

## WORD OF WISDOM GODLY COUNSEL ON HEALTH

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### WHAT IS THE WORD OF WISDOM?

The Lord gave a revelation on a code of health as “a word of wisdom” to the saints of Zion, now called the Word of Wisdom in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It is a revelation on “the order and will of God in the temporal salvation of all saints in the last days.” It is a set of guidelines given for temporal or physical health and well-being. Joseph Smith received this revelation in 1833 as a request to better understand healthy living practices. It was distributed to the early saints throughout the church, and later ratified by the members as church doctrine and added to the Doctrine and Covenants in 1835.

The basic principles of the word of wisdom outline what substances and foods should or should not be consumed. The revelation also comes with a promise given to those who obey the revelation. The revelation begins:

*A word of wisdom for the benefit of the council of high priests, assembled in Kirtland, and church; and also, the saints in Zion: to be sent greeting: not by commandment, or constraint: but by revelation and the word of wisdom: showing forth the order and will of God in the temporal salvation of all saints in the last days. Given for a principle with promise, adapted to the capacity of the weak, and the weakest of all saints, who are or can be called saints.*

*D&C 80 heading [89:1-3]<sup>1</sup>*

The components of the word of wisdom include some of the following items, which are further explained in below:

- The appropriate use of alcohol;
- Abstinence from tobacco;
- Admonitions against drinking hot drinks;
- Counsel on eating fruits, vegetables, herbs, and meats;

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<sup>1</sup> Note that scripture references from the Doctrine & Covenants (hereafter D&C) come from the 1835 published edition. The standard 2013 edition reference is found in brackets.

- Guidelines on the use of grains; and
- Blessings or promises to those who adhere to the revelation.

The original word of wisdom received by Joseph Smith is not the “law of health” lived by church members today. Yes, the words of the revelation appear the same today in contemporary editions of the Doctrine and Covenants as it did in the original text, except for changes in punctuation. However, the law of health to which the church requires adherence does not closely follow some of the principle as they are outlined in the revelation.

The church has concluded on interpretations about this word of wisdom that differ from the original revelation. Contained in this article are some questions regarding the word of wisdom, its history, how it evolved from counsel to commandment, and what are some of the guiding principles within the revelation. To read and compare contemporary renderings and the original manuscript of the revelation, please see the Comparative Analysis section below.

## A HISTORICAL REVIEW

### WORD OF WISDOM: COUNSEL TO COMMANDMENT

The revelation of the word of wisdom was given to Joseph Smith on February 27, 1833. It originated through a request from Emma Smith, who was concerned about—and probably disgusted by—the use of tobacco in the School of Prophets, especially since it was the same place that Joseph received many of his revelations and where he was writing the inspired version of the Bible. Emma and Joseph lived in the Whitney store where these meetings took place, and she would have to clean the tobacco spit off the floor.

The original revelation was given as a greeting to the saints, “not by commandment or constraint.” However, in church doctrine today, the directive has changed to a commandment obligated upon members in full fellowship as a sign of worthiness. It has evolved from a “principle with promise” to a law with consequence.

Based on the original revelation, the Lord intended this word of wise counsel regarding truths of health to be an invitation for his disciples to learn and to follow. The principles outlined in the word of wisdom have a promise of health, wisdom, knowledge, and temporal salvation. There is no evidence the Lord intended a forced, coerced, or compelled obedience to the principles of this revelation. In contrast, he states otherwise. So, why do we as a church consider the word of wisdom to be a commandment?

### WORD OF WISDOM OBSERVED BY JOSEPH SMITH

When Joseph Smith received this “word of wisdom” from the Lord in 1833 to show “the order and will of God in the temporal salvation of all saints in the last days” it was sent as a revelation, but not as a commandment. The Lord was very clear that it was not given by way of “commandment or constraint but by revelation and the word of wisdom.” Further, he says it is given as a principle with a promise.

Unfortunately, there is very little written about Joseph Smith’s personal view of the word of wisdom. All we have are the accounts of others who witnessed Joseph’s behavior or recorded his statements. We know because of those accounts that after the revelation was given in 1833 Joseph occasionally drank wine (aside from sacramentally), drank beer, drank tea, and smoked cigars. His behavior can either be viewed as a guideline on how he felt the Lord instructed him to follow this principle, or as an aberrance from the Lord’s counsel. Taking our contemporary lens of the word of wisdom, many feel surprised and even offended that Joseph would behave in such a manner. The irony here is that the revelation came through Joseph. How can we retroactively criticize the man who received the revelation based on our own interpretations of its words? It’s like trying to tell a painter that he painted his own painting wrong when we disagree with the interpretation.

Either way, shortly after the original revelation was received, there did arise discrepancies of belief on how it should be lived. Some apparently felt the guidelines in the word of wisdom required strict adherence. There are two accounts of members tried by the high councils of the church during Joseph’s presidency with offenses against the word of wisdom. Granted, both of these had additional charges that were graver than word of wisdom concerns.

The first occurred on August 19, 1835, where Almon Babbit was tried for “not keeping the Word of Wisdom; for stating the Book of Mormon was not essential to our salvation, and that we have no articles of faith except the Bible.” In the proceedings of this court, Elder Babbit admitted “that he had taken liberty to break the Word of Wisdom, from the example of President Joseph Smith, Jun., and others, but acknowledged that it was wrong.”<sup>2</sup> (It should be noted that Joseph Smith was not at this council—he being in Michigan at the time—and there is no record suggesting he knew of its convening.

The irony here is that only two years after the revelation, an elder of the church was charged with disobeying the word of wisdom when it was clearly stated in the revelation it was not to be compelled. Another interesting quagmire is that Elder Babbit “broke” the word of wisdom by following the example of Joseph Smith, the prophet, as well as others. The underlying questions—and perhaps unanswerable—is who was aberrant, Joseph Smith or the high counsel? Was Joseph “breaking” the word of wisdom, or did Joseph understand this principle with promise better than anyone else?

The second occurrence happened a few years later during the trial of David Whitmer. He was charged on five counts, the first for “not observing the Word of Wisdom.” David Whitmer was excommunicated by that court, but not on grounds of breaking the word of wisdom. The council believed “he had offered contempt to the Council” in a letter David wrote to John Murdock. David felt the charges were unrighteous and “not agreeable to the revelation of God,” and refused to attend the court and basically said he was choosing to no longer associate with the church.<sup>3</sup>

It is clear from these two accounts that some believed the word of wisdom required strict adherence, and that disobedience was grounds for church discipline. Yet no evidence is found suggesting Joseph Smith agreed with these conclusions. Joseph Smith seemed to live under the impression there was no crime in smoking a cigar or drinking alcohol or tea. One researcher referenced a journal by Amasa Lyman, stating:

*Joseph Smith tried the faith of the Saints many times by his peculiarities. At one time, he had preached a powerful sermon on the Word of Wisdom, and immediately thereafter, he rode through the streets of Nauvoo smoking a cigar.<sup>4</sup>*

Joseph Smith was the man who received the revelation from God’s own mouth. He knew more about the intent of the revelation than anyone. He was not encumbered by the judgments or perceptions of others. He stated, “I made this my rule: when the Lord commands it, do it.”<sup>5</sup> If the Lord had intended the word of wisdom to be a commandment, Joseph would have lived it as a commandment. Regarding alcohol, Joseph Smith wrote in his entry on April 17, 1840, “This day the Twelve blessed and drank a bottle of wine at Penworthan, made by Mother Moon forty years before.”<sup>6</sup> On another occasion in 1844 he recorded that he stopped for “a glass of beer at Moesers.”<sup>7</sup>

Additionally, in 1843, ten years after the revelation on the word of wisdom, Joseph Smith passed an ordinance as the mayor of Nauvoo on the personal sale of liquors. The ordinance states, “Section 1. Be it ordained by the City Council of Nauvoo, that the Mayor of the city be and is hereby authorized to see or give spirits of any quantity as he in his wisdom shall judge to be for the health and comfort, or convenience of such travelers or other persons as shall visit his house from time to time.”<sup>8</sup> These are just a few of several records that exhibit Joseph Smith’s example of living the word of wisdom, which gives us great understanding of the intent of the word of wisdom.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Smith, Jr., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1973) 2:252. (hereafter *History of the Church*.)

<sup>3</sup> *History of the Church*, 3:18-19.

<sup>4</sup> “Joseph Smith as an Administer” (BYU Masters Thesis, May 1969).

<sup>5</sup> *History of the Church*, 2:170.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 4:120.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 6:424. The comment that he “drank a glass of beer at Moesers” has been removed from the published version of the *History of the Church* but is preserved in the *Millennial Star* 23, no. 45 (9 November 1861): 720.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, 6:110.

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**EVOLVING INTO A “TEST OF FELLOWSHIP”**

There was a distinct change in perspective of the word of wisdom from Joseph Smith to Brigham Young. Several years after the original revelation was given, Brigham Young as the president of the church strongly encouraged members to follow the word of wisdom. “I said to the Saints at our last annual Conference, the Spirit whispers to me to call upon the Latter-day Saints to observe the Word of Wisdom, to let tea, coffee, and tobacco alone, and to abstain from drinking spirituous drinks. This is what the Spirit signifies through me.”<sup>9</sup> The statement brings a clear reminder of the importance of this principle yet comes with overtones of necessity to comply. He continued:

*If the Spirit of God whispers this to his people through their leader, and they will not listen or obey, what will be the consequences of their disobedience? Darkness and blindness of mind with regard to the things of God will be their lot.*<sup>10</sup>

This divergence from the Lord’s original counsel discloses Brigham Young’s belief regarding obedience to the word of wisdom. Without stating outright that it must be lived, his language is coercive. Yet even with the ardent encouragement to live the principles in the word of wisdom, Brigham Young did not feel he should compel people to live the principle, though he did use some energetic coercion throughout his many sermons.

