

# Doctrine and Covenants 6-9

Lesson 6: Come, Follow Me, Doctrine and Covenants, 7 February 2025

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## Introduction

After the return of the plates and interpreters in September 1828, which had been taken in conjunction with the loss of the first manuscript that summer, Joseph made little progress on the translation, if any. In March 1829, the Lord told Joseph Smith to stop translating the Book of Mormon “for a season” (D&C 5:30), and that if he did this, the Lord would “provide means whereby thou mayest accomplish the thing which I have commanded” (D&C 5:34). Shortly after that, D&C 10:4 counseled him not to “labor more than you have strength and means provided to enable you to translate.” Some of those “means” came to Joseph’s door on 5 April 1829, in the form of Oliver Cowdery (see Joseph Smith—History 1:66-67).<sup>1</sup>

Oliver had come to the Palmyra area in 1828 to teach school in place of his brother, Lyman, who was not able to fill the contract. Because some of his pupils were Smith children, as was customary, he boarded for a time with the Smith family. Oliver was just less than a year younger than Joseph Smith and also born in the same state of Vermont. He had previously clerked in a store before taking up teaching. When he heard the stories of the plates, and after the family felt they could trust him, Father Smith, armed with his commission from D&C 4, told Oliver how Joseph had translated them before but that the work had essentially ceased after the loss of the first manuscript. He invited Oliver to consider being Joseph’s scribe. Pondering this, Oliver went to the Lord in prayer. According to Joseph Smith’s 1832 history:

[The] Lord appeared unto a young man by the name of Oliver Cowd[e]ry and shewed unto him the plates in a vision and also the truth of the work and what the Lord was about to do through me his unworthy Servant therefore he was desirous to come and write for me ~~and~~ to translate. . . . I cried unto the Lord that he would provide for me to accomplish the work whereunto he had commanded me.<sup>2</sup>

Joseph was in Harmony, Pennsylvania, anxious to get back to translating, and as stated, on 2 April 1829, asked the Lord to send him help, and “was informed that the same should be forthcoming in a few days.”<sup>3</sup>

Having received his personal witness, Oliver left Palmyra with Samuel Smith, who was going to help Joseph with Spring farming tasks, for the approximately 150-mile journey to Harmony. The weather was rainy, the roads muddy and cold, and as a result Oliver froze one of his toes. They arrived near sunset on Sunday evening, 5 April 1829. Oliver and Joseph talked late into the night, then again the next day, and Oliver was Joseph’s scribe and witness (with Samuel) on the agreement purchasing from Isaac Hale the property on which he and Emma were living.<sup>4</sup> It is likely that on this day Oliver also made copies of previously received revelations; we have a copy of D&C 5 made by Oliver probably on this day, and he may have also copied the other two (D&C 3 and 4) as well.<sup>5</sup>

By Tuesday, 7 April 1829, just two days after his arrival, Oliver began to write the Book of Mormon as Joseph dictated, and their work on the translation continued at a brisk pace until the book was completed in June. Emma reported that they sat together at the same table in the little two-room home where the three lived, the plates sitting on the table covered by a linen cloth.<sup>6</sup> Neither Joseph nor Oliver left descriptions of the experience in any detail, but according to eyewitnesses, Joseph at this time used his seer stone more than the Nephite interpreters.<sup>7</sup> He would put the stone in his hat to better see the

<sup>1</sup> Background on Oliver Cowdery from *JSP*, D1:470, Biography, [Cowdery, Oliver](#); Scott H. Faulring, “Oliver Cowdery, Book of Mormon Scribe,” in Black and Skinner, *Joseph*, 85-94; Black, *Who’s Who*, 74-77; Brewster, *Encyclopedia*, 10-111.

<sup>2</sup> *JSP*, H1:16, History, circa 1832, [6](#); this is the last entry in the 1832 history.

<sup>3</sup> Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1844-1845, bk. 8, p. [4](#).

<sup>4</sup> Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1844-1845, bk. 8, p. [3](#); see *JSP*, D1:28-34 (Agreement with Isaac Hale, 6 April 1829, [1](#)) for the document. This agreement was thus the beginning of Oliver being a scribe for Joseph. The second page of the document shows that the first payment of \$64 was paid on 6 April, probably provided by Oliver Cowdery, who had just received \$65.50 payment for teaching school (Faulring, “Oliver Cowdery,” in Black and Skinner, *Joseph*, 89).

<sup>5</sup> See *JSP*, D1:14, Revelation, March 1829 [D&C 5], [Source Note](#). Note that no copies of D&C 3 and 4 are known in Oliver’s hand, but it seems possible that if he copied one that he might have copied all three.

<sup>6</sup> Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 1:539-540.

<sup>7</sup> Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 1:532.

translation, while the plates themselves sat covered on the table nearby.<sup>8</sup> Research on the manuscripts shows that he could ‘see’ between 20 and 30 words at a time, which he would dictate to Oliver, who would then read it back. Joseph would offer corrections, including the spelling of names, then once it was correctly recorded, the next group of words would be revealed.<sup>9</sup>

During this time, many important events happened to the two of them, many of which are reflected in the sections of the Doctrine and Covenants received in April 1829 (D&C 6-9), the subject of this week’s *Come, Follow Me* lesson.

## Summary Chronology

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- **Sun, 5 Apr 1829** (Harmony, PA) – Oliver Cowdery arrived with Samuel Smith.
- **Mon, 6 Apr 1829** (Harmony, PA) – Joseph Smith signed agreement to purchase a home from his father-in-law, Isaac Hale, written by Oliver Cowdery, who also copies at least one revelation previously received.
- **Tue, 7 Apr 1829** (Harmony, PA) – Oliver Cowdery began to write for Joseph Smith in the Book of Mormon translation.
- **Early Apr 1829** (Harmony, PA) – D&C 6 received, for Oliver Cowdery.
- **Apr 1829** (Harmony, PA) – D&C 8 receive, Oliver desires to translate.
- **Apr 1829** (Harmony, PA) – D&C 7 received, question about John the Apostle.
- **Second half Apr 1829** (Harmony, PA) – D&C 9 received, about translation and writing.

# Doctrine and Covenants 6

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## Setting

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As explained above, Oliver Cowdery’s arrival in Harmony was a direct answer to Joseph Smith’s prayers. Shortly after his arrival in Harmony on 5 April 1829, Joseph inquired of the Lord in Oliver’s behalf and received this revelation through the “Urim and Thummim,” (D&C 6 heading)<sup>10</sup> probably meaning one of Joseph’s seer stones at this point.<sup>11</sup> Oliver’s questions are not recorded but from the answers given in the revelation, he was likely wondering about his own mission and whether this work he had committed to really was of God. The exact date is unknown but from the context, it was quite soon after starting the translation work on 7 April 1829.

## Documents and Publication

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The original manuscript is not extant. It was copied into Revelation Book 1 but the pages that contained it were removed at some point and lost. The Book of Commandments version is thus the oldest complete copy.<sup>12</sup> D&C 6 was first published as Chapter 5 of the 1833 Book of Commandments. It was Section 8 in the 1835 and 1844 Doctrine and Covenants.

