

SECTION 32

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

OVERVIEW

Doctrine and Covenants Section 32, received in October 1830, is a pivotal administrative and missiological text in early Mormon history. It formally calls Parley P. Pratt and Ziba Peterson to join a mission to the 'Lamanites' (Native Americans living on the western frontier). The text presents Jesus Christ speaking in the first person through Joseph Smith, commanding these elders to declare 'my gospel,' learn of Him, and be meek. Crucially, the revelation promises divine accompaniment ('I myself will go with them') and identifies Christ as their 'advocate with the Father.' It also establishes strict boundaries on their authority: they are to heed 'that which is written' (likely the Bible and the recently published Book of Mormon) and are explicitly forbidden from 'pretending' to receive new revelation, reinforcing Joseph Smith's sole authority to bring forth new scripture. This mission was historically significant as it took the missionaries through Kirtland, Ohio, leading to the conversion of Sidney Rigdon and a massive increase in Church membership, despite the mission to the Native Americans being largely unsuccessful.

KEY FIGURES

Jesus Christ (The Speaker), Parley P. Pratt, Ziba Peterson, Oliver Cowdery, Peter Whitmer Jr.

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. LAMANITE IDENTITY

Assertion: Native Americans ('Indians') are 'Lamanites,' a remnant of the House of Israel described in the Book of Mormon.

"go with my servants... into the wilderness among the Lamanites. (D&C 32:2)"

Evangelical Comparison: The text explicitly identifies the indigenous peoples of the American frontier as 'Lamanites.' In Mormon theology, this means they are descendants of Lehi (an Israelite) and are heirs to specific covenant promises found in the Book of Mormon. Evangelicals view Native Americans as peoples created in God's image (Genesis 1:27) in need of the Gospel, but reject the historical claim of Israelite ancestry as it lacks biblical and archaeological support. This identification is foundational to early Mormon missiology, as the Book of Mormon was viewed as a record written specifically for this demographic.

2. CHRIST AS ADVOCATE

Assertion: Jesus Christ pleads the cause of the believer before the Father.

"I am their advocate with the Father, and nothing shall prevail against them. (D&C 32:3)"

Evangelical Comparison: The text uses the biblical title 'Advocate' (1 John 2:1). In Evangelical theology, Christ's advocacy is based solely on His propitiation—His finished work on the cross which satisfies God's wrath. In the context of D&C 32, while the protection is promised, the advocacy is often linked in broader Mormon theology to the individual's faithfulness to covenants and the specific mission call. However, in this specific text, the usage is very close to the biblical model of divine protection and intercession.

3. ECCLESIASTICAL HIERARCHY/REVELATION

Assertion: Subordinate elders are restricted to written scripture and cannot receive new normative revelation for the church.

"pretend to no other revelation (D&C 32:4)"

Evangelical Comparison: This doctrine establishes the 'prophetic bottleneck.' While Mormonism claims to be a religion of continuous revelation, this text explicitly limits the missionaries to 'that which is written.' They are forbidden from producing new revelation, a right reserved for the Prophet (Joseph Smith). This contrasts with the Evangelical view of Sola Scriptura, where the canon is closed for all, and the Universal Priesthood, where all believers have equal access to illumination by the Holy Spirit through the completed Word, without a hierarchical mediator determining valid truth.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: While the language of 'gospel,' 'advocate,' and 'meekness' resonates with Evangelical ears, the structural foundation is radically different. The text operates on the premise that the Bible is insufficient and that God is issuing new, binding canon through Joseph Smith. Furthermore, the 'gospel' being declared includes the Book of Mormon as a necessary component for the restoration of the 'Lamanites,' a concept foreign and contradictory to the biblical Great Commission which is not ethnic-specific in its soteriology but universal based on the Adamic nature of man.

Shared Values:

Desire to evangelize/share the gospel; Importance of meekness and humility; Belief in prayer; Christ as Advocate

Friction Points:

- 1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – The text asserts new revelation and validates the Book of Mormon (by validating the Lamanite concept), denying the sufficiency of the Bible.
- 2. [Major] Universal Priesthood – Restricts the ability to receive revelation to the Prophet alone ('pretend to no other revelation'), creating a mediation layer between the believer and God's will.

