

# Doctrine and Covenants 1

Lesson 2: Come, Follow Me, Doctrine and Covenants, 10 January 2025

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## Introduction

In this lesson, we will explore the first Section of the Doctrine and Covenants, which the Lord instructed the Prophet Joseph Smith to include as a preface to that work. The words of this Section help lay a solid groundwork for the messages of the Doctrine and Covenants and dovetail with the publication history discussion of Sections 67-70 (lesson 26).

### Summary Chronology

- **Sat, 27 Aug 1831** (Kirtland, OH) – Joseph and others returned from several weeks in Missouri.<sup>1</sup>
- **Mon, 12 Sep 1831** (Hiram, OH) – Joseph and Emma moved to the John and Alice (Elsa) Johnson farm in Hiram, Ohio.<sup>2</sup>
- **Thu, 13 Oct 1831** (Ravenna, OH) – Ezra Booth published the first of nine letters against Joseph and the Church. Ezra had joined the Church in 1831 and had gone to Missouri with Joseph and others but during that trip became disenchanted with the Prophet and so authored these letters, which were later published in Eber D. Howe’s 1834 book, *Mormonism Unveiled*.<sup>3</sup>
- **Tue-Wed, 25-26 Oct 1831** (Orange, OH) – Joseph presided at a conference where Hyrum Smith requested Joseph share the details of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, but Joseph stated, “that it was not intended to tell the world all the particulars of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, & also said that it was not expedient for him to relate these things, &c.” Fifteen elders were ordained high priests.<sup>4</sup>
- **Tue-Wed, 1-2 Nov 1831** (Hiram, OH) – A two-day conference was held at the John Johnson farm, with one of the key topics being the desire to publish Joseph Smith’s revelations. Resolved to publish 10,000 copies (later reduced to 3,000). Several revelations were received in conjunction with this conference (D&C 1, 67, 68, and 133). A testimony of the divine origin of the Book of Commandments was presented and accepted.<sup>5</sup>

## Doctrine and Covenants 1

### Setting

Joseph and Emma had moved from Kirtland, Ohio, to Hiram, Ohio, about 30 miles southeast of Kirtland, on 12 Sep 1831 (see Church History Map 3). There they lived with John and Elsa Johnson, and Joseph spent much of his time with Sidney Rigdon working on the translation of the Bible.<sup>6</sup> They would stay in this home until after mob attacks on Joseph and Sidney Rigdon in March 1832. More revelations were received here than any other single location—sixteen that end up in the scriptures (Sections 1, 65-71, 73, 76-77, 79-81, 99, and 133) as well as three other non-canonized revelations.

The Johnson home was built in 1828, part of a growing community that first settled this part of Ohio in 1804. Neighbors include Symonds Ryder and Ezra Booth, both of whom would join the Church but then turn against it later. To support Joseph teaching groups of people, the Johnsons built a log and brush bowery in their front yard. Joseph and others would stand at the front door of the home and teach up to 200 people.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> JS History, vol. A-1, [146](#).

<sup>2</sup> JS History, vol. A-1, [153](#).

<sup>3</sup> [Ezra Booth – Biography](#).

<sup>4</sup> Minute Book 2, [25 Oct. 1831, p. 14](#); JS History, vol. A-1, [156](#).

<sup>5</sup> Minute Book 2, [1 Nov. 1831](#), [30 Apr. 1832](#).

<sup>6</sup> Robinson and Garrett, *A Commentary*, 1:17.

<sup>7</sup> Black, *Inspirations and Insights*, 7-8.

“The Johnson farmhouse and surrounding acreage was the first Ohio historic property purchased by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. [It was purchased in 1956 and after several years was remodeled to match its 1830s appearance.] It was dedicated on October 28, 2001, by President Gordon B. Hinckley. He said on that celebratory occasion, ‘The power of God that was expressed in that farmhouse . . . has gone over the earth . . . and we have scarcely seen the beginning of it. So long as this Church lasts . . . so long as its history is written and known, the John Johnson home will have a prominent place in that history.’”<sup>8</sup>

*Saints* notes that Ezra Booth, soured on the Church after his trip to Missouri, had “published a letter in a local newspaper accusing Joseph of making false prophecies and hiding his revelations from the public.”<sup>9</sup> Booth’s letters were widely read and impacted people’s receptiveness to the message of the Restored Gospel. Additionally, while Joseph had received dozens of revelations, few had seen them, with only a small number of handwritten copies available.

The Church was prepared to begin publishing its own works. D&C 47 had directed John Whitmer to keep a history and to support Joseph by “transcribing all things” which he was given (D&C 47:1). William Phelps had been called to be “a printer unto the church” (D&C 57:11) and Oliver Cowdery as his assistant (D&C 57:13). Phelps acquired a press and supplies and took them to Missouri in the fall of 1831.<sup>10</sup>

With everything in place and the decision apparently already made to print the revelations, a conference of the Church convened on 1-2 Nov 1831, at the Johnson home, to discuss the details of publishing the revelations of Joseph Smith.<sup>11</sup> Present at the conference were ten men: Joseph Smith, Jr.; Oliver Cowdery; Sidney Rigdon; William E. McLellin; David Whitmer; John Whitmer; Peter Whitmer, Jr.; Orson Hyde; Luke Johnson; and Lyman Johnson.<sup>12</sup>

Some argued that the revelations should not be printed at all, believing that making known the plans for Missouri would hurt the Church.<sup>13</sup> In the end, the conference decided to publish 10,000 copies of the revelations (reduced in 1832 to 3,000 because of the expense). During a recess before the afternoon session, Joseph Smith received a revelation that the Lord designated as “the preface” to the book, which is D&C 1 today.<sup>14</sup> John Whitmer noted simply in the minutes, “Preface received by inspiration.”<sup>15</sup>

William E. McLellin, an early member and later apostle who was present, offered more details years later. In an interview in 1882 with William Kelly, a member of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, McLellin said that a preface had first been drafted by himself, Oliver Cowdery, and Sidney Rigdon, but that it had not been satisfactory to the conference (the attendees “picked it all to pieces,” he said), so everyone asked Joseph to petition the Lord. Accordingly, between the morning and afternoon sessions, the group bowed in prayer with Joseph, and then the Prophet “dictated by the Spirit the preface found in the Book of Doctrine and Covenants while sitting by a window in the room in which the conference was sitting; and Sidney Rigdon wrote it down. Joseph would deliver a few sentences, and Sydney [sic.] would write them down, then read them aloud, and if correct, then Joseph would proceed and deliver more, and by this process the preface was given.”<sup>16</sup>

Chronologically, this revelation falls between Sections 66 and 67 but has always been printed as the first section in every edition of the Doctrine and Covenants because of the Lord’s designation as “my preface unto the book of my commandments” (D&C 1:6).

