

Doctrine and Covenants 18

Lesson 9: Come, Follow Me, Doctrine and Covenants, 28 February 2025

David A. LeFevre

Introduction

The translation work was finished by 1 July 1828, in the small Whitmer home, and Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery, and Martin Harris applied for a copyright for the book on 11 June 1829. After the three and eight witnesses saw and testified of the plates, Joseph began to arrange for printing of the book, secured by a note from Martin Harris against his farm.

Summary Chronology

- **Early June 1829** (Fayette, NY) – The “word of the Lord” instructed Joseph and Oliver to ordain each other elders as well as perform other ordinances once those baptized could be assembled and approved their ordination. (This happened on 6 April 1830.)
- **About 4-14 June 1829** (Fayette, NY) – D&C 18 was received about this time for Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer.
- **Thu, 11 Jun 1829** (Utica, NY) – Richard R. Lansing, clerk of the Northern District Court in Utica, New York, entered Joseph Smith’s copyright application, including the title page, for the Book of Mormon, probably filed by Martin Harris. Joseph traveled there and back, pausing the translation for several days.
- **Early to mid-Jun 1829** (Palmyra and Rochester, NY) – Martin Harris, Joseph, and Oliver began to look for a printer for the Book of Mormon, going to several in Palmyra and Rochester. After first turning them down, Egbert B. Grandin of Palmyra finally decided to take it on with Harris’ land as a guarantee. The trip to Rochester was another pause in the translation work.
- **End of Jun 1829** (Fayette, NY) – The three witnesses were shown the plates and had a divine witness to the truth of the Book of Mormon.
- **End of Jun 1829** (Palmyra, NY) – After the three witnesses, Joseph Smith showed the plates to the eight witnesses near the Smith family log home in Manchester.
- **Fri, 26 Jun 1829** (Palmyra, NY) – Egbert B. Grandin published the title page of the Book of Mormon in his newspaper, the *Wayne Sentinel*.
- **About Wed, 1 Jul 1829** (Fayette, NY) – The Book of Mormon translation was completed, according to David Whitmer, and the plates returned to Moroni.

Doctrine and Covenants 18

Setting

Chronologically speaking, D&C 18 is out of order in the Doctrine and Covenants, being received shortly after Joseph and Oliver arrived in Fayette in early June 1829. It appears to stand in time between D&C 14 and 15, revelations to David and John Whitmer. In Revelation Book 1, it is called “A Revelation to Oliver David & the twelve.”¹

This date of early June is confirmed by a letter from Oliver Cowdery to Hyrum Smith, dated 14 June 1829, which quoted parts of this section, including: “remember the worth of souls is great in the sight of God behold the Lord Your God suffered death upon the cross after the manner of the flesh wherefore he suffered the pains of all men that all men might repent and come unto him.”²

¹ *JSP*, D1:69; Revelation, June 1829-B [D&C 18], [Historical Introduction](#). Revelation Book 1 lists it as the second of the June 1829 revelations in the [index](#), between D&C 14 and 15, though the pages with the text of the revelation are not extant.

² Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 2:403.

Joseph's history said in relation to this period of time that they were in the Whitmer home, that one day they:

Had not long been engaged in solemn and fervent prayer, when the word of the Lord, came unto us in the Chamber, commanding us; that I should ordain Oliver Cowdery to be an Elder in the Church of Jesus Christ, and that he also should ordain me to the same office, ~~accordin~~ and then <to> ordain others as it should be made known unto us from time to time: we were however commanded to defer this our ordination untill, such times, as it should be practicable to have our brethren, who had been and who should be baptized, assembled together, when we must have their sanction to our thus proceeding to ordain each other, and have them decide by vote whether they were willing to accept us as spiritual teachers, or not, when also we were commanded to bless bread and break it with them, and to take wine, bless it, and drink it with them, afterward proceed to ordain each other according to commandment, then call out such men as the Spirit should dictate, and ordain them, and then attend to the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost, upon all those whom we had previously baptized; doing all things in the name of the Lord.³

This is apparently the revelation referred to in D&C 128:21 where “the voice of God in the chamber of old Father Whitmer” declared many things to them. As seen above, this future meeting included the sacrament, ordaining others to the priesthood, and the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost. Though this revelation in Fayette was not recorded, many of its principles ended up as inspired direction in Section 20 later. About the same time as this unrecorded revelation, D&C 18 was received.

This experience in the chamber and other revelations had begun to make it clear that a church was to be organized. Oliver appears to have come to Joseph with questions about how that was to happen. He may have asked questions such as: ‘What will be the beliefs of this church? What will be our roles? What will be the rules governing the church?’ And others of a similar nature. These types of questions seem to be what prompted D&C 18, which Joseph’s history describes as illustrating “the nature of our calling to this Priesthood as well as that of others who were yet to be sought after.”⁴

Documents and Publication

This was first published as Chapter 15 of the 1833 Book of Commandments, which is the oldest extant version (it was in Revelation Book 1 but those pages are now missing). It was Section 43 in the 1835 and 1844 Doctrine and Covenants.

