

SECTION 69

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

OVERVIEW

This revelation, known in modern Latter-day Saint editions as Section 56, was dictated by Joseph Smith in June 1831. It addresses a specific crisis of obedience involving Ezra Thayer and Thomas B. Marsh. The text is significant for establishing the theological principle that God may 'command and revoke' instructions based on the faithfulness or rebellion of the recipients. The revelation reassigns missionary companionships for the journey to Missouri (Zion) after Ezra Thayer's refusal to comply with the Law of Consecration (property laws). The text issues severe warnings: salvation is explicitly tied to keeping commandments, and those who refuse to take up their cross are threatened with being 'cut off.' It concludes with a dual condemnation of the 'rich' who withhold substance and the 'poor' who are greedy and lazy, while promising the earth's inheritance to the 'pure in heart.' For the believer, this text underscores the fluidity of divine instruction mediated through the prophet and the absolute necessity of obedience for salvation.

KEY FIGURES

The Lord (Speaker), Joseph Smith, jr., Thomas B. Marsh, Ezra Thayer, Selah J. Griffin, Newel Knight

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. DIVINE REVOCATION

Assertion: God reserves the right to revoke previous commandments and issue new ones based on the obedience or rebellion of the people.

"I the Lord command and revoke, as it seemeth me good... wherefore I revoke the commandment which was given unto my servants (v2)"

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, God's moral law is immutable, though His administrative dealings (dispensations) may change. However, this text presents a God who revokes specific directives ('commandment which was given') explicitly because of human 'stiffneckedness.' This introduces a theology where divine instruction is contingent and reactive to human agency, rather than a fixed decree. It creates a precedent in Mormonism where current revelation can supersede previous revelation, a concept foreign to the 'faith once for all delivered' (Jude 1:3) in historic Christianity.

2. CONDITIONAL SALVATION VIA OBEDIENCE

Assertion: Salvation is contingent upon taking up one's cross and strictly keeping commandments.

"he that will not take up his cross and follow me, and keep my commandments, the same shall not be saved. (v1)"

Evangelical Comparison: The text explicitly states that one who does not 'keep my commandments... shall not be saved.' In Evangelical soteriology, salvation is a gift of grace received through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9), and good works are the *result* of salvation, not the *cause*. This text places the burden of securing salvation on the believer's performance and obedience to the prophet's commands, effectively establishing a works-righteousness system.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in the mechanism of salvation and the nature of divine law. This text presents a God who reacts to human failure by changing the law ('command and revoke') and conditions salvation on the believer's ability to keep these shifting commandments. Evangelicalism posits a God whose standard is perfection (Matthew 5:48), which no human can meet, necessitating the imputation of Christ's righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21). The text's warning that 'he that will not... keep my commandments... shall not be saved' places the believer under the curse of the law (Galatians 3:10), whereas the Gospel offers freedom from that curse.

Shared Values:

Concern for the poor; Condemnation of greed and laziness; Call to repentance; Belief in the Second Coming (Day of Visitation)

Friction Points:

1. [Major] Immutability of God – God changes his commands based on human action ('revoke as it seemeth me good').
2. [Critical] Sola Fide – Salvation is explicitly denied to those who do not keep commandments.
3. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – New revelation supersedes biblical sufficiency and demands obedience to a modern prophet.

Semantic Warnings:

"Saved"

In Text: Conditional state achieved by obedience, commandment-keeping, and enduring to the end in the Mormon church.

Evangelical: Justification by faith alone, a completed status for the believer in Christ (Romans 8:1).

Example: *Verse 1 says 'he that will not... keep my commandments, the same shall not be saved,' making salvation a reward for works.*

"Cut off"

In Text: Excommunication from the church organization, equated with spiritual loss.

Evangelical: Usually refers to judgment or separation from God, but here conflated with institutional membership.

Example: *Ezra Thayer is threatened with being 'cut off out of my church' (v3) as a consequence of pride.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: A future state contingent on obedience, repentance, and church membership.

How Attained: By taking up the cross, following the prophet, and keeping commandments (v1).

Basis of Assurance: Low assurance; dependent on current standing and obedience ('sins... are not pardoned' v4).

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text explicitly rejects Sola Fide by stating that failure to keep commandments results in not being saved. Compare with Romans 3:28: 'Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.'

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Thomas B. Marsh must journey speedily to Missouri (v2)
2. Ezra Thayer must repent of pride and selfishness (v3)
3. Rich men must give substance to the poor (v5)
4. Poor men must labor with their own hands and not be greedy (v5)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept changes in church assignments without complaint
2. Submit to the prophet's authority to revoke previous commands
3. Consecrate property/money as directed by leadership

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 1, it says those who don't keep commandments won't be saved. How many commandments must you keep perfectly to be assured of your salvation?
2. Verse 2 says the Lord 'revokes' commandments. How does that impact your confidence in knowing what God wants from you today versus yesterday?

3. Verse 4 mentions that the people's sins were 'not pardoned' because they sought their own counsel. Do you believe pardon depends on your obedience or on Jesus's sacrifice?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Lament of the Unsaved – This captures the despair of trying to earn salvation and failing. It points to the need for a Savior who saves *completely* before the harvest passes. [Jeremiah 8:20 (Source); 2 Corinthians 6:2 ('Now is the day of salvation')]
2. Broken Heart and Contrite Spirit – God does not despise a broken heart. This is the posture of true saving faith—admitting spiritual bankruptcy. [Psalm 51:17; Matthew 5:3]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Performance Anxiety [Severe] – The explicit threat that failure to obey results in lost salvation creates a high-pressure environment where the believer can never rest in Christ's finished work.
2. Uncertainty/Instability [Moderate] – The doctrine that God 'revokes' commandments means the believer's foundation is always shifting. What is right today may be wrong tomorrow if the prophet speaks.
3. Fear of Exclusion [Severe] – The threat of being 'cut off' (v3) leverages social and spiritual isolation to enforce compliance.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Prophetic Revelation

Verification Method: Fulfillment of the prophet's words over time ('these words... shall be fulfilled' v3)

Evangelical Contrast: Evangelicals test prophecy against the closed canon of Scripture (Acts 17:11). This text demands obedience to new revelation that claims to be the voice of God, independent of biblical verification.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: June 1831

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated)

Textual Issues: This text (Section 69 in 1835 edition) was re-numbered to Section 56 in later editions (1876/1921/1981/2013).