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# TREASURING

## the Doctrine and Covenants

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Of the Presidency of the Seventy

After moving with their mother to Independence, Missouri, in the fall of 1831, young sisters Mary Elizabeth and Caroline Rollins soon learned of the hardship and persecution the Saints faced there. One night an angry mob attacked their home; on another occasion, they witnessed an attack on the newly constructed printing office located on the upper floor of the William W. Phelps residence.

During the attack on the printing office, the mob forced the Phelps family from their home and threw their belongings into the street. Mobsters then went to work destroying the printing equipment upstairs and throwing unbound manuscripts from the building. Some brought out large sheets of paper and declared, “Here are the Mormon Commandments!”<sup>1</sup> By this time, the Prophet

Joseph Smith had received many sacred revelations, some as early as 1823, when the angel Moroni appeared to the boy prophet. Joseph had recorded numerous revelations in his own handwriting, but no text had been prepared and distributed

**A photograph of Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner, along with some of the manuscript pages she and her sister rescued from the mob as young girls.**



for the benefit of members of the Church. With much excitement, the Saints in Missouri anticipated the publication of these revelations as a “Book of Commandments.” This work was under way at the printing office when the mob struck. Mary Elizabeth, then 15, described what happened:

“My sister Caroline [age 13] and myself were in a corner of a fence watching them; when they spoke of the commandments I was determined to have some of them. Sister said if I went to get any of them she would go too, but said ‘they will kill us.’”<sup>2</sup>

While the mob was busy at one end of the house, the two girls ran and filled their arms with the precious sheets. The mob saw them and ordered the girls to stop. Mary Elizabeth recalled: “We ran as fast as we could. Two of them started after us. Seeing a gap in a fence, we entered into a large cornfield, laid the papers on the ground, and hid them with our persons. The corn was from five to six feet high, and very thick; they hunted around considerable, and came very near us but did not find us.”<sup>3</sup>

This courageous act by two young girls helped preserve the printed text of the Prophet Joseph’s early revelations, paving the way for the subsequent completion of the Book of Commandments, which later became the Doctrine and Covenants.

### The Capstone of Our Religion

How important is this great legacy of scripture? President Gordon B. Hinckley



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(1910–2008) said, “The Doctrine and Covenants is unique among our books of scripture. It is the constitution of the Church.

While the Doctrine and Covenants includes writings and statements of various origins, it is primarily a book of revelation given through the Prophet of this dispensation.”<sup>4</sup>

President Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994) taught, “The Doctrine and Covenants is the binding link between the Book of Mormon and the continuing work of the Restoration through the Prophet Joseph Smith and his successors.” He testified, “The Book of Mormon brings men to Christ. The Doctrine and Covenants brings men to Christ’s kingdom, even The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. . . . The Book of Mormon is the ‘keystone’ of our religion, and the Doctrine and Covenants is the capstone, with continuing latter-day revelation.”<sup>5</sup>

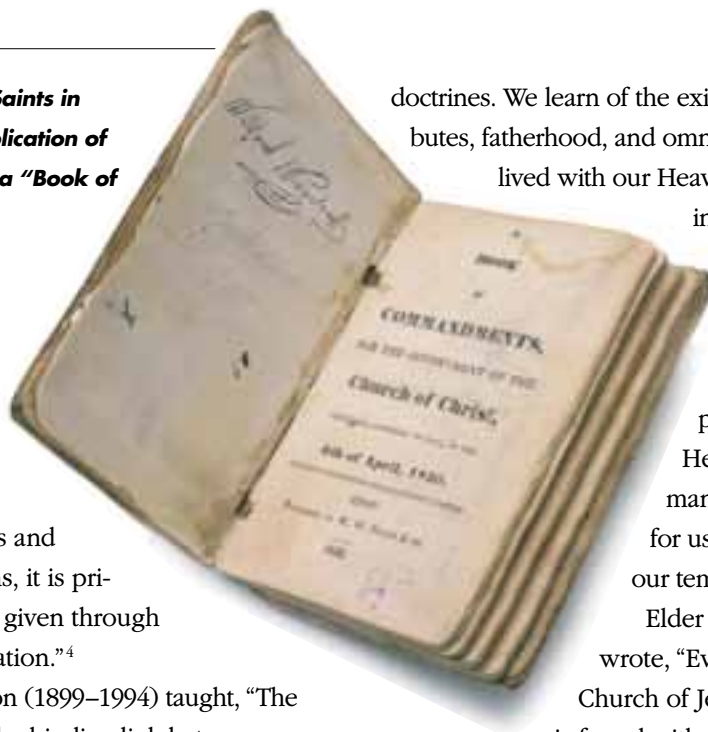
The Lord introduces the revelations contained in the Doctrine and Covenants with a thundering declaration concerning the purposes of God in the latter-day Restoration:

“Hearken, O ye people of my church, saith the voice of him who dwells on high, and whose eyes are upon all men; yea, verily I say: Hearken ye people from afar; and ye that are upon the islands of the sea, listen together.

“For verily the voice of the Lord is unto all men, and there is none to escape; and there is no eye that shall not see, neither ear that shall not hear, neither heart that shall not be penetrated” (D&C 1:1–2).

Marvelous truths—many in the words of the Lord Himself—then follow. Nowhere in the scriptures does the Lord speak so directly to His people through His prophets. Many of the revelations are personally directed, some unfold the organization of the restored Church, and others offer pragmatic counsel.