Outline

1. Rely upon the Book of Mormon (1-9)
2. The worth of souls (10-16)
3. The name of Christ (17-25)
4. The mission of the Twelve (26-32)
5. The words of Christ (33-36)
6. Search out the Twelve (37-39)
7. Keep my commandments (40-47)

Summary

This revelation taught Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer about the great worth of souls to the Lord and more about taking his name upon them. Oliver was told to rely on the Book of Mormon to help start the new church. They were commissioned to call Twelve Disciples, using the Book of Mormon term, which later became Twelve Apostles. The important thing for them was to keep God’s commandments so they could continue in their callings to bring the kingdom to the world.

Rely Upon the Book of Mormon (1-9)

1 Now, behold, because of the thing which you, my servant Oliver Cowdery, have desired to know of me, I give unto you these words:

2 Behold, I have manifested unto you, by my Spirit in many instances, that the things which you have written are true; wherefore you know that they are true.

³ *JSP*, H1:326; History, 1838-1856, vol. A-1 [23 December 1805-30 August 1834], [27](#).

⁴ *JSP*, H1:328; History, 1838-1856, vol. A-1 [23 December 1805-30 August 1834], [27](#).

3 And if you know that they are true, behold, I give unto you a commandment, that you rely upon the things which are written;

4 For in them are all things written concerning the foundation of my church, my gospel, and my rock.

5 Wherefore, if you shall build up my church, upon the foundation of my gospel and my rock, the gates of hell shall not prevail against you.

6 Behold, the world is ripening in iniquity; and it must needs be that the children of men are stirred up unto repentance, both the Gentiles and also the house of Israel.

7 Wherefore, as thou hast been baptized by the hands of my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., according to that which I have commanded him, he hath fulfilled the thing which I commanded him.

8 And now, marvel not that I have called him unto mine own purpose, which purpose is known in me; wherefore, if he shall be diligent in keeping my commandments he shall be blessed unto eternal life; and his name is Joseph.

9 And now, Oliver Cowdery, I speak unto you, and also unto David Whitmer, by the way of commandment; for, behold, I command all men everywhere to repent, and I speak unto you, even as unto Paul mine apostle, for you are called even with that same calling with which he was called.

Commentary

With the Book of Mormon translation mostly done, the Lord began to teach Oliver how the book would be used. More than just proof of Joseph’s prophetic calling, Oliver was to look through it to find important doctrinal and administrative guidance to help establish the new church that was soon to be organized.

1 ***the thing which you, my servant Oliver Cowdery, have desired to know***. The question Oliver asked was not given in the text or the history, but given the context of just having received the Melchizedek Priesthood, starting to baptize others, and examining the answers the Lord gave, the question was probably something like, ‘Now that we have the authority, how shall we run the church?’

2 ***by my Spirit in many instances***. This was before Oliver’s experience as one of the three witnesses, so his testimony of “the things which you have written,” meaning the Book of Mormon translation, was based on many confirmations of the Holy Spirit, as well as things he witnessed as part of the work of translation, but not yet on a personal manifestation.

3 ***rely upon the things which are written***. Oliver was called to rely on the Book of Mormon for direction on running the fledgling church. This included taking the words of the Book of Mormon and creating a document called “Articles of the Church of Christ” that gave direction about how various things should be done, such as the sacrament, baptisms, and ordinations. The document also includes several quotes from D&C 18 and other early revelations.⁵ See the introduction to D&C 20 (in two weeks) for more details.

4 text note:

1833 concerning my church, my gospel, and my rock

1835 concerning the foundation of my church, my gospel, and my rock

The 1835 change emphasized the early nature of the church here, since it was not yet officially organized until the next spring.

4 ***my church, my gospel, and my rock***. The Book of Mormon contains essential information about how the Church of Christ should function, the basic principles of the gospel, the principle of revelation, and especially the doctrine of the Atonement. Verse 5 relates these three terms to each other.

5 text note:

1833 build up my church, and my gospel, and my rock, the gates of hell shall not prevail

1835 build up my church upon the foundation of my gospel and my rock, the gates of hell shall not prevail

When the revelation was given, of course, there was yet no church, but this prepared them for that task. Like the change in v. 4, this edit in the 1835 edition (retained today) made it clear that it was the Church that was built up, not all three items, and that the Church is built on the foundation of the good news of the gospel of Christ and the rock of revelation and priesthood authority.

7 ***thou hast been baptized by the hands of my servant Joseph Smith***. Oliver and Joseph baptized each other less than one month previous (D&C 13).

8 ***I have called him unto mine own purpose***. Oliver struggled during this time (and again in Kirtland) with humility comparing himself to Joseph. Being there for many foundational events, he considered himself nearly equal to Joseph Smith. The Lord was trying to teach him here (again) that Joseph’s calling was different from his own, with a special purpose.

⁵ See Faulring, “An Examination,” and *JSP*, D1:368-370 for details about the creation and use of the Articles of the Church of Christ, which is partly recorded in Revelation Book 1, [23-24](#).

9 *Oliver Cowdery, I speak unto you, and also unto David Whitmer*. The first eight verses were directed at Oliver alone; now the rest of the revelation is to both men.

