

The *Doctrine and Covenants*

The RLDS Doctrine & Covenants is largely a collection of “revelations” received by their various prophets.¹ These revelations are believed to have been given directly by God to their “prophet, seer and revelator” and therefore represent God’s will. Each revelation is given a sequential number and is thereafter referred to as a “section.” As I write this (1996) there are currently 160 sections in the RLDS Doctrine & Covenants, the most recent one having been added in April 1996. Of these 160 sections, 113 or 70% come from the Joseph Smith era, 1828–1844; only 47 or 30% have come since.

Historical Background

Joseph Smith began receiving his revelations in 1828. His first fifteen were received through the same “seer stone” by which he produced the Book of Mormon.² These are sections 2 through 16 in the current RLDS *Doctrine & Covenants*. A collection of Joseph Smith’s revelations was first published in 1833 as the *Book of Commandments*. Two years later these same revelations were substantially altered and republished as part of a larger *Doctrine & Covenants*. (These alterations will be discussed below.) Shortly after Joseph Smith’s murder the church leadership published a second edition of the *Doctrine & Covenants* in 1844, adding many new sections received since 1835. Among those new sections were three which taught the doctrine of “baptism for the dead” and other temple rituals.

Shortly after its Reorganization in 1860 the RLDS church unwittingly endorsed this 1844 edition, while at the same time rejecting the doctrine of baptism for the dead. They lived with this conflict between the *Doctrine & Covenants* and their official doctrine for 110 years. During this time the church said it would not completely repudiate the doctrine, but would need more “light” before beginning its practice. But in 1970 the church voted to move five sections of the *Doctrine & Covenants*, including the three on baptism for the dead, to the book’s appendix.³ They were clearly not expecting any more “light” on the issue. In 1990 the church decided to distance themselves from this issue even further by doing an “appendectomy”—they removed these five sections from their *Doctrine & Covenants* altogether.

1. Exceptions are sections 111, 112, 113 and 123 which are not “revelations,” but statements of various kinds which have reflected the beliefs of the RLDS church.

2. Whitmer, *Address to All Believers*, p. 55. See also *RHC* 1:24–25,33.

3. These were sections 107, 109, 110, 113 and 123. Sections 107, 109 and 110 dealt with baptism for the dead, section 113 recounts the story of the murder of Joseph and Hyrum Smith in 1844 and section 123 is a report of the Joint Council to the General Conference of 1895.

In the discussion to follow, I will occasionally refer to the *Doctrine & Covenants* simply as *D&C*.

“My Stone Gives Better Revelations than *Your* Stone”— Joseph Smith to be the Sole Revelator

In chapter 2 we explained that Joseph Smith produced the Book of Mormon by use of a “peep stone” or “seer stone” placed in a hat, a popular occult practice of his day. We mentioned above that the first fifteen revelations of the *Doctrine & Covenants* were produced in the same way. His use of this stone was so successful that one of his own church members decided to try the technique himself. And it worked.

Hiram Page was one of the “eight witnesses” to the Book of Mormon. He was also related to Oliver Cowdery and the Whitmer family, altogether representing seven of the eleven Book of Mormon witnesses. In the summer of 1830 Hiram acquired a seer stone of his own and began generating competing revelations regarding the building of Zion, church organization and related issues. What made matters worse was that Oliver Cowdery and the Whitmers were beginning to *believe* them. Joseph acted quickly to squash this competition by delivering a message which reserved for himself the exclusive right to engage in such revelatory matters. It also commanded Oliver Cowdery to instruct Hiram to “cease and desist” from all such practices. Here is part of Joseph’s message. “Behold, I say unto thee, Oliver...no one shall be appointed to receive commandments and revelations in this church excepting my servant Joseph Smith, Jr., for he receiveth them even as Moses...thou shalt not command him who is at thy head, and at the head of the church...thou shalt take thy brother Hiram Page between him and thee alone, and tell him that those things which he hath written from that stone are not of me, and that Satan deceiveth him.”⁴

A similar but less threatening situation developed in early 1831, this time involving a woman. A Mrs. Hubble had also begun receiving revelations regarding church government which had likewise attracted a following. Joseph again presented a message designating himself as the exclusive channel of such revelations. “O hearken, ye elders of my church...ye have received a commandment for a law unto my church, through him whom I have appointed unto you, to receive commandments and revelations from my hand [Joseph Smith]...and this shall be a law unto you, that ye receive not the teachings of any [other] that shall come before you as revelations, or commandments; and this I give unto you, that you may not be deceived, that you may know they are not of me...I am Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world.”⁵

The Alterations of 1835

The “changing of the revelations” in 1835 was one of the most significant events in Joseph Smith’s new church. Why? One reason is that it creates important doctrinal problems for today’s church. But the most important reason is that it very clearly demonstrates the deceptive nature not only of Joseph Smith, but also of all those who were in higher leadership at the time. David

4. *D&C* 27:Introduction and 1–4. See also *RHC* 1:118–119; Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, pp. 91–93.

