

# The Lawless Women Revelation

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Heber C. Kimball was a charismatic person, seeing his first vision at the age of nine.<sup>1</sup> Throughout his life, he reported seeing visions, receiving revelations, observing signs in the heavens, speaking in tongues, and experiencing other spiritual manifestations. These experiences were integral to his world view, and he felt guided through life by spiritual communications. Although Kimball was a productive revelator, his revelations were never canonized, and he kept them private. Born in 1801 in Vermont, Kimball converted to Mormonism in 1832. He was ordained an apostle in 1835 and served as the first counselor to his good friend, Brigham Young, from 1847 until his death in 1868.

Kimball's formally recorded revelations began shortly before the death of Joseph Smith and are found in his journals and a memorandum book. However, these two records covered only portions of his life. It is likely that there were more recorded revelations that have been lost to time.

## Journal Revelations

Kimball recorded several revelations in his journal between June 6, 1844, and January 25, 1845.<sup>2</sup> In the first listed revelation, he described his method for obtaining revelation: "Last nite I clothed my self and offered up the Sines [signs] of the Holy Preasthood and called one [on] the name of the Lord[.] [H]e hurd me fore my heart was ^mad[e]^comfortable."<sup>3</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup>Heber C. Kimball, April 12, 1868, *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1855-86), 12:190, <https://archive.org/details/JoDV12/page/n197/mode/2up>.

<sup>2</sup>There are other items outside this period that border on the definition of revelation but could more accurately be called "items given by inspiration" or "being moved by the spirit."

<sup>3</sup>Heber C. Kimball journal, May 1844-May 1845, entry for June 6, 1844, MS 627, LDS Church History Library (hereafter CHL), <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/1c66d65a-8781-4476-b3dc-a12c6db39174/0/16>.

clothing and signs of the priesthood were part of the Nauvoo endowment ritual.<sup>4</sup> Participants would pray in a “prayer circle” as part of the “true order of prayer” where they would offer up the signs of the priesthood while dressed in ritual clothing.<sup>5</sup> This method was considered a way to ensure revelatory answers.<sup>6</sup> Kimball apparently followed this formula to receive revelations, although he usually did not have fellow participants.

Kimball continued his journal entry saying he “inquired by the rod.”<sup>7</sup> Sarah M. Kimball<sup>8</sup> said that Kimball “showed me a rod that the Lord through the Prophet Joseph had given to him. He said that when he wanted to find out anything that was his right to know, all he had to do was to kneel down with the rod in his hand, and that sometimes the Lord would answer his questions before he had time to ask them.”<sup>9</sup> Kimball may have perceived the rod

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<sup>4</sup>Kimball retrospectively recorded in his journal that in June 1842, “I was aniciated [initiated] into the ancient order was washed and anointed and Sealed and ordained a Preast, and so forth in company with nine others, Viz. Jos[e]ph Smith, . . .” Kimball Journal, May – November 1845, MS 627, CHL, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/ea3055f9-c274-4988-8815-eba70af1007d/0/114>. This may align with an entry in Joseph Smith’s journal dated May 4, 1842, where he was “in council” with nine others including Kimball who were receiving “certain instructions concerning the priesthood.” Journal, December 1841–December 1842, 94, Joseph Smith Papers (hereafter: JSP), <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/journal-december-1841-december-1842/25>. On June 17, 1842, Kimball wrote fellow apostle Parley P. Pratt, “we have recieved some pressious things through the Prophet [Joseph Smith] on the preast hood that would caus[e] your Soul to rejoice[.] I can not give them to you on paper fore they are not to be [w]rit[t]en. So you must come and get them fore your Self. . . . There is a similarity of preast Hood in masonary. Br[other] Joseph ses masonary was taken from preast hood but has become degennated but menny things are perfect.” Heber C. Kimball, “Letter to Parley and Mary Ann Pratt,” June 17, 1842, MS 897, CHL, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/707c7146-38a5-41e6-98d8-1cad8d89bcc5/0/1>. The signs and some other aspects of the ritual may have been familiar to Kimball due to their similarity to signs he received when raised a Mason in 1823.

<sup>5</sup>D. Michael Quinn, “Latter-day Saint Prayer Circles,” *BYU Studies* 19 no. 1 (Fall 1978): 79-105, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol19/iss1/6>.

<sup>6</sup>For example, Brigham Young preached, “Let a Quorum of High Priests go into an upper room, and there appear before the Lord in the garments of the holy Priesthood, and offer up before the Father, in the name of Jesus, the signs of the holy Priesthood, and then ask God to give a revelation concerning that doctrine, and they have a right to receive it.” Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, 9:91 (May 7, 1861) <https://archive.org/details/JoDV09/page/n97/mode/2up>.

<sup>7</sup>Kimball journal, May 1844-May 1845, entry for June 6, 1844, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/1c66d65a-8781-4476-b3dc-a12c6db39174/0/16>.

<sup>8</sup>Sarah Melissa Granger was married to Heber C. Kimball’s distant cousin Hiram S. Kimball.

<sup>9</sup>Sarah M. Kimball, statement, June 21, 1892, quoted in Solomon F. Kimball, “Sacred History,” Solomon F. Kimball papers, undated, MS 3220, CHL, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/ea243c1f-10a8-4b9e-9544-61de8b751d2d/0/0>. After quoting Sarah M. Kimball, Solomon Kimball added, “My mother [Vilate Kimball] and my sister, Helen Mar, told me the same thing.”

as a fulfillment of an 1837 dream about Joseph Smith giving him a rod while Kimball was crossing the ocean to his first foreign mission in England.<sup>10</sup>

It is not clear if he always used his rod for recorded revelations. For example, he wrote, “It now sundown, and I will go up stares and coll [call] on the Lord my God that He will keepe me and my dear family from the Evles [evils] of this world.”<sup>11</sup> Neither the rod, temple clothing, signs, nor an answer to his petition are mentioned, although each may have been a component. Kimball received at least ten revelations through his rod.

