

SECTION 54 (MODERN SECTION 32)

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

OVERVIEW

This revelation, given through Joseph Smith in October 1830, addresses the expansion of the early Mormon missionary effort. Specifically, it calls Parley P. Pratt and Ziba Peterson to join Oliver Cowdery and Peter Whitmer Jr. on a significant journey into the 'wilderness' to preach to the 'Lamanites' (Native Americans). The text frames this mission as a divine mandate from Jesus Christ, who promises to be their 'Advocate' and accompany them spiritually. The revelation emphasizes the necessity of meekness and strict adherence to 'that which is written' (likely referring to the recently published Book of Mormon and previous revelations), explicitly warning the missionaries not to claim or 'pretend' to receive new revelations themselves, thereby reinforcing Joseph Smith's central role as the sole revelator for the church at this time. It concludes with an admonition to pray for understanding and a warning not to 'trifle' with divine commands.

KEY FIGURES

Jesus Christ, Parley P. Pratt, Ziba Peterson, Oliver Cowdery, Peter Whitmer Jr., The Lamanites

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. LAMANITE IDENTITY

Assertion: Native Americans are identified as 'Lamanites,' a remnant of the House of Israel described in the Book of Mormon.

"go... into the wilderness, among the Lamanites"

Evangelical Comparison: In this text, the term 'Lamanites' is not metaphorical; it is a specific ethnic and historical claim that Native Americans are descendants of Israelites who migrated to the Americas c. 600 BC. Evangelical Christianity holds to a standard historical and anthropological view of indigenous origins (Bering Strait migration) and rejects the Book of Mormon's historical narrative. Consequently, a mission to 'Lamanites' is viewed by Evangelicals as a mission based on a false historical premise, whereas for Mormons, it is the fulfillment of covenant promises to a specific bloodline.

2. CONTINUING REVELATION

Assertion: God gives specific, extra-biblical instructions to individuals regarding their movements and duties in the modern era.

"I will that he shall declare my gospel... and that which I have appointed unto him, is, that he shall go"

Evangelical Comparison: The text presents a scenario where God is speaking in the first person ('I say unto him') through a prophet to direct specific individuals. This violates the Evangelical doctrine of Sola Scriptura, which holds that the Bible is the sufficient rule of faith and practice. While Evangelicals believe God guides believers, they distinguish between personal leading and binding 'revelation' that carries the weight of scripture.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: While the language of 'preaching the gospel' and 'Christ as Advocate' sounds familiar to Evangelicals, the definitions differ radically. The 'gospel' here includes the restoration of the church through Joseph Smith and the acceptance of the Book of Mormon. Furthermore, the text operates on an open canon model, where God issues new, binding written instructions. This creates a fundamental gap regarding the sufficiency of the Bible and the nature of the Church's mission.

Shared Values:

The need to evangelize/preach the gospel; The importance of meekness and humility; Reliance on prayer; Christ as Advocate

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – The text presents itself as new, binding scripture equal to the Bible.
2. [Major] Historical/Biblical Inerrancy – Identifies Native Americans as Israelites (Lamanites), contradicting genetic evidence and biblical ethnology.

Semantic Warnings:

"Gospel"

In Text: The 'restored' gospel, including the Book of Mormon and authority of Joseph Smith.

Evangelical: The good news of Jesus Christ's death, burial, and resurrection for the forgiveness of sins (1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

Example: *When the text says 'declare my gospel,' it implies teaching the Book of Mormon to Native Americans, not just the biblical message of salvation.*

"Lamanites"

In Text: Descendants of Lehi (Israelite) found in the Americas.

Evangelical: N/A (Biblically, Native Americans are Gentiles/Nations, not a lost tribe of Israel).

Example: *The mission is specifically to 'Lamanites,' a category that does not exist in secular history or biblical theology.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Implicitly linked to accepting the 'restored' gospel and gathering with the saints.

How Attained: Through faith in Christ, but mediated through obedience to the restored priesthood authority and ordinances.

Basis of Assurance: Christ's role as Advocate is promised to those who 'give heed' to the written commandments.

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text emphasizes 'giving heed' and 'trifling not' as conditions for blessing, moving toward a works/obedience-based framework rather than Sola Fide.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Declare the gospel
2. Learn of me
3. Be meek and lowly of heart
4. Go into the wilderness among the Lamanites
5. Give heed to that which is written
6. Pretend to no other revelation
7. Pray always
8. Trifle not

Implicit Obligations:

1. Submit to the authority of Joseph Smith (the channel of this revelation)
2. Accept the Book of Mormon as the primary tool for the mission (implied by 'Lamanites' and 'that which is written')

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. The text mentions Christ as our 'Advocate.' What do you believe He pleads on our behalf? Is it our obedience, or His own sacrifice?
2. This section commands the missionaries to 'pretend to no other revelation.' Why do you think it was important to limit their ability to receive revelation?

3. Who are the 'Lamanites' mentioned here, and how does that identity fit with what we know about Native American ancestry today?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Advocate – Christ is indeed our Advocate (1 John 2:1). In the Gospel, He advocates for us not because we have fulfilled a mission or been 'meek' enough, but because He is the propitiation for our sins. [1 John 2:1-2]
2. The Wilderness – Just as these men were sent into a physical wilderness, Christ came into the wilderness of this fallen world to seek and save the lost. [Luke 19:10]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Hierarchy/Restriction [Moderate] – The command to 'pretend to no other revelation' places a spiritual ceiling on the believer. They are to be messengers of another man's revelation, not direct recipients of God's canonical truth, creating a dependency on the leader.
2. Fear of Error [Mild] – The warning to 'trifle not' introduces a fear of punishment or divine displeasure for failing to treat the specific words of the prophet with absolute solemnity.

PISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Prophetic Revelation.

Verification Method: Obedience to the prophet's voice is expected; the text implies that understanding comes through prayer ('pray always that I may unfold them').

Evangelical Contrast: Evangelical epistemology relies on testing all claims against the fixed standard of the Bible (Acts 17:11). This text relies on the authority of the modern prophet speaking for Christ.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: October 1830

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated)

Textual Issues: This text was later canonized as Section 32 in the 1876 edition of the D&C. In the 1835 edition, it was Section 54.