5. *D&C* 43:Introduction and 1–2, 8.

Whitmer, one of the three witnesses to the Book of Mormon, tells why these changes became necessary. “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. So the book of ‘Doctrine and Covenants’ was printed in 1835, and some of the revelations changed and added to” (emphasis as in the original).⁶

The 1833 *Book of Commandments* contained 64 complete revelations. Of these, 22 had already been published in the official church newspaper the *Evening and Morning Star*. With the exception of one eleven-word phrase in one revelation these two versions of the revelations were the same.⁷ In June 1833 Joseph Smith himself verified both the completeness and the accuracy of the *Book of Commandments* in a letter to the book’s printer, W.W. Phelps of Independence, Missouri. He drew the printer’s attention to only four one-word corrections in the whole book, which illustrated his attention to detail. And certainly no one could have proofread this book more accurately than Joseph Smith himself.⁸ However, when we compare the 1835 *Doctrine & Covenants* to the original revelations we find that *over 2,700 words were added and nearly 600 words were deleted*.⁹

These alterations were so massive and doctrinally significant that the church leadership decided to actually *reprint* the *Evening and Morning Star* beginning in 1835 with the changes incorporated. When they had made this decision they published the following announcement and explanation. “There are many typographical errors in both volumes [1832 & 1833] and especially in the last [1833], which we will endeavor to correct, as well as principle, if we can discover any.— It is also proper for us to say, that 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.”¹⁰ But as we shall see by looking at some of these changes, they were far more than *typographical errors*.

There are a number of statements by men in leadership roles which confirm that they knew changes were being made and that they more or less acquiesced to them. The following statement by David Whitmer is one of the more candid ones, and gives insight into the process. “I want to state also that Oliver Cowdery told me that Rigdon was the cause of those changes being made; by smooth talk he convinced Joseph, Oliver, and F.G. Williams that it was all right. Oliver told me that he had sorely repented of that thing; and he repented of the other errors he had been led into by Rigdon and others, Bro. John Whitmer likewise.”¹¹

In the discussion which follows we will look at three examples of the changes which were made in 1835, *Covering Up the Occult Connection*, *Introducing High Priests* and *The First Presidency* and *Softening the Financial Law*. We will then review Joseph Smith III’s opinion on the changes, which has defined the RLDS position. Last we will look at the position of the Church of Christ (Temple Lot), and then come to a conclusion.

6. Whitmer, *Address to All Believers*, p. 56.

7. Jack Raveill, *The Revelation Revisions of 1835*, 2d edition, (Blue Springs, MO: self-published, 1983), p. 10.

8. *T&S*, 6:800–801. Also cited in *RHC* 1:300.

9. Raveill, *The Revelation Revisions of 1835*, p. 11.

10. *E&MS*, vol. 2, no. 24, September 1834, p. 192.

11. *Saints Herald*, vol. 34, p. 93, as cited in Raveill, *The Revelation Revisions of 1835*, p. 25A.

Covering Up the Occult Connection. An interesting example of these changes is found in Section 8 of the current RLDS *Doctrine & Covenants*. It also betrays the type of occult practices which were used not only by Joseph Smith but also by a number of the other men who were instrumental in founding his church.

In chapter 2 we explained that both Joseph Smith and his father were practitioners of various occult devices. One of these practices was *divination* by use of a *divining rod*.¹² Oliver Cowdery, Joseph's principal scribe in producing the Book of Mormon, was also adept at this practice.¹³ In 1829 Joseph gave a revelation to Oliver encouraging this use of his "rod of Nature" and claiming that it was the power of God which made it work for him. As time went along Joseph became embarrassed by such obvious references to occult practices and sought rather to attribute their success to simply "the power of God." This accounts for the changes made to the revelation when it was reprinted in 1835.

Below are the related excerpts from this revelation, as it was first published in the *Book of Commandments* in 1833 compared to its altered form in the 1835 and subsequent *Doctrine & Covenants*. Words deleted from the original revelation are indicated by **strikeout**, those added are indicated by *italics*.

