

SECTION 73

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

OVERVIEW

Given in January 1832 at Hiram, Ohio, this section marks a pivot in the early ministry of Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon. Previously, in Section 71, they had been commanded to pause their work on the 'New Translation' of the Bible (later known as the Joseph Smith Translation or JST) to preach and counter anti-Mormon sentiment. Section 73 rescinds that pause, declaring it 'expedient' to resume the work of translation. While preaching remains a duty for the elders until the next conference, Smith and Rigdon are specifically tasked with prioritizing the revision of the biblical text. This section underscores the central role the JST project played in the development of early Mormon theology, serving as the catalyst for many other revelations and doctrines, despite the fact that Smith did not utilize ancient manuscripts for this 'translation.'

KEY FIGURES

The Lord (Voice of the Revelation), Joseph Smith, Jun., Sidney Rigdon, The Elders of the Church

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. PROPHETIC AUTHORITY OVER SCRIPTURE

Assertion: The Prophet has the authority and mandate to revise, expand, or 'translate' the biblical text via revelation rather than linguistic scholarship.

"it is expedient to translate again... continue the work of translation until it be finished. (D&C 73:3-4)"

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, the Bible is the 'norma normans' (the ruling rule) over all church leaders and teachings (2 Timothy 3:16). No individual has the authority to alter, expand, or rewrite the canon. By commanding Smith to 'translate' (revise) the Bible based on immediate inspiration rather than manuscript evidence, this text asserts that the Prophet's authority supersedes the received biblical text. This implies the Bible is insufficient or corrupted and requires a modern prophet to restore its 'plain and precious parts,' a view explicitly rejected by the Evangelical doctrine of Biblical preservation and sufficiency.

2. CONTINUING REVELATION

Assertion: God provides specific, logistical instructions to church leaders for immediate timeframes.

"Now I give no more unto you at this time. (D&C 73:6)"

Evangelical Comparison: Evangelicals believe God guides through the Holy Spirit's illumination of the completed Scriptures and wisdom (James 1:5), but not through new, binding legislative revelation that adds to the canon. D&C 73 presents a God who micromanages the schedules of church leaders ('until conference,' 'at this time'), creating a dependency on ongoing oracular utterances rather than the principles of the finished Word.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental theological gap in D&C 73 is the authority of the Prophet versus the authority of the Bible. By commanding Smith to 'translate' (rewrite) the Bible, the text presupposes that the Bible is insufficient, corrupted, or incomplete, and that Smith possesses the authority to correct it without manuscript evidence. This violates the Evangelical doctrine of Sola Scriptura and the belief in the providential preservation of God's Word. It shifts the locus of authority from the fixed text of Scripture to the fluid revelation of the Prophet.

Shared Values:

Importance of preaching the Gospel (though definitions differ); Value of Scripture (though the canon differs); Sobriety and diligence in ministry

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – The text asserts the need for the Bible to be 'translated' (revised) by a modern prophet, denying its sufficiency and finality.
2. [Major] Universal Priesthood – Authority is centralized in specific men (Smith/Rigdon) to define truth for the church, rather than the church submitting to the received Word.

Semantic Warnings:

"Translate"

In Text: A charismatic process of revision, expansion, and clarification of the English KJV text via 'inspiration,' without reference to original languages.

Evangelical: The scholarly process of rendering text from one language (e.g., Hebrew/Greek) into another (e.g., English) based on linguistic rules.

Example: When D&C 73 says 'translate,' it means Joseph Smith is rewriting verses to fit his theology. When Evangelicals say 'translate,' they mean converting Greek to English.

"Gospel"

In Text: The laws, ordinances, and authority of the LDS Church.

Evangelical: The good news of Jesus Christ's death, burial, and resurrection for the forgiveness of sins (1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

Example: Preaching the 'gospel' in D&C 73 implies establishing the restored church, not just proclaiming the cross.

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Implicitly linked to the acceptance of the 'fullness' of the gospel being restored through Smith's translation work.

How Attained: Through obedience to the restored church and its ordinances (implied by the context of 'preaching').

Basis of Assurance: Compliance with current prophetic directives.

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text focuses on the 'work' of translation and preaching. While not explicitly denying faith, the context is one of labor and obedience to a hierarchical system, contrasting with the rest found in finished justification (Hebrews 4:10).

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Continue preaching and exhorting until the conference (v1)
2. Resume the work of translation (v3)
3. Gird up your loins (v6)
4. Be sober (v6)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept the 'translation' (JST) as a legitimate work of God
2. Await the 'voice of the conference' for mission assignments

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 3, the Lord commands Joseph to 'translate again.' When Joseph translated the Bible, did he use Hebrew or Greek manuscripts, or was it done by inspiration?
2. If the Bible needed to be re-translated by a prophet in 1832 to be correct, does that mean the Bible Christians had used for 1,800 years was insufficient?
3. How do we reconcile Joseph's changes to the Bible with the thousands of ancient manuscripts that support the traditional reading?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Desire for Pure Scripture – We all long for the pure, unadulterated voice of God. The Good News is that God has preserved His Word for us so we don't need to guess or rely on a modern rewrite. [1 Peter 1:23-25 ('The word of the Lord endureth for ever.')]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Uncertainty of Truth [Severe] – If the Bible is considered corrupted and in need of a prophet's revision, the believer loses the 'Solid Rock' of Scripture. They become dependent on the shifting interpretations of the hierarchy rather than the objective Word of God.
2. Performance Pressure [Moderate] – The command to 'gird up loins' and the constant shifting of duties (preach, then translate, then preach) creates a culture of restless labor where one's standing is maintained by keeping up with the latest directive.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Direct revelation to the Prophet.

Verification Method: Obedience to the instruction and waiting for the 'voice of the conference' (v2).

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the objective standard of written Scripture (Acts 17:11) and the internal witness of the Spirit regarding the Gospel (Romans 8:16), not on the subjective dictates of a modern leader claiming to speak for God.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: January 10, 1832

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated)

Textual Issues: This revelation was recorded during the intense period of the JST project. The text assumes the validity of the JST process.