

THE NOVEL MORMON DOCTRINES  
OF ULTIMATE REWARDS AND  
PUNISHMENTS AS FIRST  
REVEALED IN THE VISION:  
SOME OBSERVATIONS ON HISTORY,  
SOURCES, AND INTERPRETATION

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The Vision (1832)<sup>1</sup> is one of the most important revelations of the formative period of Mormon theological development, where novel and controversial doctrines of the afterlife first made their appearance.<sup>2</sup>

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1. A slightly edited version of The Vision is found as section 76 in The Doctrine and Covenants of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2013), hereafter *SLCDC*.

2. The most controversial new teaching was, as Richard Bushman noted, the “contraction of hell,” the doctrine that the unrepentant who die in their sins would ultimately be saved in the kingdom of God. This doctrine was especially difficult for some of Smith’s followers with an orthodox Protestant background who came to Mormonism with a belief in hell for the wicked and found a similar doctrine in the Book of Mormon. For example, Brigham Young (1801–1877), a former Methodist, recalled that “it [The Vision] was so directly contrary and opposed to my former education [that] . . . I could not understand it” (*Deseret News–Extra*, Sept. 14, 1852, 24 as quoted in Robert J. Woodford, “The Historical Development of the Doctrine and Covenants” PhD diss., Brigham Young University, 1974, vol. 2, 929); see also Richard Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 199. For other examples, see Matthew C. Godfrey, Mark Ashurst-McGee, Grant Underwood, Robert J. Wood-

In a recent study I explored how The Vision expanded upon revealed teachings from the Book of Mormon and prior revelations, resolved some inherited theological problems, and set the stage for the unfolding of uniquely Mormon doctrines and practices.<sup>3</sup> There I observed that The Vision appears to be a conflation of several independent sources. Literary evidence for this conclusion includes duplications, interruptions, awkward transitions, deletions, and variances in vocabulary, style, and setting.

To date there has been little attention paid to a source-critical analysis of The Vision as scholars have been primarily interested in exploring the implications of the final canonical text. While such a “synchronic” analysis is undoubtedly of value, a “diachronic” approach aimed at dissecting composite revelations and uncovering the sources and their history can also lead to new insights.<sup>4</sup> As Mormon historian Dean C. Jessee has rightly observed: “textual analysis is as important to an understanding of the past as the gathering and selection of source material.”<sup>5</sup>

Below I posit that The Vision was composed from two poems and five previously recorded visions that were received by Joseph Smith and his scribes while revising the New Testament in early 1832. Each of the five visions can be associated with a New Testament passage between John 1 and Revelation 12. The goals of this study are to isolate the literary fragments in The Vision, assign each to its most likely pre-existing

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ford, William G. Hartley, eds., *The Joseph Smith Papers: Documents, Volume 2: July 1831–January 1833* (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2013), 183.

3. Clyde D. Ford, “The Book of Mormon, the Early Nineteenth-Century Debates over Universalism, and the Development of the Novel Mormon Doctrines of Ultimate Rewards and Punishments,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 47, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 1–23.

4. Both synchronic and diachronic approaches have long been used by biblical literary critics. For recent examples in Old Testament study see Rolf Rendtorff, *The Canonical Hebrew Bible* (Leiden: Deo Publishing, 2005) and David M. Carr, *The Formation of the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), respectively.

5. Dean C. Jessee, “The Reliability of Joseph Smith’s History,” *Journal of Mormon History* 3 (1976): 23.

source, show how the redactor of *The Vision* combined and modified the pre-existing sources to produce the final composition, and explore the possible original significances of the five visions.

That some revelations in the 1835 Kirtland edition of the *Doctrine and Covenants* (*KDC*) were confections of prior revelations can be shown by comparing *KDC* and the 1833 *Book of Commandments* (*BC*). This demonstrates that the editors of *KDC* combined revelations *either* in a sequential<sup>6</sup> or a cut and paste<sup>7</sup> format. Other revelations, whose prior sources are no longer extant, have also been suggested to be confections.<sup>8</sup> Attempted reconstruction of the original sources for revelations without extant sources, such as *The Vision*, presents considerable challenges.<sup>9</sup> Thus while some displaced fragments in *The Vision* can be confidently assigned to one of the five visions, others remain of less certain origin. Likewise, distinguishing between original sources and secondary editorial additions can be difficult.

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6. Examples include chapters 17–21 and 31–33 in *BC*, which were combined to form Sections 45 and 52 in *KDC*, respectively.

7. For example, section 13 of *KDC* begins with chapter 44 and then inverts two fragments from chapter 47 in *BC*. Another example is the edited version of Smith's Liberty Jail letters that were added to the 1872 Utah edition of the *Doctrine and Covenants*. section 121 (*SLCDC*) consists of five fragments cut and pasted from the two letters.

8. Danel W. Bachman has hypothesized that section 132 (*SLCDC*) is "an amalgamation of several separate communications to Joseph Smith, each given at separate times," and I have suggested that sections 89 (the "Word of Wisdom") and 19 are examples of "sequential" editing. See Danel W. Bachman, "New Light on an Old Hypothesis: The Ohio Origins of the Revelation on eternal Marriage," *Journal of Mormon History* 5 (1978): 26 and Clyde D. Ford, "The Origin of the Word of Wisdom," *Journal of Mormon History* 24, no. 2 (Fall 1998): 129–154 and "Debates over Universalism," 22.

9. Good examples are the many complex analyses and unresolved disputes over the sources of the Pentateuch in the twentieth century. For a recent review, see Ernest Nicholson, *The Pentateuch in the Twentieth Century: The Legacy of Julius Wellhausen* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

## II. A Literary History of The Vision

Between March 1831 and July 1832 Smith was intermittently occupied with revising the New Testament. Beginning in mid-February 1832 Smith worked on John 1–Revelation 11 with Sidney Rigdon as principal scribe. Sometime thereafter, Revelation 12–22 was completed with Frederick G. Williams as scribe.<sup>10</sup> On several occasions, Smith and his scribes received visions that provided information regarding the scriptural passage under scrutiny, and which they were commanded to record.<sup>11</sup> Sometime following these recordings an individual we will call the “redactor” combined these texts into a single work which is no longer extant and which we will term the “autograph” of The Vision. For convenience, the five visions are numbered below according to the sequence of their scriptural associations in the New Testament, and individual verses in The Vision are numbered according to the 2013 Salt Lake City edition of the Doctrine and Covenants (*SLCDC*), section 76.

