

SECTION 8

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

OVERVIEW

Delivered in April 1829, this revelation addresses Oliver Cowdery, who was acting as scribe for Joseph Smith during the translation of the Book of Mormon. Cowdery desired the ability to translate the plates himself. The text establishes the fundamental epistemology of Mormonism: that revelation is received via the Holy Ghost speaking to the 'mind and heart' (feelings and thoughts). It explicitly links this spiritual mechanism to the power Moses used to part the Red Sea. Furthermore, the text validates Cowdery's use of a specific spiritual instrument, referred to here as the 'gift of Aaron' (historically the 'rod of nature' or dowsing rod), promising that through faith, this gift would allow him to uncover 'mysteries' and translate ancient sacred records. The revelation places the burden of the miracle on Cowdery's faith, establishing a pattern where spiritual failure is attributed to the adherent's lack of belief rather than the validity of the promise.

KEY FIGURES

Jesus Christ (The Speaker), Oliver Cowdery, Joseph Smith, Moses, Aaron

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. SUBJECTIVE REVELATION (MIND AND HEART)

Assertion: Divine truth is communicated through a dual channel of intellectual thought and emotional feeling (burning in the bosom).

"I will tell you in your mind and in your heart, by the Holy Ghost... this is the spirit of revelation (D&C 8:2-3)"

Evangelical Comparison: Evangelical theology teaches 'illumination'—where the Spirit helps the believer understand and apply the objective, revealed truth of the Bible (1 Corinthians 2:12-13). D&C 8 teaches 'revelation' as the acquisition of new information or 'mysteries' through subjective internal impressions. This shifts the locus of authority from the external text of Scripture to the internal experience of the believer, opening the door to extra-biblical doctrines.

2. THE GIFT OF AARON (DIVINING ROD)

Assertion: God sanctions the use of physical objects (divining rods) as legitimate means of receiving revelation and performing miracles.

"you have another gift, which is the gift of Aaron... you shall hold it in your hands, and do marvelous works (D&C 8:6-8)"

Evangelical Comparison: While the 2013 text uses the term 'gift of Aaron,' historical analysis confirms this refers to Oliver Cowdery's use of a dowsing rod (rod of nature). Evangelical Christianity views the use of divining rods or similar objects as distinct from biblical miracles and categorizes them under divination, which is strictly prohibited. The Bible describes Aaron's rod as a unique sign of authority, not a tool for general believers to divine information.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in the definition of revelation. For the Evangelical, revelation is the objective disclosure of God in history and Scripture, now closed (Hebrews 1:1-2). For the adherent of D&C 8, revelation is a current, subjective, and pragmatic tool for uncovering 'mysteries' and producing new scripture. Additionally, the text's validation of the 'gift of Aaron' (divining rod) introduces a syncretism between Christianity and folk magic that is incompatible with the biblical prohibition against divination.

Shared Values:

Belief in the Holy Ghost; Importance of faith; Prayer as communication with God; Reverence for Moses and Aaron

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Asserts the existence of additional 'scripture' and 'ancient records' necessary for the believer.
2. [Major] Theology Proper (Divine Nature) – God is depicted as responding to mechanical/ritual inquiries (dowsing) rather than sovereign will.
3. [Major] Sola Fide – While 'faith' is mentioned, it is faith as a power source for works (translation) rather than trust in Christ's finished work.

Semantic Warnings:

"Gift of Aaron"

In Text: A spiritual gift involving a physical object (rod) held in the hand to reveal truth.

Evangelical: The priesthood authority or specific role of Aaron and his sons; Aaron's rod was a specific sign of God's choice, not a method for general revelation.

Example: *In D&C 8, the gift is a tool for translation/divination. In the Bible, Aaron's role is mediatorial and sacrificial.*

"Mysteries of God"

In Text: Hidden knowledge, ancient records, and esoteric truths available to the faithful.

Evangelical: Truths once hidden but now fully revealed in Jesus Christ (Colossians 1:26).

Example: *Paul speaks of the 'mystery' of the Gospel being made known to all nations; D&C 8 speaks of mysteries as secrets to be uncovered.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Implicitly linked to keeping commandments and receiving revelation (v. 4-5).

How Attained: Through obedience ('keep my commandments') and accessing divine power/protection.

Basis of Assurance: Subjective confirmation ('tell you in your mind and in your heart').

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text focuses on faith as a mechanism for power ('faith to translate') rather than faith as the sole instrument of justification (Romans 3:28).

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Ask in faith (v. 1)
2. Keep my commandments (v. 5)
3. Doubt not (v. 8)
4. Trifle not with these things (v. 10)
5. Ask that you may know the mysteries of God (v. 11)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Trust internal feelings as the voice of God
2. Accept the validity of translating ancient records via spiritual gifts
3. Maintain personal worthiness to ensure safety from enemies

Ritual Requirements:

1. Holding the 'gift' (rod) in hands to receive revelation (v. 8)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 2, it says God speaks to your mind and heart. How do you distinguish between your own emotional thoughts and the voice of God?

2. Verse 6 mentions the 'gift of Aaron' that Oliver held in his hands. Have you ever studied the history of what that object actually was in the original 1833 revelation?
3. If faith is required to translate (v. 11), and Oliver failed to translate, does that mean he had no faith? How does that pressure to perform affect a believer?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The desire for direct communication with God. – We all long to hear God's voice. In the New Covenant, we don't need a rod or a prophet to mediate; we have the completed Word of God and the Spirit testifying of Christ. [Hebrews 1:1-2, John 10:27]
2. Deliverance from enemies. – Christ has delivered us from our ultimate enemy, sin and death, not through a magic gift, but through His cross. [Colossians 1:13]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Uncertainty/Subjectivity [Moderate] – The believer is forced to rely on fluctuating emotions ('heart') to determine eternal truth, leading to anxiety when feelings are absent or contradictory.
2. Performance/Faith as Work [Severe] – The text implies that if a miracle (translation) doesn't happen, it is because the believer didn't have enough faith. This turns faith into a 'work' of merit rather than a resting trust.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Subjective internal experience (thoughts and feelings) attributed to the Holy Ghost.

Verification Method: The text implies self-verification: if you ask with an honest heart and faith, the feeling you receive is the truth.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology tests spirits against the objective standard of Scripture (1 John 4:1, Acts 17:11). D&C 8 makes the subjective experience the standard of truth.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: April 1829

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated)

Textual Issues: Significant redaction: The 1833 Book of Commandments (7:3) read: 'you have another gift, which is the gift of working with the rod: behold it has told you things.' The 1835 D&C changed this to 'gift of Aaron' to obscure the reference to Oliver's dowsing rod.