

Doctrine and Covenants 89-92

David A. LeFevre

General Introduction

The first three months of 1833 were a time of change for Joseph Smith and the Church. In December 1832, Jesse Gause, second counselor in the presidency of the high priesthood, was excommunicated. Gause had literally walked away from the Church in late 1832, leaving an opening in the presidency. On 5 January 1833, Joseph Smith received a revelation calling his scribe, Frederick G. Williams, as the new counselor. On 8 March 1832, another revelation was received, calling for the two counselors in the presidency of the high priesthood to be equal in holding keys to Joseph Smith. Seven days later, the Lord commanded that the new counselor, President Williams, be added as a member of the United Firm, the body of men overseeing the property, holdings, printing, and financial interests of the Church. Then on 18 March 1833, at a conference of high priests, Sidney Rigdon and Frederick G. Williams were officially ordained as counselor/presidents, thus setting up the Quorum of the First Presidency as we have it today.

Meanwhile, in Missouri, trouble had been brewing for some time. The existing settlers were different from the members of the Church of Christ in almost every way. Socially, the Mormons were tight-knit and kept to themselves, causing a divide between them and the Missourians. Financially, the Mormons also kept to themselves, trading and dealing with one another, rather than integrating into the local economy. Politically, they were predominantly Democrats, while the southerners who made up the majority of the existing population in Jackson County were Whigs, and the settlers feared the Mormons gaining control of courts and political offices as their population increased. As northerners, the Mormons were not slave holders and many had strong opinions about the evils of slavery, but Missouri was a slave state, brought into the Union under that umbrella in 1820, which was supported by the predominantly southern settlers. And spiritually, the Saints had very different beliefs. Some had not kept their plans for Missouri to themselves as they had been instructed, and their proclamations that the Missourians were going to lose their farms and homes to the newcomers because it was God's will did not help relations.

These tensions and differences began to manifest themselves as early as spring 1832 when small groups vandalized Mormon properties and harassed church members. Throughout 1832 and early 1833, there was sporadic harassment—rocks thrown, windows broken, shots fired at homes, the burning of hay, and many insults. Tensions were building that would come to a head in the spring and summer of 1833, shortly after the revelations in this lesson were given.

Still, the work in Missouri progressed, especially the printing. William W. Phelps and Oliver Cowdery were hard at work printing *The Evening and the Morning Star*, with subscribers in several parts of the United States, and *The Book of Commandments*, for which they secured a copyright in February 1833.

The revelations received in the time period of this document brought further changes. The Word of Wisdom implemented a new standard for personal behavior that took many years to solidify but eventually became a hallmark for what it means to be a Latter-day Saint. Joseph Smith was nearing the end of a three-year effort to provide a new version of the Bible. Having learned much along the way about many important doctrinal topics, he had one more revelation related to the Apocrypha that happened in this period.

Summary Chronology

- **Sat, 5 Jan 1833** – Revelation (unpublished) received calling Frederick G. Williams as counselor in the presidency of the high priesthood, to replace Jesse Gause, Kirtland, Ohio.
- **Sun, 13 Jan 1833** – A conference of high priests was convened by Sidney Rigdon in Kirtland, to discuss the challenges they were having with leaders in Zion.
- **Tue-Wed, 22-23 Jan 1833** – The first meeting of the School of the Prophets, Kirtland.
- **Wed, 13 Feb 1833** – The copyright for the Book of Commandments was secured, Missouri.
- **Wed, 27 Feb 1833** – D&C 89 received in Kirtland.
- **Fri, 8 Mar 1833** – D&C 90 received in Kirtland.
- **Sat, 9 Mar 1833** – D&C 91 received in Kirtland.

- **Fri, 15 Mar 1833** – D&C 92 received in Kirtland.
- **Mon, 18 Mar 1833** – Sidney Rigdon and Frederick G. Williams ordained presidents of the high priesthood, counselors to Joseph Smith, equal in holding keys.

D&C 89 – A Word of Wisdom

Setting

Received Wednesday, 27 February 1833, Kirtland, Ohio (translating room, upstairs, Newel K. Whitney store).

No contemporary details were provided by any known parties, but later recollections provide some of the background behind this revelation. Brigham Young (who was not present but spoke of the circumstances from what others said, and was in those rooms many times) reported that because of heavy smoking and chewing of tobacco among the School of the Prophets being held upstairs in the Newel K. Whitney store where Joseph and Emma Smith were living, that Emma and others complained about the smoky air, mess, and stains left by those smoking and spitting tobacco juice on the floor. These valid complaints prompted Joseph Smith to ponder how servants of the Lord should act, and to query the Lord about the practice. Zebedee Coltrin remembered that Joseph came out of the translating room and read the revelation to over twenty members of the School of the Prophets in attendance that day. Joel Johnson added that it was in the evening.¹

There were many opinions on the consumption and use of alcohol especially in that day, but also tobacco, coffee, and tea. Many Christians were calling for a greatly reduced consumption of alcohol or even abstinence. In Kirtland, there was a Temperance Society with a membership of several hundred, which advocated against alcohol. Other publications of the time spoke of the health benefits of certain foods and drinks.²

But the reality was that most people drank alcohol in some form, in increasing amounts leading up to the 1830s. Tobacco was broadly used in the form of snuff, pipes, and chew, though the invention that made it widely popular—the cigarette—came just a few years after Joseph Smith’s death. Some considered it a miracle drug, fighting cancer, gout, ulcers, arrow wounds, flatulence, and more. Others considered it a poison and a danger to society like alcohol.³

These controversies and differences of opinion, which existed among Church members themselves as much as the general population, likely impacted the Prophet’s questions about these substances as he went to the Lord for guidance. Without the support of medical science we enjoy today, the Lord was their only source of good answers. “In the midst of this cultural shift, at the very moment when everyday people started to concern themselves with their own cleanliness and bodily health, the Word of Wisdom arrived to light the way.”⁴

Documents and Publication

The oldest copy is from SGN (113-115, about June 1833), with other copies in RB2 (49-51, about Feb-Mar 1833) and RB1 (167-168, about Apr 1833). It was first published as a broadsheet in Jan 1834, then in Eber Howe’s book, *Mormonism Unveiled* (227-229, between 1 Oct and 28 Nov 1834), then as Section 80 of the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants and as Section 81 in the 1844 Doctrine and Covenants.