In one statement early on, Brigham Young stated, “Some of the brethren are very strenuous upon the ‘Word of Wisdom’, and would like to have me preach upon it, and urge it upon the brethren, and make it a test of fellowship. I do not think I shall do so. I have never done so.”<sup>11</sup> This statement suggests a movement among some the “the brethren” to compel strict compliance to the word of wisdom as a “test of fellowship”, or evidence of faithfulness. One of these may have been Wilford Woodruff. In 1989, Wilford Woodruff, then president of the church, stated in a presidency meeting with the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve that he considered the word of wisdom to be a commandment.<sup>12</sup>

Prior to Wilford Woodruff’s presidency, John Taylor in 1886 felt there was inherent iniquity in not complying with the tenets of the word of wisdom. He continued to assert that the word of wisdom should not be obligated, and though it appears from his writing that he believed a man’s worthiness is affected by adherence to those principles, he also felt it did not inhibit a person from entering the temple. In his letter to John McAllister and David Cannon in November 30, 1886, John Taylor as the president of the church stated:

*The Word of Wisdom as originally given was sent not by commandment or constraint; but ‘by revelation on the the [sic] Word of Wisdom, for the temporal salvation of all Saints in these days,’ and no rule has been formulated, nor law proclaimed, nor counsel given since that time which makes its strict observance, necessary to receive ordinances of life and salvation in the temples. There are many cases where people may violate the strict letter of the Word of Wisdom, and yet be following its spirit in doing so....and yet...we are opposed to the common use of these articles by Latter-day Saints. A man or a woman who disregards the Word of Wisdom and still profess to be a Latter-day Saint ought to be ashamed of their conduct. A judicious bishop will not give a recommend to such a person without first taking up a labor with him or her against the indulgence in the habits mentioned in the Word of Wisdom. No person who flagrantly violates that word should ask for a recommend.*<sup>13</sup>

A mental shift evolved regarding obedience to the word of wisdom, where the word of wisdom changed from a principle (not a commandment or to be constrained) with a promise (not a condemnation or judgment) to a condition of obedience, which created belief that anyone not living those principles commits a sin. Reviewing the original revelation, there is no indication the Lord finds offense in not complying to this principle of health, aside from the threat of the destroying angel who will pass over only those who “keep and do these sayings, walking in obedience to the commandments” (D&C 80:3

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<sup>9</sup> Brigham Young, *Discourses of Brigham Young*, comp. John A. Widtsoe (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1954).

<sup>10</sup> Brigham Young, *Discourses of Brigham Young*, comp. John A. Widtsoe (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1954).

<sup>11</sup> Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, ed. George D. Watt et al (London: Latter-Day Saints’ Book Depot, 1854-1886) 9:35. (Here after *Journal of Discourses*.)

<sup>12</sup> “Minutes of First Presidency and Council of Twelve Meeting,” *Journal History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (5 May 1898) as cited in Thomas G. Alexander, “The Word of Wisdom: From Principle to Requirement,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 14, no 3 (Autumn 1981): 78–88.

<sup>13</sup> John Taylor, letter to John D. T. McAllister and David H. Cannon (Nov. 30, 1886) in *The Development of LDS Temple Worship, 1846-2000: A Documentary History*, ed. Anderson, Devery (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2011)

[89:18]). Obviously, there are consequences in health, but at no time has there been a declaration prior to Brigham Young's presidency that there was judgment or sin in disregarding or deviating from the word of wisdom.

In that same meeting mentioned above in which President Woodruff said that he viewed word of wisdom as a commandment, "one member [of the meeting] read [to the group] from the twelfth volume of the Journal of Discourses a statement by Brigham Young that seemed to support the notion that the Word of Wisdom was a commandment of God."<sup>14</sup> They may have been referencing Brigham Young's statement, "I know that some say the revelations upon these points [the word of wisdom] are not given by way of commandment. Very well, but we are commanded to observe every word that proceeds from the mouth of God."<sup>15</sup>

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## INFLUENCE DURING THE PROHIBITION

By the late 1800s the transition from counsel to commandment had nearly become complete. This belief was justified by Joseph F. Smith in these words:

*The reason undoubtedly why the Word of Wisdom was given—as not by 'commandment or restraint' was that at that time, at least, if it had been given as a commandment it would have brought every man, addicted to the use of these noxious things, under condemnation; so the Lord was merciful and gave them a chance to overcome, before He brought them under the law.<sup>16</sup>*

Joseph F. Smith's "undoubted" conclusion is a bold statement considering that up to that point there had not been a public directive given by the Lord to change this principle to a law. The Lord at no point "brought [the people] under the law" of health the church lives today. The men leading the church did that. The closest thing we get to a revelation by the turn of the century is a "statement by Brigham Young that seemed to support the notion that the Word of Wisdom was a commandment of God" (emphasis added).

Joseph F. Smith and Heber J. Grant were major catalysts in changing the church's stand on the word of wisdom. President Grant's words are very pointed in a conference address he gave in April 1925.

*I regret to say that there is becoming evident among the Saints, a lack of interest and a looseness in observing the Word of Wisdom.... No man who uses tobacco is worthy to stand as high councilor in this Church. He owes it to himself to clean himself up or step aside and allow a man with more faith, with more manhood, with more integrity to God and his laws, to take the position that he occupies. President Wilford Woodruff from this stand, many years ago, called upon every man holding the Priesthood and occupying any office in the Church, to obey the Word of Wisdom or to resign and step aside. I reiterate that men who do not obey the Word of Wisdom are not worthy to stand as examples before the people, to be invited into private priesthood meetings and to discuss matters for the welfare of the Church of God. Their disobedience shows a lack of faith in the work of God.<sup>17</sup>*

When the prohibition movement came to Utah, "the Latter-day Saints were already working internally before 1906 to oppose the consumption of alcoholic beverages and to interdict tea, coffee and tobacco among members. The interpretations given by nineteenth-century leaders to the Word of Wisdom and the then accepted view that Brigham Young had declared it a commandment provided part of the basis for this emphasis in the Church" on prohibition.<sup>18</sup> According to church leaders at that time, Brigham Young's assertion that following every word that proceeds from God's mouth regarding the word of wisdom became his declaration that the word of wisdom was a commandment and no longer an invitation.

*Most vocal among General Authorities in his opposition to the use of tea, coffee, alcohol and tobacco was Heber J. Grant who would become one of the leaders of the state prohibition movement. He was particularly outraged at the church members who served liquor*

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<sup>14</sup> Thomas G. Alexander, "The Word of Wisdom: From Principle to Requirement." *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 14, no 3 (Autumn 1981): 78–88.

<sup>15</sup> *Journal of Discourses*, 13:182-183

<sup>16</sup> Joseph F. Smith, Conference Report (October 1913).

<sup>17</sup> Heber J. Grant, Conference Report (April 1925).

<sup>18</sup> Thomas G. Alexander, "The Word of Wisdom: From Principle to Requirement." *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 14, no 3 (Autumn 1981): 78–88.



*and at some of the Twelve who opposed the prohibition of liquor at Saltair. He was also concerned with the indifference some of the General Authorities demonstrated to the feelings of Protestant ministers who complained about the Saltair saloon.*<sup>19</sup>

There was a change in church policy regarding temple recommends during the presidency of Heber Grant. His passionate push toward prohibition became the church's focal point of action. In the 1944 version of the Handbook of Instructions for the church, it stated that temple recommends "are not to be issued to persons who do not sustain the General Authorities of the Church; who are not honest tithesayers or who do not undertake to become honest tithesayers, as distinguished from part tithesayers or token payers; who do not observe the Word of Wisdom or express a willingness to undertake to observe the Word of Wisdom; and who are not otherwise fully worthy by believing in and living the gospel...."

### TODAY'S PERSPECTIVE ON THE WORD OF WISDOM

President David O. McKay, successor of President Grant, likewise held the same viewpoint. "I explained that people who go to the temple should be full tithesayers and should observe the Word of Wisdom; that as a matter of fact, it is a question of their faith. Men who have a testimony of the Gospel and believe it should contribute to it and if they fail to keep their promise to observe these commandments the Bishop has a right to withhold the recommend, not wholly on the failure to pay tithing but because of their lack of faith in the Gospel."<sup>20</sup> Note that in less than 100 years (and actually much earlier), there is a significant change in philosophy from Brigham Young, who said that the word of wisdom should not be considered a test of someone's faithfulness, to Heber Grant and David McKay who asserted that a man's faith is determined on how strictly he adheres to the principles of the word of wisdom.

By 1960, a bishop could not only withhold a temple recommend from a person for their failure to live by the principles of the word of wisdom, but a person's adherence to the word of wisdom was an official indication of worthiness according to church policy. Regarding temple recommends, the General Handbook of Instruction in 1960 stated the following:

*No person should receive a recommend for any purpose unless he is believed to be worthy in every respect. Unworthiness disqualifies him. Before issuing recommends bishops will assure themselves by searching inquiry that the recipients are free from all kinds of immoral practices; that they have no affiliation, in sympathy or otherwise, with any of the apostate groups that are running counter to the established order of the Church; that they sustain local and General Authorities of the Church; are full tithesayers, or will covenant to become such; that they observe the Word of Wisdom, abstaining from tea, coffee, tobacco, and liquor; and that they are fully worthy as evidenced by their observance of the whole gospel law including abiding by all conditions of their temple obligations.*

Clear guidelines appear that implicate sin upon anyone who drinks tea, coffee, or "liquor", or uses tobacco, which by logical deduction means that by 1960 the church had officially taken the position that the word of wisdom was no longer a principle, but was an absolute law.

That position is still held today. According to current church vernacular, the word of wisdom is called the "law" of health. It is considered a commandment indeed. In current church practices, if a person wants to join the church, or an existing member wants to be in full fellowship with the church or wants to have a temple recommend, he or she must strictly adhere to the guidelines of the word of wisdom found in church policy, not from the original revelation. The underlying problem with this is two-fold for the church:

1. The "law of health" required by the church today is not the word of wisdom revealed by the Lord. It is close, but different, therefore we do not currently live what the Lord revealed; and
2. Our enforcement of this "law of health" contradicts the revelation stating specifically that it was given "not by commandment, or constraint", and by compelling others to live it we in turn break the Lord's directive.

On both counts, we have deviated from the counsel of God and have made a law unto ourselves.

<sup>19</sup> Heber J. Grant Diary (June 30, 1898, August 17, 1900, and July 11, 1901) as cited in Thomas G. Alexander, "The Word of Wisdom: From Principle to Requirement." *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 14, no 3 (Autumn 1981): 78–88.

<sup>20</sup> David O. McKay Diary, (July 9, 1954).

## IS THE WORD OF WISDOM A COMMANDMENT?

## A “GREETING, NOT BY COMMANDMENT OR CONSTRAINT”

Joseph Smith received counsel from the Lord to show “the order and will of God in the temporal salvation of all saints in the last days.” It was given to him as a revelation, but not as a commandment. The Lord clearly stated it was not given by way of “commandment or constraint but by revelation and the word of wisdom.” Further, he says it is given as a principle (or a rule of conduct or tenant of truth) with a promise. In this revelation, the Lord does not imply that this code of conduct for health was intended to be enforced in future generations, and the wording of that revelation specifically states it is not to be constrained upon others. Synonyms of constrain include the following: to force, to compel, to obligate, to coerce, to make, or to pressure. Taking the appropriate context of the wording in the timeframe of this revelation, the entry for the word constraint in the 1828 Webster’s Dictionary is listed as follows:

*CONSTRAINT, noun Irresistible force, or its effect; any force, or power, physical or moral, which compels to act or to forbear action, or which urges so strongly as to produce its effect upon the body or mind; compulsion; restraint; confinement.*

*Not by constraint but by my choice, I came.*

*Feed the flock of God, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint but willingly. 1 Peter 5:2.*

Based on the original revelation, it appears the Lord intended this word of wise counsel to be an invitation for his disciples to learn and follow his precepts. The principles have a promise of health, wisdom, knowledge, and temporal salvation. There is no evidence the Lord intended a forced, coerced, or compelled obedience to the principles of this revelation. In glaring contrast, it states otherwise. This is consistent with many of the laws and principles in heaven. Coercion is not the way if heaven.

