

SECTION 12 (MODERN D&C 38)

FAITH: Mormonism | TEXT: Doctrine and Covenants | VOLUME: 1835 Edition | AUTHOR: Joseph Smith

OVERVIEW

Given in January 1831, this revelation (now Doctrine and Covenants Section 38) marks a pivotal shift in early Mormon history: the command to physically gather the church to Kirtland, Ohio. Speaking in the voice of Jesus Christ, the text asserts high Christology ('Great I AM,' 'Alpha and Omega') and omniscience. It warns of 'secret chambers' and conspiracies seeking the destruction of the Saints, using fear of external enemies as a catalyst for internal cohesion. The text introduces the concept of the 'Zion of Enoch'—a city so righteous it was taken into heaven—as a prototype for the Saints. The central mandates are to cease distinct economic stratification ('esteem his brother as himself'), achieve total unity ('if ye are not one, ye are not mine'), and physically relocate to Ohio. There, they are promised 'my law' and to be 'endowed with power from on high.' The revelation concludes with a command to 'save yourselves' through obedience and labor, establishing a pattern where spiritual safety is contingent upon geographic gathering and communal conformity.

KEY FIGURES

Jesus Christ (The Great I AM), Enoch (Prophet of the City of Zion), The Enemy (Conspirators in 'secret chambers'), The Poor (Objects of required charity), Nephites of old (Negative example of pride)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. GEOGRAPHIC GATHERING

Assertion: Spiritual safety and divine endowment are contingent upon physically moving to a specific location (Ohio).

"escape the power of the enemy... go to the Ohio: and there I will give unto you my law; and there you shall be endowed with power (Verse 7)"

Evangelical Comparison: In this text, salvation and spiritual empowerment are linked to a specific geographic migration ('go to the Ohio'). This contrasts sharply with the Evangelical understanding of the Church as the spiritual body of Christ, present wherever two or three are gathered (Matthew 18:20) and indwelt by the Holy Spirit regardless of location (John 4:21-24). The New Testament does not command a physical gathering to a holy city, but a spiritual gathering into Christ.

2. CONDITIONAL ACCEPTANCE

Assertion: Divine ownership of the believer is contingent upon absolute unity with the group.

"if ye are not one, ye are not mine (Verse 6)"

Evangelical Comparison: The text asserts 'if ye are not one, ye are not mine,' making salvation or divine belonging conditional on communal harmony. While the Bible encourages unity (John 17), it never establishes it as the prerequisite for justification. In Evangelical theology, a believer belongs to Christ because of the seal of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13), even if the local church struggles with division (as seen in the Corinthian epistles).

3. RESTORATIONIST EXCLUSIVITY

Assertion: God is only well pleased with this specific group; the rest of the world is under darkness.

"there is none else with whom I am well pleased... the powers of darkness prevail upon the earth (Verse 3)"

Evangelical Comparison: The text claims 'none else with whom I am well pleased,' delegitimizing all other Christian expressions existing in 1831. Evangelicalism holds that God is pleased with all who are in Christ Jesus by faith (Hebrews 11:6), regardless of their denominational affiliation. This text establishes the 'One True Church' paradigm central to Mormonism.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: While the text uses high Christological titles, it functionally shifts the burden of salvation onto the believer. The command 'Save yourselves' (v9) combined with the threat 'if ye are not one, ye are not mine' (v6) creates a works-righteousness paradigm. Salvation is not received by faith alone but is achieved through obedience to the prophet's command to move, labor, and unify. Furthermore, the text introduces extra-biblical cosmology (Zion of Enoch) and claims exclusive divine favor, rejecting the validity of historic Christianity.

Shared Values:

Divinity of Christ; Care for the poor; Moral purity; Expectation of the Second Coming

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Adds binding commandments (move to Ohio) and historical assertions (Enoch's city) not in the Bible.
2. [Critical] Sola Fide – Conditions belonging to Christ on social unity ('if ye are not one, ye are not mine') and active labor ('Save yourselves').
3. [Major] Universal Priesthood – Establishes a hierarchy where the 'law' and 'power' are dispensed through a specific location and leadership structure.
4. [Major] Ecclesiology – Claims exclusive franchise on God's pleasure ('none else with whom I am well pleased').