Outline

- Reason for the revelation (1-4)
- Alcohol, tobacco, and hot drinks (5-9)
- Fruits, flesh, and grains (10-17)
- Blessings of obedience (18-21)

¹ Revelation, 27 February 1833 [D&C 89], *JSP*, D3:11-12.

² Revelation, 27 February 1833 [D&C 89], *JSP*, D3:12-14.

³ Harper, *Making Sense*, 322-323.

⁴ Jed Woodworth, “[The Word of Wisdom](#),” *Revelations in Context*.

Reason for the revelation (1-4)

1 ***A Word of Wisdom***. In previous scriptures and revelations, the phrase “word of wisdom” mostly appeared as a spiritual gift, in many scriptures in contrast to “the word of knowledge.”⁵

1 ***for the benefit of the council of high priests***. The oldest copy in Sidney Gilbert’s notebook has “for the benefit of the Saints in the last days,” but RB2 reads as does our current version. The council of high priests was the highest governing body in the Church in early 1833.

1 ***also the saints in Zion***. The revelation was given in Kirtland and addressed to those brethren in the School of the Prophets, but applied to “the church” as a whole, which included members in Missouri (Zion).

2 ***sent greeting; not by commandment or constraint***. See Results for how this was interpreted. The standard thinking that it was not a commandment at first and then later became one is a bit oversimplified, as many considered it a strong commandment as soon as it was received, but it’s true that it was not an expected standard for behavior for all members until the early twentieth century. However, even today, verses 5-9 are the expected standards to be lived by worthy members, while the teachings in verses 10-17 are still “not by commandment or constraint.”

2 ***by revelation and the word of wisdom***. See v. 1 commentary above. The information was clearly received by revelation and not just Joseph’s opinions on the health questions of his day.

2 ***the temporal salvation of all saints***. The Lord gave this not only for the benefit of the Saints in 1833 but for “all saints” in the future Church. The blessings of living these commandments are very self-evident today.

3 ***a principle with promise***. Some commandments are given because they are morally correct. These have promises that are both temporally beneficial (natural consequences) and spiritually (blessings for obedience).

3 ***adapted to the capacity of the weak and the weakest***. This is not to say that there is local or individual adaptation of the commandments then or now, but rather that what the Lord was revealing could be lived by Saints at any level of personal progression and previous experience. Many of these substances were highly addictive and require effort to discontinue, as new converts or returning members can often testify. The Lord’s assurance is that even “the weakest of all saints” can live these laws and enjoy these blessings.

4 ***thus saith the Lord unto you***. This appears to be where the actual revelation began. It’s not clear how vv. 1-3 fit into the first dictated revelation—were they added by Joseph Smith, by the scribe (probably Frederick G. Williams), or by the copyist?

4 ***evils and designs which do and will exist***. Looking at the world then, now, and in our future, these commandments were given specifically for the benefit of Latter-day Saints. In other dispensations, wine was commonly used with no interdiction from God, for example. But because of the evils of our day, the Lord moves his covenant people away from such things that might have been acceptable before.

4 ***this word of wisdom***. This is the third and last mention of the phrase that became the title of this revelation.

Alcohol, tobacco, and hot drinks (5-9)

5 ***wine or strong drink among you, behold it is not good***. Wine has a fairly low alcohol content, as does beer (both between 3-14%). “Strong drink” would include drinks like vodka (35-50%), whiskey (40-60%), rum (38-57%) or bourbon (51-79%).⁶ The opposite of “strong drink” today is “soft drink” which has no alcohol.

5 ***only in assembling yourselves together to offer up your sacraments***. The allowed exception in the revelation is sacrament wine, which according to D&C 27:2-4 and verse 6 was only to be with wine of their own making. It wasn’t until the early twentieth century that water was only used with the sacrament.

7 ***strong drinks are not for the belly, but for the washing***. In a day lacking antiseptics of any kind, alcohol was typically the best infection killer available. Even today, pure alcohol is used for sterilization and disinfection.

⁵ See 1 Corinthians 12:8; Moroni 10:9; D&C 46:17; also mentioned in D&C 50:1; 78:2; 88:118.

⁶ See <http://www.alcoholcontents.com/>.

Early Saints interpreted this quite literally, using cinnamon-infused whiskey to wash their bodies before participating in holy gatherings.⁷

8 ***tobacco is not for the body, neither for the belly.*** This clear injunction makes tobacco “not good for man,” but is permissible to use on wounded or sick animals “with judgment and skill.”

9 ***hot drinks are not for the body or belly.*** “Hot drinks” was interpreted by Joseph Smith himself to be coffee and tea.⁸

Fruits, flesh, and grains (10-17)

10 ***all wholesome herbs God hath ordained.*** “Herbs” had a broader meaning in 1833 than today, referring to all manner of vegetables and plants.⁹ The Church has no position on which plants are “wholesome” and which are not, so we are left to use our own judgment and inspiration (also true for everything in this section).

11 ***in the season thereof.*** Vegetables and fruits have seasons, though today with worldwide distribution, greenhouses, freezer storage, and more, we tend to be less impacted by seasonal availability than previous generations. Still, there is nothing like fresh corn or strawberries or (pick your personal favorite) coming straight from the garden. We can enjoy these with “prudence and thanksgiving.”

12 ***flesh . . . ordained for the use of man.*** I suspect few verses have generated more controversy or discussion in quorum meetings or class discussions than 12-13. Here are the things that are clear. The eating of meat is “ordained” by God for man, so there is no prohibition against it from the Lord (see D&C 49:18-19; 59:16-17). We are to express gratitude when we eat it.

12 ***they are to be used sparingly.*** In a day when meat was considered a daily necessity, the Lord offered that it could be eaten less often with a corresponding increase in other types of food (vv. 14-17).

13 ***they should not be used, only in times of winter, or of cold, or famine.*** Ironically for today’s language, “only” in 1833 could also mean ‘except for.’¹⁰ That does help this otherwise potentially confusing phrase to be understood that meats should be used “sparingly” (v. 12) except in winter, cold, or famine. It was more natural in the 1800s to butcher especially large animals in the colder months, as that way the meat could be preserved for a time before being eaten. With no refrigeration, a summer butchering would require immediate consumption (making for tough meat) or preserving (jerky), an arduous task.

14 ***All grain is ordained for the use of man and of beasts.*** Grains are “the staff of life,” a common phrase then and now. A staff is something that supports or holds up, meaning that grains support life.

