

# D&C 133 - 134

Lesson 31, Doctrine & Covenants, Adult Religion Class, Monday, 15 May 2017

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## General Introduction

These two revelations are tucked away at the end of the Doctrine and Covenants, completely out of date order. We might call them the ‘flashback pair,’ with the revelation just before them being Joseph Smith’s last and the one right after it honoring the fallen Prophet and his brother. These two sections—one an important revelation and the other a declaration of beliefs—were put last because they act as summaries of key messages and positions taken by the Church in its early years, and (in the case of D&C 134) because the book was mostly printed.

Nevertheless, their messages are as timely as today’s headlines—indeed, they guide us in decision-making today because their themes and principles are long-lasting, even eternal. They have both helped steer the Church to become what it is today and merit our study to never forget the principles taught.

### Summary Chronology

#### D&C 133

- **Sat, 29 Oct 1831, Hiram, OH** – JS received D&C 66.

- **Sun, 30 Oct 1831, Hiram, OH** – JS received D&C 65.
- **Tue-Wed, 1-2 Nov 1831, Hiram, OH** – A two-day conference was held at the John Johnson farm, with one of the key topics being the desire to publish Joseph Smith’s revelations. Resolved to publish 10,000 copies (later reduced to 3,000). Several revelations were received in conjunction with the conference (D&C 1, 67, 68).
- **Thu, 3 Nov 1831, Hiram, OH** – JS received D&C 133.

#### D&C 134

- **Mon, 17 Aug 1835, Kirtland, OH** – Oliver Cowdery authored D&C 134. JS left on a mission to Michigan either on this date or just before it.
- **Sun, 23 Aug 1835, Kirtland, OH** – JS returned from trip to Michigan.
- **Sep 1835, Kirtland, OH** – Doctrine and Covenants first was available for purchase.

## D&C 133 – The Last Days

### Date and Location

Thursday, 3 November 1831, Hiram, OH

### Setting

The brethren held a two-day conference in Hiram, Ohio, at the John Johnson farm, on 1-2 November 1831. Several revelations were received at the conference—sections 1, 67, and 68. There were two main topics of interest: publishing the revelations in the Book of Commandments, and spreading the gospel through missionary work. Section 1 was received specifically as a preface to the revelations, designated as such in the text itself.

The day following the conference, when many of the brethren were still present, another revelation was received, D&C 133. This one was soon declared to be the appendix to the Book of Commandments, becoming a bookend with D&C 1 to that publication.

D&C 133 is very millennial in content and eschatological in emphasis. It speaks of the wickedness of the last days, the great call for the righteous to flee the wicked world and come to Zion, the coming judgment on the wicked, and the responsibility of the early Church to carry that message to all. It echoes themes in revelations given just prior—the gathering to Zion, the building of a temple, watching and being prepared for the judgments of the last days—but it also develops new themes that carry forward into subsequent revelations, including events associated with the Second Coming, the return of Israel to Jerusalem, the two world headquarters of the Millennium in Israel and Missouri. It equates the wicked world with Babylon more than any other section (four times) and commissions a bold endeavor for a handful of men to take the gospel message to the entire world. While other revelations called people to specific missions and assignments, this one gives the Lord’s reasons for all the work, and the urgency behind it.

Because of its initial position as an appendix (or better, an end-summary), D&C 133 has always been in or near the back of the published revelations, even though that puts it way out of chronological sequence.

## Documents and Publication

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The oldest copy is in RB1 (116-121; *JSP*, D2:114-121). It was first published in *The Evening and the Morning Star* (May 1833), then as Section 100 in 1835.

## Outline

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- Prepare for the Second Coming (1-6)
- Flee from Babylon (7-16)
- The return of Christ (17-35)
- The gospel restored (36-40)
- Judgment on the wicked (41-51)
- The year of the redeemed (52-56)
- Preaching to the world (57-74)

## Commentary

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### Prepare for the Second Coming (1-6)

1 **Hearken, O ye people of my church.** “Hearken” is a common starting phrase in many revelations, especially in 1831 revelations, including D&C 1:1, 41:2; 42:1; 43:1 and 15; 45:1 and 6; 46:1; 50:1; 57:1; 58:1; 62:1; 64:1; 67:1; 70:1; 72:1; and 78:1. To “hearken” is to hear but also to take action, to obey what you have heard.

