

D&C 76-77

Lesson 15, Doctrine & Covenants, Adult Religion Class, Monday, 9 Jan 2017

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General Introduction

On 25 January 1832, a Church conference was held in Amherst, Ohio, during which Joseph was ordained as President of the High Priesthood, and Luke and Lyman Johnson were both called on missions. (Luke's missionary companion was William McLellin, who abandoned his mission and instead courted and married Emeline Miller, Luke's cousin.) After the conference, Joseph Smith returned to Hiram, Ohio, and continued to work on the translation of the Bible. The Johnson home was generally a quiet, peaceful place to do this work and they had graciously supplied him with a translation and meeting room upstairs, giving up their own bedroom for that purpose. Though the dairy and cheese business the Johnson's ran on their property was successful, it was under stress now with two sons off on missions for the Church and many additional mouths to feed, including Joseph and Emma and the Murdock twins they had taken in, Sidney Rigdon and his wife and six children, and other Church leaders there to work with Joseph, such as Oliver Cowdery and some of the Whitmers. Some of the men helped on the farm but it was still more than the Johnsons could do alone.

Accordingly, Joseph sent missionaries out to seek support from local members. Ironically, Ezra Booth's attacks on Joseph Smith in the local press had included 'revealing' that this translation work, which Booth perceived as a secret effort (based on verses in the translation, such as Moses 1:42), had in fact made it easier to get support, as members were now fully aware of what Joseph was doing. The missionaries were successful and two of them, Hiram Smith and Reynolds Cahoon, were called as counselors to Bishop Newel K. Whitney shortly after their return. In other words, the Bible translation work was made possible in early 1832 because of the support of the members in Portage county.

Joseph Smith's other activity at this time was preaching at either the South Schoolhouse in Hiram or at the Johnson

home, often to a group seated in a bowery (a temporary shelter made of tree branches), with sometimes as many as two hundred listening as he stood on the front porch. Many were converted because of these meetings, including Rosetta Snow, the mother of Eliza and Lorenzo Snow, who later joined the Church in 1835 and 1836, respectively.¹

It was in this setting that the sections in this lesson were received.

Summary Chronology

- **Wed, 25 Jan 1832** – Joseph Smith appointed president of the high priesthood.
- **Thu, 26 Jan – Thu, 16 Feb 1832** – Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon resumed the work on the Bible translation after the Amherst conference, finishing the book of Luke and starting the early chapters of John.
- **Thu, 16 Feb 1832** – Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon received D&C 76, while translating the fifth chapter of John.
- **Mon, 27 Feb 1832** – Revelation received by Joseph Smith (not in D&C).
- **Feb-Mar 1832** – Frederick G. Williams and Joseph Smith began copying revelations and other items into Revelation Book 2.
- **Thu, 1 Mar 1832** – D&C 78 was received.
- **Between Sun, 4 Mar and Tuesday, 20 Mar 1832** – D&C 77 was recorded.
- **Wed, 7 Mar 1832** – D&C 80 was received.
- **Thur, 8 Mar 1832** – Joseph Smith selected and ordained Jesse Gause and Sidney Rigdon his counselors in the presidency of the high priesthood.
- **Mon, 12 Mar 1832** – D&C 79 was received.
- **Thu, 15 Mar 1832** – D&C 81 was received.

¹ See Staker, *Hearken, O Ye People*, 310-312, 319-320.

D&C 76 – The Vision

Date and Location

Thursday, 16 February 1832, at Hiram, Ohio, in the John and Elsa Johnson home.

Setting

February 1832 was very cold in Ohio that year. Emma Smith was caring for the Murdock twins but was also now pregnant with what would be her first child to survive, Joseph Smith III. On 16 February, the day of D&C 76, it was cloudy with temperatures in the 20s, with deep snow on the ground, a perfect day for scripture study and contemplation.²

In a later history, Joseph is recorded to have said that as part of their conversation this day, they were pondering “that if God rewarded every one according to the deeds done in the body, the term ‘heaven’, as intended for the Saints eternal home, much include more kingdoms than one.”³

The background of this conversation is known from Rigdon’s previous associations and preaching. Others in that period had written about heaven having three different levels, for example, but they did not portray these levels in same manner as described in the Vision.⁴ This entered the discussion of John 5:29 they had on 16 February 1832. While some of the terms used in D&C 76 may not be similar to those used by others of that time and place, the way they were used and the concepts presented about life after death were certainly unique. Most significantly, the doctrine of hell and who went there differs radically in the Vision as compared with all other teachings of the day.⁵

This section is often called “The Vision” because of the way it was received. In reality, it might just as well be called “The Visions” because it was a series of visions, not just one, but it was received in a single sitting, chaining the

visions together into one experience that was recorded singly.

There were “perhaps twelve” others in the ‘translating room’ upstairs at the Johnson home in Hiram, Ohio, when D&C 76 was received. One of them, Philo Dibble, wrote about it.⁶ He said that the men there “saw the glory and felt the power, but did not see the vision.” He recounted the experience this way:

Joseph would, at intervals, say: “What do I see?” as one might say while looking out the window and beholding what all in the room could not see. Then he would relate what he had seen or what he was looking at. Then Sidney replied, “I see the same.” Presently Sidney would say, “what do I see?” and would repeat what he had seen or was seeing, and Joseph would reply, “I see the same.”

This manner of conversation was repeated at short intervals to the end of the vision, and during the while time not a word was spoken by any other person. Not a sound nor motion made by anyone but Joseph and Sidney, and it seemed to me that they never moved a joint or limb during the time I was there, which I think was over an hour, and to the end of the vision.

When it was over, Dibble said that “Joseph sat firmly and calmly” while Sidney was “limp and pale.” He reported that the Prophet attributed this to Sidney being “not used to it as I am.”⁷

D&C 76 differs from most other sections in the Doctrine and Covenants in that it tells its own story. The section includes something about the setting and context of the visions as well as some of the things that happened during the experience. Unlike other revelations, very little was recorded in the first-person voice of the Lord; the writing is that of Joseph and Sidney describing what they saw and heard, though it was written by the inspiration of the Spirit, which no doubt influenced the language, organization, and

² Staker, *Hearken, O Ye People*, 320.

³ “History, 1838–1856, volume A-1 [23 December 1805–30 August 1834],” p. 183, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed January 1, 2017, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-a-1-23-december-1805-30-august-1834/189>.

⁴ Alexander Campbell, Sidney Rigdon’s former mentor, wrote in 1828 of the Kingdom of Law, the Kingdom of Favor, and the Kingdom of Glory (which he also called the Kingdom of Works), the first being for the Jews (who obeyed the Law), the second for those born again through Christ (who had faith and were baptized), and the third was for “all they who obey Jesus Christ, through faith in his blood, according to their knowledge.” In other words, those who kept the commandments and did good

works were the only ones eligible for glory (Harker, *Hearken, O Ye People*, 322-323). Emmanuel Swedenborg from Sweden has also theorized in the mid-1700s of a heaven with three levels, called celestial, spiritual, and natural (*JSP*, D2:180; Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 198-199).

⁵ *JSP*, D2:180; Staker, *Hearken, O Ye People*, 321-323; Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 198-200.

⁶ Though it was not published until 1892; see Millet, *Studies in Scripture*, 280.

⁷ In another account, Dibble said that “Joseph appeared as strong as a lion, but Sidney seemed weak as water.” See Larry E. Dahl, “The Vision of the Glories,” in Millet, *Studies in Scripture*, 280-281.

impact. It was also received by both Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon, both seeing the same vision and recording it together (though the details of how they did that are unknown).

The organization of the vision is reflected in the headings in the Commentary section below. The flow is a compare and contrast—first Christ, then Satan; first the sons of perdition, then the celestial glory. Putting these visions side-by-side provided the Prophet and his scribe a complete understanding of the breadth and depth of God’s plan of salvation for all his children.

In 1843, Joseph Smith wrote a poetic rendition of The Vision in a letter to William W. Phelps. This is perhaps the only poetry ever written by the Prophet. This prophetic interpretation of D&C 76 was published in *The Times and Seasons* (1 February 1843), and can found in several books and on several websites,⁸ so I will not retype it here. But it is worth studying, for eleven years of additional understanding come through in many of the renditions the Prophet gave of the verses of this vision. Some of those stanzas are included below, indicated by italicized indented text.