In the five revelations recorded in his journal, he asked about the status of his family multiple times, was twice told that congress would not help the saints,<sup>12</sup> that Willard Richards would survive his illness, and that the Twelve would overcome their enemies.<sup>13</sup> Finally on January 25, 1845, he “inquired of the Lord by the Rod as follows, If we should finish the Temple, it was verly yes, that my sins ware fore given and that I should over come, and get my Apointment of my inheritence while in the probation and that the Temple commity ware not Enimes to the Twelve Apostles.”<sup>14</sup>

## Memorandum Book Revelations

Not long after his death, Heber C. Kimball’s family discovered a book he had used for record keeping. It contained records of items received while crossing the plains, baptismal and ordinance dates, genealogical information, and more. Towards the end of “H.C. Kimballs Memorandum”<sup>15</sup> they discovered a series of recorded revelations received by Kimball between

<sup>10</sup>The dream occurred between July 1 and 19, 1837. See Orson F. Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball, an Apostle; The Father and Founder of the British Mission* (Salt Lake City: Kimball Family, 1888), 127.

<sup>11</sup>Kimball journal, May 1844-May 1845, entry for June 12, 1844, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/1c66d65a-8781-4476-b3dc-a12c6db39174/0/25>.

<sup>12</sup>In April 1844, Fellow apostle Orson Hyde petitioned the U.S. president and Congress on behalf of the Council of Fifty, asking that Joseph Smith lead one hundred thousand volunteers to protect national interests in the West. Kimball and Lyman Wight were later dispatched and joined Hyde in his efforts on June 2. Council of Fifty, Minutes, March 1844–January 1846; Volume 1, March 10, 1844–March 1, 1845, 261, JSP, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/council-of-fifty-minutes-march-1844-january-1846-volume-1-10-march-1844-1-march-1845/253>. Kimball’s revelations about congress occurred on June 6 and 10.

<sup>13</sup>Sidney Rigdon, John C. Bennett, Francis Higbee and Chauncey Higbee were specified. Kimball journal, May 1844-May 1845, entry for September 5, 1844, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/1c66d65a-8781-4476-b3dc-a12c6db39174/0/63>.

<sup>14</sup>Kimball journal, May 1844-May 1845, entry for January 25, 1845, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/1c66d65a-8781-4476-b3dc-a12c6db39174/0/84>.

<sup>15</sup>Heber C. Kimball, Memorandum Book, 1848-1864, MS 26352, CHL, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/record/c35560da-bfb2-4a64-a4df-f8d331e841cc/0?view=browse>. Biographer Stanley Kimball notes: “The first four pages consist of items received from various people

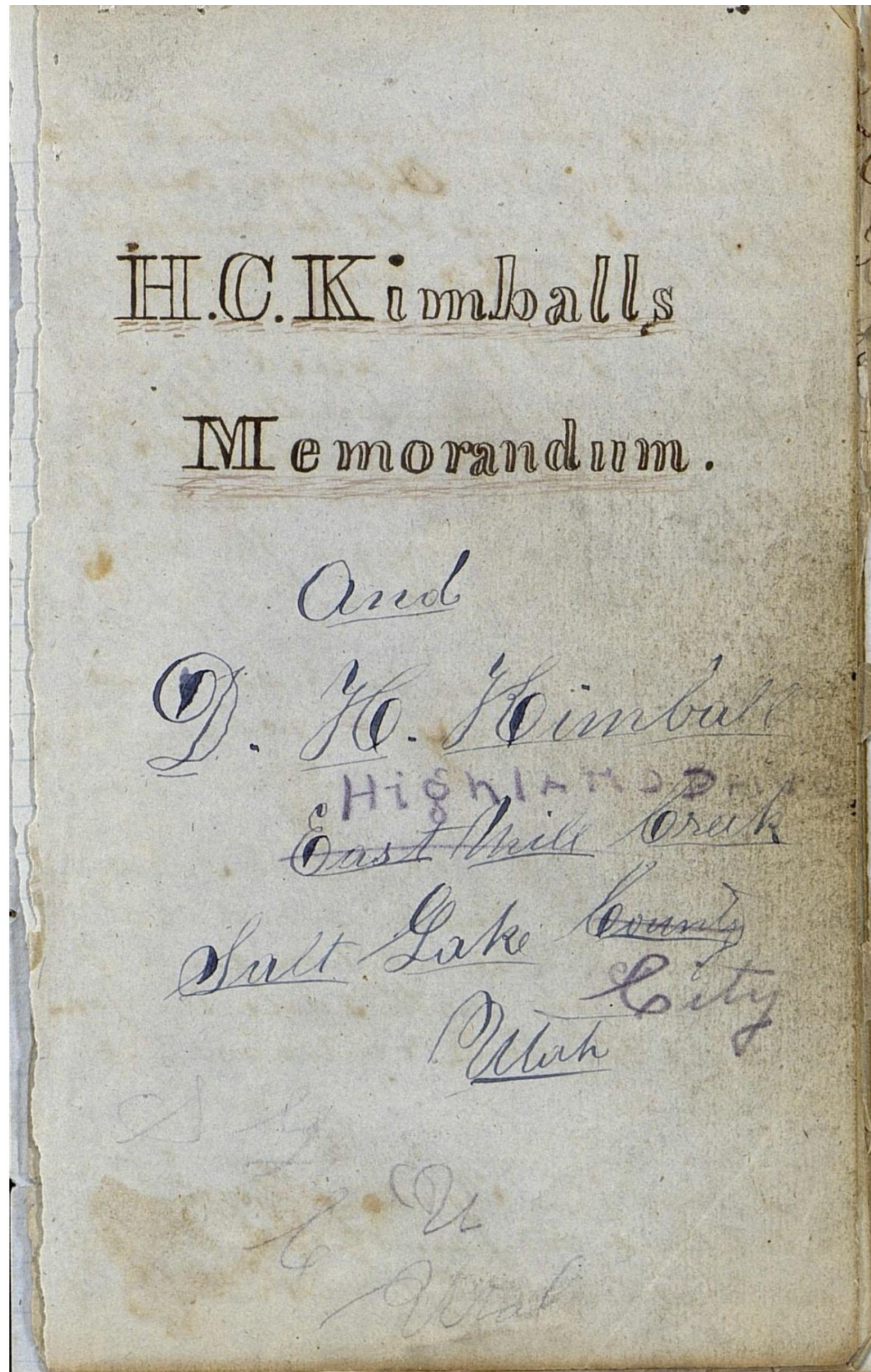


Figure 1:

