

The Case of the Changing Word

An Investigation into the Revisions
of the Doctrine & Covenants



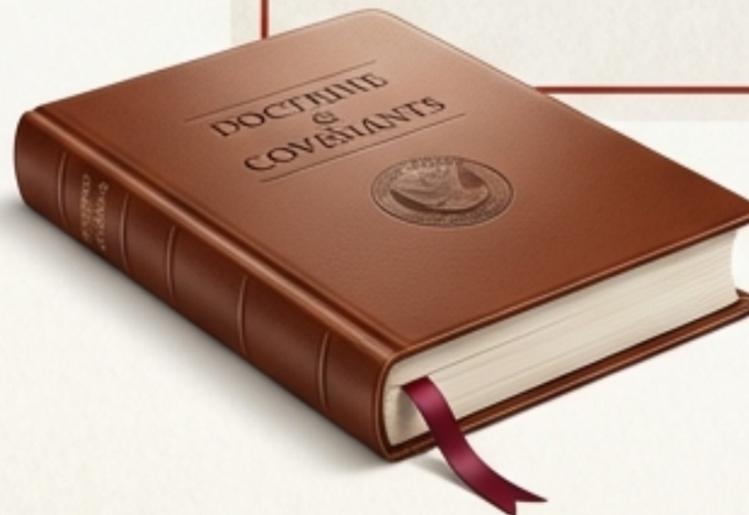
God's Word, Unchanged and Unchanging

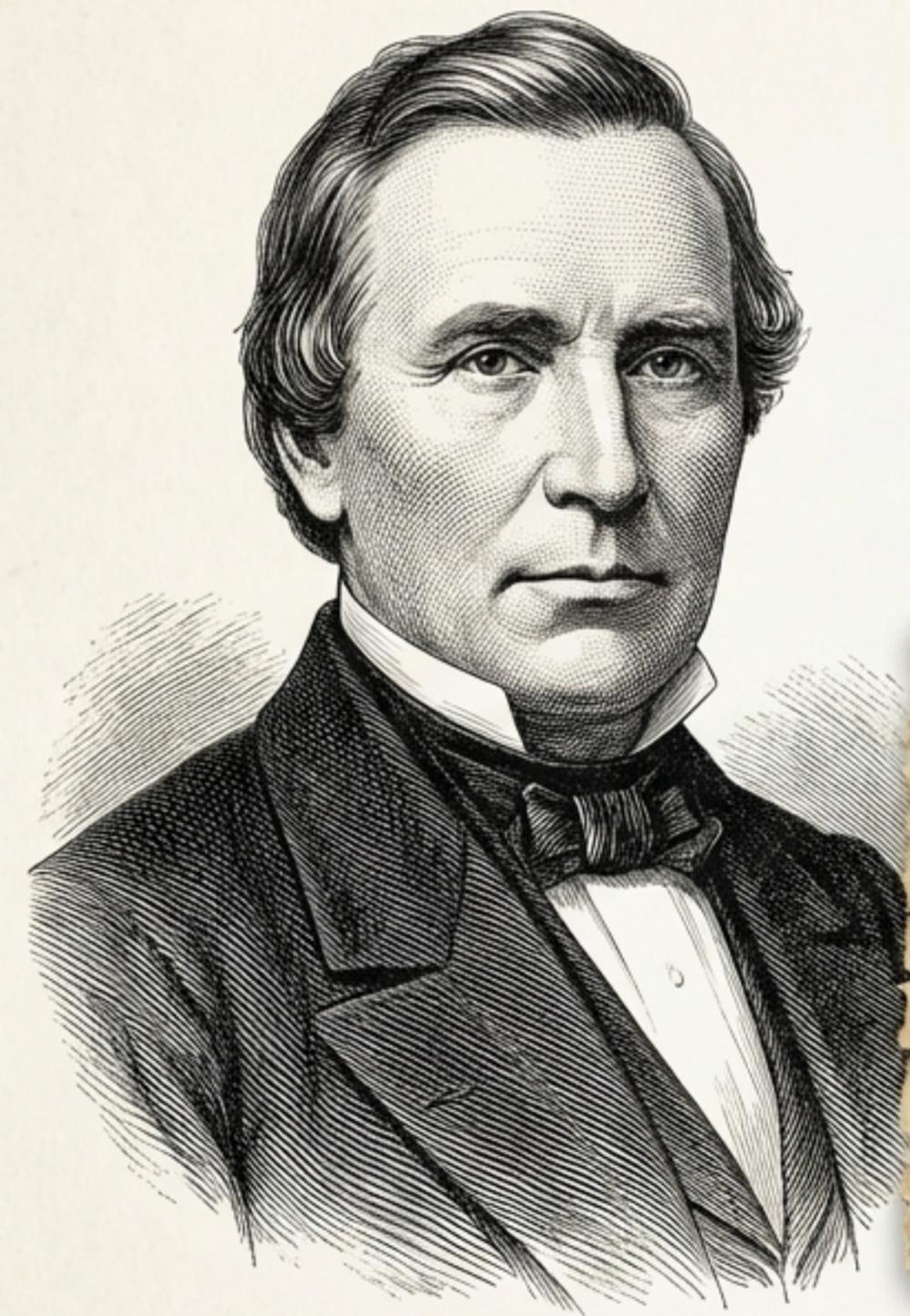


The traditional Latter-day Saint view posits that the Doctrine & Covenants contains revelations received by Joseph Smith directly from God. They were dictated verbatim, ensuring doctrinal purity. This process is understood to be precise, leaving no need for substantive changes.

“ There was no need for eliminating, changing, or adjusting any part to make it fit. But each new revelation on doctrine and priesthood fitted in its place perfectly to complete the the whole structure...”

