

SECTION 135

FAITH: Mormonism | TEXT: Doctrine and Covenants | VOLUME: 2013 | AUTHOR: John Taylor (historically attributed)

OVERVIEW

Written shortly after the events of June 27, 1844, Doctrine and Covenants Section 135 serves as the official announcement of the deaths of Joseph Smith (the Prophet) and Hyrum Smith (the Patriarch) in Carthage Jail. The text, attributed to Apostle John Taylor (who was present and wounded), frames the assassination not merely as a tragedy but as a theological necessity to 'seal the testimony' of the Restoration. It employs high hagiography, declaring that Joseph Smith has done more for the salvation of men in this world than any other person 'save Jesus only.' The text details the brutal manner of their deaths, asserts their absolute innocence, and interprets their martyrdom through the lens of biblical typology—comparing Joseph to a 'lamb to the slaughter' and his blood to that of the ancient martyrs. It establishes the narrative that the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants cost 'the best blood of the nineteenth century,' thereby elevating these texts and Joseph's prophetic office to a sacred status ratified by martyrdom.

KEY FIGURES

Joseph Smith, Hyrum Smith, Jesus Christ, John Taylor, Willard Richards

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. THE PREEMINENCE OF JOSEPH SMITH

Assertion: Joseph Smith is the second most important figure in the history of salvation, surpassing all biblical prophets and apostles.

"Joseph Smith, the Prophet and Seer of the Lord, has done more, save Jesus only, for the salvation of men in this world, than any other man that ever lived in it. (D&C 135:3)"

Evangelical Comparison: This doctrine creates a fundamental hierarchy foreign to Evangelical theology. While Evangelicals respect prophets (Moses, Elijah) and apostles (Paul, Peter) as instruments of revelation, they are never viewed as contributors to salvation in a meritorious sense. By claiming Joseph 'has done more... for the salvation of men' than apostles like Paul or prophets like Moses, the text inserts a secondary mediator between Christ and humanity. Evangelicalism holds that Christ's work is solitary and sufficient (Solus Christus), and no human agent adds to the efficacy of salvation.

2. THE SEALING OF TESTIMONY BY BLOOD

Assertion: The death of the prophet was necessary to make his testament valid and binding upon the world.

"The testators are now dead, and their testament is in force. (D&C 135:5)"

Evangelical Comparison: The text borrows the legal/covenantal language of Hebrews 9:16-17 ('where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator') and applies it to Joseph and Hyrum. In Evangelical theology, this passage refers exclusively to Jesus Christ, whose death established the New Covenant. Applying this logic to Joseph Smith implies that the 'restoration' is a distinct covenant requiring its own blood-ratification, which diminishes the sufficiency of Christ's blood to establish all truth and covenantal relationship with God.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The primary theological gap is the displacement of Christ's unique glory. By asserting Joseph Smith 'has done more, save Jesus only, for the salvation of men,' the text moves Joseph from the category of 'sinful servant' (where Moses, Paul, and all believers reside) toward the category of 'Savior/Mediator.' In Evangelicalism, the gap between Jesus and the greatest saint is infinite; in this text, Joseph is placed in a unique tier just below Christ but above all others. Furthermore, the text applies the logic of Hebrews 9 (the necessity of the death of the testator) to Joseph, implying that the 'Restoration' is a testament that required human blood to be valid, contradicting the sufficiency of Christ's blood.

Shared Values:

Condemnation of mob violence.; Respect for those who die for their convictions.; Belief in the providence of God (sparing Willard Richards).

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Solus Christus (Christ Alone) – Joseph Smith is elevated to a near-messianic status, claiming he did more for salvation than any other man save Jesus.
2. [Major] Sola Scriptura – The text asserts the Book of Mormon and D&C are equal to the Bible and required 'best blood' to bring forth.
3. [Critical] Theology of the Atonement – Implies human blood (Joseph's) was necessary to 'seal' the dispensation, obscuring the sufficiency of Christ's blood.

Semantic Warnings:

"Salvation"

In Text: Includes the bringing forth of new scripture, gathering the saints, and establishing temple ordinances (exaltation).

Evangelical: Deliverance from sin and death through faith in Jesus Christ alone (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Example: *When the text says Joseph did more for 'salvation,' it means he provided the necessary rituals and books for Mormon exaltation, not that he atoned for sin.*

"Lamb to the slaughter"

In Text: Applied to Joseph Smith surrendering to the law/mob.

Evangelical: A Messianic title applied exclusively to Jesus Christ (Isaiah 53:7, Acts 8:32).

Example: *The text appropriates Christ's title to emphasize Joseph's innocence.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: A system requiring the Book of Mormon, D&C, and the 'keys' held by Joseph Smith.

How Attained: Implicitly, through accepting the work and mission of Joseph Smith as the channel for the 'fulness of the everlasting gospel.'

Basis of Assurance: Confidence in the 'innocence' of the prophet and the validity of the restoration confirmed by martyrdom.

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text focuses entirely on the works, legacy, and martyrdom of Joseph Smith as the means of bringing salvation to the world, rather than the finished work of Christ received by faith. It suggests salvation was 'brought forth' by Joseph's labor.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Implicit Obligations:

1. Acknowledge Joseph Smith's role as essential to salvation.
2. Accept the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants as scripture sealed by blood.
3. View the martyrdom as proof of Joseph Smith's innocence and divine calling.
4. Regard the 'Gentiles' (non-Mormons) as those needing grace and charity.

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. The text says Joseph Smith did more for salvation than any man 'save Jesus only.' How do you interpret that in light of the Apostle Paul or Moses?
2. What does it mean to you that Joseph's blood was needed to 'seal' the testimony? How is that different from how Jesus's blood seals the New Covenant?
3. When you read 'testators are now dead, and their testament is in force,' does that imply the Restoration is a different testament than the one Jesus established?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Innocent Sufferer – This longing for an innocent victim who dies for the people is fully and truly met only in Jesus Christ. [1 Peter 2:22-24 ('Who did no sin... who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree')]
2. The Need for a Mediator – Humanity instinctively looks for a bridge to God. Joseph is presented as that bridge, but Jesus is the only true Mediator. [1 Timothy 2:5 ('For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus')]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Idolatrous Attachment [Severe] – The believer is burdened with defending the character of a man (Joseph Smith) as essential to their salvation. If Joseph is flawed, the 'seal' is broken. This ties their eternal security to the historical reputation of a human rather than the perfect work of Christ.
2. Persecution Complex [Moderate] – The text frames the world as 'traitors,' 'wicked men,' and 'mobs.' This cultivates an 'us vs. them' mentality where the believer feels isolated and constantly under siege by the outside world.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Testimony ratified by sacrifice (Martyrdom).

Verification Method: Accepting the 'innocent blood' as a witness/seal of truth.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the Holy Spirit illuminating the written Word of God (1 Corinthians 2:10-13), not on the tragic death of a leader as proof of their doctrinal veracity.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: 1844 (Shortly after June 27)

Authorship: John Taylor (Eyewitness, later 3rd President of the LDS Church).

Textual Issues: Written as an obituary/announcement, later canonized. It represents the immediate post-martyrdom theological processing of the event.