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Revelations and Translations, Volume 1: Manuscript Revelation Books and Volume 2: Published Revelations

James B. Allen
Brigham Young University

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Robin Scott Jensen, Robert J. Woodford, and
Steven C. Harper, eds. *Revelations and Translations,*
Volume 1: Manuscript Revelation Books.

The Joseph Smith Papers. Salt Lake City: The Church Historian's Press, 2011.

Robin Scott Jensen, Richard E. Turley Jr., and
Riley M. Lorimer, eds. *Revelations and Translations,*
Volume 2: Published Revelations.

The Joseph Smith Papers. Salt Lake City: The Church Historian's Press, 2011.

Reviewed by James B. Allen

While the two volumes of the Revelations and Translations series of the Joseph Smith Papers should intrigue anyone interested in Church history, those particularly interested in the textual history of the Doctrine and Covenants will find them an absolute treasure. Volume 1 consists of verbatim transcriptions of the manuscript books known as Revelation Book 1 and Revelation Book 2, which contain nearly all of Joseph Smith's revelations from July 1828 to November 25, 1834 (covering today's Doctrine and Covenants 3 through 106). Most of the revelations featured in volume 1 are the earliest extant copies, meaning they are the versions closest to the original transcriptions. Volume 2 reproduces all of the early published versions of the revelations, including those in the 1833 Book of Commandments (only partially complete because an anti-Mormon mob destroyed the Church's press in Missouri before the printing was finished), *The Evening and the Morning Star*, and the 1835 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants. Volume 2 also includes the new items that were added to the 1844 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants, as well as transcripts of the additional revelations that were intended to be printed in the Book of Commandments. The volume is the perfect companion to volume 1 because, as the editors observe, "together these two volumes provide the most important primary sources needed to study the revelation texts and their development during Joseph Smith's lifetime" (xx). These volumes make it possible to trace changes in the revelation texts, from their early transcriptions to their eventual publication.

However, as the editors of volume 2 point out, users of this volume should also consult the Documents series of the Joseph Smith Papers, where the earliest extant versions of the revelations are published and arranged in chronological order, with historical introductions for each revelation as well as important textual annotation not included in either of these two volumes.¹

In a way volume 1 is a redundancy, albeit a very welcome one. In 2009, the same editors published *Revelations and Transcriptions: Manuscript Revelation Books, Facsimile Edition*.² This remarkable, meticulously edited publication features full-page photographs of every page of Revelation Books 1 and 2, together with careful transcripts that preserve all the emendations and redactions made by several people, including Joseph Smith; the editors made an important and distinctive contribution by identifying, through color coding, who made each change. This was a tremendous undertaking since not all the handwriting in these documents is easily decipherable or even legible. Making judgments often depended upon familiarity with the usual characteristics of each scribe's handwriting. The editors recognize that making decisions of this sort is "an imperfect art more than a science,"³ but they must be lauded for their scrupulousness and very responsible conclusions.

However, the 2009 facsimile edition is a heavy, oversized volume, making it unwieldy to use for general study. *Revelations and Translations, Volume 1*, published in 2011, exactly duplicates the editorial methods and transcriptions of the previous publication, but since it does not include the facsimiles, it is smaller and much easier to navigate. Further, it contains the same introductory material, including an excellent essay on Joseph Smith as a translator, an introduction to the manuscript revelation books, a description of the editorial method

1. See my review of Michael Hubbard MacKay and others, eds., *Documents, Volume 1: July 1828–June 1831*, The Joseph Smith Papers (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2013); Matthew C. Godfrey and others, eds., *Documents, Volume 2: July 1831–January 1833* (2013); and Gerrit J. Dirkmaat and others, eds., *Documents, Volume 3: February 1833–March 1834* (2014), in *BYU Studies Quarterly* 55, no. 3 (2016): 174–82.

2. Robin Scott Jensen, Robert J. Woodford, and Steven C. Harper, eds., *Revelations and Translations: Manuscript Revelation Books*, facsimile edition, The Joseph Smith Papers (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2009). See my review in *BYU Studies Quarterly* 51, no. 2 (2012): 151–60.

3. Jensen and others, *Revelations and Translations: Manuscript Revelation Books*, facsimile edition, xxxi.

used, and source notes and historical introductions for both revelation books. All that is missing are the facsimiles. Especially worth noting is the explanation by the editors of their rigorous approach to editing: “The transcripts render every word letter-by-letter, as accurately as possible, preserving the exact text of the original manuscript books. This includes incomplete words, variant spellings of personal names, repeated words, and idiosyncratic grammatical constructions. The transcriptions also include both emendations made when the text was originally inscribed and redactions made later, including labeling and other archival marking” (1:xxxvi).

