

Doctrine & Covenants – Serious Changes

Within just two short years, many of Joseph Smith's original "revelations" were changed — massively and systematically. Yet Joseph did not protest, though the result was huge changes in his church's doctrine and practice. Why?

Joseph Smith received fifteen revelations beginning in 1828 through the same "seer" stone through which he produced the Book of Mormon. These are sections 2-16 in the current RLDS/Community of Christ Doctrine and Covenants (D&C). An additional 98 revelations were received by "inspiration" before Joseph died in 1844.

- **1833 Book of Commandments.** The church quickly took steps to publish these words "from [God's] own mouth" (D&C 19:2b). They were printed piecemeal, one or more per issue, in the official church newspaper, the *Evening and Morning Star* (E&MS) until the complete book of revelations could be prepared at the church's own print shop in Independence, Missouri. Mob action against the church in 1833 destroyed their press and stopped completion of the book — *but* press sheets of the first 64 revelations were salvaged and a few hundred bound copies of this Book of Commandments (BofC) were distributed. Some of these revelations had already appeared in the E&MS, and (with the exception of one 11-word phrase) those 22 revelations are identical in both the E&MS and BofC. In June 1833 Joseph Smith wrote to W. W. Phelps (the printer) pointing out only *four one-word corrections* after personally proofreading the entire BofC (*RLDS History of Church*, 1:300). Now one of the rarest books produced by the early Mormon church, this 1833 Book of Commandments (along with the 1835 Kirtland Edition D&C) has been photo-reproduced by the RLDS church and is distributed by Herald House as a "Replica Edition."
- **1835 Doctrine and Covenants.** However, when we compare the 1835 D&C (Kirtland Edition) to the original revelations (from the bound *B of C* and later ones printed in the *E&MS*), we find *over 2,700 words added and almost 600 words deleted*. These changes are so significant *the numbering of the revelations was altered* to make them more difficult to compare.
- **The Evening & Morning Star now needs to be reprinted.** The E&MS was actually *reprinted* by the church leadership to include their new wording: "In the first 14 numbers, in the Revelations, are many errors, typographical and other, occasioned by transcribing manuscript; but as we shall have access to originals, we shall endeavor to make proper corrections" (E&MS, vol.2, no. 24, Sept. 1834, p 192). However, by examining these massive and systematic

changes, it is clear that they are *far more* than simply typographical errors. Something else is clearly going on here.

- **Covering Up the Occult Connection.** In 1829 Joseph gave a revelation to Oliver Cowdery, his principal scribe for the *Book of Mormon*, encouraging his use of an occult divining rod—the “rod of nature.” Comparing D&C 8:3 with BofC chapter 7, we find 17 words deleted and 64 words added to change this “rod of nature” to a “gift of Aaron” and then declare it to be the “gift” or “power” of God. The church had become too respectable to admit of this overtly occult practice. Better cover up.
- **Introducing High Priests and the First Presidency.** David Whitmer (one of the three special Book of Mormon witnesses) in his *Address to All Believers in Christ* (Richmond, MO: 1887, p. 56) tells us plainly why the early revelations had to be changed.

“In the winter of 1834 they saw that some of the revelations *had to be changed*, because the heads of the church had gone too far, and had done things in which they had already gone ahead of some of the former revelations.” (emphasis added)

Two ways they had “gone ahead” were by introducing the office of “High Priest” and the creation of a “First Presidency.” Every significant function of higher leadership in the RLDS church is performed by High Priests. *But the office of High Priest is completely illegitimate in the Christian church* (see our articles on Joseph Smith’s Aaronic & Melchizedek Priesthoods). The First Presidency created a ruling triumvirate of a President (Joseph) and two “Counselors.” This same pattern of government is used in the church down to local pastorates. In order to legitimize High Priests and a First Presidency, earlier revelations (D&C 17, 42 & 48) were altered so it appeared they were there from the beginning.

- **Softening the Financial Law.** Joseph met Sydney Rigdon in Kirtland Ohio in December 1830. Part of Rigdon’s Campbellite congregation was practicing “common stock,” imitating the early Christian church practice of “all things common,” found in Acts 2. By February 1831 Joseph himself received a revelation which sought to further regulate the practice, and — more importantly — put him in charge of it. Thus gaining the trust of Sidney Rigdon and his Campbellites, this one act alone more than doubled the size of his fledgling church. But dissention soon arose over the practice, including some in the highest ranks of the church, notably Oliver Cowdery. Interestingly, Oliver Cowdery was one of only two men charged with republishing Joseph’s revelations as the D&C in 1835. It is not surprising, then, that the offending revelation (BofC section 44) was gutted of “all things common” when republished as D&C section 42 in 1835. Problem solved.

- There are *many* other revelation changes than presented in this brief overview. See Paul Trask's book, **Part Way to Utah: the Forgotten Mormons** for more details.
- Joseph died a full nine years after his own revelations were *substantially* altered in the 1835 D&C. Yet there is no evidence that he ever sought to overturn this outright coup of his original theology, nor that he ever publicly protested how others had had the audacity to change revelations which were directly from God.
- If Joseph's revelations really were "from [God's] own mouth" (D&C 19:2b), how dare *anyone* change them? And how dare Joseph Smith's own complicity by playing along with it — *for nine full years?* •

Paul Trask

For a more thorough and detailed analysis, see Paul Trask's book, **Part Way to Utah: the Forgotten Mormons** at www.help4rlds.com.