9 *even as unto Paul mine apostle*. Oliver's and David's callings were compared to Paul's, the apostle to the Gentiles. Several meanings are possible. First, they were to take the gospel to the Gentiles, as did Paul. Second, they were called as special witnesses of Christ, to bear testimony of him and his work throughout the world. And third, this alludes to their future role as "apostles," using the New Testament meaning of that term as one sent with authority; these two men were never part of the Quorum of the Twelve but had authority over that initial group (see below).

The Worth of Souls (10-16)

10 Remember the worth of souls is great in the sight of God;

11 For, behold, the Lord your Redeemer suffered death in the flesh; wherefore he suffered the pain of all men, that all men might repent and come unto him.

12 And he hath risen again from the dead, that he might bring all men unto him, on conditions of repentance.

13 And how great is his joy in the soul that repenteth!

14 Wherefore, you are called to cry repentance unto this people.

15 And if it so be that you should labor all your days in crying repentance unto this people, and bring, save it be one soul unto me, how great shall be your joy with him in the kingdom of my Father!

16 And now, if your joy will be great with one soul that you have brought unto me into the kingdom of my Father, how great will be your joy if you should bring many souls unto me!

Commentary

How great a value does the Lord place on one soul? How does the repentance of a single person impact him? These verses explain.

10 *the worth of souls is great in the sight of God*. This short verse is perhaps the most significant theological point of this revelation. While various Internet estimates of the worth of body range from thousands to millions of dollars, that is not God's point here. "There is no means of measurement that can adequately place a value on a human soul. As created by God they are immortal; as redeemed by the blood of Christ they can become as God is. That which is eternal denies measurement."⁶

11 *text note*:

1833 behold the Lord your God suffered death

1835 behold the Lord your Redeemer suffered death

While both titles are correct, the change to "Redeemer" in 1835 fits the context perfectly, because his suffering, death, and resurrection are the ultimate act of redemption.

11 *your Redeemer suffered death*. The Lord stated that "the worth of souls is great" to him (verse 10), then he explained just how great. First, he "suffered death" for them. Next, he suffered "the pain of all men," meaning every pain and suffering ever experienced in life, an allusion to the expansion of the Atonement to include experiences in Gethsemane *and* on the cross. Third, "he hath risen again from the dead" (verse 12) and triumphed over death and hell. This he did "that all men might repent and come unto him."

13 *how great is his joy in the soul that repenteth!* God finds no joy in punishing us for our sins but finds infinite and eternal joy when we repent and let the Atonement work in our lives to change us toward our eternal potential. "No doubt we underestimate the price the Lord paid to make repentance possible, and we similarly underestimate the joy he feels when we take advantage of his sacrifice and do repent."⁷

14 *cry repentance unto this people*. Because repentance is the first step toward any hope of salvation, Oliver and David were admonished to make it their cry to the world. This was the charge given in nearly all early revelations.

15 *labor all your days . . . and bring, save it be one soul*. Several have pointed out that the one soul we must first bring to God is our own, and that is true enough. But the challenge to these early brethren was to bring others to God, to teach change of life, and then their joy would be great with that convert in God's kingdom. Jesus paid the ultimate price for our souls; in return, he expects us to share that message with others and help them do the same.

⁶ McConkie and Ostler, *Revelations*, 138.

⁷ Robinson and Garrett, *A Commentary*, 1:106.

15 *how great shall be your joy with him*. Just as God rejoices over a single repentant soul (v. 13), so we will rejoice together in any role that we have in bringing another soul to that repentant experience. God invites us to experience with others the same joy he feels as we repent.

16 *how great will be your joy if you should bring many souls unto me*. Whether we bring one or millions to Christ, the wording of verses 15 and 16 are the same, reflecting that the joy is the same—infinite joy cannot be multiplied!

The Name of Christ (17-25)

17 Behold, you have my gospel before you, and my rock, and my salvation.

18 Ask the Father in my name in faith, believing that you shall receive, and you shall have the Holy Ghost, which manifesteth all things which are expedient unto the children of men.

19 And if you have not faith, hope, and charity, you can do nothing.

20 Contend against no church, save it be the church of the devil.

21 Take upon you the name of Christ, and speak the truth in soberness.

22 And as many as repent and are baptized in my name, which is Jesus Christ, and endure to the end, the same shall be saved.

23 Behold, Jesus Christ is the name which is given of the Father, and there is none other name given whereby man can be saved;

24 Wherefore, all men must take upon them the name which is given of the Father, for in that name shall they be called at the last day;

25 Wherefore, if they know not the name by which they are called, they cannot have place in the kingdom of my Father.

Commentary

Many scriptures speak of the power of the name of Christ or the need to take his name upon us. These verses offer details about the significance of those phrases.

17 *you have my gospel before you*. A reminder to study the Book of Mormon because of the fulness of the gospel that it contains.

17 *my gospel . . . my rock, and my salvation*. Verses 4-5 speak of the Church, the gospel, and the rock. This verse drops Church and adds “my salvation.” It’s interesting that Jesus’ name in Hebrew and Aramaic means “salvation.” So we have the good news of Christ, the authority of Christ, and the gift of salvation through Jesus, which gift is represented in the very meaning of his name given by an angel to his mother and her husband (Luke 1:31; Matthew 1:21).