15 ***only in times of famine and excess of hunger.*** The antecedent of “these” in this verse could be “grain” or all the beasts mentioned or just the wild animals (the last group mentioned). Many favor the latter interpretation—in other words, wild animals should be eaten in times of famine and hunger.¹¹

However, the flow of the text is about grains. See v. 13, which helps us see this should probably read ‘except in times.’ Thus, I read this potentially that grains are ordained for man’s use except in times of famine, when grains would be challenging to acquire. In those cases, we might need to rely more on animal flesh until crops could be restored.

16 ***the fruit of the vine.*** Though we typically use this phrase referring to grapes and wine, the context indicates a broader meaning, because grapes don’t grow “in the ground.” Many vegetables and fruits grow on vines; it could also be using that as a generic term for any fruiting plant.

17 ***wheat for man, and corn for the ox, and oats for the horse, and rye for the fowls and for swine.*** This doesn’t mean none of those listed cannot consume other things (the revelation just said [v. 12] flesh was ordained of God for man, for example), but that these are ‘primary’ grains for the different types of animals, examples of how grains can bless our lives.

⁷ Kate Holbrook, “Health in Their Navel and Marrow to Their Bones,” in Scott C. Esplin, Richard O. Cowan, and Rachel Cope, *You Shall Have My Word: Exploring the Text of the Doctrine and Covenants* (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2012), 193.

⁸ Revelation, 27 February 1833 [D&C 89], *JSP*, D3:14.

⁹ Robinson and Garrett, *A Commentary*, 3:147.

¹⁰ *JSP*, D3:21n124.

¹¹ Robinson and Garrett, *A Commentary*, 3:150; Harper, *Making Sense*, 327.

17 *barley . . . for mild drinks*. Non-alcoholic barley drinks were common at the time, either soaking barley grains or boiling roasted barley. Beer is also made from barley.

Blessings of obedience (18-21)

18 *health in their navel and marrow to their bones*. From Proverbs 3:8. Most modern translations interpret the word translated “navel” in the KJV as a generic reference to the body, but the specific meaning of the Hebrew word is ‘umbilical cord.’ How fascinating that today pregnant women are especially counseled to avoid alcohol, tobacco, and other substances, and eat well—in short, obey the Word of Wisdom—so as to give their babies the greatest opportunity for a healthy start to life.

19 *find wisdom and great treasures of knowledge*. Colossians 2:3, Paul lauds the Laodiceans as those who have “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” The Lord promised that those who keep the commandments of this revelation will have both wisdom and hidden treasures of knowledge.

20 *shall run and not be weary, and shall walk and not faint*. From Isaiah 40:31, where those who “wait upon the Lord” (meaning, who serve him; think “waiter”) will be renewed and carried as if on eagle’s wings so they can achieve this.

21 *the destroying angel shall pass by them*. From Exodus 12:23, where putting the blood of a lamb on their door posts would mark the children of Israel so when “the destroyer” came to take the firstborn, they would be safe. So today those who keep these commandments are generally more healthy, live longer, and have many other blessings that typify this promise.

Of course, the greater destruction of the last days is spiritual, and those who keep these commitments are blessed to avoid great spiritual destruction that comes upon many others in the world.¹²

Results

News of this revelation and its contents spread quickly, with many members making copies. One was Wilford Woodruff who copied it into the back of his personally-bound Book of Commandments. Within a few months, it was published as a broadsheet and widely available.

Application of the revelation was inconsistent by today’s requirement of living the Word of Wisdom as a prerequisite to temple attendance, but not surprising considering how ingrained these substances were in the culture. An early council decision required an office (priesthood) holder to be required to obey the Word of Wisdom once taught it. As early as February 1834, members who didn’t keep the commandment were chastised in conferences. Others picked up on the language that it was “for the benefit” of the Saints and “not by commandment or constraint,” and argued for an optional application. The counter argument cited the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants publication of the revelation, which put what is today vv. 1-3 as an italicized heading, not part of the actual revelation (thus making the softened disclaimer not from the Lord). In the end, some immediately and fully complied, while others, including Joseph and Emma Smith, continued to serve coffee and tea and consume certain alcoholic beverages, or Brigham Young, who used tobacco until 1860.¹³

Many felt that illness or other medical needs were exceptions to the commandment; even Joseph Smith gave whiskey to George A. Smith in 1834, when George was afflicted with cholera. Oliver Cowdery drank tea throughout 1837-1838 because of illness. Hardship or difficult times were reasons to temporarily set aside these commandments, such as when Joseph and his companions in Carthage jail drank a little wine to raise their spirits. Special and sacred occasions, such as weddings, were considered another potential exception, and of course, the sacrament. The most common exceptions tended to be tied to tea and wine. More often, the principles of the Word of Wisdom were used to speak out against drunkenness and advocate for sobriety, rather than complete abstinence.

With sermons and teachings focusing on alcohol, coffee, and tea, little emphasis was given to the food parts of the revelation. When it was spoken of, it was often tied to the idea of sparing the lives of animals, sometimes citing Joseph’s revision of Genesis 9 in the Bible translation that warned against the shedding of animal blood except as necessary, because “the blood of every beast will I require at your hands.”¹⁴

¹² Robinson and Garrett, *A Commentary*, 3:152.

¹³ Kate Holbrook, “Health in Their Navel and Marrow to Their Bones,” 194.

¹⁴ Thomas A. Wayment, *The Complete Joseph Smith Translation of the Old Testament* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2009), 54.

Clarification of terms was also needed from the beginning. When asked to define “hot drinks,” Joseph and Hyrum Smith specified coffee and tea in July 1833. Church leaders emphasized the promises of health, vigor, strength, and wisdom, and cited an increased presence of the Holy Spirit to those obeying the revelation.¹⁵ The revelation’s approach to the issues of the day was unique. Where other groups spoke against alcohol as something that caused terrible diseases, D&C 89 simply declared it not good. It gave clear positions and simple justifications and focused on the tie between care of the body and spiritual benefits.

Full observance took time. On 13 October 1882, President John Taylor was inspired to require adherence to D&C 89 for the whole Church. The next year (2 September 1883), the Quorum of the Twelve resolved to fully obey it, and the next month (11 October 1883), it became a condition for participating in the Schools of the Prophets of those days (priesthood leadership meetings).