## Documents and Publication

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The original manuscript is no longer extant. The revelation was copied into Revelation Book 1 by John Whitmer, probably between 12 and 20 November 1831, just before he and Oliver Cowdery left for Missouri.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Black, *Inspirations and Insights*, 5.

<sup>9</sup> *Saints*, 1:140.

<sup>10</sup> *JSP*, D2:94-95.

<sup>11</sup> *JSP*, D2:95 notes that the conference only discussed how many to print, not the decision to do so, concluding that decision must have already been made.

<sup>12</sup> Minute Book 2, [p. 16](#); Cannon and Cook, *Far West Record*, 26-27.

<sup>13</sup> *Saints*, 1:141.

<sup>14</sup> *JSP*, D2:104.

<sup>15</sup> Minute Book 2, [p. 16](#); Cannon and Cook, *Far West Record*, 27.

<sup>16</sup> William Kelley to the editor, 16 January 1882, in *Saints Herald*, [1 March 1882, 67](#).

<sup>17</sup> *JSP*, D2:104; *JSP MRB*:222-227; *JSP*, R1, 173-176; [Revelation Book 1, Page 125](#).

This section was first published in *The Evening and the Morning Star*, March 1833.<sup>18</sup> It was included as Chapter I in the 1833 Book of Commandments and as the first section in every edition of the Doctrine and Covenants since that time.<sup>19</sup>

## Outline

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1. The Lord's Voice of Warning ([1-7](#))
2. Babylon Should Fear and Tremble ([8-16](#))
3. Joseph Smith's Mission ([17-23](#))
4. The Only True and Living Church ([24-33](#))
5. Search These Commandments ([34-39](#))

Note: The 1835 verses were longer than today's:

<u>1835</u>	<u>Today</u>	<u>1835</u>	<u>Today</u>
1	1-5	5	24-33
2	6-10	6	34-36
3	11-16	7	37
4	17-23	8	38-39

## Introduction

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Section 1 is the Lord's testimony of the truthfulness of the revelations but also a call to prepare for the Second Coming and recognize the Lord's hand in the work of the latter days. It contrasts Babylon—the world, which is doomed to destruction—with the Church, which is the means of salvation for the entire world. It invites—indeed, it requires—us to choose between the two, and then to share that message with others. The Lord has called Joseph Smith to give the world commandments, the Book of Mormon, and the true and living Church with the active voice of the Lord. All are to receive this warning and invitation.

In John Whitmer's copy in Revelation Book 1, he included an introduction that is not part of the first printed version of the revelation in *The Evening and the Morning Star*,<sup>20</sup> though it was included in the 1833 Book of Commandments,<sup>21</sup> then dropped in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants<sup>22</sup> and all editions since. The source for this introduction is not known. It is:

A Preface or instructions upon the Book of Commandments which were given of the Lord unto his Church through him whom he appointed to this work by the voice of his Saints through the prayer of faith this church being organized according to the will of him who rules all things on the Sixth day of April in the year of our Lord 1830.

## The Lord's Voice of Warning (1-7)

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1 Hearken, O ye people of my church, saith the voice of him who dwells on high, and whose eyes are upon all men; yea, verily I say: Hearken ye people from afar; and ye that are upon the islands of the sea, listen together.

2 For verily the voice of the Lord is unto all men, and there is none to escape; and there is no eye that shall not see, neither ear that shall not hear, neither heart that shall not be penetrated.

3 And the rebellious shall be pierced with much sorrow; for their iniquities shall be spoken upon the housetops, and their secret acts shall be revealed.

4 And the voice of warning shall be unto all people, by the mouths of my disciples, whom I have chosen in these last days.

5 And they shall go forth and none shall stay them, for I the Lord have commanded them.

6 Behold, this is mine authority, and the authority of my servants, and my preface unto the book of my commandments, which I have given them to publish unto you, O inhabitants of the earth.

7 Wherefore, fear and tremble, O ye people, for what I the Lord have decreed in them shall be fulfilled.

## Commentary

In the opening verses, the Lord not only explains why the revelations should be published but puts all their efforts in the context of the last days. Listen to the Lord, he says to the people of the Church and of the whole world. None will escape the Lord's word and the wicked will have sorrow as their secret deeds are openly revealed. This is a warning to all, carried

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<sup>18</sup> [Revelations printed in The Evening and the Morning Star, June 1832–June 1833, Page 6.](#)

<sup>19</sup> [Book of Commandments, 1833, Page 3](#); Robinson and Garrett, *A Commentary*, 1:18; Cook, *The Revelations*, 4.

<sup>20</sup> *JSP*, R2:279.

<sup>21</sup> *JSP*, R2:15.

<sup>22</sup> *JSP*, R2:385.

by disciples who will not be stopped because they have authority to teach and publish the revelations. The world should fear and tremble.

1 **Hearken**. “Hearken” means to listen and to act. The Lord often invites us to listen, hear, and hearken (e.g., Deuteronomy 6:4; Isaiah 1:2; 49:1). Note that the audience of this command and revelation is both “my church,” “ye people from afar,” “all people” (v. 4), and the “inhabitants of the earth” (v. 6). It’s everyone. “It is part of God’s character to be in active communication with His children, to be in a relationship with His children. And from that first verse of the revelations, the Lord calls upon us to listen.”<sup>23</sup>

1 **Hearken ye people from afar; and ye that are upon the islands of the sea**. This text closely resembles Isaiah 49:1, though reversed in its order.