## Outline

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1. The Lord’s laborers gain salvation ( <a href="#">1-6</a> )	1835 verses compared to 2013			
2. The gift of salvation ( <a href="#">7-13</a> )				
3. Oliver’s witness of the work ( <a href="#">14-24</a> )	<u>1835</u>	<u>2013</u>	<u>1835</u>	<u>2013</u>
4. Oliver invited to translate ( <a href="#">25-28</a> )	1	1-2	9	20
5. The Lord is with them ( <a href="#">29-37</a> )	2	3-5	10	21
	3	6-7	11	22-25
	4	8-9	12	26-27

<sup>8</sup> MacKay and Frederickson, *Joseph’s Seer Stones*, 50-55.

<sup>9</sup> Skousen, *The Earliest Text*, xxiv-xxv. Skousen states that the idea that the translation would not proceed without the scribe recording it *perfectly* is in error because there are many instances of scribal misspellings and even mis-hearing errors. But the evidence that Joseph saw words includes how he sometimes had to spell words, especially names, for the scribes.

<sup>10</sup> Harper, *Making Sense*, 37.

<sup>11</sup> MacKay and Frederick present evidence from Emma Smith that after Oliver Cowdery’s visit, the seer stones were used and not the interpreters. However, other accounts do still mention the Nephite instruments being used in the latter part of the translation. See *Joseph Smith’s Seer Stones*, 51-55.

<sup>12</sup> *JSP*, D1:34, Revelation, April 1829—A [D&C 6], [Source Note](#).

5	10-13	13	28	7	15-17	15	32-33
6	14	14	29-31	8	18-19	16	34-37

## Introduction

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Oliver Cowdery was taught about revelation and his own witness and told things that only he had known, which confirmed the truth of the work to him. He was also offered the gift to translate with Joseph and admonished to be a disciple of Christ. Casey Griffiths has stated that Section 6 “is the beginning of a series of lessons on personal revelation for Oliver Cowdery.”<sup>13</sup> Those lessons continue in the other sections in this lesson.

Many of the phrases in the opening verses are similar to those in D&C 4, 11, 12, and 14, all received within a few weeks of each other. As one commentary put it, “This repetition should not be understood as a divine ‘form letter’ implying less than personal or individual concern for the recipients. Rather, it emphasizes the importance of the calling made to these servants and to all who have followed them in the Lord’s service.”<sup>14</sup>

## The Lord’s Laborers Gain Salvation (1-6)

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**1** A great and marvelous work is about to come forth unto the children of men.

**2** Behold, I am God; give heed unto my word, which is quick and powerful, sharper than a two-edged sword, to the dividing asunder of both joints and marrow; therefore give heed unto my words.

**3** Behold, the field is white already to harvest; therefore, whoso desireth to reap, let him thrust in his sickle with his might, and reap while the day lasts, that he may treasure up for his soul everlasting salvation in the kingdom of God.

**4** Yea, whosoever will thrust in his sickle and reap, the same is called of God.

**5** Therefore, if you will ask of me you shall receive; if you will knock it shall be opened unto you.

**6** Now, as you have asked, behold, I say unto you, keep my commandments, and seek to bring forth and establish the cause of Zion;

## Commentary

**1 *great and marvelous work*.** The title has expanded from the revelation to Joseph’s father (D&C 4), where it was just a marvelous work (D&C 4:1).

**2 *my word, which is quick and powerful*.** The Lord’s work is “quick,” which here doesn’t refer to speed but means ‘alive.’ So many in Joseph’s and our day believe that God’s word only comes through dead prophets and ancient writings, but Joseph knew that God is living and speaks living words to living prophets.

**2 *sharper than a two-edged sword*.** Compare to Hebrews 4:12. A sword with two edges is sharp on both sides, so it can cut both ways, or, as one person expressed it, defend and attack at the same time. The idea is that God’s word cuts deep, going straight to the heart, no matter how we receive it. But unlike a sword, it doesn’t harm us but benefits us with its penetrating power.

**2 *dividing asunder of both joints and marrow*.** It takes not only an extremely sharp knife to cut through bone, but great strength behind the blade. So is the power of God’s word—like a blade that is wielded with such force and expertise that it severs joints and bones in a single blow.

**3 *reap while the day lasts*.** This verse is similar to D&C 4:4 (and others that will come later) but this phrase is new, though it will be repeated in Sections 11, 12, and 14, and once in the Book of Mormon (Alma 26:5). The ripe field doesn’t stay ripe forever, so the work must be done in the right time—“the day.” Someone who procrastinates their service to God might miss the harvest and the blessing of “everlasting salvation in the kingdom of God.”

**4 *whosoever will thrust in his sickle and reap, the same is called*.** Joseph Smith, Sr., was told that having a desire was enough to get him called (D&C 4:3), but the Lord requires work and effort of Oliver—he has to go harvesting, and then he is “called of God.”

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<sup>13</sup> Griffiths, *Scripture Central Commentary*, 1:96.

<sup>14</sup> Robinson and Garrett, *A Commentary*, 1:53.

**6 as you have asked.** The revelation came to Oliver after a request, which is the pattern for many of these early, personal revelations. They requested the word of the Lord for them individually, and Joseph looked at the interpreters or the stone in his hat, just like he did for the Book of Mormon, and dictated the words. That told the recipients the revelation came straight from God.

**6 establish the cause of Zion.** This is the first recorded chronological mention of “Zion,” though Joseph Smith could certainly have encountered it earlier in the translation of the lost manuscript, as the phrase appears several times in the account on the small plates that we have in 1 and 2 Nephi. Joseph Smith’s concept of Zion expanded and clarified over time. It is hard to know just what it meant to him here, though we can say with confidence that what he understood in 1829 differed dramatically from what he understood in 1835 or 1842.

## The Gift of Salvation (7-13)

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**7** Seek not for riches but for wisdom, and behold, the mysteries of God shall be unfolded unto you, and then shall you be made rich. Behold, he that hath eternal life is rich.

**8** Verily, verily, I say unto you, even as you desire of me so it shall be unto you; and if you desire, you shall be the means of doing much good in this generation.

**9** Say nothing but repentance unto this generation; keep my commandments, and assist to bring forth my work, according to my commandments, and you shall be blessed.

**10** Behold thou hast a gift, and blessed art thou because of thy gift. Remember it is sacred and cometh from above—

**11** And if thou wilt inquire, thou shalt know mysteries which are great and marvelous; therefore thou shalt exercise thy gift, that thou mayest find out mysteries, that thou mayest bring many to the knowledge of the truth, yea, convince them of the error of their ways.

**12** Make not thy gift known unto any save it be those who are of thy faith. Trifle not with sacred things.

**13** If thou wilt do good, yea, and hold out faithful to the end, thou shalt be saved in the kingdom of God, which is the greatest of all the gifts of God; for there is no gift greater than the gift of salvation.

### Commentary

**7 Seek not for riches but for wisdom.** Joseph and Oliver were both young and in need of the wisdom that comes with maturity and the refining power of the Spirit. Oliver’s life had been as hard as Joseph’s, with him apparently needing to work from a young age to help support his family. It would not be surprising if thoughts of personal wealth entered his mind as he heard about the plates and the interpreters. But the Lord steered him clear of that, pointing him toward “wisdom,” which would bring him eternal life, which is likened to being rich.

**7 the mysteries of God shall be unfolded.** Oliver sought for knowledge of the things of God that comes only through revelation—the mysteries. With this promise (and the additional reinforcement in v. 11), he became bold to ask the Lord for understanding of gospel principles and mysteries, as is shown in subsequent sections.

**8 as you desire of me so it shall be.** What an amazing promise to the 22-year-old teacher. His desires were to assist Joseph in the work, to play some role in this great translation effort, and the Lord promised him just that, which would result in “much good in this generation.”