## A “TEST OF FELLOWSHIP”

To review a history of how the church transformed the word of wisdom from Godly counsel to a commandment, please refer to the previous section, Word of Wisdom: Counsel to Commandment. That history will not be repeated here. Yet, there was a divergence from the Lord’s original revelation beginning with Brigham Young and other early church leaders. The revelation began to change from an invitation to live a principle with a promise of physical salvation to an implication that not living by this standard will “bring darkness and eventually apostasy.” Yet even using strong and pointed language, he did not use obedience to the word of wisdom as a “test of fellowship.”

That change came years later. There is evidence in the statement of Joseph F. Smith that he felt the word of wisdom was commandment. He said, “the reason undoubtedly why the Word of Wisdom was given—as not by ‘commandment or restraint’ was that at that time, at least, if it had been given as a commandment it would have brought every man, addicted to the use of these noxious things, under condemnation; so the Lord was merciful and gave them a chance to overcome, before He brought them under the law.”<sup>21</sup>

Heber Grant made clear that strict obedience to the word of wisdom constituted a “test of fellowship” in his conference address on April 1925. “I regret to say that there is becoming evident among the Saints, a lack of interest and a looseness in observing the Word of Wisdom.... No man who uses tobacco is worthy to stand as high councilor in this Church. He owes it to himself to clean himself up or step aside and allow a man with more faith, with more manhood, with more integrity to God and his laws, to take the position that he occupies.”<sup>22</sup>

These changes bring to question whether the statements above sounds like a change in the Lord’s words or will, or a change in the minds and beliefs of men. It is clear from the historical recounting of Heber Grant’s experiences that prohibition encompassed an important emotional and political aspect of his life. This by no means disqualified President Grant from receiving instruction from the Lord regarding the tenets of the word of wisdom, but it did greatly influence his judgment in this area. (And there is no publicly available revelation stating the Lord changed the revelation.)

<sup>21</sup> Joseph F. Smith, Conference Report (October 1913).

<sup>22</sup> Heber J. Grant, Conference Report (April 1925).

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## COUNSEL OR COMMANDMENT?

The question that keeps coming to mind is this: If the Lord truly wanted to change the word of wisdom from counsel given “not by commandment or constraint” to a commandment or law defining the worthiness of men and women and their rights to eternal blessings in the temple, would that not come as a direct revelation like the original? If it did come that way, where is that revelation? We can read the original in the Doctrine and Covenants and elsewhere, but there is no other revelations on this subject from the Lord mouth. The Lord set a divine pattern with Joseph Smith on how he communicates with his church; to claim the Lord has changed those patterns since then leads to unrighteous dominion.

When Emma Smith complained to Joseph her concerns regarding the use of tobacco at the school of prophets, Joseph received a quick and decisive revelation, which is written for all to read. Would the Lord not provide a new revelation in a similar manner to the same or another prophet if he changed the parameters? Is that not the pattern we see with Joseph Smith’s revelations: when the Lord changes directive, he says so in a new revelation? If that new revelation was received, why was it never shared with the members and where is it accessible to read? How are we held accountable to revelations we cannot read our review?

The Lord does not do things in secret. If he changed his mind on something, he would send another revelation. It does not appear that the Lord did give directive for the church members or its leaders to compel people to live the word of wisdom or to change its parameters. The closest thing to a revelation we get by the turn of the century (which does not qualify according to the patterns of God outlined here) is a “statement by Brigham Young that seemed to support the notion that the Word of Wisdom was a commandment of God.”<sup>23</sup>

So, does this answer the question? Is the word of wisdom a commandment or is it not a commandment? The only revelation we have directly from the Lord states it is not a commandment, and as always, his word trumps all else. According to church policy, it is a commandment. Yet, it does not appear that anyone can produce a valid revelation from the Lord to support that policy. Rather than a decisive word from the Lord, a conclusion appears to have evolved from the influences of passionate prohibitionists and through inferences of statements made long ago.

The word of the Lord—in his own words, from his own voice—dictated to Joseph Smith still stands as it did when it was first received nearly 200 years ago: a word of wisdom given “not by commandment or constraint but by revelation and the word of wisdom shewing forth the order and will of God in the temporal salvation of all saints in the last days given for a principle with promise.”

In sum, if the word of wisdom has become a commandment in our minds, it is because the evolution of thought over a century beginning with a “statement by Brigham Young that seemed to support” that notion has eclipsed the dictation of the Lord directly to Joseph Smith. Unless anyone can produce a revelation from God to counter his original guidelines to Joseph, that original revelation still stands as the official word of the Lord.

## THE WORD OF WISDOM PAST VS. PRESENT: WHICH IS RIGHT?

### A WORD OF WISDOM: AS ORIGINALLY REVEALED

The word of wisdom was given as a revelation to Joseph Smith in 1833 as guidelines to physical health. It was given by Joseph as a “principle with a promise” and intended as a greeting from the Lord “not by commandment or constraint, but by revelation and the word of wisdom, showing forth the order and will of God in the temporal salvation of all saints in the last days” (Heading to D&C 80 [89:2-3]).

According to the original revelation on the word of wisdom, the Lord admonishes against the following substances:

- Wine, except in use of sacraments. Wines used for sacramental purposes should be “pure wine of the grape of the vine, of your own make” (D&C 80:1 [89:5-6]).
- “Strong drinks”, which are used “not for the belly, but for the washing of your bodies” (D&C 80:1 [89:7]).
- Tobacco, which is considered “not good for man; but is an herb for bruises, and all sick cattle” (D&C 80:1 [89:8]).
- “Hot Drinks”, which are not otherwise defined (D&C 80:1 [89:9]).

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<sup>23</sup> Thomas G. Alexander, “The Word of Wisdom: From Principle to Requirement.” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 14, no 3 (Autumn 1981): 78–88.



Part of the revelation concerns the appropriate use wholesome fruits, vegetables, and grains. The Lord encouraged the use of the following foods:

- Wholesome herbs used “in the season thereof, and every fruit in the season thereof” with “prudence and thanksgiving” (D&C 80:2 [89:10-11]).
- Meat or “flesh” of the “beasts and of the fowls of the air” to be used “sparingly” (D&C 80:2 [89:12-13]).
- Grains “to be the staff of life” (D&C 80:2 [89:14]). Regarding grains, the Lord further states, “All grain is good for the food of man.... Nevertheless wheat for man, and corn for the ox, and oats for the horse, and rye for the fowls, and for swine, and for all beasts of the field, and barley for all useful animals, and for mild drinks; as also other grain” (D&C 80:3 [89:16-17]).
- “Wild Animals” to be used “only in times of famine, and excess of hunger” (D&C 80:2 [89:14-15]).

The final portion of the revelation is a promise to those who adhere to the principles of the revelation. The following promises are outlined:

- Physical health “in their navel, and marrow to their bones” (D&C 80:3 [89:18]).
- Wisdom and knowledge, “great treasures of knowledge, even hidden treasures” (D&C 80:3 [89:19]).
- Physical strength. They “shall run and not be weary, and shall walk and not faint” (D&C 80:3 [89:20]).
- Spiritual protection that the “destroying angel shall pass by them...and not slay them” (D&C 80:3 [89:21]).

According to the guidelines of this revelation, those who choose to obey its precepts receive physical blessings and protection. Truly it is an “order and will of God” regarding the “temporal salvation of all saints in the last days”. Yet it is given as an invitation to those will receive it. Nowhere within the revelation is condemnation for not following the principles in these guidelines (other than physical consequences), nor does it imply increased worthiness to those who do abide the principle (again, other than physically).

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### THE LAW OF HEALTH: AS DEFINED BY THE CHURCH TODAY

The doctrine of the word of wisdom, as set forth currently in the Churches is Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints according to the True to the Faith booklet under the topic “Word of Wisdom” is as follows:

*The Word of Wisdom is a law of health revealed by the Lord for our physical and spiritual benefit. In this revelation, which is recorded in section 89 of the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord tells us which foods are good for us to eat and which substances are not good for our bodies. He promises spiritual and physical blessings for obeying the Word of Wisdom.*

*In the Word of Wisdom, the Lord commands us not to take the following substances into our bodies:*

- *Alcoholic drinks (see D&C 89:5–7).*
- *Tobacco (see D&C 89:8).*
- *Tea and coffee (see D&C 89:9; latter-day prophets have taught that the term “hot drinks” refers to tea and coffee).*

*Anything harmful that people purposefully take into their bodies is not in harmony with the Word of Wisdom. This is especially true of illegal drugs, which can destroy those who become addicted to them. Stay entirely away from them. Do not experiment with them. The abuse of prescription drugs also leads to destructive addiction.*

The Lord declares that the following foods are good for our bodies:

- *Vegetables and fruits, which should be used “with prudence and thanksgiving” (see D&C 89:10–11).*
- *The flesh “of beasts and of the fowls of the air,” which is “to be used sparingly” (see D&C 89:12–13).*
- *Grains such as wheat, rice, and oats, which are “the staff of life” (see D&C 89:14–17).*

In summarizing the word of wisdom, the church has essentially defined the word of wisdom as abstaining from five forbidden substances: alcohol (in all forms), coffee, tea, tobacco, and harmful drugs. Part of the doctrine is healthy eating, and there is some admonition to live a healthy lifestyle, but the emphasis is on avoiding those five substances.

An additional clarification was published in the youth magazine, the *New Era*, on the word of wisdom as follows:

*Modern prophets and apostles have frequently taught that the Word of Wisdom warns us against substances that can harm us or enslave us to addiction. So, with those facts in mind, let's try to clear up a few items that Latter-day Saint youth today may find a little confusing.*

**Vaping, E-Cigarettes, Etc.** *Electronic vaporizers or e-cigarettes are devices people use to inhale mist, usually with various flavors.... Vaping is clearly against the Word of Wisdom.*

**Mocha, Latte, Macchiato, Etc.** *The word coffee isn't always in the name of coffee drinks. So, before you try what you think is just some new milkshake flavor, here are a couple of rules of thumb: (1) If you're in a coffee shop (or any other shop that's well-known for its coffee), the drink you're ordering probably has coffee in it, so either never buy drinks at coffee shops or always ask if there's coffee in it. (2) Drinks with names that include café or caffè, mocha, latte, espresso, or anything ending in -cino are coffee and are against the Word of Wisdom.*

**Green Tea, Iced Tea** *Green tea and black tea are both made from the leaves of the exact same tea plant. The only difference is that the leaves in black tea are fermented and in green tea they're not. They're both tea and against the Word of Wisdom.... Also, iced tea is still tea.*

**Marijuana, Opioids** *Marijuana may be legal for medicinal or even recreational use in a lot of places now, but that doesn't mean that any use is suddenly not against the Word of Wisdom. Medical uses are being studied, but just like many pain medications such as opioids, marijuana is an addictive substance. Such habit-forming substances should be avoided except under the care of a competent physician, and then used only as prescribed.”<sup>24</sup>*

Though not stated in either of these summaries of the word of wisdom, strict adherence to these guidelines is required for admittance into the temple. Strict adherence to the original revelation will not qualify, since there have been specific changes or alterations in interpretation. What has evolved over time in the church is a hierarchy of priorities to live. If a person abstains from the five forbidden substances, he or she is considered eligible for full fellowship in the church and a temple recommend (assuming they live by the other qualifying parameters, too), even if they ignore all other aspects of the church's law of health. Conversely, if a man or woman lives strictly to healthy living as outlined in the original revelation, but does not abstain from all five of the church's banned substances, his or her recommend is in jeopardy.