1 **saith the voice of him who dwells on high**. “Claiming God’s omnipotence and omnipresence, the divine voice establishes the power to call out to all humanity.”<sup>24</sup>

2 **the voice of the Lord**. For hundreds of years, people could escape the voice of the Lord as there were no prophets on the earth. Now this section declares that they cannot, and the promise is that everyone shall hear that voice. Given the subject of the conference—to publish the revelations—and the Lord’s intention that this be the preface to that publication, the message is clear: the revelations of the prophets are not just for the converted members, but for the world, as a testimony of the need to repent and return to God and acknowledge Christ as the Savior of mankind and the truth of his word (Philippians 2:10-11).<sup>25</sup>

2 **there is none to escape**. The language echoes that of Jeremiah 42:17 and 44:14. The Lord speaks to everyone, and all will see it, hear it, and be touched by it. See also v. 4 and D&C 133:7-8, 37 (given two days after this preface).

3 **the rebellious shall be pierced with much sorrow**. This is the first hint that this revelation is about so much more than printing a book. The language is eschatological—looking to the Second Coming, when for perhaps the first time in the history of the earth, righteousness will be fully rewarded and wickedness will bring full sorrow. Like John’s Revelation, D&C 1 is binary—we must choose if we’re in the Lord’s camp or the enemy’s and face the consequences of that choice. There is no neutral ground.<sup>26</sup>

4 **the voice of warning shall be unto all people**. Equated with the voice of the Lord in v. 2, the charge to take a warning message to the whole world is given to this small band of disciples gathered in a farmhouse (see also v. 11). What an amazing challenge for these early converts and a great vision of what the Church would become.

5 **none shall stay them**. The Lord’s promise that nothing can stop the work from going forward gave strength to the small group of disciples there and to us today, as we work to continue to fulfil the command to warn the world.

6 **mine authority, and the authority of my servants**. See v. 38, the voice and the authority of the Lord is given to his designated servants; the servants act at the command of the Lord (v. 5) and so have authority to speak his words.

6 **my preface**. So was this section designated by Jesus Christ; it was not written by men at the conference but given by direct revelation from the Lord himself.

6 **the book of my commandments**. The name of the book was taken from this passage. It also declares the source of the revelations contained therein—they are not the words of Joseph Smith or any other mortal, but the words of God.

6 **publish unto you, O inhabitants of the earth**. The ‘target audience’ for the Book of Commandments was not just the young Church and its members, as great as their desire was for the printed revelations, but the entire earth who all need to hear that voice of God speaking again in our day. The purpose of the Book of Commandments was to prepare the world for the Second Coming (v. 12).

7 **fear and tremble**. Sometimes we say in the Church that to ‘fear God’ means to give him reverence, and in some scriptures that could be the meaning of the term. But there are many instances, including this one, which are clearly intended to teach that all of us truly need to be afraid of the consequences of our wicked choices, because “the wrath of God shall be poured out upon the wicked” (v. 9) and his “anger . . . is kindled” (v. 13).

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<sup>23</sup> Johnson, *Revelation*, 11.

<sup>24</sup> Johnson, *Revelation*, 13.

<sup>25</sup> Robinson and Garrett, *A Commentary*, 1:19.

<sup>26</sup> McConkie and Ostler, *Revelations*, 43.

7 *what I the Lord have decreed in them shall be fulfilled*. “Them” refers to the revelations given to Joseph Smith planned to be published by this conference, which are promised to all come to pass. See also vv. 37-38.

## Babylon Should Fear and Tremble (8-16)

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8 And verily I say unto you, that they who go forth, bearing these tidings unto the inhabitants of the earth, to them is power given to seal both on earth and in heaven, the unbelieving and rebellious;

9 Yea, verily, to seal them up unto the day when the wrath of God shall be poured out upon the wicked without measure—

10 Unto the day when the Lord shall come to recompense unto every man according to his work, and measure to every man according to the measure which he has measured to his fellow man.

11 Wherefore the voice of the Lord is unto the ends of the earth, that all that will hear may hear:

12 Prepare ye, prepare ye for that which is to come, for the Lord is nigh;

13 And the anger of the Lord is kindled, and his sword is bathed in heaven, and it shall fall upon the inhabitants of the earth.

14 And the arm of the Lord shall be revealed; and the day cometh that they who will not hear the voice of the Lord, neither the voice of his servants, neither give heed to the words of the prophets and apostles, shall be cut off from among the people;

15 For they have strayed from mine ordinances, and have broken mine everlasting covenant;

16 They seek not the Lord to establish his righteousness, but every man walketh in his own way, and after the image of his own god, whose image is in the likeness of the world, and whose substance is that of an idol, which waxeth old and shall perish in Babylon, even Babylon the great, which shall fall.

### Commentary

The disciples are called to call the world to repentance that they might avoid the coming judgment. The Lord’s latter-day servants are given power to seal up the wicked to their destruction. People will be judged based on how they treated others. They need to prepare for the Lord’s coming because judgment is waiting for the wicked like a sword. The wicked are those who have changed ordinances and broken covenants, who seek their own will and pleasure. Like ancient Babylon, they will fall.

**8 power given to seal.** Here the brethren were told they have power to “seal” the wicked up to judgment. In a meeting held less than a week previous, Joseph Smith stated, “the order of the High priesthood is that they have power given them to seal up the Saints unto eternal life.” Then in a revelation given the same day as this one, the brethren were also told that they would have power to “seal [the righteous] up unto eternal life” (D&C 68:12). The reference here to the sealing power appears to extend it to the wicked as well.<sup>27</sup> This is not a direct reference to temple ordinances, which will not be revealed for many years, but to the power to ‘bind’ or ‘secure’ someone or something, just as seals (wax or clay impressions) were used anciently to confirm the truth of a document and secure it for delivery to another.<sup>28</sup> This is a similar sealing power as was given to Elijah (1Kings 17:1) and Nephi (Helaman 10:4-7).

**8 the unbelieving and rebellious.** Unbelievers are those who hear the message of truth and refuse it, while the rebellious are those who know it is true but choose not to live accordingly. Neither title applies to someone who has not at least heard the gospel message.<sup>29</sup>

**9 the wrath of God shall be poured out.** Compare 1 Nephi 14:15, 17; 22:16; Revelation 14:10; 16:1; Moses 7:1. Revelation 16:1 is especially relevant with the metaphor of the wrath of God being literally poured out from vials (or better translated, bowls) by the angels upon the wicked.