Heber C. Kimball memorandum book, 1848-1864, MS 26352.  
Images courtesy of LDS Church History Library, Salt Lake City, UT

1852 and 1864. Referring to the Memorandum Book, his son noted, “After father died, we found in a blank book where he had jotted down some of the things the Lord had told him.”<sup>16</sup>

Most of the twenty-one revelatory items in the book<sup>17</sup> were of a prophetic nature, giving predictions of future events. These revelations predicted:

- A division of states between the North and South
- When the occupying soldiers of Johnston’s army would leave.<sup>18</sup>
- A period of sickness and mourning.<sup>19</sup>
- Two revelations about the U.S. “making war” with the church.<sup>20</sup>
- That Kimball would be blessed among the saints.
- That Kimball would be favored by Brigham Young above all others.

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during April and May 1848, apparently in connection with the immigration to the Great Salt Lake Valley. Following this are eighteen pages of baptismal, marriage, and ordination data for the years 1883 to 1934. Most of this material pertains to Kimball’s son David Heber.” Stanley B. Kimball, ed., *On the Potter’s Wheel: The Diaries of Heber C. Kimball*, Appendix A (Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Books in association with Smith Research Associates, 1987).

<sup>16</sup>Stanley B. Kimball, *The Diaries of Heber C. Kimball*, Appendix A, 171-72; Solomon Kimball; “Sacred History.”

<sup>17</sup>The CHL scan of the Memorandum Book has fourteen revelatory items, plus one additional item that has one sentence of a version of a revelation. If this item is counted, then there are three versions of a single revelation in the scan of the Memorandum Book plus twelve other revelatory items. Stanley Kimball does not count the single-sentence item in *Diaries of Heber C. Kimball*. Solomon Kimball’s “Sacred History” lists six revelations from the Memorandum Book that are not included in the CHL scan with a note that more revelations originally existed in the Memorandum Book that are of a personal nature. Stanley Kimball wondered if additional revelations were removed “intentionally or accidentally” from the Memorandum Book (Stanley B. Kimball, *The Diaries of Heber C. Kimball* Appendix A, note 3, 176). The items listed in “Sacred History” include four alternate versions of revelations found in the Memorandum Book, plus two additional revelations. In total, there are twenty-one known revelatory items, six of which appear to be alternate versions of revelations ranging from 1852 to 1865, leaving fifteen items with unique dates and ideological content. The majority of these revelations contain predictive text, sometimes with conditions, and can also be classified as prophecies. Non-predictive items include a revelation that Adam was the God and father of humanity, and the three versions of the February 3, 1852 revelation.

<sup>18</sup>The revelation was recorded in February 1859 which said most or all of the occupying U.S. troops were to leave within the year. Johnston’s army had entered Utah territory in June 1858, part of the so-called “Utah War.” The troops were recalled in 1861 because of the Civil War.

<sup>19</sup>The period was over the summer of 1859. Just after the text of the revelation, Kimball (probably later) noted it “was so.”

<sup>20</sup>This was predicted during the civil war in 1862, and that it would occur by the beginning of 1865.

- That the U.S. would reject the church's petition for statehood.<sup>21</sup>
- That Kimball could have twenty-five additional years of life if desired.<sup>22</sup>
- Several revelations predicting Kimball would be lifted up, while sorrow would befall fellow First Presidency Counselor Daniel H. Wells.<sup>23</sup>

Only four entries were not prophecies. Three of these shared the date of February 3, 1852. The text and dating of the three items make it apparent that these are three versions or attempts to write one revelation.

## Lawless Women Revelation, Version 1

The first of these three items<sup>24</sup> is short and written in faded pencil. It says:

*Feb 3. 1852  
Great Salt Lake City  
Mr K Shall devote his intire [sic] time<sup>25</sup>*

The "5" of "1852" was written over another number, possibly a "2," "3," "6," or "8." It is unclear why there is no additional text to the revelation.

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<sup>21</sup>When he received this revelation in 1862, the church was in the process of making an application for statehood which was rejected later that year.

<sup>22</sup>This was given in 1862 when he was 60 years old. Kimball lived to 1868. He apparently prayed for death in his later years. See Solomon Kimball, "Sacred History," and Stanley B. Kimball, *The Diaries of Heber C. Kimball*, 172.

<sup>23</sup>Wells was appointed Second Counselor to Brigham Young in 1857. Two of these revelations were received in 1862. The last (1864) also included Albert Carrington and Joseph A. Young, who were to be "spoiled" in their evil designs and removed from their place. Kimball, who had partnered with Brigham Young for most of his life, felt he was losing favor with Young, and being slighted by these men. Another revelation discussing Wells is recorded in Solomon Kimball, "Sacred History."

<sup>24</sup>My ordering of the revelations is based on their content. The pages of the Memorandum Book are unbound.

<sup>25</sup>This item was not included in Stanley Kimball's record of revelations from the Memorandum Book. Following the text of the revelation are a number of math problems in a different hand, subtracting various numbers (years?) from either 1934 or 1931. For example:  $1934 - 1854 = 80$ .