There are a large number of textual differences between the copy in Revelation Book 2, recorded very soon after the Vision was given, and the version we use today. Many are minor or simply reflect good editing (improved clarity and language) but a few are potentially interesting in terms of the development of the thinking of Joseph and Sidney as they pondered on this revelation, so I have included some of those as text notes below.

Documents and Publication

The oldest copy is in Revelation Book 2 (between 16 Feb and 8 Mar 1832), the first item in the book. Other copies include Sidney Gilbert notebook (April 1832) and Revelation Book 1 (between 26 Apr and Aug 1832). It was first published in *The Evening and the Morning Star* (July 1832) as Section 91 in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants, then as Section 82 in the 1844 Doctrine and Covenants.

Outline

- Doxology (1-4)
- Blessings to those who fear God (5-10)
- Revelation background (11-18)
- Glory of God (19-24)
- Satan (25-29)
- Sons of perdition (30-49)
- Celestial glory (50-70)

- Terrestrial glory (71-80)
- Celestial glory (81-88)
- Compare and contrast (89-98)
- Celestial revisited (99-112)
- See and understand by the power of the Spirit (113-119)

Commentary

Doxology (1-4)

1 ***Hear, O ye heavens, and give ear, O earth.*** This is the only time this phrase is used in the Doctrine and Covenants. When used in the Old Testament (Isaiah 1:2 and Deuteronomy 32:1), they are calling the heavens and the earth to be witnesses of what is about to said and done, as if it were a court case and evidence was being presented to them.

1 ***rejoice ye inhabitants thereof.*** The people of the earth commanded to rejoice. What is coming next is a revelation that has not been known for centuries, with doctrines long lost to mankind in apostasy. We are to rejoice because “the Lord is God,” meaning Christ, and he it is who reveals this Vision to Joseph and Sidney.

1 ***beside him there is no Savior.*** While the Vision covers many topics, none is more important than this one. Jesus Christ is the Savior and Redeemer of all mankind in all states of preparedness for their future circumstances.

1 ***text note:***

RB2 reads “beside him there is none else.” This was later made more specific to his salvific authority with the current text.

2 ***marvelous are his ways.*** A doxology is praise literature that glorifies God. These verses fit that description perfectly.

3 ***His purposes fail not.*** Whatever Jesus designs to do, it happens, because no one “can stay his hand.”

4 ***his years never fail.*** This phrase is similar to a doxological phrase in Hebrews 1:12, where it says, “thy years shall not fail.” It means that his purposes are always achieved and he never grows old.

Blessings to Those Who Fear God (5-10)

5 ***text note:***

In RB2, “For thus saith the Lord” was not included, but added to clarify when the Lord is speaking versus when Joseph and Sidney are writing of their experience.

5 ***merciful and gracious unto those who fear me.*** To fear God is to recognize his power and our complete lack of it, to understand the meaning of judgment brought on by sin

⁸ Some sources include: Cook, *Revelations*, 158-166; Larry E. Dahl, “The Vision of the Glories,” in Millet, *Studies in Scripture*,

295-305; McConkie and Ostler, *Revelations*, 540-550; <http://www.centerplace.org/history/ts/v4n06.htm>.

and know that by ourselves we can do nothing to avoid it. So we fear the potential outcomes of our own wickedness but are amazed at the mercy and grace he nevertheless offers us by virtue of the Atonement.

5 *delight to honor those who serve me.* One of the amazing themes of D&C 76 is that God saves every one of his children that he can—in stark contrast to much of the Christian world that believes that most of mankind is going to hell. God takes great delight in blessing and honoring us. Even our meager efforts to serve him result in indescribable blessings, such as those outlined in verses 6-10.

6 *eternal shall be their glory.* Those who fear God and serve him will receive eternal glory. Joseph Smith learned in 1829 that “Eternal punishment is God’s punishment” (D&C 19:11) so by natural extension, eternal glory would be God’s glory, meaning that those who strive to be obedient and are full partakers in the Atonement of Christ will be glorified with a like glory to that of the Father.

7 *reveal all mysteries.* It is often said that mysteries are those things that can only be learned by revelation. The testimony of Christ is thus a mystery to one who has not received it; the knowledge that prophets are on the earth again today is a mystery to one who does not ask the Lord if it is true. Those who fear will be taught “hidden mysteries” from the past and “ages to come.” These are “the wonders of eternity” relating to “many generations” (v. 8).

As the poetic version of D&C 76 says:

*I'll surely reveal all my mysteries to them,—
The great hidden myst'ries in my kingdom stor'd—
From the council in Kolob, to time on the earth.
And for ages to come unto them will I show
My pleasure & will, what my kingdom will do:
Eternity's wonders they truly shall know.*

7 text note:

The phrase “pertaining to my kingdom” was “to come” in RB2. This broad promise of knowing all things to come was narrowed in editing to better reflect the topic of the Vision.

9 *their understanding reach to heaven.* People so blessed by the Lord understand the things of the earth and the things of heaven, beyond the wisdom of the wisest on earth.

10 *by my Spirit will I enlighten them.* The great eternal truths are learned not by study nor by the efforts of man, but by the light of the Holy Spirit. This reflects not only God’s pattern for learning but what Joseph and Sidney experienced in this vision.

One commentary shared a talk by Elder Bruce R. McConkie where he compared radio and television signals to revelation; they are all around us all the time but unless

we tune in to them (by fearing God and living his commandments), we will not know they are even there. The Holy Spirit is the way we tune into to heavenly ‘broadcasts.’⁹

Revelation Background (11-18)

11 *the sixteenth day of February.* Very few revelations record the date as part of the revelation. This one has the added benefit of allowing us to know the exact progress of the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible—they were in the fifth chapter of John on this date.

12 *our eyes were opened.* They saw in vision things they could not see with their natural, mortal eyes. Opened eyes in the scriptures are often eyes that see things in a new way or for the first time—“to see and understand the things of God.” In verse 19 they call it “the eyes of our understandings.” The next time Joseph Smith described this happening to himself was when he experienced divine and angelic visitations in the Kirtland temple with Oliver Cowdery in 1836 (D&C 110).

12 text note:

The word “enlightened” was originally recorded as “enlarged.”

13 *from the beginning before the world was.* Too often the contents of D&C 76 are simplified: ‘the three degrees of glory.’ But there is significant information about things that happened before the earth was even created for our benefit, and these are as significant doctrinally as what happens after the resurrection.

14 *whom we saw and with whom we conversed.* Though most of the words in D&C 76 are those of Joseph and Sidney, this verse makes clear the originator of the words. The two conversed with Christ himself and learned much from him and the Spirit (v. 12). This is the second known time that Joseph Smith has seen Christ and the first for Sidney.

15 text note:

In RB2, it read “For as we sat doing the work of translation.” The edit to “For while we were doing” implies more action which reflects their true effort.

15 *which was given unto us.* From the manuscript, we can tell just what happened. Sidney Rigdon first wrote the verse out in full just as it is in the King James Version, then he corrected it, because the Spirit ‘gave’ them a new translation. The corrected version of John 5:29 is in verse 17.

17 This is the verse with the changes marked just as Sidney recorded them:

And shall come forth; they ~~that~~ <who> have done good, ~~unto~~ <in> the resurrection of ~~life~~ <the just>; and they ~~that~~ <who> have done evil, ~~unto~~ <in> the resurrection of ~~damnation~~ **the unjust.**

⁹ McConkie and Ostler, *Revelations*, 517-518.

Similar expressions were found in the Book of Mormon, in Alma 12:8, and in the New Testament, in Luke 14:14, which had recently been translated, and in Acts 24:15, which was yet future in the translation effort but could certainly be a scripture with which Joseph was familiar.

18 **this caused us to marvel.** The changes are subtle but meaningful. Instead of focusing on judgment, as John 5:29 does in the KJV, the JST instead emphasizes the two resurrections, one of the just and one of the unjust.

Having translated the Book of Mormon, which has several references to two resurrections, this change should not have been new or startling information to Joseph Smith. Thus we see that more was at work here than the words themselves; the Spirit was teaching them and their pause to ponder (v. 19) and their willingness to be taught (humility) allowed the Lord to give them a mighty vision.