— Joseph Fielding Smith





An Insider's Stunning Accusation

David Whitmer, one of the Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon and a foundational leader of the early Church, later in his life published a **direct accusation** that the revelations he saw recorded were subsequently altered.

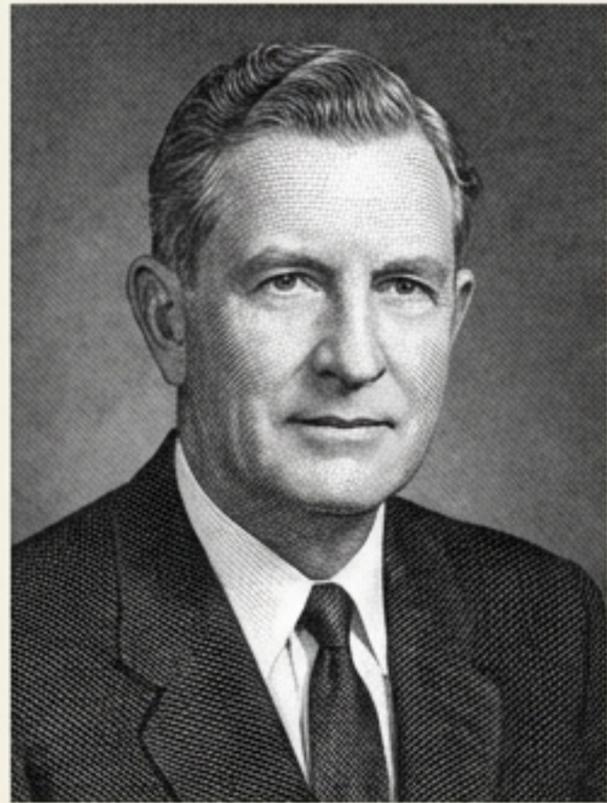
“Some of the revelations as they are now in the book of Doctrine and Covenants have been changed and added to... the meaning is entirely changed on some very important matters, as if the Lord had changed his mind a few years after he gave the revelations.”

— David Whitmer, *An Address to All Believers in Christ*

This raises the central question for our investigation: Was he right?

