

SECTION 79

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

OVERVIEW

Doctrine and Covenants Section 79 is a brief revelation dictated by Joseph Smith on March 12, 1832, in Hiram, Ohio. It addresses Jared Carter, an early convert and active missionary in the nascent Latter-day Saint movement. The text functions as a specific 'mission call,' a genre common in the Doctrine and Covenants, where the voice of Deity (Jesus Christ) gives logistical instructions to an individual through the prophet. Carter is commanded to travel to 'eastern countries' (likely referring to the eastern United States) to proclaim the 'everlasting gospel.' The text emphasizes that his authority to preach is derived from the 'power of the ordination' he has received, reinforcing the developing Mormon concept of priesthood authority as a prerequisite for valid ministry. The revelation promises the companionship of the 'Comforter' (Holy Spirit) for guidance and teaching. Crucially, the promise of success—represented by the agricultural metaphor of being crowned with 'sheaves' (converts)—is explicitly conditional: 'inasmuch as he is faithful.' This section illustrates the centralized control of missionary activity in early Mormonism, where individual evangelism was directed by specific revelation through the church president.

KEY FIGURES

Jesus Christ (The Speaker), Jared Carter (The Recipient), Joseph Smith (The Revelator/Mediator)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. ECCLESIASTICAL AUTHORITY IN EVANGELISM

Assertion: Preaching the gospel requires specific ordination and a specific call through the prophet.

"go... in the power of the ordination wherewith he has been ordained (D&C 79:1)"

Evangelical Comparison: In this text, the authority to preach is tied to 'the ordination wherewith he has been ordained.' In Mormon theology, this refers to the Priesthood (likely Melchizedek), which is viewed as the exclusive authority to act in God's name. Evangelical Christianity holds to the 'Priesthood of All Believers' (1 Peter 2:9), asserting that the command to evangelize (Matthew 28:19-20) applies to all Christians by virtue of their faith in Christ, not by a specific ritual ordination or permission from a central hierarchy. For Evangelicals, the power is in the Gospel message itself (Romans 1:16), not the office of the messenger.

2. CONDITIONAL FRUITFULNESS

Assertion: Spiritual success (sheaves) is contingent upon the individual's faithfulness.

"And inasmuch as he is faithful, I will crown him again with sheaves. (D&C 79:3)"

Evangelical Comparison: The phrase 'inasmuch as he is faithful' places the burden of the mission's outcome on the missionary's performance. While Evangelicals believe obedience is important, they generally view spiritual fruit (converts) as the work of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:6-7: 'God gave the increase'), rather than a direct reward for the messenger's personal merit. This text reinforces a 'transactional' relationship common in LDS theology: blessings are predicated on obedience to laws and ordinances.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental theological gap lies in the source of authority and the nature of the 'gospel' being preached. For the Evangelical, the authority to preach comes from the Great Commission given to the Church and the internal call of the Holy Spirit, validated by the local body—not a specific priesthood office restored in 1829. Furthermore, when D&C 79 refers to the 'everlasting gospel,' it refers to the specific restorationist message of Mormonism (including Joseph Smith's role), whereas the Evangelical understanding of the Gospel is strictly the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). The text also implies a continuous, open canon where Christ gives new, specific verbal instructions that carry scriptural weight, violating the sufficiency of the Bible.

Shared Values:

Imperative to evangelize; Reliance on the Holy Spirit (Comforter) for guidance; Jesus Christ identified as Lord; Joy in the Gospel message

Friction Points:

1. [Major] Universal Priesthood – Restricts the authority to preach/minister to those with specific 'ordination' (Priesthood office).
2. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Presents a modern text as the direct voice of Christ, equal to or superseding biblical authority for the individual.
3. [Moderate] Sola Gratia – Suggests spiritual rewards ('crowning') are contingent on human faithfulness ('inasmuch as').

Semantic Warnings:

"Ordination"

In Text: Conferral of specific Priesthood authority (Aaronic or Melchizedek) necessary to administer and preach effectively.