Glory of God (19-24)

19 **while we meditated.** The translation manuscript itself illustrates the pause here. As mentioned above, Sidney wrote the whole verse out first, just as it reads in the KJV. Then the brethren were given the changes, and Sidney edited the text, crossing out words and inserting the changes above the line. But at the end of the verse, the change from “damnation” to “the unjust” was inserted on the line immediately after the verse, showing that they had stopped and had not written anything else before making those edits. Though feeling the pressure to keep the translation moving, they nevertheless stopped and meditated on the meaning of these changes.

20 **the Son, on the right hand of the Father.** Like the First Vision, received by Joseph Smith nearly twelve years previous, the Son is found on the right hand of the Father, the position of approbation and trust.

21 **angels, and them who are sanctified before his throne.** There are several recorded instances of prophets seeing the throne of the Lord with angels and/or Saints around, including Genesis 28:12; Isaiah 6:1-3; Revelation 4; 7; and 1 Nephi 1:8.

*I beheld round the throne, holy angels and hosts,
And sanctified beings from world that have been,
In holiness worshipping God and the Lamb,
Forever and ever, amen and amen!*

21 text note:

The phrase “who worship him” was not in RB2.

22 **the testimony, last of all, which we give.** This does not mean that there are no additional testimonies, but more accurately means ‘most recently.’ A testimony is a knowledge of something; Joseph and Sidney had absolute knowledge of Christ’s existence after their experience, and so bore testimony: “That he lives!”

23 **heard the voice bearing record.** The voice of the Father bears record of the Son, testifying that he “the Only Begotten.”

24 **the worlds...and the inhabitants.** Joseph Smith had learned about the vastness of God’s creations in the translation of the early chapters of Genesis, especially Moses 1. In the Vision, Christ is the creator and the one that makes it possible for us to become begotten of God, the same title that he holds uniquely now.

*By him, of him, and through him, the worlds were all
made,
Even all that career [careen?] in the heavens so broad,
Whose inhabitants, too, from the first to the last,
Are sav’d by the very same Saviour of ours;
And, of course, are begotten God’s daughters and sons,
By the very same truths, and the very same pow’rs.*

Satan (25-29)

25 **an angel of God who was in authority.** After the glory of the Father and the Son, the men were shown a vision of Satan. Joseph Smith had learned much about Satan from translating the early chapters of Genesis, including his life in the pre-existence, his proposal to save mankind but keep the glory to himself, and more. D&C 76 adds even more, letting us know that he was an angel of God—a trusted messenger with authority—who “rebelled against the Only Begotten Son.” Because of this rebellion, he was “thrust down” from God’s presence.

26 **was called Perdition.** Perdition is a Latin term that means a ruin, a loss, or a destruction, all appropriate names for the inciter of rebellion. It is found several times in the New Testament but isn’t directly applied to Satan as a title. Rather, it represents loss or destruction. See v. 32.

26 **he was Lucifer, a son of the morning.** This word means ‘light-bearer’ or ‘morning star’ (so this verse calls him “a son of the morning”). Lucifer is a title reflecting great honor, power, and authority. It is only found in Isaiah 14:12 (and 2 Nephi 24:12, which is an Isaiah quotation) and in this verse in all of scripture.

27 **he is fallen! is fallen.** Lucifer was such a being of influence and authority that his fall caused the heavens to weep (v. 26).

*And I saw and bear record of warfare in heav’n;
For an angel of light, in authority great,
Rebell’d against Jesus, and sought for his pow’r,
But was thrust down to woe from his Godified state.
And the heavens all wept, and the tears drop’d like dew,
That Lucifer, son of the morning had fell!
Yea, is fallen! is fall’n, and become, Oh, alas!
The son of Perdition; the devil of hell!*

28 *the Lord commanded us that we should write*. There are four times (here and vv. 49, 80, and 113) when the men were told to stop viewing and write down what they were seeing while their memories were fresh and the Spirit helped them know what to record. Some things they saw but were commanded not to write (v. 115).

28 *Satan, that old serpent, even the devil*. “Satan” means adversary in Hebrew, and “devil” is from the Greek, meaning slanderer or one who separates or divides. He fell from being a favored son, a bearer of the Father’s light, to a liar and enemy of God, who now tries to separate us from our heavenly parents, from Christ, and from each other.

29 *he maketh war with the Saints of God*. Because of his fall, he seeks to take the kingdom from God and Christ (v. 28 and Revelation 12:7-10) by making war on those who attempt to follow them in this life. He surrounds them with evil influences, thoughts, and enticements.

Sons of Perdition (30-49)

30 *the sufferings of those with whom he made war and overcame*. In v. 29, Satan made “war with the saints of God.” Verses 30-49 describe the result of that war for some of those Saints who are overcome by Satan and thus suffer eternally and immeasurably.

30 *text note*:

In RB2, it read “a vision of the eternal sufferings.” The words “eternal” or “eternity” are used 9 times in D&C 76, more than any previous revelation and less than only D&C 132 overall. This would have been a tenth case.

31 *concerning all those who know my power*. In order to fall to this lowest of estates, the Lord taught that people must first know God’s power and be partakers of it, then allow themselves to be completely overcome by the devil, wholly turning themselves totally over to him by denying truth and defying God’s very power. In other words, this is those who have come to earth, fully known all the goodness and blessings of God, and knowing full well what they are doing, turned their back on it all to follow Satan, just like those who elected to follow him in the pre-Earth life. Clearly, not many shall fall into this category. See also v. 35 for more conditions of receiving this punishment.

32 *the sons of perdition*. Satan is Perdition, the lost one; those who are overcome by his power thus become his sons, just as those who put their faith in Christ become his sons and daughters.

The term “son of perdition” is found in the New Testament (John 17:12 and 2 Thessalonians 2:3) and in the Book of Mormon (3 Nephi 27:32; 29:7) but always in the singular and having a seemingly symbolic meaning of someone

who is lost or destroyed (see v. 26). Only here is it a title for a specific group of people.

33 *vessels of wrath*. The phrase comes from Romans 9:22, where the “vessels of wrath” are contrasted with the “vessels of mercy” (Romans 9:23); the former are those falling under God’s condemnation, while the latter are those saved by his grace. D&C 76 teaches that the “vessels of wrath” are in fact the sons of perdition.

34 *no forgiveness in this world nor in the world to come*. Sons of perdition are lost forever, having forfeited their ability to repent by their choice of rejecting Christ.

35 *having crucified him unto themselves*. This verse lists more things required to become a son of perdition (see v. 31), including denying the Holy Spirit and Christ, and essentially crucifying him again in a very personal way. Joseph Smith taught that the only ones who could commit this sin must “receive the Holy Ghost, have the heavens opened unto him, and know God, and the sin against Him...he has got to deny Jesus Christ when the heavens have been opened unto him, and to deny the plan of salvation with his eyes open to the truth of it” (Robinson, *Commentary*, 298). President Spencer W. Kimball added that “we hope only few will deny the Holy Ghost.”¹⁰

*And denying the only begotten of God,-
And crucify him to themselves, as they do,
And openly put him to shame in their flesh,
By gospel they cannot repentance renew.*

36 *the lake of fire and brimstone*. From Genesis 19:24; Revelation 19:20; 20:10; 21:8,¹¹ this image is symbolic of eternal suffering and in Revelation is equated with the second death (v. 37). Brimstone is sulfur, invoking both destruction and a terrible smell, and it is thought that the symbol may refer to garbage piles outside of cities like Jerusalem that would catch fire and burn and stink for weeks and months, making them feel eternal.

37 *the second death*. The first spiritual death was the Fall, when man was separated from the presence of God. The second spiritual death is only inflicted on those who qualify as sons of perdition—a permanent separation from God, leaving them eternally without glory or light, hence the term ‘outer darkness’ (D&C 101:91; 133:73).

38 *the only ones who shall not be redeemed*. To be redeemed is to be let out of prison, to be forgiven of sins through the atonement of Christ and made ‘righteous’ or right with God. Because of their total rejection of the atonement, these sons of darkness and of Satan can never receive that forgiveness. It is not so much a consequence of

¹⁰ Dahl, “The Vision of the Glories,” in Millet, *Studies in Scripture*, 286.

¹¹ Also mentioned in 2 Nephi 9:16, 19, 26; 28:23; Jacob 3:11; 6:10; Mosiah 3:27; Alma 12:17; 14:14.

their behavior as it is their choice to not have the atonement apply to them.

