

SECTION 27

FAITH: Mormonism | TEXT: Doctrine and Covenants | VOLUME: 2013 | AUTHOR: Joseph Smith

OVERVIEW

Doctrine and Covenants Section 27, received in August 1830, marks a pivotal moment in the development of Mormon ecclesiology and ritual practice. Historically, the text begins as a pragmatic instruction regarding the sacrament (communion); Joseph Smith, seeking wine for a service, is stopped by an angel and told that the specific emblems (bread and wine) are secondary to the spiritual intent ('an eye single to my glory'). This leads to the permanent substitution of water for wine in LDS practice. However, the text pivots abruptly in verse 5 to a grander theological claim: the 'Restoration of the Priesthood.' The revelation lists a pantheon of biblical figures—Moroni, Elias, John the Baptist, Elijah, the Patriarchs, Michael (Adam), and Peter, James, and John—who are said to have visited Smith to confer specific 'keys' of authority. This text serves as the primary scriptural proof-text for the LDS claim that their authority derives from a literal, physical transfer of keys from ancient prophets to Joseph Smith, establishing a rigid hierarchy distinct from the 'priesthood of all believers' found in Protestantism. It concludes with a re-contextualized version of the 'Armor of God' passage from Ephesians.

KEY FIGURES

Jesus Christ, Joseph Smith, Moroni, Elias, John the Baptist, Elijah, Michael (Adam), Peter, James, and John, Oliver Cowdery

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. SACRAMENTAL PRAGMATISM

Assertion: The physical elements of the Lord's Supper (bread/wine) are not essential; water may be substituted if the heart is right.

"it mattereth not what ye shall eat or what ye shall drink when ye partake of the sacrament (D&C 27:2)"

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical Christianity, while transubstantiation is rejected, the use of the fruit of the vine and bread is generally maintained as a matter of obedience to Christ's institution in the Gospels (Matthew 26:26-29). D&C 27 introduces a doctrine of indifference regarding the elements, leading to the unique LDS practice of using water. This suggests a theology where the authority of the administrator (priesthood) is more critical to the ordinance's validity than adherence to the biblical form.

2. ANGELIC RESTORATION OF PRIESTHOOD KEYS

Assertion: Spiritual authority (keys) was lost and had to be physically restored by specific biblical figures visiting Joseph Smith.

"Peter, and James, and John, whom I have sent unto you, by whom I have ordained you and confirmed you to be apostles (D&C 27:12)"

Evangelical Comparison: Evangelicalism holds that Christ is the permanent High Priest (Hebrews 7:24-25) and that all believers have direct access to God (1 Peter 2:9). D&C 27 asserts that authority is dispensational and hierarchical, requiring a 'restoration' via angelic ordination. This implies that between the death of the Apostles and Joseph Smith, the authority to act in God's name was absent from the earth, effectively delegitimizing all Christian history in the interim.

3. MICHAEL-ADAM IDENTITY

Assertion: The Archangel Michael is the pre-mortal spirit of Adam, the first man.

"Michael, or Adam, the father of all, the prince of all, the ancient of days (D&C 27:11)"

Evangelical Comparison: Biblical theology maintains a strict ontological distinction between humans (created in God's image) and angels (ministering spirits). Hebrews 2:7 states man was made 'a little lower than the angels.' Identifying Adam as Michael collapses this distinction and supports the Mormon doctrine of the pre-existence of human souls, suggesting humans are the same species as angels/gods.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: While the text uses familiar Christian language (Redeemer, Armor of God, Sacrament), it redefines the mechanism of grace. In Evangelicalism, grace is mediated directly from Christ to the believer through the Holy Spirit. In D&C 27, grace and authority are mediated through a restored line of priesthood 'keys' held by Joseph Smith and his successors. The text claims that the 'fulness of the gospel' is found in the Book of Mormon (v5) and that authority comes from specific angelic ordinations (v8, v12), creating a closed system where salvation is accessible only through the LDS institution. Furthermore, the conflation of Adam with the Archangel Michael collapses the Creator/creature distinction, paving the way for the Mormon doctrine of exaltation (man becoming god).

