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Revelation and the Living Prophet

“The grand rule of heaven [is] that nothing should ever be done on earth without revealing the secret to his servants the prophets.”

From the Life of Joseph Smith

In Kirtland, Ohio, the Prophet Joseph Smith received a flood of revelations, making this period of great importance in establishing the doctrine and government of the Church. When the Prophet received these revelations, he was often in the presence of other Church leaders, with someone recording his words as he received them from the Lord. The revelations frequently came to him in answer to prayer. Parley P. Pratt, who later became a member of the Twelve, was present when the Prophet received the revelation that is now Doctrine and Covenants 50. Elder Pratt recalled:

“After we had joined in prayer in his translating room, he dictated in our presence the following revelation. Each sentence was uttered slowly and very distinctly, and with a pause between each, sufficiently long for it to be recorded, by an ordinary writer, in long hand. . . . There was never any hesitation, reviewing, or reading back, in order to keep the run of the subject.”¹

Although some revelations had been copied by hand for personal use, Church members generally did not have them. Joseph Smith knew that the revelations of God were of such importance that they must be carefully preserved and made available to the world. In November 1831, at a special conference held in Hiram, Ohio, the Prophet and other Church leaders decided to publish a selection of the revelations the Prophet had received up to that time. After this decision was made, the Prophet received a divine communication that the Lord called “my preface unto the book

of my commandments” (D&C 1:6). This revelation, which is now Doctrine and Covenants section 1, signified the Lord’s approval for publication of the revelations and explained His purposes in giving them. “Search these commandments,” the Lord declared, “for they are true and faithful, and the prophecies and promises which are in them shall all be fulfilled” (D&C 1:37). After hearing the revelation read back to him on the second day of the conference, the Prophet “arose and expressed his feelings and gratitude” for this manifestation of the Lord’s approval.²

Following this conference, the Prophet recalled, “my time was occupied closely in reviewing the commandments and sitting in conference, for nearly two weeks; for from the first to the twelfth of November we held four special conferences. In the last . . . the conference voted that they prize the revelations to be worth . . . the riches of the whole earth.” The conference also declared that the revelations are “the foundation of the Church in these last days, and a benefit to the world, showing that the keys of the mysteries of the kingdom of our Savior are again entrusted to man; and the riches of eternity [are] within the compass of those who are willing to live by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.”³

Handwritten copies of the revelations were taken to William W. Phelps in Missouri, to be published as the Book of Commandments. Brother Phelps, who had been commanded by the Lord to go to Missouri and become a printer for the Church (see D&C 57:11), soon began setting the type for the book. However, on July 20, 1833, a mob destroyed the press and most of the printed sheets. Some of the loose sheets were rescued by Church members and individually bound, but the book was never officially published. In 1835, the revelations intended for the Book of Commandments plus many additional revelations were published in Kirtland as the Doctrine and Covenants. With additional revelations that have been added since 1835, this book stands as a witness that God speaks today through His living prophet, the President of the Church, for the blessing and guidance of His Church.

Teachings of Joseph Smith

God has always guided His people and His Church through revelation.

Articles of Faith 1:9: “We believe all that God has revealed, all that He does now reveal, and we believe that He will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God.”⁴

“We never can comprehend the things of God and of heaven, but by revelation. We may spiritualize and express opinions to all eternity; but that is no authority.”⁵

“The doctrine of revelation far transcends the doctrine of no revelation; for one truth revealed from heaven is worth all the sectarian notions in existence.”⁶

“Salvation cannot come without revelation; it is in vain for anyone to minister without it. . . . No man can be a minister of Jesus Christ except he has the testimony of Jesus; and this is the spirit of prophecy [see Revelation 19:10]. Whenever salvation has been administered, it has been by testimony. Men of the present time testify of heaven and hell, and have never seen either; and I will say that no man knows these things without this.”⁷

“Jesus in His teachings says, ‘Upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.’ [Matthew 16:18.] What rock? Revelation.”⁸

“The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was founded upon direct revelation, as the true Church of God has ever been, according to the Scriptures (Amos 3:7, and Acts 1:2); and through the will and blessings of God, I have been an instrument in His hands, thus far, to move forward the cause of Zion.”⁹

The Prophet spoke at a Church conference in April 1834: “President Joseph Smith, Jun., read the second chapter of Joel’s prophecy, prayed, and addressed the conference as follows: . . . ‘We are differently situated from any other people that ever existed upon this earth; consequently those former revelations cannot be suited to our conditions; they were given to other people, who were before us; but in the last days, God was to call

a remnant, in which was to be deliverance, as well as in Jerusalem and Zion [see Joel 2:32]. Now if God should give no more revelations, where will we find Zion and this remnant? . . .’

