

SECTION 28

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

OVERVIEW

Doctrine and Covenants Section 28 (September 1830) addresses a critical crisis of authority in the nascent Church of Christ. Hiram Page, one of the Eight Witnesses to the Book of Mormon, began receiving revelations concerning the location of Zion and church governance through a 'seer stone.' These claims gained traction among members, including Oliver Cowdery. In this text, Joseph Smith speaks in the voice of the Lord to consolidate prophetic authority, establishing a strict hierarchy where Joseph alone holds the 'keys of the mysteries' and functions 'as Moses'—the sole channel for binding revelation upon the Church. The text declares Page's revelations to be of diabolical origin ('Satan deceiveth him') and orders Cowdery to correct Page. Simultaneously, it initiates the first major missionary effort to the 'Lamanites' (Native Americans), identifying the borders of their lands as the future site of the city of Zion, thereby linking the church's eschatology with the specific geography and anthropology of the Book of Mormon.

KEY FIGURES

Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery, Hiram Page, The Lord (Jesus Christ), Satan, Moses (Typological reference), Aaron (Typological reference)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. PROPHETIC PRIMACY / ONE-MAN REVELATION

Assertion: Only Joseph Smith (and his successors) can receive commandments or revelations for the entire Church; personal revelation cannot contradict the head.

"No one shall be appointed to receive commandments and revelations in this church excepting my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., for he receiveth them even as Moses. (D&C 28:2)"

Evangelical Comparison: Evangelical theology holds to the 'Priesthood of All Believers' (1 Peter 2:9), where all Christians have direct access to God through Christ, and 'Sola Scriptura,' meaning the canon is closed and sufficient. D&C 28 re-establishes a Mosaic hierarchy where a single human mediator is necessary to reveal God's will for the community. This effectively places the Prophet in a position of magisterial authority superior to the Bible, as he holds the 'keys of the mysteries' and can generate new binding scripture.

2. LAMANITE IDENTITY

Assertion: Native Americans are 'Lamanites,' a remnant of the House of Israel described in the Book of Mormon, to whom the gospel must be restored.

"Go unto the Lamanites and preach my gospel unto them... (D&C 28:8)"

Evangelical Comparison: The text presupposes the historicity of the Book of Mormon, labeling Native Americans as 'Lamanites.' Evangelical missiology approaches Native Americans as distinct ethnic groups created in God's image, without the theological overlay of them being 'fallen Israelites' who need to be restored to a covenant status lost by their ancestors. This doctrine in D&C 28 drives the specific eschatological hope of building Zion in America.

3. DIABOLICAL DECEPTION VIA OBJECTS

Assertion: Satan can mimic revelation through physical objects (seer stones) to deceive church members.

"Tell him that those things which he hath written from that stone are not of me and that Satan deceiveth him (D&C 28:11)"

Evangelical Comparison: From an Evangelical perspective, the use of a 'seer stone' for revelation is categorically occultic (Deuteronomy 18:10-12). However, D&C 28 does not condemn the ***method*** (as Joseph Smith also used a seer stone), but rather the ***source*** and ***authority***. It claims Satan deceived Page, implying that the instrument itself is neutral or usable by God if in the right hands (Joseph's), but dangerous if used by unauthorized members.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: D&C 28 illustrates the fundamental structural difference between Mormonism and Evangelical Christianity. While Evangelicals believe the veil was torn and access to God is open to all believers through Christ (Hebrews 10:19-20), this text reconstructs the veil. It establishes Joseph Smith as the necessary mediator ('as Moses') between God and the Church. Consequently, truth is not found in a fixed text (Bible) but in a dynamic, evolving stream of revelation controlled by one man. This creates a magisterial authority that supersedes the biblical canon.

Shared Values:

Desire for order in the church; Belief in the existence of Satan and deception; Commitment to missionary work

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] **Sola Scriptura** – Asserts that new, binding commandments are given through Joseph Smith, effectively reopening the canon.
2. [Major] **Universal Priesthood** – Restricts the ability to receive God's will for the community to one individual, denying the equality of believers before God.
3. [Major] **Theology Proper / Anthropology** – Redefines Native American history and identity based on extra-biblical revelation (Book of Mormon).
4. [Major] **Sola Fide / Christian Liberty** – Implies that spiritual safety is found in obedience to a human leader rather than faith in Christ alone.