#### 10 text note.

RB1: unto every man according to his works

EMS: unto every man according to his work

1833: unto every man according to his work

The original copy in Revelation Book 1 has “works,” which makes more sense in the context than the singular “work.” The singular was in the first printing in *The Evening and the Morning Star* and in the Book of Commandments, probably as a typesetting error, but has been maintained in every edition since.

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<sup>27</sup> JSP, D2:105 n196; also JSP, D2:82.

<sup>28</sup> McConkie and Ostler, *Revelations*, 44.

<sup>29</sup> Robinson and Garrett, *A Commentary*, 1:20.

10 **to the measure which he has measured to his fellow man.** Each of us is judged based on how we treat others, showing that the ‘golden rule’ (Matthew 7:12) is not just a nice way of treating others but an eternal law impacting our ultimate reward. See also Matthew 7:21-23.

11 **unto the ends of the earth.** Consider the audacity of the declaration: a handful of men in a small town in Ohio are being tasked to take God’s message to the entire world! Yet their foundation has enabled millions to embrace the Restoration in all parts of the world today, and more will continue to join themselves to the cause of truth.

12 **Prepare ye, prepare ye for that which is to come.** Joseph Smith had already received several revelations outlining events of the last days preceding the Second Coming, such as D&C 29 and 45. The brethren were counseled in the strongest terms to prepare for these events.

12 **the Lord is nigh.** Based on statements like these in several revelations, the early Saints believed that the Second Coming was very close. Perhaps one of our challenges today is to maintain that same sense of anticipation and effort, even though the warning to prepare seems less urgent given the passage of time. President Nelson is again teaching us to think of the Second Coming as an imminent event: “Brothers and sisters, now is the time for you and for me to prepare for the Second Coming of our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. . . . I call upon you to rededicate your lives to Jesus Christ. I call upon you to help gather scattered Israel and to prepare the world for the Second Coming of the Lord.”<sup>30</sup>

13 **his sword is bathed in heaven.** Compare Isaiah 34:5, the only other place this image is used in scripture. The Hebrew word in Isaiah for “bathed” (*ravah*) means to be saturated or drunk, and is a parallel to the next verse, where the Lord’s sword is “filled [*male*, to be full] with blood.” The sword is thus raised and poised to strike, already soaked in the blood of hypocritical sacrifices of lambs, goats, and rams offered by the wicked, and it will now be used to slay those same people.

14 **the arm of the Lord shall be revealed.** This phrase also comes from Isaiah, at the beginning of the final servant song (Isaiah 53:1). Abinadi (Mosiah 14:1) and John (John 12:38) both quoted it. Abinadi quoted Isaiah 53 to demonstrate that Christ will come down among the people, becoming subject to the flesh and to the Spirit (Mosiah 15:1-5), and then sacrifice himself for us in compassion and mercy (Mosiah 15:6-9). John sees the arm of the Lord revealed in Jesus’ many miracles. D&C 90:10 (given later than this section) also uses the phrase to indicate that through missionary work in the last days, the power of the Lord will convince the nations of the truth. Thus the “arm of the Lord” (holding the sword of judgment from v. 13) is manifest through Christ and his chosen servants to the salvation—or destruction—of many.

14 **text note:**

RB1: the voice of the Lord neither his servants

EMS: the voice of the Lord, neither the voice of his servants

1833: the voice of the Lord, neither the voice of his servants

The second phrase, “the voice of,” is not present in the original in RB1 but was added in *The Evening and the Morning Star* and the Book of Commandments, and retained in all subsequent editions, making the phrase parallel to “the voice of the Lord.” This also parallels the next phrase, “the words of the prophets and apostles” and more significantly matches the phrasing in v. 38, which equates the voice of the Lord and the voice of his servants.

14 **cut off from among the people.** This is a common Old Testament phrase,<sup>31</sup> with only one other usage in the D&C, in a revelation that was given just two days after this one (D&C 133:63). To be cut off from among the people means a serious and perhaps permanent separation from family, friends, and fellow Saints; today this would be considered the equivalent of excommunication. An even greater application is in the Book of Mormon, where to be “cut off from the presence of the Lord” means to suffer “spiritual death” or a separation from the Lord.<sup>32</sup>

15 **strayed from mine ordinances.** To stray is usually a gradual process more than an abrupt departure.<sup>33</sup> For example, you can imagine how baptism by immersion as a critical covenant could stray over time to become less important, change its form (perhaps when water was at a premium), and finally lose its meaning and covenantal power. At first, the changes were subtle and those making the changes felt fully justified in such minor adjustments. But in the end, the power of the ordinance was lost just the same. The phrase (especially with the next) is similar to Isaiah 24:5 where it says the people have “changed the ordinance,” with similar meaning.

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<sup>30</sup> Russell M. Nelson, “The Lord Jesus Will Come Again,” [Oct. 2024 General Conference](#).

<sup>31</sup> Some examples include Exodus 31:14; Leviticus 17:4, 9; 18:29; 19:8; 20:18; 23:29; Numbers 9:13; 15:30; 19:20.

<sup>32</sup> Alma 42:9; Helaman 14:16-18. Note also that the Book of Mormon quotes Moses using this phrase four times: 1 Nephi 22:20; 3 Nephi 20:23; 21:11; 21:20.

<sup>33</sup> Robinson and Garrett, *A Commentary*, 1:21.



**15 *broken mine everlasting covenant.*** The people who reject the prophets (v. 14) have strayed from the Lord’s everlasting covenant. While the phrase “everlasting covenant” is found many times in the scriptures, only in Isaiah 24:5 and here is it described as broken. In Isaiah’s case, the earth is defiled because of the actions of its inhabitants. In this revelation, such actions by the people bring about a “calamity” that causes the Lord to call new prophets (v. 17) to once again establish the everlasting covenant (v. 22).

**16 *seek not the Lord to establish his righteousness.*** The Lord’s “righteousness” is his just-ness, truth, virtue, perfection, and right-ness.<sup>34</sup> To establish his righteousness in the world doesn’t change the nature of the Lord in any way but it does change the world as those attributes of God are respected, appreciated, and worshipped by mankind. Here the Lord is saying that those under condemnation do not seek the Lord’s righteousness, part of the justification for their judgment.

