

Robin Scott Jensen, Robert J. Woodford, and Steven C. Harper, eds., *Revelations and Translations: Manuscript Revelation Books, Facsimile Edition*. (First volume of the Revelations and Translation series of The Joseph Smith Papers. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman, general editors. Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2009. xliii, 707 pp. Hardback: \$99.95. ISBN: 978-1-57008-850-6.

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This photographic volume reproduces two manuscript books. A color reproduction of each manuscript page is on the left hand side with a transcription on the facing page to the right. Nothing like this has been printed before in Joseph Smith scriptural study. The size of the large book is nine-by-twelve inches and it weighs eight pounds. You should have a table to read and use the volume. The paper is custom milled and archival quality—a masterful production. The books reproduced are A Book of Commandments & Revelations and Kirtland Revelations.

These church volumes include, among others, the handwriting of two major copyists, John Whitmer and Frederick G. Williams. Additions to the texts are color coded to individuals who at various times corrected copying errors and worked on the grammar of these documents. The editors have produced a volume of the highest standard for producing historical documents. No question they are to be congratulated along with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints who made this volume in the Joseph Smith Papers possible. The first manuscript book was started by church historian John Whitmer. He appears to have commenced recording copies of Joseph Smith Jr.'s revelations about March 1831 at Kirtland, Ohio. The volume contains Smith's early revelatory documents starting with his first revelation of July 1828. In its present form, there are eighteen pages missing for the period April through June 1829. The handwritten compilation was converted from the historian's record, by being dedicated and consecrated at a conference in November 1831, to become a major source for printing the Book of Commandments.

A number of church elders were chosen to be stewards of the revelations and their handwritten notations and grammar suggestions are written above the line as one examines the manuscript pages. These additions were sometimes followed by the typesetter and at other times ignored. Besides being used for the *Evening and the Morning Star* and the Book of Commandments, the volume was later utilized in 1835 for the Doctrine and Covenants. It is clear that the printing of the Book of Commandments was not completed before the press work was stopped by a mob in July 1833. This is confirmed by the printer's take marks at the end of gathered pages for the book. Also, there is evidence that additional revelations received after November 1831 were to be included in the publication.

The Book of Commandments and Revelations manuscript has been designated Revelation Book 1 because it is the earlier of the two records. It contains copies of the revelatory documents dating from July 1828 to June 1834. The manuscript compilation was recorded by John Whitmer with a few revelations copied by Oliver Cowdery. One unique feature of this collection is Whitmer's historical introductions to the commandments. John Whitmer made a concerted effort to copy the revelatory messages

of Joseph Smith into a permanent record. Keeping this book was a responsibility of his office as church historian for the next three years. In 1831, Whitmer also copied parts of Smith's Bible revision of the New Testament.

Three interesting documents are contained in Whitmer's record. The first one is a copy of the early 1830 revelation to go to Kingston, Upper Canada, to "sell a copyright" of the Book of Mormon. Though Hiram Page, William E. McLellin, and David Whitmer mention that a revelation was given by Joseph Smith, this is the only known copy (30-31). An explanation of 1 Corinthians 7:14, printed in LDS and RLDS Doctrine and Covenants as section 74, was believed to be given in early 1832 based upon the *History of Joseph Smith*. This volume (60-61) indicates that it was given to Smith in 1830. A new item is what is termed "A Sample of pure language" (144), was given by Joseph Smith about March 1832. This is a question and answer document concerning the name of God. For example, a question is asked, "What is the Son Awman [Ahman]," with the answer, "It is the greatest of all the parts of Awman [Ahman] which is the Godhead the first born." This last document may relate to the gift of tongues or interpretation of languages.

The copies of the commandments are not always in chronological order, even though most are numbered. John Whitmer may have recorded the texts from copies in his possession. It is of interest that for LDS Doctrine and Covenants 21 (RLDS D&C 19) the revelation for Oliver Cowdery to ordain Joseph Smith was recorded as being "given at Fayette Seneca County State of New York" (26-27). This was corrected in the Book of Commandments chapter 22, to "given in Manchester, New-York." In the Book of Commandments, the day of the month was specific for six revelations given on April 6, 1830, and one message from an angel given on September 4, 1830.

The Book of Commandments and Revelations is listed as being housed in the LDS church historian's office in July 1858 and in an 1878 index of records. Joseph Fielding Smith, an apostle and church historian of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, retained John Whitmer's manuscript revelation book in his office safe. This safe was subsequently moved into the first presidency's walk-in vault after Joseph Fielding Smith became church president in 1970. There it remained until it was turned over to the LDS church history department. It could not be confirmed that the manuscript volume was on the inventory of Joseph Fielding Smith's safe, as access was denied—though it is listed in works cited (687) in the reference material section. The Joseph Smith Papers Project began working with the manuscript in the middle of 2006. In that short period they have done a magnificent job.

When work recommenced for the Kirtland reprint of the *Evening and Morning Star* and for the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants, some of the prophet-president's revelations were modified. This brings us to the second manuscript volume: the Kirtland Revelations Book, started by Frederick G. Williams and Joseph Smith. This volume is now called Revelation Book 2. The manuscript includes a few copies of revelations given during 1829-1830, a note of events in March 1832, but it mainly covers the period 1831 through 1834. Especially useful is the identification and highlighting of where the handwriting of Joseph Smith appears when he copied texts.

One of the more interesting questions relates to the approximate time when Frederick G. Williams started transcribing copies of documents onto the pages of this volume. The editors speculate that this may have been as early as February or March 1832 (5, 406-9, 676, 684). No historical documentation is cited to support this dating.

Williams wrote, "I commenced writing for Joseph Smith Jr- July 20<sup>th</sup> 1832." This is confirmed by a July 31, 1832, letter of Smith. A more compelling assessment is that the work of copying commenced about November 1832 near the time Williams and Smith worked together in revising the Old Testament, when they took turns in writing a short sketch of Joseph's early life and in copying letters in the first of two letter books. Smith wrote in his journal for December 1, 1832, "wrote and corrected revelations &c" reflected in his handwriting appearing on pages 13 to 15 of Revelation Book 2.

As these two copy books indicate, there were a number of individuals who had access to and made textual revisions. These two manuscript volumes contain evidence of the struggles that were made in trying to preserve—in written form, though not in perfect harmony—Joseph Smith's revelations. Revelations in both books have markings that were made for the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants.

I located possibly fourteen transcription errors. They are considered minor when compared to the laborious work that the editors did for this facsimile volume. In the works cited listing at the end of the volume, under "Hyde, Orson, and Parley P. Pratt. Notebook of Revelations, 1834" (687), Orson Pratt should be listed rather than Parley P. Pratt.

While two individuals will copy a handwritten manuscript differently, these preserved books show redactions in various stages for publication in Missouri and Ohio. Textual studies of the revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants can now be more accurately reflected by using this volume.

Those who follow changes, redactions, and the process by which the revelations of Joseph Smith became part of Restoration scriptures will want to compare and study what may have been omitted and added to Smith's commandments and revelations. I recommend this volume (with transcriptions) for the serious inquirer of Latter Day Saint scriptures. If there is just one book that you should own of the Joseph Smith Papers, this is the book.