**9 Say nothing but repentance.** Richard Bennett has written in his book, *School of the Prophet*, that this period in Joseph’s (and Oliver’s) life was a ‘school’ to learn the principles of the gospel. Oliver would have opportunities in this life to preach much more than just repentance, but at this time and in this place, he needed to learn more about it, so that’s what he was also to preach. Soon he and Joseph would learn about baptism and take the next step.<sup>15</sup>

**9 assist to bring forth my work.** The Book of Mormon for now, but this command hints at Oliver’s role in the next several years, bringing forth many aspects of the restored gospel while serving at Joseph Smith’s side. Oliver Cowdery has more mentions in the Doctrine and Covenants than anyone but Joseph Smith. He will be there for critical events, such as the restoration of priesthood and keys, the founding of the Church, the mission to Missouri, printing Church materials and scriptures, visions of the Savior and other prophets, calling and setting apart the Twelve Apostles, and so much more. Sometimes because Oliver left the Church in 1838, we might overlook his contributions, but we must not do that, for it’s hard to find anyone besides Joseph Smith who contributed more.

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<sup>15</sup> Bennett, *School of the Prophet*, 51-59.

10 ***thou hast a gift***. The gift that Oliver has is not explained in great detail here, except that it will “find out mysteries” and “bring many to the knowledge of the truth” (verse 11). Some say the gift appears to be one of receiving revelation,<sup>16</sup> while others see it as the gift to be a good scribe for Joseph.<sup>17</sup> The Lord will say more about Oliver’s gifts in D&C 8 and 9. He offered Oliver another gift in verses 25-28 below.

11 ***exercise thy gift, that thou mayest find out mysteries***. Verse 7 explained the mysteries of God would be unfolded if Oliver sought for wisdom and did the other things required in verses 3-6. Now the Lord added that Oliver’s gift would help with understanding the mysteries.

12 ***Make not thy gift known***. This was good advice, given the persecution that Joseph himself had experienced when his gift of translation had been made known.

13 ***no gift greater than the gift of salvation***. Though Oliver had other gifts, the Lord’s reminder was that doing good and holding out faithful qualifies him for “the greatest of all the gifts of God,” to be “saved in the kingdom of God.” Thus, grace and the power of the Atonement continued to be taught very early and often in Church history.

## Oliver’s Witness of the Work (14-24)

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14 Verily, verily, I say unto thee, blessed art thou for what thou hast done; for thou hast inquired of me, and behold, as often as thou hast inquired thou hast received instruction of my Spirit. If it had not been so, thou wouldst not have come to the place where thou art at this time.

15 Behold, thou knowest that thou hast inquired of me and I did enlighten thy mind; and now I tell thee these things that thou mayest know that thou hast been enlightened by the Spirit of truth;

16 Yea, I tell thee, that thou mayest know that there is none else save God that knowest thy thoughts and the intents of thy heart.

17 I tell thee these things as a witness unto thee—that the words or the work which thou hast been writing are true.

18 Therefore be diligent; stand by my servant Joseph, faithfully, in whatsoever difficult circumstances he may be for the word’s sake.

19 Admonish him in his faults, and also receive admonition of him. Be patient; be sober; be temperate; have patience, faith, hope and charity.

### Commentary

14 ***as often as thou hast inquired thou hast received instruction of my Spirit***. Not only have Oliver’s prayers for understanding and knowledge been answered every time, but the lesson was also taught that if we want to receive instruction from God, we have to inquire. Oliver was learning that revelation from God comes in many ways, with “instruction” being the first mentioned.

14 ***thou wouldst not have come to the place where thou art***. The fact that he was there with Joseph was a testimony of God’s influence and a proof of divine inspiration. Oliver learned that revelation also comes as we act and then see God’s hand in it. So it is with us—as we look back at our lives, we can see the Lord in our lives and recognize that we would not be in that place without his guiding hand and direction. Revelation charts the course of our lives, sometimes in overt and sometimes in more subtle ways.

15 ***thou hast inquired of me and I did enlighten thy mind***. Similar to the comment in verse 14, when we inquire, we can be taught and enlightened by the Lord. In Oliver’s case, he was trying to understand if the feelings and thoughts he had

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<sup>16</sup> McConkie and Ostler, *Revelations*, 79.

<sup>17</sup> Robinson and Garrett, *A Commentary*, 1:55.



been experiencing were of God or something else, and the Lord assured him that they were from him because he was “enlightened by the Spirit of truth.”

16 *none else save God that knowest thy thoughts*. Though Joseph was giving this revelation to Oliver, as a testimony of the true source, the Lord reminded Oliver that only God knows our innermost thoughts and desires. For Oliver, the things said in this revelation proved to him that God was speaking to him and not Joseph Smith, though Joseph said the words as he wrote them.

17 *these things as a witness*. Another form of revelation is a witness of truth. Like many of us, Oliver was looking for confirmation. Here he was, in a strange place with this man, getting ready to live in poverty and spend his days writing as Joseph dictated. He was sacrificing much. Was it really the work of God? This revelation is Oliver’s witness that what he has been writing was true. He will have many other witnesses later, but it started with believing the feelings and direction that he had already received.

17 *the words or the work which thou hast been writing are true*. Revelation also comes from God’s prophets. Oliver sat with quill in hand while Joseph looked in his hat and read out words for Oliver to write down. It was tedious and slow work, and they worked long hours to make the amazing progress they did. Did it cross his mind that Joseph was just making all this up? If it did, the Lord here confirmed the divine source of Joseph’s words.

18 *stand by my servant Joseph*. Oliver did this for many years in significant and powerful ways. Sadly, in 1838 he was excommunicated for coming out against Joseph Smith and other Church leaders. He did return to the Church in 1848, being rebaptized by Orson Hyde. He served in the Church until his death in 1850 from a chronic lung condition.

20 *thou art Oliver*. The Lord knows our names and everything about us. See notes on D&C 3:9.

20 *I will encircle thee in the arms of my love*. Besides this verse, this phrase is also (and only) found in the writings of Lehi (so perhaps also on the lost manuscript) in 2 Nephi 1:15. It is a marvelous image of a tender Savior.

21 *I am Jesus Christ*. As the Lord identified Oliver by name as the recipient of the revelation, even so he identified himself as the giver, a pattern he will follow in other revelations to individuals in the coming days. See also D&C 10:57-58.

21 *came unto mine own*. From John 1:11.

21 *I am the light which shineth in the darkness*. From John 1:5.

22 *cast your mind upon the night*. As mentioned above, Oliver had prayed before coming to see Joseph Smith and had experienced a marvelous dream/vision of the plates and a confirmation of the truth of it all. He had apparently not told anyone of that experience, so when Joseph revealed it in this revelation, Oliver knew it was from the Lord.

23 *Did I not speak peace to your mind?* The peace of God is the greatest witness of his love and involvement in our lives. One of the great powers of revelation and the Spirit is to bring peace.

24 *have you not received a witness?* Oliver sought a revelation through Joseph Smith as a confirmation or witness that what he was doing was of the Lord. But the Lord reminds him that he had already told him that. “Remember” is a very frequent command in scripture, because we need to always remember our experiences with God. Too often with other events in our lives, we forget how he has been with us in the past, spoken to us, trained and tutored us, comforted us. Keeping a journal can help us remember those critical events, so we can look back in faith-challenging times and remind ourselves that we have already received a witness. Faith is moving forward with that very real memory of how God has supported us always in mind.