Even with that, it still wasn’t until the early 1900s that general acceptance of the Word of Wisdom was a consistent standard throughout the Church. In the October 1908 General Conference, First Presidency member Anthon H. Lund announced that living the Word of Wisdom would be a requirement for anyone in a leadership position. In 1913, men being recommended for missionary service had to be fully compliant. In 1919, President Heber J. Grant required it for anyone receiving a temple recommend. And finally, in 1921, President Heber J. Grant sent a letter to all members calling for complete abstinence from alcohol, coffee, tea, and tobacco among all members. This led to today’s standards and practices relative to these items.¹⁶

D&C 90 – The First Presidency

Setting

Received Friday, 8 March 1833, Kirtland, Ohio.

In April 1830, Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery were called as the first and second elders of the Church, providing the initial organized leadership. Soon high priests were ordained, and the quorum or council of high priests was the governing body. Then in January 1832, Joseph Smith was ordained the President of the High Priesthood and then selected two counselors in March. One of them was Sidney Rigdon and the other Jesse Gause, who left the Church and was excommunicated in December 1832, replaced by Frederick G. Williams in January 1833. However, there were still questions about the role of this leadership team. Exactly one year after calling his counselors, Joseph Smith received a clarifying revelation, helping them see that this presidency functioned as its own quorum and that the counselors held keys like the president, though still under his direction and leadership. In short, this was another important step in the creation of the First Presidency as we know it today.¹⁷

Documents and Publication

The oldest copy is from NKW (about Mar 1833), with other copies in RB2 (51-55, about March 1833) and RB1 (168-170, about Apr 1833). It was first published as Section 84 in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants and as Section 85 in the 1844 Doctrine and Covenants.

Outline

- Joseph Smith and keys (1-5)
- Counselors hold equal keys (6-7)
- The word must go forth (8-11)
- Current priorities (12-18)
- Residences and an agent (19-27)

¹⁵ Revelation, 27 February 1833 [D&C 89], *JSP*, D3:14-19. Lorenzo Snow was one of these who taught that members should abstain from eating meat; see Kate Holbrook, “Health in Their Navel and Marrow to Their Bones,” 194.

¹⁶ Today the First Presidency includes drug abuse among the required things to avoid, which clearly is not in the text of the revelation but is the interpretation for our day. See “[The Word of Wisdom](#),” *Revelations in Context*; also Robinson and Garrett, *A Commentary*, 3:142-144.

¹⁷ Robinson and Garrett, *A Commentary*, 3:154-156; Revelation, 8 March 1833 [D&C 90], *JSP*, D3:24-27.

- Vienna Jaques (28-31)
- Work with those in Zion (32-37)

Joseph Smith and keys (1-5)

1 **my son**. The revelation was apparently given to Joseph Smith individually, though it answers questions on several subjects that involve others.

1 **thy sins are forgiven thee**. This is a common statement from the Lord in the Doctrine and Covenants, showing his mercy and compassion. That it was also the first thing the Lord told Joseph speaks to what was prominently on his mind and what the priority is with God.

2 **the keys of the kingdom given unto you**. The Prophet had received keys from several messengers and would yet receive more in the Kirtland temple in 1836. Keys turn locks and open doors that would otherwise remain closed to another without those keys.

2 **which kingdom is coming forth for the last time**. One other revelation had spoken of this being the “last times” (D&C 27:13), but this is the only mention in the D&C of the kingdom being given “for the last time.”

3 **the keys of this kingdom shall never been taken from you**. Because of his role at the head of this dispensation, Joseph’s keys would stay with him even “in the world to come.” This is a dramatic change from warnings of the earlier years, when he was told that he would hold the keys “until I shall appoint unto them another in his stead” (D&C 28:7) or even stronger, “and if [he doesn’t abide in me], another will I plant in his stead” (D&C 35:18; also 43:4 and 64:5). Now the “if” is gone and the promise is sure, in terms of keys and authority.

4 **through you shall the oracles be given**. “Oracles” means the revelations from the Lord, and through Joseph Smith was to receive such revelations for the whole Church.

5 **beware how they hold them lest they are accounted as a light thing**. The revelations from the Lord through Joseph Smith must not be treated lightly or storms of condemnation will fall upon such that do that. The imagery is from Matthew 7:26-27.

Counselors hold equal keys (6-7)

6 **their sins are forgiven them also**. As with Joseph Smith, the first reassurance from the Lord relates to the spiritual status of Sidney Rigdon and Frederick Williams, who are also mercifully forgiven.

6 **they are accounted as equal with thee in holding the keys**. The counselors in the First Presidency are not equal in all things—the president still presides and is the only one authorized to exercise keys—but are in terms of the keys held. There are no keys held by the President that are not also held by the counselors. Later this will also be true for the Quorum of the Twelve.

7 **the keys of the school of the prophets**. We may not think of keys in terms of administering something like the School of the Prophets, but there are keys involved and it required a divine commission to stand and teach others doctrines and truths from the Lord.

The word must go forth (8-11)

8 **That thereby they may be perfected**. From the context (and v. 9), “they” refers to the counselors who under the direction of the president would be “perfected in their ministry” of taking the message of salvation to the world.

9 **through your administration they may receive the word**. Through Joseph Smith, the counselors in the Presidency would receive the word and revelations of God.

9 **through their administration the word may go forth**. One of the critical responsibilities of the counselors is to take “the word” of the restoration and the Atonement of Christ they receive from the Prophet to the entire world, first to the Gentiles and then to the Jews.

10 **the heathen nations, the house of Joseph**. Reflecting the order of v. 9, the “gospel of their salvation” goes first to the heathen Gentile nations and then to the Jews, including those of the house of Joseph.

11 ***every man shall hear the fulness of the gospel in his own tongue.*** A bold statement and challenge to this young Church of a few hundred souls in 1833, that their mission is to take the message to all the nations and teach them in their native languages. This promise motivated many to journey to far-away lands and learn the local languages to teach the people there. With that effort and their ordination (meaning, set apart), through the Holy Spirit, they would have the power to accomplish it through revelation from Jesus Christ.

Current priorities (12-18)

12 ***continue in the ministry and presidency.*** Another of Joseph's questions was perhaps related to his own role in the growing Church. The Lord confirms that he is doing the right things in his personal ministerial and leadership efforts.