18 *you shall have the Holy Ghost, which manifesteth all things*. Book of Mormon language permeates the Doctrine and Covenants at this time—no surprise given how Joseph had been immersed in it for the last few weeks and so the Lord used that language to teach him and tie together his revelations with that book. In a number of scriptures they had translated in the previous two months, the Holy Ghost manifested heavenly things to mortal man (e.g., Jacob 7:12; 3 Nephi 16:4; Moroni 8:9; Moroni 10:4). Here the promise was that with faith and prayer, “all things which are expedient” would be made known.

19 *faith, hope, and charity*. These three attributes are combined in 1 Corinthians 13, Alma 7, Ether 12, and Moroni 7, 8, and 10. D&C 4 and 12 both mentioned them together as well. This reference is the last mention of them together in the Doctrine and Covenants. The order is important: we begin with the gift of faith, which gives us hope for a better life, salvation, resurrection, and more, then we exercise charity as we turn our faith and hope outward to others.⁸

20 *Contend against no church*. This basic attitude was advocated early by the Lord—even before there was a Church—and remains the general practice of Latter-day Saints today. Even as people protest our faith outside of the Conference Center during General Conference, create podcasts, videos, and books speaking out against the Church, and teach in their churches how to combat “Mormonism,” we belittle no other faith and in fact, work hard to build good relationships and partner with those in other churches to do good in our communities and across the world.

20 *save it be the church of the devil*. Much is said about this “church” in 1 Nephi 13-14, chapters that Joseph and Oliver would have recorded about the same time as this revelation was received. The Book of Mormon teaches that this church is not a religious organization or denomination but rather any group that fights against God. “This is instruction to us to contend against all evil, that which is opposed to righteousness and truth.”⁹

⁸ Robinson and Garrett, *A Commentary*, 1:106.

⁹ McConkie and Garrett, *Revelations*, 139, quoting Joseph Fielding Smith.

21 **Take upon you the name of Christ.** This is another prominent Book of Mormon theme, where we learn that we must be called by his name to enjoy salvation (Mosiah 5:8-10); that it involves making covenants (Mosiah 6:2; also verse 23 here) and repentance (Alma 34:38); that it is a manifestation of church membership (Mosiah 25:23; Alma 1:19; 46:14); and that it is by his name that we are called at the last day, the day of judgment (3 Nephi 27:5; see also verse 24 in this section). Taking his name means being adopted into Christ's family (who becomes our spiritual father) and thus receiving all the blessings of that association, including favor and inheritance.

22 **baptized in my name.** D&C 18 is the first time baptism is given as a commandment in the Doctrine and Covenants. References are in verses 7, 22, 29, 41, and 42, though of course the word is used over one hundred times in the Book of Mormon and nearly the same number in the New Testament.

23 **Jesus Christ is the name which is given of the Father.** Because Jesus accomplished the Atonement, the Father has us act and do all things in his name. Jesus is speaking these words through Joseph Smith but he is clear that he acts in humility and only under the authority and direction of the Father.

24 **in that name shall they be called at the last day.** Mosiah 5:7-12 explains this concept well. We take upon ourselves his name and that becomes the name by which we are called, perhaps something like a team name or organization name (the church of Christ, perhaps). Benjamin taught that if we are not called by Christ's name, then we are not on the right hand of God, but are instead called by some other name ('Satan'?) and are found on the left hand of God. We have to retain Christ's name by repenting and staying free from sin, then we can "hear and know the voice by which [we] shall be called, and also, the name by which he shall call [us]" (Mosiah 5:12).

25 **know not the name by which they are called.** Imagine going your whole life not knowing your own name. People would call out to you and you would have no idea they were talking to you. So it will be at the judgment if we make covenants and are thus called by the name of Christ, but then we do not endure to the end (v. 22). If that is our fate, when we are called at the last day, we will have lost our association with Christ's name, and will not recognize that we are being called, thereby forfeiting our place in God's kingdom. To keep our association with his name, we must remain faithful to our covenants. The alternative is to hear the Lord say, "Ye never knew me; depart from me ye that work iniquity" (JST Matthew 7:23).

The Mission of the Twelve (26-32)

26 And now, behold, there are others who are called to declare my gospel, both unto Gentile and unto Jew;

27 Yea, even twelve; and the Twelve shall be my disciples, and they shall take upon them my name; and the Twelve are they who shall desire to take upon them my name with full purpose of heart.

28 And if they desire to take upon them my name with full purpose of heart, they are called to go into all the world to preach my gospel unto every creature.

29 And they are they who are ordained of me to baptize in my name, according to that which is written;

30 And you have that which is written before you; wherefore, you must perform it according to the words which are written.

31 And now I speak unto you, the Twelve—Behold, my grace is sufficient for you; you must walk uprightly before me and sin not.