In constructing the autograph, the redactor organized The Vision into four parts: Part 1 (vv. 1–10): an introduction consisting of two poems; Part 2 (vv. 11–31): narrative introductory excerpts from visions 1, 2, 4, and 5 arranged in a sequential manner, in the chronological order of reception, and without clear evidence of editorial additions; Part 3 (vv. 31–113), a heterogeneous collection of materials from visions 2–5, consisting largely of lists with each item beginning with “they are they” or “these are they” that summarize the eligibility and/or the rewards or punishments of the human group under consideration; and lastly, Part 4 (vv. 114–19), a conclusion largely written by the redactor. The lists and other materials in Part 3 are organized into four sections that describe the four possible ultimate fates of humans: the eternal abode of the devil (vv. 32–49), the celestial world (vv. 50–70), the terrestrial

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10. Scott H. Faulring, Kent P. Jackson, Robert J. Matthews, eds., *Joseph Smith's New Translation of the Bible* (Provo: Brigham Young University, 2004), 58–59.

11. Doctrine and Covenants 76:28, 49, 80, 113.

world (vv. 71–80), and the telestial world (vv. 81–113). All these sections have been significantly reworked by the redactor, who deleted some items, inserted fragments from the visions 2–5 texts, and added editorial comments. Like Part 2, the inserted fragments from other visions seem to follow the chronological order of reception of the originals, as if the redactor skimmed the vision texts in order for the desired passages. The redactor’s editorial additions, which are frequent in Part 3, clarified and/or intensified the information in the lists, emphasized some themes distinct from the original vision texts (e.g., the need for the reader to have personal revelation to fill in what the redactor has deleted), and, unlike the terse original lists, showed a preference for long sentences with dependent clauses and the use of adverbs (wherefore, therefore, then, neither). These characteristics aid in identifying the redactor’s editorial insertions in Part 3.

During the latter part of 1830 or early 1831, Church historian John Whitmer began keeping a written record entitled *A Book of Commandments & Visions of the Lord (BCVL)*. Recent scholars have concluded that “[t]extual evidence indicates that [John] Whitmer and [Oliver] Cowdery copied revelations and other items [in *BCVL*] . . . from even earlier manuscripts *that are no longer extant*.”<sup>12</sup> In November 1831, Cowdery and Whitmer left for Missouri, taking *BCVL* with them, where it was a source of the revelations printed in *The Evening and The Morning Star* (Independence, 1832) and *BC*.<sup>13</sup>

A similar work to *BCVL*, which has become known as the Kirtland Revelation Book (*KRB*), was begun in Kirtland in early 1832 by Frederick G. Williams. His first entry was *The Vision*. A copy of *The Vision* was carried to Missouri where it was entered into *BCVL* by Whitmer. This was the source for the first published version of *The Vision* in *The*

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12. Robin Scott Jensen, Robert J. Woodford, Steven C. Harper, eds., *The Joseph Smith Papers: Visions and Translations; Manuscript Visions Books* (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2009), 5; emphasis mine.

13. *Ibid.*, 6.

*Evening and The Morning Star* in July 1832.<sup>14</sup> And the *KRB* version was a source for publication in *Evening and Morning Star* (Kirtland, 1835) and, shortly thereafter, in *KDC*.<sup>15</sup>

It is presumed in this study that Williams used the autograph as the source for his entry into *KRB*. When Williams had copied the first five verses, he was interrupted by Smith, who inserted vv. 6–7 in his own handwriting; Williams then continued copying. Thus *The Vision* did not reach its final form until William’s *KRB* entry. Smith’s insertion is also present in *BCVL*. In a few places *KRB* and *BCVL* differ in wording, with *BCVL* generally having the better readings (see footnote discussions under individual passages below). In some instances, the differences could be explained as either a copying error by Williams or a correction by Whitmer (e.g., vv. 12, 20). The former is considered more likely since Whitmer failed to make some other obviously needed changes (e.g., vv. 25, 96). In addition, Whitmer sometimes preserved an alternative reading that most likely derived from the autograph itself (e.g., v. 100). Taken together these observations suggest that Whitmer also copied from the autograph (or a copy) and added Smith’s insertion (vv. 6–7).

### III. A Literary Analysis of The Vision

Based on the foregoing, the version of *The Vision* chosen for analysis is that in *KRB* (with an occasional correction from *BCVL*). In editing *KRB*, I have corrected some spelling errors. The proposed scriptural associations and settings for the five previously recorded visions are as follows: vision 1 (*The Prologue of John* [John 1:1–18], before creation);

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14. *The Evening and The Morning Star* 1, no. 2 (July 1832): 2–3. Robin Scott Jensen, Richard E. Turley Jr., Riley M. Lorimer, eds., *The Joseph Smith Papers: Revelations and Translations, Volume 2: Published Revelations* (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2011), 225.

15. *Evening and Morning Star* 1, no. 2 (July 1832 [Feb. 1835]): 27–30. Jensen, Turley, and Lorimer, eds., *Joseph Smith Papers: Revelations and Translations Volume 2*, 225.

vision 2 (John 5:29, the resurrections of the just and unjust); vision 3 (1 Corinthians 15:40–41, the four ultimate rewards and punishments, vision 3a: the celestial world, vision 3b: the terrestrial world, vision 3c: the telestial world, vision 3d: the wicked in the realm of Satan); vision 4 (Revelation 7: the heavenly court, the Lamb, and the righteous in the afterlife; the voice from heaven); and vision 5 (Revelation 12, vision 5a: Lucifer rebels and is thrust out of heaven, vision 5b: Satan overcomes some of the saints of God; the voice of the Lord). Below, the *KRB* version is reproduced with identification of the proposed fragments from the original sources and with the redactor's proposed editorial additions in bold italics. A discussion of the rationales for these identifications follows the analysis.

