

LECTURE 2

FAITH: Mormonism | TEXT: Doctrine And Covenants | VOLUME: 1835 | AUTHOR: Joseph Smith

OVERVIEW

Lecture 2 of the 'Lectures on Faith' (originally part of the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants) addresses the object of faith—God—and the epistemological question of how humanity acquires knowledge of His existence. Joseph Smith argues against the idea that creation alone (Natural Theology) is sufficient to spark the initial idea of God in the human mind. Instead, he posits that knowledge of God originated in a direct, face-to-face revelation to Adam. This knowledge was then preserved and transmitted via 'human testimony' through a chronologically overlapping chain of patriarchs. Smith utilizes extensive genealogical math (based on Genesis 5 and 11) to demonstrate that figures like Methuselah knew both Adam and Noah, and Shem knew both Noah and Abraham, ensuring the tradition remained pure. The text also incorporates the 'New Translation' (Joseph Smith Translation) of Genesis, asserting that Adam received explicit Christian theological instruction (sacrifice in the name of the Son, the gift of the Holy Ghost) immediately after the expulsion from Eden. The lecture concludes that while faith begins with human testimony, its ultimate goal is for the believer to obtain their own direct manifestation of God, similar to the ancients.

KEY FIGURES

God the Father, Adam, Eve, Cain, Abel, Seth, Enoch, Methuselah, Lamech, Noah, Shem, Abraham

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. TRANSMISSION VIA HUMAN TESTIMONY

Assertion: The initial idea of God's existence comes solely through human testimony passed down from father to son, not through creation or intuition.

"We have seen that it was human testimony, and human testimony only, that excited this enquiry, in the first instance in their minds—it was the credence they gave to the testimony of their fathers"

Evangelical Comparison: Evangelical theology holds to General Revelation (Psalm 19, Romans 1), asserting that creation and conscience speak to all men regardless of tradition. Furthermore, Evangelicals believe faith is a gift of God (Ephesians 2:8) initiated by the Holy Spirit through the Word (Romans 10:17). Lecture 2 shifts the locus of initial faith to 'human testimony' and the reliability of patriarchal tradition. This creates a dependence on an unbroken chain of human authority rather than the sufficiency of Scripture and the immediate witness of the Spirit.

2. ANACHRONISTIC CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE

Assertion: Adam and Eve knew the specific name of Jesus Christ, the plan of redemption, and the Holy Spirit immediately after the Fall.

"This thing is a similitude of the sacrifice of the Only Begotten of the Father... And you shall do all that you do in the name of the Son... In that day the Holy Spirit fell upon Adam"

Evangelical Comparison: Evangelical hermeneutics generally observe 'Progressive Revelation,' where the mystery of Christ is unveiled gradually from Genesis to Revelation (Hebrews 1:1-2). While the Protoevangelium (Genesis 3:15) exists, Adam having explicit knowledge of the title 'Son,' the 'Holy Spirit,' and Christian baptismal formulas is historically and theologically rejected by Evangelicals as anachronistic. This text asserts the Gospel was fully revealed at the beginning, rather than fulfilled in the fullness of time.

3. THEOPHANY AS THE GOAL OF FAITH

Assertion: The purpose of faith is to progress from believing testimony to obtaining a personal, face-to-face manifestation of God.

"Until like Enoch the brother of Jared, and Moses, they shall obtain faith in God, and power with him to behold him face to face."

Evangelical Comparison: Evangelicalism emphasizes 'walking by faith, not by sight' (2 Corinthians 5:7) and finding assurance in the promises of Scripture (1 John 5:13). Lecture 2 suggests that the maturity of faith is

demonstrated by replicating the experiences of prophets who saw God physically. This creates a two-tiered spirituality where 'true' knowledge requires a visionary experience, potentially devaluing the blessedness of those who 'have not seen and yet have believed' (John 20:29).

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: While sharing a belief in the same biblical figures, Lecture 2 fundamentally alters the mechanism of faith. For the Evangelical, faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Romans 10:17). For Smith, faith begins with 'human testimony' and the credibility of the fathers. Additionally, the insertion of full Christian theology (baptism, Holy Ghost, the name of the Son) into the life of Adam collapses the distinction between the Old and New Covenants, obscuring the progressive nature of redemptive history and the uniqueness of the Incarnation as the moment of full revelation (Hebrews 1:1-2).