Semantic Warnings:

"The Comforter"

In Text: A source of revelation that confirms the Prophet's words and guides preaching, but is subordinate to church hierarchy.

Evangelical: The Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, who guides believers into all truth and glorifies Christ (John 16:13), not a human leader.

Example: *In v1, the Comforter helps Oliver teach, but in v2, Oliver is forbidden from receiving commandments for the church, limiting the Spirit's role to the hierarchical structure.*

"Keys"

In Text: Authority to control the administration of the priesthood and revelation ('keys of the mysteries').

Evangelical: Metaphor for the authority of the Gospel message to open the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 16:19), accessible to the church, not restricted to a single autocrat.

Example: *Joseph holds the 'keys of the mysteries' (v7), implying secret or higher knowledge necessary for the church's operation.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Implicitly linked to the 'upbuilding of Zion' and adherence to the 'covenants of the church.'

How Attained: Through obedience to the commandments given through Joseph Smith.

Basis of Assurance: Confidence is derived from being in alignment with the Prophet and the Church order.

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text emphasizes 'obedience unto the things which I shall give unto him' (v3) and 'doing all things in order' (v13). This shifts focus from resting in Christ's finished work to active compliance with an evolving ecclesiastical system.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Oliver Cowdery must not command Joseph Smith (v6)
2. Oliver Cowdery must preach to the Lamanites (v8)
3. Oliver Cowdery must correct Hiram Page regarding the seer stone (v11)
4. The Church must conduct business by common consent (v13)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Members must reject any revelation that does not come through the appointed Prophet
2. Members must accept the Prophet's authority as equal to Moses
3. Members must view Native Americans as Lamanites

Ritual Requirements:

1. Common consent (voting/sustaining) in conference (v10, v13)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In D&C 28, Hiram Page is condemned for using a seer stone, yet historical records show Joseph Smith used one for the Book of Mormon. How does one distinguish between a 'divine' stone and a 'satanic' stone?
2. The text says Joseph receives commandments 'even as Moses.' In the New Testament, Hebrews says God has now spoken 'by his Son.' Do we still need a Moses figure if we have Jesus?
3. If a church member today felt the Holy Spirit (the Comforter) leading them to a truth that contradicted the President of the Church, based on verse 2, which one must they follow?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The desire for a tangible word from God – People long for certainty and direction. The text offers a human prophet to fill this void. [Hebrews 1:1-2 - God has spoken fully and finally in His Son. We don't need to look to stones or new prophets for the 'mysteries'; the mystery of God is Christ (Colossians 2:2-3).]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Fear of Deception [Severe] – The text implies that even sincere believers (like Oliver Cowdery and the Whitmers) can be easily deceived by Satan if they listen to anyone other than Joseph. This creates a paranoia where one's own spiritual discernment is untrustworthy.
2. Absolute Submission [Moderate] – The believer is stripped of the right to question the leader ('Thou shalt not command him who is at thy head'). This creates a spiritual ceiling where personal growth is capped by the leader's current revelation.
3. Missiological Pressure [Mild] – The command to build Zion on the borders of the Lamanites places a burden of geographical and racial gathering that historically failed (Zion was not successfully built in Missouri), potentially causing dissonance.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Authoritative Revelation (Vertical/Hierarchical). Truth is determined by the Prophet, not by consensus, reason, or individual spiritual experience if that experience contradicts the leader.

Verification Method: Obedience to the 'head' (Joseph) and confirmation by the 'Comforter'–but only if that confirmation aligns with the Prophet's teachings.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology tests all prophecy against the fixed standard of Scripture (Acts 17:11, 1 John 4:1). D&C 28 tests prophecy against the authority of Joseph Smith.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: September 1830

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated)

Textual Issues: The revelation addresses the 'seer stone' of Hiram Page. Historically, Joseph Smith also used a seer stone to translate the Book of Mormon. Later editions of church history downplayed Joseph's stone use while retaining this condemnation of Page's stone use.