Semantic Warnings:

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| <p>"Gospel"</p> <p>In Text: The 'restored' gospel, which includes faith in Christ, repentance, baptism by proper authority, and acceptance of the Book of Mormon.</p> <p>Evangelical: The good news of Jesus Christ's death, burial, and resurrection for the forgiveness of sins (1 Corinthians 15:1-4).</p> <p>Example: <i>When D&C 32:1 says 'declare my gospel,' it implies teaching the Book of Mormon narrative to Native Americans, whereas Paul's gospel was 'Christ and him crucified.'</i></p> | <p>"Lamanites"</p> <p>In Text: Descendants of Israelites in the Americas; the target audience of the Book of Mormon.</p> <p>Evangelical: Term does not exist in the Bible.</p> <p>Example: <i>The text sends missionaries to 'Lamanites' (Native Americans), attributing a covenant lineage to them that the Bible does not assign to Gentile nations.</i></p> |
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SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Implicitly linked to accepting the 'gospel' being preached and the gathering of Israel (Lamanites).

How Attained: Through faith, repentance, and the implied ordinances that the missionaries were authorized to perform.

Basis of Assurance: Divine promise: 'I will bless them' (v5) and 'nothing shall prevail against them' (v3).

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text emphasizes 'doing' (go, declare, heed, pray) as the condition for the blessing. While not explicitly denying faith, the context is a works-heavy mission assignment essential for the 'blessing.' Contrast with Ephesians 2:8-9 where salvation is a gift, not a wage for service.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

- 1. Declare my gospel (v1)
- 2. Learn of me (v1)
- 3. Be meek and lowly of heart (v1)
- 4. Go into the wilderness among the Lamanites (v2)
- 5. Give heed to that which is written (v4)
- 6. Pretend to no other revelation (v4)

7. Pray always (v4)

8. Trifle not (v5)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Submit to the leadership of Oliver Cowdery (implied by being added to his mission)
2. Accept the physical risks of the frontier wilderness
3. Accept the Book of Mormon as the primary tool for converting Lamanites

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 4, the missionaries are told to 'pretend to no other revelation.' Why do you think it was necessary to restrict what they could hear from God?
2. The text sends them to the 'Lamanites.' How do you reconcile the Book of Mormon's claim that Native Americans are Israelites with current DNA evidence showing Asian ancestry?
3. Verse 3 says Christ is our 'Advocate.' In your experience, what is He advocating *based on*? Is it our performance or His sacrifice?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Advocate – Just as these missionaries needed an advocate to face the dangers of the wilderness, we need an advocate to face the judgment of a Holy God. Jesus stands in our place. [1 John 2:1 - 'We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.']
2. Into the Wilderness – The call to go into the unknown represents the life of faith. However, in the Gospel, we don't go to find a lost tribe to validate a book; we go to find lost souls to validate the Cross. [Hebrews 13:13 - 'Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach.']

Spiritual Weight:

1. Hierarchy/Restriction [Moderate] – The command to 'pretend to no other revelation' creates a spiritual ceiling. The believer is dependent on the central leader for truth and cannot trust their own reading of scripture if it contradicts the leader.
2. Performance Pressure [Moderate] – The command 'trifle not' combined with the high stakes of the mission places the burden of the 'Lamanites'' salvation on the missionaries' obedience.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Prophetic Revelation (Joseph Smith acting as the mouthpiece of God).

Verification Method: Obedience to the revelation and subsequent spiritual confirmation (blessings promised in v5).

Evangelical Contrast: Evangelical epistemology relies on the objective standard of the written Bible (Berean principle, Acts 17:11). D&C 32 relies on the subjective acceptance of Joseph Smith's ability to channel the voice of Christ.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: October 1830

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated)

Textual Issues: The revelation was originally addressed to Parley P. Pratt and Ziba Peterson. It was included in the 1833 Book of Commandments as Chapter 34.