## Oliver Invited to Translate (25-28)

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25 And, behold, I grant unto you a gift, if you desire of me, to translate, even as my servant Joseph.

26 Verily, verily, I say unto you, that there are records which contain much of my gospel, which have been kept back because of the wickedness of the people;

27 And now I command you, that if you have good desires—a desire to lay up treasures for yourself in heaven—then shall you assist in bringing to light, with your gift, those parts of my scriptures which have been hidden because of iniquity.

28 And now, behold, I give unto you, and also unto my servant Joseph, the keys of this gift, which shall bring to light this ministry; and in the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established.

## Commentary

**25 *a gift, if you desire of me, to translate.*** Oliver was invited to join Joseph Smith in experiencing the gift of translation. Note that they were doing this work before they were baptized, before receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost, before being members of the Church. This was a marvelous gift of the Spirit offered to both of these men.

**26 *records which contain much of my gospel.*** The implication here is that beyond the plates they currently possess are other records, “kept back” from the world because of wickedness.

**27 *parts of my scriptures which have been hidden.*** The first instance of this promise being fulfilled was Section 7, but Oliver will later be involved in the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible and the Book of Abraham, later in his service.

**28 *two or three witnesses.*** The Lord invited Oliver to translate at least partially to fulfill the law of witnesses. He knew Oliver would struggle and learn from the experience, and not translate much, but just having a second witness to the process was significant. Beyond the translation, Oliver will stand as a second witness to many of the greatest events of the Restoration—significant because up to this point, the only witness was Joseph Smith. Oliver’s mission was to be another voice to all of the events about to transpire.

## The Lord Is with Them (29-37)

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**29** Verily, verily, I say unto you, if they reject my words, and this part of my gospel and ministry, blessed are ye, for they can do no more unto you than unto me.

**30** And even if they do unto you even as they have done unto me, blessed are ye, for you shall dwell with me in glory.

**31** But if they reject not my words, which shall be established by the testimony which shall be given, blessed are they, and then shall ye have joy in the fruit of your labors.

**32** Verily, verily, I say unto you, as I said unto my disciples, where two or three are gathered together in my name, as touching one thing, behold, there will I be in the midst of them—even so am I in the midst of you.

**33** Fear not to do good, my sons, for whatsoever ye sow, that shall ye also reap; therefore, if ye sow good ye shall also reap good for your reward.

**34** Therefore, fear not, little flock; do good; let earth and hell combine against you, for if ye are built upon my rock, they cannot prevail.

**35** Behold, I do not condemn you; go your ways and sin no more; perform with soberness the work which I have commanded you.

**36** Look unto me in every thought; doubt not, fear not.

**37** Behold the wounds which pierced my side, and also the prints of the nails in my hands and feet; be faithful, keep my commandments, and ye shall inherit the kingdom of heaven. Amen.

## Commentary

**30 *if they do unto you even as they have done unto me.*** To essentially say that they can’t do worse to you than they did to Jesus—whip, beat, and torture him, humiliate him, deprive him of all human dignity, brutally hang him on a cross to die an immensely painful death—may not provide much immediate comfort. But the reality is that Oliver faced the same potential end as Joseph Smith—martyrdom—appears to be the Lord’s allusion here. Joseph Fielding Smith was of the opinion that if Oliver had remained faithful through those years, it would have been him and not Hyrum who fell at Joseph’s side in Carthage Jail.<sup>18</sup> But whatever the case, the blessing of eternal glory was also promised.

**32 *two or three are gathered.*** This is a quote from Matthew 18:20, the only other place where this phrase is used. How relevant to their situation, with the three of them—Joseph, Oliver, and Emma—gathered each day in their little house, doing the work of translation. Each day they “gathered” to do that work, the Lord was in their midst.

**33 *whatsoever ye sow, that shall ye also reap.*** A timely metaphor, since Joseph and Samuel were just putting in their spring planting.

**34 *fear not, little flock.*** What a touching name for the small group in the house in Harmony given by the Good Shepherd. Even if “earth and hell” combined against them, they were protected of the Lord in heaven.

**34 *if ye are built upon my rock.*** This phrase appears five more times in the Doctrine and Covenants,<sup>19</sup> after this the first usage. It comes from two passages in the New Testament—the parable of the wise and foolish builders (the wise man

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<sup>18</sup> Brewster, *Encyclopedia*, 111.

<sup>19</sup> D&C 6:34; 11:24; 18:15; 33:13; 50:44; 128:10 (which is a quotation of Matthew 16:18).

builds his house on a rock; Matthew 7:24-25) and from Peter's commission that the Church will be built on the rock of personal revelation (Matthew 16:17-18). But neither of those use "my rock." This term will be found often in The Book of Mormon, especially in the words of Christ in 3 Nephi.<sup>20</sup>

35 *sin no more*. The Lord readily forgives sin but also readily challenges us to change our behavior so the sin is not repeated. From the beginning, the power of the Atonement of Christ to change lives is clearly taught.

35 *perform with soberness the work*. There is an urgency and importance to what they are doing. The work of translation was not one to be done with jokes or a flippant attitude, but rather a sense of the eternal import of their efforts.

36 *Look unto me in every thought*. This unique phrase is only found here but speaks to their situation and need. The dedication required of them to spend hours each day translating and writing, seeking the Spirit, required them to stay focused on the Lord's commandment each minute.

This verse is the 2025 Youth Theme for the Church, ten powerful words that all youth are invited to learn and live by.

37 *Behold the wounds . . . the prints of the nails*. There is no indication that they saw Christ at this time, but both of these men had already seen him in one form and would yet experience his presence on other occasions, giving them the opportunity to fulfill this commandment to look and "be faithful." For anyone who has not seen Christ, we can still "behold" his wounds and suffering as we remember him weekly in the sacrament.

## Results

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Oliver Cowdery felt that this revelation had to be from God. In an interview in 1884, David Whitmer, Oliver's friend before either met Joseph Smith, said this about D&C 6: "Soon after Oliver's arrival in Harmony, he wrote to me and said that Joseph had enquired [enquired] of the Lord concerning him, and had told him secrets of his life that he knew could not be known to any person but himself, in any other way than by revelation from the Almighty."<sup>21</sup>

D&C 6 gave Oliver conviction to go on and participate in the translation, even though he would make no money and put his own safety at risk. Because the revelation told him things only the Lord knew, he knew the work was also of the Lord.

Following Section 6, Joseph and Oliver continued working on the translation at a startling rate. There are 269,510 words in the original Book of Mormon. The translation began on 7 April and was done no later than 30 June, a total of eighty-five days. But they could not translate every day; there were days of traveling (and even moving to a new city about 150 miles away), work on Joseph's farm, traveling to Colesville and back, receiving and recording revelations, and more. That reduces the number of days translating to about sixty-three, and it could be less because we simply don't have a daily record of what they were doing. But taking the higher number, it means that they needed to translate on average about 4,278 words per day. One page of the Book of Mormon manuscript holds about 443 words (608 pages total), which means they had to write almost ten pages per day to achieve that outcome. Doing the math shows that if they were very fast (20 words per minute), it would require at least 4 hours of translation work per day, and at the slower rate of 10 words per minute, it would require at least seven hours of translation per day. Experiments have shown that the 20 words per minute rate is feasible but perhaps not day after day, and perhaps not with the materials they had to work with (ink and quill pens that needed to be regularly sharpened, dipped, etc.).<sup>22</sup>

All this is to say that the work of translation was very challenging for the two young men and required commitment and diligence on a daily basis to complete. It would have been thrilling and uplifting but also exhausting.