Semantic Warnings:

"Zion"

In Text: A physical city/community to be built by the Saints (modeled after Enoch's city).

Evangelical: Often refers to Jerusalem, the people of God, or the heavenly city (Hebrews 12:22).

Example: *In this text, Zion is a project to be built in Ohio/Missouri; in the Bible, Zion is the dwelling place of God.*

"Endowed"

In Text: A specific impartation of power to be received at a future time in Ohio (precursor to temple rituals).

Evangelical: Believers are already sealed with the Holy Spirit upon believing (Ephesians 1:13).

Example: *The text says 'there you shall be endowed,' implying a lack of power until the ritual/gathering occurs.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Escaping the destruction of the wicked, inheriting the land, and possessing the earth in eternity.

How Attained: By gathering to the Ohio, obeying the voice of the prophet, laboring with hands, and achieving unity.

Basis of Assurance: Compliance with the command to gather and internal feelings of unity.

Comparison to Sola Fide: The command 'Save yourselves' (Verse 9) is the antithesis of 'By grace are ye saved through faith' (Ephesians 2:8). The text places the onus of rescue on the believer's action (relocation/obedience).

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Go to the Ohio (Verse 7)
2. Preach the warning voice to neighbors (Verse 9)
3. Labor with hands (Verse 9)
4. Appoint men to govern property and help the poor (Verse 8)
5. Save yourselves (Verse 9)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Liquidate immovable assets ('farms that cannot be sold, let them be left or rented') (Verse 8)
2. Accept Joseph Smith's revelations as the voice of Christ

3. Achieve social and economic equality

Ritual Requirements:

1. Prepare to be 'endowed with power' (Verse 7)
2. Bear the vessels of the Lord (Verse 9)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 9, the text says 'Save yourselves.' How do you reconcile that with Ephesians 2:8 which says salvation is a gift of God, not of works?
2. Verse 6 says 'if ye are not one, ye are not mine.' Does this mean that if a church has disagreements, its members lose their salvation?
3. The text commands a move to Ohio to receive God's law. Do you believe we still need to go to a specific physical location to find God or His law today?
4. Who are the 'none else with whom I am well pleased' in verse 3? Does this mean all other Christians in 1831 were rejected by God?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. Longing for a Safe Land – The human heart longs for a place of safety and belonging. The text offers Ohio; the Gospel offers the Kingdom of God. [Hebrews 11:10, 16 (Abraham looked for a city whose builder is God, a heavenly country).]
2. Desire for Purity – We all sense our uncleanness before a holy God. The text demands self-purification; the Gospel offers Christ's purification. [1 John 1:7 (The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin).]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Displacement / Instability [Severe] – The command to uproot one's life, sell property (often at a loss), and move to a new location creates immense physical and financial stress, framed as a test of faith.
2. Perfectionism / Unity Anxiety [Severe] – The statement 'if ye are not one, ye are not mine' places the burden of everyone else's behavior on the individual. If the group isn't perfect, the individual's standing with God is threatened.
3. Works-Righteousness [Critical] – The command 'Save yourselves' places the ultimate responsibility for salvation on the adherent's effort and obedience.
4. Isolation / Us vs. Them [Moderate] – Believing that God is pleased with 'none else' creates deep isolation from the broader Christian body and fosters a siege mentality against the 'enemy' in secret chambers.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Prophetic Revelation

Verification Method: Observation of external threats ('wars in far countries') and internal confirmation ('treasure up wisdom').

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the illuminated Word of God (Psalm 119:105) and the Berean principle of testing teaching against Scripture (Acts 17:11). This text demands obedience to a new revelation based on the authority of the speaker ('I am Christ').

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: January 2, 1831

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated)

Textual Issues: This text was later canonized as D&C 38. The 1835 version shows minor editing from the original manuscript to clarify the 'gathering' doctrine.