“The President then gave a relation of obtaining and translating the Book of Mormon, the revelation of the Priesthood of Aaron, the organization of the Church in 1830, the revelation of the High Priesthood, and the gift of the Holy Ghost poured out upon the Church, and said: ‘Take away the Book of Mormon and the revelations, and where is our religion? We have none.’”¹⁰

The President of the Church is appointed to receive revelation from God for the Church; individuals may receive revelation for their own responsibilities.

“Jesus . . . set in the church firstly Apostles, and secondly prophets, for the work of the ministry, perfecting of the saints, etc.; . . . the grand rule of heaven [is] that nothing should ever be done on earth without revealing the secret to his servants the prophets, agreeable to Amos 3:7.”¹¹

In September 1830 Joseph and Emma Smith moved from Harmony, Pennsylvania, to Fayette, New York. When they arrived, they found that some Saints were being deceived by claims of false revelations: “To our great grief, . . . we soon found that Satan had been lying in wait to deceive, and seeking whom he might devour. Brother Hiram Page had in his possession a certain stone, by which he had obtained certain ‘revelations’ concerning the upbuilding of Zion, the order of the Church, etc., all of which were entirely at variance with the order of God’s house, as laid down in the New Testament, as well as in our late revelations. As a conference meeting had been appointed for the 26th day of September, I thought it wisdom not to do much more than to converse with the brethren on the subject, until the conference should meet. Finding, however, that many, especially the Whitmer family and Oliver Cowdery, were believing much in the things set forth by this stone, we thought best to inquire of the Lord concerning so important a matter; and before [the] conference convened, we received the following:

“Revelation to Oliver Cowdery, given at Fayette, New York, September, 1830.

“ ‘ . . . Behold, verily, verily, I say unto thee, no one shall be appointed to receive commandments and revelations in this Church excepting my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., for he receiveth them even as Moses. And thou shalt be obedient unto the things which I shall give unto him. . . .

“ ‘And thou shalt not command him who is at thy head, and at the head of the church; for I have given him the keys of the mysteries, and the revelations which are sealed, until I shall appoint unto them another in his stead. . . .

“ ‘And again, 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; for, behold, these things have not been appointed unto him, neither shall anything be appointed unto any of this church contrary to the church covenants.

“ ‘For all things must be done in order, and by common consent in the church, by the prayer of faith.’ [D&C 28:2–3, 6–7, 11–13.] . . .

“At length our conference assembled. The subject of the stone previously mentioned was discussed, and after considerable investigation, Brother Page, as well as the whole Church who were present, renounced the said stone, and all things connected therewith, much to our mutual satisfaction and happiness.”¹²

“The Presidents or [First] Presidency are over the Church; and revelations of the mind and will of God to the Church, are to come through the Presidency. This is the order of heaven, and the power and privilege of [the Melchizedek] Priesthood. It is also the privilege of any officer in this Church to obtain revelations, so far as relates to his particular calling and duty in the Church.”¹³

“We do not consider ourselves bound to receive any revelation from any one man or woman without his being legally constituted and ordained to that authority, and giving sufficient proof of it.

“ . . . It is contrary to the economy of God for any member of the Church, or any one, to receive instructions for those in

authority, higher than themselves; therefore you will see the impropriety of giving heed to them; but if any person have a vision or a visitation from a heavenly messenger, it must be for his own benefit and instruction; for the fundamental principles, government, and doctrine of the Church are vested in the keys of the kingdom.”¹⁴

**The President of the Church conveys the word of God
to us for our day and generation.**



Heber C. Kimball

*Heber C. Kimball, while serving as a counselor to President Brigham Young, reported: “Brother Joseph Smith many a time said to Brother Brigham and myself, and to others, that he was a representative of God to us, to teach and direct us and reprove the wrong doers.”*¹⁵

Wilford Woodruff, the fourth President of the Church, reported: “I will refer to a certain meeting I attended in the town of Kirtland in my early days. At that meeting some remarks were made . . . with regard to the living oracles and with regard to the written word of God. . . . A leading man in the Church got up and talked upon the subject, and said: ‘You have got the word of God before you here in the Bible, Book of Mormon, and Doctrine and Covenants; you have the written word of God, and you who give revelations should give revelations according to those books, as what is written in those books is the word of God. We should confine ourselves to them.’