13 ***when you have finished the translation of the prophets.*** The Prophet had been working his way through the Old Testament since the previous summer, though until just the month before this revelation had been splitting his time with that and revising the previous work on the New Testament. Now that the New Testament revision was done,¹⁸ the Lord instructed him to continue through the remaining books of the Old Testament. That he needed to finish "the prophets" indicates that he was already in that part of the book, perhaps in Isaiah. He will speed through the major and especially the minor prophets and finish the whole translation work, except for minor revisions, by July 1833.

13 ***from thenceforth preside over the affairs of the church and the school.*** Once the translation was completed, which had been a priority for Joseph since June 1830, he would shift his focus to his role as president and oversee the Church and the School of the Prophets.

14 ***from time to time . . . receive revelations.*** After completing the Bible translation, the sheer number of revelations that Joseph Smith recorded decreased. In the Doctrine and Covenants, in 1830, he recorded nineteen; in 1831, thirty-seven; in 1832, sixteen; in 1833, twelve. After that, the most in any one year is eight, with the total number in the Nauvoo period (1841-1844) at ten.

That doesn't mean that revelation wasn't coming to Joseph Smith in many different ways. Many were just not written down as he and the Church matured. Many were probably more administrative and thus less likely to be recorded. Fewer were given to individuals as the Church grew. And without a flood of new doctrines as in the early years, there simply wasn't as much that merited writing down. But this verse nevertheless seems to anticipate that slower pace of recording revelations that began in 1833.

15 ***set in order the churches.*** Again, an emphasis on his role as president of the high priesthood in what he should do next.

15 ***study and learn, and become acquainted with all good books, and with languages.*** One of Joseph's efforts in subsequent years was to study broadly from many sources and to acquaint himself with languages. There is no record that he became fluent in any other language, but he studied Hebrew, Greek, and German, at least.

16 ***your business and mission in all your lives.*** Shifting to the whole presidency, it is clear that it was the Lord's intention that this was a lifetime commitment, not just something they took on for a few years. As consecrated stewards, they were in for the long haul.

17 ***be admonished in all your high-mindedness and pride.*** Though their sins were forgiven (vv. 1, 6), making them justified, they still had changes to make in their lives to become more sanctified and avoid future sins. Pride was the first trait the Lord called out for them to work on to avoid "a snare upon your souls."

18 ***Set in order your houses.*** The Lord isn't specific as to what needed to be set in order in their houses (other than "slothfulness and uncleanness"), but with Church business taking much of their time—travel to other cities, conferences, translations, and more—this was a reminder to put priority on their home life as well.

¹⁸ Frederick G. Williams recorded a short note in Minute Book 1 on Saturday, 2 February 1833, "This day completed the translation and the reviewing of the New testament." See "Minute Book 1," p. 8, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed February 4, 2017, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/minute-book-1/12>.

Residences and an agent (19-27)

19 ***let there be a place provided.*** Frederick G. Williams had been called to full-time labor in the presidency and had consecrated his land to the Lord. As a result, others now lived there, including Joseph Smith, Sr., and Lucy Smith (v. 20). Accordingly, the Lord commanded that Williams and his family have a stewardship where they could live.

21 ***remain where he now resides.*** Sidney Rigdon left Hiram, Ohio, right after the attacks on himself and Joseph Smith (March 1832). He had lived for a time in Chardon, Ohio (near Kirtland), then moved into Kirtland on “the flats” in May 1832.

22 ***the let bishop search diligently to obtain an agent.*** Bishop Partridge in Missouri had an agent that assisted him, Sidney Gilbert. Bishop Whitney in Kirtland had been directed already to get such an agent (D&C 84:112-113) but apparently had not yet done so. The Lord counseled him to get “a man who has got riches in store” but who also has “strong faith.” Both attributes would be helpful to the growing Church in Ohio.

23 ***enabled to discharge every debt.*** The agent was to bring his money in a consecrated manner to pay off local debts so the bishop’s storehouse would “not be brought into disrepute” before the local people. The Church needed to pay its bills and debts. Unfortunately, there is no evidence that Bishop Whitney ever did find this man or have any agent.

24 ***Search diligently, pray always, and be believing.*** This verse also appears to be directed to the bishop, with a rejoinder to search diligently (for his agent), to continue to pray, and to believe in the promises of God, allowing everything to work for his good. The “covenant” mentioned is likely that of the United Firm (D&C 82).

25 ***Let your families be small.*** This wasn’t a call for population control or curtailing children, as the rest of the verse makes clear. Rather, the “families” to keep small were those “who do not belong to your families,” those the Saints were caring for who came to the area as new converts or otherwise in need. Taking such people in was common practice but could tax those with small stewardships, such as Joseph Smith, Sr.¹⁹

26 ***not taken from you and given to those that are not worthy.*** If a person with a stewardship gave away too much and couldn’t pay their own debts and bills, they might lose their stewardship to a bank or creditor, which impacted the Church overall, and hindered the commandments of the Lord being met (v. 27).

Vienna Jaques (28-31)

28 ***my handmaid Vienna Jaques.*** Vienna had joined the Church sometimes in 1832 after having a vision of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon. She traveled to Ohio to meet Joseph Smith after being baptized by E. Harris (possibly Emer, Martin’s brother), returning to her home in Boston and converting several others. In 1833, she came to Kirtland to join with the Saints with about \$1400 of savings and valuables. Joseph invited her to accept consecration, which she did without hesitation.²⁰

28 ***receive money to bear her expenses, and go up.*** With her funds consecrated, the Lord instructed that Vienna should receive funds to go to Missouri and there receive an “inheritance” (v. 30) or stewardship from Bishop Partridge.

29 ***she be rewarded in mine own due time.*** With no promise of recouping her own money but trusting in the Lord, Vienna was promised a reward in the Lord’s time.

31 ***settle down in peace.*** The promise of going to Zion and spending the rest of her life in peace was something the forty-five-year-old Vienna likely looked forward to. Sadly, there wasn’t much peace in Missouri for the Latter-day Saints, and Vienna ended up in Nauvoo no later than 1842. She was among the earliest groups to arrive in Utah, 2 October 1847, and lived there until she died in 1884.²¹ In Utah, she seems to have found the promised peace.

Work with those in Zion (32-37)

32 ***write this commandment.*** The Lord commanded Joseph to write this down and send it to the brethren in Zion. There were some hard feelings at this time between leaders in the two centers of Church activity in Kirtland and Independence, so the encouragement to send it by “love greeting” surely spoke to that.

