

SECTION 51 (MODERN D&C 28)

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

OVERVIEW

This revelation, originally given in September 1830 and cataloged as Section 51 in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants (Section 28 in modern editions), addresses a critical crisis of authority in the nascent Mormon movement. Hiram Page, a member of the church, had begun receiving revelations through a 'stone,' challenging Joseph Smith's leadership. This text decisively establishes a hierarchical structure modeled on Old Testament typology: Joseph Smith is positioned as the 'Moses' figure—the sole channel for divine commandments to the entire body—while Oliver Cowdery is relegated to the role of 'Aaron,' a spokesman and subordinate. The text explicitly invalidates Page's revelations as satanic deceptions and commands Cowdery to confront him. Furthermore, it initiates the first major missionary effort to the 'Lamanites' (Native Americans), linking the movement's theology to a specific geographic and ethnic destiny involving the construction of a literal city of Zion.

KEY FIGURES

Joseph Smith (The 'Moses' figure/Head of the Church), Oliver Cowdery (The 'Aaron' figure/Second Elder), Hiram Page (The rival revelator/Deceived), The Lamanites (Target audience for evangelism)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. PROPHETIC EXCLUSIVITY (THE 'ONE MAN' DOCTRINE)

Assertion: Only Joseph Smith is appointed to receive commandments and revelations for the entire church.

"no one shall be appointed to receive commandments and revelations in this church, excepting my servant Joseph Smith, jr. for he receiveth them even as Moses"

Evangelical Comparison: Evangelical theology holds that the veil of the temple was torn (Matthew 27:51), granting all believers direct access to God through Christ (Hebrews 4:16). This text rebuilds that veil by establishing a human mediator ('as Moses') who is the sole conduit for binding revelation. While Evangelicals respect pastoral authority, they reject the idea that a leader holds a monopoly on hearing from God for the community, citing 1 John 2:27 and the sufficiency of Scripture.

2. KEYS OF THE MYSTERIES

Assertion: Joseph Smith holds specific, exclusive authority to unlock hidden spiritual knowledge.

"for I have given him the keys of the mysteries and the revelations which are sealed"

Evangelical Comparison: The text implies a Gnostic-adjacent view where spiritual truth is hidden ('sealed') and requires a specific authorized key-holder to access. Evangelicalism teaches that the 'mystery' was kept secret for long ages but is now disclosed to all nations through the prophetic writings (Romans 16:25-26). There are no longer 'sealed' mysteries requiring a human mediator to unlock; the canon is open to all.

3. LAMANITE IDENTITY

Assertion: Native Americans are 'Lamanites' and the target of specific covenant restoration.

"you shall go unto the Lamanites and preach my gospel unto them... cause my church to be established among them"

Evangelical Comparison: The text commands a mission to the 'Lamanites,' identifying the indigenous peoples of North America as the remnant of the House of Israel described in the Book of Mormon. Evangelicals view Native Americans as created in God's image and in need of the Gospel, but reject the specific Mormon assertion of their Israelite ancestry as historically unfounded and extra-biblical.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in the structure of authority. Evangelicalism is built on the 'finished work' of Christ and the 'closed canon' of Scripture, meaning no human leader can add to the deposit of

faith. This text establishes an 'open canon' controlled by a single human mediator ('as Moses'). This creates a magisterium that supersedes the Bible, as the living prophet's current revelation trumps previous revelation. This is structurally incompatible with the Protestant Reformation's removal of the human intermediary between the believer and God.

Shared Values:

Desire for order in the church.; Zeal for evangelism (missionary work).; Belief in the existence of Satan and deception.

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Universal Priesthood – Re-establishes a Mosaic hierarchy where one man mediates for the people, explicitly denying others the right to receive commandments for the body.
2. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Asserts that new, binding commandments are being generated that are 'sealed' and 'mysteries' outside the Bible.
3. [Major] Christology (Mediatorship) – Elevates Joseph Smith to a 'Moses' role, effectively making him a necessary mediator between the Church and God for current truth.
4. [Major] Historical/Biblical Inerrancy – Identifies Native Americans as Israelites (Lamanites), imposing a false historical narrative on a people group.