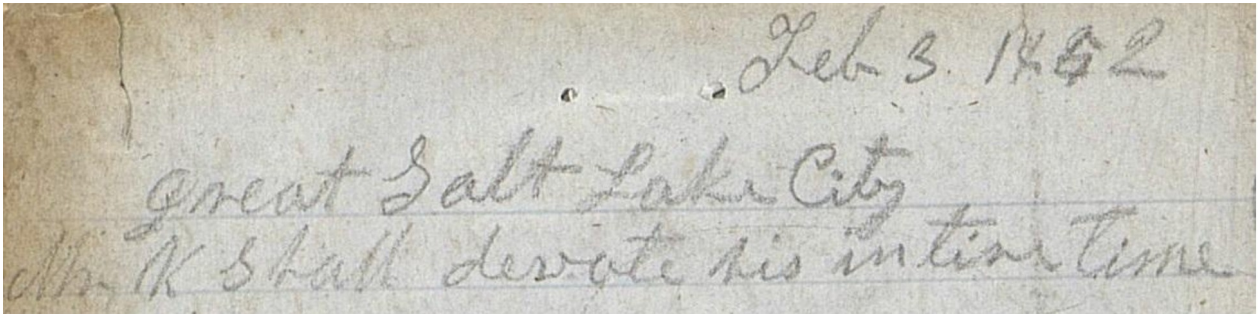


Figure 2:  
 Lawless Women Revelation, version 1.  
 Heber C. Kimball memorandum book, 1848-1864, MS 26352, p. [8], CHL.

All three versions of the revelation begin similarly, but with distinct differences.

- "Mr K Shall devote his intire time"
- "My Son Heber ~~Thou~~ <sup>he</sup> shall devote his entire time..."
- "The Spirit said I should devote my time..."

In the first version, Kimball is tersely addressed as "Mr K." In the second, he is warmly called "My Son Heber," and the biblical sounding "thou" is crossed out and replaced with "he." In the third version, Kimball is not addressed, but told by the spirit that he should devote his time, but not his entire time as in the first two versions. All three versions provide the date and city where the revelation was received, but with variation in form.

## Lawless Women Revelation, Version 2

The text of the second version is as follows:

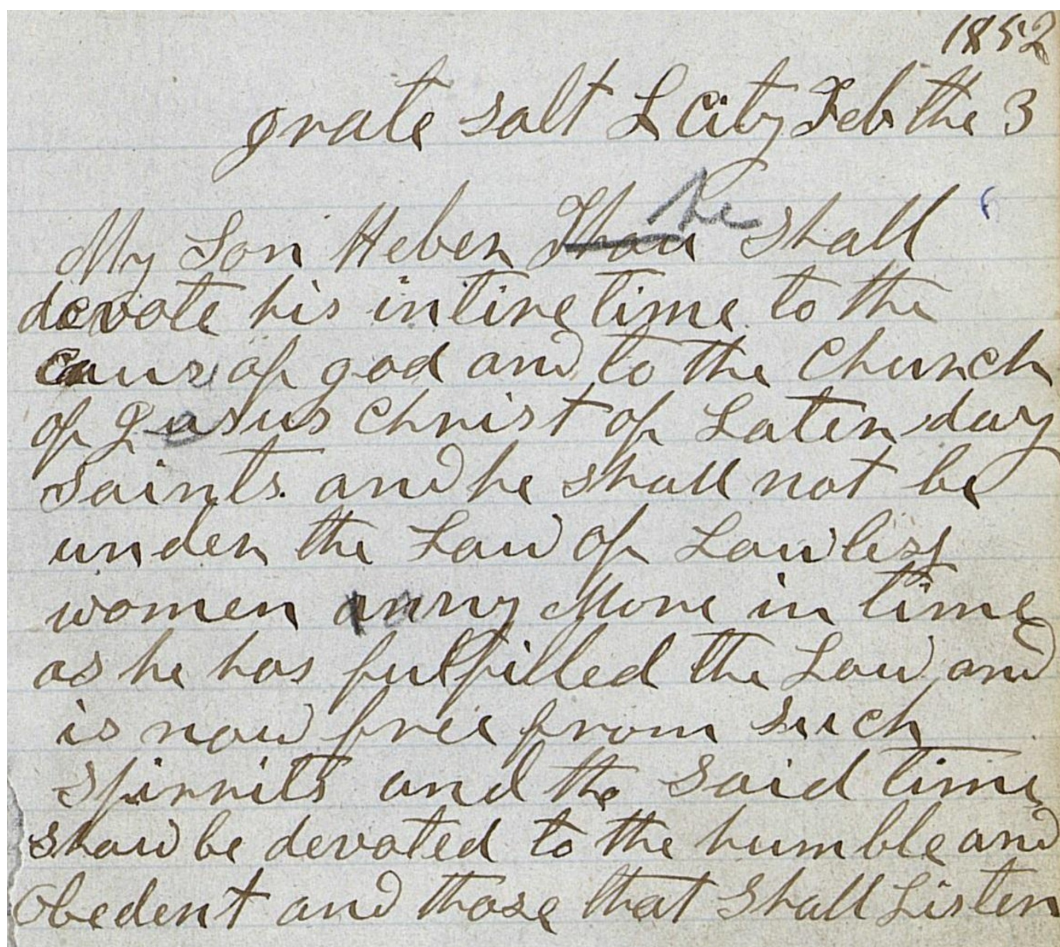
*Grate Salt L. City, Feb the 3 <sup>1852</sup><sup>26</sup>  
 My Son Heber ~~Thou~~ <sup>he</sup><sup>27</sup> shall devote his entire time to the caus[e] of god and  
 to the Church of Jesus Christ of Lat[t]er day Saints and he shall not be under the*

<sup>26</sup> "1852" written above "the 3" in same pen and hand.

<sup>27</sup> The two corrections in the text of this version were done with a different writing instrument later in Kimball's hand. "He" is written above "Thou."



law of Lawless women ~~an~~<sup>any</sup><sup>28</sup> More in time as he has fulfilled the Law and is now free from such Spirrits and the Said time shall be devoted to the humble and obed[i]ent and those that shall listen.



1852  
grate salt L City Feb the 3  
My Son Heber ~~Thou~~ <sup>He</sup> shall  
devote his intine time to the  
Causa of god and to the Church  
of Jesus Christ of Latter day  
Saints. and he shall not be  
under the Law of Lawless  
women any more in time  
as he has fulfilled the Law and  
is now free from such  
Spirrits and the said time  
shall be devoted to the humble and  
Obedent and those that shall listen

Figure 3:

Lawless Women Revelation, version 2.