**16 *after the image of his own god.*** To misunderstand the nature of God is to make salvation impossible—so the Lord told Joseph Smith in the First Vision, that the creeds that misrepresented the Father and the Son are “an abomination” to him (Joseph Smith—History 1:19). The image of God had by many in the world is “in the likeness of the world” and is “that of an idol,” meaning that men worship something that they create, like idols of old times.<sup>35</sup> This also means that people of the world “have taught that truth is relative and that everyone decides for himself or herself what is right.”<sup>36</sup>

**16 *which waxeth old.*** A man-made idol will get old and decay in some way, while the Lord who is unchanging and eternal (Moroni 8:18; D&C 20:17), always there and ready to support his children.

**16 *Babylon the great, which shall fall.*** Verses 14-16 describe the state of the wicked world, labeled “Babylon” by the Lord. Several allusions to Isaiah are evident, including 21:9; 24:5-6; 34:1-10; and 52:11. The language of Revelation 14:8 and 18:2 (which draw on Isaiah 21:9) is also evident in this verse. Babylon, of course, represents all that is evil, and the Saints are called to come out of her and bring as many others as possible along (D&C 133:5, 7).

## Joseph Smith’s Mission (17-23)

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17 Wherefore, I the Lord, knowing the calamity which should come upon the inhabitants of the earth, called upon my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., and spake unto him from heaven, and gave him commandments;

18 And also gave commandments to others, that they should proclaim these things unto the world; and all this that it might be fulfilled, which was written by the prophets—

19 The weak things of the world shall come forth and break down the mighty and strong ones, that man should not counsel his fellow man, neither trust in the arm of flesh—

20 But that every man might speak in the name of God the Lord, even the Savior of the world;

21 That faith also might increase in the earth;

22 That mine everlasting covenant might be established;

23 That the fulness of my gospel might be proclaimed by the weak and the simple unto the ends of the world, and before kings and rulers.

### Commentary

Verse 17 is a turning point. Before this, there is a lot of talk of wickedness and judgment; after it, we begin to see blessings poured out on the faithful. The Lord called upon Joseph Smith and other “weak things” to take his message to the world. Verses 19-23 explain what the “weak things” will accomplish with the Lord’s help: disciples speak in God’s name, increase faith, establish covenants, and proclaim the gospel to worldly leaders.

**17 *the calamity which should come.*** There have been many troubling times in the world’s history, but the time ahead of the Second Coming will likely be second to none in terms of destructive force, except for perhaps the flood at the time of Noah. Those who do not give heed to the warning voice will suffer disaster and tragedy. “Today we are blessed to be led by prophets who understand the need for us to prepare for the calamities ‘which should come’.”<sup>37</sup>

#### 17 *text note.*

RB1: called upon my Servants Joseph

EMS: called upon my servant Joseph

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<sup>34</sup> These are the various meanings of the Hebrew term *tsedeq* and the Greek *dikaiosuné*, both of which are generally translated “righteous” or “righteousness.”

<sup>35</sup> McConkie and Ostler, *Revelations*, 48-49; Robinson and Garrett, *A Commentary*, 1:22.

<sup>36</sup> D. Todd Christofferson, “[Moral Discipline](#),” October 2009 General Conference.

<sup>37</sup> W. Christopher Waddell, “[There Was Bread](#),” October 2020 General Conference.

1833: called upon my servant Joseph

1835: called upon my servant Joseph Smith jr.

In the earliest recording and printing of this verse, the name Joseph was all that was needed to know who this was. But in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants, they likely felt the need to include his full name, so it would be clear to all readers who was the servant of the Lord spoken of. That full name has been retained in all subsequent editions. The same issue occurs in v. 29 again, with “Joseph” in the original and first printings later being changed to Joseph Smith, Jun.

17 **Joseph Smith, Jun.** The Lord’s servant in the last days to carry the message to the earth is the Prophet of the Restoration. Others have a role (v. 18), but we sing “Praise to the Man” because of the singular contribution of this man to whom the Lord spoke from heaven and gave commandments or revelations.

18 **they should proclaim these things.** The role of most of us in the Church is to announce and declare truth to others around us, that the words of latter-day prophets will be amplified by our individual voices. Most of the earliest revelations were calls to people to proclaim the gospel message and call others to have faith, repent, be baptized, and receive the Holy Ghost. That assignment has not changed.

19 **text note.**

RB1: the w{a\weak} things of the world should come forth

EMS: the weak things of the world should come forth

1833: the weak things of the world should come forth

1835: the weak things of the world shall come forth

“Should” in this phrase matches the next phrase, “that man should not counsel his fellow man.” It persisted in the first two publications in *The Evening and the Morning Star* and the Book of Commandments. But the 1835 edition changed it to the future tense “shall,” making the result more certain. It has persisted in all editions.

19 **The weak things of the world.** We don’t think of Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and other early Church leaders as weak, but the world does not generally view them as great leaders or people of influence or stature, especially not at this time in Church history. This small group of humble farmers, merchants, teachers, and printers were called upon to perform great miracles. Compare 1 Corinthians 1:23-29. The next verses highlight what the weak will accomplish with God’s help and support. “So, do you feel weak? insignificant? Congratulations, you just made the lineup! Do you feel unimportant? inferior? You may be just who God needs.”<sup>38</sup>

20 **that every man might speak in the name of God.** Moses tried to get his people to this state, declaring that he “would God that all the LORD’s people were prophets, and that the LORD would put his spirit upon them!” (Numbers 11:29).

21 **faith also might increase.** Faith in the Divine is very low today and continues to decline as a secular perspective dominates daily life and thought. This is the first of several reasons why the Lord speaks to prophets today and wants every person to speak in his name (through v. 28).

22 **That mine everlasting covenant might be established.** See v. 15 above. God has always worked in a covenant relationship with his people. Re-establishing that in the last days is a critical part of the Restoration.

