

SECTION 79 (MODERN SECTION 81)

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

OVERVIEW

This revelation, originally dictated in March 1832 and canonized as Section 79 in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants (Section 81 in modern editions), formally calls Frederick G. Williams to the office of High Priest and Counselor to Joseph Smith. The text is pivotal in the development of the 'First Presidency' within Mormon hierarchy. It asserts that Joseph Smith holds the 'keys of the kingdom,' which are inherent to the presidency of the High Priesthood, thereby centralizing authority in Smith and his immediate counselors. The text outlines specific duties for Williams, including prayer, preaching, and succoring the weak. Theologically, it presents a covenantal structure where the promise of 'immortality and eternal life' is explicitly conditional ('if thou art faithful unto the end') upon the performance of these administrative and ministerial duties. This text serves as a foundational document for the hierarchical structure of the LDS Church, linking administrative loyalty directly to soteriological outcomes.

KEY FIGURES

Jesus Christ (Alpha and Omega), Joseph Smith (Key Holder), Frederick G. Williams (Recipient/Counselor)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. KEYS OF THE KINGDOM

Assertion: The keys of the kingdom belong always unto the presidency of the high priesthood (Joseph Smith and his counselors).

"unto my servant Joseph Smith, jr. unto whom I have given the keys of the kingdom, which belongeth always unto the presidency of the high priesthood"

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, the 'keys' mentioned in Matthew 16:19 represent the authority to open the kingdom of heaven through the proclamation of the Gospel. This authority is derivative of the Word of God and belongs to the church collectively or the apostles foundationally. This text redefines keys as a transferable bureaucratic authority inherent to a specific office ('presidency of the high priesthood'), effectively mediating access to God's kingdom through allegiance to Joseph Smith's administration.

2. CONDITIONAL ETERNAL LIFE

Assertion: Eternal life is a reward granted only after proving faithfulness in church office and duties to the end.

"if thou art faithful unto the end thou shalt have a crown of immortality and eternal life"

Evangelical Comparison: The text constructs an 'If/Then' soteriology. The recipient receives the crown of eternal life *if* they are faithful in their office, prayer, and ministry. This contradicts the Evangelical doctrine of Sola Fide (Faith Alone), where justification is a completed work of grace received at the moment of belief (Romans 5:1, Ephesians 2:8-9), and good works are the fruit, not the root, of salvation.

3. MODERN HIGH PRIESTHOOD

Assertion: Believers can be called to be 'high priests' within the church hierarchy.

"hearken to the calling wherewith you are called, even to be a high priest in my church"

Evangelical Comparison: The text establishes a distinct office of 'High Priest' within the church structure. Evangelical theology, grounded in the Epistle to the Hebrews, asserts that the Levitical priesthood is obsolete and that Christ is the unique, unchangeable High Priest who intercedes for believers. Consequently, there is no scriptural warrant for a special class of 'high priests' in the New Covenant; rather, there is the universal priesthood of all believers.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: While the ethical commands (prayer, helping the weak) resonate with Christian living, the theological framework is fundamentally divergent. The text constructs a system where access to God's authority is mediated through Joseph Smith's 'keys,' and entry into eternal life is contingent upon fulfilling a specific church office. This violates the Evangelical tenets of the sole mediation of Christ (1 Timothy 2:5) and justification by faith alone (Romans 3:28). The re-establishment of a 'High Priesthood' office further obscures the finished work of Christ as the final High Priest.

Shared Values:

Importance of prayer (public and private); Duty to help the weak and suffering; Proclaiming the gospel; Faithfulness to God

Friction Points:

1. [Major] Universal Priesthood – Establishes a hierarchical 'High Priesthood' and 'Presidency' that mediates authority, denying the equal standing of all believers before God.
2. [Critical] Sola Fide – Makes 'immortality and eternal life' conditional on being 'faithful in the office' and 'doing these things.'
3. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Asserts new, binding revelation through a modern prophet that alters New Testament ecclesiology.

Semantic Warnings:

"High Priest"

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

Evangelical: In the NT, a title reserved for Jesus Christ alone (Hebrews), or the Jewish Levitical office which passed away.

Example: *In this text, Williams is called to be a 'high priest'; in Hebrews 4:14, 'we have a great high priest... Jesus the Son of God.'*

"Keys of the Kingdom"

In Text: Administrative authority to govern the church and authorize ordinances, held by the Presidency.

Evangelical: The authority to proclaim the Gospel and declare forgiveness of sins based on Christ's work (Matt 16:19, John 20:23).

Example: *Joseph Smith 'holds the keys' in this text; in Revelation 1:18, Jesus says 'I have the keys of hell and of death.'*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Receiving a 'crown of immortality and eternal life' in the 'mansions' of the Father.

How Attained: By being 'faithful unto the end' in the appointed office, prayer, and ministry.

Basis of Assurance: Performance-based: 'Inasmuch as thou art faithful... I will bless him.'

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text explicitly links the reward of eternal life to human faithfulness in a calling ('if thou art faithful... thou shalt have'). Sola Fide asserts that eternal life is a gift received by faith, independent of works (Ephesians 2:8-9).

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Listen to the voice of the Lord
2. Hearken to the calling of high priest and counselor
3. Be faithful in council
4. Pray always vocally and in the heart
5. Pray in public and in private
6. Proclaim the gospel
7. Succor the weak
8. Lift up the hands which hang down

9. Strengthen the feeble knees
10. Stand in the office appointed

Implicit Obligations:

1. Submit to the authority of Joseph Smith as the key holder
2. Maintain active administrative service to secure salvation

Ritual Requirements:

1. Ordination to the office of High Priest (implied by the calling)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. The text says 'if thou art faithful unto the end thou shalt have a crown.' How does a person know for sure if they have been faithful *enough* to earn that crown?
2. In Hebrews, Jesus is called our High Priest because he offered the final sacrifice. Why does this text say Frederick G. Williams needed to be a high priest too?
3. This section promises eternal life based on faithfulness in a church office. How does that connect with Titus 3:5, which says 'not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us'?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. Succoring the Weak – This describes exactly what Christ did for us when we were helpless (Romans 5:6). We cannot strengthen ourselves; Christ strengthens us. [Hebrews 12:12-13 (Context: Looking to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith)]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Performance Anxiety [Severe] – The believer is burdened with the knowledge that their eternal destiny hangs on their personal faithfulness in their church calling. There is no rest, only the demand to 'be faithful unto the end' to secure the crown.
2. Ecclesiastical Dependence [Moderate] – The believer must rely on the 'presidency' who holds the keys, rather than having direct access to the throne of grace through Christ alone.
3. Uncertainty [Severe] – Since the promise is conditional ('If thou art faithful'), the believer can never possess the assurance of salvation in the present tense (1 John 5:13).

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Prophetic Revelation (Joseph Smith acting as the mouthpiece of God).

Verification Method: Implicit trust in the prophet's claim to hold the 'keys' and speak for God.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the objective standard of written Scripture (Acts 17:11, 2 Timothy 3:16). This text relies on subjective acceptance of Smith's authority.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: March 1832 (Original dictation); 1835 (Publication in D&C).

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated).

Textual Issues: The original manuscript (Kirtland Revelation Book) names Jesse Gause as the recipient. Gause served as a counselor but was excommunicated/left in late 1832. When the revelation was published in 1835, Gause's name was replaced with Frederick G. Williams without explanation.