*Poem 1*

1. Hear O ye heavens  
And give ear O earth

***And rejoice ye inhabitants thereof***

For the Lord he is God  
And beside him there is none else

2. For great is his wisdom  
Marvelous are his ways

***And the extent of his doings none can find out***

3. His purposes fail not  
Neither are there any who can stay his hand,

4. From eternity to eternity he is the same  
And his years never fail

*Poem 2*

5. I the Lord am merciful and gracious  
Unto them who fear me  
And delight to honor

Them who serve me in righteousness and in truth

**6. Great shall be their reward**

**And Eternal Shall be their glory**

7. And unto them will I reveal all mysteries

**Yea all the hidden mysteries of my Kingdom**

**From days of old and for ages to come**

**Will I make Known unto them the good pleasure of my will concerning all things to come. Yea**

8. Even the wonders of eternity shall they know

And things to come will I shew them

Even the things of many generations

9. Their wisdom shall be great

And their understanding reach to heaven

And before them the wisdom of the wise shall perish

And the understanding of the prudent shall come to naught

10. For by my spirit will I enlighten them

And by my power will I make known unto them the secrets of my will

Yea even those things which eye has not seen nor ear heard

Nor yet entered into the heart of man

*Introduction to vision 1, before creation*

11. We Joseph & Sidney being in the spirit on the sixteenth of February in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and thirty two

12. and through the power of the spirit our eyes were opened and our understandings were enlarged (enlightened<sup>16</sup>) so as to see and understand the things of God

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16. *KRB* has “enlarged” and *BCVL* “enlightened.” The latter is clearly preferred as it reproduces Ephesians 1:18, Poem 2 and the Book of Mormon (cf. Alma 32). This is most likely a copying error by Williams. It was corrected in *Evening and Morning Star* and *KDC*.



13. even the things which were from the beginning before the world was which was ordained of the Father through his Only Begotten Son who was in the bosom of the Father even from the beginning

*A vision of the divine Son in the beginning (from vision 1, before creation)*

14. of whom we bear record and the record which we bear is the fullness of the gospel of Jesus Christ who is the Son whom we saw and with whom we conversed in the heavenly vision

*Introduction to vision 2, the resurrections of the just and unjust*

15. for as we sat doing the work of translation which the Lord had appointed unto us we came to the twenty ninth verse of in the fifth chapter of John which was given unto us thus

16. speaking of the resurrection of the dead who should hear the voice of the Son of Man

17. and shall come forth they who have done good in the resurrection of the just and they who have done evil in the resurrection of the unjust

18. now this caused us to marvel for it was given us of the spirit

*From the introduction to vision 4, the heavenly court, the Lamb, and the righteous in the afterlife; the voice from heaven*

19. and while we meditated upon these things the Lord touched the eyes of our understandings and they were opened and the glory of the Lord shone round about

*A vision of God, the Lamb, and the sanctified saints in heaven (from vision 4, the heavenly court, the Lamb, and the righteous in the afterlife; the voice from heaven)*

20. and we beheld the glory of the Son on the right (hand<sup>17</sup>) of the Father and received of his fullness

21. and saw the holy angels and they who are sanctified before his throne worshipping God and the Lamb for ever and ever

22. and now after the many testimonies which have been given of him this is the testimony last of all which we give of him that he lives

23a. for we saw him, even on the right hand of God

*The voice from heaven bears record that Jesus is the creator (from vision 4, the heavenly court and the righteous in the afterlife; the voice from heaven)*

23b. And we heard the voice bearing record that he is the only begotten of the Father

24. that by him and through him and of him the worlds are made and were created and the inhabitants thereof are begotten sons and daughters unto God

*Vision 5a: Lucifer rebels and is thrust down from heaven*

25. and this we saw also and bear record that an angel of God who was in authority in the presence of God who rebelled against the Only Begotten Son whom the Father loved who was in the bosom with (of<sup>18</sup>) the Father and was thrust down from the presence of God and the Son

26. and was called Perdition for the heavens wept over him for he was Lucifer even the son of the morning

27. and we beheld and lo he is fallen is fallen even the son of the morning,

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17. *BCVL* adds “hand,” which is the better reading, reproducing the same phrase in Luke 3:7 (Joseph Smith Translation), see also Acts 7:55. Again, most likely a copying error by Williams.

18. Both *BCVL* and *KRB* have “with,” which was secondarily corrected to “of” in each. This appears to be an error in The Vision autograph. Whitmer failed to make this correction suggesting that he was trying to faithfully copy the wording of the autograph.

28. and while we were yet in the spirit the Lord commanded that we should write the vision.

*Introduction to vision 5b. Satan overcomes some of the saints of God; the voice of the Lord*

28b. *for* we beheld Satan that old serpent even the devil who rebelled against God and sought to take the kingdom of our God and his Christ<sup>19</sup>

29. wherefore he maketh war with the saints of God and encompasseth them round about,

*The vision of the fate of those whom Satan overcomes (from vision 5b, Satan overcomes some of the saints of God; the voice of the Lord)*

30. and we saw a vision of the eternal sufferings of those with whom he made war and overcame for thus came the voice of the Lord unto us

31. ***thus saith the Lord concerning all those who know my power and have been made partakers thereof and have suffered themselves through the power of the devil to be overcome unto the denying of the truth and the defying of my power***

*Redactor's insertion #1 into vision 5b (from vision 2, the resurrection of the unjust)*

32. they are they who are the sons of perdition of whom I say it had been better for them to have never been born

33. for they are vessels of wrath doomed to suffer the wrath of God with the devil and his angels throughout all eternity

34. ***concerning whom I have said there is no forgiveness for them in this world nor in the world to come***

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19. In BCVL this reads "Kingdoms of our God, & of his Christ." Whitmer did not make a similar change in v. 28; this suggests a copying error by Whitmer.

