, grammar, and spelling), changes made in person (from second to third person or vice versa), formality (thee/you, hath/has,

repenteth/repent, etc.), or clarification (such as replacing the name of the person referred to with a pronoun). None of these changes affect the actual content of the revelation. Substantive changes, on the other hand, add or delete actual content, thereby altering the meaning or adding new meaning to the revelation.

Most of the changes made between Newell K. Whitney's manuscript version and the 1833 publication of the revelation are simple clarifications, as are the majority of changes in these early revelations. For example, a reader can lose track of who is being addressed, or who the revelation is about; inserting names in appropriate places helped to clarify the subject of the revelation. The Whitney manuscript uses the terms "my servant" and "he" or "him" to talk about two different people, Joseph Smith and Martin Harris. The pronouns were changed in the later versions to the person's name. Other subjects were also clarified by substituting the correct noun; in verse 1, "things" was changed to "plates" to clarify what the Lord is talking about.

While there are a great many changes, few are really substantive. For example, in verse 4 of the 1981 edition, the gift of translation is described as Joseph's only gift in the first manuscript, but the "first gift" in 1835. This could be considered either a clarification or a fraud. If it is a clarification, then the Lord had originally told Joseph only his present task or responsibility, that of translating the plates; Joseph changed the revelation between 1833 and 1835 to bring it up to date, to allow his additional gifts and responsibilities, including his call, in the following verse, to "go forth and deliver my words unto the children of men." One might also see this as fraud by reading "no other gift" very literally: Joseph had one and only one task, that of translating the plates, when he had completed that task, he would have "no other gift." In this interpretation, Joseph would have changed the phrase to justify his later actions: he was not called to be a prophet or to organize a church, but assumed those roles on his own.

Another example of substantive change in section 5 is the deletion of a large amount of text and the addition of new text, in the 1835 verse 3 (our present verses 17 through 19). The newer version talks about much the same subject but does not include potentially offensive statements such as "deliver them up unto Satan" or "the sword of justice hangeth over their heads," which might have been misinterpreted, especially by the Missourians with whom the Mormons had had so much trouble. Softening the message was politically expedient for the Saints who had just lost much to their indignant neighbors.

Another addition, this one more interesting because of its source, is our present verse 14, a quote directly out of the "uninspired" Song of Solomon (6:10). These phrases, "clear as the moon, fair as the sun,

and terrible as an army with banners,” also appear in later revelations (105:31 and 109:73). RLDS church historian Richard P. Howard (1969, 106) does not say specifically when Joseph Smith declared the Song “uninspired” during his work on the revision of the Old Testament but shows that the work was completed by 1833, before the revisions for the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants began. Joseph was then adding material that he had already decided was uninspired to a revelation he claimed to be from God.

### OTHER CHANGES BETWEEN 1833 AND 1835

Substantive changes were made in many other revelations between their publication in the Book of Commandments and in the Doctrine and Covenants; some of these changes are bothersome if seen from the perspective that revelation is unchanging. I will briefly discuss six of the most notable sections that changed.

Section 7 (1981 edition) is “a translated version of the record made on parchment by John and hidden up by himself” (D&C 7, introduction). Extensive additions to the 1833 text almost doubled the size of the section when it was published in 1835 (see Table 2). Wording from the 1833 version was unaltered. The additions are mostly clarifications, but many add new meaning to the revelation. Joseph originally translated or received the text of the parchment in 1829. Did he then retranslate the parchment before 1835 to include the additional text, or did he add the new text on his own volition to expand the earlier work?

#### 1833 Book of Commandments, Section 6

1. And the Lord said unto me, John my beloved, what desirest thou?

and I said Lord, give unto me power that I may bring souls unto thee. —

And the Lord said unto me: Verily, verily I say unto thee, because thou desirest this, thou shalt tarry until I come in my glory:

#### 1835 Doctrine and Covenants, Section 33

1. And the Lord said unto me, John, my beloved, what desirest thou? **For if ye shall ask, what you will, it shall be granted unto you.**

And I said **unto him**, Lord, give unto me power **over death**, that I may live **and** bring souls unto thee.