This speaks to the universal nature of salvation in D&C 76. The only people who do not receive a kingdom of glory (not yet explained but coming next) are the sons of perdition. Though heaven has many different levels or experiences, nearly all of God's children will be there in the end, thanks to the Atonement of Christ.

*They are they, who must groan through the great second death,
And are not redeemed in the time of the Lord;
While all the rest are, through the triumph of Christ,
Made partakers of grace, by the power of his word.*

39 For all the rest. Verses 39 through 44a are a parenthetical remark, related to the previous comments about the sons of perdition but contrasting their experience with the rest of humanity. The good news of the gospel is that others will be saved.

39 text note:

Verse 39 started "who shall be brought forth..." in RB2. The clarifying mark that the parenthetical note in the next verses pertain to "all the rest" was needed to avoid confusion that these verses might apply to the sons of perdition. The change, however, can give the impression that the sons of perdition are not resurrected, which is incorrect and demonstrated by the original wording.

39 the Lamb, who was slain. The reference to Christ as the Lamb is mostly found in John's writings (twenty-nine times in Revelation alone), and up to fifty-seven times in 1 Nephi.¹² D&C 76 has one-fourth of all the uses of the term in the entire Doctrine and Covenants.

39 in the bosom of the Father. From John 1:18; to be in the bosom represents not just a close relationship but to be in the protection and care of.

40 the gospel, the glad tidings. The gospel or good news is the news announced in v. 41-44 about Christ.

41 crucified...to bear the sins...to sanctify...to cleanse. Jesus' atonement placed the burden of the sins of the world upon him that he might redeem, cleanse, and "sanctify the world." That is the core of the gospel message (v. 40).

*That he came to the world in the middle of time,
To lay down his life for his friends and his foes,
And bear away sin as a mission of love;
And sanctify earth for a blessed repose.*

¹² New Testament references include John 1:29, 36; Acts 8:32; 1 Peter 1:19; Revelation 5:6, 8, 12, 13; 6:1, 16; 7:9, 10, 14, 17; 12:11; 13:8, 11; 14:1, 4, 10:15:3; 17:14; 19:7, 9; 21:9, 14, 22, 23, 27; 22:1, 3. Book of Mormon references include 1 Nephi 10:10; 11:21, 27, 31, 32, 34, 35, 36; 12:6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 18; 13:26, 28, 29,

42 through him all might be saved. The word "all" is used several times in these verses. God will save all of his children. In fact, verse 44 says "he saves all except them," referring to the sons of perdition. This is one of the stunning doctrines among a Christian world that believe that God would save a very few of all mortals. In Latter-day Saint theology, salvation is universal except for the handful of sons of perdition (v. 43).

*The Savior will save all his Father did give,
Even all that he gave in the regions abroad,
Save the Sons of Perdition: They're lost; ever lost,
And can never return to the presence of God.*

44 everlasting punishment, which is endless punishment, which is eternal punishment. From the Bible translation, Joseph learned that two of God's names are "Endless and Eternal" (Moses 7:35). D&C 19 explained that eternal and endless punishment are God's punishment, because those are his names (D&C 19:6-12). It teaches this "mystery" (19:8) to convey that "it is not written that there shall be no end to this torment" (19:6). So though the punishment of the sons of perdition is everlasting, endless, and eternal, it is at least possible that there is a change in their status of some kind ("no man knows" when it will end, v. 45), though Joseph Smith taught that no one should teach that the devil and the sons of perdition would "ever be restored" and that anyone promoting that is teaching "the doctrine of devils."¹³ What this does mean for certain is that their punishment originates from God.

44 where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. From Mark 9:44, 46, and 48. Jesus repeated the phrase three times in this passage to represent an unending punishment. The worm reference apparently refers to the belief that a cavity and toothache were caused by a worm boring into the tooth. If the worm never dies, the pain goes on forever.¹⁴

46 except to them who are made partakers. The full extent of this mystery will not be revealed to man, but will be revealed to the sons of perdition themselves at some point (also v. 48).

47 straightway shut it up again. Though some have understood this concept by vision, like Joseph and Sidney, it is quickly shut up again, so the full understanding is not taught to men on the earth.

48 except those who are ordained unto this condemnation. Though the Lord has revealed information about the

32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41; 14:1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 10, 12, 13, 14, 20, 24; 2 Nephi 31:4, 5, 6; 33:14; Alma 7:14; Mormon 9:2, 3, 6; Ether 13:10, 11.

¹³ Robinson and Garrett, *A Commentary*, 2:302.

¹⁴ Robinson and Garrett, *A Commentary*, 2:302-303.

fate of these people, no one can truly understand it except those who suffer that fate (also v. 46).

49 **Write the vision.** At this juncture—the end of “the sufferings of the ungodly”—the Lord commanded Joseph and Sidney to write what they had seen so far. At each of these commands, it’s not clear if

Celestial Glory (50-70)

50 **we saw and heard.** The Vision was both visual and audible, so they saw what they were learning and had it explained to them. We don’t know all the voices they heard but we know from the record that they heard the Father’s and the Son’s.

50 **the resurrection of the just.** In a tremendous reversal and contrasting experience to the vision of Satan and the sons of perdition, the men were now shown the vision of the celestial glory, introduced to them as the fate of those who come forth in the resurrection of the just, the term they had just added to John 5:29 through the translation and which equals the first resurrection. Since the resurrection of the just includes celestial and terrestrial beings (v. 85), this verse leads into the whole section of vv. 59-80, though from the text it is also clearly divided into two segments for each glory.

That this section focuses on the celestial glory is not made explicit until v. 70. These verses outline the requirements or characteristics of those who qualify for this glory and associated blessings.

51 **received the testimony of Jesus.** To receive something is to take it into our lives, to make it a part of us, to have it change us in some way. When we receive the testimony of Christ, which is a gift from God, it makes us a new person and we are motivated to do the next things called out in the Vision—believe and have faith, be baptized, and receive the Holy Spirit.

51 **baptized after the manner of his burial.** Baptism is clearly taught in the scriptures as being a universal requirement. D&C 76 emphasizes that this is a “commandment which he [God] has given.”

52 **by keeping the commandments they might be washed and cleansed from all their sins.** This is to be justified, which happens because they keep the commandments. Baptism is one of the commandments that must be kept, but we are washed and cleansed through obedience to other commandments as well, such as taking the sacrament. This is because the reception of the Holy Spirit is the true cleansing agent (Moroni 8:25; 3 Nephi 27:20).

52 **receive the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands.** After baptism, celestial beings will have received the Holy Spirit into their lives by proper priesthood authority.

53 **overcome by faith.** This is to be sanctified. Those thus sanctified are “sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise,” meaning their status is ratified by the Holy Spirit, who cannot be deceived and which is given abundantly (“shed forth”) to the faithful. We do not overcome the world “by our own magnificent feats of willpower and self-perfection. We do not save ourselves; Jesus saves us...we must have faith in him as our Savior and become one with him through the gospel covenant. Then, as a part of him, we can share in *his* victory (see Romans 8:37), and this is how we overcome by faith.”¹⁵

*For these overcome, by their faith and their works,
Being tried in their life-time, as purified gold,
And seal'd by the spirit of promise, to life,
By men called of God, as was Aaron of old.*

54 **the church of the Firstborn.** This is to be exalted, to dwell in the presence of God and Christ. As the Church of Jesus Christ is God’s Church on earth, so the Church of the Firstborn is his Church in eternity.

55 **the Father has given all things.** Exalted beings receive “all that my Father hath” (D&C 84:38).

56 **priests and kings.** The co-titles of priest and king represent all heavenly and earthly power (Revelation 1:6; 5:10). They apply to women as well as men (priestesses and queens¹⁶).

*They are they, of the church of the first born of God,-
And unto whose hands he committeth all things;
For they hold the keys of the kingdom of heav'n,
And reign with the Savior, as priests, and as kings.*

57 **which was after the order of Enoch.** Those exalted in the celestial kingdom are priests of God, after the order of Melchizedek, which priesthood was earlier after the order of Enoch, according to the JST version of Genesis, where it says of Melchizedek, “having been approved of God, he was ordained an high priest after the order of the covenant which God made with Enoch, it being after the order of the Son of God” (JST Genesis 14:24).

58 **they are gods.** Citing Psalm 82:6 and probably John 10:34 but changing it to the third person, this is an early glimpse of a unique Latter-day Saint doctrine of the ultimate divinity of man, developed more fully by Joseph Smith in the later Nauvoo period.