¹⁹ Robinson and Garrett, *A Commentary*, 3:162.

²⁰ Black, *Who’s Who*, 145.

²¹ See [Vienna Jaques](#) biography on the Joseph Smith Papers site. See also Results below.

32 **to preside over Zion in mine down due time.** It was not the plan for Joseph to remain in Kirtland forever but he would go to Missouri at some point and preside there personally. This happened in 1838.

33 **let them cease wearying me concerning this matter.** The leaders in Missouri had asked multiple times when Joseph Smith was going to join them in Zion.

34 **your brethren in Zion begin to repent.** A letter sent in January 1833 calling the Missouri leaders to repentance had caused them to do just that. They sent a letter back on 26 February 1833 as a peace offer, which wasn't received until after this revelation in Kirtland. But the Lord knew the letter was on its way and more importantly that hearts had been changed.²²

35 **not well pleased . . . William E. McLellin . . . Sidney Gilbert . . . the bishop.** William McLellin had been excommunicated in December 1832, likely related to his not finishing two missions and leading a group to Missouri without authorization.

Sidney Gilbert had not been following commandments as agent, delaying opening the required store, and being critical of Joseph Smith and other Ohio leaders in a letter from December 1832. He had also withheld credit from some of those in need.

Bishop Edward Partridge had been critical of Joseph Smith and others for some time. The previous summer he had seemed to put that all behind him, extending the "right hand of fellowship" to the Prophet, but subsequently had apparently continued with some form of criticisms.²³

36 **I, the Lord, will contend with Zion.** Coupled with the invitation to send a "love greeting" to Missouri and the Lord's promise to take care of the chastening, this was the opportunity to let the Prophet step back from the contention and work to mend feelings on both sides.

37 **she shall not be removed out of her place.** Though the Saints themselves did not remain in Missouri, the promise is to the place. Jackson County remains the center place of Zion to this day, though the fulfillment of that title is yet future.

Results

Though we don't know the exact questions Joseph took to the Lord that resulted in D&C 90, we can surmise many of them from the revelation. The Lord continued to teach his prophet how to act in his office, how to lead others, how to organize and divide up responsibilities, and how to deal with controversy and challenges. D&C 90 reflects Joseph's continuing prophetic tutorial.²⁴

Though he was called and perhaps began functioning as early as January 1833, Frederick G. Williams was formally ordained as a counselor in the presidency shortly after this revelation, on 18 March 1833.²⁵ With this revelation and that ordination, the First Presidency as we know it today was nearly complete.

The language used in January 1833 for Joseph's two counselors reflected the majority of their work with the Prophet, which was "chief scribe and high counselor" for Sidney Rigdon and "assistant scribe and counselor" for Frederick G. Williams.²⁶ With this revelation, their roles as scribes fell into the background compared to their roles as counselors; today we would say "first counselor" and "second counselor," but also call each of them "president," reflecting the broader set of responsibilities these men took on to oversee all the affairs of the Church and their sharing of keys and authority. Joseph Smith still presided but they had equal administrative and priesthood authority.²⁷

Vienna Jaques did go to Missouri but didn't leave until late spring, waiting to travel with the party of William Hobart, and arriving sometime in June. She received an inheritance from the bishop but was not there long before the persecution in Missouri forced her and everyone else out of Jackson County to the north. She was an eyewitness to the tar and feathering received by Bishop Partridge at the hands of the mob. After that, she cared for the needs of others, including members of the Camp of Israel (Zions Camp) who came later. Recognizing her efforts and learning, Joseph Smith wrote to her, echoing the language of this revelation, that God "will exalt thee in His own due time." In Missouri, she married Daniel

²² JSP, D3:31n196.

²³ JSP, D3:31n197.

²⁴ Harper, *Making Sense*, 339.

²⁵ Minutes, 18 March 1833, JSP, D3:40.

²⁶ Minutes, 22-23 January 1833, JSP, D2:380-381.

²⁷ Revelation, 8 March 1833 [D&C 90], JSP, D3:26.

Shearer, a widower, and they went to Illinois. But the marriage ended poorly, and when it was time to go to Utah, she drove her own wagon, arriving with Charles C. Rich's company, 2 Oct 1847. She was given a lot in Salt Lake City where she lived the remainder of his life. In her early nineties, she was still caring for her little farm, milking her own cow and making butter. She passed away on 7 February 1884, just over fifty-one years since this revelation, "true to her covenants" and viewing the Restoration as "a priceless treasure."²⁸

The ongoing tensions between Kirtland and Independence are reflected in this revelation as well. Many in Missouri hoped Joseph would come live there soon to help ease tensions and resolve issues, but Kirtland leaders made it clear that he wouldn't do that until leaders in Missouri repented of their criticisms and hard feelings. The distance combined with poor and delayed communications made collaboration in Church leadership difficult over the next few years.

D&C 91 – The Apocrypha

Setting

Received Saturday, 9 March 1833, Kirtland, Ohio.

On 8 March 1833, Joseph Smith was told to finish "the translation of the prophets" (D&C 90:13). Based on the pace of the translation work, he was likely just starting the prophets, perhaps in the book of Isaiah. Now the next day, he had a revelation answering questions about the Apocrypha. Some have concluded that he somehow moved through all the prophetic books in one day and reached the Apocrypha, a collection of fourteen books tucked in between the Old and the New Testaments in Joseph Smith's 1828 Bible.²⁹ But from manuscript and letter evidence, he did not finish Malachi until July 1833. That means that on 9 March 1833, he was looking ahead in his Bible, pondering what to do with these works when he got there later. In fact, the reference to the prophets in D&C 90:13 may have triggered this very question, with Joseph wondering if the Apocrypha was included in that command or not.

The question was a valid one and not at all clear to people then. Catholics and Eastern Orthodox churches accepted the Apocrypha as scripture, but Protestants had deemed them suspect since the days of Martin Luther, following the lead of Jerome who originally left them out of his Latin translation, the Vulgate, because there were no Hebrew originals. Today, Protestant Bibles, including the King James Version that the Church uses, rarely include them, so most Latter-day Saints are unaware of them. But in Joseph Smith's day, most Bibles still had the books, but set them apart in some way. In his Bible, they were in a smaller font, as if to highlight their diminutive worth, with their own page numbers.

