

### **#30) D&C 81-83 Revelations Prepared for Publication by the Literary Firm**

#### **Background of the Literary Firm (Compare with D&C 26)**

After the November 1831 leadership conference in Hiram, section 70 commanded a group to oversee the publication of Joseph's revelations.<sup>1</sup> Later this group became known as the Literary Firm, and they consecrated all profits from the printing to building the church (D&C 82:17-18). To have the funds to start the publishing, the Lord called a "United Firm," to help with their economic needs.<sup>2</sup> While the Literary Firm originally had plans to publish a number of works, including a hymnal and an almanac, its primary focus was the Book of Commandments.<sup>3</sup>

By March 1832, the church publication fell under "The Literary Firm" (D&C 78:3, 9). The organization included Joseph, Sidney Rigdon, and Newel K. Whitney as well as . On April 30, 1832, the Literary Firm of Missouri held their first recorded meeting. One of their first projects was to publish the canonized revelations, as the Book of Commandments. It appears they too were given license to make punctuation changes and a few editorial alterations. Grant Underwood proposes that,

Joseph apparently allowed these trusted associates to make whatever textual "revisals" they felt impressed by the Spirit to make. Joseph seems to have had a healthy awareness of the inadequacy of finite, human language, including his own, to perfectly communicate an infinite, divine revelation.<sup>4</sup>

The evidence for this claim comes from one of Joseph's letters.

#### ***New Translation / Joseph Smith Translation***

On July 1832, the Prophet wrote to his friend and publisher, W. W. Phelps. Joseph gives an answer—which allows us to assume that Phelps asked if he could publish more of Joseph's new biblical translation. Joseph wrote that he does not want to share it with him:

I would inform you that they will not go from under my hand during my natural life for correction, revisal or printing and the will of [the] Lord be done therefore you need not expect them this fall.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to not wanted personal editing, Joseph was still in the New Testament and had most of the Old Testament to go (except for Genesis 1-24).

#### ***Book of Commandments / Doctrine and Covenants***

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/intro/introduction-to-revelations-and-translations-volume-2?p=1&highlight=Book%20of%20Commandments%20and%20Revelation#6587053456938083990>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/intro/introduction-to-revelations-and-translations-volume-2?p=1&highlight=Book%20of%20Commandments%20and%20Revelation#7067673339772890345>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/intro/introduction-to-revelations-and-translations-volume-2?p=1&highlight=Book%20of%20Commandments%20and%20Revelation#10845390393107352699>

<sup>4</sup> Grant Underwood, *BYU Studies*, vol 48.3, 78.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/letter-to-william-w-phelps-31-july-1832/5?highlight=printing%20and%20the%20will>

The next attempt for a complete publication of the Prophet Joseph's revelations began in earnest in September 1834. A committee of the Prophet Joseph, Sidney, Oliver, and Fredrick G. Williams selected and arranged new "items of the doctrine of Jesus Christ for the government of the church" (josephsmithpapers.org, Minute Book 1 / "Conference A," 1832–1837. CHL). The publication was finished in 1835 with the new title: The Book of Doctrine and Covenants. The "Doctrine" portion referred the seven Lectures on Faith that grew out of the "Elder's School" in Kirtland, Ohio, during the winter of 1834-1835. The Second half of the Book was known as "The Covenants and Commandments" which were primarily the Revelations that Joseph had received up to 1835. The digital version of these original texts of the 1833 and 1835 collections of Joseph's revelations is available to all to study on JosephSmithPapers.org.

### ***What is a Revelation?***

As we study these sections in particular, and church history generally, we realize that there are multiple definitions for the Holy Spirit's work of revelation. Some refer to personal revelation to one's mind and heart as taught to Oliver Cowdery in sections 6, 8, 9, 11, etc.) Other revelations are God's direct words heard by the Prophet as in D&C 70:2-3:

For I give unto them a commandment; wherefore hearken and hear, for thus saith the Lord unto them—I, the Lord, have appointed them, and ordained them to be stewards over the revelations and commandments which I have given unto them . . .

Multiple revelations instructed Joseph that he was to be the spokesman for God's revelation to His people. For example, D&C 28:2

No one shall be appointed to receive commandments and revelations in this church excepting my servant Joseph Smith Jun., for he receiveth them even as Moses.

There were also times when the Lord encouraged Joseph to actively seek more understanding through asking more questions, as he was told in D&C 42:61,

If thou shalt ask, thou shalt receive revelation upon revelation, knowledge upon knowledge, that thou mayest know the mysteries and peaceable things—that which bringeth joy, that which bringeth life eternal.

Most revelation came from actively seeking and knocking on heaven's doors. Occasionally there were revelations received passively, like Saul on the road to Damascus, but even then, it was in answer to other peoples' prayers.

I assume the same is true for other sincere seekers who want to serve God and humbly listen for personal revelation.