35. ***having denied the Holy Ghost after having received it and having denied the only begotten son of the father crucifying him unto themselves and putting him to an open shame***

*Redactor's insertion #2 into vision 5b (from vision 3d, the wicked in the realm of Satan)*

36. these are they who shall go away into the lake of fire and brimstone with the devil and his angels

37. and the only ones on whom the second death shall have any power

38. ***yea verily*** the only ones who shall not be redeemed in the due time of the Lord after the sufferings of his wrath

*Redactor's insertion #3 into vision 5b (from vision 4: the heavenly court, the Lamb, and the righteous in the afterlife; the voice from heaven)*

39. who shall be brought forth by the resurrection of the dead through the triumph and glory of the lamb who was slain who was in the bosom of the father before the worlds were made

40. this is the gospel the glad tidings which the voice out of the heavens bore record unto us

41. that he came into the world even Jesus to be crucified for the world and to bear the sins of the world and to sanctify the world and to cleanse it from all unrighteousness

42. that through him all might be saved whom the father had put into his power

43. ***who glorifyeth the Father and saveth all the works of his hands except those sons of perdition who denieth the son after the father hath revealed him***

44a. ***wherefore, he saves all except them***

*The continuation of vision 5b: Satan overcomes some of the saints of God; the voice of the Lord*

44b. these shall go away into everlasting punishment which is eternal punishment to reign with the devil and his angels throughout all eternity where the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched which is their torment

45. and the end thereof neither the place thereof and their torment no man knoweth

46. **neither was revealed neither is neither will be revealed unto none save to them to whom are made partakers thereof**

47. **nevertheless I the Lord shew it by vision unto many but straightway shutteth it up again**

48. **wherefore the end the width the height the depth and the misery thereof he understandeth not neither any man save them who are ordained unto this condemnation**

*Redactor's insertion #4 into vision 5b (from the conclusion of vision 4: the heavenly court and the righteous in the afterlife; the voice from heaven)*

49a. and we heard the voice saying write the vision

*Conclusion of vision 5b, Satan overcomes some of the saints of God; the voice of the Lord*

49b. **for lo** this is the end of the vision of the eternal sufferings of the ungodly

*Introduction to vision 3a: the celestial world (missing)*

*Redactor's insertion #1 into vision 3a (from vision 2: the resurrections of the just)*

50. **and again we bear record for we saw and heard and this is the testimony of the gospel of Jesus Christ** concerning them who come forth in the resurrection of the just

51. they were they who received the testimony of Jesus and believed on his name **were baptized after the manner of his burial being buried in**

***the water in his name and this according to the commandment which he hath given***

***52. that by keeping the commandments they might be washed and cleansed from all their sins and receive the Holy Ghost by the laying on of the hands of him who is ordained and sealed unto this power***

***53. and who overcome by faith and are sealed by that Holy Spirit of Promise which the Father shedeth forth upon all those who are just and true***

54. they are they who are the church of the first born

55. they are they into whose hands the Father hath given all things

56. they are they who are priests and kings who having of his fullness and of his glory . . .

***57. and are priests of the most high after the order of Melchizedek which was after the order of Enoch which was after the order of the only begotten son***

***58. wherefore as it is written they are Gods even the sons of god***

***59. wherefore all things are theirs whether life or death or things present or things to come, all are theirs and they are Christ's and Christ is God's***

60. and they shall overcome all things

***61. wherefore let no man glory in man but rather let them glory in god who shall subdue all enemies under his feet***

***62. these shall dwell in the presence of God and his Christ for ever and ever***

*Redactor's insertion #2 into vision 3a (from vision 4: the heavenly court, the Lamb, and the righteous in the afterlife; the voice from heaven)*

63. these are they whom he shall bring with him when he shall come in the clouds of heaven to reign on the earth over his people

64. these are they who shall have part in the first resurrection

65. these are they who shall come forth in the resurrection of the just

66. these are they who are come unto mount Zion and unto the city of the Living god, the heavenly place the holiest of all

67. these are they who are come to an innumerable company of Angels to the general assembly and church of Enoch and of the first born

68. these are they whose names are written in heaven where God and Christ is judge of all

69. these are they who are just men made perfect through Jesus the mediator of the new

covenant who wrought out this perfect atonement through the shedding of his own blood.

*From vision 3a: The celestial world*

70. these are they whose bodies are celestial whose glory is that of the sun even God the highest of all whose glory the sun of the firmament is written of as being typical

*Vision 3b: The terrestrial world*

71. and again we saw the terrestrial world **and lo these are they who are the terrestrial** whose glory differeth from that of the [celestial] **church of the first born who have received the fullness of the father** even as that of the moon differeth from the sun of the firmament

72. **behold** these are they who died without Law

73. **and also they who are the spirits of men kept in prison whom the son visited and preached the gospel unto them that they might be judged according to men in the flesh**

74. who received not the testimony of Jesus in the flesh but afterwards received it

75. these are they who are honorable men of the earth who were blinded by the craftiness of men

76. these are they who receive of this glory but not of the fullness

77. these are they who receive of the presence of the son but not of the fullness of the father

78. **wherefore they are bodies terrestrial and not bodies celestial and differeth in glory as the moon differeth from the sun**

79. **these are they who are not valiant in the testimony of Jesus wherefore they obtained not the crown over the kingdoms of our god,**

80. and now this is the end of the vision which we saw of the terrestrial that the lord commanded us to write while we were yet in the spirit,

*Vision 3c: The telestial world*

81. and again we saw the glory of the telestial which glory is that of the lesser even as the glory of the stars differeth from that of the moon in the firmament

82. these are they who receive not the gospel of Christ neither the testimony of Jesus

83. these are they who deny not the holy ghost,

84. these are they who are thrust down to hell

85. these are they who shall not be redeemed from the devil until the last resurrection **until the Lord even Christ the Lamb shall have finished his work**

86a. these are they who receive not of his fullness in the eternal world but of the Holy Ghost

*Redactor's insertion #1 into vision 3c (from vision 3: the 3 worlds are an orderly hierarchy of ministrations*

86b. The telestial receives through the ministration of the terrestrial

87. and the terrestrial through the ministration of the celestial

88. **and also the telestial receive it of the administering of angels who are appointed to minister for them or who are appointed to be ministering spirits for them for they shall be heirs of salvation**

*Redactor's insertion #2 into vision 3c (from vision 3: The 3 worlds are ascending levels of glory)*

89. and thus we saw in the heavenly vision the glory of the telestial which surpasseth all understanding



90. ***and no man knoweth it except him to whom God hath revealed it***

91. and thus we saw the glory of the terrestrial which excelleth in all things the glory of the telestial ***even in glory and in power and might and in dominion***