In the church today, adherence to the principles of the word of wisdom as written in the church policies constitutes the “personal holiness” of an individual. Russell Nelson, current president of the church stated, “All requirements to enter the temple relate to personal holiness.”<sup>25</sup> The eleventh temple recommend interview questions asks if the interviewee understands and lives by the word of wisdom.

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## SUMMARIZING THE DIFFERENCES

There are distinct differences in the word of wisdom as read in the original revelation and as defined in church policy. Which is correct? As most aspects of church policy are derived from changes of interpretation or perspective of various leaders over the past 180 years, and the original revelation comes directly from God's mouth through Joseph Smith, the original revelation must be correct. God's voice always trumps all others.

Below are the main differences between the original revelation and current church interpretation and policy.

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<sup>24</sup> “Vaping, Coffee, Tea, and Marijuana,” *New Era* (August 2019).

<sup>25</sup> Russell Nelson, “Closing Remarks,” *Ensign* (November 2019).

	<b>Original Revelation</b>	<b>Current Church Policy</b>
Compliance Requirements:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not a commandment</li> <li>• Not to be compelled</li> <li>• Will of God for temporal salvation</li> <li>• Sent by greeting to all Saints</li> <li>• Principle with a promise</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A commandment</li> <li>• Required for temple admittance</li> <li>• Defines personal holiness</li> <li>• Requirement for all Saints for spiritual salvation</li> <li>• Law with consequences of discipline</li> </ul>
<b>Beverages</b>		
Alcohol:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No strong drink</li> <li>• No wine, except for sacraments if it is of your own make</li> <li>• Barely is meant for mild drinks (e.g., beer)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No alcohol of any kind</li> </ul>
Other Drinks:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No hot drinks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No coffee (hot or cold), or anything with coffee in it</li> <li>• No green or black tea (hot or cold); some herbal teas are acceptable</li> </ul>
<b>Substances</b>		
Tobacco:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No tobacco for man</li> <li>• Used for bruises and sick cattle</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No tobacco</li> <li>• No nicotine</li> <li>• No vaping or e-cigarettes</li> </ul>
Other Substances:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wholesome herbs for the constitution, nature, and use of man</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No harmful drugs</li> <li>• No marijuana (unless prescribed by a competent physician)</li> <li>• Avoid habit-forming substances (unless prescribed by a competent physician)</li> </ul>
<b>Foods</b>		
Fruits, Vegetables, and Herbs:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wholesome herbs for the constitution, nature, and use of man</li> <li>• Every herb and fruit used in the season thereof</li> <li>• Use with prudence and thanksgiving</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eat fruits and vegetables in any season</li> <li>• Use with prudence and thanksgiving</li> </ul>
Meats:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flesh of beasts and fowls for use of man</li> <li>• Use with thanksgiving</li> <li>• Use sparingly at all times not only winter or famine</li> <li>• Wild animals for famine and excessive hunger only</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eat flesh of beasts and fowls</li> <li>• Use sparingly only in times of winter and famine</li> </ul>
Grains:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All grains are good for man and beast and are the staff of life</li> <li>• Wheat for man, corn for the ox, oats for horses, rye for fowls and swine, and for all beasts of the field, barley for all useful animals, and for mild drinks, as also other grain</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eat all grains</li> <li>• Grains are the staff of life</li> </ul>

Brigham Young set the standard on future interpretations of the church on the word of wisdom. He said, “I know that some say the revelations upon these points [the word of wisdom] are not given by way of commandment. Very well, but we are commanded to observe every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.”<sup>26</sup>

<sup>26</sup> *Journal of Discourses*, 13:182-183.

Though it is true the Lord instructed his covenant children to “live by every word that proceedeth forth from the mouth of God” (D&C 4:7 [84:44]), that does not imply compelling a person to live those words, for the Lord also said “behold it is not meet that I should command in all things, for he that is compelled in all things, the same is a slothful and not a wise servant: wherefore he receiveth no reward” (D&C 18:6 [58:26]).

Additionally, condemnation is given to those who abuse their priesthood authority by compelling others to do their will. Joseph stated that the powers of God and even the authority of our priesthood would be revoked if “we undertake to cover our sins, or to gratify our pride, or vain ambition or to exercise control or dominion or compulsion upon the souls of the Children of Men in any degree of unrighteousness.”<sup>27</sup>

Another inherent problem to forcing someone to live these principles is that they become accountable to live other’s interpretations of the word of wisdom and not what is dictated to their hearts and minds by the Holy Ghost.

## EXPOUNDING THE WORD

### WHAT IS THE LORD’S VIEW ON ALCOHOL?

#### WHAT DOES THE TERM ‘STRONG DRINK’ MEAN?

To truly understand the revelation given by God to Joseph Smith, we need to also understand the terms or language that is used in that revelation. The terms wine and strong drink have a deep scriptural meaning both historically and symbolically. Strong drink comes from the Hebrew root word שָׁכַר (shā-kār) which means an intensely intoxicating drink and infers drunkenness, be that from fruit, grains, or other means. This could mean strong wines, vodkas, whiskeys, strong beers, or any other drink that causes intoxication.

The doctrine outlined in the church in the True to the Faith booklet indicates it is a commandment not to drink alcoholic drinks. However, this viewpoint is contrary to the teachings found within other scriptures. Based on a review of scriptural references to wine and strong drink, there are only a few instances where a person or group of people were prohibited from drinking such substances, among these were the sons of Aaron who ministered in the tabernacle and the Nazarites (See Leviticus 10:9 and Numbers 6:3).<sup>28</sup>

Aside from those specific groups, wine and strong drink were accepted and used among the Israelites. The Lord’s guideline for those who had to liquidate their tithing because of distance to bring to the tabernacle was that they could “bestow that money for whatsoever thy soul lusteth after, for oxen, or for sheep, or for wine, or for strong drink, or for whatsoever thy soul desireth; and thou shalt eat there before the Lord thy God, and thou shalt rejoice, thou, and thine household” (Deuteronomy 14:26). Also, it was instructed that “in the holy place shalt thou cause the strong wine to be poured unto the Lord for a drink offering”. Both instances use the same Hebrew root (שָׁכַר | shā-kār). It’s clear the Lord at that time did not condemn the drinking of strong drinks.

#### AVOIDING INTOXICATION

Throughout the Old and New Testaments, there is warning against abuse of wine and strong drinks. It is clear that moderate use of alcoholic drinks was acceptable to the Lord, but drunkenness was displeasing to God. Isaiah proclaims a woe upon those who imbibe themselves with strong drink. “Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink, and that continue until night, and wine inflame them” (Isaiah 5:11).

<sup>27</sup> “History, 1838–1856, volume C-1 [2 November 1838–31 July 1842],” p. 908, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, accessed 18 February 2020 from <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-c-1-2-november-1838-31-july-1842/90>. See also the 2013 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants 121:37.

<sup>28</sup> Note that references from the Old and New Testament are taken from the Joseph Smith inspired version of the Bible. Any deviance in the King James Version of the Bible is noted in brackets following the reference.

Wine has rich symbolic meaning within scripture, as does the term strong drink. Isaiah uses this term to indicate false doctrines. Just as men stagger in strong drink, so they can also stagger spiritually in false doctrines. Speaking to the “drunkards of Ephraim,” Isaiah gives a glimpse of this unpleasant sight:

*But they also have erred through wine, and through strong drink are out of the way; the priest and the prophet have erred through strong drink, they are swallowed up of wine, they are out of the way through strong drink; they err in vision, they stumble in judgment. For all tables are full of vomit and filthiness, so that there is no place clean.*

Isaiah 28:7-8

His vision if our day shows prophets and priests staggering around in a drunken stupor throwing up their philosophies on the table for others to consume. Because of rampant false doctrines, Isaiah says there is no longer any clean places.

According to the Lord’s revelation on alcoholic beverages, he admonishes to abstain from strong drink (suggesting drink that are intensely intoxication) and from wines, except “in assembling yourselves together to offer up your sacraments before him. And, behold, this should be wine, yea, pure wine of the grape of the vine, of your own make.” He further admonishes that “strong drinks are not for the belly, but for the washing of your bodies” (D&C 80:1 [89:5-7]).

Does the Lord condemn someone who does drink wines or strong drinks? The word of wisdom is for temporal salvation, not spiritual. And though all things temporal are spiritual in nature, he means that consuming such substances will hold physical, natural consequences, not eternal, everlasting consequences. The revelation he gave to Joseph Smith is not a condemning chastisement, but forewarnings counsel on how to maintain physical health “in the last days.”

## THE MANY WINES IN THE BIBLE

In the Old and New Testaments, there are several different words that were translated into English as the word wine. In Hebrew, these words include the following:

- New or Sweet Wine: עֲסֵס | ä-sēs’: new or sweet wine or juice which has just been trodden out. There has been some cultural error in the church suggesting that new wine is simply grape juice. However, the use of this word is associated with intoxication as in Isaiah 49:26, “And I will feed them that oppress thee with their own flesh; and they shall be drunken with their own blood, as with sweet wine [עֲסֵס | ä-sēs].”
- New or Sweet Wine: תִּירוֹשׁ | tē-rōsh’. The above reference to new wine is a poetic synonym of another Hebrew word translated into new or sweet wine (base word תִּירוֹשׁ | tē-rōsh’). Wine or new wine in this context also has capacity to intoxicate if used in abundance, as warned by Hosea who said, “wine and new wine take away the heart” and lead to whoredoms (Hosea 9:2). The reference to new wine used in the day of Pentecost as recorded in acts was this same form of the word.
- Red Wine: חֶמֶר | he’-mer. There are only two references to “red wine” or the “pure blood of the grape” from the base word חֶמֶר (See Deuteronomy 32:14 and Isaiah 26:2). The symbolism of this word is purity. It symbolically points to the washing of our garments in the blood of Christ.
- Wine: סִבָּא | sō’-be: The Hebrew base word סִבָּא | sō’-be means wine but has an abstract meaning of drunkenness as used in Nahum, “For while they be folded together as thorns, and while they are drunken as drunkards, they shall be devoured as stubble fully dry” (Nahum 1:10).
- Fermented Wine: יַיִן | yä’-yin: The most common word for wine in Hebrew is יַיִן. It has the connotations of fermented wine and implies intoxication. This is the word most often used in scripture.

