

CHAPTER TWO

CONTINUING THE PROGRAM OF THE PROPHET

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One of the significant contributions of Joseph Smith was to establish a program that enabled other leaders to continue the work which he restored. This program included not only teaching others essential gospel principles but training others to record, publish, and preserve his historical records. These records included doctrinal contributions and descriptions of his experiences. Following the martyrdom of Joseph Smith, the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles was the only group of leaders who continued this vital program of the Prophet.

RECORDING AND PRESERVING HISTORICAL RECORDS

The accomplishments of Joseph Smith, including his doctrinal contributions, have been preserved in a variety of documents. One of Joseph Smith's early contributions was to establish a program which preserved historical records. The period of intense record keeping under Joseph Smith's direction began when the Church was organized on April 6, 1830, and continued until his death on June 27, 1844. During these fourteen years, Joseph Smith kept a variety of records and appointed others to record, write, and publish the history of the Church. These records described his activities, teachings, visions, prophecies, and many other gifts of the Spirit. The importance of these records is evident by the fact that so many were

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preserved amid intense persecution and subsequent migrations of Latter-day Saints. If Joseph Smith had been a fraud, as he was sometimes accused, it is difficult to understand why he was so concerned and so involved in recording and preserving the history of the Church.¹

On the day the Church was organized, the Prophet recorded a revelation which specified, "Behold, there shall be a record kept among you" (D&C 21:1). Shortly following the recording of this revelation, Oliver Cowdery was called to be the first Church historian and he was the first Latter-day Saint to publish an early history of the Restoration. This history, which was printed in Kirtland in the *Latter-day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* in 1834 and 1835, described the visitations and teachings of Moroni, the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, and the restoration of the priesthood.² Selections from that publication have been inserted as a note in the current edition of our Pearl of Great Price (see Joseph Smith—History, 58–59).

HISTORIES

Based on records that have survived, Joseph Smith's personal involvement in writing history began in November 1832 when he commenced an autobiography that he wrote partly with his own pen and dictated other portions to his clerk, Frederick G. Williams. This autobiography included a brief account of his family, boyhood experiences, and education. He recalled that because of the poverty of his family, his formal education was neglected and all he learned were the rudiments of reading, writing, and arithmetic. He also wrote an account of his First Vision in this manuscript, which is the only account of that vision in his own handwriting. He included in this 1832 record many doctrinal concepts that he learned from the Lord in 1820, such as the reality of the Atonement and the Second Coming. He also described in that history events relating to the coming forth of the Book of Mormon.³

Although the 1832 autobiography was not published during the life of Joseph Smith, concepts included in that record were included in a missionary pamphlet published by Orson Pratt in 1840. This pamphlet, entitled "An Interesting Account of Several Remarkable Visions," was based upon information that Elder Pratt had learned from Joseph Smith and was the first publication by a Latter-day Saint

of the Prophet's First Vision.⁴ Moreover, selections from that pamphlet were included in Joseph Smith's Wentworth Letter, which was published in the *Times and Seasons* in March 1842. This 1842 history contained the first published account written by Joseph Smith of his First Vision and included the Articles of Faith, both later published in the Pearl of Great Price.⁵

JOURNALS

In the 1830s and early 1840s, Joseph Smith also recorded his experiences in journals. The earliest journals that have been preserved include his experiences between November 27, 1832, and April 3, 1836 (except for the period from December 1834 to September 1835). Although portions of the earliest journal were written by Joseph, most of the information recorded in 1835 and 1836 was dictated to scribes. In 1836 he recorded in his journal daily events that occurred during the greatest Pentecostal season in the history of the restored Church.⁶ Selections from these journal entries were included in the history of the Church, and his account of his vision of the celestial kingdom is now section 137 in the current edition of the Doctrine and Covenants.⁷ The last entry in that journal is a description of a vision in the Kirtland Temple during which Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery saw the Savior and received keys of the priesthood from Moses, Elias, and Elijah.⁸ This account became section 110 of our Doctrine and Covenants.