Another example of the interesting information found in the introductory material of volume 1 is a note on how the revelations were compiled for publication. As explained on pages xxxi–xxxii, in most cases a scribe committed the revelations to paper as Joseph Smith dictated them. Then someone copied them into the manuscript books, from which they were eventually typeset. However, at times the process was not that simple. The revelation now known as Doctrine and Covenants 86, for example, was dictated by Joseph Smith on December 6, 1832, and written down by Sidney Rigdon. A copy was made by Frederick G. Williams; Orson Hyde copied that copy; John Whitmer copied Hyde’s copy into Revelation Book 1, and from there it was edited for publication. Interestingly, another copy of that revelation was inscribed into Revelation Book 2 by Frederick G. Williams. The revelation did not appear in the 1833 Book of Commandments, but it was in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants. At the beginning of the copy in Revelation Book 2, Joseph Smith wrote the words “To go into th[e] covenants,” meaning the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants (1:355–57).

Most of the revelations in volume 1 were published during Joseph Smith’s lifetime. Others were canonized later and included in later editions of the Doctrine and Covenants. Nine of the revelations in these manuscript revelation books have not been canonized by the Church and therefore are not included in the Doctrine and Covenants. One example is the revelation given sometime early in 1830 commanding Oliver Cowdery, Hiram Page, Josiah Stowell, and Joseph Knight to go to Canada to secure or sell (both words are used in the revelation) the Book of Mormon copyright (1:26–28).⁴

4. For more information on this revelation, see Stephen K. Ehat, “Securing’ the Prophet’s Copyright in the Book of Mormon: Historical and Legal

The introductory material in volume 2 includes an excellent essay titled “Joseph Smith–Era Publications of Revelations,” which provides important background information relating to the documents reproduced in the book. The editors also explain the need for publishing the revelations. Early in his ministry, they note, Joseph Smith was fairly accessible to his followers. He became less so, however, as the Church grew, and fewer members had regular contact with him and “therefore with the community-building, faith-affirming power of his revelations.” The editors continue, “Publication allowed more people to access and interpret the revelations—the element of the new religion that drove every aspect of its doctrine and practice” (xxv).

The first document in volume 2 is the Book of Commandments—images of the 160 printed pages of the 1833 publication are in the volume. This section is preceded by an important historical introduction. Although there is no textual annotation, in the left margin, beside the photograph of each page, the editors have placed line numbers in order to facilitate significant notations, including identification of the source text for each revelation and the reason why the editors believe it to be the source. We learn much about the textual history from these annotations. For example, the notation for chapter 2 (now Doctrine and Covenants 3) reads: “This version reflects editing marks made in Revelation Book 1, indicating that the latter was used as a source text for the former” (2:19). That same notation occurs with most of the revelations. However, the notation for the oft-quoted revelation in chapter 3 (now Doctrine and Covenants 4) reads: “Other than a correction of the date of this revelation, no editing marks corresponding to this version are found in the extant portion of Revelation Book 1. The source text for this version is unknown” (2:21). The notations for the next two revelations read: “The pages containing the text of this revelation are missing from Revelation Book 1. The source text for this version is unknown” (2:22, 26). Though certain pages are missing from the revelation book, by going to the Documents series of the Joseph Smith Papers, the textual historian finds the earliest extant, complete versions of these revelations: Doctrine and Covenants 4 is in a collection of Edward Partridge’s papers in the Church History Library,⁵ the text for Doctrine and Covenants 5

Context for the So-Called Canadian Copyright Revelation,” *BYU Studies* 50, no. 2 (2011): 4–70.

5. MacKay and others, *Documents, Volume 1*, 9–13.

is in the Newel K. Whitney Papers at BYU,⁶ and the Book of Commandments itself contains the earliest extant version of Doctrine and Covenants 6.⁷

The Book of Commandments is followed by a transcript of the “Proposed Sixth Gathering of the Book of Commandments.” This includes all the material the editors believe would have been included in the Book of Commandments if its printing had not been so precipitously interrupted (2:173). It begins with the last part of chapter 65 (now Doctrine and Covenants 64) and ends with chapter 77 (now Doctrine and Covenants 133). It also includes, at the end, “The Testimony of Witnesses,” over the names of eighteen of Joseph Smith’s associates (2:175–93). This testimony was published, without signatures, in the 1835 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants as “the written testimony of the Twelve” (2:566). It is published in the current (2013) edition of the Doctrine and Covenants as “Testimony of the Twelve Apostles to the Truth of the Book of Doctrine and Covenants,” followed by the names of those who were members of the Twelve at the time.

