

SECTION 30 (MODERN SECTION 3)

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

OVERVIEW

This text, historically known as the first recorded revelation of Joseph Smith (July 1828), addresses the crisis of the lost 116 pages of the Book of Mormon manuscript. The text functions as a divine rebuke of Joseph Smith for yielding to the pressure of Martin Harris (referred to here as a 'wicked man') to take the manuscript. The revelation establishes a foundational dynamic in early Mormonism: the prophet is chosen but fallible, and his authority ('the gift') is conditional upon strict obedience to revelation over social pressure. It asserts that while human efforts can be frustrated, God's purposes are immutable ('one eternal round'). Crucially, it outlines the missiological purpose of the Book of Mormon: to bring the Lamanites (indigenous peoples) to the knowledge of their fathers and reliance on the 'merits of Jesus Christ.' This section serves to re-establish Smith's authority after a significant failure, framing the translation project as a divine inevitability that cannot be stopped by human error.

KEY FIGURES

God (The Speaker), Joseph Smith (The Recipient), Martin Harris (The 'Wicked Man'), The Lamanites (Target audience of the work), The Nephites (Ancestral record keepers)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. CONDITIONAL PROPHETIC AUTHORITY

Assertion: A prophet can lose his 'gift' and calling if he fears man more than God or transgresses strict commandments.

"except thou do this, thou shalt be delivered up and become as other men, and have no more gift. (v4)"

Evangelical Comparison: In this text, the prophetic office is presented as a possession of a supernatural 'gift' (specifically translation power) that elevates the holder above 'other men.' The threat is that transgression will cause Joseph to 'become as other men,' implying that a prophet in good standing is ontologically or spiritually distinct from the laity. In Evangelical theology, all believers are priests (1 Peter 2:9), and while offices exist (pastor, teacher), the individuals remain men saved by grace, not possessors of a distinct 'gift' that separates their nature from the congregation. Furthermore, biblical prophets are judged by the truth of their prophecy (Deuteronomy 18:22), not merely by their administrative obedience.

2. THE RESTORATION OF ISRAEL (LAMANITES)

Assertion: The Book of Mormon is preserved specifically to restore the Lamanites (Native Americans) to the knowledge of Christ.

"and that the Lamanites might come to the knowledge of their fathers... and that they may believe the gospel (v6)"

Evangelical Comparison: The text asserts a dispensational necessity for the Book of Mormon: the 'testimony of the Jews' (Bible) is parallel to the testimony of the Nephites. This implies the Bible was insufficient or inaccessible for the salvation of the indigenous peoples of the Americas in the way God intended. Evangelicalism maintains Sola Scriptura—that the Bible is the sufficient, complete revelation of God for all people groups (2 Timothy 3:16-17) and that no additional 'plates' or lineage-specific records are required for the Great Commission.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: While the soteriological language in verse 6 ('rely upon the merits of Jesus Christ') is strikingly evangelical, the ecclesiological and bibliological framework is radically divergent. The text assumes the Bible is insufficient for the Lamanites, requiring a new corpus of scripture. Furthermore, it elevates Joseph Smith to a unique mediator role where his 'gift' is the conduit for this salvation. In Evangelicalism, the Holy Spirit illuminates the existing Word (Bible) to all people; here, a specific lost record must be physically restored by a specific seer for God's purposes to succeed.

Shared Values:

God's sovereignty (He cannot be frustrated); The danger of pride and boasting; Salvation through relying on the 'merits of Jesus Christ' (v6)

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Asserts the necessity of the Book of Mormon ('these plates') alongside the Bible ('testimony of the Jews').
2. [Major] Universal Priesthood – Establishes a hierarchy where the prophet possesses a 'gift' that separates him from 'other men,' denying the equal standing of all believers before God.

Semantic Warnings:

"Gift"

In Text: A supernatural power or authorization, specifically to translate ancient records, which can be revoked.

Evangelical: Spiritual gifts (charismata) given to the body of Christ for edification (1 Cor 12), not a singular office-holding power that defines one's status against 'other men.'

Example: *Joseph is threatened with having 'no more gift' and becoming 'as other men.'*

"Wicked"

In Text: One who frustrates the specific work of the restoration or disobeys the prophet's strict instructions (applied here to Martin Harris).

Evangelical: Morally depraved or sinful in a general sense; unrighteous.

Example: *Martin Harris is called a 'wicked man' (v5) despite being a wealthy, religious supporter, because he lost the manuscript.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Believing the gospel, relying on the merits of Jesus Christ, and being glorified (v6).

How Attained: Through faith in Jesus Christ and repentance (v6), facilitated by the restoration of the record.

Basis of Assurance: Assurance is tied to the successful restoration of the record and the fulfillment of God's promises to the fathers.

Comparison to Sola Fide: Verse 6 is highly compatible with Sola Fide ('rely upon the merits of Jesus Christ'). However, the context implies this reliance is impossible for the Lamanites without the Book of Mormon, adding a material/historical prerequisite to the hearing of the Gospel.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Repent of that which thou has done (v4)
2. Do not fear man more than God (v3)
3. Do not boast in own strength (v2)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Prioritize the translation work above all human relationships
2. View the 'director' (God/Angel) as the absolute authority over the manuscript

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 6, it says we are saved by relying on the 'merits of Jesus Christ.' How does that phrase help you understand your relationship with God today?
2. The text says Joseph could lose his gift and become 'as other men.' Does this mean a prophet is only a prophet when he is perfectly obedient?
3. If the Bible ('testimony of the Jews') was already in the world, why does this text say the Lamanites specifically needed the plates to come to know Christ?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. Relying on the Merits of Christ – This is the core of the Gospel. We cannot save ourselves; we must rely entirely on Christ's finished work. [Titus 3:5 - 'He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy.']

Spiritual Weight:

1. Fear of Failure/Rejection [Severe] – The text instills a deep fear that one mistake can cause God to revoke His calling and gifts. Joseph is told he will 'fall' and be 'delivered up' if he is not strictly obedient.
2. Pressure to Perform [Moderate] – The believer is taught that God's support is conditional on their performance. Verse 3 says 'you should have been faithful and he would have extended his arm,' implying God's protection was withdrawn due to human error.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Direct revelation through a chosen seer.

Verification Method: The text implies verification through the fulfillment of the work (the eventual publication of the record) and the internal testimony of the text itself.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the public, historical verification of the Resurrection and the closed canon of Scripture (Jude 1:3). This text relies on private revelation given to one man, validated by his subsequent success in producing the work.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: July 1828

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated as revelation)

Textual Issues: This is the earliest recorded revelation in the D&C. It was canonized in the 1833 Book of Commandments before the 1835 D&C. The text reflects early Mormon theology which was more Trinitarian and Protestant-adjacent than later Nauvoo-era theology.