2 **The Lord who shall suddenly come to his temple.** From Malachi 3:1 (3 Nephi 24:1), the only other mention of his coming “suddenly” is in D&C 36:8. However, other scriptures mention Christ coming to the temple (e.g., 42:36). The idea of building a temple in Zion was just introduced to the Church in the summer of 1831 when Church leaders dedicated land in Independence, Missouri for that purpose. Now in the fall, the Lord puts some urgency behind their efforts; he needs a temple to suddenly come to.

2 **come down upon the world.** The opposite of what those in the temple will experience with his coming, the “ungodly” will experience “a curse to judgment.”

3 **make bare his holy arm.** Like ‘girding up the loins,’ making bare the arm is getting ready for work or action; God is going to work hard for the salvation of mankind.

4 **sanctify yourselves.** To sanctify is to set something or someone apart for a specific, usually divine purpose. Another equivalent term is ‘make holy.’

5 **Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord.** From Isaiah 52:11 (3 Nephi 20:41). This was quoted once before in the Doctrine and Covenants 38:42. The reference is to

the temple (v. 2), such as the priests and Levites who carried the various instruments used in temple worship.

6 **Call your solemn assemblies.** From Joel 1:14; 2:15. This is the first chronological use of this phrase, also tying to temple worship. The term was used in the revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants leading up to the dedication of the Kirtland temple but not after that (see D&C 88:70, 117; 95:7; 108:4; 109:6, 10).

### Flee from Babylon (7-16)

7 **Go ye out of Babylon.** The concept is echoed in Jeremiah 50:8 and in the metaphor of Babylon used repeatedly in Revelation (14:8; 16:19; 17:5; 18:2, 10, 21), though that book never calls for the Saints to leave her, specifically, because in John’s chronology, that has already happened. We get a sense of Babylon’s days of glory in the Apocalypse but most of the laments are about her fall because judgment is already upon her.

8 **Send forth the elders of my church.** The Church in late 1831 was a few hundred members, at most. Yet the call was far-reaching, for elders to go to the whole world—the nations, the islands, foreign lands, the Gentiles and the Jews—and teach important truths.

9 **Go ye forth unto the land of Zion.** The main cry of the elders was to gather to Zion, meaning Jackson County, Missouri, which had just been identified as the central place of Zion in the summer of 1831.

9 **that her stakes may be strengthened.** The imagery of stakes that hold down tent Zion and are moved add as the tent is enlarged to allow more people into it is from Isaiah 33:20 and 54:2. The first use of the term in a modern revelation pre-dated this revelation by just two days (D&C 68:25-26).

10 **Awake and arise.** Though several Old Testament scriptures use these terms together (Judges 5:12; Psalms 7:6; 44:23; Isaiah 26:19; Habakkuk 2:19, it’s in the Book of Mormon that the words are found in direct proximity (2 Nephi 1:14; Moroni 10:31). The only other use in the Doctrine and Covenants is from the summer of 1838, calling some of the brethren in Kirtland to stop coveting land and possessions and come to Missouri. Here it is to the world from the elders—“Prepare yourselves for the great day of the Lord.”

10 **go forth to meet the Bridegroom.** See Matthew 25:1-6, where the parable is to the ten young women to go out and meet the bridegroom as he comes for the wedding. Like the young women, we are asked well ahead of time to be prepared; will we do it?

11 **ye know neither the day nor the hour.** A quote from Matthew 25:13. It says we can’t know the specific day or hour but it doesn’t say we can’t know the season as we

watch for the prophesied signs, many of which are given here in this revelation.

