Before the Doctrine and Covenants we had a volume of scripture called the “Book of Commandments” (1833), short for “A Book of Commandments for the Government of the Church of Christ.” This was an incomplete collection of the Prophet Joseph Smith’s revelations containing 65 sections (not the same as the first 65 of the present-day Doctrine and Covenants).

But the Book of Commandments was incomplete because a mob in Independence, Missouri, had broken into the printing shop where the collection was being printed, destroyed the press and type, and scattered the pages. Some Saints gathered what pages they could find and bound them, with the result being less than had been planned.

In 1835, a new collection of revelations was printed and named “Doctrine and Covenants.” Unlike the Book of Commandments, it contained two parts—the “Lectures on Faith” (the doctrine) and the previous Book of Commandments with new sections added—brining the total to 101 (the covenants). The order of the revelations in the second section of the Doctrine and Covenants was different than it had been in the Book of Commandments. In the latter, it had been chronological, while in the new book revelations were grouped according to subject matter: first were revelations on priesthood and church organization, followed by the sections from the Book of Commandments. In 1876
the sections were rearranged so that all but section 1 were put in chronological order.

The “Lectures on Faith” were lessons used in the School of the Prophets the previous winter. They were dropped from the LDS canon in 1921, perhaps because the doctrine taught in them concerning the Godhead wasn’t consistent with the continuing revelations of the prophets. However, the title “ Doctrine and Covenants” was retained. Since we have retained the word *doctrine* in the title of this book of scripture, it is reasonable to assume that even without the “Lectures on Faith,” the book we now have contains doctrine, in other words, the teachings of the prophets.

In the Old and New Testaments, the word *doctrine* usually translates a word that means “instruction,” with an emphasis on the activity of teaching more than on its content. (In the Old Testament, occasionally it also translates words meaning “announcement” or “chastisement.”) In nineteenth-century English it also meant “instruction,” but with an emphasis on the content. Which meaning do you think best helps us think about the Doctrine and Covenants as scripture?

The word *covenant* appears 479 times in the scriptures—it is one of their most common words. The word translated “covenant” in the Old Testament is from a word meaning “to choose” and also “to cause to eat, to cause to partake.” It means “to form a confederacy, to make a compact.” Significantly, anciently a covenant seems to have been made by exchanging pieces of food, often meat. In Joseph Smith’s time, the English word *covenant* primarily meant “a mutual agreement to act in certain ways.” How can the
revelations contained in the Doctrine and Covenants be considered covenants? How does a covenant differ from a contract?

Questions
What do you make of the changes that have occurred to our collection of modern revelations? Is the Doctrine and Covenants a new book or a revised edition of the Book of Commandments?

Does the full title of the Book of Commandments differentiate it from the Doctrine and Covenants, or does it help us understand better what we find in the Doctrine and Covenants?

Did the deletion of the “Lectures on Faith” change the book substantially? How about the addition of sections 137 and 137 or the two official declarations?