Shared Values:

Existence of one God.; God as Creator and Governor.; Reality of the Fall of Man.; Necessity of Sacrifice (Christ).; Historical reality of Adam, Noah, Abraham.

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Relies on the Joseph Smith Translation (JST) which adds non-extant theological content to Genesis.
2. [Major] Christology (Progressive Revelation) – Claims Adam had full knowledge of the Trinity and the Atonement, flattening biblical history.
3. [Moderate] Sola Gratia – Emphasizes human diligence and inquiry as the primary means of obtaining knowledge of God, rather than divine initiative.
4. [Major] Sola Fide – Shifts the focus from forensic justification by faith to a works-intensive seeking of visionary experience.

Semantic Warnings:

"Faith"

In Text: A principle of power and action based on testimony, leading to knowledge/vision.

Evangelical: Trust and reliance on God's character and promises (Hebrews 11:1).

Example: *In Lecture 2, faith is the engine to 'behold him face to face.' In Evangelicalism, faith is the hand that receives Christ's righteousness (Romans 4:5).*

"New Translation"

In Text: A corrected version of the Bible (JST) restoring lost truths.

Evangelical: N/A (Evangelicals view this as an alteration of the text without manuscript support).

Example: *The text quotes the 'New Translation' to show Adam knew the 'Only Begotten,' a phrase absent from Genesis in standard Bibles.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Implicitly linked to 'life and salvation' centering in God, but operationally defined as obtaining the knowledge of God (John 17:3 interpreted as literal acquaintance).

How Attained: Through diligence, obedience to commandments (sacrifice), and seeking a manifestation.

Basis of Assurance: Personal revelation and manifestation (seeing God), rather than the objective promise of Scripture.

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text does not mention justification by faith alone. It emphasizes 'diligence and faithfulness in seeking after him' to obtain knowledge.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Believe the testimony of the fathers/patriarchs.
2. Seek diligently to know God's character.

3. Offer sacrifices in the name of the Son (historical command to Adam applied as a pattern).
4. Repent and call upon God in the name of the Son.

Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept the 'New Translation' (JST) as authoritative scripture.
2. View the patriarchal lineage as the necessary conduit of truth.
3. Strive for a personal visitation or manifestation of God.

Ritual Requirements:

1. Animal sacrifice (historically referenced as a similitude of Christ).
2. Calling upon God in the name of the Son.

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. The text says faith comes by 'human testimony.' How does that compare with Romans 10:17, which says faith comes by hearing the word of Christ?
2. Lecture 2 emphasizes that Adam, Enoch, and Moses saw God face-to-face. Do you feel that your faith is incomplete if you haven't had that same visual experience?
3. Why do you think the standard Bible doesn't record Adam knowing the name of Jesus or the Holy Spirit, while this text says he did?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The desire for direct communion with God. – This desire for intimacy is fulfilled in Christ, who is the image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15). Through the Spirit, we have access to the Father (Ephesians 2:18) without needing a theophany. [John 1:18, Hebrews 10:19-22]
2. The importance of fathers teaching children. – The Bible commands parents to raise children in the discipline of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4), showing that family discipleship is God's design, even if it isn't the *source* of saving faith. [Deuteronomy 6:6-7]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Uncertainty/Epistemological Instability [Moderate] – By grounding faith in a specific, fragile chain of human testimony and a revised Bible, the believer's faith becomes vulnerable to historical criticism. If the chronology is wrong, the basis for faith is shaken.
2. Performance/Visionary Pressure [Severe] – The text implies that 'true' faith leads to seeing God face-to-face. This creates a hierarchy where believers who have not had supernatural manifestations may feel spiritually inferior or that their faith is insufficient.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Primarily Human Testimony (Tradition) leading to Direct Revelation (Theophany).

Verification Method: Checking the chronological overlap of patriarchs to ensure the tradition is unbroken, followed by personal diligence to obtain a manifestation.

Evangelical Contrast: Evangelical epistemology relies on the objective Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16) illuminated by the Spirit, not on the reliability of human oral tradition or the necessity of a face-to-face vision.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: 1835 (published in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants).

Authorship: Joseph Smith (traditionally attributed, though Sidney Rigdon likely assisted in drafting/editing).

Textual Issues: The text relies on the 'New Translation' of Genesis, which has no support in ancient Hebrew manuscripts or the Septuagint.