32 And, behold, you are they who are ordained of me to ordain priests and teachers; to declare my gospel, according to the power of the Holy Ghost which is in you, and according to the callings and gifts of God unto men;

Commentary

Joseph and Oliver and David were aware of the Twelve Apostles in the New Testament, and after the translation of the Book of Mormon, they were newly aware of the Twelve Disciples in 3 Nephi, called by the resurrected Jesus. The Lord explained that this would also be the pattern in our dispensation, and moreover, Oliver and David (and later Martin Harris) would be the ones that will call the Twelve. Interestingly, this won't happen for about six years, but when it does, they cite this revelation as their authority and as the starting point for the new Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

26 **there are others who are called.** The Lord already knew these men that would serve in this position, and like Jeremiah 1:5, had already called them, even though they didn't know it yet.

27 **the Twelve shall be my disciples.** It's 1829 and there is yet no Church, no published Book of Mormon, and only a basic understanding of the priesthood. Yet the Lord gave direction to a group of men that will not even be called for six more years—the Quorum of the Twelve—so they would understand their calling when it came.

27 **take upon them my name will full purpose of heart.** Another phrase that appears and is explained by the Book of Mormon is taking on Christ's name with "full purpose of heart." To do this is to have no hypocrisy but to sincerely repent (2 Nephi 31:13; 3 Nephi 12:24) and cleave unto God (Jacob 6:5). It means to serve him with all diligence, according to his will and not ours (Mosiah 7:33). This is the first qualification of a member of the Twelve, which then qualifies them to preach the gospel (v. 28) and be ordained with authority to baptize (v. 29).

28 **called to into all the world to preach my gospel.** While this remains the call of the Twelve today, they bear more administrative responsibilities for the Church than did the original Twelve in the 1830s, who spent much time on missions in many parts of the world declaring the gospel and baptizing those who believed.

30 **that which is written before you.** Referring to the Book of Mormon, which is now written and available to read and study, at least to a few, until it is printed. The Twelve are to know and use the Book of Mormon in their ministry.

31 **my grace is sufficient for you.** See 2 Corinthians 12:9; Ether 12:26-27; and especially Moroni 10:32. Grace is an important doctrine of the latter-day gospel, the gift of God that makes all work in the kingdom possible. It is both sufficient to help us, and sufficient to satisfy us and meet our needs.

32 **ordain priests and teachers.** Again, no church yet and no formal priesthood. But the Book of Mormon speaks of priests and teachers, so the charge to the Twelve is given in the context of what Joseph and Oliver know at this time.

The Words of Christ (33-36)

33 And I, Jesus Christ, your Lord and your God, have spoken it.

34 These words are not of men nor of man, but of me; wherefore, you shall testify they are of me and not of man;

35 For it is my voice which speaketh them unto you; for they are given by my Spirit unto you, and by my power you can read them

one to another; and save it were by my power you could not have them;

36 Wherefore, you can testify that you have heard my voice, and know my words.

Commentary

It was important to emphasize the source of the revelation; it did not come from a mortal man, though a mortal man spoke the words and another mortal man wrote them down. It was the voice of Christ, heard again on the earth through his authorized servants.

33 **I, Jesus Christ . . . have spoken it.** As with other revelations, this is being received with Joseph looking into his seer stone in his hat. Miraculous as that is, the brethren still hear Joseph's voice dictating the words to them. So the Lord reassures them that the words Joseph dictates are not from him, but are of divine origin.

34 **you shall testify they are of me.** Because they have received this witness, Oliver and David are to testify that the words are from God, not man. "These words" can refer to this revelation, to other revelations, and to the Book of Mormon.

35 **given by my Spirit unto you.** The power that is used is not magic or mysterious, but the Spirit of God speaking through God's prophet.

35 **text note:**

1833

For they are given by my Spirit unto you

1835 for it is my voice which speaketh them unto you: for they are given by my Spirit unto you

The clarification that it is God's voice and not Joseph's was added in the 1835 edition.

35 **by my power you can read them one to another.** It is clear that the Lord wanted these revelations written down, copied, and eventually printed, because they were to be read together—in groups, meetings, classes, and families. How blessed we are to have the scriptures that let us hear the voice of God directly through the printed page (or our devices) and through the Holy Ghost that comes to us as a result of reading them individually and together.

36 **testify that you have heard my voice.** By the power of the Spirit, they have received and together read the words, which allows them to testify to the world that they are of the Lord. Later, the Lord will tell the young Church, "whether by mine own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the same" (D&C 1:38).

Search Out the Twelve (37-39)

37 And now, behold, I give unto you, Oliver Cowdery, and also unto David Whitmer, that you shall search out the Twelve, who shall have the desires of which I have spoken;

39 And when you have found them you shall show these things unto them.

38 And by their desires and their works you shall know them.

Commentary

Returning to the topic of the Twelve, Oliver and David were given more instructions about this critical task that is one of the most important steps in the organization of the Church in our day.

37 *search out the Twelve*. Oliver and David (and later Martin Harris also) were given the charge by the Lord to find the Twelve apostles. This would not happen until 1835, after Zion's Camp, but then these brethren kept that assignment, and worked with Joseph Smith to call and ordain the original twelve apostles.

