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# Oracles of God

## A New Digital Collection of Significant Prophetic Documents

Ryan S. Gardner

When President Russell M. Nelson read the “Restoration of the Fulness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ: A Bicentennial Proclamation” at the 190th annual general conference on April 5, 2020, several articles appeared explaining this newest proclamation in the context of its predecessors.<sup>1</sup> These articles revealed that these historically and spiritually valuable documents were not readily accessible in a single digital repository.

A new online digital collection,<sup>2</sup> entitled “Oracles of God,” has been created in the special collections at the David O. McKay Library at Brigham Young University–Idaho, making it possible for people to study some of the most significant documents from the First Presidency

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1. For example, see Scott Taylor, “How Rare a Proclamation: A Look at 2020’s on the Restoration and the 5 Previous in Church History,” *Church News*, April 5, 2020, <https://www.thechurchnews.com/leaders-and-ministry/2020-04-05/general-conference-april-2020-sunday-morning-new-proclamation-restoration-180340>; “Prophet Introduces a New Proclamation to the World: ‘The Restoration of the Fulness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ,’” Church of Jesus Christ Newsroom, April 5, 2020, <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/restoration-proclamation>; Tad Walch, “The Church Has Now Issued 6 Proclamations in Its History. Here’s a Look Back at Each,” *Deseret News*, April 5, 2020, <https://www.deseret.com/faith/2020/4/5/21208843/church-proclamations-history-mormon-lds-latter-day-saints-gordon-b-hinckley-russell-m-nelson>; Lindsey Williams, “What Are the 6 Proclamations That Have Been Issued in Church History?” *LDS Living*, April 5, 2020, <https://www.ldsliving.com/What-Are-the-6-Proclamations-that-Have-Been-Issued-in-Church-History/s/92664>.

2. The collection can be found at <https://archives.byui.edu/s/public/page/oracles-of-god>.

and the Quorum of Twelve Apostles. The initial launch of this collection features twenty-four documents, including declarations, proclamations, statements, expositions, and epistles. Several criteria were used to determine which documents to include in this collection.

First, the document had to be noncanonical, meaning that it was not included in the standard works of the Church. Resources on the Church's website or in the Gospel Library app already provide members of the Church with helpful background and commentary on these revelations.

Second, the document had to be disseminated by the First Presidency or the Quorum of Twelve Apostles (or both). Documents issued by the "unanimous voice" of these two quorums were given highest priority. Documents whose authorship could not be definitively ascertained were not considered.<sup>3</sup> Documents issued by a single member of either quorum likewise did not meet this criterion. In some instances where only a majority of either, or both, of these quorums were available to approve and issue the document,<sup>4</sup> it was considered for inclusion.

Third, the document had to be public-facing. Documents addressed to the entire Church membership or the world at large were given highest priority. In instances where a document was originally issued to a specific group of people for public use and later became used more broadly, it was considered.

Fourth, it had to be demonstrable that the document has had a significant impact on Church doctrine or practice. This was demonstrated either by how widely the document was distributed at the time of its original issuance or how often it has been reprinted over time, or both. Documents that were widely distributed when they were first issued and have been republished many times since were given highest priority. Other documents may have been included in this collection because they were distributed widely at the time, even though they may not have had a wide distribution since. In addition to merely being published widely, a document may also have been considered for inclusion because of the impact of the doctrines and principles it conveys.

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3. For example, a series of articles in *The Evening and Morning Star* in Kirtland, Ohio, in 1833–34 have been deemed influential by many Church historians and scholars. But because the articles were issued by "the elders of the Church at Kirtland" and the editors at the Joseph Smith Papers Project determined they were written by "JS and other leaders in Kirtland," this document was not included (see "Letter to the Church, circa February 1834," Joseph Smith Papers, accessed August 6, 2021, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/letter-to-the-church-circa-february-1834/2>).

4. See Doctrine and Covenants 107:28.

While these criteria were helpful in identifying key documents to include in the collection, considerations for what could realistically be prepared for the launch of the website also contributed to what constitutes the collection's initial contents. The "Oracles of God" website does not contain all documents that meet or could be considered for inclusion based on these criteria. But it is a robust beginning.

The digital collection is organized into categories: declarations, proclamations, statements, expositions, and epistles. Each of the twenty-four documents has its own landing page within one of these groups. Underneath the title of the document is a headline image that links to a featured version of the document. The Introduction contains an image of the signatories of that document, as well as some helpful background information that gives some context for the document. The Commentary and Impact section provides brief introductions to additional resources to show how this document has been influential in the Church. Finally, the Extant Documents section provides links to as many electronic copies of the document as could be found in various venues, such as ChurchofJesusChrist.org or the Church History Library's digital collection. Because this is intended to be an online resource, the vast majority of footnotes take readers to information that is electronically accessible to the public. The project is deeply indebted and grateful to all those who have provided these resources, which have enabled us to bring together such a tremendous amount of information that will enrich readers' understanding of and appreciation for these prophetic documents.

In June 1829, nearly a year before the Church was organized, the Lord explained that the revelations given through his servants were "not of men nor of man, but of me. . . . For it is my voice which speaketh them unto you; for they are given by my Spirit unto you. . . . Wherefore, you can testify that you have heard my voice, and know my words" (D&C 18:34–36). Those who participated in the creation of this unique digital collection had this experience with these documents. It is hoped that all those who engage with the word of the Lord given through his servants in these documents will have the same experience and receive the spiritual stability promised by the Lord in 1841: "And if my people will hearken unto my voice, and unto the voice of my servants whom I have appointed to lead my people, behold, verily I say unto you, they shall not be moved out of their place" (D&C 124:45).

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