

SECTION 92 (MODERN D&C 91)

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

OVERVIEW

This section, originally received on March 9, 1833, and cataloged as Section 92 in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants (Section 91 in modern editions), addresses Joseph Smith's inquiry regarding the Apocrypha. At the time, Smith was engaged in his 'inspired translation' (revision) of the King James Bible. Upon reaching the Apocrypha-intertestamental books included in the Catholic canon but generally rejected as canonical by Protestants—Smith sought divine direction on whether to translate them. The revelation asserts a nuanced view: the Apocrypha contains many truths but also many 'interpolations by the hands of men.' Consequently, the Lord instructs Smith that translating these texts is 'not needful.' Instead, the text shifts the burden of discernment to the reader, establishing a subjective epistemology where the 'Spirit' is the mechanism for separating truth from error. This revelation is significant as it reinforces the Mormon view that written scripture is susceptible to corruption ('interpolations') and that living revelation or spiritual intuition is required to adjudicate textual validity.

KEY FIGURES

The Lord, Joseph Smith

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. SUBJECTIVE EPISTEMOLOGY (DISCERNMENT BY SPIRIT)

Assertion: The truthfulness of a text is determined by the spiritual enlightenment of the reader rather than the objective nature of the text itself.

"whoso readeth it let him understand, for the Spirit manifesteth truth; and whoso is enlightened by the Spirit shall obtain benefit therefrom"

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, the Holy Spirit works through the Word of God, which is objectively true and sufficient (2 Timothy 3:16). The Spirit does not provide new revelation to validate a text, but illuminates the believer's mind to understand what God has already revealed. In contrast, this text proposes a 'burning in the bosom' epistemology where the reader's subjective experience determines the validity of the content. This shifts authority from the text to the reader's feelings, creating a scenario where truth becomes fluid based on individual spiritual sensitivity. This mirrors the broader Mormon concept found in Moroni 10:3-5, fundamentally altering the test for truth from objective scriptural consistency (Acts 17:11) to subjective internal impression.

2. TEXTUAL CORRUPTION OF SCRIPTURE

Assertion: Religious texts, even those associated with scripture (like the Apocrypha), contain material errors inserted by human hands.

"there are many things contained therein that are not true, which are interpolations by the hands of men"

Evangelical Comparison: The assertion that the Apocrypha contains 'interpolations by the hands of men' reflects a broader Mormon hermeneutic of suspicion regarding biblical texts. Joseph Smith taught that the Bible was correct only 'as far as it is translated correctly' (Articles of Faith 1:8), implying that human agency has corrupted the transmission of God's word. Evangelical textual criticism acknowledges minor scribal variants but affirms that the Bible has been providentially preserved in all essential doctrines. This text's claim undermines confidence in the transmission of religious texts, necessitating a modern prophet to restore or adjudicate them.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The theological gap here is subtle but profound. An Evangelical rejects the Apocrypha because it lacks the marks of canonicity (apostolic origin, universal acceptance, internal consistency). Joseph Smith rejects it because a voice speaking as 'the Lord' told him it wasn't 'needful' and contained 'interpolations.'

This shifts the foundation of the canon from historical evidence and providential preservation to the fiat of a modern revelator. Furthermore, the instruction to the reader to use the Spirit to filter truth from error introduces a Gnostic-like element where the 'enlightened' reader can find hidden truths in corrupted texts, a practice foreign to the Evangelical doctrine of Sola Scriptura.

Shared Values:

Rejection of the Apocrypha as canonical scripture.; Belief that the Holy Spirit aids in understanding spiritual truth.

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – The text claims authority equal to or above the Bible to adjudicate biblical/extra-biblical texts via new revelation.
2. [Major] Theology Proper (Holy Spirit) – Reduces the Holy Spirit's role to a 'truth detector' for extra-biblical texts rather than the witness to the finished work of Christ.

Semantic Warnings:

"The Spirit"

In Text: A mechanism for discerning truth from error in a text; a feeling that validates content.

Evangelical: The Third Person of the Trinity who convicts of sin and illuminates the objective Word of God (John 16:13).

Example: *In this text, 'the Spirit' helps a reader pick true verses out of the Apocrypha. In Evangelicalism, the Spirit helps a reader apply the truth of the Bible.*

"Interpolations"

In Text: Human additions that corrupt the text, rendering it a mix of truth and error.

Evangelical: While textual criticism identifies scribal additions (e.g., the Comma Johanneum), Evangelicals do not view the Bible as containing 'interpolations' that corrupt its doctrinal integrity.

Example: *Smith claims the Apocrypha has 'interpolations by the hands of men' implying a corruption of an original truth.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Not explicitly defined in this text.

How Attained: Implies that access to truth and spiritual benefit is conditional upon 'receiving by the Spirit.'

Basis of Assurance: Confidence is based on personal spiritual enlightenment.

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text focuses on the mechanics of revelation and discernment rather than justification. However, the requirement to possess the Spirit to 'obtain benefit' suggests a performance-based spirituality distinct from the unconditional promise of the Gospel.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Do not translate the Apocrypha.

Implicit Obligations:

1. Seek the Spirit when reading religious texts to discern truth from error.
2. Accept Joseph Smith's prophetic authority to determine what is or is not scripture.

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. This section says the Apocrypha has 'interpolations by the hands of men.' How do you determine which verses are true and which are interpolations?
2. If the Spirit is required to separate truth from error in the Apocrypha, does that mean truth is subjective to the reader's feelings?
3. How does this approach to discerning truth compare to the Bereans in Acts 17:11, who searched the Scriptures daily to verify what they were taught?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The desire for pure truth. – Just as Smith worried about human corruption in the text, we should worry about human corruption in our righteousness. We need a righteousness that is not 'interpolated' by our own works. [Philippians 3:9 - 'Not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ.']}

Spiritual Weight:

1. Uncertainty/Cognitive Load [Moderate] – The believer is burdened with the task of being the final arbiter of truth. They must constantly 'feel' the Spirit to know if what they are reading is true or an 'interpolation.' This creates anxiety: 'Did I feel the Spirit? Was that my own thought?'
2. Fear of Deception [Moderate] – If one does not 'receive by the Spirit,' they 'cannot be benefitted.' This implies that a lack of spiritual feeling equates to a lack of spiritual standing, leading to fear that one is unworthy or cut off from God.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Direct Revelation (for the Prophet) and Subjective Spiritual Impression (for the reader).

Verification Method: The reader must be 'enlightened by the Spirit' to distinguish truth from error.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the objective standard of Scripture to test spirits (1 John 4:1). This text relies on the Spirit to test the text, reversing the order of authority.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: March 9, 1833

Authorship: Joseph Smith

Textual Issues: This section was originally printed in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants as Section 92. In current LDS editions, it is Section 91.