

Section 77

Having been treated to section 76 in February 1832 for his efforts to understand and revise the Bible, Joseph continued his painstaking study of the scriptures. His history says that “about the first of March, in connection with the translation of the scriptures, I received the following explanation of the Revelations of Saint John.”¹ The questions answered by this revelation are embedded in it.

Section 77 is a key to unlocking the meanings of Revelation chapters 4–11. It models the right way to approach that famously complicated book. Joseph Smith studied the book carefully, formulated questions for the Lord, then sought and received the Lord’s answers to his specific questions.

Joseph rarely spoke of or taught from John’s Revelation. One exception is an April 1843 sermon. The Nauvoo high council had recently convened a hearing to correct Pelatiah Brown’s interpretation of Revelation 4–5. Joseph described Brother Brown as “one of the wisest old heads we have among us,” though he had misunderstood the meanings of the beasts John saw in Revelation 4. Joseph was frustrated that John’s Revelation was “a subject of great speculation” among Latter-day Saints and others, speculation based on ignorance about John’s intended meanings. Joseph decided to reveal some of John’s meaning to combat the ignorance.

¹ “[History, 1838–1856, volume A-1 \[23 December 1805–30 August 1834\]](#),” p. 192, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed June 7, 2020.

Joseph taught that with the exception of chapter 12, John's Revelation is about the future, not the past. Joseph taught that "John saw curious looking beasts in heaven, he saw every creature that was in heaven, all the beasts, fowls, & fish in heaven, actually there, giving glory to God. I suppose," Joseph continued, "John saw beings there, that had been saved from ten thousand times ten thousand earths like this, strange beasts of which we have no conception all might be seen in heaven. John learned that God glorified himself by saving all that his hands had made whether beasts, fowl fishes or man."

Because of section 77, Joseph knew what the beasts represented. He had a key to John's Revelation, and he was not a hostage to the rampant speculation. "We may spiritualize and express opinions to all eternity," Joseph told the Saints, "but that is no authority."² Section 77 is an authoritative key to understanding parts of John's Revelation. As a possessor of such keys, Joseph could say as perhaps no other person can, "Revelation is one of the plainest books God ever caused to be written."³

² "[Discourse, 8 April 1843, as Reported by William Clayton-A](#)," p. [2], The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed June 7, 2020.

³ "[History, 1838–1856, volume D-1 \[1 August 1842–1 July 1843\]](#)," p. 1523, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed June 7, 2020.