And the Lord said unto me, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, because thou desirest this thou shalt tarry until I come in my glory, **and shalt prophesy before nations, kindreds, tongues and people.**

2. And for this cause, the Lord said unto Peter:—If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? for he desiredst of me that he might bring souls unto me: but thou desiredst that thou might speedily come unto me in my kingdom:

I say unto thee, Peter, this was a good desire, but my beloved has

undertaken a greater work.

3. Verily I say unto you, ye shall both have according to your desires, for ye both joy in that which ye have desired.

2. And for this cause the Lord said unto Peter, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? For he desired of me that he might bring souls unto me; but thou desiredst that thou might speedily come unto me in my kingdom.

I say unto thee, Peter, this was a good desire, but my beloved has desired that he might do more, or a greater work, yet among men than what he has before done;

yea, he has undertaken a greater work; therefore I will make him as flaming fire and a ministering angel: he shall minister for those who shall be heirs of salvation who dwell on the earth; and I will make thee to minister for him and for thy brother James: and unto you three I will give this power and the keys of this ministry until I come.

3. Verily I say unto you, ye shall both have according to your desires, for ye both joy in that which ye have desired.

Section 8 (1981 edition) is a revelation to Oliver Cowdery giving him the gift of revelation to help in the translation work. In addition, Oliver has another gift, which in the 1833 edition is the gift of “working with the rod,” the “rod of nature.” In the 1835 version, the “rod of nature” became the “rod of Aaron,” probably to distance the growing church from the association of its founders with previously acceptable folk magic (Quinn 1987, 32ff).

Section 19 is a revelation to Martin Harris concerning eternal punishment. The 1833 version of what is now verse 21 reads: “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.” Despite this warning that the doctrine taught in the revelation was too strong for the world, the revelation was published anyway. In 1835 the text of the verse was changed to read as it does today, allowing for the doctrine to be publicly taught: “And show not these things unto the world until it is wisdom in me.”

Section 20, the Article and Covenants of the Church, was heavily edited between 1833 and 1835. One change, the addition of the office of high priest, has already been mentioned. Also, before 1835 Joseph

Smith and Oliver Cowdery were each called "an elder" of the Church, seemingly on equal standing; the 1835 edition made Smith the "first elder" and Cowdery the "second elder" (v. 2 and 3, 1981 edition). The text or most of the text of verses 10, 15, 41, 50-52, 62-63, 65-67, and 73 was also added in 1835.

Section 25 is a revelation addressed to Emma Smith. In the 1833 version, Emma is told that her "husband shall support thee *from* the church" (italics added), or temporally, while in 1835 he will support her "*in* the church," or spiritually. Also, in the 1833 version, the identity of the voice addressing Emma is not clear: The opening verses read in part, "Emma, my daughter in Zion, a revelation I give unto you, concerning my will." This could be Joseph speaking, or the Lord. Large additions in 1835 make it clear that revelation is from God.

Section 27, concerning the sacrament, was greatly expanded between 1833 and 1835. The long list of those who will share the sacrament at the last day (verses 5b-13, 1981 edition), as well as a description of the armor of God (verses 15b-18), were added, tripling the length of the revelation Joseph Smith received on his way to purchase wine.

The revelations include several more changes between 1833 and 1835 (see Petersen 1955; Howard 1969; Woodford 1974), but those already discussed illustrate the problem that arises in studying the history of the Doctrine and Covenants. The revelations in the 1835 edition are in some instances substantially different from the earliest manuscript and printed versions. But the question remains: did the leaders of the Church go astray in making the changes (as David Whitmer claimed), or were the changes justified? Answers to this question depend on one's interpretation of revelation.

#### EXPLANATIONS OF CHANGING REVELATION

The substantive changes in the Doctrine and Covenants can be explained in a number of ways. Some explanations, of course, are more palatable to the believer than others.