Joseph Smith recognized his deficiencies and imperfections in conveying his ideas in writing, and his temporal responsibilities continued to increase after he was forced to flee from Kirtland in January 1838. Subsequently, after moving to Missouri early in 1838 and to Nauvoo in May 1839, many of his activities were recorded in journals that were almost entirely written by his scribes. These scribes traveled with him and recorded in their words Joseph's activities and teachings.⁹ Shortly before his martyrdom, Joseph declared, "For the last three years I have a record of all my acts and proceedings, for I have kept several good, faithful, and efficient clerks in constant employ: they have accompanied me everywhere, and carefully kept my history, and they have written down what I have done, where I have been, and what I have said; . . . I have [a] written testimony to prove my actions."¹⁰

LETTERS

The journals and letters of Joseph, especially those that were written and dictated by him, provide a glance into his daily life, his love for his family, his personality, and his teachings. Today more than ninety of Joseph Smith's letters have survived, and most of these are currently located in the Church Archives. One of these documents, Joseph Smith's March 20, 1839, letter to the Church written in the Liberty Jail, was initially published in the *Times and Seasons* (May and July 1840). Excerpts from that twenty-nine-page letter were included in the 1876 edition and the current edition of the Doctrine and Covenants as sections 121, 122, and 123.¹¹

REVELATIONS

Joseph Smith's doctrinal contributions are not only found in his historical writings but also in his revelations. The earliest reference to Joseph Smith compiling the revelations he had received was in July 1830, and throughout the remainder of his life he continued to arrange and copy revelations. The initial efforts to publish these documents began in November 1831 when Joseph Smith and a council of high priests selected for publication more than sixty revelations that he had received. This work, entitled the Book of Commandments, contained sixty-five revelations and was to be published in the first Mormon press established in Independence, Missouri. During its publication, however, the press was destroyed by a mob. Meanwhile, William W. Phelps, a convert and former publisher who was called to establish this press, printed some of Joseph's revelations in 1832 and 1833 in the first Mormon periodical, the *Evening and Morning Star*.¹²

In 1835, under the direction of Joseph Smith, Latter-day Saints replaced the Book of Commandments with the first edition of the Doctrine and Covenants. Joseph Smith set many precedents as he prepared the first edition of this work for publication. For example, a committee was appointed by the high council to assist Joseph Smith in compiling or determining the revelations that should be published and in editing the revelations. This committee included the First Presidency of Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, Frederick G. Williams, and Oliver Cowdery. Oliver Cowdery at that time was involved in reprinting revelations that had been printed in the Book of

Commandments in a new edition of the *Evening and Morning Star*, which was being printed in Kirtland. He wrote in that periodical that he was correcting errors in the initial printing of the revelations because he had access to more reliable copies of the manuscripts.¹³

The editing of the revelations by the committee included other changes. There is no indication in the writings or revelations of Joseph Smith that he was given perfect, final language as he recorded the revelations. Rather, he was inspired in fundamental thoughts. As suggested by Orson Pratt, Joseph received ideas from God and clothed those ideas with words that came to his mind. In the preface to that work we read, "These commandments are of me, and were given unto my servants in their weakness, after the manner of their language, that they might come to understanding" (D&C 1:24). Subsequently, editorial changes were not only made to correct errors by scribes and publishers, but words were inserted by editors to throw increased light upon subjects unfolded in the revelations. For example, since there were developments in Church government in the early 1830s with new officers being appointed (such as counselors to bishops), words, phrases, and sentences were added so that instructions would apply to officers not in the Church at the time the initial revelations were given. There was also a combining of revelations. What is now section 42 contains instructions on the law of consecration and stewardship, which Joseph Smith received on February 9 and February 23, 1831.¹⁴

The committee also changed the name of that work to *Doctrine and Covenants*, and this first edition included seven lectures on faith delivered in Kirtland, which Joseph Smith approved. These theological discussions appeared under the heading of "Doctrine"; and the second part, consisting of 103 revelations, was included under the title "Covenants and Commandments."¹⁵

Joseph Smith also supervised the publication of a second edition of the *Doctrine and Covenants*. On June 12, 1844, two weeks before the martyrdom, a notice appeared in the *Nauvoo Neighbor* that a new edition of the *Doctrine and Covenants* would be available in about one month.¹⁶ The martyrdom of Joseph and the wounding of John Taylor interrupted the final publication date, but this new edition contained seven revelations that Joseph Smith received between 1834 and 1844. These sections included information about building

a temple in Nauvoo and an epistle regarding baptism for the dead that was to be performed in that sacred building (see D&C 127–28). One other section was added immediately prior to its publication. This new section was a tribute written by John Taylor describing the martyrdom of Joseph and Hyrum and identifying some of Joseph's remarkable accomplishments (see D&C 135).¹⁷