Shared Values:

Centrality of Jesus Christ as Redeemer; Importance of the Sacrament/Communion; Spiritual warfare (Armor of God); Belief in the Second Coming

Friction Points:

1. [Major] Sola Scriptura – Adds new requirements (water for wine) and new narratives (angelic ordinations) not found in or supported by the Bible.
2. [Critical] Universal Priesthood – Re-establishes a Levitical/Aaronic and Melchizedek hierarchy, denying the priesthood of all believers.
3. [Critical] Christology (Sufficiency) – Implies Christ's work was insufficient to preserve the Church, necessitating a restoration of keys.
4. [Major] Theology Proper (Creation) – Confuses the creature (Adam) with the angelic (Michael), blurring ontological distinctions.

Semantic Warnings:

"Keys"

In Text: Authoritative permission/power delegated to specific men to administer ordinances and govern the church.

Evangelical: Metaphorical authority given to the Church to preach the Gospel and declare forgiveness (Matthew 16:19).

Example: In D&C 27, 'keys' are physical spiritual commodities transferred by angels. In the Bible, keys represent the opening of the kingdom through the preaching of the Gospel.

"Elias"

In Text: A specific prophet distinct from Elijah who lived in the days of Abraham (or a title for a forerunner).

Evangelical: The Greek form of the name Elijah.

Example: D&C 27 lists Elias and Elijah as separate visitors. The Bible uses the names interchangeably depending on the language (Hebrew/Greek).

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Implicitly defined as participation in the kingdom built up on earth (v4) and gathering with the saints.

How Attained: Through the 'keys' of the ministry (v12) and obedience to the restored ordinances.

Basis of Assurance: Faithfulness to the 'armor' and the 'word which I reveal unto you' (v18).

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text emphasizes 'keys,' 'ordinances,' and 'armor' (works/obedience) as the means to stand. Sola Fide (Romans 3:28) asserts justification is by faith apart from deeds of the law or ritual keys.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Listen to the voice of Jesus Christ (v1)
2. Do not purchase wine or strong drink from enemies (v3)
3. Partake of the sacrament with an eye single to glory (v2)
4. Put on the whole armor of God (v15)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Acknowledge Joseph Smith's authority as equal to Peter, James, and John
2. Accept the Book of Mormon as the 'fulness of the everlasting gospel'
3. Recognize the hierarchical necessity of priesthood keys

Ritual Requirements:

1. Use of water (implied by context and v2) or new wine made by believers for sacrament
2. Ordination to priesthood offices (Aaronic and Melchizedek) referenced in v8 and v12

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verses 6 and 9, both Elias and Elijah are mentioned as separate people who committed keys. Since 'Elias' is just the Greek way of saying 'Elijah,' how do you understand them being two different visitors?
2. Verse 2 says it doesn't matter what we eat or drink for the sacrament. Why do you think Jesus would set aside the specific symbols of His body and blood (wine) that He instituted in the Gospels?
3. The text mentions Peter, James, and John ordained Joseph Smith (v12). If believers are already a 'royal priesthood' through Christ (1 Peter 2:9), why was a separate ordination by angels necessary?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Desire for Pure Worship – The text shows a desire to be separate from the world and 'enemies' of God. The Gospel answers this not by isolation, but by the sanctifying blood of Christ which cleanses us from within. [1 John 1:7]
2. The Armor of God – The text rightly identifies the need for spiritual protection. This is a bridge to discuss Ephesians 6 and how our righteousness is actually Christ's righteousness (Breastplate), not our own worthiness. [Ephesians 6:10-18]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Institutional Dependency [Severe] – The believer is taught that their connection to God is dependent on the validity of the 'keys' held by the church leadership. If the leader falls or the keys are questioned, the believer's salvation is jeopardized.
2. Uncertainty of Authority [Moderate] – By claiming authority comes from specific, secret historical visitations, the believer must constantly defend historical claims against contradictory evidence (like the Elias/Elijah issue) rather than resting on the public, open promise of Scripture.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Vertical Revelation (Prophet receiving dictation from God).

Verification Method: Internal spiritual confirmation of the prophet's claims; acceptance of the historical narrative of angelic visitation.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the public, historical deposit of faith 'once for all delivered' (Jude 1:3) and the testing of spirits against Scripture (Acts 17:11). D&C 27 demands acceptance of private, unverifiable angelic encounters as the basis for universal authority.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: August 1830 (composite text).

Authorship: Joseph Smith

Textual Issues: The earliest manuscripts of this revelation (Book of Commandments, 1833) contain only verses 1-4 and part of 5. The elaborate list of angelic visitors (Peter, James, John, Elias, Elijah, etc.) was added in the 1835 edition but backdated to the 1830 revelation. This is a major redactional issue.