A few of the studies examining the changes in the revelations seek to explain and justify the changes. As Melvin Petersen pointed out, explanations can usually be categorized by whether the writer is a believer or nonbeliever; the believer usually claims that all changes were made within Joseph's role as prophet, while the nonbeliever usually claims that the changes were some form of fraud or deception. For example, Petersen concludes his own analysis: "A prophet cannot be justly criticized when he rewrites the commandments he received from God, for he is only doing that which is part of his role as prophet"

(1955, 165). A 1977 study by another believer, Robert J. Woodford, also allows changes within Joseph's role as prophet, as does Howard's 1969 study.

On the other hand, nonbelievers have freely criticized changes in what should be God's word. Jerald and Sandra Tanner say, "Although we feel that Joseph Smith had a right to revise his own writings, we do not feel that he had a right to revise the revelations which he claimed to be the word of God. . . . If these were really revelations from God, Joseph Smith would have had no right to revise them" (1987, 27). The Tanners can suggest only that Joseph Smith is a deceiver, a fraud.

Rather than adopting a simple believer/nonbeliever, prophet/fraud explanation, I would suggest that changes could have been made for a variety of reasons.

### *Fraud*

Joseph Smith could have written revelations for his own benefit and purpose, then changed them later as the situation demanded. This is the explanation favored by those who do not accept Smith's calling as a prophet. Both Fawn Brodie's *No Man Knows My History* (1971) and Dale Morgan's unfinished history of early Mormonism (1986) contain extensive arguments supporting the idea that the revelations were Smith's creations, "received" or changed as the situation demanded. The Tanners, whom I have already mentioned, would also favor this explanation.

Pious and personal fraud are different things. Joseph Smith could have changed the revelations to benefit the Church or to benefit himself. Though one method may be more benevolent, they are both still fraud. I point this out only to make a distinction in the purpose of the change (see Hutchinson 1988, 18).

Of course, Joseph Smith may not have been responsible for all of the changes. David Whitmer blames Sidney Rigdon for some changes: "I was told that Sidney Rigdon was the cause of those changes being made: by smooth talk he convinced Brother Joseph and the committee that it was all right" (Whitmer 1887, 61). We also know that Oliver Cowdery once tried to "command" Joseph to make changes (HC 1:105); and Cowdery, together with other members of the Literary Firm, certainly had opportunities to make changes without Joseph's knowledge when they were preparing the manuscripts. However, because Joseph did not reverse any of the changes and used the new scriptures until his death, he must have approved of the changes, regardless of their source.



### *Social/Political Considerations*

Some changes can be explained by social or political considerations. As pointed out earlier, the language of the early versions of today's section 5, and other revelations using similar language, undoubtedly offended the "old settlers" of Jackson County, resulting in hostile action against the Saints. The Mormons very boldly stated, in their published revelations and through editorial statements in the *Evening and Morning Star*, that they intended to obtain all of Jackson County, including the riches of the Gentiles, by whatever means necessary. Joseph Smith changed the language of the revelation to make it less offensive to the Gentiles, who would undoubtedly see it.

The tragic eviction of the Saints from Jackson County fresh in his memory as he prepared copy for the Doctrine and Covenants in 1834-35, Joseph Smith brought to bear the lessons in diplomacy learned from history in the rephrasing of the above statement: ["for I will consecrate the riches of the Gentiles, unto my people which are of the house of the Israel" (Book of Commandments 44:32) to] "for I will consecrate of the riches of *those who embrace my gospel among the Gentiles, unto the poor of my people who are of the house of Israel*" (D&C, 1835 edition, 13:11). In a similar frame of mind, Joseph Smith sought to convey in wiser, more restrained language the essence of the ideas which he had earlier written regarding the promises of the Lord to the faithful who respond to the gospel message. (Howard 1969, 210, italics added)

### *Inaccurate Manuscripts*

Another possible explanation is that the manuscripts from which the publisher worked were inaccurate. This is a standard response, but one, as I will show, that does not satisfactorily explain more than minor corrections. B. H. Roberts offers this explanation for the addition of text to section 20 (1981 edition).