59 **all things are theirs.** Echoing the theme of v. 55, the promise that all things present and past are theirs.

So all things are theirs; yea, of life, or of death;

¹⁵ Robinson and Garrett, *A Commentary*, 2:304-305.

¹⁶ McConkie and Oster, *Revelations*, 530.

*Yea, whether things now, or to come, all are theirs,
And they are the Savior's, and he is the Lord's,
Having overcome all, as eternity's heirs.*

60 **they shall overcome all things.** Through faith in the victory of Christ, celestial heirs overcome all things, including death, hell, and sin. “Just as Christ vicariously suffered and paid for sins, so also we, through him, vicariously conquer and overcome all things.”¹⁷

61 **let no man glory in man.** Nothing related to salvation is anything that man can take credit for. Rather, we “glory in God” who is the only one who can defeat all of our enemies (v. 60), which victory he shares with us by his grace or gift.

62 **dwell in the presence of God and his Christ.** Celestial residents enjoy the personal presence of all members of the Godhead, even the Father himself.

63 **he shall bring with him.** At the Second Coming, Jesus will appear with angels and saints who have gone before and been resurrected like him. Those with him shall be members of the Church of the Firstborn, the exalted who have overcome the world and all other things through their faith and obedience and Christ’s Atonement.

64 **the first resurrection.** Verse 65 equates this term with the “resurrection of the just” (also v. 50), thus closing the loop on their understanding of this phrase they translated in John 5:29. The first resurrection was a concept Joseph already knew, both from the Book of Mormon (e.g., Mosiah 15:21-26; Alma 40:15-17) and previous revelations (D&C 45:54; 63:18).

66 **the city of the living God.** Verses 66-69 use similar language to Hebrews 12:22-24, enlarging on the concepts taught in that New Testament chapter. God’s city is the heavenly Jerusalem

67 **the general assembly and church of Enoch, and of the Firstborn.** Enoch’s people lived according to these laws and were caught up to be with God (Moses 7:69), as a pattern for others who might strive to likewise be part of the church of the Firstborn.

*These are they that have come to the heavenly place;
To the numberless courses of angels above:
To the city of God; e’en the holiest of all,
And the home of the blessed, the fountain of love:*

68 **whose names are written in heaven.** There are records kept on earth and records kept in heaven (see Luke 10:20; Philippians 4:3; Hebrews 12:23; Revelation 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27; 22:19; Alma 5:58). The ones in heaven will be the final word.

69 **just men made perfect.** “Just” people are those who are justified, or forgiven of sins, by the atonement of Christ; by that same atonement they are finally made perfect in the resurrection.

69 **Jesus the mediator of the new covenant.** A mediator is a go-between, someone who negotiates between two parties. Jesus stands between us and the Father, who much condemn all sin but can show mercy because of the sacrifice his Only Begotten Son made in our behalf. Other scriptures refer to him as our advocate, which has a similar meaning to mediator.

70 **whose bodies are celestial.** Finally, at the end of the information about this kingdom, we get the name of the glory inherited by those described in verses 50-70: celestial. The comparison to the sun matches language in 1 Corinthians 15:40-41.

*These are they that are perfect through Jesus’ own blood,
Whose bodies celestial are mention’d by Paul,
Where the sun is the typical glory thereof,
And God, and his Christ, are the true judge of all.*

Terrestrial Glory (71-80)

71 **we saw the terrestrial world.** The next glory was presented to the men, with a different glory and different qualifications, and the name given up front. “Terrestrial” is a word from 1 Corinthians 15:40 that pertains to the earth (*terra* in Latin). This is not to mean the earth as it is today but rather the earth as it was first created.¹⁸

*Again I beheld the terrestrial world,
In the order and glory of Jesus, go on;
’Twas not as the church of the first born of God,
But shone in its place, as the moon to the sun.*

72 **died without law.** This doesn’t mean those who did not hear the gospel in this life alone; this comment needs to be taken in the context of the next two verses.

73 **kept in prison, whom the Son visited.** As mentioned in 1 Peter 3:19-20, Jesus started missionary work in the spirit world after his death and before his resurrection.

*Behold, these are they that have died without law;
The heathen of ages that never had hope,
And those of the region and shadow of death,
The spirits in prison, that light has brought up.*

74 **received not...in the flesh, but afterwards.** In the spirit world, many who rejected the gospel in this life will receive it in the next. “Received” means to embrace and accept and is not didn’t have a chance to hear it.¹⁹

¹⁷ Robinson and Garrett, *A Commentary*, 2:308.

¹⁸ Robinson and Garrett, *A Commentary*, 2:313-314.

¹⁹ Robinson and Garrett, *A Commentary*, 2:316.

*To spirits in prison the Savior once preach'd,
And taught them the gospel, with powers afresh;
And then were the living baptiz'd for their dead,
That they might be judg'd as if men in the flesh.*

75 honorable men...blinded by the craftiness of men.

Though good people, they never did choose to accept the fulness of the gospel in this life, because they remained blinded by the persuasions of other men. But the Prophet held out hope for them in the next life.

*These are they that are hon'rabable men of the earth;
Who were blinded and dup'd by the cunning of men:
They receiv'd not the truth of the Savior at first;
But did, when they heard it in prison, again.*

76 who receive of his glory, but not of his fulness. The terrestrial kingdom is not a terrible place; it will have the glory of God upon it. But it is not a place with the fulness of the glory of God or of his blessings, as the celestial world will be.

I taught a family with the missionaries once. As we discussed the plan of salvation and I bore testimony about eternal families, they laughed and said they did not expect to be married after this life and would prefer to be alone with God than together. I was baffled at first, but then realized that they fit the description of this kingdom perfectly—good people who just didn't want the fulness of the Father's blessings.

77 the presence of the Son. Terrestrial inhabitants do not receive the presence of the Father, but do enjoy the occasional presence of the Son. Jesus will not dwell in the terrestrial kingdom, as his abode is the celestial realm.

78 as the moon differs from the sun. See 1 Corinthians 15:41; the difference between the two bodies is stark and significant

79 not valiant in the testimony of Jesus. A fundamental difference between the celestial and the terrestrial glories is the way they receive the testimony of Jesus. Valiant means heroic, brave, or worthy.

80 write while we were yet in the Spirit. Once again, the men were commanded to pause in their vision experience and write down what they had just seen and heard.

Telestial Glory (81-88)

81 the glory of the telestia. The final glory is still glorious, but like the stars compared to the moon, in terms of brightness. The word "telestial" is unique in Mormon theology—it does not appear in the Bible nor is it used by any other Church—the word is not even found in many dictionaries. It was created in the English language with this vision and

possibly has the meaning of something far away (from celestial), since "tele" means 'at a distance.'²⁰ When Joseph Smith was later (about June 1832) translating 1 Corinthians 15:40, he added the word there with the third level of resurrection Paul saw, aligning with what he had learned in D&C 76.

82 received not the gospel of Christ, neither the testimony. Telestial glory recipients never received the gospel or the testimony of Jesus, either in this life or the spirit world.

83 who deny not the Holy Spirit. They might be on the wicked side of the equation, but they are not sons of perdition.

84 they who are thrust down to hell. "Hell" can mean many things. In this case, it appears to refer to their state in the spirit world or prison, where they are confined while waiting for the resurrection.

85 until the last resurrection. The first resurrection is for the celestial and terrestrial heirs, while the last resurrection is for the telestial glory and the sons of perdition. All will be resurrected, but the more righteous a person is, the shorter the wait.

86 but of the Holy Spirit. Those in the telestial realm did not enjoy the presence of the Father or the Son, but do have the possibility of contact with the Holy Spirit in some way. Not having denied the Holy Spirit (v. 83), they can still receive that presence and administering angels from the terrestrial kingdom (v. 88).

88 heirs of salvation. The telestial kingdom is a place of salvation; they are saved from sin, pain, injustice, death, hell, and Satan. It will be a place of joy (v. 89).

*These are they that receive not a fulness of light,
From Christ, in eternity's world, where they are,
The terrestrial sends them the Comforter, though;
And minist'ring angels, to happify there,*

Compare and Contrast (89-98)

These verses step back and do some quick comparisons with all three glories, before turning back for a more detailed look at the telestial kingdom again.