Original Revelation Published as Chapter 7 in the 1833 Book of Commandments	RLDS Doctrine & Covenants Section 8 as Published in the 1835 and all Subsequent Editions
<p>...you [Oliver Cowdery] have another gift, which is the gift of working with the rod; behold it has told you things; behold there is no other power save God that can cause this rod of Nature to work in your hands;</p> <p style="text-align: right;">for it is</p> <p>the work of God.</p> <p>And, therefore, whatsoever you shall ask me to tell you by that means, that will I grant unto you, that you shall know;</p> <p style="text-align: right;">remember, that</p> <p>without faith you can do nothing.</p>	<p>3b. ...you [Oliver Cowdery] have another gift, which is the gift of working with the rod Aaron; behold it has told you <i>many</i> things; behold there is no other power save <i>the power of</i> God that can cause this rod of Nature to work in your hands <i>gift of Aaron to be with you</i>;</p> <p>c. therefore doubt not, for it is the gift of God, and you shall hold it in your hands, and do marvelous works; and no power shall be able to take it away out of your hands, for it is the work of God.</p> <p>d. And, therefore, whatsoever you shall ask me to tell you by that means, that will I grant unto you, that you shall know <i>and you shall have knowledge concerning it</i>; remember, that without faith you can do nothing.</p>

12. Tanner, *Mormonism: Shadow or Reality?*, pp. 46–47.

13. *Ibid.*

This practice of “working with the rod” is ancient and has been long acknowledged as an occult technique. Ironically, it has also been referred to as the “Rod of Aaron.” The following is an excerpt from *The Encyclopedia of Occult Sciences*, page 322.

“A treatise on the Diving Rod in two volumes gives the following explanation:—

The Rod, also called Caduceus, divining Rod, *Rod of Aaron*, Staff of Jacob, etc., was known in all times, and many writers mention it...

As to the discovery of treasures, according to the author it must be assumed that the rod correctly handled is sensitive to metallic emanations, and he gives a list of mines found by this means...” (emphasis added).¹⁴

An article on Divining on page 1 of the book *The Divining Rod* (1894) goes even further.

“*Divining*, the faculty of feeling or discovering water, is of very ancient origin. From the most remote period indications are not wanting of the faculty of discovering water, metals, or veins of ore beneath the surface of the earth...The instruments used are known as the Divining Rod—often called the ‘Vigata Divina’—the Wand of Mercury, the *Rod of Aaron*, etc.; and there is no doubt that certain individuals have acquired the power, partly natural and strengthened by practice, of discovering water, etc., in the bowels of the earth. Many philosophers have believed in the occult power ascribed to this magic wand” (emphasis added).¹⁵

Finally, *Unger’s Bible Dictionary* lists *rabdomancy* as a form of *divination* under the general heading of *Magic*. There it is defined simply as “divination by rods.”¹⁶

In closing, it is significant to note that the prophet Hosea decried Israel’s use of such techniques as a form of idolatry, “They consult a wooden idol, *and are answered by a stick of wood*.” He says that such practices “*take away the understanding of my people*” (Hosea 4:11–12). Interestingly, former RLDS Historian Richard P. Howard acknowledges that Oliver had in fact used the divining rod. And he also acknowledges the alteration of this revelation in 1835. But he attributes these changes rather to Joseph’s increasing spiritual maturity, and hence his ability to place this earlier experience in a “more accurate perspective.”¹⁷

Introducing High Priests and The First Presidency. David Whitmer has already explained the need to change the wording of some of the original revelations. “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.” Two of the ways they had “done things in which they had already gone ahead of some of the former revelations” were the introduction of the office of *High Priest* and the creation of a *First Presidency*. These innovations have serious ramifications.

High Priests rule the RLDS church. With the sole exception of the quorum of Seventy (who are Elders) every significant function of higher leadership is performed by High Priests. This

14. As cited in Tanner, *Mormonism, Magic and Masonry*, p. 29.

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 29–30.

16. Unger, *Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, pp. 679–683.

17. Richard P. Howard, *Restoration Scriptures*, (Independence, MO: Herald Publishing House, 1969), pp. 211–214, as cited in Tanner, *Mormonism: Shadow or Reality?*, pp. 47–48.

includes not only the presiding First Presidency, but Apostles, Bishops, Patriarchs, Stake Presidents and frequently includes even local pastors. *But the office of High Priest is completely illegitimate in a Christian church*, and will be examined more fully in chapters 14 and 15 which deal with Joseph Smith's "Restored Priesthood."

The concept of a First Presidency created a ruling triumvirate consisting of Joseph Smith as President together with two "counselors." This triumvirate concept is significant because it defines not only the top echelon of the church's hierarchy, but is used throughout virtually every aspect of the organization, from Bishops and Seventy to individual priesthood quorums and even the local pastorate. It is a universal pattern of government in the church, Mormon and RLDS alike.

