

Section 1

The Doctrine and Covenants is a problem solver. Every section in it resolves a problem or a dilemma. Joseph Smith learned as a youth that when he had a dilemma he could not resolve, he could ask God in faith and be answered, not upbraided (Joseph Smith—History, 1:10–19).

In the case of Doctrine and Covenants section 1, the problem was how to preface the Book of Commandments. By November 1831, Joseph had dictated dozens of revelation texts. John Whitmer had hand-copied many of them into the Book of Commandments and Revelations. The missionaries and their converts needed copies, so Joseph gathered a group of elders at the Johnson home in Hiram, Ohio, and together they determined to publish the revelations in a book: the Book of Commandments.

Every book needs a preface to guide readers and tell them what the author intends. A committee of the Church’s best writers drafted a preface for the book, but it was not suited to the task of introducing the Lord’s latter-day revelations. The Lord then revealed what he called “*my* preface to the book of *my* commandments” (D&C 1:6, emphasis added). Joseph sat down near a window and dictated the words slowly as Sidney Rigdon wrote them down.¹

¹ “[Minutes, 1–2 November 1831](#),” p. 15, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed July 21, 2020. “[Revelation Book 1](#),” p. 125, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed July 21, 2020. Joseph “dictated by the spirit the preface found in the Book of Doctrine and Covenants while sitting by a window in the room. Sidney



Photo of the Johnson Home in Hiram, Ohio. Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

What does section 1 say about what the Savior intends to accomplish by giving the latter-day revelations? It tells why the Lord opened the last dispensation. He saw the consequences of broken covenants. People had “strayed from [His] ordinances” (D&C 1:15), gone off in their “own way” (v. 16), and created their own gods. Calamitous judgments were therefore inevitable and imminent. Knowing all that, the Lord desired to spare as many people as

possible by inviting all to repent and return to him. He called and authorized Joseph Smith and others “that mine everlasting covenant might be established” (v. 22), the living Church of Jesus Christ restored, and His gospel taken to all people everywhere.

In Section 1 the Lord applies the ancient archetype for wickedness—Babylon—to the world of Joseph Smith and the earliest Saints. The Savior’s restored Church is the vehicle out of Babylon. The Lord is pleased with His Church and its mission, which is not the same as being pleased with its members.

Section 1 was not the Lord’s first revelation to Joseph. It belongs at the beginning of the Doctrine and Covenants because it outlines the Lord’s purposes for all the subsequent sections. When Joseph finished dictating and Sidney Rigdon finished writing, the problem was solved—the Book of Commandments now had a preface that was equal to the task of introducing the Lord’s latter-day revelations.

Rigdon wrote it down. Joseph would deliver a few sentences and Sidney would write them down, then read them aloud, and if correct, then Joseph would proceed and deliver more, and by this process the preface was given.”