12 ***the Gentiles flee unto Zion.*** This is the first mention of the idea of two world center-places, one for Gentiles and one for Jews in Jerusalem (v. 13). See also v. 20-21.

13 ***the mountains of the Lord's house.*** The plural is significant, as the only temple discussed so far was the one in Independence. This anticipates multiple temples in the Church but more importantly, one in Zion and one in Jerusalem, neither of which exist yet today, before the Second Coming.

14 ***wickedness, which is spiritual Babylon.*** To clarify the metaphor, Babylon is defined as “wickedness,” not just a physical place. Likewise, Zion is “the pure in heart” (though not until 1833 in D&C 97:21, but see Moses 7:18).

15 ***let not your flight be in haste.*** “Come to Zion” was the call but equally important was to come in an orderly way, letting “all things be prepared” ahead of coming.

15 ***let him not look back lest sudden destruction.*** A reference to Lot's wife, who looked back, perhaps regretting their decision to flee the city before it was destroyed, and she turned to salt (Genesis 19:26).

16 ***commandeth all men everywhere to repent.*** Before the Church was even organized or the Book of Mormon published, the Lord's instruction was “Say nothing but repentance unto this generation” (D&C 6:9). Without the call to repent, change, and make transforming covenants with God, the Church would just be a nice social organization. With the call to repent and priesthood authority to enable true change in lives through the Holy Ghost, we can make new creatures of us all.

## The return of Christ (17-35)

17 ***God hath sent forth the angel.*** The obvious association with Moroni is immediately noted, but the symbolic message is for many messengers from God to prepare the way for Christ's coming.

17 ***make his paths straight.*** Matthew 3:3 (and Mark 1:3 and Luke 3:4) quote Isaiah 40:3, which all come into play here. Anciently, heralds would precede a great man, not only announcing his coming but literally making the road he would come on clear, smooth, and “straight” to make his journey easier. In our day, we prepare for the Second Coming by preparing the world with the gospel message, the call to repent, and the plea to gather to holy places and make sacred covenants. All those things make paths straight (and straighten out many lives) so the earth is ready for his coming.

18 ***the Lamb shall stand upon Mount Zion.*** From Revelation 14:1, where the Lamb stands on the mountain with 144,000.

18 ***Father's name written on their foreheads.*** In the ancient world, slaves would sometimes have the master's name tattooed on their hands or foreheads to signify permanent ownership. So the 144,000 symbolic followers of God have his name on their foreheads, meaning they are committed to him and permanently his.

20 ***he shall stand upon the mount of Olivet.*** See Zechariah 14:4, a prophecy where the Messiah stands on the Mount of Olives as it breaks in half, leaving a “great valley” in the middle of the mountain, with openings on the east and west, allowing the inhabitants of Jerusalem to flee tragedy and be safe with this great Messiah, who they recognize not at first, until they see his hands and feet (Zechariah 13:6; also Acts 1:11-12). The Messiah also stands on the ocean (putting his feet on it shows his total control over it) and islands in the sea, and on Zion itself.

21 ***voice out of Zion, and he shall speak from Jerusalem.*** This is the clearest scripture describing the ‘two capitals’ concept during the Millennium, with the Lord directing the world from both locations in Israel and Missouri. It helps us better understand less clear passages, such as Isaiah 2:2-3, where both places are mentioned but not clearly as two centers of world government.

22 ***many waters . . . great thunder.*** See Revelation 14:2, from which this is nearly a quote, but also Psalm 29:3; 93:4; Ezekiel 43:2; Revelation 1:15. Note that in Revelation 19:6, the “great multitude” that is praising the Lord also speaks with a voice that is like “many waters” and “mighty thunderings.”

23 ***driven back into the north countries.*** Jeremiah prophesied of a return from “the north countries” (Jeremiah 31:8), by which he probably meant the land of Assyria and Babylon. But there is more at work here, as the waters of the ocean are driven north, causing islands to become one land. Revelation mentions islands and mountains moving in the last days (6:14; 16:20), representative of a massive change in the landscape.

