SECTION 50 (MODERN D&C 27)

OVERVIEW

This revelation, given in August and September 1830, addresses two primary concerns of the early Latter-day Saint movement: sacramental purity and priesthood authority. Initially, the text pragmatically addresses the risk of purchasing wine from 'enemies,' instituting the practice that the specific elements (bread/wine) are secondary to the intent ('eye single to my glory'), eventually leading to the use of water. However, the text pivots significantly in verse 2 to a grand eschatological vision of a future banquet involving Christ and a specific lineage of ancient prophets. It asserts that Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery have received 'keys' and authority directly from these figures—specifically Moroni, Elias, John the Baptist, Elijah, and the patriarchs. It explicitly identifies the archangel Michael as Adam. The text concludes by appropriating the 'Armor of God' imagery from Ephesians 6, modifying it to explicitly link the 'gospel of peace' with the message committed by these angelic visitors, thereby tying spiritual survival to the acceptance of Joseph Smith's restored authority.

KEY FIGURES

Jesus Christ, Moroni, Elias, John the Baptist, Elijah, Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery, Michael (Adam), Peter, James, John (the Beloved)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. ANGELIC RESTORATION OF PRIESTHOOD

Assertion: Priesthood authority and 'keys' were lost and had to be physically restored to Joseph Smith by resurrected biblical figures (John the Baptist, Peter, James, John).

> *"John... whom I have sent unto you... to ordain you unto this first priesthood... And also with Peter, and James, and John... by whom I have ordained you and confirmed you to be apostles"*

Evangelical Comparison: Evangelical theology holds to the 'Priesthood of All Believers' (1 Peter 2:5-9), meaning all Christians have direct access to God through Christ, the sole Mediator (1 Timothy 2:5). This text asserts that access to God's ordinances requires specific 'keys' transferred by physical ordination from ancient figures to Joseph Smith. This establishes a hierarchical mediation structure absent in the New Testament church after the ascension, effectively denying the sufficiency of Christ's high priesthood to sustain the church without new angelic interventions.

2. DIFFERENTIATION OF ELIAS AND ELIJAH

Assertion: Elias and Elijah are distinct individuals who committed separate keys to Joseph Smith.

> *"and also with Elias... and also Elijah, unto whom I have committed the keys of the power of turning the hearts"*

Evangelical Comparison: In the New Testament (e.g., Matthew 17:3, Luke 4:25), the Greek text uses 'Elias' to refer to the Hebrew prophet Elijah. There is no separate prophet named Elias who holds a distinct dispensation from Elijah. This text presents them as two separate beings appearing sequentially. While later LDS theology attempts to define Elias as a title or a different prophet (like Noah), the text here presents a confusion of the biblical identity that creates a historical and philological error from an evangelical critical perspective.

3. MICHAEL-ADAM IDENTITY

Assertion: The Archangel Michael is the pre-mortal/post-mortal identity of Adam, the first man.

> *"Michael, or Adam, the father of all, the prince of all, the ancient of days"*

Evangelical Comparison: The Bible presents Adam as the first human, created from dust (Genesis 2:7), and Michael as a chief prince among angels (Daniel 10:13, Jude 1:9). Hebrews 1-2 makes a sharp distinction between humans (made a little lower than angels, but redeemed) and angels (ministering spirits). Conflating Adam with an archangel blurs the ontological distinction between humanity and the angelic host, a doctrine unique to Mormonism and absent from orthodox Christianity.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: While the text uses familiar Christian language (sacrament, armor of God, apostles), it redefines the mechanism of grace. In Evangelicalism, the 'keys' were apostolic authority to open the gospel to the world, fulfilled in the first century. Here, 'keys' are bureaucratic permissions required to validly perform rituals, held exclusively by Joseph Smith's lineage. This shifts the focus from 'Sola Fide' (faith in Christ) to faith in the *authorized channel* of Christ. Furthermore, the text introduces a cosmology where humans (Adam) are angels (Michael), and biblical identities are confused (Elias/Elijah), creating a distinct theological universe incompatible with historic orthodoxy.

Shared Values:

Importance of the Lord's Supper (Sacrament).; Belief in the Second Coming.; Spiritual warfare (Armor of God).; Reverence for biblical patriarchs.

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura — Adds new revelation and redefines biblical figures (Adam/Michael, Elias/Elijah) contrary to the biblical text.

2. [Critical] Universal Priesthood — Re-establishes a mediating priesthood hierarchy necessary for valid worship, denying the priesthood of all believers.