“When he concluded, Brother Joseph turned to Brother Brigham Young and said, ‘Brother Brigham, I want you to take the stand and tell us your views with regard to the [living] oracles and the written word of God.’ Brother Brigham took the stand, and he took the Bible, and laid it down; he took the Book of Mormon, and laid it down; and he took the Book of Doctrine and Covenants, and laid it down before him, and he said: ‘There is the written word of God to us, concerning the work of God from the beginning of the world, almost, to our day. And now,’

said he, ‘when compared with the living oracles those books are nothing to me; those books do not convey the word of God direct to us now, as do the words of a Prophet or a man bearing the Holy Priesthood in our day and generation. I would rather have the living oracles than all the writing in the books.’ That was the course he pursued. When he was through, Brother Joseph said to the congregation: ‘Brother Brigham has told you the word of the Lord, and he has told you the truth.’”¹⁶

Brigham Young, the second President of the Church, recalled: “Many years ago the Prophet Joseph observed that if the people would have received the revelations he had in his possession and wisely acted upon them, as the Lord would dictate, they might in their power to do and understand have been many years ahead of what they then were.”¹⁷

We sustain the President of the Church and other Church leaders by praying for them and heeding their counsel.

Joseph Smith recorded that the following occurred at the dedication of the Kirtland Temple on March 27, 1836: “I then made a short address, and called upon the several quorums, and all the congregation of Saints, to acknowledge the [First] Presidency as Prophets and Seers, and uphold them by their prayers. They all covenanted to do so, by rising.

“I then called upon the quorums and congregation of Saints to acknowledge the Twelve Apostles, who were present, as Prophets, Seers, Revelators, and special witnesses to all the nations of the earth, holding the keys of the kingdom, to unlock it, or cause it to be done, among them, and uphold them by their prayers, which they assented to by rising.

“I next called upon the quorums and congregation of Saints to acknowledge the presidents of Seventies . . . and to uphold them by their prayers, which they did by rising. . . .

“The vote was unanimous in every instance, and I prophesied to all, that inasmuch as they would uphold these men in their several stations, . . . the Lord would bless them; yea, in the name of Christ, the blessings of heaven should be theirs.”¹⁸

“Like those who held up the hands of Moses [see Exodus 17:8–13], so let us hold up the hands of those who are appointed to direct the affairs of the Kingdom, so that they may be strengthened, and be enabled to prosecute their great designs, and be instrumental in effecting the great work of the last days.”¹⁹

“Now for persons to do things, merely because they are advised to do them, and yet murmur all the time they are doing them, is of no use at all; they might as well not do them. There are those who profess to be Saints who are too apt to murmur, and find fault, when any advice is given, which comes in opposition to their feelings, even when they, themselves, ask for counsel; much more so when counsel is given unasked for, which does not agree with their notion of things; but brethren, we hope for better things from the most of you; we trust that you desire counsel, from time to time, and that you will cheerfully conform to it, whenever you receive it from a proper source.”²⁰

Eliza R. Snow recorded: “[Joseph Smith] said, if God has appointed him, and chosen him as an instrument to lead the Church, why not let him lead it through? Why stand in the way when he is appointed to do a thing? Who knows the mind of God? Does He not reveal things differently from what we expect? [The Prophet] remarked that he was continually rising, although he had everything bearing him down, standing in his way, and opposing; notwithstanding all this opposition, he always comes out right in the end. . . .

“He reproved those that were disposed to find fault with the management of the concerns of the Church, saying God had called him to lead the Church, and he would lead it right; those that undertake to interfere will be ashamed when their own folly is made manifest.”²¹

Those who reject the living prophet will not progress and will bring upon themselves the judgments of God.

“Notwithstanding, literally speaking, that all knowledge comes from God, yet when it has been revealed, all men have not believed it as revelation at the time. . . .



“Noah was a perfect man, and his knowledge or revelation of what was to take place upon the earth . . . was not believed by the inhabitants of the earth.”

“Noah was a perfect man, and his knowledge or revelation of what was to take place upon the earth gave him power to prepare and save himself and family from the destruction of the flood. This knowledge, or revelation, . . . was not believed by the inhabitants of the earth. They knew Adam was the first man, made in the image of God; that he was a good man; that Enoch walked with God three hundred and sixty-five years, and was translated to heaven without tasting death. But they could not endure the new revelation: the old we believe because our fathers did, but away with new revelations. And the flood swept them away. . . .

