
John the Revelator

D&C 6

Joseph Smith wrote of the circumstances that led up to his inquiry about John the Revelator:

During the month of April I continued to translate, and he (Oliver Cowdery) to write, with little cessation, during which time we received several revelations. A difference of opinion arising between us about the account of John the Apostle, mentioned in the New Testament, as to whether he died or continued to live, we mutually agreed to settle it by the Urim and Thummim.¹

Thus, Doctrine and Covenants 7 was a revelation received by both Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery. Oliver not only received the revelation with the Prophet Joseph but was also the scribe to the revelation.

Through the Urim and Thummim, Joseph and Oliver learned that the resurrected Lord asked, “John, my beloved, what desirest thou?” He replied, “Lord, give unto me power over death, that I may live and bring souls unto thee.” His request was granted. John was promised that he would “prophesy before nations, kindreds, tongues and people” and be as “flaming fire and a ministering angel; he shall minister for those who shall be heirs of salvation who dwell on the earth” (D&C 7:1–3, 6).

As to Joseph and Oliver seeing the parchment on which John the Revelator wrote, conclusions reached by scholars are assumptions. Perhaps the definitive answer lies in the heading of this chapter published in the 1833 Book of Commandments: “Translated from parchment, written and hid up by John the Revelator.” However, there is no indication in the heading that the parchment was ever in the hands of Joseph or Oliver.

¹ History, 1838–1856, volume A-1 [23 December 1805–30 August 1834], p. 15. Joseph Smith Papers.

After this revelation, thoughts of John the Revelator continued to be on the mind of the Prophet Joseph Smith. In June 1831 at the fourth general conference of the Church, held in Kirtland, Ohio, Joseph “prophesied that John the Revelator was then among the Ten Tribes of Israel who had been led away by Shalmaneser, King of Assyria, to prepare them for their return from their long dispersion, to again possess the Land of their fathers.”² Joseph later stated, “It was a mission and an ordinance for [John] to gather the tribes of Israel” (D&C 77:14). In 1836 Heber C. Kimball said that after the First Presidency, the Twelve Apostles, and the Presiding Bishop had received their endowments in the Kirtland Temple, “the beloved disciple John was seen in our midst by the Prophet Joseph, Oliver Cowdery and others.”³

² Smith, *History of the Church*, 1:176.

³ Orson F. Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball: An Apostle, The Father and Founder of the British Mission* (Salt Lake City: Kimball Family, 1888), 91–92.