24 ***in the days before it was divided.*** This refers to an obscure and unclear reference in Genesis 10:25 about the earth being divided in the days of Peleg. Some take that to mean a huge division of the landmasses of the earth, but geologically there is no evidence for such a recent, huge event. Since this is the only real reference in scripture referring to this event, time will only tell how much is literal and how much is symbolic.

25 ***shall reign over all flesh.*** D&C 49:6 anticipates this event of the Lord being king over the whole earth, as does 1 Chronicles 16:31; Psalms 97:1; 99:1; Jeremiah 23:5; and Revelation 19:15-16.

26 **they who are in the north countries.** Those in the “north countries” are the ‘lost’ tribes taken captive by Assyria and Babylon. This prophecy stands alone in canonized scripture, predicating divine help through prophets do “smite the rocks” and melt ice so these people can return. However, in Joseph Smith’s Bible was a passage that he surely knew, from 2 Esdras 13:40-47, that spoke of the ten tribes leaving Assyria, heading north supported by miracles, and predicting their eventual return by the same miraculous power, with God blocking rivers that they might pass over and return to their previous homes.

27 **an highway shall be cast up.** Another unique prophecy but echoing the call of Isaiah 62:10 to “cast up the highway” in preparation for the Lord’s coming.

28 **Their enemies shall become a prey.** The language echoes 2 Kings 21:14 but again is unique to this prophecy.

29 **pools of living water.** Jesus is the living water (Jeremiah 2:13; John 4:10) but it will one day come out of Jerusalem and heal the world (Zechariah 14:8). Like all these verses about the gathering of the ten tribes, it’s unclear how much is symbolic language and how much is literal; the “barren deserts” of the wicked world would certainly be healed by the “living water” of Christ and his reign, for example.

30 **they shall bring forth their rich treasures.** “They” likely refers to the tribes coming out of the north. In D&C 63:41, Church members were promised that if they sent their “treasures” to Zion, they would be greatly blessed. In this case, the treasures come from returning tribes who are led by prophets to come worship the new king of the earth.

31 **the everlasting hill shall tremble.** This is the only use of this phrase in the Doctrine and Covenants and has allusion to Genesis 49:26, the blessing of Israel to his son, Joseph.

32 **they fall down and be crowned with glory.** The lost tribes will come to Zion and fall down before the Lord, who will crown them with glory by “the hands of the servants of the Lord.”

33 **songs of everlasting joy.** Originally from Isaiah 35:10, this idea of the righteous coming to Zion singing joyful songs was also in D&C 45:71; 66:11; and Moses 7:53. D&C 84:99-102 records one of the songs they will sing.

34 **richer blessing upon the head of Ephraim.** The lost tribes experience in the last days was described, and even “richer” blessings were promised to those of the tribe of Ephraim, which is most of the members of the Church in that day and ours, based on lineage and inheritance.

35 **Judah . . . shall be sanctified in holiness.** Not only the lost tribes and Ephraim but Judah also shall be made holy again to the Lord and will be blessed with his presence “day and night.”

## The gospel restored (36-40)

36 **sent forth mine angel.** See v. 17. Though the angel (or angels) have appeared to a few in the past, bringing keys and restored truth and knowledge, in the day of the Coming of the Lord, they will appear “unto many” on the earth.

37 **gospel shall be preached unto every nation.** An important sign of the last days is that the whole world will have the opportunity to hear the gospel message. Until that happens, we can safely say the Second Coming is not yet.

38 **Fear God and give glory to him.** In a world that gives glory to those with wealth, fame, power, or even a great YouTube channel, the message of the servants of God in the last days to recognize and fear the judgments he has promised upon the wicked is a critical one.

39 **worship him that made heaven, and earth.** The call of the missionaries is to acknowledge the God who created all things and who thus has power over all things.

40 **rend the heavens.** The last days will be a time of misery for many, who will seek for the Lord and ask for him to come down.