Joseph wondered, were these books in his Bible scripture, equal with the Old and New Testaments, or something of lesser value? Should he go through them in his translation efforts and correct them, or set them aside like he had done for the Song of Solomon, indicating in the manuscript of the translation that it was "not Inspired writings."³⁰ D&C 91 is the Lord's answer.

Documents and Publication

The oldest copy is in RB2 (55, about mid-March 1833), with another copy in SGN (115-116, after 12 June 1833). It was first published as Section 92 in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants and as Section 93 in the 1844 Doctrine and Covenants.

Commentary

1 *Apocrypha*. The word is from Greek, meaning 'secret' or 'hidden.' The name was given to these books by Protestants. The fourteen books that bear this title today were named as follows in Joseph Smith's Bible: 1 Esdras, 2 Esdras, Tobit, Judith, The rest of Esther, Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch with the Epistle of Jeremiah, The Song of the Three Children, The Story of Susanna, The Idol Bell and the Dragon, The Prayer of Manasses, 1 Maccabees, and 2 Maccabees.

²⁸ Black, *Who's Who*, 145-147; [Vienna Jaques biography](#), Joseph Smith Papers site.

²⁹ The later History of the Church entry written by others adds to the confusion, writing that Joseph had "come to that portion of the ancient writings called the Apocrypha" while doing the translation work, when he received this revelation (HC 1:331).

³⁰ Old Testament manuscript 2, p. 97.

1 *many things contained therein that are true*. Some of the Apocryphal books are historical in nature and generally accepted as factual, while others are of a different type or quality. The Lord did not explain which books or chapters were “true,” just declared that some are.

2 *many things contained therein that are not true*. The untrue things in the fourteen books are that way because they are “interpolations by the hands of men,” meaning something inserted into something else. The implication is that truth was there before but men inserted something into them that made them untrue. That could be words, phrases, sections, chapters, or whole books.

3 *it is not needful that the Apocrypha should be translated*. Joseph Smith’s translation efforts had many purposes but rewriting “not true” works to become true was apparently not one of them, at least in the case of these books.

4 *whoso readeth it, let him understand, for the Spirit manifesteth truth*. To avoid a detailed verse-by-verse divine commentary, and likely to encourage us learning to rely on the Spirit for such guidance, the Lord invited anyone who would like to read the Apocrypha to do so using the Spirit as a guide, because ‘whoso is enlightened by the Spirit shall obtain benefit therefrom’ (v. 5).

6 *whoso receiveth not by the Spirit, cannot be benefited*. Reading the Apocrypha—or any scripture, for that matter—without the benefit of the Spirit to aid comprehension and application, will result in far less benefit to the student.

Results

There are scores of scholars who study the Bible today with the idea of getting back to the ‘original’ text. This is done by studying the various manuscript families and traditions and attempting to surmise what the original reading may have been. It is great detective work and employs the best efforts and thinking of some of the brightest minds on the planet.

The problem is, of course, that we have no original manuscripts, just copies, most of them multiple generations away from the originals, which exhibit a large number of “interpolations by the hands of men.” Some of these interpolations that are well-known include Mark 16:9-20, John 8:2-11, and 1 John 5:7-8. In other words, scholars are sure these were not in the original versions of these works but were added significantly later by likely well-meaning scribes who wanted to fill out the story or supply something that surely was there before but somehow lost (as they may have supposed).

The Apocrypha is almost all interpolations, by this definition. The best evidence is that little, if any, of it was written by original authors and passed down, but rather was created whole-cloth by much later scribes/editors. But the Lord invites us to consider these books anyway, to see where we can find truth, because we are assured that truth does lie in their pages. What a great invitation to hone our scripture study and Spirit-listening skills and find the uplifting portions; we are assured of “benefit” from the effort.

Note that this revelation applies specifically to the fourteen books labeled “The Apocrypha” (capital “A”) and not to dozens of other spurious works sometimes called “apocrypha” (little “a”). While we can certainly read all of these books for learning and interest, we should not expect the same benefits from many of them promised for reading the Apocrypha by the Spirit. These other apocryphal and pseudepigraphal books are in a separate category

D&C 92 – Williams and the United Firm

Setting

Received Friday, 15 March 1833, at Kirtland, Ohio.

One year previous, on 1 March 1832, a group was organized called the United Firm (D&C 78). Following in the footsteps of the Literary Firm (D&C 70:1-3), the United Firm oversaw both the publications of the Church as well as other Church properties and stores (D&C 78:3, 82:11-12). Nine men had been named by revelation as the initial members. Interestingly, one of them was not Jesse Gause, the second counselor in the high priesthood at the time. However, after Gause’s excommunication and replacement by Frederick G. Williams, this short revelation was received to designate Williams as a full member of the United Firm, in his role as president equal in holding keys to Joseph Smith.

Documents and Publication

The oldest copy is in RB2 (55, about late Mar 1833) with other copies in the Revelations Collection (about 15 Mar 1833) and Joseph Smith Letterbook 1 (33, about 21 Apr 1833). It was first published as Section 93 in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants and as Section 94 in the 1844 Doctrine and Covenants. It was also published in the *Times and Seasons* (15 Dec 1844; 1 Jan 1845).

Commentary

1 *I give unto the united order.* The oldest copies show this is a reference to the United Firm. When the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants was published, some references to the United Firm were changed to “united order” to legally protect those belonging to the firm, which by 1835 had been dissolved. Early Doctrine and Covenants editions also used code names for members of the Firm for the same reason. These were done away in recent editions as the need to protect their names no longer exists.

1 *the commandment previously given.* Refers to D&C 78 and 82.

1 *ye shall receive him into the order.* While Jesse Gause was not admitted into the United Firm by virtue of his calling as counselor, Frederick G. Williams was, likely due to two factors. First, he had been a dedicated scribe to the Prophet for several months, and previous scribes had been put in the Literary and United Firm. Secondly, with the change of counselors being considered presidents with equal keys and Sidney Rigdon already being part of the Firm, it would make sense to admit the other president as well so all three would have the same position in decision making.

2 *you shall be a lively member in this order.* “Lively” means ‘active’, ‘vigorous’, or ‘energetic.’ Williams was to be fully engaged in his responsibilities in the United Firm.