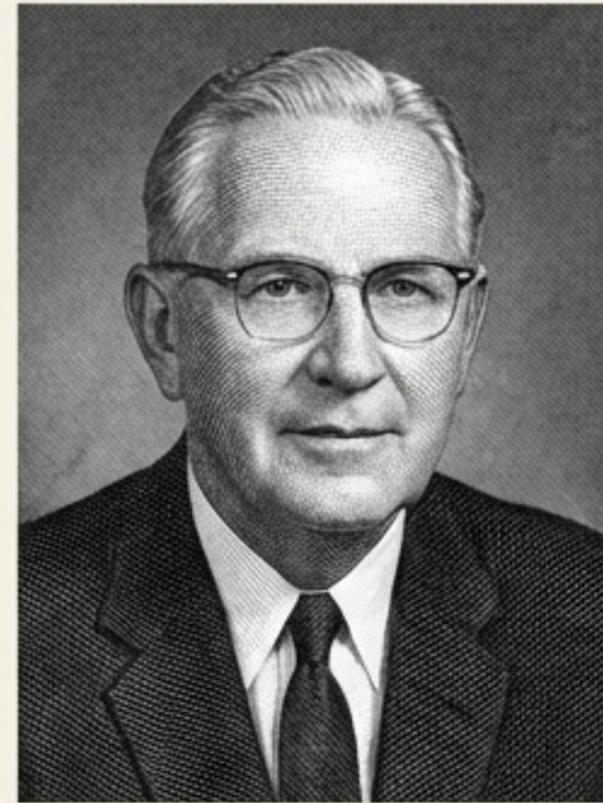
“No Fundamental Changes Have Been Altered”

The Church’s position has been consistently maintained by its modern leaders. They have asserted that any changes are minor, grammatical, or simply for clarification.



“As far as I know there have been no changes at all in any of the revelations. If there have been any changes it would have all been fixing grammar or something like that.”

— Apostle LeGrand Richards



“None of the early Revelations of the church have been revised, and the Doctrine and Covenants stands as printed, **including sections five and seven.**”

— Apostle Hugh B. Brown

Exhibit A: The Prophet's Evolving "Gift"

A key revelation (now D&C 5) was altered between the 1833 *Book of Commandments* and the 1835 *Doctrine & Covenants*, fundamentally expanding Joseph Smith's role.

Book of Commandments, 1833

...he shall pretend to **no other gift**, for I will grant him **no other gift**.

Doctrine & Covenants, 1835

...this is the **first gift** that I bestowed upon you... I will grant you no other gift **until it is finished**.

Analysis



This revision opened the door for future translations and revelations that the original text explicitly forbade. **David Whitmer confirmed the original understanding:** Joseph was to be "through with it" after the Book of Mormon.

Exhibit B: Writing Priesthood Authority into History

The original revelations in the *Book of Commandments* contained no mention of Peter, James, and John, nor the hierarchical offices of “First Elder” and “Second Elder.” These concepts were added in 1835.



BEFORE (1833, on D&C 20)

Joseph is called “...an Elder of this church,” and Oliver Cowdery “...an elder of this church...”



AFTER (1835, D&C 20)

Joseph is now “...the **first** Elder of this church,” and Oliver “...the **second** Elder of this church...”

Key Insight

This change established a formal rank structure, allowing Joseph to “pull rank” on other leaders. Further additions to D&C 27 retroactively inserted the visitation of Peter, James, and John to create a chain of authority.

