

Journal of Discourses

The *Journal of Discourses* (often abbreviated *J.D.*) is a 26-volume collection of public sermons by early leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church). The first editions of the *Journal* were published in England by George D. Watt, the stenographer of Brigham Young. Publication began in 1854, with the approval and endorsement of the church's First Presidency,^{[1][2]} and ended in 1886. The *Journal* is one of the richest sources of early Latter-day Saint theology and thinking. It includes 1,438 sermons given by 55 church leaders, including most numerously Brigham Young, John Taylor, Orson Pratt, Heber C. Kimball, and George Q. Cannon.

History

The *Journal* was the proposal of George D. Watt, who was Brigham Young's stenographer. Watt had recorded several early sermons in Pitman shorthand, and proposed to the LDS Church that this and other material be published, with printing to be done in England where printing costs were cheaper.^[1] The church's First Presidency immediately approved the idea, and officially granted Watt the privilege of preparing and publishing them.^[1] Watt recorded the material in the first four volumes of sermons himself, and he continued to contribute through volume twelve, but at least eleven other stenographers were involved.

After recording the sermons, Watt transcribed them and sent them to the speaker for careful review.^[3] By far, Young has the most sermons recorded in the *Journal*, with 390. It was said that:

Brigham Young secured stenographic reports of his addresses. As he traveled among the people, reporters accompanied him. All that he said was recorded. Practically all of these discourses (from December 16, 1851 to August 19, 1877) were published in the *Journal of Discourses*, which was widely distributed. The public utterances of few great historical figures have been so faithfully and fully preserved.^[4]

For at least the first volume, Young personally edited his own sermons.^[1] For future volumes, Young helped to select which sermons should be included in the publication, and he assigned his personal secretary to carefully copy-edit the manuscript pages before publication.^[3]

Full title

The full title of the journal was inconsistent across volumes. The title of the first volume was, *Journal of Discourses by Brigham Young, President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, His Two Counsellors, the Twelve Apostles, and Others*. In volume 6, the title was shortened to *Journal of Discourses by President Brigham Young, His Two Counsellors, the Twelve Apostles, and Others*. In some of the first 19 volumes, the word "Delivered" was added to the title to precede the word "by". Some of these volumes omitted the words "and Others" and some replaced the phrase "His Two Counsellors" with "His Counselors".

Volume 20 was the first published after the death of Brigham Young, and the title used was *Journal of Discourses by President John Taylor and Other Members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Also, Remarks by Other Prominent Elders*. Volume 21—published after John Taylor had been ordained as Young's successor to the office of President of the Church—adopted the title *Journal of Discourses by President John Taylor, His Counsellors, the Twelve Apostles, and Others*, which remained consistent until the final 26th volume.

Impact

The *Journal* was highly esteemed in its day and considered to be an authoritative source of Latter-day Saint teachings.^[5] The preface to the 8th volume, written by apostle George Q. Cannon in 1861, stated:

The *Journal of Discourses* deservedly ranks as one of the standard works of the Church, and every rightminded Saint will certainly welcome with joy every Number as it comes forth from the press as an additional reflector of 'the light that shines from Zion's hill.'^[6]

Although it was privately printed, the *Journal of Discourses* was considered to be an official publication of the LDS Church.^[7] However, its contents were not always considered to be official statements of doctrine.^[8] The church currently states that the publication is not an official church publication.^[9] In distancing itself from the work, it has encouraged its members to focus instead on canonized scripture.^[10]

The *Journal of Discourses* is often relied upon by Mormon fundamentalists to justify their beliefs.

See also



**Latter Day Saint
movement portal**

- List of Latter Day Saint periodicals

Notes

1. Watt (2007), p. 145
2. "Letter from the First Presidency", *Journal of Discourses* 1:6 (<http://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/cdm/ref/collection/JournalOfDiscourses3/id/1913>).
3. Watt (2007), p. 147
4. John A. Widtsoe, *Discourses of Brigham Young* (1925), Deseret Book, 1954 edition: ISBN 0-87747-066-9.
5. In 1870, Brigham Young said, of his own discourses, that "when they are copied and approved by me they are as good as Scripture as is couched in this Bible, and if you want to read revelation read the sayings of him who knows the mind of God." "Remarks by President Brigham Young", *Journal of Discourses* 13:261, at 264 (<http://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/cdm/ref/collection/JournalOfDiscourses3/id/4879>).
6. "Preface" (<http://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/JournalOfDiscourses3/id/9604/rec/8>), *Journal of Discourses* 8:3. The notion of what constitutes the LDS Church's standard works has evolved since Cannon made this statement. In 1874, soon after this quote was made, the church's presiding officer George A. Smith used the term to refer to scripture and any other church publication that illustrates "the principles of life and salvation made known in the gospel of Christ". Smith, George A. (1874). "Remarks by President

George A. Smith" (<http://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/cdm/ref/collection/JournalOfDiscourses3/id/6598>). *Journal of Discourses*. Since the early 20th century, the term has referred only to a small number of books of canonized scripture. Williams, Clyde J. (1992), "Standard Works" (http://eom.byu.edu/index.php/Standard_Works), in Ludlow, Daniel H. (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, New York: Macmillan Publishing, pp. 1415–16, ISBN 0-02-879602-0, OCLC 24502140 (<https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/24502140>).

7. Watt at 146 ("Even though the *Journal of Discourses* was a private venture, it was an official church publication.").
8. Watt, Ronald G. (1992), "Journal of Discourses" (http://eom.byu.edu/index.php/Journal_of_Discourses), in Ludlow, Daniel H. (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, New York: Macmillan Publishing, pp. 769–70, ISBN 0-02-879602-0, OCLC 24502140 (<https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/24502140>).
9. "Journal of Discourses" (https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/journal-of-discourses?lang=eng&_r=1), churchofjesuschrist.org, accessed 28 June 2016.
10. Blomberg, Craig L.; Robinson, Stephen E. (2009), *How Wide the Divide?: A Mormon & an Evangelical in Conversation*, InterVarsity Press, p. 68 (Robinson, a Latter-day Saint, states, "During my lifetime, and especially during the last decade, the instructions to members have consistently run along these lines: Never mind the *Journal of Discourses*; return to the Scriptures; stick to the Standard Works.").


Bibliography

- Watt, Ronald G. (2007). "The beginnings of "The Journal of Discourses" : a confrontation between George D. Watt and Willard Richards" (<http://utah.ptfs.com/awweb/awarchive?type=file&item=11939>). *Utah Historical Quarterly*. 75 (2): 134–148.

Further reading

- Holzapfel, Richard Neitzel (2000), "Journal of Discourses", *Encyclopedia of Latter-day Saint History*, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, pp. 592–93.

External links

-  Works related to *Journal of Discourses* at Wikisource
- *Journal of Discourses* (<http://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/cdm/search/collection/JournalOfDiscourses3>) (PDF scans): each page of all 26 volumes, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.
- *Journal of Discourses* (https://archive.org/download/JournalOfDiscourses18541898/Journal_of_Discourses_1854-1898.pdf) Combined PDF scan of all 26 volumes by Signature Books. Browse by Volume, Author or Year.

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