2 *in keeping all former commandments.* The “former commandments” related to the bond or covenant the members of the Firm entered into. William Phelps and Sidney Gilbert were given the task of creating a document with this covenant. Though not extant today, it appears to have required full consecration on their parts, followed by reception of a stewardship and a commandment to “be equal” in how they shared to proceeds of the Firm’s interests to support their families, and to seek the interest of their neighbors, and do it all with an eye single to God.³¹

Results

Frederick G. Williams was the first member added to the United Firm since its creation in 1832. Since some of the men in the Firm were in Ohio and some in Missouri, Joseph wrote and explained to those in Zion about Williams’ appointment. Some of them raised questions about it, wondering about his specific role. On 25 June 1833, Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, Martin Harris, and Frederick G. Williams wrote a letter to Missouri, justifying his membership in the group by saying, “all members of the United Firm are considered one.”³² There were no further protestations.

Frederick G. Williams consecrated his large farm, some of which was later part of the temple property in Kirtland. He served diligently in his calling, such that Joseph Smith wrote in his journal on 19 November 1833, “Brother Frederick [G. Williams] ~~is a man who~~ is one of those men in whom I place the greatest confidence and trust for I have found him ever full of love and Brotherly kindness he is not a man of many words but is ever wining because of his constant mind he shall ever have place in my heart and is ever intitled to my confidence.” Then it continued in Oliver Cowdery’s handwriting: “He is perfectly honest and upright, and seeks with all his heart to magnify his presidency in the church of ch[r]ist.”³³

Unfortunately, Williams was removed from the Church presidency in 1837, shortly after moving to Far West, Missouri. Though nominated by Joseph Smith for that office, other leaders objected, and in the end, Hyrum Smith was nominated in his place and approved unanimously.³⁴ During the exodus of Church members from Missouri, Williams was one those excommunicated by the Missouri high council in 1839, which he only discovered by when he arrived in Quincy, Illinois later that year. Appealing to Church leaders, his membership was reinstated in 1840. He remained a member of the

³¹ JSP, D3:37n234.

³² Letter to church Leaders in Jackson County, Missouri, 25 June 1833, JSP, D3:154-155.

³³ 14-19 November 1833, Journal, 1832-1834, JSP, J1:19.

³⁴ Minute Book 2, 1 November 1837 meeting notes, [82-83](#).

Church until his untimely death in 1842 in Nauvoo. His wife and son went west with the Saints to Utah and their descendants number in the hundreds today. Williams is the only member of the original First Presidency whose family went west and stayed with the Church.³⁵

Images



Image #1: Newel K. Whitney store, Kirtland, Ohio (image from Joseph Smith Papers, Church History Library; photo taken by George Edward Andersen, 1907).

³⁵ Frederick G. Williams, “[Frederick Granger Williams of the First Presidency of the Church](#),” *BYU Studies* 12 (Spring 1972), 243-261. Note that the author is the grandson (twice removed) of Frederick G. Williams of Joseph Smith’s day.



Image #2: The restored N. K. Whitney & Co. store today.

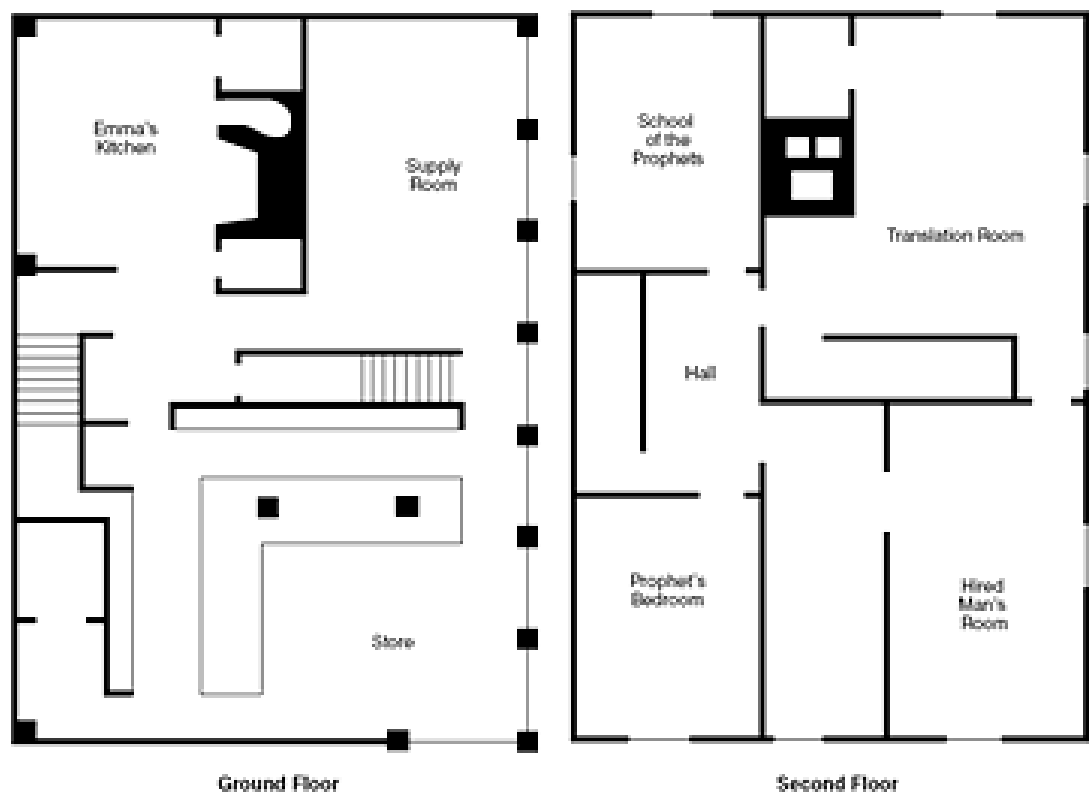


Image #3: Floor plan of the Newel K. Whitney store, showing rooms used by Joseph and Emma and the School (from *Church History in the Fulness of Times Student Manual*, Chapter Ten (113-126)).

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For text notes:

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- RB2 – Revelation Book 2, from *JSP*, MRB:407-665; R1:307-482.
- EMS – The Evening and the Morning Star, June 1832-May 1833, from *JSP*, R2:202-299.
- NKW – Newel K. Whitney papers (various Dx volumes)
- SGN – Sidney Gilbert Notebook (various Dx volumes)
- 1833 – Book of Commandments, printed in 1833, from *JSP*, R2:13-193.
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