

*Historical Context of the Doctrine and Covenants and Other Modern Scriptures, Volume 1*, by Kurt Elieson (Dallas, Texas: Kurt Elieson, 2011).

Kurt Elieson's *Historical Context of the Doctrine and Covenants and Other Modern Scriptures* is a nice self-published surprise. Elieson, a Texas attorney, saw a hole in the corpus of Doctrine and Covenants commentaries and study guides, and he aimed to fill it. He has succeeded on several fronts.

Elieson's contention is that most published commentaries on the Doctrine and Covenants "often discuss the historical background of each section," but frequently "in chopped-up little pieces that are themselves separated from the larger context." And, Elieson asserts, narrative histories of the Church "rarely mention even half [of the D&C's] sections." His book seeks to be a bridge over that gap by "providing an uninterrupted narrative focused specifically on the Doctrine and Covenants" (viii). That approach gives Elieson's book real value. It is essentially a chronological reporting of events connected with the Restoration's first decade (1820–1831), with special attention to each section of the Doctrine and Covenants as it appears in that chronology. The term "narrative" might be a little misleading, since the book does not attempt a smooth and continuous story. It is, in that sense, more journalistic than anything; Elieson has given each sequential episode its own heading, he has written in the present tense, and he has quoted liberally from other sources.

But that is what makes this book's contribution unique. It brings together a commendable number of sources—primary and secondary—such that interested readers can find, in one place, a wealth of information about how and where each of Joseph Smith's

revelations fits into the history of the Church. Elieson has overcome the penchant for "chopped-up" snippets of historical background. He has also interspersed among the many Mormon vignettes a number of American and world history sections that illustrate the larger cultural and political landscape in which Joseph Smith and his associates lived and thought.

Elieson's book incorporates much of the latest scholarship coming out of the Joseph Smith Papers Project. Because this field is currently a hotbed of discovery, it is understandable that some of the most recent works might be missed in Elieson's bibliography—like Mark Staker's important *Hearken, O Ye People*, or Steven Harper's *Making Sense of the Doctrine and Covenants*. And since Elieson's book has been published, there have been developments that readers will want to keep in mind, like the new edition of the scriptures with updated Doctrine and Covenants section headings. The forthcoming first volume of the Documents series of the *Joseph Smith Papers* also promises to add important detail to the work Elieson tackles, since that series places all of the revelations (and other Joseph Smith documents) into a chronological, heavily annotated framework.

One other minor drawback of Elieson's book is that the citation format in the notes is a little difficult to follow because of abbreviations and italics, but the notes can be sorted through with a little effort (and recourse to the bibliography). A more standardized citation system would have solved that issue. Still, in most respects Elieson has woven together in one helpful book an up-to-date and remarkably thorough collection of diary accounts and documentary evidence to give depth and context to the story of the receipt (and, importantly, the early circulation) of

Joseph Smith's revelations. Because of that, Elieson's book should earn a place on many desks as a ready reference for readers interested in both the Doctrine and Covenants and the history of the Latter-day Saints.

—J. B. Haws