
Oliver Cowdery and the Doctrine and Covenants

D&C 9:2

Oliver Cowdery was given the gift to translate in one revelation (D&C 8:8) and rebuked in another revelation (D&C 9:5) for not acting upon the gift. For failing to continue translating as he had commenced, Oliver lost the gift to translate and was told, “Behold, you have not understood; you have supposed that I would give it unto you, when you took no thought save it was to ask me” (D&C 9:7). The revelation ends with a plea for Oliver to “stand fast in the work” and obtain the promise of being “lifted up at the last day” (D&C 9:14).

Because of the revelatory rebuke, to assume Oliver was somehow less important to the Restoration is an incorrect assumption. Take, for example, his role in the Doctrine and Covenants.

The Doctrine and Covenants records three individuals receiving revelations from Joseph Smith: Oliver Cowdery, Sidney Rigdon, and David Whitmer. Of these three men, Oliver was the first to receive revelations with the Prophet Joseph. Over a seven-year period (1829–1836), he received at least seven revelations with the Prophet (D&C 6, 7, 13, 18, 24, 26, and 110). Of these revelations, two were received through the Urim and Thummim (D&C 6 and 7) and three by the revelatory process of mind and heart (D&C 18, 24, and 26). Two sections recount Joseph and Oliver receiving priesthood keys from heavenly messengers (D&C 13 and 110). Nineteen sections mention Oliver’s name in conjunction with a specific assignment (see D&C sections mentioned above plus sections 8, 9, 17, 23, and 28), and one section is believed to be authored by him (D&C 134).

Between 1829 and 1831, he scribed sections 6–9, 11–12, 14–18, 20–24, 26, 28–32, and the early Missouri revelations, including sections 57–62 and 63–70. He also wrote portions of the minutes of a February 17, 1834, meeting of the Kirtland High Council (D&C 102). Bottom line, over twenty-two percent of the revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants are linked in one way or another to Oliver Cowdery. Excluding Joseph Smith, no other person is mentioned more often in the Doctrine and Covenants than he. No wonder; Oliver was the principal scribe of the Book of Mormon translation, the first “preacher” of the restored Church, Second Elder, Apostle, and Associate President of the Church.