## Judgment on the wicked (41-51)

41 **it shall be answered upon their heads.** Because they are unrepentant and wicked, the very power they hoped the Lord would manifest to fix the world will be a “melting fire” to them, causing the earth’s waters to boil.

42 **all nations shall tremble.** When Jesus comes, no one shall be left wondering about his power and authority. All will not only know him but will tremble in his presence.

43 **terrible things, things they look not for.** Many will expect a Second Coming without consequences, at least for them personally. They embrace the message of God’s love but don’t understand that we must also fear him (Revelation 14:7).

44 **meet him who rejoiceth and worketh righteousness.** Though the wicked must fear and tremble, the righteous will rejoice and meet the Lord in his coming with joy.

45 **great things thou hast prepared.** A near quote of Isaiah 64:4, which Paul also quoted in 1 Corinthians 2:9. The plan of God has always included “great things” for those doing their best to live according to his commandments and who rely on the mercies of Christ to become justified and sanctified.

46 **cometh down from God in heaven with dyed garments.** When people see Jesus returning, they will notice his clothing that appears dyed. This verse and the next two echo Isaiah 63:1-3.

48 **red in his apparel.** Nearly quoting Isaiah 63:2, when we first see him, we will not understand the nature of what



changed the color of his clothing; see. 51 and Revelation 19:11-15.

**49 *sun shall hide . . . moon shall withhold . . . stars shall be hurled.*** There are several scriptures that speak of these or similar events (e.g., Isaiah 13:10; Joel 2:10, 31; D&C 29:14; 34:9). They are very symbolic of the withdrawal of the presence of the Lord, which lights up and powers the whole universe.

**50 *I have trodden the wine-press alone.*** No one but Christ could do he did for us. Revelation 19:15 calls the wine-press “the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.”

**51 *stained all my raiment.*** Having trampled the wicked “in fury,” their blood is what actually turns Jesus’ clothing red.

### The year of the redeemed (52-56)

**52 *the year of my redeemed is come.*** “My redeemed” are those make clean by the blood of the Lamb, who will “mention the loving kindness of their Lord,” counting all their blessings given by God’s grace.

**53 *In all their afflictions he was afflicted.*** Like Isaiah 53:4-5, where the Messiah has “borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows,” “wounded for our transgressions” and “bruised for our iniquities.” Alma 7:11-12 declares that “he will take upon him the pains and sicknesses of his people” and take on him our infirmities. In this verse, he is afflicted with us; everything we feel he also feels, so he fully understands “how to succor his people” (Alma 7:12).

**54 *Enoch . . . Noah . . . Moses.*** These three Old Testament prophets were called out from “them all [in] the days of old” (v. 53) as heads of dispensations. They were redeemed by Christ, along with “they who were with [them].”

**55 *who were with Christ in his resurrection.*** The prophets in v. 54 plus Elijah and John (presumably John the Baptist) were declared to have been resurrected with Jesus. Matthew said, “many bodies of the saints which slept arose” with Jesus (Matthew 27:52).

**56 *the graves of the saints shall be opened.*** Likewise, at his Second Coming, there will be a large group of resurrected saints who will rise and “stand on the right hand of the Lamb” as he stands on Mount Zion (Israel) and at the New Jerusalem (North America) and sing songs of praise.

### Preaching to the world (57-74)

**57 *sent forth the fulness of his gospel.*** In anticipation of the “year of my redeemed” and to give all men the opportunity to “be made partakers of the glories which were to be revealed,” the restored gospel was given to men through the Prophet Joseph Smith in our day.

**58 *To prepare the weak.*** Paul taught that God chose the foolish and weak, in the eyes of the world, to carry his message and “confound the wise” (1 Corinthians 1:27). In

the revelation given just two days before this one, the Lord taught that weak would break down the strong and the fulness of the gospel would be “proclaimed by the weak and the simple” (D&C 1:19, 23). That concept is extended here, teaching that the gospel is restored in our day “to prepare the weak” for that work, that “two shall put their tens of thousands to flight.”

