
Warren A. Cowdery

1788–1851

D&C 106

Warren, the brother of Oliver Cowdery and a resident of Freedom, New York, was known by near neighbors as a successful farmer and physician. He ran an apothecary business in town and was the go-to man when sickness struck. Although Warren was a god-fearing man, he showed little interest in the religions of his day. He did not enter baptismal waters until 1834, even though his brother Oliver had played a key role in the Restoration from the beginning.

On November 25, 1834, Warren was called by revelation to preside over the Church in the regions round about Freedom:

It is my will that my servant Warren A. Cowdery should be appointed and ordained a presiding high priest over my church in the land of Freedom and the regions round about;

And should preach my everlasting gospel, and lift up his voice and warn the people, not only in his own place, but in the adjoining counties;

And devote his whole time to this high and holy calling, which I now give unto him, seeking diligently the kingdom of heaven and its righteousness, and all things necessary shall be added thereunto; for the laborer is worthy of his hire. (D&C 106:1–3)

In the revelation, the Lord promised Warren that if he would humble himself and be faithful, “I have prepared a crown for him in the mansions of my Father” (D&C 106:8).

In September 1835 Warren wrote a letter condemning the character and teachings of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.¹ The Twelve responded to his letter by charging Warren with unchristian-like conduct.² The rift between the apostles and Warren was slow to mend. After Warren had packed up his possessions and medical supplies and gathered with the Saints in Kirtland, the Prophet Joseph Smith discussed with him the charges he had made against the Twelve. At their meeting, Warren confessed that he had been in the wrong and expressed a willingness “to publish that they [the Twelve] were not in the fault.”³

His humility on that occasion led the Prophet Joseph to ask Warren to act as a scribe and an assistant recorder for the Church. Warren magnified both assignments. He is credited with taking minutes of the Kirtland High Council meetings, making entries in Joseph Smith’s diary, scribing patriarchal blessings, recording the history of the Church from 1835 to 1836, and helping write the dedicatory prayer for the Kirtland Temple (see D&C 109). In addition, he served as the manager of the Church’s printing office and book bindery. He succeeded his brother Oliver Cowdery as editor of the *Messenger and Advocate*, editing the newspaper through its final edition in September 1837.

With all his service to the Church and to the Prophet Joseph Smith, in 1838, surprisingly, Warren voluntarily withdrew from the fellowship of the Saints. His disaffection with Joseph Smith and other Church leaders occurred about the same time as that of his brother Oliver. The remainder of his life, Warren resided in Kirtland. From 1838–40 he was a justice of the peace in the community. He died on February 23, 1851, at age sixty-two.

¹ Smith, *History of the Church*, 2:283.

² Dean C. Jessee, comp., *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1984), 137.

³ Oliver Cowdery Diary, 5 March 1836. Church History Library.