“The same principle . . . was signally manifest among the Jews when the Savior came in the flesh. [They] boasted of the old revelations, garnished the sepulchres of the dead, gave tithes of mint and anise, made long prayers for a pretense, and crossed sea and land to make proselytes, but yet when the new revelation came fresh from the mouth of the great I Am himself, they

could not endure it—it was too much. It showed the corruptions of that generation, as others before, and they cried, away with him; crucify him! . . .

“Once more, the same course and language were used when the Book of Mormon came to this generation. The old revelation, the old patriarchs, pilgrims and apostles, were blessed. We believe in them, but the new ones we cannot abide.”²²

“The world always mistook false prophets for true ones, and those that were sent of God, they considered to be false prophets, and hence they killed, stoned, punished and imprisoned the true prophets, and these had to hide themselves ‘in deserts and dens, and caves of the earth’ [see Hebrews 11:38], and though the most honorable men of the earth, they banished them from their society as vagabonds, whilst they cherished, honored and supported knaves, vagabonds, hypocrites, impostors, and the basest of men.”²³

“I have not the least idea, if Christ should come to the earth and preach such rough things as He preached to the Jews, but that this generation would reject Him for being so rough. . . . Many men will say, ‘I will never forsake you, but will stand by you at all times.’ But the moment you teach them some of the mysteries of the kingdom of God that are retained in the heavens and are to be revealed to the children of men when they are prepared for them, they will be the first to stone you and put you to death. It was this same principle that crucified the Lord Jesus Christ, and will cause the people to kill the prophets in this generation.

“Many things are [inexplicable] to the children of men in the last days: for instance, that God should raise the dead; [they forget] that things have been hid from before the foundation of the world, which are to be revealed to babes in the last days.

“There are a great many wise men and women too in our midst who are too wise to be taught; therefore they must die in their ignorance, and in the resurrection they will find their mistake. Many seal up the door of heaven by saying, So far God may reveal and I will believe. . . .

“It always has been when a man was sent of God with the priesthood and he began to preach the fullness of the gospel,

that he was thrust out by his friends, who are ready to butcher him if he teach things which they imagine to be wrong; and Jesus was crucified upon this principle.”²⁴

“Woe, woe be to that man or set of men who lift up their hands against God and His witness in these last days: for they shall deceive almost the very chosen ones!

“. . . When a man goes about prophesying, and commands men to obey his teachings, he must either be a true or false prophet. False prophets always arise to oppose the true prophets and they will prophesy so very near the truth that they will deceive almost the very chosen ones.”²⁵

“In consequence of rejecting the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the Prophets whom God hath sent, the judgments of God have rested upon people, cities, and nations, in various ages of the world, which was the case with the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, that were destroyed for rejecting the Prophets.”²⁶

William P. McIntire reported: “[Joseph Smith] prophesied that all those that made light of the revelations that were given, and of him and his words, would ere long cry and lament, . . . saying, Oh! that we had hearkened to the words of God and the revelations given.”²⁷

Suggestions for Study and Teaching

Consider these ideas as you study the chapter or as you prepare to teach. For additional help, see pages vii–xii.

- Review the account on pages 193–94, noting how the early Church members felt about the revelations received through Joseph Smith. What are your feelings about the Doctrine and Covenants?
- Read the fourth paragraph on page 195. Why do you think that “salvation cannot come without revelation”?
- Review pages 196–97. Why do you think people sometimes allow themselves to be deceived, as in the story about Hiram Page? What can we do to avoid being deceived by false prophets or false teachings?

- Review the last two full paragraphs on page 197 and the paragraph that continues onto page 198. How do we benefit from having only one man who can receive revelations for the entire Church? What experiences can you share in which the Lord has guided you in your specific responsibilities?
- On pages 198–99, read how Joseph Smith and Brigham Young responded when a man said we should confine ourselves to the revelations written in the scriptures. What would be missing from your life if you confined yourself to the standard works, without hearing the words of the living prophet? What can we do to follow the spirit of Brigham Young’s counsel?
- What can we do to uphold the President of the Church and other Church leaders? (For some examples, see pages 199–200.) What counsel did the President of the Church give in the past general conference? In what ways have you been blessed as you have followed the prophet and other Church leaders?
- What are some ways in which people reject God’s prophets? (For some examples, see pages 200–203.) What are some possible consequences of choosing not to follow the counsel of those the Lord has chosen to lead His Church?