**59 *thresh the nations by the power of his Spirit.*** The word “thresh” is only found one other time in the Doctrine and Covenants, where it is used exactly like here (“thresh the nations by the power of my Spirit,” D&C 35:13). To “thresh” is to trample or walk on, usually with grain in order to separate it from the husk, for eating. To “thresh the nations” mean to separate out the wheat and the chaff by trampling on them all. It’s a difficult process for the grain but the only way to separate the edible and useful wheat kernel from the chaff that surrounds it. It’s a powerful metaphor for the work of the “weak things” in the last days, as directed by “the power of his Spirit,” to find the elect.

**60 *now are to go forth unto all flesh.*** When Joseph’s first revelations, or “commandments,” were given, they were for the small band of members he had gathered around him. But two days before this revelation, Church leaders had determined to try and publish ten thousand copies of the Book of Commandments, an audacious goal, that all can read the worlds of the Lord to the world.

**61 *according to the mind and will of the Lord.*** The Lord confirmed that the publishing of the commandments was his own desire.

**62 *him that repenteth and sanctifieth . . . shall be given eternal life.*** To repent with humility leads to the process of justification, or forgiveness of sins and setting ourselves right before God, a status only achieved through the Atonement of Christ. After we are justified, we can be sanctified, which is the power of the gift of the Holy Ghost through the Atonement, to change and transform us into new creatures, to make us ready to enter the presence of God (Moses 27:25-26).

**63 *hearken not . . . should be cut off.*** There are twenty-one scriptures in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers that speak of actions and sins that would cause someone to be “cut off from among his people” (e.g., Leviticus 17:4). The likely reference, however, is Deuteronomy 18:18-19, which doesn’t use the words “cut off” but does required the people to hearken to the prophet that will be raised up, like Moses, to speak the commandments of the Lord. Whoever does “not hearken,” the Lord promises, “I will required if of him.”

**64 *written by the prophet Malachi.*** The verse quoted is Malachi 4:1, which speaks of the day of the Lord being like a burning oven which will burn the proud and the wicked,

burning off their branches and shoots, leaving nothing but stubble, meaning burned chaff.

66 *no man among you received me*. The Lord's answer to the wicked, mentioned in v. 63-64, is that no "received" him, meaning accepted him for who he was and listened to his teachings. For that, they are "driven out."

67 *my arm was not shortened at all that I could not redeem*. Even though he continued to call to his people with no answer, the Lord confirmed that he was as anxious as ever, and as powerful as ever, to save them. Verses 67-69 are a close paraphrase of Isaiah 50:2-3.

68 *I dry up the sea, I make the rivers a wilderness*. Giving several examples of his power, he started with drying up the sea. There are at least two examples of that in scripture: Exodus 14:1-31 and Joshua 3:14-17.

69 *clothe the heavens with blackness*. The heavens turning black, as if covered with sackcloth (heavy, goat-hair material), is the second example of the Lord's power, something that only he can do.

70 *he shall lie down in sorrow*. Still speaking to the wicked who did not hearken, the Lord's promise was that they shall have sorrow in death, instead of hope (like those in v. 62).

71 *ye believed not my servants*. The reason for their fate is that they didn't obey God's voice which came to them from his servants; though the servants were sent, the wicked did not receive them.

72 *they sealed up the testimony and bound up the law*. Compare Isaiah 8:16. The servants, duly commissioned by God and rejected by the wicked, are a testimony that God's words have been ignored, preparing the way for the wicked to be "delivered over unto darkness."

73 *go away into outer darkness*. "Outer darkness" is only mentioned twice in the Doctrine and Covenants, and this is the first one chronologically (the other is D&C 101:91). Though the term is not used, D&C 76 alludes to this same fate for the sons of perdition, calling it "the lake of fire and brimstone," "the second death," and "everlasting punishment" (D&C 76:30-49).

74 *the Lord your God hath spoken it*. Not only confirming the source of the revelation and information recorded here, but confirming the words themselves, for when God speaks, we can be assured of its truth.