During this time, they were quite destitute, and appealed to Joseph Knight, Sr., in nearby Colesville, New York, which was on the Susquehanna River but about 16 miles north of Harmony. Joseph Knight wrote:

Now Joseph and Oliver Came up to see me if I Could help him to some provisions, having no way to Buy any . . . I Bought a Barral of Mackrel and some Lined paper for writing and when I Came home I Bought some nine or ten Bushels of grain and five or six Bushels taters and a pound of tea, and I went Down to see him and they ware in

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<sup>20</sup> See Helaman 5:12; 3 Nephi 11:39-40; 14:24; 18:12-13.

<sup>21</sup> "About the Book of Mormon," *Deseret News*, 9 April 1884, [190](#). See also *JSP*, D1:34, Revelation, April 1829—A [D&C 6], [Historical Introduction](#).

<sup>22</sup> Numbers and translation conclusions come an excellent and detailed article by John W. Welch, "Timing the Translation of the Book of Mormon: "Days [and Hours] Never to Be Forgotten," in *BYU Studies*, 57:4 (2018), pp. 10-50.



want Joseph and Oliver were gone to see if they could find a place to work for provisions. But found none they returned home and found me there with provisions, and they were glad for they were out.<sup>23</sup>

## Doctrine and Covenants 8

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### Setting

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Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery were in Harmony, Pennsylvania, engaged in the translation of the Book of Mormon. The Prophet wrote that Oliver was desirous, even “exceedingly anxious”<sup>24</sup> to translate, too—something he had been already promised (D&C 6:25). They inquired of the Lord and received this response. The heading in the Book of Commandments summarized it, saying, “A Revelation to Oliver he being desirous to know whether the Lord would grant him the gift of Revelation & the Translation.”<sup>25</sup>

### Documents and Publication

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The original revelation is not extant. The oldest copy is in Revelation Book 1.<sup>26</sup> This was first published as Chapter 7 in the 1833 Book of Commandments, and it was Section 34 in the 1835 and 1844 Doctrine and Covenants.

### Outline

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1. The gift of revelation ( <a href="#">1-5</a> )	1835 verses compared to 2013	
2. Oliver’s gift ( <a href="#">6-12</a> )	<u>1835</u>	<u>2013</u>
	1	1-2
	2	3-4
	3	5-12

### Introduction

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Soon after the work began on the translation, Oliver “became exceedingly anxious to have the power to translate bestowed upon him,”<sup>27</sup> as had been promised him in Section 6. One of the chapters they translated very near the beginning talk about King Mosiah who could translate ancient records by looking at “the things [that] are called interpreters.” A person commanded by God to do this was called a seer, revelator, and prophet (Mosiah 8:13, 16). Accordingly, Joseph asked the Lord and received this revelation.

In these verses, Oliver Cowdery is invited to help translate and receive gifts from God to assist in that work.

### The Gift of Revelation (1-5)

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**1** Oliver Cowdery, verily, verily, I say unto you, that assuredly as the Lord liveth, who is your God and your Redeemer, even so surely shall you receive a knowledge of whatsoever things you shall ask in faith, with an honest heart, believing that you shall receive a knowledge concerning the engravings of old records, which are ancient, which contain those parts of my scripture of which has been spoken by the manifestation of my Spirit.

**2** Yea, behold, I will tell you in your mind and in your heart, by the Holy Ghost, which shall come upon you and which shall dwell in your heart.

**3** Now, behold, this is the spirit of revelation; behold, this is the spirit by which Moses brought the children of Israel through the Red Sea on dry ground.

**4** Therefore this is thy gift; apply unto it, and blessed art thou, for it shall deliver you out of the hands of your enemies, when, if it

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<sup>23</sup> Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 4:19-20; Cook, *Revelations*, 13.

<sup>24</sup> Harper, *Making Sense*, 42.

<sup>25</sup> *JSP*, D1:45, Book of Commandments, 1833, [19](#).

<sup>26</sup> *JSP*, D1:44; see *JSP*, MRB:14-17; Revelation Book 1, [12](#).

<sup>27</sup> *JSP*, H1:286 (Draft 2), History, 1838-1856, vol. A1, 16.

were not so, they would slay you and bring your soul to destruction.

5 Oh, remember these words, and keep my commandments. Remember, this is your gift.

## Commentary

1 ***surely shall you receive a knowledge***. Oliver was promised knowledge of things that he had asked about if he exhibited three attributes of someone ready for revelation: faith, an honest heart, and a belief that he would receive.

1 ***a knowledge concerning the engravings of old records***. The Book of Mormon was the only old record with engravings that the men had access to. But their interest must have been piqued by mention in the translation of other records, such as the record of the Jaredites found by the people of Limhi.<sup>28</sup> With the Book of Mormon's revelation to Joseph Smith, would other records be discovered or provided as well? This must have been a topic of fascinating conversation during breaks from the work of dictation and writing.

2 ***in your mind and in your heart***. Revelation works with both thoughts and emotions. One cannot separate the two without missing part of the message. Sometimes the Spirit might prompt us with something that doesn't make sense, so we have to listen to the heart. Other times we may have "pure Intelligence flowing into [us]," as Joseph Smith taught,<sup>29</sup> that will bring us to a perfect understanding in our minds. When both work together, we get the maximum benefit from our revelatory experiences.

But the message here is also that revelation comes in many forms. Oliver had previously known peace as communication from God (D&C 6:23). Other scriptures teach us that revelation can bring comfort or joy or answers, and it can come from the Spirit, from other people, even art or music.<sup>30</sup> As verses 6-12 teaches below, God will speak to us in whatever way he can best reach us.

3 ***this is the spirit of revelation***. Oliver asked about translation. The Lord went bigger, talking about a gift that was so powerful that it was the same one Moses used to open up the Red Sea and let the children of Israel pass through. Moses had it revealed to him what to do by the Holy Ghost as he stood at the shore of the sea with Egypt's armies bearing down upon his people. By heeding that spirit of revelation and having faith, he was able to perform great miracles in the Lord's name.

4 ***this is thy gift***. Oliver was blessed with the same spirit of revelation as Moses and Joseph. This gift was so powerful it would not only let him translate texts (verse 11) but would deliver him from his enemies, just as the Lord did through Moses. Without this gift, his enemies would kill his body and bring his soul to destruction.

## Oliver's Gift (6-12)

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6 Now this is not all thy gift; for you have another gift, which is the gift of Aaron; behold, it has told you many things;

7 Behold, there is no other power, save the power of God, that can cause this gift of Aaron to be with you.

8 Therefore, doubt not, for it is the gift of God; and you shall hold it in your hands, and do marvelous works; and no power shall be able to take it away out of your hands, for it is the work of God.

9 And, therefore, whatsoever you shall ask me to tell you by that means, that will I grant unto you, and you shall have knowledge concerning it.

## Commentary

6 ***you have another gift***. See the text note below. Oliver's other gift was related to the gift that Aaron enjoyed. That means that Oliver was blessed with both a gift related to Moses but also to his brother, Aaron.

6-9 ***text note***:

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<sup>28</sup> JSP, D1:45, Revelation, April 1829—B [D&C 8], [Historical Introduction](#).

<sup>29</sup> History, 1838-1856, vol. C-1 [2 November 1838—31 July 1842], [9 \[addenda\]](#).