92. and thus we saw the glory of the celestial which excelleth in all things ***where God even the Father reigneth upon his throne forever and ever***

93. ***before his throne all things bow in humble reverence and giveth glory forever and ever***

94. ***they who dwell in his presence are the church of the first born and they see and they are seen and know as they are known having received of his fullness and of his grace***

95. ***and he maketh them equal in power and in might and in dominion***

*Redactor's insertion # 3 into vision 3c (from vision 3: the 3 worlds compared to heavenly bodies)*

96. and the glory of the celestial is one even as the glory of the son<sup>20</sup> (sun) is one,

97. and the glory of the terrestrial is one even as the glory of the moon is one

98. and the glory of the telestial is one even as the glory of the stars is one for as one star differeth from another star in glory even so differeth one from another in glory in the telestial world

*Redactor's insertion #4 into vision 3c (from vision 5b: Satan overcomes some of the saints of God)*

99. these are they who are of Paul, and of Apollos and of Cephus

*Redactor's insertion # 5 into vision 3c (from vision 2: the resurrection of the unjust)*

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20. This error in spelling is present in *KRB* and *BCVL*, suggesting that it derives from the autograph. Again, it was not corrected by Whitmer.

100. these (they<sup>21</sup>) are they who say they are some of one and some of another some of Christ & some of John and some of Moses and some of Elias and some of Esaisas and some of Isaiah and some of Enoch

101. but received not the gospel neither the testimony of Jesus neither the prophets neither the everlasting covenants

102. last of all these are they who will not be gathered with the saints to be caught

up unto the church of the first born and received into the cloud<sup>22</sup>

*Redactor's insertion #6 into vision 3c (from vision 5b: Satan overcomes some of the saints of God; the voice of the Lord)*

103. these are they who are liars and sorcerers and adulterers and whore-mongers and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie

104. these are they who suffer the wrath of God on the earth

105. these are they who suffer the vengeance of eternal fire

106. these are they who are cast down to hell ***and suffer the wrath of Almighty God until the fullness of times when Christ shall have subdued all enemies under his feet and shall have perfected his work***

107. ***when he shall deliver up the Kingdom and present it unto the Father spotless saying I have overcome and have trodden the winepress alone even the winepress of the fierceness of the wrath of Almighty God***

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21. In v. 100 *KRB* records “these are they” but *BCVL* has “they are they.” Since the surrounding verses uniformly use “these are they” it is more likely that Williams made the change either to harmonize or unintentionally. Thus the presence of the phrase in *BCVL* suggests that Whitmer copied from the autograph (or a copy) rather than a copy of Williams’s entry since it is difficult to understand why Whitmer would make such a change, either intentionally or as a copying error.

22. Both *KRB* and *BCVL* have “these are they.” Yet this verse seems to conclude the fragment and to belong with vv. 100–01, which seemed to use “they are they.” It may be that a change was made by the redactor either to minimize an otherwise awkward transition between vv. 102 and 103 or as a copying error.

108. ***then shall he be crowned with the crown of his glory to sit on the throne of his power to reign forever and ever***

109. ***but behold and lo we saw the glory of the telestial world that they were in number as innumerable as the stars in the firmament of heaven or as the sand upon the sea shore***

110. and heard the voice of the Lord saying these all shall bow the knee and every tongue shall confess ***to him who sitteth upon the throne for ever and ever***

111. for they shall be judged according to their works and every man shall receive according to his own works ***and his own dominion in the mansions which are prepared***

*The conclusion of vision 3c, the telestial world*

112. they shall be servants of the most high but where God and Christ dwells they cannot come worlds without end

113. this is the end of the vision which we saw which we were commanded to write while we were yet in the spirit,

*The conclusion of The Vision*

114. ***But great and marvelous are the works of the Lord and the mysteries of his kingdom which he shewed unto us which surpasseth all understanding in glory and might and in dominion***

115. ***which he commanded us we should not write while we were yet in the spirit and are not lawful for men to utter***

116. ***neither is man capable to make them known for they are only to be seen and understood by the power of the Holy Ghost which God bestows on those who love him and purifies themselves before him*** 117. ***to whom he grants the privilege of seeing and knowing for themselves***

118. ***that through the power and manifestation of the spirit while in the flesh they may be able to bear his presence in the world of glory.***

*From the conclusion of vision 4: the heavenly court, the Lamb, and the righteous in the afterlife; the voice from heaven)*

119. And to God and the Lamb be glory and honor and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

#### IV. Some Observations on the Poems and Visions and the Rationales for the Fragment Assignments

##### *The two poems*

The two poems are interesting examples of early Mormon poetry, about which little has been written. Both draw on Authorized Version Old and New Testament phraseology and simulate Old Testament verse. However, the two poems are different stylistically. As biblical scholar Adele Berlin has noted,<sup>23</sup> poetry in the Hebrew Bible is “largely the product of two elements: terseness<sup>24</sup> and parallelism.”<sup>25</sup> Parallel lines often have word pairs that may be similar or opposite in meaning. Poem 1 more rigidly follows Berlin’s elements, especially if the third lines in vv. 1 and 3 (bold

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23. Adele Berlin, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm B. Eerdmans, 2008), 5.

24. Terseness refers to a limited number (2 to 5) of Hebrew words or “units” in each line.

25. Parallelism refers to two or more lines that express an idea in different ways. Parallel lines may have corresponding “word pairs” that are similar or opposite in meaning, as seen especially in poem 1. Brief reviews of Hebrew Bible verse structure are available in many introductions to the Old Testament, Bible dictionaries, and commentaries on the poetic books. For a more detailed analysis, see Michael P. O’Connor, *Hebrew Verse Structure* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1997) and additional observations on the work in William L. Holladay, “Hebrew Verse Structure Revisited (I): Which Words Count,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 118, no. 1 (1999): 19–32 and “Hebrew Verse Structure Revisited (II): Conjoint Cola, and Further Suggestions,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 118, no. 3 (1999): 401–16.

italics), which interrupt the parallelism, are considered to be secondary additions, perhaps by the redactor.