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## Results

D&C 133 is a remarkable revelation to a young Church. It is vast and eschatological, explaining the reasons behind so many of the commandments given in other, earlier revelations. We still await many of the events and signs described herein, but the commandment to the weak to take the gospel to all the world is ongoing, such that millions have now embraced the message first restored through the young Prophet, Joseph Smith.

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# D&C 134 – Declaration on Government and Law

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## Date and Location

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Monday, 17 August 1835, Kirtland, OH

## Setting

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After the press in Independence, Missouri, was destroyed in the summer of 1833 by angry local citizens, printing ended for the Book of Commandments, the first effort to print the revelations of Joseph Smith. It was soon determined to purchase another printing press and put in Kirtland, Ohio, and print the scriptures again. The collection was expanded with additional revelations received since 1833, and a section of lectures was added at the beginning, giving it the name Doctrine (lectures) and Covenants (revelations).

Printing was well under way in August 1835. Joseph Smith and Frederick G. Williams, two members of the publication committee for the volume, were off on a mission to Michigan. The other two members, Oliver Cowdery and Sidney

Rigdon, led a conference held on 17 August 1835, to put to a vote of acceptance the final volume. After the conference voted to approve the revelations, William W. Phelps first stood up and read an article on marriage, then Oliver Cowdery arose and read a second article on government, entitled "Declaration on Government and Law." Both were likely authored by Cowdery and were considered not revelations but statements of belief. In that context, both were voted on and accepted by the conference. The latter became D&C 134. Both were added at the end of the book, partly because most of the book was already printed and partly because they were presented as appendices to the revelations.

The document deals with the tension the Saints felt after being expelled by mob forces in Jackson County, Missouri, in 1833. Church members lost their property, their right to worship as they pleased, their right to vote, and were abused by the very government that declared their liberty and rights as fundamental to a successful society. They appealed to government officials, judges, and more, to have

their rights and lands restored to them, but they received no support from any quarter. These tragedies and the lack of government support for their constitutional rights caused many to speak bitterly of Missouri officials, while still trying to declare their support for the principles espoused in the Constitution.

When Joseph and Frederick G. Williams returned from their mission, Joseph first learned about Oliver's documents. He may not have immediately approved of the documents, but later he quoted from the government declaration and endorsed its teachings. The declaration on marriage was later (1876) replaced in the Doctrine and Covenants by D&C 132.

Each statement (which are now verses) starts with "We believe" except verse 9 which begins "We do not believe."

## Documents and Publication

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The oldest copy is from the first printing in the *Messenger and Advocate* (August 1835), with the next printing available just days later, when it was included as section 102 in 1835.

## Outline

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- Purpose of governments (1-4)
- Uphold good governments (5-8)
- Religion and government (9-10)
- Self-defense (11-12)

## Commentary

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### Purpose of governments (1-4)

**1 governments were instituted of God.** This does not mean that every government on the earth, past, present, or future, was instituted by God. Rather, the concept of government, the need to have collective laws that govern society and behavior, comes from God. From an 1835 perspective, this is a declaration that the federal and state governments were put in place by God, as devised by the founding fathers of the United States.

**1 he holds men accountable.** People in authority in government are directly accountable to their Maker for their actions in making and administering laws. They will be blessed if they act "for the good and safety of society" but judged harshly for abuses of power.

**2 free exercise of conscience, the right and control of property, and the protection of life.** While fundamental principles of what good government is, these are also the three areas of complaint the Saints had after being driven from Jackson County. They lost their ability to exercise choice, control their own purchased properties, or protect

their lives from those who conspired to drive them out and even kill them.

**3 such as will administer the law in equity and justice should be sought.** Governments are not faceless entities but are made of people fulfilling various roles. One such role is enforcement of the laws, seeking to support victims of abuse and stop and punish those who breaks the laws. The belief that such people should be good and honorable people is fundamental to this declaration, regardless of the form of government.