<sup>30</sup> Griffiths, *Scripture Central Commentary*, 1:113.

RB1 <sup>31</sup>	1833 <sup>32</sup>	1835 <sup>33</sup>
now this is not all for thou hast another gift which is the gift of working with the sprout Behold it hath told you things Behold there is no other power save God that can cause this thing of Nature to work in your hands for it is the work of God & therefore whatsoever ye shall ask to tell you by that means that will he grant unto you that ye shall know	Now this is not all, for you have another gift, which is the gift of working with the rod: behold it has told you things: behold there is no other power save God, that can cause this rod of nature, to work in your hands, for it is the work of God; and therefore whatsoever you shall ask me to tell you by that means, that will I grant unto you, that you shall know.	Now this is not all thy gift; for you have another gift, which is the gift of Aaron: behold it has told you many things: behold there is no other power save the power of God that can cause this gift of Aaron to be with you; therefore, doubt not, for it is the gift of God, and you shall hold it in your hands, and do marvelous works; and no power shall be able to take it away out of your hands; for it is the work of God. And therefore, whatsoever you shall ask me to tell you by that means, that will I grant unto you and you shall have knowledge concerning it:

Several items of interest arise from these changes. First, the phrase “the gift of Aaron” that we read today was first inserted in 1835, replacing “rod of nature” in 1833 and “this thing of Nature” in RB1. In Revelation Book 1, John Whitmer first wrote “the sprout” but then Sidney Rigdon changed it to “this rod.” Sidney’s hand also made the modernizing changes in this and many other revelations (“ye” to “you,” etc.). Apparently, Oliver Cowdery had something that was first referred to as a “sprout” then as a “rod.” Later, Joseph Smith equated this with the “gift of Aaron” and so changed it in the 1835 text. What this item was is not certain, because neither Joseph nor Oliver nor anyone else of the period wrote about it. Some believe that Oliver had a divining or diviner’s rod that he used.<sup>34</sup> That would match what was widely believed in those days about such things—that they could not only find things, such as water or metal (Joseph enemies once brought a dowser to his home to try and find the plates), but also reveal information to the possessor, just as Joseph’s seer stone and the Nephite interpreters did for him. Thus the “sprout” reference perhaps has to do with the type or nature of wood that Oliver used. Alternatively, some argue strongly that it can only be the Urim and Thummim.<sup>35</sup>

Whatever the item referred to was, it was something that Oliver could hold in his hand, and it was something the Lord determined he could use with Oliver for his own purposes (verse 8). It is not unreasonable to suppose that Oliver used this instrument in his attempt to translate the Book of Mormon, given the Lord’s clear sanction here.

**7 *this gift of Aaron.*** Aaron’s gifts that supported Moses as prophet are documented in the books of Exodus and Numbers. He cast his rod down and it became a snake (Exodus 7:9-12); his rod budded and even bore almonds long after it was cut (Numbers 17:8); he was Moses’ spokesman (Exodus 4:10-17; 7:1). Likewise, Oliver had gifts that supported Joseph Smith, including being a participant in ordinations and restorations of keys, being a Church spokesman (verbally and in writing), and calling and teaching the Twelve apostles.<sup>36</sup>

**10 *without faith you can do nothing.*** The Lord was working with the brethren according to their own language, knowledge, and experience. If Oliver had a divining rod or some other instrument, the message was that it all works by faith in God. These things should not be trifled with or taken lightly.

**11 *that you may translate and receive knowledge.*** Oliver was again invited to translate here. We don’t know how much Oliver did. Much of the original Book of Mormon manuscript is lost—especially the part that may well have had Oliver’s translation and Joseph’s handwriting. He may have done some to stand as the second witness of it, but neither he nor Joseph ever explained just how much that was.

However, it may not have been the Book of Mormon at all that Oliver translated. See the introduction below to D&C 7, which may in fact have been Oliver’s translation effort.

**12 *the same that spake unto you from the beginning.*** A reminder of the great spiritual experiences Oliver had before he met Joseph Smith, and that it was the same person speaking to him now.

<sup>31</sup> JSP, D1:46, Revelation Book 1, [13](#).

<sup>32</sup> JSP, R2:31, Book of Commandments, 1833, [19](#).

<sup>33</sup> JSP, R2:471-472, Doctrine and Covenants, 1835, [161](#).

<sup>34</sup> JSP, D1:46 n116-118, Revelation, April 1829-B [D&C 8], [13, notes 5-7](#).

<sup>35</sup> McConkie and Garrett, *Revelations*, 87-88.

<sup>36</sup> Griffiths, *Scripture Central Commentary*, 1:114.

## Results

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The Lord didn't criticize Oliver for his 'magic' outlook and instruments, but rather worked with him to teach him something about them that he could do in faith. "The Lord legitimized, not criticized, these gifts."<sup>37</sup> Today we might see seer stones or divining rods as odd things, but if so, then we forget how the Lord has worked with many people, including Moses, Aaron, the brother of Jared, Lehi, the Jewish high priest, and many others. All of these had objects that helped them understand and interpret God's will. The Lord worked with Oliver in D&C 8 to show him how his gifts might fit in with the overall gospel plan for the Restoration and the last days. Later editors, including Joseph Smith, turned Oliver's "sprout" and "thing of Nature" into "the gift of Aaron." The words may be more Biblical but the true imagery is exactly the same. Whatever helps us know the mind of God is a great blessing.

# Doctrine and Covenants 7

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## Setting

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Not long after his arrival in Harmony and while working on the translation with Joseph Smith, Oliver and Joseph had a conversation about the fate of John the Beloved, based on a reading of John 21 (and perhaps added to by the fate of Alma in Alma 45:19, the translation of which may have coincided with this). One of them thought he had lived on, one thought he had died; the record does not say who supported which position. Based on their experience and on the promises of D&C 6 and 8, they took the question to the Lord, and received a remarkable answer through the "Urim and Thummin" (probably the seer stone), whereby they were shown an actual parchment manuscript written by John himself, hidden up by him, but now lost to the knowledge of the world (and perhaps not even in existence any more).<sup>38</sup> By the power of God, the brethren were able to translate this manuscript, seen only to them in vision. This amazing experience was perhaps only one of many such answers the two young men received during the translation process.

In Revelation Book 1, John Whitmer placed what is today D&C 7 after D&C 8. Later in the 1833 Book of Commandments, the order was reversed and has remained so since. However, Whitmer's order was probably the correct chronology; D&C 7 was, in fact, a joint revelation received by both Joseph and Oliver,<sup>39</sup> perhaps fulfilling Oliver's desire to translate "ancient records which have been hid up, that are sacred" (D&C 8:11; also D&C 6:26-27), a perfect description of the content of D&C 7. That he and Joseph had to accomplish it together may allude to the challenges Oliver faced, as discussed in D&C 9.

## Documents and Publication

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Like John's parchment, the original manuscript is not extant. The oldest copy is in Revelation Book 1.<sup>40</sup> It was first published as Chapter 6 of the 1833 Book of Commandments, then was edited (expanded) substantially when it was published as Section 33 in the 1835 and 1844 Doctrine and Covenants, showing the ongoing and fluid nature of revelation to Joseph Smith.

## Outline

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3. John the Beloved ( <a href="#">1-3</a> )	1835 verses compared to 2013			
4. Peter and John ( <a href="#">4-8</a> )	<u>1835</u>	<u>2013</u>	<u>1835</u>	<u>2013</u>
	1	1-3	3	8
	2	4-7		

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<sup>37</sup> Harper, *Making Sense*, 43.