Poem 1 is written in third person and its theme is God and his attributes. It resembles a Psalmist hymn of praise or divine kingship (e.g., Psalms 135:5–6, 147:5). Poem 2 features the Lord speaking in first person. Its theme is the rewards of human faithfulness. This poem resembles the sayings of many Old Testament prophets that were often introduced with the messenger formula “thus says the Lord.” Interestingly, the editors of *KDC* added “For thus saith the Lord” to the beginning of Poem 2. As noted above, Smith added vv. 6–7 (bolded) to poem 2 during copying into *KDC*. This addition also interrupts the symmetry of the poem. It is tempting to suggest that the first line of v. 7 was originally the missing first line of v. 8 and the original poem had four stanzas of four lines each. At any rate, the presence of the poems at the beginning of *The Vision* immediately informs the reader that *The Vision* is not one of Smith’s typical revelations, which would begin by identifying those addressed and often the person speaking (e.g., the Lord). Rather, *The Vision* is something else.

### *Vision 1: Before creation*

Vision 1 is the only vision whose date and participants are preserved. The scene is precreation “before the world was” (v. 13). The scriptural passage under revision is not given. Nevertheless, vocabulary such as “the beginning,” “only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father,” “bear (record or witness),” and “fullness,” clearly points to the Prologue of the Gospel of John (John 1:1–18), a passage that Smith revised. Unfortunately, the communication between the Son and Smith and Rigdon, presumably a part of the original, has been deleted by the redactor.

### *Vision 2: The resurrections of the just and unjust*

Vision 2 is the only one that explicitly identifies the scriptural reference under revision. The original text seems to have described changes made

to John 5:29 followed by a description of those eligible for the resurrections of the just and the unjust. A fragment describing those who will come forth in the resurrection of the just is explicitly preserved (vv. 50b–56) but has been displaced to vision 3a. The redactor has expanded v. 51a to include the need for baptism and receiving and being sealed by the Holy Ghost for entrance into the celestial world, v. 56 to further explain “priests and kings,” and v. 60 as a guard against arrogance. This unequivocal fragment from the resurrection of the just uses the unusual “they are they” (a phrase that occurs in the Bible only in John 5:39) as opposed to the much more frequent “these are they”<sup>26</sup> which appears in visions 3, 4, and 5. This suggests that “they are they” can be used to identify additional fragments from vision 2.

The fragments identifying those who will come forth in the resurrection of the unjust are more challenging to identify. Two passages (vv. 32–33, 100–02), which begin with “they are they” and describe the wicked, appear to be from this section of vision 2. Verses 100–02 were displaced to their present location in part because of the similar themes of vv. 99 and 100.<sup>27</sup>

In a corrective to John 5:29, Book of Mormon authors had pointed out that the terms “[everlasting] life” and “[everlasting] damnation” more appropriately refer to eternal outcomes than to the resurrection (Helaman 12:26). The New Testament divides humanity into “the just”

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26. “These are they” occurs repeatedly in Mark and Revelation and in several instances in the Book of Mormon, sometimes in short lists (Mosiah 15:12, Alma 41:7). However, the longer “these are they” lists in The Vision are unique to Mormon scripture.

27. If v. 102 derives from vision 2, one would expect the event described, the righteous being caught up to the cloud (1 Thessalonians 4:16–17), to also be a part of the description of those eligible for the resurrection of the just. This event, which is associated with the resurrection in 1 Thessalonians, appears nowhere else in The Vision. It may have been deleted by the redactor from the vision of the resurrection of the just. Alternatively, since Smith revised 1 Thessalonians 4:17, the verse could be from a vision other than the five visions.

and “the unjust” (Matthew 4:45) but makes reference only to the “resurrection of the just” (Luke 14:14). The Book of Mormon prophet Alma taught that both the just and the unjust will be resurrected (Alma 12:8). Vision 2 clarified and expanded this knowledge regarding the two resurrections. In vision 2, those eligible for the resurrection of the just will be faithful Mormons. The future reward of “eternal life” in the Book of Mormon became the receipt of “all things” and the “fullness” of God. Conversely, the wicked can expect to come forth in the resurrection of the unjust and reside in misery with the devil.

*Vision 3: A novel schema of ultimate rewards and punishments*

In the original vision 3, the reader was first introduced to the three “kingdoms of glory” (celestial, terrestrial, and telestial). The date, participants, and circumstances were not included in The Vision. In his revision of 1 Corinthians 15:40–41, Smith inserted the neologism “telestial.” The presence of this term in vision 3 as well as other vocabulary from the Authorized Version of 1 Corinthians 15:40–41 (celestial, terrestrial, sun, moon, stars, etc.) establishes the scriptural connection. Vision 3 appears to originally have been a series of four visions of the four possible “worlds” (celestial, terrestrial, telestial, and the realm of the devil) in which humans could ultimately find themselves. Verses 83–84 emphasize that the inhabitants of the telestial world have not denied the Holy Ghost and will not be redeemed until the last resurrection. This implies that there was a fourth group who did deny the Holy Ghost and will not be redeemed. Fragments from this section appear in vv. 36–38.

The redactor deleted the description of the celestial world (only v. 70 can be unequivocally identified, although there may be others<sup>28</sup>)

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28. For example, v. 85 in vision 3c speaks of the “last resurrection,” implying a statement that those of the celestial world will come forth in the “first resurrection.” This is possibly preserved in v. 64, which the redactor might have placed next to v. 65 (vision 4) because of similar themes. Likewise, v. 71 suggests that

and substituted fragments from visions 2 and 4. The description of the vision of the terrestrial world remains mostly intact (vv. 73 and 78 are the redactor's editorial expansions and v. 79 is an addition that is out of place), showing the literary structure that was likely followed in the originals of visions 3a, 3c, and 3d. The description of the telestial world has multiple insertions between v. 86b and its conclusion at v. 113. The phrase "of the telestial" was dropped from v. 113 (compare to v. 80) to make this verse appear as a conclusion to all of the visions.

