

# SECTION 3

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

## OVERVIEW

Doctrine and Covenants Section 3 is a foundational text in the development of Mormon authority, dictated in July 1828 after Joseph Smith's scribe, Martin Harris, lost 116 pages of the translated Book of Mormon manuscript. The text functions as a divine rebuke, asserting that while God's purposes cannot be frustrated by human error, Joseph Smith's standing as a seer is conditional upon his obedience. It establishes a theological tension where the prophet is chosen but liable to fall and lose his 'gift' if he fears man more than God. The revelation also outlines the missiological purpose of the coming Book of Mormon: to restore the knowledge of the Savior to the indigenous peoples of the Americas (Lamanites), whom the text claims are remnants of Israel. It serves to reassert Joseph's authority after a significant failure while simultaneously warning him of the precariousness of his position.

## KEY FIGURES

God (The Speaker), Joseph Smith (The Recipient), Martin Harris (The 'Wicked Man'), Nephites, Lamanites

## DOCTRINES ANALYZED

### 1. DIVINE IMMUTABILITY VS. HUMAN AGENCY

**Assertion:** God's course is 'one eternal round' and cannot be frustrated, yet human agents can fail and be replaced.

*"The works, and the designs, and the purposes of God cannot be frustrated... his course is one eternal round. (D&C 3:1-2)"*

**Evangelical Comparison:** Evangelical theology affirms God's immutability (Malachi 3:6) and sovereignty (Job 42:2). However, the Mormon phrase 'one eternal round' (D&C 3:2) introduces a concept often interpreted in later LDS theology as cyclical progression or eternal recurrence, contrasting with the biblical linear timeline of Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Consummation. While the text's assertion that God's plan overrides human failure is biblical (Genesis 50:20), the specific application here is to preserve the production of a new scripture (Book of Mormon), which Evangelicals reject as unnecessary given the sufficiency of the Bible.

### 2. CONDITIONAL PROPHETIC OFFICE

**Assertion:** A prophet can lose his calling, gift, and spiritual standing if he yields to the fear of man.

*"if thou art not aware thou wilt fall... thou shalt be delivered up and become as other men, and have no more gift. (D&C 3:9, 11)"*

**Evangelical Comparison:** In Evangelical theology, the canon is closed, and there is no office of 'Prophet' equivalent to the Old Testament or Apostolic era that governs the church today. D&C 3 presents the prophetic office as a 'gift' specifically tied to the power to translate ancient records. The threat that Joseph could 'become as other men' (D&C 3:11) implies that the layperson's state is one of spiritual demotion, contrasting with the Evangelical doctrine of the Universal Priesthood of Believers (1 Peter 2:9), where all believers have equal access to God.

### 3. RESTORATION SOTERIOLOGY

**Assertion:** The Book of Mormon is necessary for the Lamanites to know the promises of the Lord and rely on Christ.

*"And that the Lamanites... might know the promises of the Lord, and that they may believe the gospel and rely upon the merits of Jesus Christ (D&C 3:20)"*

**Evangelical Comparison:** This text claims the Book of Mormon was preserved specifically to bring the 'Lamanites' (indigenous peoples) to salvation. While the phrase 'rely upon the merits of Jesus Christ' (D&C 3:20) is strikingly compatible with Sola Fide, the context creates a friction point: it posits that the Bible was insufficient or unavailable to accomplish this task effectively for these people, necessitating an extra-biblical revelation. It ties salvation history to a specific, archaeologically unsupported American lineage.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

**Theological Gap:** While the soteriological language in verse 20 is close to Evangelicalism, the ecclesiological and bibliological framework is incompatible. The text assumes the Bible is insufficient for the 'Lamanites' and requires a new record. Furthermore, it establishes Joseph Smith as a mediator whose 'gift' is essential for God's work to proceed, violating the Universal Priesthood. The authority structure is built on continuous, extra-biblical revelation.