Use of wine in ancient Israel was both encouraged and discouraged depending on circumstance. There is rich symbolism in red wines pointing to the blood of Jesus Christ. It also has symbolic reference to the house of Israel which is the branch or vine and sometimes the grape or fruit of the vine. Isaiah gives a parable of the Lord’s vineyard associating the men of Judah as the pleasant plant of the Lord:

*I sing to my well-beloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My well beloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill; and he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein; and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes. And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard. What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, it brought forth wild grapes. And now go to; I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard; I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; and I will break down the wall*



*thereof, and it shall be trodden down; and I will lay it waste; it shall not be pruned, nor digged; but there shall come up briers and thorns; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant; and he looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry.*

*Isaiah 5:1-7*

Wine was also used to gladden the heart and enliven the soul. “He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man; that he may bring forth food out of the earth; And wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make his face to shine, and bread which strengtheneth man’s heart” (Psalms 104:15). References throughout the Old Testament suggest wine was used regularly. Paul urges Timothy to “use a little wine for thy stomach’s sake and thine often infirmities” (1 Timothy 5:25).

The early saints similarly used wine to uplift their hearts. John Taylor recorded an experience when he and Joseph were in prison. “Sometime after dinner we sent for some wine. It has been reported by some that this was taken as a sacrament. It was no such thing; our spirits were generally dull and heavy, and it was sent for to revive us.... I believe we all drank of the wine, and gave some to one or two of the prison guards.”<sup>29</sup>

Joseph Smith enjoyed occasionally wine with others. Three years after he received the revelation of the word of wisdom, he stated the following:

*We then partook of some refreshments, and our hearts were made glad with the fruit of the vine. This is according to the pattern set by our Savior Himself, and we feel disposed to patronize all the institutions of heaven.*<sup>30</sup>

In the revelation in the word of wisdom, the Lord indicates it is not pleasing to Father to drink wine unless it is used for sacraments. He does not indicate why that is other than due to “evils and designs which do, and will exist in the hearts of conspiring men in the last days” (D&C 80:1 [89:4]). But in days to come, when the Lord will sit at feast with his covenant children he will celebrate with new, sweet wine. “And in this mountain shall the Lord of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined” (Isaiah 25:6). This has such spiritual symbolism, but also has literal connotations.

## WINE IN THE SACRAMENTS

The most prominent use of wine throughout scripture is its presence in the sacramental emblems. From the very beginning of the Old Testament we have an account that resembles the sacramental offerings. “And Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought forth bread and wine; and he break bread and blest it; and he blest the wine, he being the priest of the most high God, and he gave to Abram, and he blessed him” (Genesis 14:17-18 [14:18-19]). Wine historically had always been used for nearly every sacrament recorded in the scriptures in the New Testament, the Book of Mormon, and the Doctrine and Covenants.

The pattern of using wine carried on through the restorative timeframe of the early church in the 19th century. Joseph received a revelation in 1830 shortly after the church was established (and almost three years before the word of wisdom was revealed). The Lord said, “It mattereth not what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, when ye partake of the sacrament, if it so be that ye do it with an eye single to my glory.” The concern was that some enemies of the church may contaminate or poison the wine. “A commandment I give unto you, that you shall not purchase wine, neither strong drink of your enemies” (D&C 50:1 [27:2-3]). This is a similar theme presented in the revelation in the word of wisdom.

Though as a church we often reference this as a catalyst for the change from wine to water, it was not until many years after the people had settled in Utah that the official transition took place. Joseph F. Smith and Heber Grant were the strongest proponents of prohibition in all its forms. It was around the turn of the 20th century that wine was officially

<sup>29</sup> John Taylor, *History of the Church*, Vol 7.

<sup>30</sup> *History of the Church*, 2, (14 January 1836).

removed from the sacramental altars in the chapels and replaced by water. The presiding leadership first officially substituted water for wine in the sacrament in their temple meetings beginning July 5, 1906.<sup>31</sup>

It may have never been the intent of the Lord for the church to make this permanent transition, just as it was not his intent that alcoholic beverages be banned. By banning wines for sacramental use, the church members have been secluded from the deep symbolic richness of red wine as one of the Lord's sacrificial emblems. The instructions given to Joseph early on in the church teach us the following about the sacrament:

1. The bread and wine represent the emblems of the Lord's flesh and blood (D&C 2:8 [20:40]);
2. Members should be careful where they get their "wine and strong drinks", to not purchase them from their enemies (D&C 50:1 [27:3]);
3. Wine should be used for sacraments but is not "meet in the sight of your Father" for other uses in the last days (D&C 80:1 [89:5]);
4. Wine used for sacraments should be a new or "pure wine of the grape of the vine, of your own make" (D&C 80:1 [89:6], see also D&C 50:1 [27:4]);
5. When wine is not available, any other suitable substitute may be used (D&C 50:1 [27:2]).

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### MILD DRINKS OF BARLEY (AKA: BEER)

There is very little information on beers in the ancient scriptures. One reference suggests that the Hebrew root word שָׁכַר (shā-kār) meaning strong drink derives from the Akkadian word šikaru, which means barley beer. This is possible, but there is little evidence of what the ancients considered strong drinks. The only direction given in scripture by the Lord on this subject is his directive that barley should be used "for all useful animals, and for mild drinks, as also other grain" (D&C 80:3 [89:17]). Those mild drinks made from grains are what we would call beers. Though there is little insight from historical evidences in the scriptures, based on this revelation, the Lord indicates that mild drinks are a good thing (when used in temperance and moderation). Joseph Smith, the man who received the word from God, even enjoyed a beer now and again.<sup>32</sup>

An apologetic organization of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (though not affiliated with the church) dedicated to "providing well-documented answers to criticisms of LDS doctrine, belief and practice" answered a question regarding the definition of strong drinks and mild drinks. "The text of the Word of Wisdom forbids 'strong drink' [D&C 89:5, 7], which was initially interpreted as distilled beverages (hard liquor). Beer, unfermented or lightly fermented wine, and cider were considered 'mild drinks' [D&C 89:17] and therefore acceptable (note that verse 17 specifically permits 'barley...for mild drinks'). The complete prohibition of alcoholic drinks of any kind in the church only became part of the Word of Wisdom following the temperance movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Presidents Joseph F. Smith and Heber Grant supported the movement and Grant made complete abstinence from alcohol in any form a requirement for temple admittance in the early 1920s."<sup>33</sup>

This in one of those instances where the revelation has been changed over time. According to church policy, beer is not acceptable, and drinking such constitutes sin or "breaking" the word of wisdom. But the revelation itself says that barley is intended both for useful animals and for mild drinks, such as beer.

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<sup>31</sup> Thomas G. Alexander, "The Word of Wisdom: From Principle to Requirement." *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 14, no 3 (Autumn 1981): 78–88.

<sup>32</sup> *History of the Church*, 6:424. The comment that he "drank a glass of beer at Moesers" has been removed from the published version of the History of the Church but is preserved in the Millennial Star 23, no. 45 (9 November 1861): 720.

<sup>33</sup> "The History and Implementation of the Word of Wisdom," FairMormon.org. Accessed 25 July 2019.

## WHAT ARE HOT DRINKS?

## DEFINING HOT DRINKS

A very short, but also very controversial line appears in the word of wisdom stating, “hot drinks are not for the body, or belly.”<sup>34</sup> The church from Brigham Young on declared this to mean coffee and tea, for those were the common drink in that time that were prepared hot. The article from True to the Faith states that “latter-day prophets have taught that the term ‘hot drinks’ refers to tea and coffee.” This understanding came from Brigham Young, who stated the following:

*This Word of Wisdom prohibits the use of hot drinks and tobacco. I have heard it argued that tea and coffee are not mentioned therein; that is very true; but what were the people in the habit of taking as hot drinks when that revelation was given? Tea and coffee. We were not in the habit of drinking water very hot, but tea and coffee—the beverages in common use.*<sup>35</sup>

Brigham Young’s statement is very clear and seems a valid conclusion. It is interesting that chocolate (or hot chocolate) does not appear on the list. It was available in the United States even from the colonial period. Perhaps it was not a commonly consumed drink, or perhaps it was not prepared as hot as coffees and teas at that time. As a side note, iced coffees and iced teas did not start appearing in the United States until the 1840s and the 1860s, respectively. We unfortunately do not have any commentary on hot drinks from Joseph Smith, though we know he did have a tea now and again.

## INVESTIGATING CAFFEINE

Members for more than a century have puzzled on why teas and coffees were banned, aside from the “hot drink” component. The current dominant belief rumored among members is caffeine and its addictive qualities are the reason for the banning. In fact, the only similar attribute between coffee beans and tea leaves is the presence of caffeine and the hotness of the water. This may be why the belief concerning caffeine arose.

There is no official statement by the church that indicates why coffee and tea are forbidden and other hot drinks or caffeinated drinks are not. This is where one of the greatest divergence from the word of wisdom emerges. The words “hot drinks” in the original revelation have no value in our church culture today.

Was the Lord intending “hot drinks” to mean hot drinks, as he stated, or was he intending coffee and tea, as well potentially as other caffeinated beverages? Is coffee and tea more addictive than other beverages or foods? The Lord is omniscient, meaning he knows all things. If caffeine was the concern, why did he not say that in the revelation? If it was specifically tea and coffee, why did he not also say so, especially since he knew iced coffees and teas, and decaffeinated drinks were on their way? These questions are not intended to justify the consumption of teas and coffees, but intended to analyze what the Lord is really telling us in his revelation on the word of wisdom. Do we have it right?

The most recent guidelines of the church ban coffee and tea whether it is hot or cold, caffeinated or decaffeinated, and in any forms thereof. Perhaps they just needed to take a stand. It is confusing to members, though, because the questions remain unanswered as to why the church allows the drinking of other caffeinated beverages like sodas and energy drinks, yet still requires abstinence from decaffeinated coffees? Similarly, why does the church allow the drinking of other hot drinks, yet still required abstinence from iced coffees and teas? There is nothing in the original revelation admonishing against cold drinks.