In a prior study<sup>29</sup> I suggested that vision 3 originated from a desire to resolve the "four groups/two outcomes" problem of God's justice inherited from the Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon describes four human groups that are accountable for sin: (1) faithful Church members (2 Nephi 31:11–20), (2) the untaught who have not heard the Word (Mosiah 3:11), (3) those who hear but refuse to repent (Mosiah 3:12), and (4) the unpardonable who "deny the Holy Ghost" (Alma 39:6). In the Book of Mormon the first two groups are assigned to "eternal life" and the last two to "everlasting damnation." But the groups are not equal in the gravity of their sins, thus creating the problem of divine justice. This difficulty was hardly new, as Christian theologians had speculated on subdivisions of heaven and hell for centuries.<sup>30</sup> Vision 3 resolved the four groups/two outcomes problem by increasing the number of outcomes to four. Thus the Book of Mormon's "eternal life" was divided into the celestial world for the faithful and terrestrial for the untaught. And "everlasting damnation" was divided into a temporary stay in hell

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those of the celestial world belong to the "church of the first born" and "have received the fullness of the father," so vv. 92–95 may have been derived from the original vision 3a, although with some reworking.

29. Ford, "Debates over Universalism," 15–17.

30. See Colleen McDannell and Bernhard Lang, *Heaven: A History* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University, 1988) and Alice K. Turner, *The History of Hell* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1993).



for the unrepentant (a kind of Mormon Purgatory) and a permanent one for the unpardonable.

*Vision 4: The heavenly court, the Lamb, and the righteous in the afterlife; the voice from heaven*

Although the passages assigned to vision 4 also contain some vocabulary from John's prologue, this is clearly a different vision. In vision 4, Smith and Rigdon beheld God's throne, which was surrounded by "angels" and deceased "sanctified" humans who were "worshiping" God and "the Lamb" "forever and ever." These features suggest a vision similar to that in Revelation 7:9–17. Rather than speaking directly with Jesus as in vision 1, communication was through "the voice [from heaven]," which is helpful in identifying other fragments from this vision. One of these fragments (vv. 40–42) seems out of place as its very positive and encouraging verses were placed into the otherwise negative descriptions of the ultimate sufferings of the wicked. After inserting fragments from visions 2 and 3 into vision 5b, perhaps the redactor wanted also to include something from vision 4. However, this caused some difficulty, forcing the redactor to add his clarifying commentary in vv. 43–44a.

In describing the righteous Christians who had withstood severe earthly persecution, Revelation 7:14 states: "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." Although there is nothing in the fragment at v. 63–69 to definitively connect it with any of the visions, an expansion of Revelation 7:14 in vision 4 continuing "these are they" introductions would be a reasonable option. These descriptions are different than the "these are they" statements of vision 3, as they do not focus so much on criteria during mortality as they do on outcomes afterward. Verses 63–69 include a reworking of Hebrews 12:22–24, a scripture not revised by Smith. Verse 119, the current ending of The Vision, may have been the original ending of vision 4.

If this analysis is correct, then vision 4 interprets the scene of Revelation 7 as the intermediate state (the time between death and resurrection), since the faithful are residing with God and angels in a future world (v. 63), but their resurrection has not yet occurred (v. 64). The Book of Mormon had already described the intermediate state: “concerning the state of the soul between death and the resurrection . . . the spirits of those who are righteous are received into a state of happiness . . . the spirits of the wicked . . . are cast out into outer darkness . . . until the time of their resurrection” (Alma 40:11–14). Vision 4 identified the righteous spirits as faithful Mormons.

It is likely that Smith and supportive Church members would have interpreted vision 4 in the context of contemporary events. At the time of vision 4 “intense opposition to the Church [had] erupted in Ohio.”<sup>31</sup> The Church and its members were under attack in the press and from locals and Church apostates. Like the righteous saints of Revelation 7:13–14 who had faithfully endured “great tribulation,” vision 4 informed those Mormons who remained faithful despite the persecutions that they could expect to reside happily after death with God and the righteous in the heavenly New Jerusalem (v. 66), while awaiting the accompanying of Jesus in his triumphal return to earth (v. 64, see Matthew 24:30), their resurrection (vv. 64–65), and ultimate reward.

*Vision 5: Satan is cast down and wars against the saints*

Vision 5 consists of two visions (5a and 5b) of Satan that were received while revising Revelation 12. Vision 5a (vv. 25–28) describes Lucifer’s rebellion and thrusting down, contains some wording from John’s prologue, and (according to already existing Mormon scripture) describes an event that occurred before creation (Moses 4:3). While these features might suggest an assignment to vision 1, the lack of a description of Lucifer in John’s prologue and the description of the casting out of the

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31. Milton V. Backman, Jr., *The Heavens Resound: A History of the Latter-day Saints in Ohio 1830–1838* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983), 93.

devil in Revelation 12:9 suggest the latter as the scriptural reference, as additionally informed by Isaiah 14:12.

In vision 5b Smith and Williams beheld Satan warring against the saints of God and overcoming some. This vision can confidently be related to Smith's revision of Revelation 12:7–17, not only because of similarities in setting and vocabulary (“Satan,” “that old serpent,” “the Devil,” “make war” [with the righteous]), but because Smith added to Revelation 12:8 a new phrase in scripture: “the kingdom of our God and His Christ.”<sup>32</sup> This phrase is a correction or a deletion of “the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ” in Revelation 12:10. Its presence in vision 5b (v. 28) clearly establishes the scriptural connection. That vision 5b is a different vision than vision 5a can be seen from the different names (“Perdition” and “Lucifer” as opposed to “Satan” and “the devil”), the notice that the vision of “Lucifer” is ending at v. 28, and the different settings in time (before and after creation, respectively).

In vision 5b Smith and Williams saw a vision similar to that of John in Revelation 12:17 that reads: “And the dragon (devil) was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God.” Vision 5b informs us that in this war, some of the saints of God were overcome by the devil (v. 30). Given the Church's difficulties alluded to above, Smith and his readers may well have associated this vision with apostate Mormons such as Ezra Booth and Symonds Ryder. The additions of the redactor in vv. 31, 34–35, 38, 46–48 intensify the descriptions of future suffering for such individuals. Verses 46–48 offer an editorial correction to v. 45, pointing out that such wicked persons may also receive a vision similar to vision 5b. A few months prior to receiving this vision, Smith had given a message similar to vision 5b to the Ohio Saints: “I the Lord have looked upon you and have seen abominations in the Church which profess[es] my name . . . wo[e] be unto them what are deceivers and hypocrites for thus

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32. Faulring, *New Translation*, 577.

saith the Lord, I will bring them to judgment.”<sup>33</sup> Vision 5b seems to end with just such a submission and judgment for the wicked (vv. 110–111).