Heber C. Kimball memorandum book, 1848-1864, MS 26352, p. [15], CHL.

This text describes Kimball fulfilling “the law of lawless women,” freeing up time to devote to the church. Because he had fulfilled their law, he would be free from “such Spirrits.”

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<sup>28</sup>Correction was made later with different writing instrument.



He is told that his time should be devoted to those who were obedient and would listen to him. This curious revelation raises several questions:

Who were the lawless women?

What law had Kimball fulfilled?

How was he free from the spirits?

What or who were these spirits?

## Lawless Women Revelation, Version 3

The third version also discusses lawless women, but with some interesting differences.

*The Word of the Lord to Me HCK. G.S.L. City, Feb[r]uary the 3, 1852  
 The Spirrit said I should devote my time to the Church of Jesus Christ of Lat[t]er  
 day Saints and I should not be under the Law of Lawless [indistinguishable] women  
 anny more in time as I have fulfilled the Law [and] am now free from Such Spirrits.  
 and the said time shall be devoted to the humble and Obed[i]ent and those that  
 shall Listen to my Council and shall have faith in my council. and shall Listen  
 to his Law for he is my servent and I will stand by him and those that will not  
 build him up shall not prosper I mean those of his hous[e] shall not prosper and  
 peas [peace] shall not be with thim [sic] They shall see sorrow Except they repent  
 HCK*

This version contains the most text, sharing conceptually similar text, but with additional text where the previous version ends. Most of this version is in Kimball's voice while the other two versions are in the voice of the Lord.

Version 2 has a phrase that is removed in Version 3 (Table 1, Row 4) where Kimball is to devote his time to both the cause of God, and to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The "cause of god" is removed in version 3. Other than this, the text of Version 2 corresponds with the text in Version 3 (Table 1, Rows 2-6) except that the voice of Version 2 is in the voice of the Lord, while the voice of Version 3 is in Kimball's voice.

Additional text was added to the end of version 3 (Table 1, rows 7-9). This text shifts from Heber's voice to the voice of the Lord, who instructs them (the "Spirrits") to listen to

25 city February the 3 1852

the spirit said I should devote  
my time to the church of Jesus  
Christ of Latter day Saints  
and I should not be under  
the Law of Lawless women  
any more in time as I have  
fulfilled the Law am now free  
from such spirits. and  
the said time shall be devoted  
to the humble and obedient and  
those that shall listen to my  
council and shall have faith  
in my council. and shall listen  
to his Law for he is my servant  
and I will stand by him  
and those that will not build  
him up shall not prosper  
I mean those of his house  
shall not prosper and they  
shall not be with them they  
shall see sorrow except they  
repent

HCK

Figure 4:

Lawless Women Revelation, version 3.

Heber C. Kimball memorandum book, 1848-1864, MS 26352, p. [13], CHL.

Kimball's law, and that the Lord stands by Kimball. The shift in voice in the addition may have been due to an uncareful reading of the preceding text that was in Heber's voice.

A period at the end of row 7 of version 3 suggests that Kimball may have completed the sentence. However, additional text past the period changes the finalized sentence into a run-on sentence that ignores the period, continuing in row 8. This may indicate that Kimball later returned to a completed revelation with additional thoughts.

Table 1		
Comparison of versions 2 and 3 of the Lawless Women Revelation		
Row	Version 2	Version 3
1		The Word of the Lord to Me HCK.
2	Grate Salt L. City, Feb the 3 /1852/	G.S.L. City, Febuary the 3, 1852
3	My Son Heber <del>Theu</del> /he/ shall devote his entire time	The Spirrit said I should devote my time
4	to the caus of god and	
5	to the Church of Jesus Christ of Later day Saints and he shall not be under the law of Lawless women an/a/ny More in time	to the Church of Jesus Christ of Later day Saints and I should not be under the Law of Lawless [indistinguishable] women anny more in time
6	as he has fulfilled the Law and is now free from such Spirrits and the Said time shall be devoted to the humble and obedent and those that shall listen.	as I have fulfilled the Law [and] am now free from Such Spirrits. and the said time shall be devoted to the humble and Obedent and those that shall Listen
7		to my Council and shall have faith in my council.
8		and shall Listen to his Law for he is my servent and I will stand by him and those that will not build him up shall not prosper
9		I mean those of his hous shall not prosper and peas [peace] shall not be with thim They shall see sorrow Except they repent HCK

The final line of version 3 has the Lord adding clarification to what has been previously said (Table 1, row 9): *“I mean those of his hous[e] shall not prosper and peas [peace] shall not be with thim They shall see sorrow Except they repent.”* This sentence provides clues about the identity of the lawless women. The phrase “those of his house” indicates the problem occurred in his household. These women in “his house” would not “listen to his law” and

would “not build him up.” This tells us that the “lawless women” were disobedient wives, and would not listen to their husband’s law, but instead would tear him down.

The revelation warns that “except they repent” they “shall not prosper and peas [peace] shall not be with them,” and that Kimball is “free from such Spirrits.” The text of rows 5-6 (Table 1) indicates that the Lawless Women and the “Spirrits” are one and the same: “I should not be under the Law of Lawless women anny more in time as I have fulfilled the Law [and] am now free from Such Spirrits.”

Note the revelation’s term “in time”: “. . . he shall not be under the law of Lawless women any more in time.” This phrase may delineate between “time” (this life) and “eternity” (the next life). The revelation might indicate that the breach of law by his wives and its consequences were for “time” but not eternity. Or the phrase may have been used in a more pedestrian way, saying that in time (i.e., after a while) he would not be under their law.