89 the telestial, which surpasses all understanding. Though by comparison, we see the glory of the telestial through the Lord's eyes as the light of stars compared to the brightness of the sun, it is still a glory beyond our present comprehension, and can only be understood by revelation (v. 90). It is a great reward for those who receive it—as great as they could receive.

²⁰ Robinson and Garrett, *A Commentary*, 2:318.

92 ***the glory of the celestial, which excels in all things.*** The terrestrial kingdom excels the telestial (v. 91) and the celestial excels above them both, because it is where God himself reigns and dwells and all bow to him (v. 93).

94 ***they see as they are seen.*** Compare 1 Corinthians 13:12 (“I know even as also I am known”). Celestial beings dwell in a realm of perfect understanding and clarity. There is no hypocrisy, no hidden agendas, nothing to fear, and nothing impure. Like the Father, they share his vision of eternity and his comprehension of all things, thus they see as they are seen and know and they are known.

95 ***equal in power, and in might, and in dominion.*** The Father makes the heirs of the celestial kingdom equal to himself in power, might, and dominion, though they are never equal with him in all things, and thus eternally bow before his throne in humble reverence (v. 93), because their status is a gift from him—he *makes* them equal in these things.

98 ***the telestial world.*** While the preceding verses compared the three, the remaining verses to 112 focus again on the telestial kingdom.

Telestial Revisited (99-112)

99 ***of Paul, and of Apollos, and of Cephas.*** This expression from the New Testament (1 Corinthians 1:12; 3:22) and represents the division of opinions among Christianity and men in general (v. 100). It also represents those who embrace the messengers more than the message.

*These are they that came out for Apollos and Paul;
For Cephas and Jesus, in all kinds of hope;
For Enoch and Moses, and Peter, and John;
For Luther and Calvin, and even the Pope.*

101 ***received not the gospel, neither the testimony of Jesus...prophets...the everlasting covenant.*** The inheritors of the telestial kingdom reject Jesus and his message of salvation, the prophets who taught it, and all covenants associated with it. In short, they deliberately choose to have nothing to do with anything related to salvation.

102 ***who will not be gathered.*** In early 1832, the concept of gathering was wholly tied to the law of consecration and stewardship, which were laws given to prepare the Church to be sanctified and receive the glory of God (D&C 42 and 43). Putting it in their terms, then, the Lord declared that those who would not gather and live these laws were fit for the lowest degree of glory only.

*By the order of God, last of all, these are they.
That will not be gather'd with the saints here below,
To be caught up to Jesus, and meet in the cloud:-
In darkness they worshipp'd; to darkness they go.*

103 ***liars, and sorcerers, and adulterers, and whoremongers.*** This is not a complete list of all the sins that will

qualify a person for the telestial kingdom, but is representative. It is interesting that lying gets mentioned twice. In the poetic version, Joseph Smith added hypocrites, thieves, and the proud to the list.

104 ***suffer the wrath of God.*** Though a kingdom of glory, it is also a place of suffering, at least compared with the two kingdoms above it. They suffer the “wrath of God,” “the vengeance of eternal fire” (v. 105), and “the wrath of Almighty God” (v. 106).

106 ***cast down to hell.*** As explained in verse 84 above, telestial recipients are in hell after they die, being confined to the spirit world until the last resurrection. Verses 106-108 explain when that resurrection will be—after Christ himself has fully completed his work.

107 ***I have overcome and have trodden the wine-press alone.*** At the end of his work—when all of Father’s children have had the opportunity to accept and reject the gospel in mortality and post-mortality—then Jesus can “deliver up the kingdom” to his Father and declare that he has finished the work. The image of him working alone in the wine press comes from Isaiah 63:3, where the wicked are the ones being crushed like grapes, and their blood staining his garment red as he tramples them in fury and anger.

108 ***shall he be crowned.*** Jesus already sits at the right hand of the Father and rightly takes his place as God, but his final crown waits until this moment, when the work given him by the Father is complete.

109 ***text note:***

RB2 was missing the phrase “and the inhabitants” from the beginning of this verse, intimating that they only saw the glory of the telestial world, but they later added that they also saw in vision the inhabitants as well.

109 ***they were as innumerable as the stars.*** The comparison to the stars is appropriate both in terms of glory as well as the numbers of those in the telestial kingdom. With many children on worlds scattered throughout the universe, it is no wonder that the number of those who inherit this kingdom are innumerable to man.

110 ***all shall bow the knee.*** Even those who inherit a glory that does not allow them to enjoy the presence of Christ will nevertheless bow their knee to him and confess his right to be on the throne given him by the Father and to judge them appropriately.

111 ***they shall be judged according to their works.*** The judgment is based on our own actions and decisions, and we each receive exactly what we should, with a mansion and dominion perfectly suited to our station.

112 ***they cannot come.*** Telestial beings can never come into the presence of the Father and the Son.

See and Understand by the Power of the Spirit (113-119)

113 *the end of the vision*. Like the opening verses that explain the Vision, these concluding verses are inspired declarations and direction that were not part of the vision, but written as directed by the Spirit that we might learn some additional lessons beyond the theology of the vision itself.

113 *we were commanded to write*. With the Vision over, the brethren were commanded to write for the final time.

115 *he commanded us we should not write*. Parts of what they saw—perhaps much of it!—was not written, by commandment of the Lord. This was partly because they were not capable of conveying what they saw in words, but more importantly because they were “not lawful for man to utter” and “they are only to be seen and understood by the power of the Holy Spirit” (v. 116).

117 *seeing and knowing for themselves*. Joseph and Sidney wanted to be clear about this point: this was not a vision granted to them alone. All who love God and “purify themselves before him” (v. 116) are promised the same privilege, vision, and comprehension of these eternal truths.

118 *they may be able to bear his presence*. The Spirit transforms the righteous even while in the flesh so that they can endure the glory of God (compare Moses 1). The purification required to see the same vision is the same required to stand in the presence of God, which we all must do to be worthy of the blessings and glories promised in the Vision.

119 *glory, and honor, and dominion forever*. The language of the final verse is reminiscent of several verses in Revelation, though no specific verse serves as a direct quote.²¹ Rather, the two brethren expressed their humility and respect for the Father and Son by ascribing to them these attributes of praise and worship, a fitting ending.

Results

D&C 76 was strikingly new doctrine; no other church on earth taught anything like it then, nor do they now. Many Saints and some outside the Church first saw in it a decla-

²¹ Compare Revelation 1:6 (“glory and dominion”); 4:9 (“glory and honour”); 4:11 (“glory and honour and power”); 5:12 (“power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing”); 5:13 (“Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power”); 7:12 (“Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might”); and 19:1 (Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power”).

²² Esplin, Grow, and Godfrey, *Joseph Smith’s Revelations*, Loc 11151.

ration of universal salvation, such as taught by the Universalists.²² This was disturbing to those raised in more traditional Protestant churches that taught of heaven for the righteous and hell for the wicked. And it’s true that this view of degrees of glory and sons of perdition sends very few souls to something that is not glorious—making the Mormon conception of heaven one of the broadest and most generous among Christian churches then and today. But it also uses much of the language of the Bible and Protestant teachings relating to eternal rewards and glory, even as it stretches that language into new meanings and took the exaltation of mankind into god-like power and dominion.²³

Some of the Saints struggled with the concepts it presented. For example, Brigham Young, of a traditional Methodist background, said, “When the Vision came first to me, it was so directly contrary and opposed to my former education, I said, wait a little; I did not reject it, but I could not understand it. . . . I used to think and pray, to read and think, until I knew, and fully understood it for myself, by the visions of the holy Spirit.”²⁴ Joseph Young, his brother and raised in the same faith, said, “I could not believe it at first. Why the Lord was going to save every body.” But after praying and discussing it with Joseph, he “could see it was nothing but good sense accompanying the power of God.”²⁵

Others who had a more Campbellite background accepted it more readily. John Murdock was one of these. When he discovered some stumbling after reading it, he recorded that “I called them together & confirmed them in the truth.”²⁶

Others had rejected traditional Christian concepts and so felt inclined to accept this quite readily. Wilford Woodruff rejoiced in reading the Vision, even before he had met Joseph Smith: “It had given me more light and more knowledge with regard to the dealings of God with men than all the revelation I had ever read in the Bible or anywhere else. . . . [It] opened my eyes. It showed me the power of God and righteousness of God in dealing with the human family. . . . The man that advanced that revelation was a prophet of God. I know it for myself.”²⁷

The Prophet himself declared the Vision to be “pleasing to the Saint” and a “light which burst upon the world.” He

²³ Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 199-201.

