

# Section 66

---

Section 66 teaches many lessons. One is to be careful what you ask for. Another is that knowing for certain that Joseph Smith was the Lord’s revelator is insufficient to motivate obedience to the Lord’s revelations through Joseph.

The Lord gave section 66 to William McLellin through Joseph on October 29, 1831. After copying the revelation in his entry for that day, William wrote that it “gave great joy to my heart because some important questions were answered which had dwelt upon my mind with anxiety and yet with uncertainty.”<sup>1</sup> Previous to meeting Joseph, William secretly prayed that God would “reveal the answer to five questions through his prophet, and that too without his having any knowledge of my having made such request.” In 1848, ten years after bitterly parting ways with Joseph Smith, William wrote: “I now testify in the fear of God, that every question which I had thus lodged in the ears of the Lord of Sabbaoth, were answered to my full and entire satisfaction. I desired it for a testimony of Joseph’s inspiration. And I to this day consider it to me an evidence which I cannot refute.”<sup>2</sup>

William’s questions are unrecorded, but the revelation he wrote as Joseph dictated expresses the Lord’s will for him (D&C 66:4). The revelation therefore compelled William to act either in obedience or disobedience to the Lord’s will. His subsequent

---

<sup>1</sup> Jan Shippo and John W. Welch, editors, *The Journals of William E. McLellin, 1831–1836* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 46–47.

<sup>2</sup> Shippo and Welch, *The Journals of William E. McLellin*, 57.

journal is an accountability report with the revelation in mind. The journal and related documents reveal his inconsistent effort to obey the revelation's many specific commands.

The revelation blessed William for turning from his iniquities to truth and receiving the fulness of the gospel. Still, the Lord told William that he was not completely clean and needed to repent of sins the Lord would show him. The Lord specifically warned William to “commit not adultery—a temptation with which thou hast been troubled” (D&C 66:10). The Lord commanded William to serve a mission to the East with Samuel Smith until the Lord sent word for them to return. The Lord commanded William to bear testimony to everyone everywhere he went, and his journal testifies that he did. He went about “reasoning with the people” while Samuel Smith bore his simple, powerful testimony as a witness of the Book of Mormon plates. Commanded to “lay your hands upon the sick and they shall recover,” William did so and they were. He tried to “be patient in affliction,” but as rejections mounted and winter approached, William’s resolve to obey the revelation faltered (v. 9). He forsook Samuel Smith and returned to Kirtland in late December 1831 of his own volition. The Lord rebuked William a few weeks later (D&C 75:6–7).

Humbled, William started on another mission but again forsook his companion and calling, attributing his disobedience to poor health and lack of faith. He took a job to accumulate cash and married Emiline Miller, perhaps in disobedience to the command “seek not to be cumbered” (D&C 66:10) with family obligations while called to full-time missionary service. Then the newlyweds set out for Zion in Jackson County, Missouri, where William circumvented the law of consecration. Rather than meeting with Bishop Partridge to consecrate his property and receive an inheritance, William purchased two lots on Main Street, all in disobedience to specific commands that he “go not up to the land of Zion as yet; but inasmuch as you can send, send; otherwise think not of thy property” (v. 6).

William’s disobedience to the revelation did not diminish his faith in it or its revelator. He wrote in August 1832 “that Joseph Smith is a true Prophet or Seer of the Lord and that he has power and does receive revelations from God, and that these revelations

when received are of divine Authority in the church of Christ.”<sup>3</sup> Upset by William’s hypocrisy, Joseph wrote that his “conduct merits the disapprobation of every true follower of Christ.”<sup>4</sup>

Section 66 left William’s future in his hands. If he chose to do the Lord’s will continually, he could “have a crown of eternal life” (D&C 66:12). Instead, William chose to do his own will. On May 11, 1838, William confessed to Bishop Partridge that he had quit “praying and keeping the commandments of God and went his own way and indulged himself in his lustful desires.”<sup>5</sup> He spent the rest of his long life outside the Savior’s Church, struggling to resolve the unbearable tension between his sure testimony of the revelation and his unwillingness to abide by all of its terms.

---

<sup>3</sup> Shipps and Welch, *The Journals of William E. McLellin*, 87.

<sup>4</sup> “[Letter to Emma Smith, 6 June 1832](#),” p. [2], The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed October 5, 2020.

<sup>5</sup> “[History, 1838–1856, volume B-1 \[1 September 1834–2 November 1838\]](#),” p. 796, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed October 5, 2020.