Related Scriptures: Proverbs 29:18; Jacob 4:8; 3 Nephi 28:34; Mormon 9:7–9; D&C 21:1–6

Notes

1. Parley P. Pratt, *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*, ed. Parley P. Pratt Jr. (1938), p. 62; punctuation modernized; paragraph divisions altered.
2. “The Conference Minutes and Record Book of Christ’s Church of Latter Day Saints 1838–39; 1844,” entry for Nov. 2, 1831, p. 16, reported by John Whitmer, Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah. This record book contains records from 1830 to 1844.
3. *History of the Church*, 1:235; from “History of the Church” (manuscript), book A-1, pp. 172–73, Church Archives.
4. Articles of Faith 1:9.
5. *History of the Church*, 5:344; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Apr. 8, 1843, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Willard Richards and William Clayton.
6. *History of the Church*, 6:252; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Mar. 10, 1844, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Wilford Woodruff.
7. *History of the Church*, 3:389–90; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith about July 1839 in Commerce, Illinois; reported by Willard Richards.
8. *History of the Church*, 5:258; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Jan. 22, 1843, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Wilford Woodruff.

9. *History of the Church*, 6:9; from Joseph Smith, "Latter Day Saints," in I. Daniel Rupp, comp., *He Pasa Ekkelesia [The Whole Church]: An Original History of the Religious Denominations at Present Existing in the United States* (1844), p. 404.
10. *History of the Church*, 2:52; punctuation modernized; paragraph divisions altered; from the minutes of a Church conference held on Apr. 21, 1834, in Norton, Ohio; reported by Oliver Cowdery.
11. "Baptism," an editorial published in *Times and Seasons*, Sept. 1, 1842, p. 905; grammar modernized; Joseph Smith was the editor of the periodical.
12. *History of the Church*, 1:109–11, 115; paragraph divisions altered; from "History of the Church" (manuscript), book A-1, pp. 53–55, 58, Church Archives; the date of Joseph and Emma's arrival in Fayette is incorrectly given as August 1830 in *History of the Church*.
13. *History of the Church*, 2:477; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Apr. 6, 1837, in Kirtland, Ohio; reported by *Messenger and Advocate*, Apr. 1837, p. 487.
14. *History of the Church*, 1:338; from a letter from Joseph Smith and Frederick G. Williams to John S. Carter, Apr. 13, 1833, Kirtland, Ohio.
15. Heber C. Kimball, *Deseret News*, Nov. 5, 1856, p. 274.
16. Wilford Woodruff, in Conference Report, Oct. 1897, pp. 22–23; punctuation modernized; paragraph divisions altered.
17. Brigham Young, *Deseret News*, Dec. 9, 1857, p. 316.
18. *History of the Church*, 2:417–18; from a Joseph Smith journal entry, Mar. 27, 1836, Kirtland, Ohio; see also *Messenger and Advocate*, Mar. 1836, p. 277.
19. *History of the Church*, 4:186; from a letter from Joseph Smith and his counselors in the First Presidency to the Saints, Sept. 1840, Nauvoo, Illinois, published in *Times and Seasons*, Oct. 1840, p. 178.
20. *History of the Church*, 4:45, footnote; from a letter from the First Presidency and high council to the Saints living west of Kirtland, Ohio, Dec. 8, 1839, Commerce, Illinois, published in *Times and Seasons*, Dec. 1839, p. 29.
21. *History of the Church*, 4:603–4; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Apr. 28, 1842, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Eliza R. Snow; see also appendix, page 562, item 3.
22. "Knowledge Is Power," an editorial published in *Times and Seasons*, Aug. 15, 1842, pp. 889–90; spelling, punctuation, and grammar modernized; italics deleted; Joseph Smith was the editor of the periodical.
23. *History of the Church*, 4:574; punctuation modernized; from "Try the Spirits," an editorial published in *Times and Seasons*, Apr. 1, 1842, p. 744; Joseph Smith was the editor of the periodical.
24. *History of the Church*, 5:423–25; punctuation modernized; paragraph divisions altered; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on June 11, 1843, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Wilford Woodruff and Willard Richards; see also appendix, page 562, item 3.
25. *History of the Church*, 6:364; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on May 12, 1844, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Thomas Bullock.
26. *History of the Church*, 5:256–57; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Jan. 22, 1843, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Wilford Woodruff.
27. William P. McIntire, reporting a discourse given by Joseph Smith in early 1841 in Nauvoo, Illinois; William Patterson McIntire, Notebook 1840–45, Church Archives.