## Kimball, Plural Marriage & the Status of Women

Heber C. Kimball was the “most married man in the modern Western world.”<sup>29</sup> He married his first wife Vilate in 1822, and his first plural wife, Sarah Noon, in 1842.<sup>30</sup> In the next year, he offered to Joseph Smith, his daughter, Helen Mar, who writes that she was married to Smith in May 1843.<sup>31</sup> In the fall of 1844 after Joseph Smith’s death, Kimball married eleven more wives;<sup>32</sup> three more in early 1845; twenty-two in the winter of 1845-46, and another in 1848. After a nearly eight-year break, he married four more wives in 1856 and his last in 1857 for a total of forty-four wives.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Stanley B. Kimball, *Heber C. Kimball: Mormon Patriarch and Pioneer* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 234

<sup>30</sup>Stanley Kimball, *Patriarch and Pioneer*, 95. Biographer Stanley Kimball also includes the story that Joseph Smith introduced the principle of plural marriage to Kimball in the summer of 1841 when Smith asked him if he (Joseph) could marry Kimball’s wife Vilate. After a few anxious days, Heber and Vilate agreed to the proposal, but Smith told them it was only a test, and the proposed polyandrous marriage did not occur. See 93, 109 note 1.

<sup>31</sup>Stanley Kimball, *Patriarch and Pioneer*, 95; Helen Mar Kimball Whitney, “Scenes in Nauvoo,” *Woman’s Exponent* 11, no. 5 (August 1, 1882): 39; Jeni Broberg Holzapfel and Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, eds., *A Woman’s View: Helen Mar Whitney’s Reminiscences of Early Church History* (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1997), 482–87.

<sup>32</sup>I count the 1844 marriage of Lydia Kenyon in this category, even though the month or day of her marriage is unknown.

<sup>33</sup>This marriage list is based on Charles M. Hatch and Todd M. Compton, editors, *A Widow’s Tale: 1884-1896 Diary of Helen Mar Kimball Whitney* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997), 39-41, and Stanley Kimball, *Patriarch and Pioneer*, 307-15. Heber C. Kimball would state at Vilate Kimball’s funeral that “she has been true to me always and never left Nor forsook me. I have taken 40 wives & many without her knowledge but she afterwards gave them to me in the Temple.” Wilford Woodruff Journal (October 22,

Kimball's most productive period of marrying occurred in February 1846. On the 3rd he married ten women, the following day he married two more wives, and the day following five more.

Kimball received his Lawless Women revelation on the sixth anniversary of the day he married ten women – the most women he married in a single day. Not much imagination is needed to surmise that managing such a large household would have its share of problems.<sup>34</sup> A grandson noted that Kimball “was often heard to declare that the plural order of marriage, with its manifold cares and perplexities, had cost him 'bushels of tears.’”<sup>35</sup>

In the nine months previous to the Lawless Women revelation, he had divorced twice and would go through a separation and divorce in the next two months. A total of sixteen wives would leave him in total, or about 36% of his wives.<sup>36</sup>

From the colonial period through the mid-nineteenth century, American culture remained highly patriarchal. Women were expected to be obedient and focus on domestic duties, while men held legal and economic control over their families and operated in the public sphere. The mid-nineteenth century saw the beginnings of change for women, including laws passed for Utah Territory in early 1852.<sup>37</sup> For instance, both women and men could now act as their own legal representatives or appoint either a woman or a man to represent them. Previously, women were represented by a male relative or guardian.<sup>38</sup>

Another law permitted women to initiate divorce proceedings and potentially retain custody of their children, as well as have a say in child custody agreements.<sup>39</sup> Fathers were typically considered the legal guardians of their children, usually retaining custody after divorce. Additionally, another law protected widows by granting them property rights despite the stipulations in their husbands' wills or claims from creditors.<sup>40</sup>

As a respected member of the legislature,<sup>41</sup> Kimball was involved in discussions from the fall of 1851 through the winter of 1851-1852 to form a government that included these laws, which were approved within several weeks of Kimball's Lawless Women revelation.

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1865 - December 31, 1872), entry for October 8, 1868, titled “The Funeral of Vilate M. Kimball Oct 24 1867.” <https://wilfordwoodruffpapers.org/p/kRoX>.

<sup>34</sup>Stanley Kimball, *Patriarch and Pioneer*, 227-41.

<sup>35</sup>Stanley Kimball, *Patriarch and Pioneer*, 231.

<sup>36</sup>Stanley Kimball, *Patriarch and Pioneer*, 227-28, 307-15; Hatch and Compton, *Widow's Tale*, 40-41.

<sup>37</sup>Lisa Madsen Pearson and Carol Cornwall Madsen, “Innovation and Accommodation: The Legal Status of Women in Territorial Utah, 1850-1896,” in *Women in Utah History: Paradigm or Paradox?*, Patricia Lyn Scott and Linda Thatcher, eds. (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2005), 36-81.

<sup>38</sup>An Act for the Regulation of Attorneys, in *Acts, Resolutions and Memorials, Passed at the Several Annual Sessions of the Legislative Assembly of the Territory of Utah*, 90, edited by Brigham H. Young, (Salt Lake City, 1855), 55-56 (hereafter: *Legislative Assembly*). This act was approved February 18, 1852.

<sup>39</sup>An Act in Relation to Bills of Divorce, *Legislative Assembly*, 82-94, approved March 6, 1852.

<sup>40</sup>Act in Relation to Estates of Decedents, *Legislative Assembly*, 67-73, approved March 3, 1852.

<sup>41</sup>Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball*, 405-06.



During these deliberations, Kimball may have reflected on the status of his marriages and the potential implications of his wives' new rights.

Another topic being debated in the legislature shared some commonality with Kimball's revelation regarding improper role reversal (a wife ruling over her husband), and the concept of a law being fulfilled, or ending. From mid-January to early-February 1852, repeated debates over a slavery statute invoked discussions about slavery, the curse of Cain, African American rights to rule, interracial marriage, and priesthood. It was during these discussions that Brigham Young first publicly articulated priesthood restrictions against African Americans.<sup>42</sup> The resulting statute would legalize slavery in the Utah Territory.<sup>43</sup>

On February 5, 1852, Young spoke of the elevated "seed of Abraham" over the "seed of Cane [Cain];" and that "Negros shall not rule us." To illustrate his point, Young spoke hypothetically about a procreative relationship between white priesthood leaders and African American women. "We will all go & mingle with the seed of Cane and they may have all the privileg[e] they want . . . that moment we loose the pristhood & all Blessing & we would not be redeemed untill Cane was."<sup>44</sup> In Young's view, the proposed marital relationship between white priesthood holders and African Americans would inappropriately elevate the subservient group, while demoting white men and erasing their priesthood.