Verses 99, 103–106 are non-specific descriptions of the characteristics and fate of the wicked that do not seem to belong to visions 2 or 3 and are, therefore, proposed to derive from vision 5b. Verses 99 and 100 are duplications that have apparently been placed together. Verses 99 and 105 reproduce 1 Corinthians 1:12 and Jude 1:7, both of which are related to unfaithful Church members. Presumably these individuals were condemned to an eternal stay with the devil in the original vision 5b. In order to include these passages under the punishments of those destined for the telestial world, whose inhabitants would eventually be redeemed from the devil, the redactor had to add vv. 106b–108, explaining that this stay would be temporary.

### *The conclusion of The Vision*

The conclusion seems to be largely a composition of the redactor with the exception of v. 119 (vision 4). Verses 115–118 expand on the redactor’s editorial assertions in *The Vision* (vv. 48, 90) that humans cannot understand the details of future worlds from the written record, but only by personal revelation.

## V. Some Implications of this Study for the Dating, the Authors, and the Interpretation of *The Vision*

Helpful information for dating *The Vision* autograph includes: (1) contemporary accounts suggesting its existence; (2) evidence presented here that the revision of Revelation 12 had preceded the autograph (see discussion on vision 5b); and (3) publication of *The Vision* in the July 1832 edition of *The Evening and the Morning Star*. Church missionary Samuel Smith recorded in his journal on March 21, 1832 that he had

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33. Revelation received May 9, 1831 and recorded on page 82 of *BCVL* (SLCDC 50:4–6).

read a copy of “the vision . . . which Smith and Rigdon had seen.”<sup>34</sup> Likewise, a local Universalist publication in its March 21 edition stated that “The Mormonites” had a “new revelation” that taught “that the whole human family will . . . be saved.”<sup>35</sup> While a reference to the original vision 3 rather than to The Vision is possible for these two accounts, this is considered unlikely given the redactor’s determination to keep portions of this vision from public view (see below). Thus these accounts suggest a date in early March 1832 for composition of The Vision autograph.

The need for the revision of Revelation 12 prior to composition of the autograph is a potential problem for this dating. Since Williams was officially appointed as a scribe to Smith on July 20, 1832 and Smith noted in a letter dated July 31, 1832 that the New Testament revision was “finished,” some have concluded that Revelation 12–22 was revised between the two dates.<sup>36</sup> The letter stated that “we have finished the translation of the New testament . . . [and] we are making rapid strides in the old book [Testament].”<sup>37</sup> This obviously does not exclude the possibility that some of the revision of Revelation 12–22 could have continued in March with Williams as scribe. Although Smith was living in Hiram and Williams in Kirtland, Smith traveled to Kirtland during this time.<sup>38</sup>

One important motivation for the redactor to undertake his task was to delete portions of the texts of the five visions that were not considered appropriate for general consumption. Although the visions were recorded, presumably in detail, the redactor insists (vv. 46, 90, 116)

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34. Ronald K. Esplin, ed., *The Joseph Smith Papers: Documents Volume 2, July 1831–January 1833* (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2013), 183.

35. *Evangelical Magazine and Gospel Advocate* 3, no. 2 (Mar. 17, 1832): 67.

36. Faulring, *New Translation*, 59.

37. Letter to William W. Phelps in *JSP: Documents Vol. 2*, 267.

38. In a journal entry dated March 8, 1832, Smith noted that he had been in Kirtland from February 29 to March 4. Some biblical revision, and/or composition of The Vision autograph, and/or initial entry into *KRB* could have taken place at this time. See *JSP Manuscript Revelation Books*, 435.

that other humans will need their own personal revelation if they are to gain a similar knowledge of these transcendental worlds. Although the visionaries were repeatedly commanded to record the visions (vv. 28, 49, 80, 113), the redactor was ordered not to write the details (v. 115). Thus the redactor has left us only a shell of the original texts. These considerations likely explain such major deletions as Smith and Rigdon's conversation with Jesus in vision 1 and the vision of the celestial world.<sup>39</sup>

Lastly, we may say something about the authors. The original poems, descriptions of the visions, and lists seem to have been carefully and skillfully crafted. Conversely, the redactor's editorial conflation was done less skillfully, possibly in haste, and frequently with unsatisfactory results. For example, the transitions connecting fragments from different sources are often awkward (vv. 30–31, 39, 43–44a, 50, etc.), some requiring subsequent revision.<sup>40</sup> These observations might suggest that the composer(s) of the original poems/visions and the redactor were separate persons. It is tempting to conclude that it was the scribes, Rigdon and Williams, who composed the originals, which were then edited by Smith, an activity that continued and concluded with the addition of vv. 6–7. It is difficult to envision any others with the necessary knowledge and spiritual authority who would have been involved.

The realization that *The Vision* is a conflation of previously existing texts presents new challenges and opportunities for Mormon historians

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39. That *The Vision* has major deletions has also been pointed out by Robert Woodford in "Historical Development," vol. 2, 927–28. Woodford reproduces a retrospective reminiscence (1892) by Philo Dibble, who claimed to be present during "the vision which is recorded in the Book of Doctrine and Covenants." Dibble recalled that "many things were seen and related that are not written." Dibble was likely a witness to the reception of vision 3. See *Juvenile Instructor* 27, no. 10 (May 15, 1892): 303–04.

40. The awkwardness of v. 39 was noted by the editors of *KDC*, who modified it by replacing "who" with "for all the rest." This change seems ill advised as it could convey the erroneous impression that those consigned to spend eternity with the devil may not be resurrected.

and literary critics. Further work on the individual texts delineated in this analysis might shed additional light on the progressive development of Mormon theology in early 1832. These results also suggest the need to explore other revelations searching for signs of redaction and a prior history. And one wonders whether any of the missing parts from the original texts used by the redactor of *The Vision* might be found elsewhere? Such future work on these and other questions holds the promise of further elucidating one of the most important documents of Mormon literature.