23 **the fulness of my gospel might be proclaimed.** The gospel message must be taught in the earth to those who will listen. The “fulness” of the gospel is found in the Book of Mormon (D&C 20:9; 27:5; 42:12), telling us that the phrase does not refer to every doctrine revealed today. Rather, the fulness is the plan of salvation essential to return to God’s presence,<sup>39</sup> what is required to experience celestial glory,<sup>40</sup> which Nephi calls “the doctrine of Christ” (2 Nephi 31:2) and explains in terms of faith, baptism, repentance and remission of sins, and being changed by the power of the Holy Ghost (2 Nephi 31:2-21).

## The Only True and Living Church (24-33)

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24 Behold, I am God and have spoken it; these commandments are of me, and were given unto my servants in their weakness, after the manner of their language, that they might come to understanding.

25 And inasmuch as they erred it might be made known;

26 And inasmuch as they sought wisdom they might be instructed;

27 And inasmuch as they sinned they might be chastened, that they might repent;

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<sup>38</sup> Gary E. Stevenson, “[Your Priesthood Playbook](#),” April 2019 General Conference.

<sup>39</sup> Black, *Inspirations and Insights*, 8.

<sup>40</sup> Robinson and Garrett, *A Commentary*, 1:23-24.



28 And inasmuch as they were humble they might be made strong, and blessed from on high, and receive knowledge from time to time.

29 And after having received the record of the Nephites, yea, even my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., might have power to translate through the mercy of God, by the power of God, the Book of Mormon.

30 And also those to whom these commandments were given, might have power to lay the foundation of this church, and to bring it forth out of obscurity and out of darkness, the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth, with which I,

### Commentary

The revelation/preface ends mostly with great promises to those who heed (v. 1) the commandments in the book that shall be printed. Though communicated through fallible, mortal words, humble readers will find wisdom, correction, strength, and knowledge. Along with the Book of Mormon, readers of this book will bring the little Church out of obscurity as the only true and living church on earth. The repentant will be forgiven but the unrepentant will lose light.

24 *in their weakness, after the manner of their language*. The Doctrine and Covenants and Joseph Smith-History are our only English scriptures that are not a translation. The Lord spoke in English to the mind of Joseph Smith and he recorded it in a language that we can understand. It must be expressed in human language, which is not as clear and meaningful as divine language, spoken by the power of the Holy Ghost. This was one of the concerns of the early members when it came to publishing the revelations, that the language was imperfect.

Joseph Smith spoke of “the little narrow prison almost as it were total darkness of paper, pen and ink and a crooked broken scattered and imperfect language.”<sup>41</sup> The Lord taught less than six months before this revelation that when people “preach it [the words of truth] by the Spirit of truth” and it is received by the same Spirit, then “both are edified and rejoice together” (D&C 50:17-22). So it is with our study of scripture: as we read it with the Spirit guiding us, we can better understand its meaning in our lives, even if the words are not perfect. And it should trigger our own revelatory experiences: readers are responsible to “turn their soon-to-be-published revelations into visionary training grounds.”<sup>42</sup>

So we should not be surprised to find imperfections or things that need correcting in scripture, because the Lord will always speak to us at our level of understanding, in our language of communication. Inspiration does not guarantee perfect spelling, punctuation, grammar, vocabulary choice, or interpretation.<sup>43</sup> As we gain greater knowledge and experience, we may see things differently or larger. We learn “line upon line” (Isaiah 28:10) until we at last come to a “perfect understanding” (Alma 48:11). That’s why Joseph Smith was completely comfortable changing earlier revelations in later printings, working to better express his increased knowledge and understanding in an imperfect language.

25 *inasmuch as they erred it might be made known*. How easy it would have been for Joseph Smith, who was corrected and chastened in early revelations, to just leave those out in the printing of the Book of Commandments. Why put things out to the world that were embarrassing and could hamper the work? But the Prophet showed both his humility and his obedience by including even the revelations that must have caused him pain, so that all could see where he had erred—and repented, learned, and grown. Likewise, we can be confident that as the Lord teaches us in our mistakes and sins, he will continue to love us and work with us, as he did Joseph Smith, and we can all learn from each other’s mistakes (Mormon 9:31).

### 26 text note.

RB1: & in as much as they sought wisdom it might be ~~made known~~ instructed

EMS: And inasmuch as they sought wisdom, they might be instructed

The initial wording in RB1 matches that of the previous phrase, “in as much as they erred it might be made known.” It seems likely that Whitmer’s eye strayed and picked up that phrase as he copied this one, then he recognized his mistake and crossed it out (the strikeout was made before he wrote the next word) but didn’t realize he also needed to change “it” to “they.” The error was caught in the first printing in *The Evening and the Morning Star* and the correction kept in all subsequent editions.

<sup>41</sup> JSP, D2:320, Letter to William W. Phelps, 27 November 1832.

<sup>42</sup> Allred, *Seeing*, 85.

<sup>43</sup> Robinson and Garrett, *A Commentary*, 1:25.

the Lord, am well pleased, speaking unto the church collectively and not individually—

31 For I the Lord cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance;

32 Nevertheless, he that repents and does the commandments of the Lord shall be forgiven;

33 And he that repents not, from him shall be taken even the light which he has received; for my Spirit shall not always strive with man, saith the Lord of Hosts.

26 *as they sought wisdom they might be instructed*. While echoing a great principle of humbly seeking help from the Lord, this wording also echoes back to the First Vision and Joseph’s being prodded by James 1:5 to seek wisdom and be taught by the Lord.

27 *they might be chastened, that they might repent*. God leads us all to repentance and change. See v. 25 above.

28 *as they were humble they might be made strong*. Humility is a strength, not a weakness. A truly humble person will learn to rely on the Lord and not on themselves, which will always result in greater strength than trusting in the arm of flesh (v. 19). As we are humble, God can “make our spiritual flaws visible to us so that we might repent and progress.”<sup>44</sup>

28 *from time to time*. Sometimes we are impatient with the Lord’s timetable for answers to our own questions and challenges, but even Joseph Smith received revelations and answers “from time to time,” not as a constant flow of divine information. In some cases, like Liberty Jail (D&C 121-123), he anguished over the long silence he experienced.