David Whitmer blames Sidney Rigdon for prompting Joseph Smith to introduce High Priests.

"Sidney Rigdon was the cause of almost all the errors which were introduced while he was in the church...[he] would expound the Old Testament scriptures of the Bible and Book of Mormon (in his way) to Joseph, concerning the priesthood, high priests, etc., and would persuade Brother Joseph to inquire of the Lord about this doctrine and that doctrine, and of course a revelation would always come just as they desired it. Rigdon finally persuaded Brother Joseph to believe that the high priests which had such great power in ancient times, should be in the Church of Christ today. He had Brother Joseph inquire of the Lord about it, and they received an answer according to their erring desires."¹⁸

Regarding the First Presidency David says, "Just before April 6, 1830, some of the brethren began to think that the church should have a leader, just like the children of Israel wanting a king. Brother Joseph finally inquired of the Lord about it. ... [He] received a revelation that he should be the leader; that he should be ordained by Oliver Cowdery as 'Prophet, Seer and Revelator' to the church, and that the church should receive his words as if from God's own mouth."¹⁹ This action led first to a presiding "Prophet" over the church and later to a presiding First Presidency when his first two counselors were ordained on March 18, 1833—one of whom, incidently, was Sidney Rigdon.²⁰ The result was that "in a few years those [earlier] revelations were changed to admit this high office, which otherwise would have condemned it."²¹

In order to accommodate the introduction of High Priests and a First Presidency the earlier revelations were systematically altered by the insertion of these functions by name so that it would appear that they had been there all along.²²

I will close with David Whitmer's assessment of the introduction of High Priests, which needs no further comment.

"In Kirtland, Ohio, in June 1831, at a conference of the church, the first High Priests were ordained into the church. Brother Joseph ordained Lyman Wight, John Murdock, Harvey Whitlock, Hyrum Smith, Reynolds Cahoon and others to the office of a High Priest. When they

18. Whitmer, *Address to All Believers*, p. 35.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 33.

20. *RHC* 1:282.

21. Whitmer, *Address to All Believers*, p. 46.

22. For example, compare *D&C* 17:16; 17:17; 42:8; 42:19 and 48:2 to their counterpart in the *Book of Commandments*.

were ordained, right there at the time, the devil caught and bound Harvey Whitlock so he could not speak, his face being twisted into demon-like shape. Also John Murdock and others were caught by the devil in a similar manner. ...but what was the design of the devil entering into these men just as soon as they were ordained the first High Priests ever ordained in the church? Of course it was to show that God's sore displeasure was upon their erring works of ordaining High Priests into the Church of Christ."²³

Softening the Financial Law. Not long after the church was organized it began to implement the financial principle of “all things common,” imitating the early Christian church at Jerusalem as recorded in Acts 2. It is most likely that Sidney Rigdon helped introduce this concept during his early association with Joseph Smith.

You will remember from chapter 1 that after only a few short months Joseph directed his new and still small church to move to Kirtland, Ohio, just east of Cleveland. Sidney Rigdon had just joined the church and his followers now outnumbered Joseph's. Sidney had been a Campbellite minister near Kirtland, which movement had been advocating a return to primitive first century Christianity (as they understood it, of course). Accordingly, a portion of Sidney's congregation had begun practicing “all things common,” or “common stock” as it was also known.²⁴

Since he too was claiming to restore Christianity, Joseph soon decided that he could safely adopt this practice, thereby happily retaining Sidney's sizable addition to his new church. But, of course, the doctrine would first need to be purified, or *restored* as only Joseph could do through the light of a new revelation. Joseph and Sidney first met in December 1830 and by February 1831 Joseph had issued the revelation both commanding and governing this practice of “all things common.” Here is what he later said about the situation. “The branch of the church in this part of the Lord's vineyard [Kirtland, Ohio] ... were striving to do the will of God, so far as they knew it ... The plan of ‘common stock,’ which had existed in what was called ‘the family,’ whose members generally had embraced the everlasting gospel, *was readily abandoned for the more perfect law of the Lord.*” (emphasis added).²⁵

Copies of this new revelation were circulated and the remaining church obediently began to implement “all things common,” including the church which was now living in Independence, Missouri. A variety of historical documentation evidences this early implementation, including signed copies of “Consecration” and “Inheritance” forms which comply with requirements of the original revelation. In 1832 the revelation was published in the church's official newspaper, the *Evening and Morning Star*²⁶ and in 1833 in the *Book of Commandments* as Chapter 44. It is interesting to note that these two published versions of the revelation are *identical*, with the exception of only one insignificant word difference.

