

SECTION 84 (MODERN SECTION 90)

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

OVERVIEW

This revelation, given in March 1833 (cataloged as Section 84 in the 1835 edition and Section 90 in modern editions), marks a pivotal moment in the structural formalization of the early Latter-day Saint movement. It establishes the First Presidency by installing Sidney Rigdon and Frederick G. Williams as counselors equal to Joseph Smith in holding the 'keys of this last kingdom.' The text serves to consolidate authority, explicitly stating that the keys will never be taken from Joseph Smith in this world or the next, thereby securing his position against internal dissent. It outlines a missiological vision where the 'School of the Prophets' prepares ministers to preach to Gentiles and Jews. Furthermore, it addresses practical concerns, such as the 'translation of the prophets' (Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible), the financial consecration of members like Vienna Jaques, and the need to clear church debts to avoid disrepute. Theologically, it emphasizes a conditional standing before God, where Zion is chastened until she 'overcomes and is clean,' contrasting with the evangelical doctrine of imputed righteousness.

KEY FIGURES

Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, Frederick G. Williams, Vienna Jaques, Joseph Smith Sr., William E. McLellin

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. PERPETUITY OF PROPHETIC KEYS

Assertion: Joseph Smith holds the keys of the kingdom permanently, both in this life and the afterlife.

"the keys of this kingdom shall never be taken from you, while thou art in the world, neither in the world to come (Verse 2)"

Evangelical Comparison: In this text, the 'keys' are treated as a metaphysical authority vested in the person of Joseph Smith that transcends death ('neither in the world to come'). This establishes a hierarchical mediation where Smith retains authority even in the afterlife. In contrast, Evangelical theology asserts that Jesus Christ is the sole mediator (1 Timothy 2:5) and the Head of the Church. While the apostles were given authority to bind and loose (Matthew 16:19), this is understood as the declarative authority to preach the Gospel and exercise church discipline, not a dynastic or eternal control over the Kingdom that rivals Christ's supremacy.

2. PROGRESSIVE SANCTIFICATION THROUGH CHASTENING

Assertion: Zion (the church/people) must be chastened and plead with until she overcomes and becomes clean.

"I the Lord will contend with Zion and plead with her strong ones, and chasten her, until she overcomes and is clean before me (Verse 8)"

Evangelical Comparison: The text presents a soteriology where the community's standing before God is contingent on their ability to 'overcome' and become 'clean' through divine contention and chastening. This implies that their righteousness is intrinsic and achieved. Evangelical theology distinguishes between justification (being declared righteous by Christ's blood, Romans 5:9) and sanctification (the process of growth). The text blurs this, suggesting that Zion is not yet acceptable ('not well pleased with many things') and must achieve cleanliness through endurance, rather than resting in the finished work of Christ.

3. CONTINUING REVELATION (OPEN CANON)

Assertion: New oracles (revelations) are given through Joseph Smith to the church, and they must not be treated lightly.

"through you shall the oracles be given to another... lest they are accounted as a light thing, and are brought under condemnation thereby (Verse 2)"

Evangelical Comparison: The text commands the reception of new 'oracles' through Joseph Smith as a requirement for spiritual safety. It warns that treating these new revelations as a 'light thing' brings condemnation. This directly opposes the Evangelical doctrine of Sola Scriptura, which holds that Scripture is sufficient for salvation and godliness (2 Timothy 3:16-17). By placing the 'oracles' of Smith on par with or above biblical

authority (as the current guide for the church), the text shifts the locus of authority from the fixed Word of God to the fluid voice of the prophet.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in the locus of authority and the nature of mediation. In this text, access to God's will and the 'mysteries of the kingdom' is gated by the 'keys' held by Joseph Smith and his counselors. This re-establishes a Levitical-style mediation that the Epistle to the Hebrews argues was fulfilled and abolished by Christ (Hebrews 7:11-28). Furthermore, the text's warning that the keys belong to Smith 'neither in the world to come' suggests an eternal hierarchy that compromises the unique exaltation of Christ. Finally, the conditional nature of Zion's cleanliness ('until she overcomes') contrasts with the Evangelical understanding of the Church as the Bride of Christ, already washed and sanctified by His word (Ephesians 5:26).

Shared Values:

Importance of prayer; Desire for forgiveness of sins; Evangelism (Gospel to the nations); Value of education (study good books); Care for the poor/aged (Joseph Smith Sr.)