<sup>38</sup> *JSP*, D1:47, Account of John, April 1829-C [D&C 7], [Historical Introduction](#).

<sup>39</sup> *JSP*, D1:48, Account of John, April 1829-C [D&C 7], [1](#).

<sup>40</sup> *JSP*, D1:47; *JSP*, MRB:16-19; Account of John, April 1829-C [D&C 7], [Source Note](#).

## Introduction

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John the Beloved is invited to have his desire, which he determines is to stay alive and bring souls to Christ. This he is granted, while Peter is granted to come quickly to Jesus' kingdom. See John 21:20-24.

### John the Beloved (1-3)

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

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

**3** 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.

### Commentary

**1 *John, my beloved.*** These three words speak to the authorship of the gospel of John. Many scholars debate the issue, but if someone did discover this manuscript actually written by John, referring to himself as the “beloved” and expanding John 21:20-24, it would end the debate.

#### 1 *text note:*

RB1 what desirest thou

1833 what desirest thou?

1835 what desirest thou? For if ye shall ask, what you will, it shall be granted unto you

The 1835 addition clarifies that the Lord already knew John was going to ask for something righteous and thus granted it to him before he even spoke the words.

#### 2 *text note:*

RB1 give unto me power that I may bring souls unto thee

1833 give unto me power that I may bring souls unto thee

1835 give unto me power over death, that I may live and bring souls unto thee

The addition of “over death” and “live and” clarifies the nature of the power John sought for. It also makes clear that he asked to live on, and it wasn't something the Lord just granted to help him fulfill his request to be a missionary. John was told to ask for his desire, which he did, and it was granted.

**3 *thou shalt tarry until I come in my glory.*** When John was first told this, it is likely that he had no idea it would be thousands of years. It is clear from the New Testament record that the early Saints initially believed that Jesus would return again soon, perhaps in their lifetimes. But as the years passed and they grew to understand this doctrine better, they realized that it was a more distant event. Certainly, by the time John was the last remaining apostle, he better understood the divine timeline—and the length of his own request.

#### 3 *text note:*

RB1 come in my glory

1833 come in my glory

1835 come in my glory, and shall prophesy before nations, kindreds, tongues and people

John doesn't just live on until the Second Coming, but he has the bold mission to testify of Christ throughout the earth.

### Peter and John (4-8)

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**4** 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 mightest speedily come unto me in my kingdom.

**5** 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.

**6** 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.

**7** 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.

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



## Commentary

4 **If I will that he tarry.** This conversation with Peter starts like John 21:22, but is expanded dramatically in this revelation, clearing up the confusion that some feel with the version of John that we have, reflected in the editorial comments in John 21:23.

### 4 text note:

RB1 thou desiredst that thou mightest            come unto me in my kingdom

1833 thou desiredst that thou might speedily come unto me in my kingdom

1835 thou desiredst that thou might speedily come unto me in my kingdom

The Revelation Book manuscript excludes the word “speedily,” but it was included in 1833 and all subsequent publications. This matches what the Nephite disciples requested of the Lord in 3 Nephi 28:2, “that we may speedily come unto thee in thy kingdom.”

5 **this was a good desire.** Peter’s desire to come into the kingdom at the end of his labors was good. It was different from John’s but not unworthy or in any way less than John’s.

5 **or a greater work.** While “greater” can mean ‘better,’ that is clearly not the Lord’s intent here. Another meaning of greater is ‘longer’ or ‘larger,’ which probably is the meaning. John’s mission was going to be longer and larger than Peter’s, covering thousands of years and many nations of the earth.

5-7 **text note:** Verses 5-7 are almost all brand new in 1835, as shown below.

RB1	1833	1835
but my beloved has undertaken a greater work	but my beloved has undertaken a greater work	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.

The simple comment from the Revelation Book and the 1833 Book of Commandments is greatly enlarged in 1835, also expanding our understanding of the mission of Peter, James, and John. Why did these three restore the Melchizedek Priesthood? Why not Melchizedek or other of the ancient prophets? Because the Lord told them, as reflected here, that it was their calling to possess these keys until the Second Coming, and therefore their calling to pass them on. Peter leads the three of them, and John has an individual mission, but they jointly administer the keys.

8 **ye both joy in that which ye have desired.** Neither Peter’s request nor John’s were superior in some way. Both brought joy and both were gladly fulfilled by the Lord.

## Results

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This revelation prefigures the later work Joseph Smith did on the translation of the Bible, examining Biblical passages by revelation and providing greater insight into their meaning and application. In other words, this experience gave the Prophet a taste of his next translation project.

It also clarifies the role of Peter, James, and John in the latter-day Restoration. In a few weeks, they would return and lay hands on these two men, fulfilling part of their mission in the last verse to minister with keys until the Second Coming.

It is interesting to note that when David Whitmer, Oliver’s close friend, was later describing the translation process, he wrote, “Joseph Smith would put the seer stone into a hat, and put his face in the hat, drawing it closely around his face to exclude the light; and in the darkness the spiritual light would shine. A piece of something resembling parchment would appear, and on that appeared the writing.”<sup>41</sup> The only time a revelation was described as being on parchment is D&C 7. Was David’s description of the translation process given to him by his friend, Oliver, after his experience with John’s parchment?

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<sup>41</sup> Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 5:196.

It is intriguing to note that the next spring (1830), Joseph Smith gave Oliver his brown seer stone.<sup>42</sup> Was that in part because it was the one that Oliver had used to translate John’s ancient document here, and thus had success with, if only short-lived?

## Doctrine and Covenants 9

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### Setting

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As directed in Section 8, Oliver Cowdery made his attempt at translating, and apparently had some success, either through D&C 7 or possibly also some portion of the Book of Mormon translation, but it was a mixed experience and soon he was no longer able to do so. The heading in Revelation Book 1 says, “A Revelation to Oliver he was disrous to know the reason why he could not Translate & thus said the Lord unto him.”<sup>43</sup> This was the fourth revelation that was received in Harmony, Pennsylvania, in early to mid-April 1829, associated with Oliver’s arrival.

### Documents and Publication

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The original manuscript is not extant. The oldest copy is in Revelation Book 1, but the book is missing a few pages, so it lacks everything after what is today v. 9. The oldest complete copy is thus from when it was first published as Chapter 8 in the 1833 Book of Commandments. It was subsequently published as Section 35 in the 1835 and 1844 Doctrine and Covenants.

### Outline

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5. Oliver’s mission ( <a href="#">1-6</a> )	1835 verses compared to 2013			
6. The process of translation ( <a href="#">7-14</a> )	<u>1835</u>	<u>2013</u>	<u>1835</u>	<u>2013</u>
	1	1-2	4	10-12
	2	3-6	5	13-14
	3	7-9		

### Introduction

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Oliver learned firsthand how challenging translation by the gift and power of God was. As a manifestation of the principle of revelation, translation is a particular gift that requires work, preparation, and real effort. It does not come just by asking. Oliver’s attempt to translate may not have been entirely successful, but it was neither a failure for him or for Joseph. Both learned from the experience, and by extension, so do we today, even if the principles of revelatory translation apply more precisely to Oliver’s experience than to much of what we do today.