Below is the “financial law” portion of this revelation as originally given, compared to its altered form published in the *Doctrine & Covenants* in 1835. As before, words deleted from the revelation are indicated in **strikeout**, words added are indicated by *italics*.

23. Whitmer, *Address to All Believers*, p. 64–65. See also *RHC* 1:193–194.

24. *RHC* 1:141.

25. *T&S* 4:368, as cited in *RHC* 1:169.

26. *E&MS*, vol. 1, no. 2, July 1832, p. 1.

Original Revelation
Published as Chapter 44 in the
1833 Book of Commandments

If thou lovest me, thou shalt serve me and keep all my commandments.

And, behold, thou shalt consecrate all thy properties, that which thou hast unto me, with a covenant and a deed which cannot be broken;

and they shall be laid before the bishop of my church, and two of the elders, such as he shall appoint and set apart for that purpose.

And it shall come to pass that the bishop of my church, after that he has received the properties of my church, that it cannot be taken from the church,

he shall appoint every man a steward over his own property, or that which he has received, inasmuch as is sufficient for himself and family:

and the residue, shall be kept to administer to him who has not,

that every man may receive according as he stands in need:

And the residue shall be kept in my storehouse, to administer to the poor and needy, as shall be appointed by the elders of the church, and the bishop; and for the purpose of purchasing lands,

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8a. If thou lovest me, thou shalt serve me and keep all my commandments.

b. And, behold, thou ~~shalt~~ *wilt remember the poor, and consecrate all of thy properties for their support, that which thou hast unto me to impart unto them,* with a covenant and a deed which cannot be broken;

c. and inasmuch as ye impart of your substance unto the poor, ye will do it unto me, and ~~they~~ it shall be laid before the bishop of my church and his counselors, two of the elders, or high priests, such as he shall **appoint** or has appointed and set apart for that purpose.

9a. And it shall come to pass that *after they are laid before* the bishop of my church, *and* after that he has received *these testimonies concerning the consecration of* the properties of my church, that ~~it~~ *they* cannot be taken from the church, *agreeable to my commandments,*

b. ~~he shall appoint~~ every man *shall be made accountable unto me* a steward over his own property, or that which he has received *by consecration,* inasmuch as is sufficient for himself and family.

10a. And again, if there shall be properties in the hands of the church, or any individuals of it, more than is necessary for their support, after this first consecration, which is a ~~and the~~ residue, to be consecrated unto the bishop, it shall be kept to administer ~~to him who has not~~ unto those who have not, from time to time, that every man who *has need may be amply supplied, and receive according as he stands in need: to his wants.*

b. **And** *Therefore,* the residue shall be kept in my storehouse, to administer to the poor and the needy, as shall be appointed by the ~~elders~~ *high council* of the church, and the bishop *and his council,* and for the purpose of purchasing lands *for the public benefit of the church, and building houses of worship,*

Original Revelation
Published as Chapter 44 in the
1833 Book of Commandments

and the building up of the New Jerusalem which is hereafter to be revealed, that my covenant people may be gathered in one, in the day that I shall come to my temple. And this I do for the salvation of my people.

And it shall come to pass that he that sinneth and repenteth not, shall be cast out, and shall not receive again that which he has consecrated unto me:

for it shall come to pass, that which I spake by the mouths of my prophets shall be fulfilled; for I will consecrate the riches of the Gentiles, unto my people which are of the house of Israel.

Shortly after its implementation, however, dissention arose over “all things common” within even the highest ranks of the church. One of the dissenters was Oliver Cowdery who took a strong stand against the doctrine. He defended his position as follows. “The church at Jerusalem, in the days of the apostles, had their earthly goods in common; the Nephites, after the appearance of Christ held theirs in the same way; but each government was differently organized from ours, and could admit of such a course when ours cannot.”²⁷ In this regard, it is significant to note that Oliver was one of only two men charged with the responsibility of producing the altered *Doctrine & Covenants* of 1835.²⁸

Oliver Cowdery’s growing disaffection with Joseph’s church ultimately led to a parting of their ways. All of this notwithstanding his important role as scribe in producing the entire Book of Mormon, being selected as one of its “Three Witnesses” and having been a man of influence in the church as one of Joseph Smith’s counselors in the “First Presidency.” In his defense at his excommunication trial in 1838 he not only confirmed his stand against “all things common,” but rendered an opinion on Joseph Smith’s revelation. “I will not be influenced, governed, or controlled, in my temporal interest by any ecclesiastical authority or pretended revelation whatever, contrary to my own judgment.”²⁹

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c. and ~~the~~ building up of the New Jerusalem which is hereafter to be revealed, that my covenant people may be gathered in one, in ~~the~~ *that day* ~~that~~ *when* I shall come to my temple. And this I do for the salvation of my people.

