

SECTION 3 (MODERN D&C 107)

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

OVERVIEW

This text, canonized as Section 3 in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants (Section 107 in modern editions), serves as the constitutional framework for Latter-day Saint ecclesiastical authority. It delineates two distinct priesthoods: the Melchizedek (spiritual, holding keys to the mysteries of godliness) and the Aaronic (outward ordinances, ministering of angels). The text constructs a complex hierarchy involving the First Presidency, the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, the Seventy, and local presiding officers. Crucially, it anchors this authority in a historical narrative that traces the priesthood lineage directly from Adam through the biblical patriarchs (Seth, Enos, Enoch, Noah) down to the present dispensation. It introduces the concept of Adam-ondi-Ahman, a gathering where Adam blessed his posterity, and asserts that the President of the High Priesthood functions 'like unto Moses' as a seer and revelator. The text concludes with a stern warning that retention of this authority is contingent upon diligence and learning one's duty.

KEY FIGURES

Melchizedek, Aaron, Adam (Michael), Jesus Christ, Moses, Seth, Enoch, Noah

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. DUAL PRIESTHOOD AUTHORITY

Assertion: There are two priesthoods: Melchizedek (spiritual/higher) and Aaronic (outward/lesser), which are necessary to administer ordinances and govern the church.

"There are, in the church, two priesthoods, namely: the Melchizedek, and the Aaronic... The Melchisedek priesthood holds the right of presidency... The second priesthood is called the priesthood of Aaron... because it is an appendage to the greater."

Evangelical Comparison: The text establishes a rigid ecclesiastical hierarchy where access to God and spiritual authority is mediated through ordained men holding specific offices. This directly contradicts the Evangelical doctrine of the Universal Priesthood of Believers (1 Peter 2:9), where all Christians have direct access to God. Furthermore, it conflicts with Hebrews 7:23-25, which teaches that the Levitical (Aaronic) priesthood was obsolete and that the Melchizedek priesthood belongs uniquely to Christ because He lives forever and does not need successors.

2. ACCESS TO THE FATHER VIA PRIESTHOOD

Assertion: The Melchizedek Priesthood holds the keys necessary to enjoy the communion and presence of God the Father.

"The power and authority of the higher or Melchizedek priesthood, is to hold the keys... to enjoy the communion and presence of God the Father, and Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant."

Evangelical Comparison: The text claims that a specific priesthood office is required to 'open the heavens' and commune with the Father. In contrast, the New Testament teaches that the veil of the temple was torn (Matthew 27:51) and that believers have 'boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus' (Hebrews 10:19), not by the permission or keys of a human hierarchy. This doctrine re-erects a barrier of mediation between the believer and God.

3. ADAM AS MICHAEL/ARCHANGEL

Assertion: Adam is identified as Michael the Archangel and the ancient head of the priesthood.

"And the Lord appeared unto them, and they rose up and blessed Adam, and called him Michael, the Prince, the Archangel."

Evangelical Comparison: The text conflates human and angelic natures by identifying the first man, Adam, as the Archangel Michael. In standard Christian theology, angels and humans are distinct orders of creation (Psalm 8:5, Hebrews 2:7). This conflation supports the broader Mormon cosmology of pre-mortal existence and the eternal nature of beings, which diverges from the biblical account of Adam's creation from dust.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: While Evangelicalism asserts that Christ's death tore the veil, granting all believers direct access to the Father, this text reconstructs the veil. It posits that 'keys' held by a human hierarchy are required to 'open the heavens' and 'commune with... God the Father.' This effectively reinstates an Old Testament paradigm of restricted access, but expands it into a complex bureaucracy. Furthermore, the requirement of priesthood performance for 'worthiness to stand' introduces a works-based element to the believer's standing before God.

Shared Values:

Desire for church order; Recognition of Jesus as Mediator; Importance of repentance and baptism; Reverence for God's name

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Universal Priesthood – Restricts spiritual authority and administration to a select group of ordained men, denying the priesthood of all believers.
2. [Major] Sola Fide – Conditions 'standing' and 'worthiness' on diligence in office and obedience to laws, rather than faith in Christ alone.
3. [Critical] Christology (Sufficiency of Christ) – Implies Christ's mediation is insufficient without the 'appendage' of human priesthood to administer 'outward ordinances' and 'spiritual blessings.'
4. [Major] Theology Proper (Nature of Man/Angels) – Identifies Adam as an Archangel, blurring the Creator/creature distinction and the distinction between men and angels.