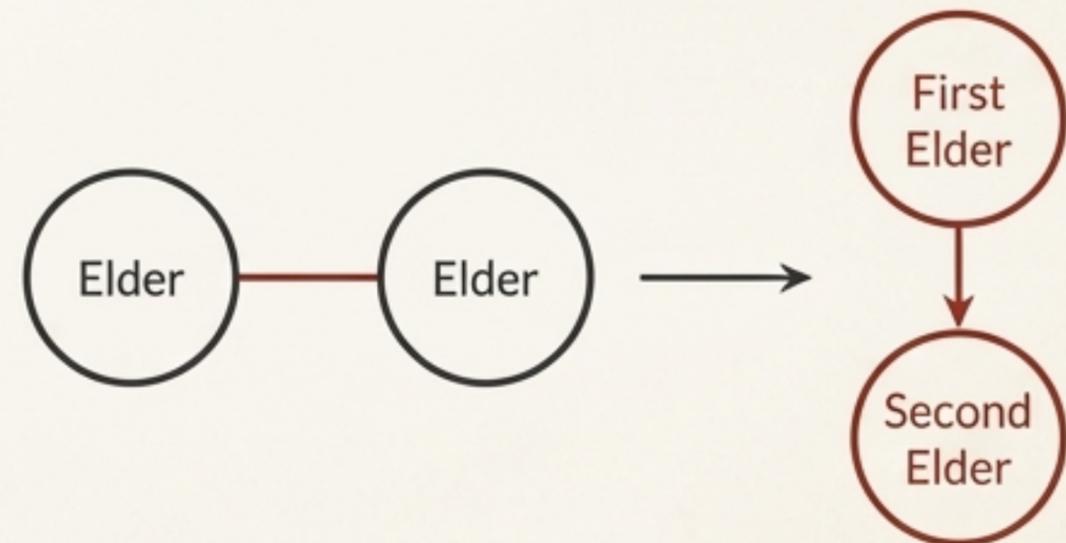
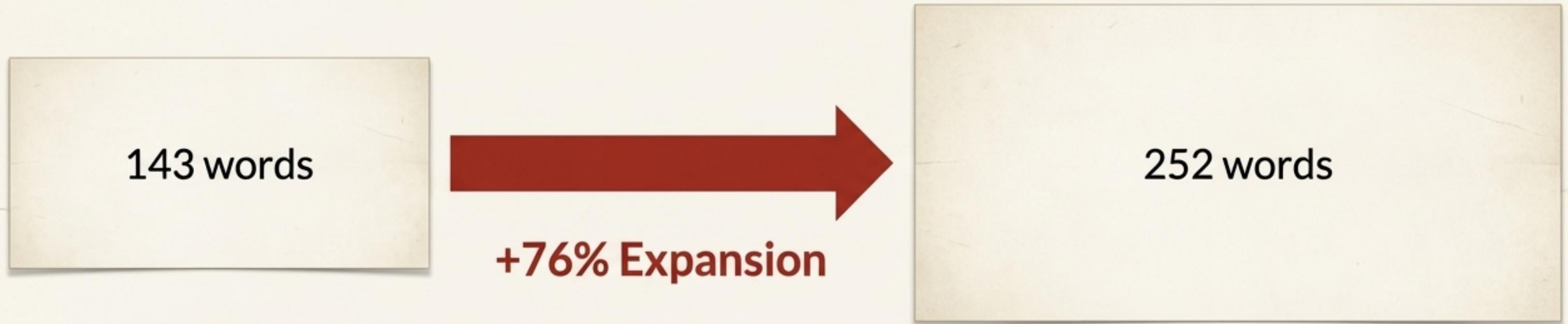


Exhibit C: The Expanding Parchment

In what is now **D&C 7**, Joseph Smith claimed to translate an ancient parchment from John the Beloved via his seer stone. This implies a fixed source text. However, the revelation was massively expanded between its first recording and the 1835 D&C.



Key Addition: Priesthood Narrative

'...and unto you three [Peter, James, and John] **I will give this power and the keys of this ministry** until I come.'

Analysis

How can a direct translation from a physical object expand years later to include new doctrines? This specific change was highlighted by Apostle Hugh B. Brown as one that *never happened*.

Exhibit D: Doctrine on Demand

Changes were also made to address practical problems and revise inconvenient historical details.



1. The Law of Consecration (D&C 42)

The original commandment to consecrate **“all”** property to the church was changed to consecrating **“of”** your property after the communal United Order system failed.