11a. And it shall come to pass that he that sinneth and repenteth not, shall be cast out *of the church*, and shall not receive again that which he has consecrated *unto the poor and needy of my church, or, in other words*, unto me;

b. *for inasmuch as ye do it unto the least of these, ye do it unto me*; for it shall come to pass, that which I spake by the mouths of my prophets shall be fulfilled; for I will consecrate *of* the riches of *those who embrace my gospel, among* the Gentiles, unto *the poor of* my people ~~which~~ *who* are of the house of Israel.

27. *E&MS*, March 1835, p. 48, as cited in Raveill, *The Revelation Revisions of 1835*, p. 7.

28. On April 19, 1834 Oliver Cowdery and Sidney Rigdon were jointly charged with the responsibility of “arranging the church covenants, which are soon to be published; and...to do the work of printing” (*T&S* 6:1059, as cited in *RHC* 1:447–448).

29. Donald Q. Cannon and Lyndon W. Cook, ed., *Far West Record: Minutes of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1830–1844*, (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1983), p. 165.

Today, the RLDS church has completely disavowed the concept of “all things common,” and has adopted a unique form of tithing based on “increase.” This doctrine teaches that church members should first deduct all of their basic living needs (their “just wants and needs”) from their income and then pay 10% of the excess which is thus deemed “surplus,” or “increase.”

Position of Joseph Smith III and the RLDS Church. The alteration of the revelations in 1835 was massive and easy to verify from historic documentation. Consequently, it became a matter of great controversy within the RLDS church in the years following the Reorganization of 1860. In 1892 Joseph Smith III addressed the issue by writing an article entitled *Book of Commandments and Book of Doctrine & Covenants* which was first published in the church’s periodical *The Saints Herald*.³⁰ This article has subsequently been republished in booklet form as well, and is available in the RLDS church archives. Joseph III’s view of the matter was decisively in favor of the *Doctrine & Covenants*, and for most RLDS it forever settled the issue.

While his statement largely ended the controversy, Joseph III’s arguments are both superficial and naïve. His arguments revolve primarily around (1) technical/legal issues regarding whether or not the *Book of Commandments* was ever really “published” and (2) the fact that the committee in charge of publishing the 1835 *Doctrine & Covenants* affirmed that it was correct as printed. His concluding statement sums up this position. “In view of what is heretofore written, we see no plausible reason why we should consent to correct the perfected work of the committee of 1834, and the assembly of 1835, by the incomplete and unfinished work of the committee of 1832–3 and W.W. Phelps & Company, publishers; especially when we have the unbroken, unchallenged indorsement of the whole of the first committee for the work of the last.” In coming up with his position it seems that Joseph Smith III is completely unaware of, or else oblivious to the significant historic documentation which bears on the topic.

The Church of Christ (Temple Lot). The Church of Christ (Temple Lot) is a smaller and even lesser-known branch of Mormonism than the RLDS Church. In 1982 it numbered approximately 3,000 people.³¹ Its biggest claim to fame is its possession of Joseph Smith’s “Temple Lot” in Independence, Missouri. Both the RLDS and the Mormon churches have tried to acquire possession of this most important piece of land for years, but to no avail. The RLDS church finally gave up and built their temple in the parking lot across the street.

The “changing of the revelations” in 1835 has become an important issue for this Temple Lot group, and a point of departure from other factions of Mormonism. They have come to believe in the *Book of Commandments* as published in 1833, rejecting the changes made to these early revelations as well as all subsequent revelations. As a result, this church no longer has the office of High Priest or a presiding First Presidency, believing, as David Whitmer maintains, that these priesthood offices were fabricated “illegally” after the church had already been fully constituted.³² But despite their strong stand on these later priesthood offices they have still failed to embrace the “all things common” principle required by this same *Book of Commandments*.

30. *Saints Herald*, January 23, 1892, vol. 39, no. 4, p. 50. See comment also in *RHC* 5:141.

31. Shields, *Divergent Paths of the Restoration*, p. 77.

32. *Ibid.*, pp. 76–83. See also Apostle Arthur M. Smith, *A Brief History of The Church of Christ (Temple Lot)*, (Independence, Mo: The Board of Publications, Church of Christ [Temple Lot], 1981), pp. 10, 12–14.

Conclusion. The changes to Joseph Smith’s original revelations in 1835 were both massive and doctrinally significant. They involved conspiracy among the very highest leadership of the church, including Joseph Smith himself. A number of statements by members of leadership confirm that they knew of the changes and had acquiesced to them. These changes were published not only in a substantially revised Doctrine & Covenants but in a completely reprinted church newspaper in an effort to cover up the changes as mere typographical errors.

