

Section 43

Section 43 is one of the loveliest, most poetic of Joseph's revelations. It is an eschatological text, meaning that it addresses the end of the world and the events that lead up to the Savior's return. But perhaps its most significant contribution is its solution to the old and perplexing problem of revelation. Avoiding the extremes of no revelation at all or a completely chaotic free-for-all, section 43 validates personal revelation and sets boundaries for what such revelations will contain. Only Joseph or his authorized successors will reveal the Lord's will for the entire Church of Jesus Christ.

Oliver Cowdery and his companions converted well over one hundred people in northeastern Ohio in the fall of 1830, then left for the western frontier to fulfill their mission call. Meanwhile, the natural leaders of the converts, Sidney Rigdon and Edward Partridge, went to New York to meet Joseph. So almost overnight there was a large group of new, leaderless converts.

The enemy of all righteous had . . . made them think that an angel of God appeared to them, and showed them writings on the outside cover of the Bible, and on parchment, which flew through the air, and on the back of their hands, and many such foolish and vain

things, others lost their strength, and some slid on the floor, and such like maneuvers.¹

Into the chaos stepped a woman we know only by her surname, Hubble. She claimed to be a prophetess. She testified that the Book of Mormon was true, and she received revelations that included commandments and laws. The Saints believed her.²

When Joseph arrived, he had a problem. Critics of revelation complain that God no longer reveals his will to women and men on earth. Believers in revelation, meanwhile, receive revelations themselves and many believe in counterfeits. Joseph did not want to make the false claim that God would not reveal himself to ordinary people, including women. Like Moses, he wished “that all the LORD’s people were prophets, *and* that the LORD would put his spirit upon them!” (Numbers 11:29, emphasis added). But how could he affirm that God continues to reveal his will while simultaneously maintaining the revealed order of the Lord’s Church?

Hubble’s gender was not the issue. Hiram Page had created a similar problem by presuming to receive revelations (D&C 28). To Emma Smith, meanwhile, the Lord had promised the power to expound scripture and exhort the Church by the spirit of revelation to her (D&C 25:7). The question was not whether women could receive revelation. They could, and did, and do. The question was to whom the Lord would reveal his will for the whole Church. The confusion required clarification.

John Whitmer prefaced section 43 by saying that “the Lord gave Revelation that the saints might not be deceived which reads as follows.” He noted that

after this commandment was received the saints came to understanding on this subject, and unity and harmony prevailed throughout the church of God: and the Saints began to learn wisdom,

¹ “[John Whitmer, History, 1831–circa 1847](#),” p. 10, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed September 28, 2020.

² “[John Whitmer, History, 1831–circa 1847](#),” p. 18, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed September 28, 2020. “[History, 1838–1856, volume A-1 \[23 December 1805–30 August 1834\]](#),” p. 101, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed September 28, 2020. Ezra Booth letter November 29, 1831, in *Ohio Star* (Ravenna, Ohio) December 8, 1831.

and treasure up knowledge which they learned from the word of God,
and by experience as they advanced in the way of eternal life.³

Section 43 makes an important distinction between revealed commandments and teachings about how to act on the revealed commandments and teachings. They are not of the same importance even if they come from the same source. The revelations of the Lord through Joseph are more important and binding than the teachings of Joseph about them.

In section 43, Saints are commanded not to receive the *teachings* of anyone as if they were *revelations or commandments* (D&C 43:5, emphasis added). The Lord commands Saints to instruct and edify each other—to produce teachings—about “how to act upon the points of my law and commandments, which I have given” (v. 8). Inspired teachings about how to obey commandments are good, but they are not the same as the Lord’s actual commandments and revelations. A Saint who feels guilty for seeking and receiving personal revelation that runs counter to the teachings of a Church leader is actually obedient to the Lord’s command in section 43 to not equate anyone’s teachings with the Lord’s commandments and revelations. Section 43 was necessary, John Whitmer said, so Saints could “learn to discern.”⁴

³ Ezra Booth letter November 29, 1831, in *Ohio Star* (Ravenna, Ohio) December 8, 1831. Book of John Whitmer, chapter 3, Community of Christ Archives, Independence, Missouri. Manuscript History of the Church, Book A-1, pages 101–3; *History of the Church*, 1:154.

⁴ “[John Whitmer, History, 1831–circa 1847](#),” p. 10, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed September 28, 2020.