Comparing coffees and hot chocolates, regular (black) coffee has about 95-165 mg of caffeine (which is quite a lot), while decaf has about 2-5 mg of caffeine. Hot chocolate (depending on the source) has about 10-25 mg of caffeine. Additionally, green tea has about 24-29 mg caffeine (similar to some chocolates) and black teas have about 25-48 mg of caffeine (similar to most caffeinated sodas, which have around 24-46 mg of caffeine). Finally, energy drinks are all over the chart from 27-164 mg of caffeine. (Note, these are all for 8 oz servings).<sup>36</sup>

<sup>34</sup> D&C 80:1 [89:9]

<sup>35</sup> Brigham Young, *Discourses of Brigham Young*, comp. John A. Widtsoe (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1954).

<sup>36</sup> “Nutrition and Healthy Eating: Caffeine Content for Coffee, Tea, Soda and More.” *Mayo Clinic*, 14 April 2017. Web. Accessed 25 July 2019.

8 oz. Servings	Caffeine (mg)
Regular Black Coffee	95-165
Decaffeinated Coffee	2-5
Green Tea	24-29
Black Tea	25-48
Hot Chocolate	10-25
Caffeinated Sodas	24-46
Energy Drinks	27-164

Note that of all these beverages, decaf coffees have the least amount of caffeine. There are certainly some health (and financial) benefits from avoiding teas and coffees, at least in abundance. Church members are probably overall benefited by being spared addictions to these substances, too. Yet there are also medical advantages to both when used appropriately and in moderation that are inaccessible to members based in church policy.

### WHAT DOES THE LORD REALLY WANT?

Because there is so much uncertainty as to why the Lord banned tea and coffee, most members are happy to just accept the current policies as the doctrine, and some have gone far enough to either 1) avoid all caffeinated drinks, or 2) avoid all hot beverages, or both. (Perhaps they hope that will cover both aspects, just in case.)

Those of us who want to be circumspect with the Lord in all things, really want to know what the Lord means by “hot drinks”. We as a people have certainly complicated this question, but perhaps it is as simple as this: “Hot drinks are not for the body, or belly.” The American Cancer Society reported in 2016:

*The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) has classified drinking very hot beverages as a probable carcinogen, something that probably causes cancer. IARC is the cancer agency of the World Health Organization. Very hot beverages refer to drinks hotter than 65 degrees Celsius, which translates to about 149 degrees Fahrenheit. In the US, coffee, tea, hot chocolate, and other hot beverages are usually drunk at temperatures lower than 149 degrees.<sup>37</sup>*

The Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center suggest that these statements may be a bit of an exaggeration. They state, “There has never been solid evidence that drinking hot liquids alone will increase esophageal cancer risk. At this point we have only the suggestion that it might make the risk higher in people who smoke or consume alcohol. I would advise people to focus instead on factors that are very solidly linked to a higher risk of developing esophageal cancer. For squamous cell, it’s smoking and alcohol.”<sup>38</sup> Whether the IARC research is correct or not, both groups commonly linked drinking hot liquids problematic, especially when coupled with alcohol and/or tobacco.

Maybe the Lord’s statement has nothing to do with caffeine, coffee, or tea, but indeed has everything to do with the temperature of the drink.

### WHAT CAN I EAT?

#### FRUITS AND VEGETABLES IN THEIR SEASON

When it comes to the things we should and should not eat for our temporal salvation, the guidelines seem fairly straight forward. “And again, verily I say unto you, all wholesome herbs God hath ordained for the constitution, nature, and use of

<sup>37</sup> Stacey Simon, “Very Hot drinks May Cause Cancer,” *American Cancer Society*, 15 June 2016. Web. Accessed 25 July 2019.

<sup>38</sup> Jim Stallard, “Burning Issue: The Truth about Hot Drinks and Esophageal Cancer Risk,” *Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center*, 3 January 2019. Web. Accessed 25 July 2019.

man.— Every herb in the season thereof, and every fruit in the season thereof. All these to be used with prudence and thanksgiving” (D&C 80:2 [89:10-11]). We should eat all “wholesome” herbs, and we should eat fruits and herbs (vegetables) in their “season”.

The True to the Faith manual does say fruits and vegetables are good to eat, “which should be used ‘with prudence and thanksgiving’”, but fails to mention the other portion of the revelation that states they should be eaten in the “season thereof”. What constitutes the season of the fruit or vegetable? Most likely it implies the time of year that it is naturally ripe on the vine or tree, or when it is ready to be picked or dug up. We often call these whole foods today, because they have not been changed into something else.

With today’s technology, the seasons of fruits and vegetables can be extended for some time. Naturally stored root vegetables can be preserved over winter, so the “season” for those may be extended beyond the growing season. Some fruits can also be preserved in this way, but many fruits and vegetables will not last long unless altered.

Some methods for preserving foods are able to maintain the value of the food’s nutrients. With the advent of modern-day shipping and storing, we are blessed to have fruits and vegetables in their “season” almost any time of year. It is nice to be able to sample foods from all over the world available in a neighborhood grocery store. Though we all know there is a difference between a mango picked fresh and one picked prematurely and shipped across the world. Similarly, pears purchased in January are not the same as pears purchased in August and September.

In order to follow the Lord’s directive to eat fruits and vegetables “in the seasons thereof”, it may not be about when these foods are eaten, but what condition they are in when consumed. Unfortunately, there are so many other ways of preserving food, that many of the nutrients may be stripped out. With modern manufacturing, foods are often changed in so many ways that they become almost unrecognizable, and so many additives and chemicals are added that they have lost their original health benefit. Some of these we call processed foods. Perhaps the most unfortunate aspect of modern food processing is the convenience and cost. A person can buy and eat processed foods easier and cheaper than whole or natural foods.

An article in Medical News Today lists nine ways that processed food is unhealthy for eating. They (are):

1. High in sugar and high-fructose corn syrup
2. Engineered for over-consumption
3. Contain artificial ingredients
4. Can become addictive (junk food)
5. Often high in refined carbohydrates
6. Low in nutrients
7. Low in fiber
8. Require less time and energy to digest
9. Often high in trans fats

The author sums up by stating, “When we replace real foods like fish, meat, fruit and vegetables with processed junk foods, we increase our risk of illness and poor health. Real food is the key to good health, processed food is not. Period.”<sup>39</sup> Though not addressed in the article, even foods stored in cans and jars with preservatives have been changed from their original state and often lose some nutrient value.

It is important that if we are to follow the word of wisdom as prescribed by the Lord, we must pursue a healthy lifestyle of eating. Rather than eating pre-processed foods, replace them with whole foods. Learn to cook. Use fruits and vegetables that are in season, and only use preserved or canned foods when the season is passed.

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## USING WHOLESOME HERBS

Herbs can be extrapolated beyond vegetables. It can also mean plants that can be used both for food and for medicinal purposes. To reiterate: “All wholesome herbs God hath ordained for the constitution, nature, and use of man.” That may

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<sup>39</sup> Kris Gunnars, “Nine Ways that processed Foods are Harming People,” Medical News Today, 1 August 2017. Web. Accessed 25 July 2019.



mean as food, but that may also mean for other healthy purposes, to also use with “prudence and thanksgiving.” Prudence as defined by the 1828 Webster Dictionary is “wisdom applied to practice.” The entry continues:

*Prudence implies caution in deliberating and consulting on the most suitable means to accomplish valuable purposes, and the exercise of sagacity in discerning and selecting them. prudence differs from wisdom in this, that prudence implies more caution and reserve than wisdom, or is exercised more in foreseeing and avoiding evil, than in devising and executing that which is good. It is sometimes mere caution or circumspection.<sup>40</sup>*

Prudence sounds like a careful practice of healthy living using herbs for food and medicine. The Lord stated to Joseph, “And whosoever among you are sick, and have not faith to be healed, but believe, shall be nourished with all tenderness with herbs and mild food” (D&C 13:12 [42:43]). We live in an odd time where people are wary of naturopathic medicines and therapies, but will not hesitate to take a prescribed medication from their physician. This is not to say that either is wholly good or bad, but both when applied correctly can provide healthy advice and medical treatment.

The medicines extracted from plants and roots in the hands of someone competent can provide wonderful healing properties. The Nephites in ancient America were skilled at the use of herbs and roots for healing. Helaman writes, “there were some who died with fevers, which at some seasons of the year, was very frequent in the land; but not so much so with fevers, because of the excellent qualities of the many plants and roots which God had prepared, to remove the cause of diseases which was subsequent to man, by the nature of the climate” (Alma 11 [46:40]).<sup>41</sup>

The art of using wholesome herbs for medical treatment has waned significantly in our current health practices. Rather than natural herbs or remedies, people would prefer lab-created chemical compounds. Undoubtedly some of these may have superior benefit, but the side effects of many medications can compromise our bodies. Russel Ballard, an apostle in the church, stated, “In some places, too many of our people are looking beyond the mark and seeking secret knowledge in expensive and questionable practices to provide healing and support.” His discussion was geared toward energy-healing, yet I would say this is applicable to both traditional and non-traditional means of medical treatment.

Yet the word of wisdom is meant for our personal physical wellbeing. Perhaps the Lord is suggesting that each of us know enough about wholesome herbs that we can use them for our own health as well as our family’s health. Most Americans revert to manufactures means for most of their ailments, from pain relief to allergy relief. Very few have access to medicinal herbs, and fewer still would know how to use those herbs.

The Lord’s statement really puts the onus on each of us. We should use wholesome herbs with prudence and with thankfulness. Thankfulness is perhaps one of the most forgotten keys. Many blessings come from a thankful heart. The Lord instructed, “Rejoice evermore, and in every thing give thanks” (D&C 85:1 [98:1]).

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## GRAINS ARE THE STAFF OF LIFE

The Lord also expects the use of grains. “All grain is ordained for the use of man, and of beasts, to be the staff of life” (D&C 80:2 [89:14]). Just as the Lord indicated we should eat whole fruits and vegetables, he also expects us to use whole grains. Whole grains are the grain product before it has been refined. Whole wheat flour is ground wheat berries with nothing added or removed. Refined flour takes out the bran and the germ and leaves only the endosperm of the wheat berry, effectively removing many of its nutrients. These flours must be enriched with nutrients to supplement what was taken out.

The same goes for other grains. When using refined grains, much of the nutritious value of the grains are depleted. Yet in our current grocery stores, almost all of the available grains are refined, bleached, and/or enriched. Even whole wheat flour is often processed and stripped of some of its nutrients. Package labelling is misleading. “Scan the bread, cereal or snack packaging, and virtually every one promotes its whole-grain goodness. But not all of them actually are whole-grain. Terms

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<sup>40</sup> “Prudence.” Webster’s Dictionary 1828 – Online Edition. Web. Accessed 19 February 2020.