Joseph Smith—through whom all of these revelations had come, whose words the church was to receive “as if from God’s own mouth”—lived with these changes for another nine years before he was murdered. He never once publicly protested the changes which were made to his own revelations. His silence necessarily implies his consent—and his complicity. What degree of reverence does this show for what he wanted others to think was God’s word? What degree of respect does it show for the trust of others which held him to be the greatest of all prophets?

This action, therefore, amounts to nothing less than a massive cover-up in order to convince the church to go along with the revised doctrinal position of the leadership. As such, it does as much as anything else to undermine the credibility of not only Joseph Smith but those who actually conspired together on the changes as well as all those who knew what was going on but choose to “go along with the crowd.” They are all found guilty.

A Survey of the Doctrine & Covenants

The Doctrine & Covenants is a diverse book. Well over 100 of its 160 sections were generated by Joseph Smith himself. The rest have been produced by his descendants as successive prophets of the RLDS church.

The Joseph Smith Era. Joseph Smith’s earliest revelations were largely personal instructions and warnings to individuals involved with him in producing the Book of Mormon. After his church had been formally instituted his revelations began ordering and structuring the new organization. A lot of attention is given to specific priesthood offices including their unique ministerial functions, hierarchal structure and prerogatives. Church government is instituted. Specific instructions are given regarding the administration of church ordinances such as baptism, ordination and communion. Along the way new theology is either revealed or confirmed. And a dietary code is instituted called the “Word of Wisdom” (D&C 86). Among the other subjects included in the book are the following.

- Selected individuals are given specific job assignments.
- Instructions are given regarding the publishing of the revelations themselves first as the *Book of Commandments* and then later as the *Doctrine & Covenants*.
- Instructions are given regarding the production and publishing of the *Inspired Version* of the Bible.
- Instructions are given to the church regarding their relocation from place to place.
- Instructions are given to the church on how to deal with the persecutions they were suffering.

- Independence, Missouri is identified as the chosen place for *Zion*, or the *New Jerusalem*.
- A new version of the afterlife is laid out based on a vision. The traditional Biblical view of heaven and hell are replaced by three “glories.”

In his final stage as first prophet of the church, Joseph Smith began introducing esoteric doctrines such as baptism for the dead and secret temple ordinances. These are reflected in Sections 107, 109 and 110 of the Doctrine & Covenants. As mentioned above, the RLDS removed these three sections from their Doctrine & Covenants in 1990.

Since the Reorganization of 1860. In 1831 there was “some murmuring among the elders” regarding the wording in some of Joseph Smith’s revelations. Joseph rose to this occasion by issuing a challenge to anyone who thought they could come up with a better one. William McLellin took up the challenge and failed, which subdued the murmuring.³³ Nor has there been an RLDS prophet since Joseph Smith who could match the theological significance of his revelations, not even his son, Joseph Smith III. Revelations received since 1860 amount to little more than “institutional housekeeping.” They concern themselves primarily with the appointing, dismissing and retiring of certain members of the church’s leadership.

There are two notable exceptions to this: Sections 156 and 160. Section 156 was issued in 1984 and introduced the explosive issues of the ordination of women and the construction of a temple in Independence. It represented the “final straw” in a growing “liberal v. fundamental” split which had been brewing in the church during the preceding 20–30 years. It resulted in thousands of RLDS leaving the formal church structure to meet independently.³⁴ The second exception is Section 160, issued in April 1996, which designated a new Prophet—W. Grant McMurray—who, for the first time in RLDS history, is not a direct descendant of Joseph Smith.

Portions of the Inspired Version. In chapter 1 we explained that Joseph Smith’s *Inspired Version* of the Bible was not published during his lifetime. It was first published by the RLDS church in 1867. The *Inspired Version* will be explored more fully in the next chapter.

Since the *Inspired Version* was not available until 1867, the RLDS church added two significant excerpts from it to their *Doctrine & Covenants* in 1864. These excerpts are contained in Sections 22 and 36. Section 22 details two purported encounters of Moses, one with God and the other with Satan. This story is included as the *Forepart* of the *Inspired Version*, serving as a sort of introduction. It will be examined more fully in chapter 10 on the *Pearl of Great Price* under the *Book of Moses*.

Section 36 is a reproduction of Genesis 7:1–78 from the *Inspired Version*. This chapter represents Joseph’s largest single alteration of the Bible and revolves around an imaginary legend of Enoch. It will be examined in detail in the next chapter under *Genesis 7*.

Despite the publication of the *Inspired Version* in 1867, the RLDS church has retained these two sections in their *Doctrine & Covenants*.