29 *having received the record of the Nephites*. The Book of Mormon is not a record of everything that ever happened in the New World. As the Lord explains here, it is primarily the record of a single group of people, the Nephites, and some of their history, leaders, prophets, wars, failures, and successes.

29 *text note*.

RB1: the mercy of God by the power of the Book of {m\<M>}ormon

EMS: the mercy of God, by the power of God, the book of Mormon

1833: the mercy of God, by the power of [G]od, the book of Mormon

1835: the mercy of God, by the power of God, the book of Mormon

Whitmer skipped over the word “God” in the description of the power by which the Book of Mormon was translated but got the capitalization correct on the book’s name. The word “God” was correctly included in *The Evening and the Morning Star* publication but in the Book of Commandments, the “G” in God was missing (the letter is partially there so it probably was an inking issue). In 1835, “God” was finally correctly rendered, though the name of the Book of Mormon was still mis-capitalized, which continued in the 1844 edition.

29 *translate through the mercy of God, by the power of God*. Joseph Smith’s only declaration in his lifetime about how the Book of Mormon was translated was that it was done “by the gift and power of God.”<sup>45</sup> The Lord echoes and confirms that statement here, adding that it was done through God’s mercy, something Joseph Smith would certainly agree with. The Book of Mormon wasn’t his only scriptural work—he also reworked portions of the Bible and gave the word the words of Jesus Christ in the revelations the men were looking to publish. “With the Restoration, scripture was no longer a scarce commodity.”<sup>46</sup>

30 *power to lay the foundation of this church*. The revelations to be published show that Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery, in particular, had power and authority to organize the church.

30 *out of obscurity and out of darkness*. From Isaiah 29:18 (also 2 Nephi 27:29), where a book would be heard by the deaf and seen by the blind out of obscurity and darkness. The Book of Mormon fulfills that chapter, according to Nephi’s inspired interpretation, where the house of Israel “shall be brought out of obscurity and out of darkness; and they shall know that the Lord is their Savior and their Redeemer, the Mighty One of Israel” (1 Nephi 22:12).<sup>47</sup>

30 *the only true and living church*. There is a purpose to a church, tied to priesthood and ordinances. The church is “true” because it is founded on correct authority and teaches the doctrines of Christ. It is “living” because it has an open communication line to the source of its truth—the Lord God—just like a plant is only living when it is growing with strong roots and an ongoing source of nourishment.<sup>48</sup>

31 *cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance*. As mentioned earlier, this is why we need to fear the Lord (v. 7). But in the same breath, he promises relief and comfort by assuring the repentant of forgiveness (v. 32).

32 *text note*.

RB1: he that repenteth & doeth the commandments

EMS: he that repenteth and doeth the commandments

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<sup>44</sup> Allred, *Seeing*, 77; also Ether 12:27.

<sup>45</sup> From the 1830 Book of Mormon and an 1842 *Times and Seasons* article, as quoted in MacKay and Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light*, 71.

<sup>46</sup> Johnson, *Revelation*, 22.

<sup>47</sup> McConkie and Ostler, *Revelations*, 53.

<sup>48</sup> Robinson and Garrett, *A Commentary*, 1:25-26.

1833: he that repenteth and doeth the commandments

1835: he that repents and does the commandments

The Biblical style of language was included first in this verse (also in v. 33 with “he that repenteth not” and v. 35 with “willeth that all men”) and persisted in the first two publications. However, in 1835 and all subsequent editions, the language was modernized to “repents” and “does” (and “repents” and will” in vv. 33 and 35), though in v. 35, the -eth form has persisted through all editions in the phrase “the day speedily cometh” (this is true for several other verses as well that use the -eth form). This partial modernization matches a later noticeable but not consistent trend in the Joseph Smith Translation to replace the -eth verbs with modern versions.

**33 from him shall be taken even the light.** The light of the gospel truth will quickly depart when we do not repent and turn back to God on a daily basis. We may grow line upon line, but sin can cause us to fall back very quickly into darkness.

**33 my Spirit shall not always strive with man.** “Striving” is work, requiring effort on the part of the Spirit. We can make choices in a way that drives that Spirit away or makes it impossible for him to continue working with us (see 2 Nephi 26:11).<sup>49</sup>

## Search These Commandments (34-39)

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34 And again, verily I say unto you, O inhabitants of the earth: I the Lord am willing to make these things known unto all flesh;

35 For I am no respecter of persons, and will that all men shall know that the day speedily cometh; the hour is not yet, but is nigh at hand, when peace shall be taken from the earth, and the devil shall have power over his own dominion.

36 And also the Lord shall have power over his saints, and shall reign in their midst, and shall come down in judgment upon Idumea, or the world.

37 Search these commandments, for they are true and faithful, and the prophecies and promises which are in them shall all be fulfilled.

38 What I the Lord have spoken, I have spoken, and I excuse not myself; and though the heavens and 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.

39 For behold, and lo, the Lord is God, and the Spirit beareth record, and the record is true, and the truth abideth forever and ever. Amen.

## Commentary

The concluding verses tell us something about God and about the surety of his words. Because God loves all his children, he tells everyone these things so they will be prepared for coming days. God will judge the world but protect the Saints. They should search the revelations which are true, spoken by the Lord and shared by his servants and testified of by the Spirit.

### 34 text note.

RB1: inhabitants of the Earth for I the Lord am willing

EMS: inhabitants of the earth, for I the Lord am willing

1833: inhabitants of the earth, for I the Lord am willing

1835: inhabitants of the earth, I the Lord am willing

“For” makes the wording awkward in this phrase and grammatically should be removed. It remained through the first two printings but was corrected in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants.

**34 willing to make these things known.** By God’s grace and love for us, he gives us ample warning and prompting to prepare us for what is to come. This book is a significant way he does that—again, emphasizing the worldwide audience of the revelations.

### 35 text note.

RB1: for I am no respecter to persons

EMS: for I am no respecter to persons

1833: for I am no respecter to persons

1835: for I am no respecter of persons

The phrase “respecter to persons” is not found in the Bible but is in the Book of Mormon in Moroni 8:12; James 2:9 does include the phrase “respect to persons” as does Alma 1:30, but that works with respect as a verb. But the more typical phrase is “repect(er) of persons” (e.g., Proverbs 24:23; 28:21; Acts 10:34; Romans 2:11; Ephesians 6:9; Colossians 3:25; James 2:1; 1 Peter 1:17; Alma 16:14).