<sup>41</sup> Note that scripture references from the Book of Mormon come from the 1830 published edition. The standard 2013 edition reference is found in brackets.

like ‘multigrain,’ ‘100% wheat,’ ‘cracked wheat,’ ‘organic,’ ‘pumpernickel,’ ‘bran,’ and ‘stone ground’ may sound healthy, but none actually indicates the product is whole-grain.”<sup>42</sup>

The negative health effects of eating poorly are well documented in research. The prevalence of obesity for adults in the united states is nearly 40%. An article in the LDS Living magazine on obesity in the church reported, “Studies on obesity and religious practice (including a BYU study) have shown that Utah members of the LDS Church are 34% more likely to be overweight than members of other religions” and nearly 60% of LDS adults are overweight. The article continues:

*Why Mormon’s Are Overweight[?] In his study, Dr. Fisher learned that most of the overweight subjects got that way through years of eating refined carbohydrates (sugar and flour-based foods) and excess animal fat followed by a series of yo-yo, merry-go-round, low-calorie, near-starvation diets.*<sup>43</sup>

It is becoming more challenging to follow the prescribed guidelines in the word of wisdom. To abstain from prohibited substances, like alcohol and tobacco, is relatively easy. But to create a healthy diet of whole foods and grains is quite challenging since most of what is offered in our grocery stores are pre-processed or refined goods.

The Lord stated that grains are considered the staff of life. Yet because of the increased health awareness in our society today, and the uptake in fad diets, grain consumption has declined for many. People often lose fat and weight quickly when jumping off carbs, and erroneously assume that is healthier way of living. However, restricting healthy consumption of whole grains limits the body’s access to essential nutrients. The object of the Lord’s counsel is healthy living, and eating whole grains is an essential element of healthy living.

**WHEN TO USE MEAT**

Animals and birds “the Lord hath ordained for the use of man” also “with thanksgiving.” The Lord gave the following counsel:

*Yea, flesh also of beasts and of the fowls of the air, I the Lord hath ordained for the use of man with thanksgiving. Nevertheless, they are to be used sparingly; and it is pleasing unto me, that they should not be used only in times of winter or of cold, or famine.*

*D&C 80:2 [89:12-13]*

Ancient Hebrew culture taught there were some kosher (or clean) animals that could be consumed and some that were unclean. Millennia later, Peter saw a vision of all sorts of unclean animals offered to him and was told to kill and eat them. Peter refused, saying, “Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean. And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common” (Acts 10:14-15). This is the revelation to which most point in suggesting it is safe to eat unkosher animals.

The Lord did not specify what flesh is good or not good in his revelation to Joseph Smith. He simply said it is pleasing to the Lord that we eat meat sparingly. He does mention that “all wild animals that run or creep on the earth” God has also “made for the use of man” but “only in times of famine, and excess of hunger” (D&C 80:2 [89:14-15]).

The quotes above come from the 1835 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants which differs slightly from the contemporary rendering of the revelation. The differences are subtle and hinge upon punctuation. Below is a comparison of the 1835 and 2013 versions of the word of wisdom:

2013 Doctrine & Covenants edition	1835 Doctrine & Covenants edition
Yea, flesh also of beasts and of the fowls of the air, I, the Lord, have ordained for the use of man with thanksgiving; nevertheless they are to be used sparingly; And it is pleasing unto me that they should not be <b>used, only</b> in times of winter, or of cold, or famine	Yea, flesh also of beasts and of the fowls of the air, I the Lord hath ordained for the use of man with thanksgiving. Nevertheless, they are to be used sparingly; and it is pleasing unto me, that they should not be <b>used only</b> in times of winter or of cold, or famine

<sup>42</sup> Kathleen Zelman, “Tips for Reaping the Benefits of Whole Grains,” WebMD. Web. Accessed 19 February 2020.

<sup>43</sup> Grant Greyson, “The Mormon Obesity Epidemic: What’s Going On?” LDS Living, 5 May 2017. Web. Accessed 25 July 2019.

In the 2013 edition, it sounds like the Lord is pleased if we eat meat only in times of winter, cold, or famine. The 1835 edition suggest the Lord is please if we eat meat sparingly, not just in winter, cold, or famine, but also at other times. Though the 2013 edition is the newest revision of the Doctrine and Covenants, the 1835 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants was the last published version while Joseph Smith was alive. Which version do we use and how is it to be interpreted? If Joseph was the one who wrote the revelation, receiving it directly from God, I would assume that he is the best source to suggest where punctuation should be placed and intent of the revelation. Alterations after that point were done by those who read the revelation, but did not hear it from the Lord.

Sparingly has a broad meaning, too, depending on how each person interprets that word. Most would probably agree that sparingly means to eat with discretion. The 1828 Webster’s Dictionary defines sparingly as “1) Not abundantly. 2) Frugally; parsimoniously; not lavishly.... 3) Abstinently; moderately.... 4) Seldom; not frequently.... [and] 5) Cautiously; tenderly.”<sup>44</sup> Clearly, the Lord is not suggesting we become vegetarian, but our perspective of sparingly today may be varied from what it was in the 19th century.

*In the book “Putting Meat on the American Table,” researcher Roger Horowitz scours the literature for data on how much meat Americans actually ate. A survey of 8,000 urban Americans in 1909 showed that the poorest among them ate 136 pounds a year, and the wealthiest more than 200 pounds.*

*A food budget published in the New York Tribune in 1851 allots two pounds of meat per day for a family of five. Even slaves at the turn of the 18th century were allocated an average of 150 pounds of meat a year. As Horowitz concludes, “These sources do give us some confidence in suggesting an average annual consumption of 150–200 pounds of meat per person in the nineteenth century.”*

*About 175 pounds of meat per person per year—compared to the roughly 100 pounds of meat per year that an average adult American eats today. And of that 100 pounds of meat, about half is poultry—chicken and turkey—whereas until the mid-20th century, chicken was considered a luxury meat, on the menu only for special occasions (chickens were valued mainly for their eggs).<sup>45</sup>*

Generally, our meat consumption is overall lower than our ancestors, and is diversified between red and white meats. Yet, just as processed foods have changed fruits, vegetables, and grains, so our meat is also altered. Accessibility to meat is probably greater than it ever has been, even though we eat less meat. Yet the quality of our meat has suffered, too. Labelling and marketing misrepresent the products purchased. Meats available in our supermarkets are often filled with antibiotics, artificially colored, sometimes medicated, and sometimes fed unnatural diets. Though we may think we are eating a healthy animal, we may not know what is actually in the meat.

Meat is ordained of God, both from beasts and birds (and probably fish, too, though it is not mentioned). Yet just like all other things, the quality of the food is probably important and will yield greater health. However, for the “temporal salvation” of the saints, the Lord does not specify what types of foods we eat, just that we eat “wholesome” herbs/vegetables and fruits, and meats sparingly. How the Lord intends us to define sparingly will require prayer and supplication.

## A BROKEN COMMANDMENT?

### HAVE WE BROKEN THE WORD OF WISDOM?

There are discrepancies between the currently defined principles of the word of wisdom in the church and the original revelation given to Joseph Smith. In order to qualify for a temple recommend in the church and to be a member in full fellowship, a person must avoid alcohol, coffee, tea, and tobacco (and harmful drugs), yet can eat whatever else he or she

<sup>44</sup> “Sparingly,” Webster’s Dictionary 1828 – Online Edition. Web. Accessed 19 February 2020.

<sup>45</sup> Nina Teicholz, “How Americans Got Red Meat Wrong,” The Atlantic, 2 June 2014. Web. Accessed 19 February 2020.

wants in whatever quantities or forms chosen. Conversely, to strictly follow the revelation as it is written may disqualify that person from obtaining a temple recommend and full fellowship.

Unfortunately, if we as a church truly declare the word of wisdom to be a law of health, a commandment from God, then we all break this commandment spectacularly. The Lord defines the parameters of his laws, not us. Yet the parameters of the word of wisdom have been altered throughout the past two centuries. If it is a law, it should be adhered to as the revelation was given. If that is the case, here is how we as a church break the word of wisdom:

1. God stated the revelation was to be given not “by commandment, or constraint: but by revelation and the word of wisdom.” Yet we as a church have compelled members to live this as a commandment and withhold temple blessings when people don’t adhere to this revelation.
2. God stated that wine should not be consumed except “in assembling yourselves together, to offer up your sacraments before him.” By banning alcohol, we are unable to use wine as a sacramental emblem as instructed in the revelation.
3. God stated that barley (and other grains) are to be used for mild drinks, yet we have banned all forms of alcohol despite the instructions of the revelation.
4. God stated that “hot drinks are not for the body, or belly,” and although we as a church have abstained from coffee and tea, we still drink hot ciders, hot chocolates, and other hot beverages despite the instructions in the revelation.
5. God stated “all wholesome herbs God hath ordained for the constitution, nature, and use of man,” yet we as a church have banned certain wholesome herbs even for medical use and as a people often believe chemical-based medications (in pills and bottles) are more effective or better than natural options.
6. God stated herbs (vegetables) and fruits should be eaten in their season, suggesting we eat whole foods, yet we as a people are not eating sufficient whole foods, but eat mostly processed foods, and by consequence have a higher obesity rate as a church than the rest of Americans.
7. God stated grains are the staff of life, yet we as a people prefer to use processed or refined grains rather than whole grains and prefer processed foods. (Admittedly, these are still grains. Maybe the Lord would be lenient on this one.)
8. God stated meat is to be used, but sparingly, yet we as a people often either 1) avoid meats altogether (we call these people vegetarians), or 2) we eat meat in abundance. Anyone who has been to a ward party knows that the culture is processed foods/flours and lots of meat.

In short, by making the word of wisdom a commandment, we have condemned ourselves, for we are not living it as it is written. It is hypocritical of us to condemn one man for drinking beer while binging ourselves on sodas; or to avoid the smokers and bereave his unhealthy habits but ignore our own eating habits and the high rates of obesity of those deemed worthy to enter the temples of God; or to goggle at the strangeness of those who try to use or suggest natural remedies for health while we happily gulp down our chemically manufactured medications; or to condemn someone for a morning coffee as we sip our steaming hot cocoa. We have forgotten that the word of wisdom is intended not for the spiritual salvation, but for the temporal salvation. Yet how we judge others in their use of these substances, may eventually affect how we are spiritually judged.

We live by nearly two hundred centuries of evolved interpretation of the meaning of the various aspects of the word of wisdom rather than living by the words themselves. The word of wisdom has evolved to mean one can basically eat or drink whatever he or she wants without consequence as long as they abstain from alcohol, tobacco, coffee, tea, and harmful drugs. The question in the temple recommend interview about the word of wisdom is not a question of health, but a question of abstaining from the five forbidden substances.

Fortunately for us, the word of wisdom is not a commandment according to the revelation given to Joseph Smith, and was never intended to be a commandment. So, our “breaking” of the commandment is a moot issue. It was given “for a principle with promise, adapted to the capacity of the weak, and the weakest of all saints, who are or can be called saint” for our “temporal salvation...in the last days” (emphasis added). Those who want to live it as if it were a commandment are welcome to do so, so long as they do not compel others to live it that way. Whatever way we choose to live this

revelation, we should diligently avoid the curse that plagued the Jews in the days of Christ who were so tightly tied up in a knot of Pharisaical philosophies they sometimes could not see the doctrines or principles buried underneath.