Kimball dated his revelation the day before the statute was approved and two days before Young's sermon. As Kimball's revelation indicated, the reversed roles in his hierarchical procreative relationships would be properly restored because he had fulfilled the law of the lawless women. Kimball penned God's will, and Young defended his newly announced doctrine by warning about the dangers of deviating from proper authority roles with marital partners. The weeks-long discussion about law, proper roles, and hierarchy regarding African American relationships to white men may have factored into Kimball's revelation.

From its origins, Mormonism developed a hierarchical and patriarchal approach in how church leadership and family were viewed. When Kimball began marrying twenty-two of his wives in the winter of 1845, he addressed the Holy Order, a quorum of those who had received temple rites where each woman covenanted to obey the law of her husband. Speaking

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<sup>42</sup>Later, the restrictions would exclude temple access for all African Americans in addition to priesthood for Black men. The speech likely occurred January 23, 1852. Utah Territorial Legislature, 1852, MS 4534 box 1 folder 3, Carruth transcription, March 30, 2013,

<https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/27d8e6cd-eb4f-4cb6-9431-6bdc4874af7d/0/0>.

<sup>43</sup>An Act in Relation to Service, *Legislative Assembly*, 82-94, 80-82, approved February 4, 1852.

<sup>44</sup>Brigham Young quoted in Wilford Woodruff Journal (January 1, 1847 – December 31, 1853), "Governor B. Youngs address Before the legislaetive assembly of the Territory of Utah upon slavery" after entry for January 4, 1852, <https://wilfordwoodruffpapers.org/p/W6Ro>. Compare Brigham Young, February 5, 1852, CR 100 912, Church History Department Pitman Shorthand transcriptions, 2013-2021, Addresses and sermons, 1851-1874, Miscellaneous transcriptions, 1869, 1872, 1889, 1848, 1851-1854, 1859-1863, Utah Territorial Legislature, 1852 January February, CHL, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/e6a939a0-3402-4771-814d-4eaf2547e613/0/0>.

of marriage covenants, Kimball “spoke of the Necessity of Women being in subjection to their husbands. I am subject to my God, my wife is in subjection to me and will reverence me in my place and I will make her happy. I do not want her to step forward and dictate to me any more than I dictate to President Young.”<sup>45</sup>

A form of this idea continued to be taught in the discourse of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints into the modern era and was part of the LDS temple endowment where women made a covenant to obey the law of their husbands until 1990.<sup>46</sup> Since then, the covenant was softened and finally removed.<sup>47</sup> It appears that many fundamentalist Mormon communities, though, have kept the wording of the earlier covenant. In 1995, the idea that men “preside” in the home “by divine design” was codified in the LDS Proclamation on the Family which remains in effect.<sup>48</sup>

Two months after receiving the Lawless Women revelation, Kimball preached: “Some have said that I was vary presumptuous to say this Brothor Brigham was my God & Saveoiour Brothe[r] Joseph was his God the one that gave Joseph the keys of the kingdom was his God wivhich was peter Jesus Christ was his God & the God & Fathe[r] of Jesus Christ was Adam.”<sup>49</sup> It was presumed that Kimball’s wives would receive exaltation through his priesthood, while he in turn would be saved by Brigham Young, who would be saved by Joseph Smith, and so on.

Two years later, Kimball spoke of the importance of hierarchical roles in maintaining happiness, hinting at some of his own marital strife. “Now suppose my wives and my children would take the same course to please me, and be subject to me, as I am to brother Brigham, would there be any sorrow, or confusion, or broils? No, there would be no sorrow, there

<sup>45</sup>George D. Smith, *An Intimate Chronicle: The Journals of William Clayton* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books in association with Smith Research Associates, 1995), 222 (December 21, 1845). This may imply that Brigham Young was Kimball’s god.

<sup>46</sup>John Dart, “Mormons Modify Temple Rites,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 5, 1990. Also removed was a summary called the lecture at the veil where “Eve covenanted with Adam that thenceforth she would obey the law of her husband and abide by his counsel in righteousness” and “he shall rule over thee in righteousness.” In the endowment, men and women vicariously act out the roles of Adam and Eve. As presiding patriarch of the church, William Smith gave nine patriarchal blessings to women between June and July 1845 where he told them to obey the law of their husbands. H. Michael Marquardt, *Early Patriarchal Blessings of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Smith Research Associates, 2007), 264, 271, 276, 283, 301, 309-310, 339. For an example of this continuing to be taught publicly in modern times, Harold B. Lee said wives are “bound to the law of your husband only so far as he keeps the law of God.” Harold B. Lee, *The Teachings of Harold B. Lee*, ed. Clyde J. Williams (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1996), 247, 253.

<sup>47</sup>Jana Riess, “Major Changes to Mormon Temple Ceremony, Especially for Women,” *Religious News Service*, January 3, 2019.

<sup>48</sup>“The Family: A Proclamation to the World.” *Ensign* 27, no. 11 (November 1995): 102.