38 *by their desires and works you shall know them*. Imagine being tasked with finding Twelve modern apostles to shoulder the burden of the Church in the last days? The guidelines the Lord gave are simple yet profound—you'll know the Twelve both by the desires of their hearts and their commitment to serve in the kingdom, which is a manifestation of their inward desires.

39 *show these things unto them*. Once the Twelve were found, this revelation would serve as a witness that the Lord had planned ahead for their call and prepared them for service.

Keep My Commandments (40-47)

40 And you shall fall down and worship the Father in my name.

they may come unto repentance, and that they may come unto the kingdom of my Father.

41 And you must preach unto the world, saying: You must repent and be baptized, in the name of Jesus Christ;

45 Wherefore, the blessings which I give unto you are above all things.

42 For all men must repent and be baptized, and not only men, but women, and children who have arrived at the years of accountability.

46 And after that you have received this, if you keep not my commandments you cannot be saved in the kingdom of my Father.

43 And now, after that you have received this, you must keep my commandments in all things;

47 Behold, I, Jesus Christ, your Lord and your God, and your Redeemer, by the power of my Spirit have spoken it. Amen.

44 And by your hands I will work a marvelous work among the children of men, unto the convincing of many of their sins, that

Commentary

The final verses of the revelation seem to be directed to the future Twelve disciples but the counsel given applies equally to Oliver, David, and us today.

40 *you shall fall down and worship the Father*. Though Christ is speaking to them, he always turns their attention to the Father, the true direction of our worship (compare Revelation 5:8, 14). When we realize how personal and intimate God's plan of salvation is for each of us, we are compelled to fall down in humility and show our gratitude to him in perfect humility. Likewise, he declares that this will be the reaction of the Twelve when they are called by the Lord. Only men of great humility could successfully serve.

41 *You must repent and be baptized*. The core mission of the Twelve is to declare to the world the necessity of repentance and baptism to a fallen world.

42 *not only men, but women, and children*. Even before the Church was organized, it was a family organization, with women and children right there with the men.

43 *keep my commandments in all things*. The other responsibility of the Twelve is to be obedient to everything God asks of them. They cannot just be good preachers or good administrators; they must be true disciples of Christ to be his witnesses.

44 *unto the convincing of many of their sins*. Repentance is constantly the theme, and the Twelve, along with all of us, have the responsibility to preach the truth such that the Holy Spirit can teach people of their own sins and the need to repent. It's important to note that convincing many of their sins is "a marvelous work."

45 *blessings . . . above all things*. These high expectations carry with them high blessings: “eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him” (1 Corinthians 2:9).

46 *after that you have received this*. With knowledge and blessings come responsibility—this revealed information must motivate us to greater obedience or we risk our own salvation.

47 *your Redeemer*. The revelation closes with the declaration that brings all readers back to the Atonement and the author of our salvation, Jesus himself.

Results

There wasn’t even a church organized when the Lord set in motion the call to the Twelve Apostles. Their critical role was explained well—teach repentance and baptism, the Atonement of Christ, and the great worth of souls.

Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris became the Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon at the end of June 1829 and kept this assignment to call the first Quorum of the Twelve in 1835. They then ordained these men by the authority they had received from the Lord as apostles themselves, though they were never members of the Quorum. Many, many people today have received their priesthood through a line that includes one of these first Twelve and the Three Witnesses who ordained them.

The account of the calling of the twelve comes from an entry in the Church’s history, dated 14 February 1835,¹⁰ and titled “a Meeting to choose the “Twelve.” Joseph Smith called the meeting “because God had commanded it, and it was made known to him by vision and by the Holy Spirit.” After recognizing those that had marched with Zion’s Camp, Joseph asked the three witnesses of the Book of Mormon (Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris) “to pray, each one, and then proceed to choose twelve men from the church as Apostles to go to all nations, kindreds, tongues and people.” After they prayed, they were each blessed by the First Presidency, then they selected the original Twelve Apostles of the latter days: Lyman E. Johnson, Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, Orson Hyde, David W. Patten, Luke Johnson, William E. McLellin, John F. Boynton, Orson Pratt, William Smith, Thomas B. Marsh, and Parley P Pratt. The three witnesses then put their hands upon each of these men’s heads and blessed and ordained them.¹¹ Each blessing is recorded in the history, which are interesting to read.

After all were ordained and set apart, Oliver Cowdery stood and gave them their charge, citing D&C 18 as the revelation that led them to extend these calls. “Our minds have been on a constant stretch,” he said, “to find who these twelve were. When the time should come we could not tell, but we sought the Lord by fasting and prayer, to have our lives prolonged to see this day, to see you and to take a retrospect of the difficulties through which we have passed, but, having seen the day, it becomes my duty to deliver to you a charge.” He then read D&C 18:27-28, and asked, “have you desired this ministry with all your hearts? If you have desired it, you are called of God, not of man, to go into all the world.” He then read the verses that speak to the Twelve (perhaps 29-47?) and gave them many other charges concerning their calling and their behavior. He reminded them that they had been ordained by those “who had their power and authority from an angel.” After a lengthy discourse, “He then took them seperately by the hand, and said, Do you with full purpose of heart take part in this ministry, to proclaim the gospel with all diligince, with these your brethren, according to the tenor and intent of the charge you have received? Each of whom answered in the affirmative.”