In connection with the story of the witnesses, the editors remind us of something very important with regard to the wording of the revelations: The language (the words, grammatical construction, and so on) was Joseph’s, not God’s, and we therefore should not expect to find language beyond what Joseph was capable of producing. The ideas and information were given by revelation and were often profound, but we should not be surprised that not all were literary masterpieces. A revelation given on November 1, 1831, as a preface to the Book of Commandments, said: “Behold, I am God and have spoken it; these commandments are of me, and were given unto my servants in their weakness, after the manner of their language, that they might come to understanding” (1:xxx; D&C 1:24). That revelation, presented to the elders attending a conference, initiated a discussion in which Joseph Smith asked the elders to sign a statement testifying that the revelations were of God. A number agreed, but by the next day, some had second thoughts because of imperfections in the language of the revelations. At that point another revelation chided them and reemphasized the fact that they should not expect literary perfection: “Your eyes have been upon my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., and his language you have known, and his imperfections you have known;

6. MacKay and others, *Documents, Volume 1*, 13–22.

7. MacKay and others, *Documents, Volume 1*, 34–37.

and you have sought in your hearts knowledge that you might express beyond his language” (1:xxx; D&C 67:5). The Lord then invited anyone who could make a revelation “like unto” any of those in the Book of Commandments to do so. If someone succeeded, they were “justified in saying that ye do not know that they are true,” but if they failed, then they must “bear record that they are true” (D&C 67:7–8). William McLellin took up the challenge and failed; he and others were then willing to sign the statement (1:xxx–xxx). All this is important, it seems to me, on two counts: (1) it confirms the integrity of the statement and those who signed it; and (2) it reminds all of us that we should not stumble if we find wording in the Doctrine and Covenants that does not seem grammatically perfect or is in some way more awkward than we would like.

The next section of volume 2 reproduces in parallel columns the twenty-five revelations published in the Church’s first newspaper, *The Evening and the Morning Star*, 1832–33, alongside the same revelations that appeared in the paper’s reprinted version, *Evening and Morning Star*, 1835–36. Only one revelation initially published in the newspaper was not published in the reprint. The text of *The Evening and the Morning Star* appears in the left column, and that of the *Evening and Morning Star* appears in the right, making it easy to see the differences between the two versions, including changes made to the text and formatting, some of which are very interesting. For example, in June 1832, the document known as “The Articles and Covenants” was published in *The Evening and the Morning Star*, where it stated that an elder was “to administer the flesh and blood of Christ according to the Scriptures” (2:205). The version of the document printed in January 1835 in the *Evening and Morning Star* expands the duties of elders, calling for them “to administer the bread and wine—the emblems of the flesh and blood of Christ—and to confirm those who are baptized into the church by the laying on of hands for the baptism of fire and the Holy Ghost, according to the scriptures” (2:205).

This section is followed by a photographic reprint of the 1835 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants, with a very informative introduction that explains how that volume came to be and why the various sections are not arranged in chronological order. This publication consisted of two parts: The first, titled “Theology,” includes seven lectures on Church doctrine now known as the “Lectures on Faith.” The second part, called “Covenants and Commandments,” consists of the revelations. Hence the origin of the name: Doctrine (the “Lectures on Faith”) and Covenants

(the revelations). The “Lectures on Faith” were included in all later editions of the Doctrine and Covenants until 1921.

Following the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants is a selection of images from Oliver Cowdery’s copy of the Book of Commandments, which was used, in conjunction with other sources, in preparing the 1835 volume. This, along with the editors’ introduction, helps us understand something of the printing history of the Doctrine and Covenants. The next section of the book is a photographic reprint of the seven sections from the 1844 edition Doctrine and Covenants that were not in the 1835 edition. The addition of those seven sections is the only major difference between the two editions.

Supplementary material at the end of the book includes a chronology of the Church’s record keeping and publishing history for the years 1831–35 and 1844, followed by a directory that includes biographical sketches of those who in any way assisted in the printing of the various editions of the revelations.