~~ALL~~ → OF



2. Oliver’s “Gift” (D&C 8)

The original revelation sanctioned Oliver Cowdery’s use of a folk-magic dowsing rod, called his “Sprout” or “Rod.” This was later sanitized to the more scriptural-sounding **“Gift of Aaron,”** stripping the folk magic element from the official record.

~~Rod~~ → Gift of Aaron

Exhibit E: The Polygamy Contradiction

The 1835 edition of the **Doctrine & Covenants**—approved by **Joseph Smith**—contained an explicit statement on marriage (then Section 101) that unequivocally **condemned** polygamy.

“Inasmuch as this church has been reproached with the crime of fornication and polygamy; we declare that we believe that **one man should have one wife; and one woman but one husband...**”

— D&C Section 101, 1835 Edition

REMOVED 1876

Analysis

This section remained official scripture for 41 years, during which polygamy was secretly introduced and practiced. It was only removed in the 1876 edition, long after the practice was public. This represents a complete reversal of what was presented as God’s law.

The Modern Defense: Explaining the Revisions

Over the years, Church historians and apologists have offered several explanations for these documented revisions.

1. Scribal Errors

The changes were merely corrections of mistakes made by scribes during the original transcription.

(B.H. Roberts)

2. Expanding Revelation

Joseph Smith was authorized by God to update, clarify, and expand earlier revelations as his own understanding grew.

(Richard Bushman)

3. Creative Co-Participation

Revelation is a dynamic, interpretive process between God and the prophet, not a verbatim dictation.

(Blake Ostler)

Assessing the Defense: Do the Explanations Hold Up?

While offered in good faith, these explanations conflict with the historical record and the nature of the changes themselves.



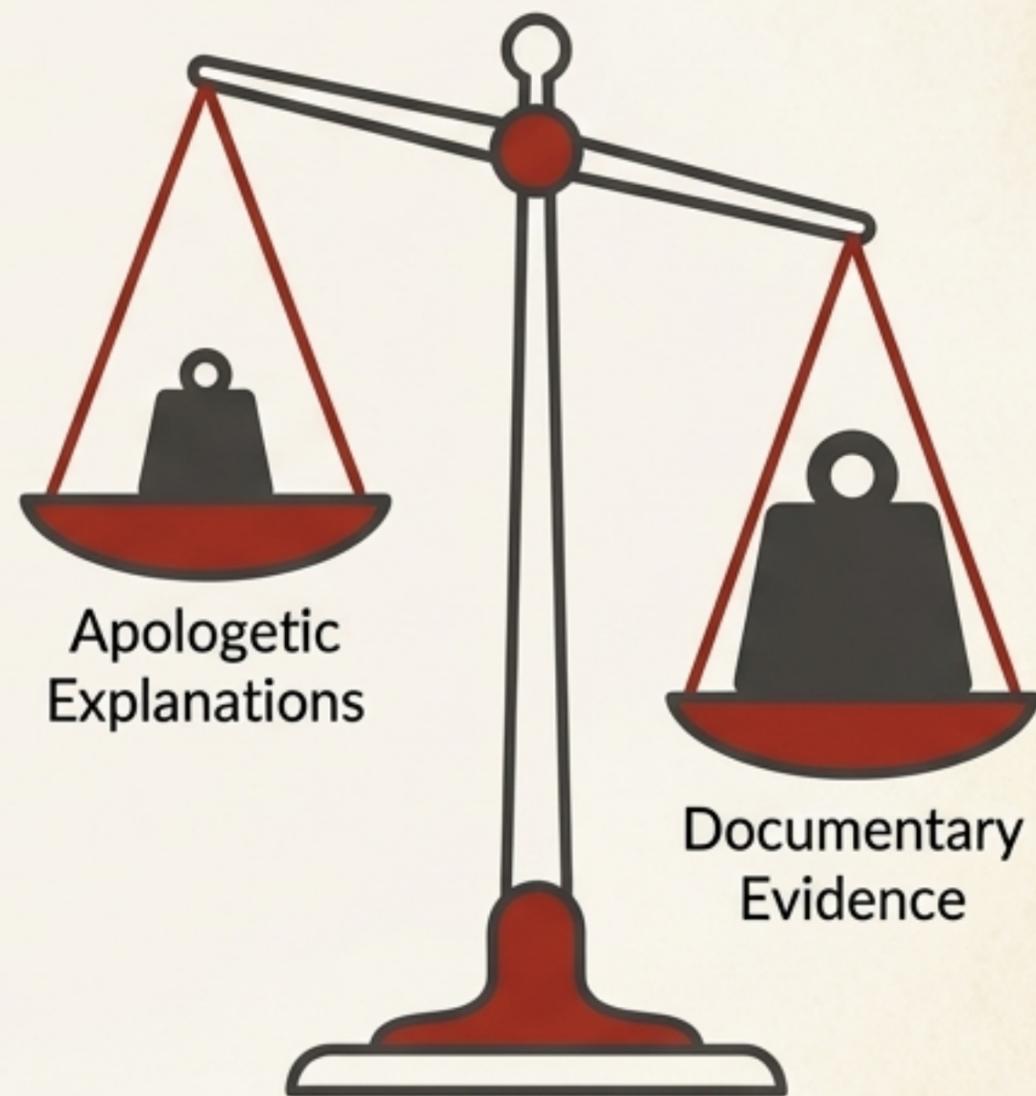
Inconsistent with "Tight Translation": The 'seer stone in a hat' method was described as a process where words appeared and would not vanish until transcribed correctly. This leaves little room for significant 'scribal errors'.