Some of the early revelations first published in the "Book of Commandments," in 1833, were revised by the Prophet himself in the way of correcting errors made by the scribes and publishers; and some additional clauses were inserted to throw increased light upon the subjects treated in the revelations, and paragraphs added, to make the principles or instructions apply to officers not in the church at the time some of the earlier revelations were given. The addition of verses 65, 66, and 67 in sec. xx of the Doctrine and Covenants is an example. (HC 1:173, footnote)

The verses cited by Roberts are those in which the office of high priest was added to the priesthood organization.

The text of the revelations for the Book of Commandments came from various manuscripts, both personal and official, mostly copies of the original. If no original or early copy was available to the 1835 committee, they revised the earliest published copy. Of course, with

original manuscripts lacking, Joseph could have then changed the text, either working from memory or modifying for clarity. This seems to be a likely explanation for the additions of phrases and simple clarifications. Unless we could find the original manuscripts (which the committee had no access to) and compare them to the committee's revisions, it would be impossible to tell if the changes were restorations or additions.

Sidney Rigdon was the first to mention possible inaccuracies, at the November 1831 conference in Hiram, Ohio, where Church leaders decided to compile and publish the revelations. Rigdon expressed concern that the manuscripts of the revelations contained scribal errors.

Remarks by br. Sidney Rigdon on the errors or mistakes which are in commandments and revelations, made either by the scribe translation in consequence of the slow way of the scribe at the time of receiving or by the scribes themselves.

Resolved by this conference that Br Joseph Smith Jr correct these errors or mistakes which he may discover by the holy Spirit while ~~receiving the revelations~~ reviewing the revelations & commandments & also the fulness of the scriptures. Resolved by this conference that Br Oliver Cowdery shall copy correct and select all the writings which shall go forth to the world ~~which go~~ through the Printing press (except) the revelations and commandments, by the Spirit of the Lord and this according to the commandment given in Missouri July 20, 1831. (Cannon and Cook 1983, 29)

Note that only scribal errors are mentioned and that Joseph Smith was to correct the errors under guidance of the Spirit.

At the April 1832 conference in Independence, W. W. Phelps, Oliver Cowdery, and John Whitmer were appointed to select revelations for printing and "make all necessary verbal corrections" (Cannon and Cook 1983, 46). The conference thereby admitted that the written versions of the revelations did need correcting, but apparently only for grammatical reasons and not to change content.

Due to delays in the planned 1831 publication of the Book of Commandments, W. W. Phelps decided to publish selected revelations in the *Evening and Morning Star* to hasten their availability to the members of the Church, despite an April 1832 order that "revelations be limited to the parties concerned until printed" in the Book of Commandments (Cannon and Cook 1983, 46). The first issue of the *Star* (June 1832) included four of the revelations received by Joseph Smith. Later editions of the newspaper included others, and one was reprinted in a corrected form. The "Articles and Covenants," now known as section 20, was printed in the first issue of the *Star* and then again with changes in number thirteen (June 1833). The editor explained, "We have again inserted the articles and covenants according to our promise in a previous number, for the benefit of our brethren abroad who

have not the first number of the first volume. As there were, some errors which had got into them by transcribing, we have since obtained the original copy and made the necessary corrections" (*Evening and Morning Star*, June 1833, 98).

The only additions were two clarifying words (v. 3 "also"; v. 8 "before") and the phrase "or from time to time as they shall direct or appoint" (v. 61, 1981 edition), clarifying how frequently conferences would be held. Also, the last few verses were left out of the reprinted version; these became section 22 in later editions.

As the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants was being prepared, Oliver Cowdery was also reprinting the *Evening and Morning Star* in Kirtland, where the Jackson County periodical had not been widely available. The prospectus of the reprint edition explained that the revelations would be updated.

