
Preface

In March 1829, a full year prior to the official organization of the Church, the Lord declared to the Prophet Joseph Smith—then engaged in the process of translating the Book of Mormon—“This generation shall have my word through you” (D&C 5:10). Two months later, Joseph’s brother Hyrum traveled to Harmony, Pennsylvania, to see if he could assist with this work. During this visit, Joseph received a revelation for his brother, which instructed him, “Wait a little longer, until you shall have my word, my rock, my church, and my gospel” (D&C 11:16). In the succeeding years, Joseph indeed received numerous revelations that fulfilled each of the promises the Lord had given Hyrum; many of these are included in the Doctrine and Covenants, “a collection of divine revelations and inspired declarations” through which the Lord invites all to come unto him (Explanatory Introduction).

As readers engage with the Doctrine and Covenants, they will recognize its Christ-centered message, a message that expands our understanding of the Lord’s purposes for each of us. By studying it, we learn more about the nature of God, the divinity of his Son, and the reality of the Holy Ghost, while also coming to recognize more completely the work they are accomplishing on the earth today. This sacred text crystallizes our understanding of the plan of salvation, which includes pre-earth life, the purposes of mortality, and the reality and nature of life after death. Furthermore, it expounds the importance of temple covenants, the eternal potential of families, and the power whereby these units can persist beyond the veil. Ultimately, it teaches us about the possibilities of fulness, indeed of exaltation.

The Doctrine and Covenants also testifies of the blessings God’s grace brings to humankind; it teaches us how to become active agents and wise

stewards. While shifting our thinking from event to process, the concepts of consecration, worship, and sanctification become more powerful and meaningful as we connect them to Christlike living and our desire to establish Zion. Organizationally, the Doctrine and Covenants clarifies the order and function of priesthood, details the duties of specific priesthood offices, and describes the role of presiding councils. Historically, it chronicles the opening of the heavens and the events of the Restoration. Indeed, the word of the Lord on these and many other topics, together with “the testimony that is given of Jesus Christ—his divinity, his majesty, his perfection, his love, and his redeeming power,” makes the Doctrine and Covenants “of great value to the human family and of more worth than the riches of the whole earth” (Explanatory Introduction).

Studying the word of the Lord contained in the Doctrine and Covenants yields great blessings, including the desire to be transformed through the grace and power of Christ. Prefacing “the book of [his] commandments,” the Lord explained that he “called upon . . . Joseph Smith, Jun., and spake unto him from heaven, and gave him commandments . . . that every man might speak in the name of God the Lord, even the Savior of the world; that faith also might increase in the earth; that [the Lord’s] everlasting covenant might be established; that the fulness of the gospel might be proclaimed by the weak and the simple unto the ends of the earth” (D&C 1:6, 17, 20–23). Harkening to these words, the reader will “come to understanding” (1:24). Those who err as well as those who sin will “be chastened” by the Lord’s revelations, “that they might repent” (1:27). Those who seek wisdom from these pages will “be instructed,” while those who humble themselves because of its words will “be made strong, and blessed from on high, and receive knowledge from time to time” (1:26, 28). These blessings and many more are available for all who “search these commandments” (1:37) and then choose to act upon them.

Inviting you to embark on this search, the forty-first annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium at Brigham Young University focuses on the text of the Doctrine and Covenants, exploring significant messages, teachings, doctrines, and themes given by the Lord and his prophets in this modern book of scripture. Elder Gary J. Coleman, emeritus member of the Seventy, begins the publication, analyzing the Lord’s personal ministry throughout the earliest revelations. Examining the Lord’s use of personal pronouns, Elder Coleman testifies of the Savior’s loving-kindness, as demonstrated by his words to the

early participants in the Restoration. Chapters throughout the remainder of the publication are organized to coincide with corresponding sections in the Doctrine and Covenants. They discuss the process by which the Lord delivered his word, the restoration of priesthood authority, and ordinances associated with the restored gospel. Chapters on Zion, the eternal nature of families, and the Word of Wisdom will enlighten you to doctrinal depths and application found in modern revelation. Literary analyses examine connections between the Bible and the Doctrine and Covenants, especially the influence of the language of Isaiah and of John the Beloved throughout the text as well as the Lord's use of parables. Finally, historical assessments of specific revelations clarify difficult passages and introduce the story behind the Lord's words. All is done in an effort to help you appreciate the power and meaningfulness contained in this sacred text and know, as President Joseph F. Smith declared, "the book of Doctrine and Covenants contains some of the most glorious principles ever revealed to the world, some that have been revealed in greater fulness than they were ever revealed before to the world."¹

As a Sperry Symposium committee, we express gratitude to the authors and presenters who participated in the conference, the external reviewers who shared their expertise, and the editors at Brigham Young University's Religious Studies Center and at Deseret Book Company who clarified the writing. The faculty members of the committee acknowledge the special contribution of Patty Smith, who provided administrative support for both the symposium and the publication. Finally, we express appreciation for the word of the Lord revealed throughout the Doctrine and Covenants, a text that represents "the mind of the Lord, . . . the word of the Lord, . . . the voice of the Lord, and the power of God unto salvation" (D&C 68:4).

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Note

1. Joseph F. Smith, in Conference Report, October 1913, 9.