<sup>49</sup>Wilford Woodruff Journal, (January 1, 1847 – December 31, 1853), entry for April 10, 1852, <https://wilfordwoodruffpapers.org/p/Dk16>.

would be no blues in my family. I am never blue when I do brother Brigham's will; but when I do not do it, I begin to grow blue . . . It always makes my family feel blue when they will not do as I wish them."<sup>50</sup>

This hierarchical model extended into the home. For example, referring to Jesus's statement, "If you love me, keep my commandments," Kimball said four years after the Lawless Women revelation: "If you love brothers Brigham, Heber, Jedediah, and the Twelve, please to keep our commandments that are given to you from day to day, and you will be blest and exalted. I do not want a woman [i.e. a wife] to tell me that she loves me, when she does not keep my commandments, for her statement would be vague and foolish."<sup>51</sup>

The next year, Kimball also preached: "What!—sustain a woman, a wife, in preference to sustaining the Prophet Joseph, brother Brigham, and his brethren! Your religion is vain when you take that course. Well, my wife may say, 'If you will sustain Brigham in preference to me, I will leave you.' I should reply, 'Leave, and be damned!' and that very quickly . . . Women are made to be led, and counselled, and directed. . . . let every man's wife strengthen the cable that connects her with her husband; for, if she does not do so, she will go to hell, and you cannot help it."<sup>52</sup>

A month later, Kimball offered his rationale for men ruling over women. "He said that women told him that He had no right to controll a woman because He was not a woman[.] He said that He contained the principle of both the men and the women for both male & female proceded from him[.] He said many though[t] that the seat of life or the soul or mind of man was in the heart others in the brain but wharever the seed of life was located there was the seat of livfe & the foundation of the soul."<sup>53</sup>

In 1857, Kimball proposed a possible dialogue that might occur upon his death when meeting Joseph Smith in the spirit world, which may relate to the idea that Kimball's lawless wives were expendable (that he was "free from Such Spirrits"):

"Here we are brother Joseph; we are here ourselves are we not, with none of the property we possessed in our probationary state, not even the rings on our fingers?" He will say to us, "Come along, my boys, . . . where are your wives?"

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<sup>50</sup> *Journal of Discourses* 2:153 (April 2, 1854), [https://archive.org/details/per\\_utah-and-the-mormons\\_journal-of-discourses-\\_brigham-young-\\_1855\\_2/page/152/mode/2up](https://archive.org/details/per_utah-and-the-mormons_journal-of-discourses-_brigham-young-_1855_2/page/152/mode/2up).

<sup>51</sup> *Journal of Discourses*, 4:65 (November 2, 1856), <https://archive.org/details/JoDV04/page/n71/mode/2up>; Cf. John 14:15.

<sup>52</sup> *Journal of Discourses*, 5:28-29 (July 12, 1857), <https://archive.org/details/JoDV05/page/n35/mode/2up>.

<sup>53</sup> Heber C. Kimball quoted in Wilford Woodruff Journal (January 1, 1854 – December 31, 1859), entry for August 2, 1857 - August 11, 1857, <https://wilfordwoodruffpapers.org/p/pgRN>.

“They are back yonder; they would not follow us.” “Never mind,” says Joseph, “here are thousands, have all you want.”<sup>54</sup>

The Lawless Women revelation gave Kimball permission to estrange himself from his “lawless,” unruly wives by ignoring them, effectively separating from them with some ending in divorce. This would free up more of his time to devote to his leadership duties. Kimball would no longer be “under the law of Lawless women any more” because he had fulfilled their law, or in other words, endured enough of his less humble, independent-minded wives dictating to him, or trying to negotiate with him, and he was “now free from such Spirrits,” with divine permission to associate only with “the humble and obedient” wives.

## Summary

Kimball’s journals and Memorandum Book are a treasure trove of information, providing a look at Kimball’s personal prophecies and revelations while an apostle and member of the First Presidency. Of all his revelations, Kimball put more effort into the Lawless Women Revelation than any other. With three versions of the text, we get a glimpse of his process of articulating and refining revelation.

We can see this revelation taking form through the various versions. The earliest attempt at dictating the revelation was aborted part way through the first sentence. His relationship with the Lord was formal and distant, as he is addressed as “Mr. K.” The second version shares the same date and introductory phrase as the earlier version but includes metaphorical references, such as “Spirrits” and “lawless women” under whose law he found himself, along with the fulfillment of that law. In this version, Kimball is addressed warmly by the Lord as “My Son.”

The third version is the longest of the three and in the voice of Kimball who said the spirit had told him these things. There is additional text where the previous version ends. The final line was apparently added to help decipher the earlier cryptic text.

It may be that Kimball received this revelation as he pondered the anniversary of his wedding to ten wives in the Nauvoo temple six years earlier, and the corresponding difficulties that had ensued. Alternatively, the ongoing legislative discussions about granting women additional rights, or Young’s articulated fear of African Americans improperly having authority over whites – might have influenced his revelation. Or there may have been other factors. Any inversion of authority roles upset the divinely established hierarchy in Young and Kimball’s minds. Kimball found happiness by strictly following Brigham Young as if Young were

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<sup>54</sup>Journal of Discourses, 4:209 (February 1, 1857), <https://archive.org/details/JoDV04/page/n215/mode/2up>, reformatted for readability.

his god. Kimball felt his wives should similarly revere him to find happiness through humble obedience. Even though the mid-19th century saw some societal advancements for women, Kimball's religious rhetoric towards women reflected a conservative, patriarchal mindset, not uncommon at the time.

The theology introduced by Joseph Smith, further evolved by Brigham Young, and echoed by Heber C. Kimball defined a hierarchical and patriarchal doctrinal framework for Latter-day Saints. Young viewed the accumulation of wives and their progeny as a means to raise up a royal priesthood and expand a man's kingdom. Kimball embraced this ideal more fervently than any other man in the early Utah church.

However, his attempt to live this "celestial" form of marriage did not produce a heavenly family on earth. Too many of his wives were independent-minded, desiring more influence over their lives or seeking greater attention and financial support from their often-absent husband.<sup>55</sup> Ten years earlier, Kimball's faith had been severely tried with the introduction of plural marriage.<sup>56</sup> But Kimball remained true and faithfully embraced the "Principle," practicing it with a vengeance. Now, he and his wives were tried with the practical implementation of large-scale plural marriage.

Kimball sought God's sanction to alleviate the angst caused by the myriad personalities in his enormous family, believing he had received divine permission to focus solely on his humble and obedient wives. For those whom God allowed him to ignore, he foresaw and prophesied sorrow for the lawless women in his family.

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<sup>55</sup>Stanley Kimball, *Patriarch and Pioneer*, 227-41.

<sup>56</sup>Stanley Kimball, *Patriarch and Pioneer*, 93-107.