

## SECTION 34

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

### OVERVIEW

Received in November 1830, this revelation is directed to Orson Pratt, a recent convert and future Apostle in the LDS movement. The text presents itself as the direct voice of Jesus Christ speaking through Joseph Smith. It begins with a high Christology, identifying Jesus as the 'Lord God' and the 'light and life of the world.' The core message is a missiological mandate: Pratt is commanded to 'lift up his voice' to declare repentance to a 'crooked and perverse generation.' The text is heavily eschatological, asserting that the Second Coming is 'soon at hand' and detailing apocalyptic signs (sun darkened, moon to blood) reminiscent of biblical prophecy. It concludes with a conditional promise of divine presence contingent upon Pratt's faithfulness. Historically, this section reflects the intense apocalyptic urgency of early Mormonism, where the restoration of the gospel was viewed as the immediate precursor to the end of the age.

### KEY FIGURES

Jesus Christ (The Speaker), Orson Pratt (The Recipient), Joseph Smith (The Revelator/Mediator)

### DOCTRINES ANALYZED

#### 1. IMMINENT ESCHATOLOGY

**Assertion:** The Second Coming is 'soon at hand' (1830) and will be preceded by cosmic signs.

*"For behold, verily, verily, I say unto you, the time is soon at hand that I shall come in a cloud with power and great glory. (D&C 34:7)"*

**Evangelical Comparison:** Both traditions affirm a literal return of Christ. However, early Mormonism was defined by a hyper-imminent millenarianism that viewed the establishment of the LDS church as the final trigger for the end times. The phrase 'soon at hand' in 1830 (nearly 200 years ago) presents a hermeneutical challenge often resolved in Mormonism by redefining 'soon' as 'in the Lord's time.' Evangelical theology generally holds to 'imminence' (it could happen at any time) without necessarily attaching it to a specific restoration movement's timeline.

#### 2. CONDITIONAL DIVINE PRESENCE

**Assertion:** Christ's presence with the believer is contingent upon their faithfulness.

*"And if you are faithful, behold, I am with you until I come (D&C 34:11)"*

**Evangelical Comparison:** In Evangelical theology, the presence of Christ (via the Holy Spirit) is a seal of salvation guaranteed by the work of Christ (Ephesians 1:13-14). In this text, the promise 'I am with you' is prefaced by the conditional clause 'if you are faithful.' This introduces a performance-based maintenance of relationship that characterizes much of LDS soteriology, where blessings and standing are often contingent on ongoing obedience rather than imputed righteousness.

### COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

**Divergence Status:** Yes

**Theological Gap:** While the Christology appears orthodox on the surface (Jesus as Lord and Creator), the mechanism of delivery creates an insurmountable gap. By accepting this text as scripture, one accepts that the biblical canon is insufficient and that Joseph Smith is the authorized mouthpiece of God. Furthermore, the conditional clause 'if you are faithful, I am with you' (v11) subtly shifts the basis of the believer's security from the finished work of Christ (Sola Fide) to the enduring obedience of the believer, a hallmark of LDS soteriology that diverges from the Evangelical understanding of Grace.

#### Shared Values:

Belief in Jesus as Redeemer; Necessity of Repentance; Expectation of the Second Coming; The Bible is referenced/alluded to (John, Joel)

#### Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – The text claims to be new, binding revelation from God, expanding the canon beyond the Bible.
2. [Major] Sola Fide / Assurance – God's presence is made conditional on human faithfulness ('If you are faithful... I am with you').

#### Semantic Warnings:

##### "Gospel"

**In Text:** The message of the Restoration, including the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith's authority.

**Evangelical:** The death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins (1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

**Example:** When D&C 34:5 says 'preach my gospel,' it implies preaching the restored church's message, not just the biblical atonement.

##### "Sons of God"

**In Text:** In LDS theology, this eventually encompasses the potential for exaltation/deification.

**Evangelical:** Adoption into God's family through faith (John 1:12, Galatians 4:5).

**Example:** Becoming a 'son of God' in Mormonism is the first step on a path toward becoming like God (Theosis/Exaltation).

## SOTERIOLOGY

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**Salvation Defined:** Becoming 'sons of God' through belief (v3), but contextually linked to accepting the restored gospel.

**How Attained:** Belief is the entry point, but faithfulness (works/obedience) is the maintenance requirement (v11).

**Basis of Assurance:** Contingent on personal faithfulness ('If you are faithful').

**Comparison to Sola Fide:** The text starts with 'believe' (v3) which aligns with Sola Fide, but concludes with 'if you are faithful' (v11), introducing the necessity of works/endurance for security, contradicting Romans 8:38-39.

## MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

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#### Explicit Commands:

1. Hearken and hear what the Lord says (v1)
2. Lift up your voice as with the sound of a trump (v6)
3. Cry repentance (v6)
4. Prophesy (v10)
5. Spare not (v10)

#### Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept Joseph Smith as the channel for God's voice
2. Maintain personal faithfulness to retain God's presence
3. Interpret current events as signs of the end times

## EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

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#### Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 11, the Lord says, 'If you are faithful, behold, I am with you.' How does that impact your sense of peace? Do you ever worry that a lack of faithfulness might cause Him to withdraw His presence?
2. This revelation was given in 1830 and says the time is 'soon at hand.' How do you interpret 'soon' given that it has been nearly 200 years?
3. When verse 3 talks about believing to become sons of God, does that mean our status as God's children is based on our belief in Him, or our performance for Him?

#### **Redemptive Analogies:**

1. The Urgency of the Message – Just as Orson was called to announce the King, Christians are ambassadors for Christ. We share the urgency that the world needs to know the Savior. [2 Corinthians 5:20]
2. Light in Darkness – We agree the world is in darkness and needs the light of Christ. The true light gives power to become children of God to all who receive Him. [John 1:12]

#### **Spiritual Weight:**

1. Uncertainty / Performance Anxiety [Moderate] – The conditional 'If you are faithful' creates a subtle but heavy burden. The believer must constantly self-evaluate: 'Am I faithful enough to keep God's presence?' This erodes the assurance of salvation and replaces rest in Christ with anxiety about personal performance.

## **EPISTEMOLOGY**

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**Knowledge Source:** Revelation (Prophetic dictation) and Pneumatic confirmation (Power of the Holy Ghost).

**Verification Method:** The text implies verification through the act of prophesying/preaching: 'it shall be given by the power of the Holy Ghost' (v10).

**Evangelical Contrast:** Evangelicals test prophecy against the closed canon of Scripture (1 Thessalonians 5:21, Acts 17:11). This text demands acceptance based on the authority of the speaker (Joseph Smith speaking as God) and subjective spiritual experience.

## **TEXTUAL CRITICISM**

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**Dating:** November 4, 1830

**Authorship:** Dictated by Joseph Smith; attributed to Jesus Christ.

**Textual Issues:** Early manuscripts of D&C revelations were often edited by Smith and associates in later editions (1835, etc.) to clarify theology or church governance, though this section remains largely consistent with early apocalyptic fervor.