### Oliver’s Mission (1-6)

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**1** Behold, I say unto you, my son, that because you did not translate according to that which you desired of me, and did commence again to write for my servant, Joseph Smith, Jun., even so I would that ye should continue until you have finished this record, which I have entrusted unto him.

**2** And then, behold, other records have I, that I will give unto you power that you may assist to translate.

**3** Be patient, my son, for it is wisdom in me, and it is not expedient that you should translate at this present time.

**4** Behold, the work which you are called to do is to write for my servant Joseph.

**5** And, behold, it is because that you did not continue as you commenced, when you began to translate, that I have taken away this privilege from you.

**6** Do not murmur, my son, for it is wisdom in me that I have dealt with you after this manner.

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<sup>42</sup> MacKay and Frederickson, *Joseph Smith’s Seer Stones*, 69-71.

<sup>43</sup> *JSP*, MRB:19, Revelation, April 1829–D [D&C 9], [1](#).

## Commentary

**1 *because you did not translate . . . and did commence again to write.*** Oliver appears to have stopped trying to translate on his own before this revelation was received and went back to just being Joseph's scribe. If so, this revelation could have been immensely comforting to him as he tried to understand his failure.

**1 *continue until you have finished this record.*** Oliver not only finished writing the translation of the Book of Mormon with Joseph, but then he was the scribe for most of a second copy of the entire book, the printer's manuscript. In other words, in just a few months, he personally wrote out nearly the entire Book of Mormon by hand, twice.

**2 *other records have 1.*** See comment on D&C 6:26 above.

**4 *write for my servant Joseph.*** Oliver came to Harmony to write. He had a desire to do more and the Lord allowed it, but now it was time to return to his first and most important calling.

**5 *you did not continue as you commenced.*** How many times do we start a project, calling, or assignment with enthusiasm and commitment, only to fade away over time? Oliver perhaps did something similar, beginning with excitement but as he discovered just how hard it was, he lost some of that excitement or willingness to work at it.

**6 *it is wisdom in me.*** Life is full of setbacks, trials, struggles, and failures. Some of those are caused by poor exercise of agency. Perhaps that is what happened with Oliver. But the Lord knew what the outcome would be before he allowed Oliver to try, and knew that in the end, Oliver would be a better person because of it. We can learn from Oliver to murmur less and trust more in God's plan for us.

## The Process of Translation (7-14)

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**7** Behold, you have not understood; you have supposed that I would give it unto you, when you took no thought save it was to ask me.

**8** But, behold, I say unto you, that you must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right, and if it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore, you shall feel that it is right.

**9** But if it be not right you shall have no such feelings, but you shall have a stupor of thought that shall cause you to forget the thing which is wrong; therefore, you cannot write that which is sacred save it be given you from me.

**10** Now, if you had known this you could have translated; nevertheless, it is not expedient that you should translate now.

**11** Behold, it was expedient when you commenced; but you feared, and the time is past, and it is not expedient now;

**12** For, do you not behold that I have given unto my servant Joseph sufficient strength, whereby it is made up? And neither of you have I condemned.

**13** Do this thing which I have commanded you, and you shall prosper. Be faithful, and yield to no temptation.

**14** Stand fast in the work wherewith I have called you, and a hair of your head shall not be lost, and you shall be lifted up at the last day. Amen.

## Commentary

**7 *you took no thought save it was to ask me.*** Oliver wanted the thrill of translating but had not put in the preparation and effort that Joseph had. The Prophet had studied the plates and tried to understand how the Nephite interpreters would work for many challenging and frustrating months. He tried to translate characters, copied characters and sent them to scholars, attempted to understand the Nephite alphabet, likely spent hours staring at the plates, wondering what their hidden message was, and prayed and repented much. It took all that effort before he was able to translate the first page. Oliver's effort was in a more compressed time. Perhaps like watching someone skilled at what they do, it seemed easy watching Joseph, but it was not.

**8 *study it out in your mind.*** Revelation begins as a mental exercise, working through the issues and options and seeking to understand what the right thing is to do. After our best efforts, then the Lord teaches us to pray and see his confirmation: "ask me if it be right."

**8 *your bosom shall burn within you.*** Many Latter-day Saints have been confused, looking for an answer that feels like an actual burning. Speaking of this verse, Elder Dallin H. Oaks stated:

This may be one of the most important and misunderstood teachings in all the Doctrine and Covenants. The teachings of the Spirit often come as feelings. That fact is of the utmost importance, yet some misunderstand what it means. I

have met persons who told me they have never had a witness from the Holy Ghost because they have never felt their bosom “burn within” them.

What does a “burning in the bosom” mean? Does it need to be a feeling of caloric heat, like the burning produced by combustion? If that is the meaning, I have never had a burning in the bosom. Surely, the word “burning” in this scripture signifies a feeling of comfort and serenity. That is the witness many receive. That is the way revelation works.

Truly, the still, small voice is just that, “still” and “small.”

“The language of peace, as spoken by the Lord, embraces a sense of quiet confidence, comfort, and warmth. It is gentle and calm, amiable and sweet; it is temperate and kind; it is orderly and identified by happiness, joy, and feelings of love” (Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet, *The Holy Ghost* [1989], 14; *Ensign*, Mar 1997, 7).

9 *stupor of thought*. The opposite course can also be a source of confusion. A “stupor” is a dullness or a diminution. Our minds are not crisp and clear, as they would be if the thing we were asking about were true. In Oliver’s case, the application was very direct—he would “forget the thing which is wrong,” referring to the translated words he was trying to judge. This dullness and loss of the words he was attempting to verify with the Lord was part of the translation process. If it happened, they could not “write that which is sacred.”

10 *if you had known this you could have translated*. Perhaps Joseph had tried to explain all this to Oliver, but it was difficult to put it into words, since the process was more intuitive and learned over time with him. It took a revelation to explain how to receive revelation.

11 *it was expedient . . . but you feared*. Translating was the right thing when he began, but that time had passed and it was no longer “expedient.” He may have been able to translate more, but he “feared” and quit. Letting our fears paralyze us or stall us can make us less useful in the kingdom. Dealing with our fears and overcoming them enable us to be a more flexible tool in the Lord’s hands.

12 *neither of you have I condemned*. Like many parents who let their children try things even though they know how it will turn out, the Lord allowed Oliver to experience this even though he knew Oliver would struggle. But the struggle is often the point of the activity. Oliver learned a great lesson from this experience and so can all of us by reading about it. It especially strengthened his testimony of Joseph’s calling and of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon, to which he will bear witness all his life. His ‘failure’ is thus not condemned by God or by us but used for the greater good of the Church as a whole.

14 *Stand fast*. This phrase means to take an unyielding position. Oliver is thus counseled to be unyielding in the work the Lord has called him to and promised to be “lifted up at the last day.”

## Results

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Oliver returned to being Joseph’s scribe for the remainder of the Book of Mormon and there is no indication that he attempted further translation efforts with the Book of Mormon. However, Oliver gained significant respect for Joseph’s gift, which he retained all of his life.<sup>44</sup> He bore testimony of Joseph’s prophetic gifts all the rest of his life. Oliver did have part in other translation efforts, such as the Bible and Book of Abraham, but whether he even played the same role as Joseph seems unlikely. Still, he will soon see and converse with angels, prophets, and the Lord himself. Oliver learned for himself what the voice of God sounded like.

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<sup>44</sup> See Oliver Cowdery’s description of the translation experience at the end of Joseph Smith-History: “These were days never to be forgotten—to sit under the sound of a voice dictated by the inspiration of heaven.”

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