Works Referenced

For text notes:

RB1 – Revelation Book 1, from *JSP*, MRB:8-405.

EMS – The Evening and the Morning Star, June 1832-May 1833, from *JSP*, R2:202-299.

1833 – Book of Commandments, printed in 1833, from *JSP*, R2:13-193.

1835 – Doctrine and Covenants, printed in 1835, from *JSP*, R2:311-635.

From the *Joseph Smith Papers* project:

¹⁰ History, 1838-1856, vol. B-1 [1 September 1834-2 November 1838], [564-566](#).

¹¹ Orson Pratt and Thomas B. Marsh were not present but were ordained later when they returned to Kirtland.

- JSP, MRB* – Jensen, Robin Scott, Robert J. Woodford, and Steven C. Harper, eds. *Manuscript Revelation Books*. Facsimile edition. First volume of the Revelations and Translations series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, edited by Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman. Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2009.
- JSP, R1* – Jensen, Robin Scott, Robert J. Woodford, and Steven C. Harper, eds. *Revelations and Translations, Volume 1: Manuscript Revelation Books*. Vol. 1 of the Revelations and Translations series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, edited by Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman. Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2011.
- JSP, R2* – Jensen, Robin Scott, Richard E. Turley, Jr., and Riley M Lorimer, eds. *Revelations and Translations, Volume 2: Published Revelations*. Vol. 2 of the Revelations and Translations series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, edited by Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman. Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2011.
- JSP, R3-1* – Skousen, Royal, and Robin Scott Jensen, eds. *Revelations and Translations, Volume 3, Part 1: Printer’s Manuscript of the Book of Mormon, 1 Nephi 1–Alma 35*. Facsimile edition. Part 1 of vol. 3 of the Revelations and Translations series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, edited by Ronald K. Esplin and Matthew J. Grow. Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2015.
- JSP, R3-2* – Skousen, Royal, and Robin Scott Jensen, eds. *Revelations and Translations, Volume 3, Part 2: Printer’s Manuscript of the Book of Mormon, Alma 36–Moroni 10*. Facsimile edition. Part 2 of vol. 3 of the Revelations and Translations series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, edited by Ronald K. Esplin and Matthew J. Grow. Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2015.
- JSP, R4* – Jensen, Robin Scott, and Brian M. Hauglid, eds. *Revelations and Translations, Volume 4: Book of Abraham and Related Manuscripts*. Facsimile edition. Vol. 4 of the Revelations and Translations series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, edited by Ronald K. Esplin, Matthew J. Grow, Matthew C. Godfrey, and R. Eric Smith. Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2018.
- JSP, R5* – Skousen, Royal, and Robin Scott Jensen, eds. *Revelations and Translations, Volume 5: Original Manuscript of the Book of Mormon*. Facsimile edition. Vol. 5 of the Revelations and Translations series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, edited by Matthew C. Godfrey, R. Eric Smith, Matthew J. Grow, and Ronald K. Esplin. Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2021.
- JSP, D1* – MacKay, Michael Hubbard, Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, Grant Underwood, Robert J. Woodford, and William G. Hartley, eds. *Documents, Volume 1: July 1828–June 1831*. Vol. 1 of the Documents series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, edited by Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, Richard Lyman Bushman, and Matthew J. Grow. Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2013.
- JSP, D2* – Godfrey, Matthew C., Mark Ashurst-McGee, Grant Underwood, Robert J. Woodford, and William G. Hartley, eds. *Documents, Volume 2: July 1831–January 1833*. Volume 2 of the Documents series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, edited by Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman. Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2013.
- JSP, D3* – Dirkmaat, Gerrit J., Brent M. Rogers, Grant Underwood, Robert J. Woodford, and William G. Hartley, eds. *Documents, Volume 3: February 1833–March 1834*. Vol. 3 of the Documents series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, edited by Ronald K. Esplin and Matthew J. Grow. Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2014.
- JSP, D4* – Godfrey, Matthew C., Brenden W. Rensink, Alex D. Smith, Max H Parkin, and Alexander L. Baugh, eds. *Documents, Volume 4: April 1834–September 1835*. Vol. 4 of the Documents series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, edited by Ronald K. Esplin and Matthew J. Grow. Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2016.
- JSP, D5* – Rogers, Brent M., Elizabeth A. Kuehn, Christian K. Heimburger, Max H Parkin, Alexander L. Baugh, and Steven C. Harper, eds. *Documents, Volume 5: October 1835–January 1838*. Vol. 5 of the Documents series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, edited by Ronald K. Esplin, Matthew J. Grow, and Matthew C. Godfrey. Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2017.
- JSP, D6* – Ashurst-McGee, Mark, David W. Grua, Elizabeth Kuehn, Alexander L. Baugh, and Brenden W. Rensink, eds. *Documents, Volume 6: February 1838–August 1839*. Vol. 6 of the Documents series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, edited by Ronald K. Esplin, Matthew J. Grow, and Matthew C. Godfrey. Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2017.