33. See *RHC* 1:223–224 and *D&C* 67:2b–d.

34. For more information see chapter 1 under *The Break Up of 1984*.

Poor Malachi. Joseph Smith had a field day with Malachi. In chapter 2 we quoted part of Joseph's 1838 official *History of the Church* where he tells of an encounter with a spiritual visitor which he claims transpired in 1823. Among a number of other things this visitor quoted from the fourth chapter of Malachi "though with a little variation from the way it reads in our Bibles." Joseph then relates the quote, including its variations from the King James Version. These variations affected three verses and substantially altered their meaning. However, when Joseph quoted this same passage in two of his later revelations it was precisely the same as in the King James Version. And in a third revelation he creates another version of it altogether. But when he came across Malachi during work on his *Inspired Version*, he simply labeled the entire book "Correct."³⁵ Figure that out.

In *D&C* 108, given in 1831, Joseph quotes a portion of Malachi 4 directly from the King James Version as one of the prophecies which would be executed upon those who do not accept him and his prophecies as being from God. In *D&C* 95, given in 1833, Joseph comes up with a new version of Malachi 4:6 altogether. And in *D&C* 110, given in 1842, Joseph quotes Malachi 4:5–6 directly from the King James Version again as supposed Biblical justification for the introduction of baptism for the dead. He quotes Malachi because he was "one of the prophets, who had his eye fixed on the restoration of the priesthood, the glories to be revealed in the last days, and in an especial manner *this most glorious of all subjects belonging to the everlasting gospel; namely: the baptism for the dead*" (*D&C* 110:17a, emphasis added). After quoting Malachi 4:5–6 directly from the King James Version he goes on by saying, "I might have rendered a plainer translation to this, but it is sufficiently plain to suit my purpose as it stands. It is sufficient to know in this case that the earth will be smitten with a curse, unless there is a welding link of some kind or other, between the fathers and the children, upon some subject or other, and, behold, what is that subject? It is the baptism for the dead. For we without them can not be made perfect; neither can they without us be made perfect" (*D&C* 110:18a–c).

Malachi 4:1,5 & 6 are shown below compared to the related portions of Joseph's 1838 Official History and to *D&C* 108:12b and 110:17b and 95:3d–e. Words deleted from the Bible are indicated by **strikeout**, those added are indicated by *italics*.

Doctrine & Covenants	King James Version Malachi Chapter 4	Joseph Smith's 1838 Official History
<u>108:12b</u>		
For, behold, the day cometh that shall burn as an oven, and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch.	1 For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be as stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch.	1 For behold the day cometh that shall burn as an oven, and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly shall burn as stubble, for the day <i>they</i> that cometh shall burn them up saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root or branch.

35. This will be discussed further in the next chapter which deals with Joseph Smith's *Inspired Version* of the Bible.

Doctrine & Covenants	King James Version Malachi Chapter 4	Joseph Smith's 1838 Official History
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>110:17b</u></p> <p>Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.</p>	<p>5 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: 6 And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.</p>	<p>5 Behold I will send you <i>reveal unto you the priesthood by the hand of</i> Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. 6 And he shall turn <i>plant in</i> the hearts of the fathers to the children <i>children the promises made to the fathers</i>, and the hearts of the children <i>shall turn</i> to their fathers; lest I come and smite the earth with a curse. <i>if it were not so the whole earth would be utterly wasted at his coming.</i></p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>95:3d-e</u></p> <p>...seek diligently to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, children to their fathers, and the hearts of the children to their fathers fathers to the children. And again, the hearts of the Jews unto the prophets; and the prophets unto the Jews, lest I come and smite the whole earth with a curse, and all flesh be consumed before me.</p>		

If all of this seems confusing, that is because it is confusing. To help keep this all sorted out, below is a chronological listing of Joseph Smith's relationship with Malachi.

- 1823 A spiritual visitor supposedly quotes Malachi 4 with *substantial variation*.
- 1831 Joseph quotes the King James Version of Malachi 4 *verbatim* in D&C 108.
- 1833 Joseph comes up with an *entirely new version* of Malachi 4 in D&C 95.
- 1833 Joseph comes across Malachi during his work on the *Inspired Version* of the Bible and labels the whole book "*Correct*" as in the King James Version.

1838 Joseph recalls his 1823 spiritual encounter—remembering his visitor’s *alteration* of Malachi *verbatim*.

1842 Joseph quotes the King James Version of Malachi 4 *verbatim* in *D&C* 110.

It is very clear from this that Joseph Smith was “making it up as he went along.” And yet his followers were to accept his revelations “as if from [God’s] own mouth” (*D&C* 19:2b).