ADDITIONAL CHURCH RECORDS

In addition to histories, journals, letters, and revelations, Joseph supervised the recording and preserving of many other historical documents during the 1830s and early 1840s. These records included proceedings of meetings and quorum and temple records.¹⁸ One of these valuable documents recorded in Kirtland between October 1832 and November 1837 was the Kirtland Council Minute Book. This record included proceedings of meetings and discussions of church policies and procedures. There is a description in this document kept by Joseph's scribe, Frederick G. Williams, of the historical setting of section 88 of our Doctrine and Covenants and accounts of meetings of the School of the Prophets. It also included a description of ordinances performed during the first term of that school and the vision of the Savior and angels to participants on March 18, 1833.¹⁹

PRESERVING THE TEACHINGS OF JOSEPH SMITH

One of the significant contributions of Joseph Smith's scribes and other members was to record Joseph Smith's sermons. Although Joseph Smith delivered more than 250 public sermons, historians have located no notes, outlines, or recorded speeches prepared by Joseph Smith. Even though no one attending these meetings recorded verbatim his sermons, a summary of about fifty sermons has survived.²⁰ One of the most faithful recorders of his teachings was Wilford Woodruff, who kept one of the most detailed diaries that has ever been preserved. After taking copious notes, he generally, after a brief period, transcribed them into more detailed accounts.²¹

Two other major contributors to preserving the teachings of Joseph were Willard Richards (Church historian) and William Clayton (Joseph's private secretary). Both of these men were present with the Prophet during many occasions in Nauvoo and traveled with the Prophet and recorded in journals his teachings as they

unfolded in meetings and conversations with others.²² William Clayton, for example, recorded Joseph Smith's distinct doctrinal contributions relating to the Godhead, celestial marriage, Adam and the priesthood, angels, the future state of the earth, and degrees in the celestial kingdom. Information recorded in that journal and records kept by Willard Richards are currently published as sections 129, 130, and 131 of the Doctrine and Covenants.²³ Moreover, William Clayton wrote as Joseph dictated the revelation on celestial marriage (see D&C 132).²⁴

Thomas Bullock and Willard Richards also recorded some of Joseph Smith's discourses. One of the last and most famous sermons of Joseph Smith, known as the King Follett discourse, probably contained more distinct teachings than any other reported sermon. It was recorded by Wilford Woodruff, Thomas Bullock, William Clayton, Willard Richards, and others.²⁵

WRITING AND PUBLISHING THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH

While living in Far West, Missouri, in April 1838, Joseph Smith commenced writing a history of the Church. Because so many inaccurate reports had been circulated about his experiences, he decided to record events in relation to the Church as they had transpired. In this history he described his birth, family, move to New York, and early visions, and the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. This manuscript, which was completed in 1839, served as the beginning of Joseph Smith's *History of the Church*, was accepted as scripture (as truth and revelation) in 1880 in Utah, and was included in the Pearl of Great Price under the heading "Joseph Smith—History."²⁶

The major contributor to the *History of the Church* was Willard Richards. In August 1841, this Apostle was called by Joseph Smith to be his private secretary and general clerk for the Church. At that time, only 157 pages had been written of that history.²⁷

Howard Coray, one of the new converts who helped write the history, recalled that after meeting Joseph Smith in Nauvoo in 1840, he was called to serve as one of Joseph's clerks. Shortly thereafter, he recalled, he was "busily employed in his office, copying a huge pile of letters into a book." After he had finished that project, Joseph Smith assigned him to assist others in compiling the history of the Church. Being a new member, he knew very little about that history, but

Joseph instructed him that he was to take the records that he gave him, combine and arrange the information in chronological order, and make necessary corrections and improvements in the grammar of the works he cited.²⁸

CONTINUING THE HISTORICAL PROGRAM OF THE PROPHET

The project of writing the history of the Church was not interrupted by the martyrdom of Joseph and Hyrum on June 27, 1844. While in the Carthage Jail, Joseph Smith informed his private secretary, Willard Richards, to continue the history that he and others were writing. At that time, Church historians had completed the manuscript of the history up to August 5, 1838. Following the death of the Prophet, the Apostles were the only priesthood quorum prepared to continue the historical program established by Joseph Smith. Elder Willard Richards continued to serve as custodian of Church records and compiler and writer of the history of the Church. Two other leaders who were not Apostles but who had been serving as scribes to the Prophet, William Clayton and Thomas Bullock, continued to help with historical projects that were then being supervised by the Twelve. Prior to the exodus from Nauvoo in 1846, the history of the Church was completed to March 1843 under Elder Richards's direction.²⁹

