Doctrine & Covenants 50 Background

Joseph Smith taught:

“During all dispensations when the gospel has been upon the earth to bless the children of God, Satan has devised various means of counterfeiting the revelatory process. One of Satan's methods is to deceive men with experiences that are difficult to understand, a technique especially evident in the very early days of the Restoration. The Prophet Joseph Smith observed: "Soon after the Gospel was established in Kirtland, and during the absence of the authorities of the Church, many false spirits were introduced, many strange visions were seen, and wild, enthusiastic notions were entertained: men ran out of doors under the influence of this spirit, and some of them got upon the stumps of trees and shouted, and all kinds of extravagances were entered into by them; one man pursued a ball that he said he saw flying in the air, until he came to a precipice, when he jumped into the top of a tree, which saved his life; and many ridiculous things were entered into, calculated to bring disgrace upon the Church of God, to cause the Spirit of God to be withdrawn, and to uproot and destroy those glorious principles which had been developed for the salvation of the human family." (History of the Church, 4:580.)

John Whitmer, describing the excessive spiritual aberrations that he witnessed in that early day, wrote: "Some had visions and could not tell what they saw, some would fancy to themselves that they had the sword of Laban, and would wield it as expert as a light dragoon; some would act like an Indian in the act of scalping; some would slide or scoot on the floor with the rapidity of a serpent, which they termed sailing in the boat to the Lamanites, preaching the gospel. And many other vain and foolish maneuvers that are unseeming and unprofitable to mention. Thus the devil blinded the eyes of some good and honest disciples. I write these things to show how ignorant and undiscerning children are, and how easy mankind is led astray, notwithstanding the things of God that are written concerning his kingdom." ("Church History," Journal of History, Jan. 1908, p. 55.)