

SECTION 7

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

OVERVIEW

Doctrine and Covenants Section 7 presents a unique textual claim: it is described as a translation of a parchment written and hidden by John the Beloved, viewed by Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery through the Urim and Thummim in April 1829. The text addresses a debate regarding John 21:20-23, specifically whether the Apostle John died or remained on earth. In this account, the Lord speaks to John, granting him 'power over death' so that he may live and bring souls unto Christ until the Second Coming. This desire to remain and work is explicitly contrasted with Peter's desire to 'speedily come' into the Lord's kingdom. The text asserts that while Peter's desire was 'good,' John's desire to continue missionary labor was 'greater.' Consequently, John is made a 'ministering angel' and, along with Peter and James, is assigned the 'keys of this ministry.' This section is foundational for Latter-day Saint claims regarding the restoration of priesthood authority (the keys held by Peter, James, and John) and the doctrine of translated beings.

KEY FIGURES

Jesus Christ, John the Beloved, Peter, James, Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. TRANSLATED BEINGS

Assertion: Certain righteous individuals, like John, are granted power over death to remain on earth and minister until the Second Coming.

"thou shalt tarry until I come in my glory, and shalt prophesy before nations (D&C 7:3)"

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, death is the gateway to the presence of Christ for the believer (2 Corinthians 5:8). The concept of a 'translated being'—someone who has not died but remains on earth in a terrestrial state to perform missionary work—is absent from Protestant theology. Evangelicals interpret John 21:23 ('Jesus did not say to him that he would not die') as a specific correction to the rumor that John would remain, whereas D&C 7 asserts the rumor was essentially true.

2. HIERARCHY OF DESIRES (WORKS VS. REST)

Assertion: The desire to remain on earth and perform missionary work is 'greater' than the desire to die and be with Christ.

"Peter, this was a good desire; but my beloved has desired that he might do more, or a greater work yet among men (D&C 7:5)"

Evangelical Comparison: This text introduces a merit-based valuation of spiritual desires. While Peter's desire to be with Jesus is called 'good,' John's desire to work is called 'greater.' In Evangelical thought, the ultimate goal of the Christian life is union with Christ (glorification). While service is mandated, the Bible does not frame the delay of heaven as a spiritually superior state to entering heaven. This reflects a Mormon emphasis on agency and instrumental usefulness over rest and presence.

3. APOSTOLIC KEYS

Assertion: Peter, James, and John hold specific 'keys of this ministry' jointly.

"unto you three I will give this power and the keys of this ministry until I come (D&C 7:7)"

Evangelical Comparison: The mention of 'keys' in D&C 7 is historically significant for Mormonism, linking authority to specific individuals (Peter, James, John). In Evangelical theology, apostolic authority resides in the apostolic writings (the New Testament), not in a continuing metaphysical office or 'keys' passed down or held in reserve. The idea that these three apostles hold a distinct, active administration over the earth contradicts the Evangelical view of Christ's sole headship and the finished nature of the apostolic era.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: D&C 7 presents a fundamental divergence in both Christology and Eschatology. Biblically, the death of a saint is 'precious in the sight of the Lord' (Psalm 116:15) and to be with Christ is 'far better' (Phil 1:23). D&C 7 inverts this, suggesting that remaining in a fallen world to work is a 'greater' state than entering glory. Furthermore, the text introduces the 'keys of ministry' concept, laying the groundwork for the LDS priesthood hierarchy which mediates between Christ and man, violating the Evangelical tenet of the Priesthood of All Believers.

Shared Values:

Desire to bring souls to Christ; Belief in the Second Coming; Reverence for Peter, James, and John

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Adds a new, hidden writing of John to the canon that contradicts the plain reading of the biblical text (John 21:23).
2. [Major] Sola Fide / Solus Christus – Elevates human work/ministry as a 'greater' good than resting in Christ's presence, subtly shifting focus from Christ's finished work to the believer's ongoing work.
3. [Major] Universal Priesthood – Establishes a hierarchy of 'keys' held by specific apostles, supporting a mediating priesthood structure.

Semantic Warnings:

"Keys"

In Text: Specific, transferable authority to administer the kingdom of God and direct ministry, held by Peter, James, and John.

Evangelical: The authority of the Gospel message to open the kingdom of heaven to believers (Matthew 16:19).

Example: In D&C 7, 'keys' are a bureaucratic power given to the three apostles; in Evangelicalism, keys represent the church's authority to preach the gospel.

"Ministering Angel"

In Text: A human being (John) transformed to a state where he can minister on earth without dying.

Evangelical: Angels are a distinct created order of spirit beings, separate from humans (Hebrews 1:14).

Example: D&C 7 calls John a 'ministering angel,' blurring the ontological distinction between humans and angels maintained in orthodox theology.

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Implied as 'heirs of salvation' (v6), but the focus is on 'bringing souls' (exaltation/work).

How Attained: The text focuses on the ***work*** of the ministry rather than the ***attainment*** of salvation, but implies that 'greater' rewards are tied to 'greater work'.

Basis of Assurance: Assurance is linked to the fulfillment of desires approved by the Lord.

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text does not explicitly deny faith, but it heavily emphasizes the merit of 'greater work' over the passive reception of the kingdom (Peter's desire).

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. John must prophesy before nations, kindreds, tongues, and people (D&C 7:3)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Adherents should value missionary labor ('bringing souls') above personal rest or comfort
2. Adherents must accept the authority of the 'keys' held by Peter, James, and John

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In John 21:23, the Bible says Jesus did *not* say John wouldn't die. How does D&C 7 fit with that clarification?
2. Why do you think the Lord described working on earth as 'greater' than being with Him in the kingdom? How does that compare to Paul's desire in Philippians 1:23?
3. If salvation is a free gift of grace, does the pressure to do a 'greater work' ever feel like a burden to earn your standing?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Desire to Save Souls – This reflects God's own heart, who desires all to be saved. It can bridge to discussing how Christ accomplished the ultimate work so we can share the news freely, not out of obligation. [2 Peter 3:9, Romans 10:14-15]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Performance Pressure [Moderate] – By labeling the desire to work as 'greater' than the desire to be with Jesus, the text subtly instills a mindset where rest is inferior to activity. The believer may feel they are never doing enough to merit the 'greater' commendation.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Mystical revelation/translation via seer stones (Urim and Thummim).

Verification Method: Personal spiritual witness of the truthfulness of Joseph Smith's prophetic claims.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the public, preserved text of Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16) and historical verification, not private translation of inaccessible hidden documents.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: Originally received April 1829; Published in Book of Commandments 1833; Revised/Expanded in 1835 D&C.

Authorship: Joseph Smith (claiming translation of John).

Textual Issues: Significant redaction: The 1833 version (Chapter VI) is much shorter. The 1835 version added verses 6-7 regarding 'ministering angels' and 'keys.' This suggests the theology of priesthood keys was retroactively inserted into the 1829 revelation.