3. [Major] Biblical Inerrancy/Consistency — Splits one biblical person (Elijah) into two (Elias and Elijah), creating a contradiction with the biblical record.

4. [Major] Theology Proper (Creation) — Conflates the first human (Adam) with an archangel (Michael), blurring the Creator/creature and angel/human distinctions.

Semantic Warnings:

> **"Priesthood"**
>
> **In Text:** A literal power and authority transferred by physical ordination from angels to men, necessary for valid ordinances.
>
> **Evangelical:** The status of all believers who have direct access to God (1 Peter 2:9), or the unique High Priesthood of Jesus (Hebrews 7).
>
> **Example:** *In this text, John the Baptist must 'ordain' men to the priesthood. In the NT, believers are a 'royal priesthood' by virtue of being in Christ.*

> **"Keys"**
>
> **In Text:** Specific authorizations to direct the work of the priesthood and govern the church.
>
> **Evangelical:** Metaphor for the authority to preach the gospel and declare forgiveness based on Christ's work (Matthew 16:19).
>
> **Example:** *The text claims Peter, James, and John committed 'keys of the kingdom' to Joseph Smith, implying exclusive administrative control.*

> **"Elias"**
>
> **In Text:** A specific prophet distinct from Elijah who holds the keys of the 'restoration of all things'.
>
> **Evangelical:** The Greek transliteration of the name Elijah.
>
> **Example:** *The text lists Elias AND Elijah as separate visitors.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Implicitly linked to partaking of the sacrament with authority and wearing the armor provided by the restoration.

How Attained: Through faith in Christ, but mediated through the 'keys' and ordinances restored by the angels.

Basis of Assurance: Confidence is derived from being in alignment with the authorized priesthood holders (Joseph and Oliver).

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text adds a layer of 'keys' and 'ordinances' as necessary for the 'fulness of the gospel,' moving away from Sola Fide where faith in Christ alone is sufficient for justification.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Do not purchase wine or strong drink from enemies.

2. Partake of the sacrament with an eye single to God's glory.

3. Make wine 'new among you' if used.

4. Lift up hearts and rejoice.

5. Gird up loins.

6. Take upon you the whole armor of God.

7. Stand faithful until Christ comes.

Implicit Obligations:

1. Acknowledge Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery as the sole authorized holders of priesthood keys.

2. Accept the Book of Mormon as the 'stick of Ephraim'.

3. Believe in the literal visitation of these specific angels to Joseph Smith.

Ritual Requirements:

1. Sacrament (Communion) observance, modified to allow water or homemade wine.

2. Ordination to priesthood offices (implied by the reference to John the Baptist's ordination of JS/OC).

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 2, the text mentions both Elias and Elijah appearing. Since 'Elias' is just the Greek way of saying 'Elijah' in the New Testament, who do you understand 'Elias' to be in this context?

2. The text says it doesn't matter what we eat or drink for the sacrament if our eye is single to glory. How does that balance with the strict requirement for priesthood authority to administer it?

3. When you read about the 'Armor of God' here, it says the preparation of the gospel was 'committed unto you' by angels. How does that differ from the gospel being fully revealed in Jesus Christ?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Eschatological Banquet — The text taps into the biblical promise of the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. [Revelation 19:9 - 'Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.']

2. Spiritual Armor — The believer's need for divine protection against evil is universal. [Ephesians 6:11 - 'Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.']

Spiritual Weight:

1. Dependency on Hierarchy [Severe] — The believer cannot simply go to Christ for the 'fulness' of the gospel; they must go through the specific men (Joseph/Oliver) who hold the keys. This creates a spiritual bottleneck and anxiety about one's standing with the institution.

2. Uncertainty of Authority [Moderate] — By basing salvation on 'keys' restored in secret angelic meetings, the believer's assurance rests on the historical veracity of Joseph Smith's claims rather than the public, historical resurrection of Christ.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Prophetic Revelation (Joseph Smith speaking as the mouthpiece of Christ).

Verification Method: Implicit trust in the prophet's testimony of these visitations; later codified as internal spiritual witness.

Evangelical Contrast: Evangelical epistemology relies on the objective standard of the closed canon of Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16) to test spirits (1 John 4:1). This text demands acceptance of subjective historical claims (angelic visits) that contradict the biblical record (Elias/Elijah distinction).

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: August/September 1830 (Composite of two revelations).

Authorship: Joseph Smith

Textual Issues: The 1835 version (Section 50) contains significant additions not found in the original 1833 Book of Commandments (Chapter 28). The detailed list of angelic visitors (Peter, James, John, Elias, Elijah, etc.) was retroactively inserted into the text to bolster authority claims during later church challenges.