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 typographical, and others, occasioned by transcribing the manuscript; but as we shall have access to originals, we shall endeavor to make proper corrections. (*Evening and Morning Star* reprint, Sept. 1834, 384)

Cowdery tried to use more accurate manuscripts for this second printing. For example, he wrote to Newell K. Whitney, a bishop of the Church, on 4 February 1835, asking to see his copy of one of the revelations for verification. The sources he used for the Kirtland *Evening and Morning Star* reprint were also used by the committee preparing the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants, so the revelations in the two were identical (Arrington 1952, 354, note). While Cowdery seems to blame all of the changes made between 1833 and 1835 on bad manuscripts and sloppy printers, it is doubtful that such substantial changes and additions of large amounts of text could be caused by printer error. In addition, Cowdery says that the material added in the reprinted version was in the originals. This is also unlikely, as seen in the example of the versions of section 5, unless large numbers of changes occurred between the original and Whitney manuscripts.

### *Transcription of Revelations*

Another possible explanation for changes in the revelations is that Joseph Smith had to interpret or transcribe the ideas that God placed in his mind; the words that he wrote or dictated were only his imperfect interpretation of what God intended. Joseph could then later rewrite or change the revelation to make it better fit what he remembered. (This, of course, fits the "word of God," rather than the "words of

God,” model.) This concept could be likened to transcribing a vision, a nonword event: any written account could be edited later to clarify the prophet’s memory or interpretation of the experience, or to change the emphasis for a particular audience or purpose. This is basically the approach taken by Dean Jessee in his study of the various accounts of Joseph Smith’s First Vision, which were written for various audiences and occasions (Jessee 1969).

Another example that supports this explanation is the vision described in section 76. This vision was verbalized in more than one way: Joseph Smith wrote a poem to W. W. Phelps, expanding upon the ideas presented in the vision.<sup>4</sup> Yet another example is a comparison of the text of section 110, another written account of a vision, with Doctrine and Covenants 128:21; the latter contains the names of additional personages delivering keys and dispensations that were not included in the first account.

However, not many changes could be explained by this theory, as most revelations were “dictated” and not transcribed from visions. Parley P. Pratt, in describing the receipt of the revelation that is now section 51, emphasized that Joseph dictated revelations without revising them.

After we had joined in prayer in the 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 an hesitation, reviewing, or reading back, in order to keep the run of the subject; neither did any 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.) (Pratt 1874, 65–66)

B. H. Roberts, in the *History of the Church*, qualifies this claim, saying that any changes made were only to bring the revelations up to date (HC 1:173, note). Pratt was mistaken, however, in saying that “this was the manner in which all of his written revelations were dictated and written.” As several historians have pointed out, some revelations were received through Joseph’s peepstones (later called the Urim and Thummim) in a process that some described as a word-for-word dictation (Van Wagoner and Walker 1982, 61; Woodford 1974, 9).

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<sup>4</sup> Published in the *Millennial Star* 4:49–55, the poem was part of an exchange of poetic letters between Smith and Phelps upon the latter’s return to the Church. See HC 5:253, 288 for Phelps’ poem and Smith’s note of replying in poem.

### *Prophetic Expansion*

A more complex approach, one which directly addresses the nature of the prophet's role in receiving revelation, is to look at the prophet as one who is authorized to update or expand existing revelations. A basic example of this was noted by Lyman Wight: the addition of the office of high priest to the original list of priesthood offices (D&C 20, 1981 edition). The "Articles and Covenants," as the section was originally known, was first compiled from various revelations and instructions in 1830, and the office of high priest was added to the Church in 1831 (Bushman 1984, 156-57; HC 1:176, note). If Church members knew about the new priesthood office, and the new organization was publicly taught, would it have made sense to continue publishing the incomplete list of priesthood offices? And as other doctrines were expanded or changed, and publicly taught, or as members of the Church were more ready to receive additional doctrines (Smith 1976, 305) was it not proper to include them in the scriptures? For example, the revelation on celestial marriage was first received about 1831, was written in 1843 (HC 5:29-34), but wasn't added to the Doctrine and Covenants until the 1875 edition, after it had been publicly taught.

Orson Pratt used the example of the prophet Jeremiah's expanding a prophetic text to justify Joseph Smith's adding new text to the revelations:

Indeed, at the time of compilation [of the revelations], the Prophet was inspired in several instances to write additional sentences and paragraphs to the earlier revelations. In this manner the Lord did truly give "line upon line, here a little and there a little," the same as He did to a revelation that Jeremiah received, which, after being burned by the wicked king of Israel, the Lord revealed over again with great numbers of additional words. (in Woodford 1974, 17)

Note that Jeremiah was commanded by the Lord only to "write in it [the scroll] all the former words" (Jer. 36:28). Jeremiah added more words on his own (v. 32) but makes no mention of any condemnation from the Lord. Expansion of prophetic texts by a prophet, then, is nothing new.