²⁴ Dahl, “The Vision of the Glories,” in Millet, *Studies in Scripture*, 281-282.

²⁵ <https://history.lds.org/article/doctrine-and-covenants-revelations-in-context-the-vision>, accessed 8 January 2017.

²⁶ <https://history.lds.org/article/doctrine-and-covenants-revelations-in-context-the-vision>, accessed 8 January 2017.

²⁷ Harper, *Making Sense*, 271.

stated that every truth in the Bible “unsullied from the wisdom of men” shows the truth of the Vision, “and witnesses the fact that that document is a transcript from the Records of the eternal world.” Reading it, “every honest man is constrained to exclaim; It came from God.”²⁸

The Vision set the Mormons apart from other faiths in a way that had not been seen before, even with the Book of Mormon and claims of angelic visits. This doctrine changed a critical and nearly universal Christian understanding of the next life—and the previous one. Signed by

both men, it stands out as a document and vision not just from Joseph Smith but attested by Sidney Rigdon with his Campbellite background.

There was much that was not written (see vv. 114-116). Joseph Smith is recorded to have said that he “could explain a hundred fold more than I ever have, of the glories of the Kingdoms manifested to me in the vision, were I permitted, and were the people prepared to received it.”²⁹ But those who love God and purify themselves have the promise that they, too, can see and know this same vision.

D&C 77 – Revelation Questions and Answers

Date and Location

Between Sunday, 4 March and Tuesday, 20 March 1832, at Hiram, Ohio, in the John and Elsa Johnson home.

Setting

Joseph Smith described the text of D&C 77 as having been received “in connexion with the translation of the scripture.”³⁰ No other details were given, nor was the text recorded in any of the early revelation books. (Note that other sections of the Doctrine and Covenants were recorded as received in early to mid-March 1832, including D&C 78, 79, 80, and 81) though they are not covered in this lesson.)

Broadly, the timing can be narrowed to between 4 March, when Joseph returned to Hiram from about a week in Kirtland, and 20 March, when Joseph was commanded to stop the translation in preparation for the trip to Missouri.³¹ But it is likely that the revelation was closer to the end of that period than the beginning, because the brethren ended the Bible translation in Revelation 11 at that time, which coincides with the last chapter mentioned in D&C 77. This seems to indicate that as they went through the chapters, they accumulated questions, and then sought guidance from the Lord on their questions. The questions would not likely have proceeded the JST work but came “in connexion” with it, as Joseph said.

²⁸ “History, 1838–1856, volume A-1 [23 December 1805–30 August 1834],” p. 192, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed December 30, 2016, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-a-1-23-december-1805-30-august-1834/198>.

²⁹ “History, 1838–1856, volume D-1 [1 August 1842–1 July 1843],” p. 1556, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed December 30, 2016, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-d-1-1-august-1842-1-july-1843/199>.

³⁰ *Times and Seasons*, 1 August 1844.

Interestingly, for the timing of the translation, it means the brethren made very quick progress in the New Testament. On 16 February, they were in John 5 and by 24 March (perhaps 20 March), they were halfway through Revelation. This aligns with the new transcription method that they started with John 6 (probably on 17 February) where they only recorded changes, not every verse and chapter. This greatly sped up the process, allowing them to progress to Revelation in just over a month, but also dramatically reducing the number of total changes made.³²

Documents and Publication

The oldest copy is in Revelation Book 1 (between 26 Apr and Aug 1832). Other copies include Richards’ Pocket Companion (1838). D&C 77 was first published in *The Times and Seasons* (1 Aug 1844). It was not included in the Doctrine and Covenants until the 1876 version.

Commentary

1 *the sea of glass*. See Revelation 4:6. The answer explains that this is the earth in its final, immortal state. Joseph Smith later stated, “when the earth was sanctified and became like a sea of glass, it would be one great urim and thummim, and the Saints could look in it and see as they are seen.”³³

2-3 *the four beasts*. See Revelation 4:6-8. The answer explains that these are “figurative expressions” to represent

³¹ JSP, D2:218 records an unpublished revelation, the Lord commanded Joseph to “omit the translation for the present time.”

³² For example, using the longer method, Matthew had 633 verses changed, Mark 427, and Luke 687, for an average of twenty-six changes per chapter. John had only 212 changes (split with the longer method in chapters 1-5 and the shorter method in the rest, giving an average of ten changes per chapter), and the rest of the New Testament averaged only three changes per chapter.

³³ Robinson and Garrett, *A Commentary*, 338; see also D&C 76:94; 130:6-9.

heaven, paradise, happiness, and beasts. Later, however, Joseph taught that these particular beasts were real creatures: “The four beasts were four of the most noble animals that had filled the measure of their creation, and had been saved from other worlds, because they were perfect: they were like angels in their sphere. We are not told where they came from, and I do not know; but they were seen and heard by John praising and glorifying God.”³⁴

4 the eyes and wings. See Revelation 4:8. The answer has the eyes represent “light and knowledge” and the wings “power, to move, to act, etc.” These responses are very much in line with typical interpretations of these symbols today. Thus, this is not a physical description of the animals, but symbolic of their abilities.

The beasts individually are also very symbolic. A lion represents Judah and wild beasts; the calf represents Ephraim and domesticated beasts; the one with the face of a man represents Reuben and mankind; and the eagle represents Dan and fowls. Thus four key tribes of Israel are portrayed, as are all the major groupings of animals recognized by the ancients, plus mankind.

5 the four and twenty elders. See Revelation 4:4, 10-11. The answer indicates that these men were actual men from the seven churches (addressed in Revelation 2-3) who were seen by John “in the paradise of God.” John may well have known some or all of them personally.

But the men also have a symbolic meaning, representing the faithful who stand in the presence of God, the number combining the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles (the old and new covenants). The JST adds that they are in the midst of the throne (JST Revelation 4:6).

6 the book which John saw. See Revelation 5:1. The book (or more properly, scroll) is loaded with writing, written on the front and back of each page so that there was no more room, then sealed with seven seals (see the next verse). The answer indicates that the book contains the will, mysteries, and works of God during the earth’s temporal existence, and the symbolism of the scroll is that every act of God is captured with nothing overlooked, including the past and the future.

7 the seven seals. See Revelation 5:2. In Revelation, the seals cannot be opened by anyone at first, and John weeps because no one is worthy to open the scroll. Seals were placed on documents by people in authority and the only one entitled to open such a sealed message was the one for whom it was intended, or one authorized by that person to act in his behalf. Seals were used on important legal documents. In this case, if someone could not be found who was

able to legally open the scroll, God’s contract with mankind could be broken, hence John’s tears.

8 the four angels. See Revelation 7:1. The answer explains that the four angels have power to save and to destroy, to shut up the heavens, to seal up unto eternal life, and to cast down to darkness. They also have the charge to bring the everlasting gospel to the whole earth, thus making them destroying *and* saving angels.

At the end of Revelation 6, the sixth seal was opened and great events were seen. Now before the seventh and final seal was opened come the four angels. Four represents completeness and totality—the angels can cover the entire earth with their shared mission. Wilford Woodruff taught that these angels are functioning now, helping to spread the gospel ahead of the promised destructions.³⁵

9 the angel ascending from the east. See Revelation 7:2. The answer indicates that this angel holds back the other four from unleashing their destruction until all the servants of God have been sealed up. It further adds that this angel functions in the role of an Elias to gather and restore. The seal he carries is the seal of God—literally the stamp of God that would mark the servants of God in their foreheads as belonging to him. Like the Passover in Egypt (Exodus 12), this seal marks and saves the servants from the coming destruction (compare Ezekiel 9:4). The angel represents several ‘Eliases’ in our dispensation, who came and restored keys, power, and knowledge.

10 What time. See Revelation 7. The answer is straightforward and matches the context of the chapter—these things happen during the sixth thousand years or during the time after the sixth seal was opened, but before the seventh seal was opened (Revelation 8:1). This is our day.

11 the one hundred and forty-four thousand. See Revelation 7:4-8. The answer states that they are high priests (a relatively new priesthood office in early 1832, with only a handful of men called), ordained to administer the gospel, ordained out of every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, to bring as many as possible into the Church of the Firstborn.