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<sup>49</sup> Robinson and Garrett, *A Commentary*, 1:26.

There is strong evidence that this language is Old English style, something which pervades the Book of Mormon translation.<sup>50</sup> That indicates that in the earliest version in Revelation Book 1 and the first two printings, the “respector to persons” language was acceptable, because it matched at least one instance in the Book of Mormon. But starting in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants, this phrase was updated to the more modern and Biblical phrase “respector of persons” and has persisted in that format in subsequent printings.

**35 *I am no respector of persons.*** God does not give one person special treatment over another. The offer of salvation and all its attendant blessings are available to all. It doesn’t mean we are all treated exactly the same, because our choices and our personal needs and missions require different actions from the Lord, but the same opportunities for joy, peace, and salvation are available to all on the same terms—making and keeping covenants with God and a commitment to discipleship to Jesus Christ.

**35 *peace shall be taken.*** We have experienced many wars and contentions, but peace still is dominant on the earth today. It will not be so as we get closer to the Second Coming and the devil exerts more “power over his own dominion.” Still, Elder Holland noted, that the Lord “must weep, along with His Divine Father, over those in the human family in our day who are ‘without affection,’ the scripture says, and who cannot figure out how to live together in love.”<sup>51</sup>

**36 *the Lord shall have power over his saints.*** Though the promise of protection may not apply to all mortal situations, the Lord has nevertheless promised to care for and be with his faithful covenant people. The Lord has power over the church through its appointed leaders.<sup>52</sup>

**36 *come down in judgment upon Idumea, or the world.*** In contrast to the power he will exert over the Church, he will bring judgment upon the wicked in the world. “Idumea” is the Latin term for the nation of Edom (Mark 3:8), a perennial enemy of Israel. Like Babylon (v. 16), here the Lord uses the term to represent wickedness in the world in general, the only reference with that usage (see Bible Dictionary, “Idumea”).

**37 *Search these commandments.*** We are to carefully search (not just read or browse) the revelations provided by the Lord in these last days, as published in the Book of Commandments and the Doctrine and Covenants, for they are “true and faithful” and will “all be fulfilled.” The decision to print the commandments is what makes searching possible—listening to Joseph or someone else teach the revelations is good but doesn’t allow for careful, personal, deep study.<sup>53</sup>

**38 *whether by mine own voice or the by the voice of my servants, it is the same.*** In the New Testament, the word “apostle” (Greek *apostolos*) means ‘one who is sent,’ and implies that the sent one has authority to speak and act in the name of the person who sent him. In the Old Testament, the word “prophet” (Hebrew *nabi*) means a ‘spokesperson’—again, one who has authority to speak on behalf of another (God, in this case). How blessed we are to have the words of prophets and apostles who are able to speak the voice and mind of the Lord! That said, as we take this verse in full context, it may not mean what some have promoted, which is that prophets and apostles *always* speak God’s words. We know from many statements of Church leaders that not everything Church leaders say is the word of God.<sup>54</sup> This verse and the previous are speaking of the revelations in the book being published (the Book of Commandments), saying that whether the revelations are declared by God himself or by one of his servants, it makes no difference to how they will be fulfilled.

**39 *text note.***

RB1: the Spirit beareth record & the record is true

EMS: the Spirit beareth record, and the record is true

This was evidently a copying error by John Whitmer into the Manuscript Revelation Book where his eye jumped over the second instance of the word “record” in the original recording of the revelation. It was quickly caught and corrected in *The Evening and the Morning Star* publication and all subsequent editions.

**39 *the Spirit beareth record, and the record is true.*** One role of the Holy Spirit is to testify of truth (John 15:26; Mormon 3:16; D&C 20:26). What we learn from the Spirit, we can be assured is true. As then Bishop Eyring taught, “It is the Spirit

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<sup>50</sup> See Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants*, 3:1596-1597 and Volume 3 (in several parts), where multiple instances of this pattern of Old English language usage are well documented.

<sup>51</sup> Jeffrey R. Holland, “[Not as the World Giveth](#),” April 2021 General Conference.

<sup>52</sup> Robinson and Garrett, *A Commentary*, 1:27.

<sup>53</sup> Allred, *Seeing*, 47-48.

<sup>54</sup> For example, Elder D. Todd Christofferson stated, “It is commonly understood in the Church that a statement made by one leader on a single occasion often represents a personal, though well-considered, opinion, not meant to be official or binding for the whole Church. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that ‘a prophet [is] a prophet only when he [is] acting as such.’” See [The Doctrine of Christ](#), April 2012 General Conference.

which will bear record to your heart as you read the scriptures, as you hear the Lord’s authorized servants, and as God speaks directly to your heart.”<sup>55</sup>

## Results

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Some at the conference still had concerns about printing the revelations. They didn’t doubt the inspiration but worried that the information might cause problems for the Saints in Missouri. They also worried about the weakness of the language in the revelations. But as a result of the failed effort by William McLellin and others to try and write a revelation from the Lord, followed by this preface given by revelation, many were willing to put their names to this Book of Commandments, declaring that the revelations came from God through his Prophet and were the Lord’s voice to the world today.<sup>56</sup> “The Lord’s preface to the Doctrine and Covenants prioritizes Joseph Smith as a conduit for the Lord’s commandments and provides a prophetic antidote to the calamity of the last days.”<sup>57</sup>

Oliver Cowdery took this revelation and the previous revelations received by Joseph Smith to Missouri to publish them to the world with William Phelps. This section announces that God speaks to man again and that man must pay attention, listen, and act to avoid the destructions coming ahead of the return of Jesus to the earth. Like the book of Revelation, Section 1 is an apocalyptic narrative, binarily contrasting Zion with Babylon and inviting the world to choose whom they will follow, while commissioning the Church to share the Lord’s message with all the world so they can be instructed by the elders and the Spirt, and repent. It is an inspired preface to a revelatory book that shows God speaks to men today.

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<sup>55</sup> Henry B. Eyring, “[To Draw Closer to God](#),” April 1991 General Conference.

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