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – The text asserts new, binding 'oracles' and 'mysteries' given through Smith are necessary for the church.
2. [Major] Sola Fide – Forgiveness and cleanliness are linked to petitions, overcoming, and chastening rather than faith in Christ's finished work.
3. [Major] Universal Priesthood – Establishes a hierarchy of 'keys' held by specific men that mediate the 'word' and 'salvation' to the nations.

Semantic Warnings:

"Keys"

In Text: Authoritative rights to preside, govern, and reveal, held by specific men eternally.

Evangelical: Declarative authority given to the church to preach the Gospel and open the kingdom of heaven to believers (Matt 16:19).

Example: In this text, 'keys' are a possession of Joseph Smith that ensures his leadership in the afterlife; in the Bible, keys are the function of the church opening the door of faith.

"Oracles"

In Text: New revelations given through Joseph Smith that guide the church.

Evangelical: The Scriptures/utterances of God committed to the Jews (Romans 3:2).

Example: The text warns against treating Smith's 'oracles' lightly; Evangelicals view the Bible as the final oracle.

"Clean"

In Text: A state achieved by Zion through chastening and overcoming.

Evangelical: A state granted to the believer through the blood of Jesus (1 John 1:7).

Example: Zion is chastened 'until she is clean' (works/process), whereas the believer 'is clean' because of the word (John 15:3).

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Implied as 'salvation of Zion' involving perfection in ministry and overcoming chastening.

How Attained: Through the administration of the keys, receiving the word, and enduring chastening until clean.

Basis of Assurance: Forgiveness is declared by the prophet ('thy sins are forgiven thee'), but standing is maintained by not treating oracles lightly.

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text makes forgiveness contingent on 'petitions' and 'prayers' (Verse 1) and cleanliness contingent on 'overcoming' (Verse 8). Romans 3:28 states a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Beware how you hold the oracles of God (Verse 2)
2. Continue in the ministry and presidency (Verse 5)
3. Finish the translation of the prophets (Verse 5)
4. Study and learn languages and good books (Verse 5)
5. Set in order your houses (Verse 5)
6. Provide a place for Frederick G. Williams and Joseph Smith Sr. (Verse 6)
7. Search for a rich agent to discharge debts (Verse 6)
8. Let families be small regarding boarders (Verse 6)
9. Write this commandment to brethren in Zion (Verse 8)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept Sidney Rigdon and Frederick G. Williams as equal key-holders with Joseph Smith
2. Consecrate financial resources to the church (exemplified by Vienna Jaques)
3. Accept chastening as a means of becoming clean

Ritual Requirements:

1. Organization of the School of the Prophets
2. Ordination to power by the administration of the Comforter

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 2, it says the keys will never be taken from Joseph Smith, even in the world to come. How does that fit with Jesus having the keys of death and Hades in Revelation 1:18?
2. Verse 8 says the Lord will chasten Zion 'until she overcomes and is clean.' Do you feel you have overcome enough to be clean, or do you rely on Christ's cleanliness?
3. What does it mean to you that the 'oracles' (revelations) must not be treated as a 'light thing' lest you fall under condemnation?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Storehouse – Just as the church needed a storehouse to pay debts, humanity has a debt of sin we cannot pay. Christ is the true Storehouse of merit and grace. [Colossians 2:14 (canceling the record of debt)]
2. The Intercessor – Joseph prayed for the brethren, but Jesus is the ultimate intercessor who lives forever to pray for us, guaranteeing our forgiveness. [Hebrews 7:25]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Performance/Perfectionism [Severe] – The requirement to be 'perfected in their ministry' and to 'overcome' to be clean creates a burden of constant striving without the assurance of finished justification.
2. Fear of Condemnation [Moderate] – The warning that treating oracles as a 'light thing' leads to condemnation creates anxiety about whether one is taking the prophet's words seriously enough.
3. Dependency on Hierarchy [Moderate] – Believers are dependent on the 'keys' held by Smith, Rigdon, and Williams for the 'word' and 'salvation,' creating a spiritual bottleneck and removing direct access to God's assurance.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Vertical revelation through a specific hierarchy (Joseph Smith -> Counselors -> Church).

Verification Method: Adherents are expected to observe the 'keys' and 'oracles' and avoid treating them lightly to avoid condemnation.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology encourages testing all things by Scripture (Acts 17:11, 1 Thessalonians 5:21). This text centralizes truth in the 'keys' held by specific men, making the leader the epistemological standard rather than the written Word of God.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: March 8, 1833

Authorship: Joseph Smith

Textual Issues: This text (1835 Section 84) was re-numbered to Section 90 in later editions (1876/1921/1981/2013). The 1835 edition represents an early formalization of the First Presidency.