Semantic Warnings:

"Priesthood"

In Text: The authority and power of God delegated to man to act in His name for the salvation of the human family.

Evangelical: The unique office of Christ (High Priest) and the service/sacrifice of praise offered by all believers (Royal Priesthood).

Example: *In this text, 'priesthood' is a governing structure men are ordained to; in the New Testament, it is the status of Christ and the collective identity of the Church.*

"Keys"

In Text: The right of presidency and power to direct the labors of the priesthood.

Evangelical: Metaphor for the authority of the Gospel message to open the Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 16:19).

Example: *Here, 'keys' are bureaucratic authorizations to administer ordinances; in Evangelicalism, 'keys' represent the proclamation of the Gospel.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Implicitly defined as exaltation or access to the presence of the Father, contingent on priesthood ordinances.

How Attained: Through the administration of ordinances (baptism, etc.) by those holding proper priesthood authority.

Basis of Assurance: Confidence is based on the validity of the priesthood line and one's personal diligence in 'learning their duty.'

Comparison to Sola Fide: Directly opposes Sola Fide by making the 'keys' of men a prerequisite for the 'blessings' of heaven. See Romans 5:1-2 vs. D&C 107:18-19.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Let every man learn his duty
2. Act in the office in which he is appointed
3. Ordain and set in order other officers

4. Uphold the presidency by confidence, faith, and prayer

Implicit Obligations:

1. Submit to the hierarchical authority structure
2. Accept the decisions of church councils as final
3. Trace spiritual authority through lineage and ordination

Ritual Requirements:

1. Ordination by laying on of hands
2. Baptism of repentance (administered by Aaronic priesthood)
3. Administering of spiritual blessings (Melchizedek priesthood)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. The text says the Melchizedek priesthood is needed to 'enjoy the communion and presence of God the Father.' How do you read Hebrews 10:19-22, which says we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus?
2. Verse 44 says 'he that is slothful shall not be counted worthy to stand.' How does this impact your sense of peace with God compared to the promise that 'there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus' (Romans 8:1)?
3. If the Melchizedek priesthood belongs to Jesus because He lives forever (Hebrews 7:24), why is it necessary for mortal men to hold it?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The desire for a valid connection to the ancient fathers (Adam, Noah). – We all long to belong to a great story. In Christ, we are adopted into the family of God and become 'heirs according to the promise' given to Abraham, without needing a genealogy of works. [Galatians 3:29]
2. The need for a Mediator. – The text correctly identifies the need for mediation but adds layers of bureaucracy. The Gospel offers the immediate, unhindered mediation of Christ. [Hebrews 4:14-16]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Performance/Worthiness Anxiety [Severe] – The explicit threat that slothfulness leads to being 'not counted worthy to stand' creates a perpetual pressure to perform church duties to maintain one's spiritual status.
2. Dependency on Hierarchy [Moderate] – Believers are made dependent on the 'keys' held by other men for their access to spiritual blessings and God's presence, creating vulnerability and potential for spiritual abuse.
3. Exclusion [Moderate] – For women and those not ordained, there is a structural exclusion from the core authority and direct administration of the faith, creating a second-class spiritual citizenship.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Hierarchical Revelation. Knowledge flows from the Presidency down to the body.

Verification Method: Obedience to the hierarchy and the 'Spirit of truth' confirming the administration.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the objective standard of Scripture (Acts 17:11, 2 Timothy 3:16). This text relies on the subjective authority of the 'living prophet' ('like unto Moses') and the institutional hierarchy.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: Circa April 1835 (with portions likely dating to 1831).

Authorship: Joseph Smith (Critical scholars note the composite nature of the revelation, combining earlier instructions with 1835 developments).

Textual Issues: This section is a compilation of revelations received at different times, edited into a single coherent document for the 1835 D&C. It reflects the evolving church structure.