

## SECTION 5 (MODERN D&C 102)

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

### OVERVIEW

This text, originally published as Section 5 in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants (now Section 102), records the minutes of the organization of the first High Council in Kirtland, Ohio, on February 17, 1834. It establishes a complex judicial and administrative body composed of twelve High Priests and a Presidency of three. The text outlines specific protocols for church discipline and dispute resolution, including the casting of lots to determine speaking order and a unique provision requiring half of the council to speak in defense of the accused to ensure equity. Crucially, the text institutionalizes the role of the President of the Church as the final arbiter who, in cases where written scripture is deemed insufficient, has the authority to receive immediate, binding revelation to settle doctrinal or principled disputes. This section solidifies the ecclesiastical hierarchy of early Mormonism, distinguishing between local standing councils and the 'travelling high council' (the Twelve Apostles), and establishes the procedural framework for the LDS Church's internal justice system.

### KEY FIGURES

Joseph Smith, Jr. (President), Sidney Rigdon (Counselor/President), Frederick G. Williams (Counselor/President), Oliver Cowdery (High Councilor/Clerk), Martin Harris (High Councilor), Joseph Smith, Sen. (High Councilor), Orson Hyde (High Councilor/Clerk)

### DOCTRINES ANALYZED

#### 1. INSUFFICIENCY OF WRITTEN SCRIPTURE

**Assertion:** Written scripture is not always sufficient to resolve doctrinal or principled difficulties; living revelation through the President is required to supplement it.

*"In cases of difficulty respecting doctrine, or principle, (if there is not a sufficiency written to make the case clear to the minds of the council,) the president may inquire and obtain the mind of the Lord by revelation. (Verse 10)"*

**Evangelical Comparison:** Evangelical theology holds to the sufficiency of Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16-17), believing the Bible contains all things necessary for salvation and godliness. This text explicitly institutionalizes the opposite view: that 'written' word may lack 'sufficiency.' It establishes a mechanism (the President) to generate new, binding revelation ('the mind of the Lord') to resolve disputes. This effectively places the living President above the written canon, as he determines when the canon is unclear and provides the authoritative solution.

#### 2. HIERARCHICAL PRIESTHOOD AUTHORITY

**Assertion:** Church governance and discipline are managed by a hierarchy of 'High Priests' and a Presidency appointed by revelation.

*"Joseph Smith, jr. Sidney Rigdon and Frederick G. Williams, were acknowledged presidents... and [twelve others], high priests, were chosen to be a standing council... (Verse 2)"*

**Evangelical Comparison:** The New Testament teaches that Jesus Christ is the sole High Priest (Hebrews 4:14) and that all believers constitute a 'royal priesthood' (1 Peter 2:9). This text reconstructs a tiered priesthood hierarchy similar to the Sanhedrin or Old Testament structures, where specific men are ordained as 'High Priests' to mediate justice and doctrine, a concept foreign to the New Testament church structure of elders/overseers and deacons.

### COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

**Divergence Status:** Yes

**Theological Gap:** The fundamental gap lies in the locus of authority. For Evangelicals, the Bible is the final court of arbitration for doctrine and practice. In this text, the 'President' is established as a living oracle who supersedes the written record when it is deemed insufficient (Verse 10). Furthermore, the ecclesiology presented is a restoration of Old Testament Levitical structures (High Priests, casting lots) rather than New

Testament church governance. This creates a mediation structure between the believer and God that the New Testament claims was abolished by Christ's high priestly work.

#### **Shared Values:**

Desire for order in the church (1 Corinthians 14:40).; Need for conflict resolution mechanisms (Matthew 18).; Concern for justice and preventing 'insult or injustice' to the accused.

#### **Friction Points:**

1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Verse 10 explicitly states that written scripture may not be sufficient and authorizes the President to create new binding revelation.
2. [Major] Universal Priesthood – Establishes a ruling class of 'High Priests' who judge the standing of members, contrary to the equality of all believers under Christ.