Following the death of Joseph Smith, another Apostle, Elder John Taylor, continued to be in charge of the printing establishment and to serve as editor of the *Times and Seasons*. The format of the paper did not change after the martyrdom. The publication of the history of the Church continued, and the policy of publishing articles describing doctrinal contributions of Joseph Smith, gospel discussions, missionary activities, minutes of meetings, and instructions to Latter-day Saints by Church leaders was not interrupted. A few days following the martyrdom, this periodical also published an account of the assassination of Joseph and Hyrum.³⁰

Meanwhile, under the direction of the Twelve, Willard Richards, with the assistance of others, gathered and transported across the plains many valuable Church records. These records included histories, journals, letters, revelations, minutes of meetings, and temple and quorum records. These documents enabled historians to

continue writing the history of the Church and to compile teachings of Joseph Smith based upon notes recorded by his contemporaries.³¹

Following the death of Elder Richards in March 1854, this historical project continued under the direction of two other Apostles, Elder George A. Smith, the new Church historian, and his assistant, Elder Wilford Woodruff.³² Since the Apostles and others who completed that history were close associates of the Prophet who had lived in Nauvoo, they were witnesses of many of Joseph Smith's activities and gospel discussions. They also based this history on what they regarded as the most reliable sources, and although they did not employ some of the modern standards of historiography, especially in using and citing sources, they testified that the history they completed was one of the most authentic ever written.³³

The history of the Church up to the martyrdom of Joseph and Hyrum was finally finished in August 1856, twenty-six years after Joseph had received the revelation to keep a record and twelve years after his death. This multivolume work eventually numbered more than two thousand pages and was one of the most detailed accounts of the rise and early history of a church that has ever been written and compiled by participants.³⁴

1876 EDITION OF THE DOCTRINE AND COVENANTS

The transportation of historical records to Utah not only aided historians in completing the history of the Church but also provided the basis for the publication of a new edition of the Doctrine and Covenants. In harmony with precedents set by the Prophet Joseph Smith, Church leaders published the 1876 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants that included twenty-six new sections. Many of these revelations were based on Joseph Smith's teachings and revelations that were recorded by contemporaries. These revelations included sections 125, 126, 129–32, and 136 in our current edition of the Doctrine and Covenants.³⁵ Many who did not accept the leadership of President Brigham Young and the Apostles did not understand or embrace many of the most distinct theological contributions of Joseph Smith that were included in these revelations.

Following the martyrdom of the Prophet, John Taylor testified in an inspired tribute to this leader that Joseph Smith in the short space of twenty years did more, save Jesus only, for the salvation of men

than any other man in this world. While identifying his most significant contributions, he declared that Joseph translated the Book of Mormon by the gift and power of God and published it on two continents. He also emphasized that Joseph Smith brought forth the revelations and commandments that compose the Doctrine and Covenants. He further stated that this man who lived great and died great in the eyes of God and who sealed his testimony with his blood brought forth many other wise documents and instructions for the benefit of the children of men (see D&C 135:3).

The significant contributions of many leaders who continued the historical program of the Prophet Joseph Smith and followed President Brigham Young westward preserved and published many documents that enable us to gain a greater understanding and appreciation of the doctrinal contributions of Joseph Smith.

NOTES

1. Dean C. Jessee, "The Reliability of Joseph Smith's History," *Journal of Mormon History* 3 (1976): 27–35.
2. Jessee, "Reliability," 30–31; Joseph Smith, *The Papers of Joseph Smith*, comp. and ed. Dean C. Jessee (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 1:11–96; *Latter-day Saints' Messenger and Advocate*, October 1834, 13–16; November 1834, 41–43; February 1835, 78–80; March 1835, 95–96; April 1835, 108–9; July 1835, 155–58; October 1835, 195–202.
3. Joseph Smith, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, comp. and ed. Dean C. Jessee (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2002), 9–20.
4. Smith, *Papers*, 1:387–401.
5. Smith, *Papers*, 1:427–37.
6. Smith, *Personal Writings*, 21–219.
7. Smith, *Personal Writings*, 174–77.
8. Smith, *Personal Writings*, 218–19.
9. Smith, *Personal Writings*, 2–3; Smith, *Papers*, 2:211, 301, 334–35. From March to October 1838 his journals were kept by George W. Robinson and James Mulholland and his Illinois journals were primarily recorded by his scribe, Willard Richards.
10. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1957), 6:409. The original source entry was Joseph Smith, *Diary*, by Willard Richards; see Joseph Smith, *The Words of Joseph Smith*, comp. and ed. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook (Provo, UT:

- Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1980), 373–74, 406.
11. Smith, *Personal Writings*, 429–46; Lyndon W. Cook, *The Revelations of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Provo, UT: Seventy's Mission Bookstore, 1981), 239–42.
 12. Smith, *History of the Church*, 1:104, 222–34, 390; Milton V. Backman Jr., *The Heavens Resound: A History of the Latter-day Saints in Ohio, 1830–1838* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983), 90–92.
 13. Kirtland Council Minute Book, Church Archives, 74–76; *Evening and Morning Star* (Kirtland, Ohio), September 1834, 192; Robert J. Woodford, "The Historical Development of the Doctrine and Covenants" (Ph.D. diss., Brigham Young University, 1974), 1:38–40. Although in this work I have cited Woodford's dissertation, selections from that work were published in Daniel H. Ludlow, ed., *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 1:425.
 14. Smith, *History of the Church*, 1:173; Backman, *Heavens Resound*, 217; Woodford, 1:7–11, 46–47; Cook, *Revelations*, 59–61. Approximately two hundred manuscript copies of revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants have been preserved, but only a few can be identified as originals. In many instances, immediately after revelations were recorded they were copied and recopied, with errors occurring in the manuscripts (Woodford, "Historical Development," 1:12).
 15. Woodford, "Historical Development," 1:41–42; Backman, *Heavens Resound*, 217.
 16. *Nauvoo Neighbor*, June 12, 1844, 235.
 17. Woodford, "Historical Development," 1:54–56; Smith, *History of the Church*, 4:164; 5:264, 273; *Times and Seasons*, January 15, 1842, 667. The new sections included in the 1844 edition are currently sections 103, 105, 112, 119, 124, 127, 128, and 135.
 18. Selections from a variety of Church records were published in early LDS periodicals and in the *History of the Church* (Jessee, "Reliability," 31–35).
 19. Kirtland Council Minute Book, December 27, 1832; March 18, 1833, Church Archives; see also Smith, *History of the Church* 1:322–24, 334–35.
 20. Ronald K. Esplin, "Joseph, Brigham and the Twelve: A Succession of Continuity," *BYU Studies* 21 (Summer 1981): 304; see also Smith, *Words of Joseph Smith*, xii.
 21. Smith, *Words of Joseph Smith*, xii.
 22. Smith, *Papers*, 2:211, 301, 334–35; Smith, *Words of Joseph Smith*, index.
 23. George B. Smith, ed., *An Intimate Chronicle: The Journals of William*

- Clayton (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1995), 95–97, 128, 515–19; Smith, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 168–73, 202–3.
24. Smith, *History of the Church*, 5:500–501.
 25. Smith, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 340–62; see also Donald Q. Cannon and Larry E. Dahl, *The Prophet Joseph Smith's King Follett Discourse* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1990).
 26. Smith, *Personal Writings*, 226–39; Smith, *Papers*, 1:265.
 27. Jessee, “Reliability,” 34–35.
 28. Howard Coray, Journal, typescript, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, 8–10.
 29. Smith, *History of the Church* 7:242–43; Jessee, “Reliability,” 34–35.
 30. *Times and Seasons*, July 1, 1844, 568.
 31. Jessee, “Reliability,” 35–36; Smith, *Words of Joseph Smith*, xv–xviii.
 32. Jessee, “Reliability,” 35–36.
 33. Smith, *History of the Church*, 7:242–43. Jessee, “Reliability,” 24–27, considers the writing of the *History of the Church* in relationship to historical practices in the mid-nineteenth century.
 34. Jesse, “Reliability,” 34–36; *Deseret News*, January 20, 1858, 363.
 35. Woodford, 75–81; *Deseret News*, September 27, 1876, 553. In addition to the sections in the Doctrine and Covenants included in the text, other revelations which were added were sections 2, 13, 85, 87, 108–11, 113–18, 120–23.