Evangelical: Public recognition and setting apart of a leader, but not a transmission of mystical power or a requirement for sharing the gospel (Acts 13:2-3).

Example: *In D&C 79:1, Carter preaches in the 'power of the ordination.'* In Evangelicalism, the power is in the Gospel (Romans 1:16).

"Everlasting Gospel"

In Text: The 'restored' gospel including LDS ordinances, priesthood, and the Book of Mormon.

Evangelical: The good news of salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone (Revelation 14:6 contextually linked to the finished work of Christ).

Example: *Carter is sent to preach the 'everlasting gospel' which involves bringing people into the LDS church structure.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Implicitly linked to accepting the 'glad tidings' and the authority of the messenger.

How Attained: For the missionary: through faithfulness in fulfilling the calling. For the hearer: implied acceptance of the message.

Basis of Assurance: Conditional: 'Inasmuch as he is faithful.'

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text focuses on the 'work' of the ministry and the 'faithfulness' of the worker as the basis for reward, contrasting with the Evangelical focus on the finished work of Christ as the sole basis for standing with God (Ephesians 2:8-9).

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Go again into the eastern countries
2. Go from place to place, and from city to city
3. Proclaim glad tidings of great joy (the everlasting gospel)
4. Let your heart be glad
5. Fear not

Implicit Obligations:

1. Submit to the specific geographic assignment given by the prophet
2. Maintain personal worthiness ('faithfulness') to ensure mission success
3. Rely on the 'power of ordination' rather than just the message

Ritual Requirements:

1. Ordination (presupposed as the basis for the mission)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. When verse 1 mentions preaching in the 'power of the ordination,' what does that mean to you? Do you believe someone without that specific ordination can preach the gospel with power?
2. Verse 3 says 'inasmuch as he is faithful' he will be crowned with sheaves. How do you handle the pressure of knowing your spiritual fruitfulness depends on your personal faithfulness?
3. How do you distinguish between the 'Comforter' teaching you truth (v. 2) and your own thoughts? How does the Bible help you test those promptings?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The desire for 'Sheaves' (Harvest) – The text reflects a valid desire to see lives changed and gathered into God's kingdom. [Jesus said the harvest is plentiful (Matthew 9:37). We share this desire, but we rest in the fact that Jesus is the Lord of the Harvest, and He draws men to Himself (John 12:32).]
2. Guidance of the Comforter – The longing for divine guidance is universal and biblical. [John 16:13 promises the Spirit will guide us into all truth–specifically truth about Jesus, glorifying Him rather than a new system or organization.]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Hierarchy/Exclusion [Moderate] – The believer may feel that their personal testimony is invalid or powerless without formal ecclesiastical authorization/ordination.
2. Uncertainty [Mild] – By opening the canon to ongoing specific instructions, the believer is constantly dependent on the current prophet for direction, rather than having a 'sure word' in completed Scripture.
3. Performance Pressure [Severe] – The phrase 'inasmuch as he is faithful' links the salvation of others (sheaves) to the missionary's personal performance. If no one converts, the missionary may internalize this as a lack of their own faithfulness.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Prophetic Revelation (mediated through Joseph Smith) and Personal Revelation (via the Comforter).

Verification Method: The text implies verification through the fulfillment of the promise (receiving 'sheaves') and the internal witness of the Comforter.

Evangelical Contrast: Evangelicals test all subjective guidance against the objective standard of the closed canon of Scripture (Acts 17:11, 2 Timothy 3:16). In this text, the 'truth' and 'way' are revealed dynamically by the Spirit in a manner that supplements scripture.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: March 12, 1832

Authorship: Dictated by Joseph Smith; scribed likely by Sidney Rigdon or similar clerk.

Textual Issues: Part of the compilation of revelations that were edited and revised for the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants. Early manuscript evidence shows Joseph Smith often revised 'dictated' words of Christ.