#### **Semantic Warnings:**

##### **"High Priest"**

**In Text:** An office in the Melchizedek Priesthood held by specific male leaders in the church.

**Evangelical:** A title belonging exclusively to Jesus Christ in the New Covenant (Hebrews), or the Levitical order in the Old Covenant.

**Example:** *In this text, 'High Priests' are convened to judge; in Hebrews 4:14, we have 'a great high priest... Jesus the Son of God' and need no other human mediator.*

##### **"The Church of Christ"**

**In Text:** The specific organization led by Joseph Smith (later LDS Church).

**Evangelical:** The universal body of all true believers in Jesus Christ across all time and denominations.

**Example:** *The text refers to the 'High Council of the church of Christ,' implying institutional exclusivity.*

## **SOTERIOLOGY**

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**Salvation Defined:** Implicitly linked to standing within the church; being 'cut off' by this council implies a loss of spiritual standing.

**How Attained:** Through obedience to the laws of the church and the decisions of the priesthood leadership.

**Basis of Assurance:** Confidence in the 'equity and justice' of the High Council and the revelation of the President.

**Comparison to Sola Fide:** The text focuses entirely on procedural justice and ecclesiastical standing. There is no mention of faith in Christ's finished work as the basis for standing; rather, standing is maintained by avoiding 'transgression' as judged by a human tribunal.

## **MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS**

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#### **Explicit Commands:**

1. The High Council must consist of twelve high priests and one or three presidents.
2. Councilors must cast lots to determine speaking order.
3. Councilors drawing even numbers must stand up in behalf of the accused to prevent insult or injustice.
4. The President must give a decision after hearing evidence.
5. The Council must sanction the President's decision by vote.

#### **Implicit Obligations:**

1. Members must submit to the jurisdiction of this council for 'important difficulties.'
2. Members must accept the President's revelation as the 'mind of the Lord' in doctrinal disputes.
3. High Priests must be willing to serve in these judicial capacities when appointed.

#### **Ritual Requirements:**

1. Casting lots (balloting) for speaking order.
2. Prayer before adjournment.

## EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

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### Discovery Questions:

1. In Verse 10, it says the President can get new revelation if the written word isn't sufficient. If a new revelation contradicts the Bible, which one takes precedence?
2. The text mentions 'High Priests' judging the people. How do you view the book of Hebrews' teaching that Jesus is our final High Priest who allows us to approach the throne of grace directly?
3. Verse 8 ensures half the council stands up for the accused to prevent injustice. That's a beautiful picture of advocacy. Who acts as your advocate before God the Father when you sin?

### Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Advocate for the Accused – Just as the council appoints defenders for the accused to ensure mercy and justice, Jesus Christ acts as our Advocate with the Father. [1 John 2:1 - 'And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.']}

### Spiritual Weight:

1. Uncertainty / Moving Goalposts [Moderate] – Because the President can receive new revelation when scripture is 'insufficient,' the believer can never be certain that the rules or doctrines won't change. The standard of truth is fluid, dependent on the leader.
2. Fear of Ecclesiastical Judgment [Severe] – The detailed description of the trial process creates a culture where spiritual standing is adjudicated by a tribunal of men. The fear of being 'called before the High Council' becomes a powerful mechanism of social control.

## EPISTEMOLOGY

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### Knowledge Source: Hierarchical Revelation

**Verification Method:** The President inquires of the Lord; the council sanctions the decision. If the council disagrees, a rehearing occurs, but the President's revelation is the ultimate source of clarity.

**Evangelical Contrast:** Biblical epistemology relies on the illumination of the Holy Spirit accessible to believers through the study of the fixed Word of God (Psalm 119:105, Acts 17:11). This text centralizes epistemological certainty in a single human figure (the President).

## TEXTUAL CRITICISM

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**Dating:** February 17, 1834 (Event); Published in 1835 D&C.

**Authorship:** Minutes taken by Oliver Cowdery and Orson Hyde; content dictated/directed by Joseph Smith.

**Textual Issues:** The 1835 version was edited from the original minutes to clarify titles (e.g., changing 'counselors' to 'presidents' in some contexts to reflect evolving hierarchy).