- JSP, H1* – Davidson, Karen Lynn, David J. Whittaker, Mark Ashurst-McGee, and Richard L. Jensen, eds. *Histories, Volume 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832–1844*. Vol. 1 of the Histories series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, edited by Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman. Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2012.
- JSP, H2* – Davidson, Karen Lynn, Richard L. Jensen, and David J. Whittaker, eds. *Histories, Volume 2: Assigned Historical Writings, 1831–1847*. Vol. 2 of the Histories series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, edited by Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman. Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2012.
- JSP, J1* – Jessee, Dean C., Mark Ashurst-McGee, and Richard L. Jensen, eds. *Journals, Volume 1: 1832–1839*. Vol. 1 of the Journals series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, edited by Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman. Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2008.
- JSP, J2* – Hedges, Andrew H., Alex D. Smith, and Richard Lloyd Anderson, eds. *Journals, Volume 2: December 1841–April 1843*. Vol. 2 of the Journals series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, edited by Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman. Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2011.

Other works:

- Allen, James B. and Glen M. Leonard, *The Story of the Latter-day Saints*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976.
- Allred, Mason Kamana, *Seeing*. Provo, UT: BYU Maxwell Institute and Deseret Book, 2004.
- Anderson, Richard Lloyd, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981.
- Backman, Milton V., *Joseph Smith's First Vision*, 2nd ed. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, Inc., 1980.
- Bennett, Richard E., *School of the Prophet*, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2010.
- Black, Susan Easton, *Inspirations & Insights from the Doctrine and Covenants: A Come, Follow Me Commentary*. American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2024.
- Black, Susan Easton, *Who's Who in the Doctrine & Covenants*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997.
- Black, Susan Easton and Andrew C. Skinner, eds., *Joseph: Exploring the Life and Ministry of the Prophet*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2005.
- Blumell, Lincoln H., Matthew J. Grey, and Andrew H. Hedges, eds., *Approaching Antiquity: Joseph Smith and the Ancient World*. Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Religious Studies Center, 2015.
- Brewster, Hoyt W., Jr., *Doctrine & Covenants Encyclopedia*. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1988.
- Bushman, Richard L., *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1984.
- Cannon, Donald Q., and Lyndon W. Cook, *Far West Record*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1983.
- The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, *Saints (1815-1846): The Standard of Truth* (vol. 1 of 4). Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2018.
- Cook, Lyndon W., *The Revelations of the Prophet Joseph Smith*. Provo, UT: Seventy’s Mission Bookstore, 1981.
- Draper, Richard D., Kent S. Brown, and Michael D. Rhodes, *The Pearl of Great Price: A Verse-by-Verse Commentary*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2005.
- Faulring, Scott H. "An Examination of the 1829 ‘Articles of the Church of Christ’ in Relation to Section 20 of the Doctrine and Covenants." *BYU Studies* 43, no. 4 (2004): [57-91](#).
- Garr, Arnold K., Donald Q. Cannon, and Richard O. Cowan, eds., *Encyclopedia of Latter-day Saint History*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000.
- Griffiths, Casey Paul, *Scripture Central Commentary on the Doctrine and Covenants* (4 vols). Springville, UT: CFI, 2024.
- Harper, Steven C., *First Vision: Memory and Mormon Origins*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2019.
- Harper, Steven C., *Joseph Smith’s First Vision*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2012.

- Harper, Steven C., *Making Sense of the Doctrine & Covenants*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2008.
- Jessee, Dean C., *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2002.
- Jessee, Dean C., *The Papers of Joseph Smith* (2 vols.). Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989, 1992.
- Johnson, Janiece, *Revelation*. Provo, UT: BYU Maxwell Institute and Deseret Book, 2024.
- MacKay, Michael Hubbard and Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light: Joseph Smith's Translation and Publication of the Book of Mormon*. Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2015.
- MacKay, Michael Hubbard and Nicholas J. Frederick, *Joseph Smith's Seer Stones*. Salt Lake City: BYU Religious Studies Center and Deseret Book, 2016.
- McConkie, Joseph Fielding, Craig J. Ostler, *Revelations of the Restoration*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000.
- Millet, Robert L. and Kent P. Jackson, *Studies in Scripture: The Doctrine and Covenants*. Sandy, UT: Randall Book Company, 1984.
- Proctor, Scot Facer and Maurine Jensen Proctor, eds., *The Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1996.
- Robinson, Stephen E., and H. Dean Garrett, *A Commentary on the Doctrine and Covenants* (4 vols.). Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2005.
- Skousen, Royal, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon*. Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 2004-2009.
- Skousen, Royal, *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text*. 2nd ed. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2022.
- Smith, Joseph, *History of the Church*. Edited by B. H. Roberts (7 vols). Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1980. Hereafter HC.
- Turley, Richard E. and William W. Slaughter, *How We Got the Doctrine and Covenants*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2012.
- Vogel, Dan, *Early Mormon Documents* (5 vols). Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996.
- Wood, Wilford C., *Joseph Smith Begins His Work* (2 vols). Salt Lake City: Wilford C. Wood, 1962.