**4 religion is instituted of God.** This is the same statement as in v. 1 pertaining to governments. It puts religious rights and liberties on equal footing with governmental claims to enforce behavior. This verse is critical in establishing the position that because of that equality, governments do not have the right to pass laws that "interfere in prescribing rules of worship." Many governments around the world in that, and some still in ours, have state religions where the government sponsors one form of worship over another. The declaration says that governments should "never control conscience" or "suppress the freedom of the soul."

### Uphold good governments (5-8)

**5 all men are found to sustain and uphold the respective governments in which they reside.** Latter-day Saints had been charged with wanting to subvert the government. Joseph was charged with treason on more than one occasion. But the Saints could point to this declaration and proudly say that their religion binds them to sustain their government. "Sedition and rebellion are unbecoming," it states, though with the condition that governments receive such support only while its citizens are "protected in their inherent and inalienable rights." Governments can and should pass laws "to secure the public interest," but cannot take away "freedom of conscience."

**6 man should be honored in his station . . . to the laws all men owe respect and deference.** Latter-day Saints declared that they also support elected or appointed officials in various government positions and the laws they create, because "without them peace and harmony" would not exist. But human laws only exist to regulate affairs between men and nations; God's laws regulate affairs between God and man. In both cases, men are answerable to God for their choices and actions.

**7 the free exercise of their religious belief.** Governments have an obligation to pass laws that protect everyone in their ability to worship according to their own choices, as long as that worship doesn't break other just laws or cause "sedition nor conspiracy."

**8 crime should be punished.** Those who committed crime against the Saints in Missouri went unpunished, making this a significant point. The declaration boldly states that

“all men” should bring offenders to justice; it’s not enough to look only to the government to enforce good laws.

## Religion and government (9-10)

**9 *We do not believe it just to mingle religious influence with civil government.*** Whether it is state-sponsored religion or just laws that favor one religion over another, the declaration stands against such favoritism. Where one religion is preferred, by definition another must be denied certain “spiritual privileges,” including civil rights to practice religion in freedom of conscience.

**10 *religious societies have a right to deal with their members.*** Internal affairs between members or leadership and members of a church should be handled by the religious organization and not by the government. But not religious society has the right to pass judgments that would include civil rights, property, or life, including any physical punishment for any reason. The ultimate and only recourse a religion has is the standing of a person within that society, of which the ultimate decision would be excommunication, or cutting that person off from fellowship and participation in that society.

## Self-defense (11-12)

**11 *men should appeal to the civil law.*** When things go wrong having to do with property, rights, or “personal abuse,” the first course of action is to appeal to the civil government for assistance. However, the declaration is clear that this does not preclude any person or group of people from defending themselves “from the unlawful assaults and encroachments” in times where an appeal cannot be made with sufficient time to afford relief.

**12 *just to preach the gospel.*** Churches not only have the right to exist and be protected by the government in their freedom of worship, but the declaration states that they have the right to share their beliefs with others. For Latter-day Saints, this means raising the warning voice “to save themselves from the corruption of the world.” There is one caveat, in 1835, that no longer applies today: the declaration takes the position that those preaching any gospel have no right to “interfere with bond-servants”—southern slaves—which would include teaching and baptizing them against their masters’ will. This was another challenge in Missouri, where Latter-day Saints were perceived as predominantly northern abolitionists, threatening the status quo in Missouri, a slave state. This declaration put the Church in a position that they hoped would settle that issue with Missourians. The carefully worded statement did not endorse slavery, but did allow for its existence, and said it was wrong to share the gospel with slaves contrary to their owners’ wishes, lest the slaves become “dissatisfied with their situations in this life.”

## Results

The Declaration on Government and Law served the Church well during the Missouri persecutions and the Nauvoo time as well. Being able to hold up an 1835 declaration that stated their support for the Constitution and the United States government proved strongly the Church’s true position in later years.

When Joseph Smith and others wrote the Wentworth letter, it included articles of faith to summarize Church beliefs. Two of them, 11 and 12, were influenced by the declaration.

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