Anthony Hutchinson discusses various versions of the creation story in Mormon scripture, commenting that Joseph Smith expanded and rewrote the story as his knowledge and understanding of Egyptian and Hebrew texts grew. He views these expansions from the point of biblical criticism. While Hutchinson's study looks specifically at Joseph's contributions to the creation story, in the books of Abraham and Moses and in the temple account, his analysis also applies to the changes in the revelations. According to Hutchinson,

people tend to preserve the stories and texts they hold as sacred but often adapt them in light of the new circumstances they experience. Often a particular text sets up a specific problem of faith or point of religious reflection for the believers of the tradition, which they solve by adapting the problematic text. The later text that now seems to contradict an earlier one results simply from efforts at understanding it or making sense of the scenery of thought it produced. (1988, 13)

Hutchinson points out that this process, an example of which is the Hebrew midrash, or interpretation, has been going on for millennia with our biblical texts; changing scriptures is nothing new. He says of Joseph Smith's revelations:

But inspiration, indeed revelation, can occur through such a process, for many of the texts we confess as inspired or revealed manifest these patterns and tendencies. Similarly, to see midrashic technique in the Joseph Smith scriptures does not imply that he knew anything of ancient targums or midrashism, but rather that like them his works tried to make sense of scripture by playing upon its inherent possibilities. (1988, 69)

Blake Ostler examines changes made to the text of the Book of Mormon in light of the expansion theory, that a prophet can expand a revelation as his understanding of the doctrine increases. He points out that Joseph Smith made changes to the original text without referring back to the plates from which the text was translated, citing the Isaiah sections as an example: "These changes indicate that Joseph Smith had a much freer idea of scripture than many of his contemporaries or his present fundamentalist critics" (1987, 105). He rules out the propositional form, where prophets only write the words that they are given (p. 108). Instead, a prophet interprets as he receives and may later change and expand the text to reflect his feelings and interpretation (p. 109). In fact, Ostler says, differences in language and world view of God and prophet make it impossible for a prophet to receive revelation without imposing some interpretation upon it. All revelation is shaped by human experience.

The model of revelation I propose here is that of creative co-participation. It seems to me that the Book of Mormon makes most sense if it is seen as both a revelation to Joseph Smith and as Joseph's expansions of the text. This view requires a theology of revelation focusing on interpretation inherent in human experience. This view is grounded in two fundamental premises: (1) There can be no revelation without human experience and, (2) there can be no human experience without interpretation. According to this view, revelation is continuing, dynamic, and incomplete. It results from free human response to God. (1987, 109)

Most of Ostler's points can be applied to the changes in the Doctrine and Covenants as well. The revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants are not translations, but neither (in the strictest sense) was the Book of

Mormon; it was instead a revelation (pp. 104–5). Joseph Smith could not translate/receive the text of the Book of Mormon without imposing, consciously or unconsciously, his own interpretation on it. The same process was at work with other revelations.

This is supported, at least for the Doctrine and Covenants, by Orson Pratt, when he spoke before the School of the Prophets on 9 December 1872 in the Salt Lake Stake:

Joseph the Prophet in writing the Doctrine & Revelations Covenants, received the ideas from God, but clothed those ideas with such words as came to his mind—but in translating the book of Mormon by the use of the Urim and Thummim, God not only revealed the ideas but the words also—

Pres. D. H. Wells remarked that God revealed such words in translating the Book of Mormon as Joseph understood, and had that been through Orson Pratt, or John Taylor, possibly different words would have been used by each one to convey the same meaning. (in Woodford 1974, 9)