To other Christians in the nineteenth century, the idea of revelation meant a spectrum of how God revealed himself to humanity. It included divine gifts from sending His Son Jesus to the words of the Bible that tell readers of Him. This is different than Joseph Smith's use of divine communication.

## **Text: D&C 81-83—Introduction**

Sections 81-83 of the Doctrine and Covenants represent a pivotal moment in early Church history, received between March 1832 and April 1832. These revelations address leadership transitions, missionary work, and temporal concerns during a period of significant growth and organizational development. The unique aspect of these sections lies in their immediate practical

application while simultaneously establishing eternal principles of Church governance and individual discipleship.

## **D&C 81: Succession and Stewardship**

**Historical Context:** Revelation received March 1832, as Jesse Gause, Joseph Smith's first counselor, had apostatized and left the Church. The revelation originally named Gause but was later adapted for Frederick G. Williams, who became the replacement counselor.

### **81:1-2—The Divine Call and Its Conditions**

These verses instruct church callings to come through revelation, not human appointment. The conditional nature ("if you will," 81:2), demonstrates that even divinely issued callings require human agency and acceptance. They also outline the need for priesthood keys. The double "verily" (81:2) emphasizes the divine authority and certainty of the call. The progression from "servant" to specific calling illustrates the principle that all callings build upon fundamental discipleship.

### **81:3-7—Keys, Authority, and Accountability**

The revelation outlines specific responsibilities and promises blessings, with particular emphasis on supporting the Prophet. Verse 4 promises that Williams would, "sit in council with my servant Joseph Smith, Jun." establishes the collegial nature of First Presidency leadership—a unique aspect of LDS Church governance where counselors are not merely advisors but participants in presiding authority. The warning in about being "cut off" (81:6) demonstrates that position doesn't guarantee salvation—a recurring theme that emphasizes continued faithfulness.

## **D&C 82: The United Order and Spiritual Economics**

**Historical Context:** April 26, 1832, this revelation addresses the Saints in Independence, Missouri, concerning their temporal and spiritual welfare through the United Order.

### **82:1-4 The Principle of Increased Accountability**

These verses introduces the distinctive understanding of forgiveness—that divine forgiveness is contingent upon our forgiveness of others. Beyond the petition in the Lord's Prayer, this makes it a divine law. It is followed by one of the most quoted passages in LDS scripture: "unto whom much is given much is required" (82:3). This principle establishes a graduated responsibility based on knowledge and opportunity, fundamental to eternal progression.

### **D&C 82:5-10—The Lord's Warning and Promise**

The Lord warns that Satan is expanding his influence while darkness spreads across the earth, and God's anger burns against widespread wickedness. However, He offers forgiveness to the faithful. The Lord then gives what He calls a "new commandment" with directions for how to act before God to secure salvation. The section concludes with one of the most significant doctrinal

statements in all scripture: "I, the Lord, am bound when ye do what I say; but when ye do not what I say, ye have no promise" (82:10). The conditional nature of all divine promises based on obedience.

### **D&C 82:11-24—Specific Counsels and Universal Principles**

The revelation provides specific direction to named individuals while establishing broader principles applicable to all Saints. This dual focus—immediate and eternal—characterizes much of the Doctrine and Covenants.

- 82:14 "bind up the law and seal up the testimony" connects to Isaiah 8:16 and represents the preservation of divine truth through proper priesthood authority
- 82:17 "every man seeking the interest of his neighbor" establishes a communitarian ethic that transcends capitalism while maintaining individual agency
- 82:19 "with one heart and one mind" echoes Acts 4:32 and is the ultimate goal of a Zion society.
- 82:20 The emphasis on unity establishes Zion as both a geographical and spiritual concept

### **D&C 83: The Law of the Church Regarding Widows and Orphans**

**Historical Context:** Received April 30, 1832, this brief revelation clarifies the Church's responsibility toward widows and children—reflecting both immediate practical needs and eternal principles of care. The specific mention of support obligations creates a legal-spiritual framework uncommon in contemporary Christianity.

**Themes:** This section, though brief, establishes important principles on

1. **Institutional Responsibility:** The Church as an organization has obligations to care for its most vulnerable members.
2. **Gender Equality in Salvation:** While recognizing different roles, the revelation affirms equal spiritual standing.
3. **Family Continuity:** The provisions for widows and children reflect eternal relationships. The revelation's brevity contrasts with its profound implications for Church welfare programs.

### **Conclusion:**

Doctrine and Covenants 81-83 represents the restoration at work—addressing immediate historical needs while establishing eternal principles. They demonstrate that revelation is not abstract doctrines, but universal divine truths that can be applied to specific circumstances. The progression from individual calling (81) to community organization (82) to institutional responsibility (83) mirrors the development of both individual discipleship and Church organization. Divine revelation addresses all aspects of human experience—personal, economic, social, and spiritual—as integrated elements of the restored gospel rather than separate spheres of concern.