Through these inspirational and edifying revelations, the Doctrine and Covenants teaches and reiterates important



doctrines. We learn of the existence of God and His attributes, fatherhood, and omniscience. We learn that we lived with our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ

in a pre-earth existence, that the

Son is separate and distinct

from the Father, that Jesus

Christ played a major role

in the early councils that

planned our universe, and that

He was chosen as the Savior of

mankind. We learn of God’s love

for us and of His preparations for

our temporal and spiritual salvation.

Elder John A. Widtsoe (1872–1952)

wrote, “Every doctrine taught by The

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

is found, either outlined or shadowed forth,

in the Book of Doctrine and Covenants. As far as I know,

there is no doctrine taught by the Church which is not

found in some way or form in this book.” He added that

the Doctrine and Covenants is essential because “no other

one of our sacred books can lay the same claim to a full

survey of all the doctrines of the Church.”<sup>6</sup>

### **Organization and Administration**

Throughout the Doctrine and Covenants the Lord carefully revealed how His Church was to be organized. In section 20 we learn of the requirements for baptism (see v. 37) and of the command to bless children (see v. 70). This section also sets forth the duties of holders of the priesthood. Ordained elders receive instruction in their duties, including the importance of following the Spirit:

“The elders are to conduct the meetings as they are led by the Holy Ghost, according to the commandments and revelations of God” (v. 45). Priests learn that they are to “preach, teach, expound, exhort, and baptize, and administer the sacrament” (v. 46). Teachers are to “watch over the church always, and be with and strengthen them” (v. 53). Deacons are instructed to assist the priests and teachers in their duties (see v. 57).

Section 20 reminds us that “it is expedient that the church meet together often to partake” of the sacrament “in the remembrance of the Lord Jesus” (v. 75). It then sets forth the sacramental prayers and instructs how the sacrament is to be administered (see vv. 76–79).

Section 107 defines the presiding quorums of the Church, including the First Presidency (see v. 22), the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles (see vv. 23, 33, 35), and the Quorums of the Seventy (see vv. 25, 34, 38).

Because the Doctrine and Covenants teaches important principles and procedures concerning the governance of the Church, it acts as the constitutional foundation of the latter-day Church.

The Doctrine and Covenants is also a rich source for personal revelation and inspiration. Like all scripture, it unlocks spiritual insights for those who earnestly study and ponder its teachings. While the original revelation may have been intended for someone in an earlier time, the words are no less powerful for us today. Ponder, for example, the instruction given through the Prophet Joseph Smith to his father regarding missionary service. These words have provided inspiration to subsequent generations of missionaries departing for their fields of labor:

“Therefore, O ye that embark in the service of God, see that ye serve him with all your heart, might, mind and strength, that ye may stand blameless before God at the last day” (D&C 4:2).

Verse 8 of section 109, part of the dedicatory prayer for the Kirtland Temple, refers to an earlier revelation commanding the Saints to build a temple. The beautiful words of this verse provide inspiration to families throughout the Church who are striving to establish righteous and loving homes:

“Organize yourselves; prepare every needful thing, and establish a house, even a house of prayer, a house of fasting, a house of faith, a house of learning, a house of glory, a house of order, a house of God.”

### Getting the Most from Our Study

We get more out of the Doctrine and Covenants when we understand the historical context of each revelation. The Lord directed the revelation in section 11, for example, to the Prophet’s brother Hyrum, who had traveled from Palmyra to Harmony, Pennsylvania, to inquire

regarding the will of the Lord. Hyrum was eager to engage in missionary work, but the Lord counseled him to be patient and wait for the coming forth of the Book of Mormon:

“Seek not to declare my word, but first seek to obtain my word, and then shall your tongue be loosed; then, if you desire, you shall have my Spirit and my word, yea, the power of God unto the convincing of men” (v. 21).

This verse not only underscores the importance of the Book of Mormon in missionary work but also has served as a source of inspiration to countless missionaries preparing to teach the gospel.

The Doctrine and Covenants contains a remarkable variety of teachings. Section 76 reveals the degrees of glory

in the hereafter. Section 84 reveals the covenant of the priesthood in a way not found in other scripture. Section 89 reveals rules of health and related promises of obedience. Section 132 reveals eternal marriage. Sections 110, 127, 128, and 138 describe the importance of work for the dead. The magnitude and depth of the teachings in this great book offer a treasure trove of inspiration and instruction for all members of the Church.

Even young Mary Elizabeth and Caroline Rollins recognized the importance of the revelations

contained in the Doctrine and Covenants. Following their courageous rescue of the original manuscripts, the Church eventually published the Book of Commandments. In appreciation, leaders gave a copy to Mary Elizabeth. Later in her life she modestly wrote, “They got them bound in small books and sent me one, which *I prized very highly*.”<sup>7</sup>

This great book of scripture is indeed a gift. May we all prize it highly. ■



ILLUSTRATION BY ROBERT T. BARRETT

***Through the Doctrine and Covenants we learn that Jesus Christ played a major role in the early councils that planned our universe, and that He was chosen as the Savior of mankind.***

### NOTES

1. “Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner,” *The Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine*, vol. 17 (July 1926): 196.
2. “Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner,” 196.
3. “Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner,” 196.
4. Gordon B. Hinckley, “The Order and Will of God,” *Ensign*, Jan. 1989, 2.
5. Ezra Taft Benson, “The Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants,” *Ensign*, May 1987, 83.
6. John A. Widtsoe, *The Message of the Doctrine and Covenants* (1969), 117.
7. “Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner,” 196; emphasis added.