This number is highly symbolic also. Twelve represents priesthood; twelve times twelve amplifies it, and multiplying it by 1,000 makes it massive and complete. In other words, it is a large and powerful priesthood group made complete by the Lord. They are associated with the temple and with the ordinances to be had there that will bring people into the celestial Church of the Firstborn, not just the earthly kingdom. It is of passing interest that the tribe of

³⁴ *Teachings*, 291-292.

³⁵ Richard Draper, *Opening of the Seven Seals*, 77.

Dan is missing from the list, replaced by Joseph's son, Manasseh, perhaps because Dan was the traditional tribe of the anti-Christ (compare the list in 1 Chronicles 7).

12 *the sounding of the trumpets*. See Revelation 8:2 (the seven angels sound their trumpets throughout chapters 8, 9, and 11). The answer relates the seven days of creation to the seven seals, and as on the seventh day he sanctified his work of creation, so at the opening of the seventh seal he will sanctify the earth and complete his work of salvation. The seven trumpets represent events that open the seventh seal and directly precede the Second Coming. Compare D&C 88:96-106.

13 *When are the things to be accomplished*. See Revelation 9. The answer is that the events of this chapter are after the opening of the seventh seal, but before the Second Coming. The chapter describes wars and plagues that will afflict mankind, with great destruction and death heaped upon mankind. These will precede the Second Coming and prepare the earth to receive its king.

14 *the little book which was eaten by John*. See Revelation 10:2, 8-11; compare Ezekiel 2:9 – 3:4. The answer is that the book/scroll represents John's mission to gather Israel and be an Elias to come and restore. John was an Elias when he came with his brethren Peter and James to restore the priesthood to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery. Joseph Smith had already learned that John was a translated being with a specific mission (D&C 7), so this is an application of that learning to a symbolic passage in Revelation.

15 *the two witnesses*. See Revelation 11:3-12. The answer is that they are two prophets raised up to work with the Jewish nation, to prophesy to them after they have gathered to and rebuilt Jerusalem. The very explanation is prophetic in a way that we might overlook today—in 1832, there was no gathering of Jews to the land of Palestine, no nation of Israel, and no rebuilding of Jerusalem.

The two prophets will be authorized servants sent to that nation to share God's messages during perhaps the most challenging time of Israel's history—events that could just as easily lead to their destruction as their salvation. They are in the likeness (in terms of their power) of two translated prophets—Moses and Elijah—calling down fire on their enemies, shutting up the heavens, turning water into blood, and smiting the earth with all manner of plagues. Revelation makes clear that these two will finally be killed and lie in the streets, giving cause to their enemies to rejoice, but then will be resurrected before everyone and taken up into heaven, signaling the time for the seventh trumpet to sound and to trigger the beginning of Christ's reign as king of the earth.

Results

D&C 77 unlocks Revelation unlike any other commentary, language study, or scholarly analysis. Using the Spirit, the Prophet looked at the images John wrote and understood their intent and meaning. He was concise but clear, and provided invaluable information that helps clarify the message of the book.

Joseph Smith taught from the Bible often, but rarely from Revelation. One notable exception was in April 1843, in response to the teaching of a member in Nauvoo, who was offering interpretations of the book. Frustrated that the symbols in Revelation were the subject of much speculation among members, he declared that the speculation was from ignorance, and proceeded to share some of his own knowledge, as he had learned from D&C 77 and subsequent personal revelation. Armed with this knowledge, he declared that "Revelation is one of the plainest books God ever caused to be written."³⁶ So it can be with us as we rely on the teachings of the prophets and the guidance of the Spirit.

³⁶ Harper, *Making Sense*, 276.

Images



Image #1: Home of John and Elsa (Alice) Johnson, Hiram, Ohio. Engraving by N. Friend, 1874. Image from Combination Atlas Map of Portage County, 1874. (Courtesy David Rumsey Map Collection, www.davidrumsey.com.); from josephsmithpapers.org.



Image #2: Johnson home today, Hiram, Ohio (from lds.org).



Image #3: "Translation room" in the Johnson home, Hiram, Ohio, built by splitting the Johnson bedroom with a new wall, where Joseph Smith worked on the Bible translation and held several Church conferences in 1831-1832.



Image #4: Johnson farm, cabins, and Ryder properties, Hiram, Ohio. Johnson property boundaries in yellow. Note the LDS church on the west edge and the cabins (not there today) where Sidney Rigdon lived.

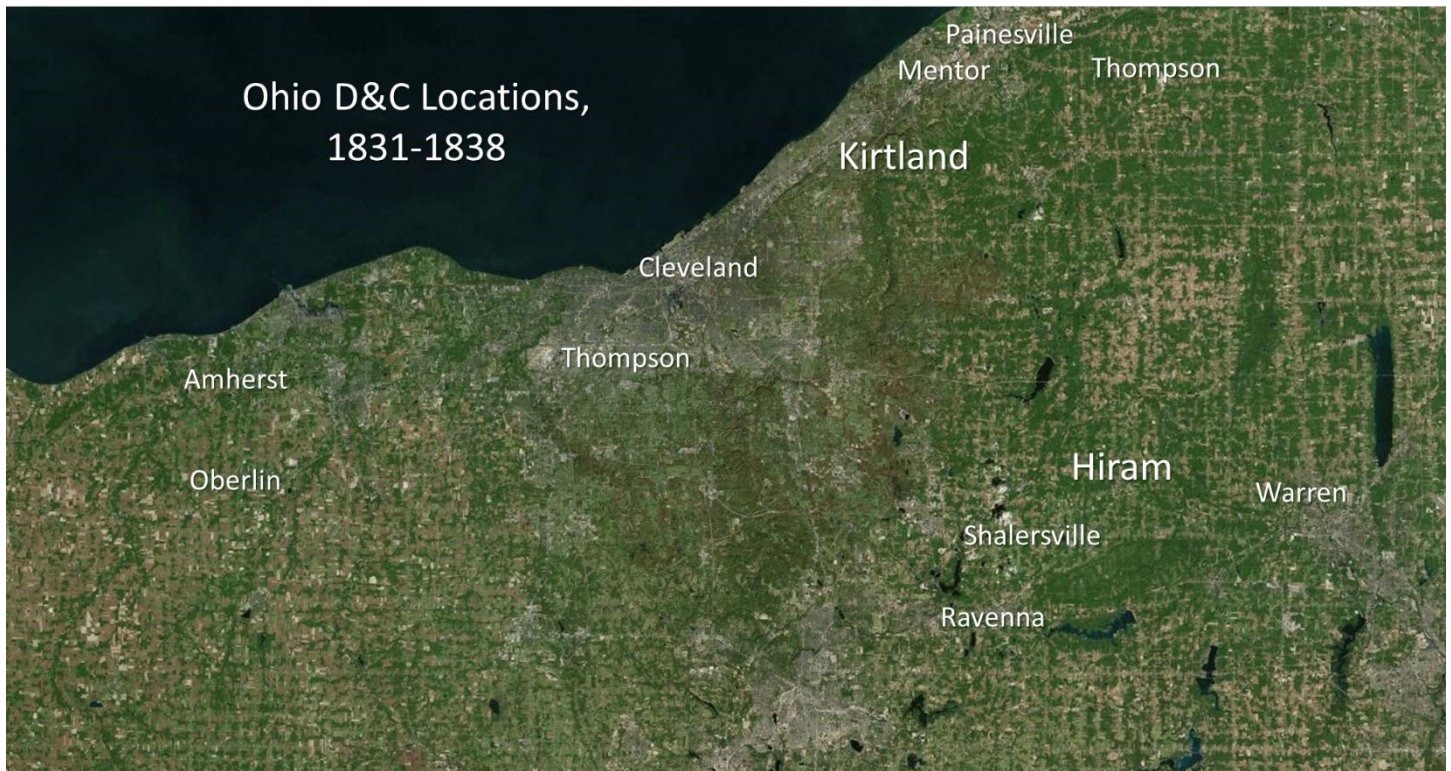


Image #5: Church history sites in the area around Kirtland, Ohio, 1831-1838.

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For text notes:

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RB2 – Revelation Book 2, from *JSP*, MRB:407-665.

Dx – Various early manuscripts of revelations in the *JSP* Documents series books.

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