Consider the potential differences between identical revelations received by different prophets, each imposing his or her own interpretation on its meaning. Further, what changes would occur in the same revelation received at different times by the same prophet? Given a revelation received by Joseph Smith in 1828, it seems hardly possible that the same revelation would be written in exactly the same words in 1835. Certainly his expanded understanding of doctrine, and perhaps his changed world view, would affect what he wrote. Thus, it should not be troubling that an 1828 revelation could be reinterpreted and rewritten in 1835. Were Joseph Smith alive today, he might still be rewriting the revelations. Instead, his successors and the membership of the Church have adopted a more propositional view, to use Ostler's term (1987, 108), and have generally preferred to leave existing revelations alone (with the exception of minor changes in the 1921 and 1981 editions of the Book of Mormon).

## CONCLUSION

Admittedly the question of whether Joseph Smith was justified in changing the revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants depends upon our own concepts of revelation and scripture, and upon our testimony and belief in Joseph Smith. Perhaps it doesn't matter at all that the revelations have been changed, unless one believes that God gave the revelations word for word and meant them to be final.

But, assuming that God revealed everything word for word, how do we account for the differences in style between the revelations of the various Old and New Testament writers (Petersen 1955, 129)?

The revelations must have been shaped by the prophet's own experiences, language, and world view. And would an omniscient God make errors in grammar and spelling that needed later correction? These errors undoubtedly come as God's revelation passes through the mind of an unschooled prophet. I personally do not find such changes disturbing.

But what of changes in content, those that change or add new meaning to the revelation? Our concept of the role of a prophet is important to consider here. Is the prophet's role to simply receive a revelation and pass it on to the people, or is he to continue teaching and expanding, giving us more knowledge of God?

It is an easy thing for believers and nonbelievers, respectively, to claim that changes were made prophetically or fraudulently. Does the validity of changes depend only upon our personal beliefs? Must believers necessarily conclude that changes were inspired by God? Or can we believe in Joseph Smith as a prophet but also accept that some of the changes were not by him in that role, or that changes were made through some means other than inspiration?

Our definition of scripture is also important to consider. Must scripture be the "word of God," or can it be any text that we accept as binding upon us as a moral law? The Doctrine and Covenants was accepted as scripture, with changes, at the 1835 conference and continues to be accepted as scripture by the Church today. Does it matter who wrote the text or where it came from as long as we accept it?

Robert Detweiler of Emory University points out that, in the traditional manner, a text becomes canonical when it is accepted as binding over a long period of time by a people or community, as with the Old Testament (1985, 215). This certainly does not fit the Doctrine and Covenants, which has a very limited history. In fact, when the 1835 conference voted to accept the book as scripture, Church members hadn't even seen it yet: it was still on the press. Few had seen the updated revelations in any form (HC 2:243–51). However, as Detweiler states, a text lacking a long tradition can be accepted as canon by a people or community if it is sponsored or endorsed by "particular authoritative figures in a community of believers who work to lend a given text divine endorsement and thus render it sacred" (p. 215). This is exactly what happened with the Doctrine and Covenants: the publication committee, the Twelve, and others influential in the religious community recommended it to the Church as scripture, and the members accepted it. Given the brief history of the Church and its scripture, how else could it have been done?

Joseph Smith learned much over the years about theology. For example, he thought differently about the nature of the godhead in



1843 than he did in 1834 (Alexander 1980). As Joseph Smith learned more, and as members of the Church were ready, he chose to change and add to the scriptures to reflect his new understanding and their new ability to comprehend. What is puzzling, however, is that so many changes were made in the revelations early, between 1833 and 1835, while almost no changes were made between 1835 and 1844, a period of greater growth and change in Mormon theology. Perhaps by then the topics with which Joseph Smith was concerned were best handled with new revelations and public teachings rather than additions to existing scripture. Perhaps after 1835, Church members were ready for new revelations.

Finally, an individual's acceptance of the changes will usually be the same as his or her personal belief in the scripture or the prophet himself. But this is not necessarily an all-or-nothing, black-or-white proposition. While the revelations came initially from God, they were changed to fit the situation by a man who was influenced not only by the Spirit but also by circumstance, his associates, and his understanding.

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