

SECTION 80 (MODERN SECTION 89)

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

OVERVIEW

This text, known within Mormonism as the 'Word of Wisdom,' was canonized as Section 80 in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants (Section 89 in modern editions). It presents a dietary code delivered as a 'principle with promise' rather than an initial constraint or commandment. The text warns against 'conspiring men' who adulterate goods, leading to specific prohibitions against wine (except for sacraments), strong drink, tobacco, and 'hot drinks.' Conversely, it mandates the use of wholesome herbs, fruits, and grains (specifically wheat for man), and permits meat only sparingly, specifically in winter, cold, or famine. The text concludes with a transactional covenant: those who observe these dietary laws are promised health ('marrow to their bones'), intellectual and spiritual insight ('hidden treasures of knowledge'), and divine protection comparable to the Passover ('the destroying angel shall pass by them').

KEY FIGURES

The Lord, Joseph Smith, High Priests, Saints in Zion, Conspiring Men, The Destroying Angel

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. TEMPORAL SALVATION

Assertion: God provides specific dietary instructions necessary for the physical and spiritual preservation of saints in the last days.

"showing forth the order and will of God in the temporal salvation of all saints in the last days."

Evangelical Comparison: While Evangelicals affirm the body as a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19), they reject the notion that dietary observance constitutes 'salvation' of any kind. The New Testament explicitly abrogates Levitical dietary codes (Mark 7:19, Acts 10:15). This text reintroduces a ceremonial law structure where physical intake directly correlates to spiritual standing and divine protection, a concept alien to the New Covenant where 'the kingdom of God is not meat and drink' (Romans 14:17).

2. COVENANTAL HEALTH AND WISDOM

Assertion: Obedience to dietary laws grants access to hidden spiritual knowledge and physical endurance.

"And all saints who remember to keep and do these sayings... shall find wisdom, and great treasures of knowledge, even hidden treasures"

Evangelical Comparison: The text establishes a gnostic-adjacent promise where 'hidden treasures of knowledge' are unlocked through physical ritual (dietary restriction). In contrast, Evangelical theology posits that all treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ (Colossians 2:3) and are accessed through the Spirit and the Word, independent of food intake. The promise of physical health as a direct result of obedience also leans toward a prosperity gospel model regarding physiology.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental theological gap lies in the relationship between the physical and the spiritual. Evangelicalism, following Jesus (Mark 7:15) and Paul (Romans 14:17), teaches that food cannot commend a person to God or defile them spiritually. This text asserts the opposite: that abstaining from specific items and consuming others is a prerequisite for 'temporal salvation,' 'hidden treasures of knowledge,' and protection from the 'destroying angel.' This effectively creates a new dietary law that functions as a condition for blessings that the New Testament ascribes to grace and the indwelling Spirit.

Shared Values:

Stewardship of the physical body; Avoidance of drunkenness; Gratitude for God's creation (food)

Friction Points:

1. [Major] Sola Scriptura – Adds new binding laws not found in the Bible and contradicts NT teaching on food freedom.
2. [Critical] Sola Fide – Implies that protection from judgment ('destroying angel') is contingent on dietary works rather than faith in Christ's blood.
3. [Major] Christology – Displaces Christ as the sole Passover Lamb; protection is achieved through obedience to the Word of Wisdom.

Semantic Warnings:

"Temporal Salvation"

In Text: Preservation of the physical body and earthly life through obedience to dietary laws.

Evangelical: Not a standard biblical phrase; salvation usually refers to deliverance from sin and hell.

Example: *In this text, 'salvation' involves avoiding sickness; in the Bible, salvation is rescue from the wrath of God (Romans 5:9).*

"Hot Drinks"

In Text: Historically interpreted in Mormonism as coffee and tea; textually vague.

Evangelical: N/A (Bible has no prohibition against temperature of beverages).

Example: *Mormons interpret 'hot drinks' as specific commodities (coffee/tea) regardless of temperature, whereas the text specifies temperature.*

"Sacraments"

In Text: Ordinances (specifically the Lord's Supper) requiring pure wine of own make (later changed to water).

Evangelical: Ordinances instituted by Christ (Baptism, Communion) as means of grace or signs of the covenant.

Example: *The text mandates wine 'of your own make' for sacraments, emphasizing the source of the element over the element itself.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Here defined as 'temporal salvation' (health/protection); implies a connection to exaltation in broader LDS theology.

How Attained: Through obedience to the 'Word of Wisdom' (dietary restrictions).

Basis of Assurance: Physical health and the feeling of wisdom/knowledge.

Comparison to Sola Fide: Directly opposes Sola Fide by making the 'passing over' of the destroying angel contingent on human works (diet) rather than the finished work of Christ.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Abstain from wine and strong drink (except pure wine for sacraments)
2. Abstain from tobacco (except for bruises/cattle)
3. Abstain from hot drinks
4. Use herbs and fruits in season
5. Eat meat sparingly, only in winter, cold, or famine
6. Use grain as the staff of life

Implicit Obligations:

1. Exercise suspicion regarding 'conspiring men' in the marketplace
2. Manufacture own wine for sacraments to ensure purity
3. View physical health as a spiritual indicator

Ritual Requirements:

1. Sacramental wine must be 'of your own make'

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. The text says this is 'not by commandment or constraint.' When and why did it become a requirement for entering the temple?
2. Verse 2 says meat should be used 'sparingly' and only in 'winter, or of cold, or famine.' Why is the prohibition on coffee strictly enforced while the restriction on meat is largely ignored?
3. In the Bible, the 'destroying angel' passed over because of the blood of the lamb (Exodus 12). Here, he passes over because of a diet. How does this relate to Jesus being our Passover?
4. Paul says in Colossians 2:16 not to let anyone judge us in meat or drink. How do you reconcile that with D&C 89?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Destroying Angel – Just as the Israelites needed the blood of the lamb to escape the destroyer, we need the blood of Jesus. No amount of dietary discipline can stop judgment; only Christ's sacrifice can. [1 Corinthians 5:7 - 'For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us.']
2. Hidden Treasures of Knowledge – We all desire hidden wisdom. The Bible says all these treasures are hidden in Christ, not in a code of conduct. [Colossians 2:2-3 - '...Christ; In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.']

Spiritual Weight:

1. Legalism/Performance [Moderate] – The believer must constantly monitor intake of food and drink to maintain spiritual standing. This creates a 'checklist' spirituality where righteousness is measured by the pantry rather than the heart.
2. Fear of Judgment [Severe] – The text implies that without these dietary observances, the 'destroying angel' may not pass by. This instills a fear that Christ's blood is insufficient protection without personal dietary works.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Revelation (Joseph Smith) and Empiricism (Pragmatic results of health)

Verification Method: Adherents are expected to obey and experience the promised physical and intellectual blessings ('principle with promise').

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the revealed Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16) rather than pragmatic testing of new dietary revelations. Truth is defined by Scripture, not by whether a practice yields 'marrow to the bones.'

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: February 27, 1833 (Published 1835)

Authorship: Joseph Smith

Textual Issues: The text explicitly states 'not by commandment or constraint,' yet later LDS leaders (Brigham Young, Heber J. Grant) canonized it as a strict requirement for temple entrance, effectively overriding the text's own preamble.