Finally, an intriguing section in the back matter deals with the words in the 1835 and 1844 editions of the Doctrine and Covenants that were substitutions for certain names, places, or other words that the editors wanted to shield from an antagonistic public. A chart lists all the substitute words and the names they stood for. For example, in several section headings, *Joseph Smith* was substituted with the name *Enoch*, and in the text of three sections, *Joseph Smith* was substituted with *Gazelem*. In the text of section 75 of the 1835 edition (now Doctrine and Covenants 78), in addition to the use of *Gazelem* for *Joseph Smith*, *Ahashdah* stood in for *Newel K. Whitney*, *Pelegoram* for *Oliver Cowdery*, and *order* for *firm*. This latter term references the United Firm, which the revelation commanded these three men to establish. Six revelations in the 1835 edition and another two in the 1844 edition contained such substitutions (2:710–11).⁸

All of this information presents the textual sleuth with opportunities for some interesting exercises in tracing the textual history of Joseph Smith’s revelations. One such possible exercise will be given here as a brief example of what can be discovered in volumes 1 and 2 of *Revelations and Translations*.

8. For more information on this interesting issue, see David J. Whittaker, “Substituted Names in the Published Revelations of Joseph Smith,” *BYU Studies* 23, no. 1 (1983): 103–12.

Section 4 of the current Doctrine and Covenants features a revelation that is often applied to missionaries. The most recent heading for that section, in the 2013 edition, reads: “Revelation given through Joseph Smith the Prophet to his father, Joseph Smith Sr., at Harmony, Pennsylvania, February 1829.” On page 11 of volume 1, the version of the text in Revelation Book 1 begins in the handwriting of John Whitmer with “AD.” “Feb” was then inserted above the line in the handwriting of Sidney Rigdon, followed by the year, “1829,” in Whitmer’s hand, except that the number “9” was written over the number “8” by an unknown scribe. Then the text continues: “A Revelation to Joseph the Father of the Seer he desired to know what the Lord had for him to do & this is what he Received as follows.” (There is no period in the manuscript, but the word “Saying” appears in the next line.) It is not uncommon in our time to hear that this revelation was given in response to Joseph Sr.’s request, as suggested in the Revelation Book 1, but that explanation has not appeared in any of the later published versions of the revelation. By the time this introductory statement appeared as part of chapter 3 in the Book of Commandments, it read, “A Revelation given to Joseph, the father of Joseph, in Harmony, Pennsylvania, February, 1829. saying:” (2:21). When the revelation appeared in the 1835 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants, it had become section 31 and the introduction read simply: “Revelation to Joseph Smith, Sen., given February 1829” (2:468).

Turning to the content of the revelation itself, the current text reads:

1 Now behold, a marvelous work is about to come forth among the children of men.

2 Therefore, O ye that embark in the service of God, see that ye serve him with all your heart, might, mind and strength, that ye may stand blameless before God at the last day.

3 Therefore, if ye have desires to serve God ye are called to the work;

4 For behold the field is white already to harvest; and lo, he that thrusteth in his sickle with his might, the same layeth up in store that he perisheth not, but bringeth salvation to his soul;

5 And faith, hope, charity and love, with an eye single to the glory of God, qualify him for the work.

6 Remember faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, brotherly kindness, godliness, charity, humility, diligence.

7 Ask, and ye shall receive; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. Amen.

The text of the revelation as written in Revelation Book 1 begins as follows: “Saying, now Behold a Marvelous work is about to come forth

among the children of men therefore O ye that embark in the service of God see that ye Serve him with all your heart might mind & Strength that ye may stand blameless before God at the last day therefore if ye have desires to serve God ye are called to the . . .” (1:11–12). The transcript in volume 1 is then followed by a bracketed notation: “pages 3–10 missing.” That unfortunate omission may help explain why the source text for the printed versions of this revelation is unknown. The wording of the rest of the revelation as published in 1833 and 1835 is generally the same as that of the current edition of the Doctrine and Covenants, except for some differences in capitalization and punctuation, the division of the text into seven verses instead of the two, and the word “perisheth” in verse 4, which was “perish” in 1833 and 1835. In addition, verse 2 in the Book of Commandments, which parallels verses 6 and 7 in the current Doctrine and Covenants, reads a bit differently: “Remember temperance, patience, humility, diligence, &c., ask and ye shall receive, knock and it shall be opened unto you: Amen” (2:20). In the 1835 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants, the word “marvelous” is misspelled “marvellous,” the division of the verses is the same, and verse 2 reads like verses 6 and 7 in the current version, except for a dash that appears after “diligence” (2:468).