Semantic Warnings:

"The Comforter"

In Text: A source of revelation that must align with Joseph Smith's dictates; used here to authorize Oliver's preaching but restricted from commanding the head.

Evangelical: The Holy Spirit who leads believers into all truth and glorifies Christ (John 16:13), not necessarily a human hierarchy.

Example: *In this text, 'led by the Comforter' is conditional on not contradicting Joseph Smith.*

"Keys"

In Text: Authoritative permission/power to control revelation and govern the church.

Evangelical: Metaphor for the authority of the Gospel message to open the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 16:19), held by the church collectively or apostles foundationally, not a dynastic right.

Example: *Joseph holds 'keys of the mysteries' exclusively.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Implicitly linked to gathering to 'the city' (Zion) and adhering to the revelations given through Joseph.

How Attained: Requires obedience to the 'keys' held by Joseph Smith.

Basis of Assurance: Assurance is found in being in right standing with the church hierarchy and participating in the gathering.

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text emphasizes 'obedience' to the prophet and 'works' (missionary journey, building a city) as central to the faith, rather than resting in the finished work of Christ (Ephesians 2:8-9).

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Oliver Cowdery must not command Joseph Smith.
2. Oliver must preach to the Lamanites.
3. Oliver must tell Hiram Page that his stone revelations are from Satan.
4. The church must operate by common consent.

Implicit Obligations:

1. Absolute submission to the ecclesiastical hierarchy.
2. Rejection of any spiritual insight that contradicts the appointed leader.
3. Acceptance of the 'Lamanite' identity for Native Americans.

Ritual Requirements:

1. Conducting church business by 'common consent' and 'prayer of faith'.

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In this section, Oliver is told he cannot command Joseph because Joseph is 'at the head.' How does this compare to the Bereans in Acts 17 who tested even the Apostle Paul's words against Scripture?
2. The text says Hiram Page was deceived by Satan through his stone. Since Joseph Smith also used a stone, what is the objective standard—outside of the men themselves—to know which stone is from God and which is from Satan?
3. If the 'Lamanites' mentioned here are not actually Israelites as DNA suggests, what does that imply about the source of the command to preach to them?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Confusion of Competing Voices – Just as the early Saints were confused by conflicting revelations, the human heart is confused by many voices. God provided the Bible as the 'Canon' (measuring rod) to be the objective standard of truth, so we aren't tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine (Ephesians 4:14). [2 Timothy 3:16-17]
2. The Need for a Mediator – The text correctly identifies the human need for a mediator between us and a holy God. However, it installs a sinful man (Joseph). The Gospel offers the sinless God-Man, Jesus, as the one true Mediator who bridges the gap perfectly. [1 Timothy 2:5]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Hierarchy/Submission [Severe] – The believer is placed under the absolute spiritual authority of a human leader. Disagreeing with the leader is equated to disagreeing with God, creating a high-control environment where critical thinking is spiritually dangerous.
2. Uncertainty/Shifting Sand [Moderate] – Because the canon is open and the leader holds 'keys of mysteries,' doctrine can change. The believer never has a 'finished' foundation, but must constantly adjust to new revelations.
3. Cognitive Dissonance [Moderate] – The command to preach to Lamanites (Native Americans as Israelites) forces the believer to maintain a worldview that conflicts with modern genetic and historical evidence.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Hierarchical Revelation. Truth flows from the Head (Joseph) down to the members.

Verification Method: Alignment with the Head. If a revelation contradicts Joseph, it is 'of the devil' (Verse 4).

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology tests all prophecy against Scripture (Acts 17:11, 1 Thessalonians 5:21). This text tests prophecy against the person of Joseph Smith.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: September 1830 (Published in 1835 D&C as Section 51).

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated).

Textual Issues: This text was a direct response to the 'Hiram Page incident.' Page had a seer stone similar to the one Joseph used to translate the Book of Mormon. The text delegitimizes Page's stone without condemning the method itself (as Joseph used one), creating a distinction based on authority rather than methodology.