Shared Values:

God's sovereignty (v1-3); The necessity of repentance (v10); Salvation through the merits of Jesus Christ (v20); Warning against pride and fear of man (v4, v7)

Friction Points:

- 1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Asserts the necessity of the Book of Mormon and claims direct new revelation.
- 2. [Major] Universal Priesthood – Elevates Joseph Smith to a unique, mediating status where his 'gift' is the bottleneck for God's will.
- 3. [Major] Sola Gratia – While mentioning Christ's merits, the maintenance of Joseph's standing is highly conditional on his performance ('if thou art not aware thou wilt fall').

Semantic Warnings:

"The Work"

**In Text:** Specifically the translation and publication of the Book of Mormon and the establishment of the LDS Church.  
**Evangelical:** Usually refers to the general ministry of the Gospel or the finished work of Christ on the cross (John 17:4).  
**Example:** *In D&C 3:16 'my work shall go forth' refers to the Book of Mormon, not just the abstract spread of the Gospel.*

"Gift"

**In Text:** The supernatural ability to translate ancient records using the Urim and Thummim.  
**Evangelical:** Spiritual gifts (charismata) given to believers for the edification of the body (1 Cor 12), not typically a singular power to produce canon.  
**Example:** *Joseph is threatened with having 'no more gift' (v11), meaning he would lose the ability to translate.*

SOTERIOLOGY

**Salvation Defined:** Knowing the promises of the Lord, believing the gospel, and being glorified (v20).

**How Attained:** By relying upon the merits of Jesus Christ and repentance (v20).

**Basis of Assurance:** In this text, assurance is tied to the successful coming forth of the record; for Joseph, assurance is conditional on obedience.

**Comparison to Sola Fide:** Verse 20 ('rely upon the merits of Jesus Christ') is one of the closest approximations to Sola Fide in Mormon scripture. However, it is embedded in a text about the necessity of producing a \*new\* scripture to effectuate this salvation, implying the Bible was insufficient.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

- 1. Repent of that which thou hast done (v10)
- 2. Do not fear man more than God (v7)
- 3. Do not boast in own strength (v4)

Implicit Obligations:

- 1. Accept the Book of Mormon as essential for the salvation of the Lamanites
- 2. Acknowledge Joseph Smith's role as the sole conduit for this translation
- 3. View Martin Harris's skepticism or mishandling of the text as 'wickedness'

## EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

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### Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 20, it says we must 'rely upon the merits of Jesus Christ.' What does it look like to rely *only* on His merits and not our own works?
2. Verse 11 mentions Joseph could 'become as other men.' How does this view of the 'common man' compare to the biblical view that all believers are a 'royal priesthood' (1 Peter 2:9)?
3. The text says God's work cannot be frustrated (v3). If the 116 pages were lost, how does this reassure you about God's sovereignty in your own life?

### Redemptive Analogies:

1. Relying on Merits – This phrase is a perfect bridge to the Gospel. It acknowledges that human merit is insufficient. [Titus 3:5 'Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us.']
2. The Unfrustrated God – Even when humans fail (like the lost manuscript), God's plan for redemption through Christ remains secure. [Job 42:2 'I know that you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted.']

### Spiritual Weight:

1. Performance Anxiety [Severe] – The text creates a high-stakes environment where a chosen leader is one mistake away from losing their divine gift and standing. This trickles down to the adherent, creating a culture where 'worthiness' is constantly evaluated and can be lost.
2. Hierarchy/Isolation [Moderate] – By threatening Joseph with becoming 'as other men,' the text devalues the spiritual status of the lay believer, creating a caste system where spiritual power is concentrated in the hierarchy rather than the body of Christ.

## EPISTEMOLOGY

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**Knowledge Source:** Revelation through a Seer (Joseph Smith)

**Verification Method:** The text implies verification through the fulfillment of the work (the eventual publication of the Book of Mormon) and the internal witness of the Spirit.

**Evangelical Contrast:** Biblical epistemology relies on the objective standard of written Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16) and the historical resurrection of Christ. D&C 3 relies on the subjective experience of the prophet and the success of his translation project.

## TEXTUAL CRITICISM

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**Dating:** July 1828

**Authorship:** Joseph Smith (dictated as revelation)

**Textual Issues:** This is the first revelation Joseph Smith wrote down (or dictated to be written). It addresses the loss of the 'Book of Lehi' (116 pages).