## WHAT CHANGES IF THE WORD OF WISDOM IS NOT A COMMANDMENT?

Taking the revelation for what it is, and how it is written, we see that the word of wisdom is not a commandment and was never intended to be a commandment. However, it continues to be a Godly counsel regarding the temporal salvation of the Saints. This means those supposed sins for “breaking” the word of wisdom, or our failure to live revealed principles of health, are really not sins at all. And after all the dust settles, the only sins left are any unrighteous judgments of men and women on how others should live the word of wisdom.

How, then, should the word of wisdom really be lived? How would we live differently than we do now?

To answer the second question first, I don’t believe we would live much different than we do now. If we want to be obedient to all the counsel given from God, then we would rejoice to live the guiding principles he outlines and enjoy the promised blessings of physical salvation. One of the greatest blessings would be a deeper and more profound understanding of the sacrifices of Jesus Christ as we partake of the sacramental emblems: bread and wine.

Another great benefit would be having a different viewpoint of how others live this principle. We would have a lot less judgment toward ourselves and other people.

Even though adherence to the word of wisdom would not be a test of faithfulness to God, it is all too easy to see the ramifications of unhealthy living, whether that is substance abuse, nicotine use, or poor eating habits. Smell of smoke on a man’s clothing does not tell us anything about the condition of his heart (spiritually speaking).

How much greater would the blessings of health, wisdom, and knowledge be if these principles in God’s revelation on the word of wisdom were lived willingly without being compelled or coerced? How nice would it be to not be in judgment of someone else because of our health habits? Those who want to live it as it is presently and culturally perceived by the church could continue to do so without judgment and at least reap the rewards of abstinence from addictive substances. Those who wanted to abandon or disregard the counsel could do so without condemnation, though they would suffer the consequences physically of such lifestyles. And both could be worthy internally to stand before the Lord! Those who lived it according to the dictates of the spirit would reap the greatest rewards of health, wisdom, knowledge, and temporal salvation, as promised by the Lord because they would do it out of love for the Lord.

Joseph Smith understood the Lord perhaps better than any of us. He share the following experience. “We then partook of some refreshments, and our hearts were made glad with the fruit of the vine. This is according to the pattern set by our Savior Himself, and we feel disposed to patronize all the institutions of heaven.”<sup>46</sup>

So, how should the word of wisdom be lived? Here are four steps:

1. Live it as it is written in the Doctrine and Covenants: as a guideline given by God to healthy living, not by commandment or constraint, but by revelation—your own revelation.
2. Interpret its meaning for yourself guided by the Spirit of God, not dictated from a pulpit or written in a policy (or a blog).
3. Determine in your own heart through prayer and fasting, and as guided by the Spirit, how God would have you live, eat, and drink.
4. And finally, refrain from judging others on how they interpret and live this principle of health.

Worthiness should not be based on what is put into the mouth, but what comes out of the mouth. For what comes out of the mouth comes from the heart (see Matthew 15:17-18).

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<sup>46</sup> *History of the Church*, 2:368-369.



# COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

## RECORDS OF THE REVELATION

Below are three different records of the word of wisdom as found in the original revelation, the 1835 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants, and in the 2013 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants.

<p><b>Original Revelation</b></p> <p>Obtained from Joseph Smith Papers Revelation Book 2, pages 49-51</p>	<p><b>Section 80</b></p> <p>Obtained from the 1835 version of the Doctrine and Covenants</p>	<p><b>Section 89</b></p> <p>Obtained from the 2013 version of the Doctrine and Covenants</p>
<p>A Revelation for the benefit of the saints &amp;c a word of wisdom for the benefit of the council of high Priests assembled in Kirtland and Church and also the saints in Zion to be sent Greeting not by commandment or constraint but by revelation and the word of wisdom shewing forth the order and will of God in the temporal salvation of all saints in the last days given for a principle with promise adapted to the capacity of the weak and the weakest of all saints who are or can be called saints behold verily thus saith the Lord unto you in consequence of evils and designs of which do and will exist in the hearts of conspiring men in the last day, I have warned you and forewarn you by giving unto you this word of wisdom by revelation that inasmuch as any man drinketh wine or strong drink among you behold it is not good neither meet in the sight of your father only in assembling yourselves together to offer up your sacrament before him and behold this should be wine yea pure wine of the grape of the vine of your own make, and again strong drinks are not good for the belly but for the washing of your bodies, and again Tobacco is not for the body neither for the belly and is not good for man, but is an herb for bruises and all sick cattle to be used with judgment and skill and again hot drinks are not for the body or belly and again verily I say unto you all wholesome herbs God hath ordained for the constitution nature and use of man evry herb in the season thereof and evry fruit in the season thereof, all all these to be used with prudence and thanksgiving yea flesh also of beasts and of the fowls of the are [air] I the Lord hath ordained or the use of man with thanksgiving nevertheless they are to be used sparingly, and it is pleasing unto me that they should not be used only in times of winter or of famine, all grain is</p>	<p>A word of wisdom for the benefit of the council of high priests, assembled in Kirtland, and church; and also, the saints in Zion: to be sent greeting: not by commandment, or constraint: but by revelation and the word of wisdom: showing forth the order and will of God in the temporal salvation of all saints in the last days. Given for a principle with promise, adapted to the capacity of the weak, and the weakest of all saints, who are or can be called saints.</p> <p>1 Behold, verily thus saith the Lord unto you, in consequence of evils and designs which do, and will exist in the hearts of conspiring men in the last days, I have warned you, and forewarn you, by giving unto you this word of wisdom by revelation, that inasmuch as any man drinketh wine or strong drink among you, behold it is not good, neither meet in the sight of your Father, only in assembling yourselves together, to offer up your sacraments before him. And behold this should be wine, yea, pure wine of the grape of the vine, of your own make. And again, strong drinks are not for the belly, but for the washing of your bodies. And again, tobacco is not for the body, neither for the belly; and is not good for man; but is an herb for bruises, and all sick cattle, to be used with judgment and skill. And again, hot drinks are not for the body, or belly.</p> <p>2 And again, verily I say unto you, all wholesome herbs God hath ordained for the constitution, nature, and use of man.— Every herb in the season thereof, and every fruit in the season thereof. All these to be used with prudence and thanksgiving. Yea, flesh also of beasts and of the fowls of the air, I the Lord hath ordained for the use of man with thanksgiving. Nevertheless, they are to be used sparingly; and it is pleasing unto me, that they should not be used only in</p>	<p>1 A Word of Wisdom, for the benefit of the council of high priests, assembled in Kirtland, and the church, and also the saints in Zion—</p> <p>2 To be sent greeting; not by commandment or constraint, but by revelation and the word of wisdom, showing forth the order and will of God in the temporal salvation of all saints in the last days—</p> <p>3 Given for a principle with promise, adapted to the capacity of the weak and the weakest of all saints, who are or can be called saints.</p> <p>4 Behold, verily, thus saith the Lord unto you: In consequence of evils and designs which do and will exist in the hearts of conspiring men in the last days, I have warned you, and forewarn you, by giving unto you this word of wisdom by revelation—</p> <p>5 That inasmuch as any man drinketh wine or strong drink among you, behold it is not good, neither meet in the sight of your Father, only in assembling yourselves together to offer up your sacraments before him.</p> <p>6 And, behold, this should be wine, yea, pure wine of the grape of the vine, of your own make.</p> <p>7 And, again, strong drinks are not for the belly, but for the washing of your bodies.</p> <p>8 And again, tobacco is not for the body, neither for the belly, and is not good for man, but is an herb for bruises and all sick cattle, to be used with judgment and skill.</p> <p>9 And again, hot drinks are not for the body or belly.</p> <p>10 And again, verily I say unto you, all wholesome herbs God hath ordained for the constitution, nature, and use of man—</p> <p>11 Every herb in the season there- of,</p>

ordained for the use of man and of beasts to be the staff of life not only for man but for the beasts of the feald and the fowls of heaven and all wild animals than [that] run or creap on the earth and these hath God made for the use of man only in times of famine and excess of hunger all gðain [grain] is good for the food of man as also the fruit of the vine that which yealdeth fruit whether in the ground or above the ground nevertheless wheet for man and corn for the ox and oats for the horse and rye for the swine fowls & for swine and for all beasts of the field and barley for all useful animals and for mild drink as also other grain, and all saints who remember to keep and do these sayings walking in obedience to the commandments shall receive health in their navel and marrow to their bones and shall find wisdom and great treasure of knowledge even hidden treasures and shall run and not be weary and shall walk and not faint and I the Lord give unto them a promise that the distroying angel shall pass by them as the Children of Israel and not slay them Amen

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times of winter or of cold, or famine. All grain is ordained for the use of man, and of beasts, to be the staff of life, not only for man, but for the beasts of the field, and the fowls of heaven, and all wild animals that run or creep on the earth: and these hath God made for the use of man only in times of famine, and excess of hunger.

3 All grain is good for the food of man, as also the fruit of the vine, that which yieldeth fruit, whether in the ground or above the ground. Nevertheless wheat for man, and corn for the ox, and oats for the horse, and rye for the fowls, and for swine, and for all beasts of the field, and barley for all useful animals, and for mild drinks; as also other grain. And all saints who remember to keep and do these sayings, walking in obedience to the commandments, shall receive health in their navel, and marrow to their bones and shall find wisdom, and great treasures of knowledge, even hidden treasures; and shall run and not be weary, and shall walk and not faint: and I the Lord give unto them a promise, that the destroying angel shall pass by them, as the children of Israel, and not slay them. Amen.

and every fruit in the season thereof; all these to be used with prudence and thanksgiving.

12 Yea, flesh also of beasts and of the fowls of the air, I, the Lord, have ordained for the use of man with thanksgiving; nevertheless they are to be used sparingly;

13 And it is pleasing unto me that they should not be used, only in times of winter, or of cold, or famine.

14 All grain is ordained for the use of man and of beasts, to be the staff of life, not only for man but for the beasts of the field, and the fowls of heaven, and all wild animals that run or creep on the earth;

15 And these hath God made for the use of man only in times of famine and excess of hunger.

16 All grain is good for the food of man; as also the fruit of the vine; that which yieldeth fruit, whether in the ground or above the ground—

17 Nevertheless, wheat for man, and corn for the ox, and oats for the horse, and rye for the fowls and for swine, and for all beasts of the field, and barley for all useful animals, and for mild drinks, as also other grain.

18 And all saints who remember to keep and do these sayings, walking in obedience to the commandments, shall receive health in their navel and marrow to their bones;

19 And shall find wisdom and great treasures of knowledge, even hidden treasures;

20 And shall run and not be weary, and shall walk and not faint.

21 And I, the Lord, give unto them a promise, that the destroying angel shall pass by them, as the children of Israel, and not slay them. Amen.