A Convenient Pattern: The changes are not random; they consistently serve to increase Joseph's authority, solve policy failures, or add new doctrines. This pattern is more consistent with human invention than divine clarification.



Undermines Divine Origin: If a prophet can unilaterally alter what is claimed to be God's direct word, it undermines the very concept of a stable, divine revelation and makes it indistinguishable from fraud.



A Question of Integrity



“None of the early Revelations... have been revised, and the Doctrine and Covenants stands as printed, including sections five and seven.”

— Apostle Hugh B. Brown

D&C 7 (Original)

"No other gift") the healthy was and aplames to pririty up God was called as howenaa, and other leano, he farm to eremavud their indersorce of priesthood of the colors fcom.

143 words

D&C 7 (Current)

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252 words



Analysis: The evidence from D&C 5 ("No other gift") and D&C 7 (the expanding parchment) proves this statement is factually incorrect. This demonstrates a pattern of official misrepresentation to the general membership about the nature and scale of the revisions.

From a Flood of Revelation to a Trickle



1830s: A Flood of Revelation



Modern Day: A Trickle

Joseph Smith demonstrated an ability to receive detailed, specific revelations on nearly any topic **on demand**—from settling biblical debates to financial matters. This contrasts sharply with the modern Church.

If the **revelatory** channel established by Joseph Smith is still open, why **have modern prophets been unable to receive** similar clarifying revelations on pressing issues like the origins of the priesthood/temple ban, the doctrine of Heavenly Mother, or LGBTQ+ theology?
Why has the divine voice grown so quiet?



You Are the Jury: Two Competing Narratives



Narrative 1: Faith & Continuing Revelation

God **reveals** truth “line upon line.” Prophets are inspired to **update** and **clarify** scripture to meet the needs of a growing, changing Church. The D&C reflects this **living, dynamic process**. The changes are evidence of God’s **continued guidance**.



Narrative 2: Evidence & Human Origins

The D&C is a collection of documents that were pragmatically **altered** over time to **solve** theological problems, **consolidate** authority, address policy failures, and **sanitize** embarrassing origins. The **pattern of revisions** points to a **human, not divine, origin**.

Continue Your Own Investigation

This presentation is a summary of a complex topic. We encourage personal study using primary sources.

Key Resources

- **For a detailed analysis and source compilation:**
LDSDiscussions.com ([Essay: “Changes to the Doctrine and Covenants”](#))
- **To view original manuscripts directly:**
The [Joseph Smith Papers Project](#) website.

Informed belief is built on a complete understanding of the facts.