Continuing this exercise, pages 9–13 of volume 1 of the Documents series reveal more information about this revelation. Reproduced there is a transcript of a handwritten copy kept by Edward Partridge that may have been made in late 1830 or early 1831 and is the earliest extant version. The editors of that volume speculate that even though the revelation may not have inspired Joseph Smith Sr. to do missionary work, it may have prompted him to share with Oliver Cowdery a “sketch of the facts related to the plates” (11–13), which may have helped convince Cowdery to accept the call to assist Joseph Smith Jr. in translating the Book of Mormon.

A similar exercise could be done with all the revelations in these Joseph Smith Papers volumes, but it is important to note that, so far as this reviewer can determine, as corrections were made to the revelations in the manuscript books and then published, there were no important changes in meaning. For the most part, the changes made were small, such as changing “therefore remember and proclaim peace” (1:249) to “Therefore, renounce war and proclaim peace” in the text of what is now Doctrine and Covenants 98:16; and changing “1832” to “one thousand, eight hundred, and thirty two” (1:190) in what is now Doctrine and Covenants 76:11.

The textual critic may also find it interesting to trace the changes made to the headings of the revelations and the division of the text into verses. The text in Revelation Book 1 that is now section 55 of the Doctrine and Covenants was inscribed by John Whitmer. The heading reads: “Commandment June 14th 1831 A Revealtion to William [W.] Phelps & Joseph Coe their Calling &c—” Sometime later, William W. Phelps inserted seven numbers into the manuscript, indicating where verses should begin (1:119). When published in the Book of Commandments as chapter 57, the heading for this revelation read, “*A Revelation to William, given in Kirtland, Ohio, June, 1831,*” and the revelation was divided into eight verses instead of the seven indicated by Phelps (2:141–42). When published in the 1835 and 1844 editions of the Doctrine and Covenants, the heading read, “*Revelation to William W. Phelps, given June, 1831,*” and it was divided into only three verses (2:506).

To be complete, the textual historian may want to extend this exercise by looking at later editions of the Doctrine and Covenants. In 1921 the heading to section 55 read, “*Revelation given through Joseph Smith the Prophet, to William W. Phelps, at Kirtland, Ohio, June, 1831,*” and then was extended to include a brief statement about the setting of the revelation and a summary of its contents. In addition, the revelation was divided into six verses (a result of Orson Pratt’s editing of the 1876 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants). The 1981 edition carried the same heading except that after the date the editors added a reference to the work traditionally referred to as *History of the Church*, “HC 1: 184–186,” and added a new summary, separated from the heading by a line space. The current edition, updated in 2013 and found online at lds.org, has the same heading, except that the date is more specific: “June 14,” instead of simply “June,” and the summary is very slightly modified. These changes were made to reflect the latest research done by the Joseph Smith Papers team. Such exercises could go on ad infinitum, but hopefully enough has been said to illustrate what the avid pursuer of textual history might do with these remarkable volumes.

Finally, the magnificence of the whole Joseph Smith Papers Project was reemphasized to me as I took occasion again to look at the Joseph Smith Papers website (www.josephsmithpapers.org). All of the volumes

9. *The Doctrine and Covenants of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Containing Revelations Given to Joseph Smith, the Prophet, with Some Additions by His Successors in the Presidency of the Church* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1921), 86.

in the project are (or will be) available online, along with considerable other material, including a reproduction of the full 1844 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants (instead of only the eight sections reproduced in volume 2 of *Revelations and Translations*) and images of the entirety of Oliver Cowdery's copy of the Book of Commandments. If readers of this review do not have access to the volumes discussed here, they should go to the website, study the content there, and then spend many delightful hours discovering what else it has to offer.

James B. Allen was a teacher and administrator in the seminary and institute programs from 1954 to 1963, then joined the faculty of Brigham Young University. He was Assistant Church Historian, 1972–79, chair of the BYU History Department, 1981–87, and the Lemuel Hardison Redd Jr. Chair in Western American History, 1987–92. He retired in 1992. He has authored, coauthored, or coedited fourteen books or monographs and around ninety articles relating to Western American and LDS history. He is married to the former Renée Jones, and together they have five children, twenty-one grandchildren, and twenty-one great-grandchildren. They served a full-time Church Educational System mission at the Boston Institute of Religion, 1999–2000, and served as officiators in the Mount Timpanogos Utah Temple, 2004–13.