

SECTION 15 (MODERN D&C 45)

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

OVERVIEW

Given in March 1831, this text (now Doctrine and Covenants Section 45) functions as a bridge between biblical eschatology and early Mormon missiology. Joseph Smith presents the voice of Jesus Christ retelling and expanding upon the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24), explicitly linking the ancient destruction of the Jerusalem Temple to future calamities awaiting the 19th-century world. The text serves a dual purpose: it establishes Joseph Smith's authority to 'translate' and clarify the New Testament (specifically referencing his revision of the Bible), and it provides the theological mandate for the 'Gathering.' Unlike the evangelical understanding of the Kingdom of God as a spiritual reality present within believers, this text defines safety and salvation geographically: the Saints are commanded to leave the 'eastern lands' and assemble in the 'western countries' (Missouri) to build a literal city, Zion/New Jerusalem. It culminates in a vision of the Millennium where children grow up without sin, a significant departure from orthodox Christian anthropology.

KEY FIGURES

Jesus Christ (The Advocate/Alpha and Omega), Joseph Smith (The Revelator), Enoch (Prototype of Zion), The Jews (Covenant People), The Gentiles (Current recipients of the gospel)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. GEOGRAPHIC SOTERIOLOGY (THE GATHERING)

Assertion: Safety from God's wrath is contingent upon physically gathering to a specific location (Zion/New Jerusalem) in the western United States.

"gather ye out from the eastern lands... go ye forth into the western countries... it shall be called the New Jerusalem, a land of peace, a city of refuge... insomuch that the wicked will not come unto it"

Evangelical Comparison: Evangelical Christianity teaches that the 'place' of safety is 'in Christ' (Ephesians 1:3), accessible to believers anywhere in the world (John 4:21-24). This text, however, re-mythologizes the concept of Zion, moving it from a spiritual metaphor or a future heavenly reality (Hebrews 12:22) to a concrete geopolitical mandate. It asserts that physical relocation is necessary to escape the 'terror of the Lord,' effectively making immigration a soteriological requirement for the 19th-century Saints.

2. MILLENNIAL SINLESSNESS

Assertion: During the Millennium, children will be born and grow up without sin.

"their children shall grow up without sin unto salvation"

Evangelical Comparison: This is a critical theological divergence. Evangelicalism affirms that all humans are born with a sin nature (Psalm 51:5, Romans 5:12) and require regeneration. This text suggests that sin is environmental or caused by Satan's external influence; once Satan is bound (verse 10), children can 'grow up without sin.' This leans toward Pelagianism, implying that human nature is not inherently fallen but merely corrupted by external forces.

3. OPEN CANON / BIBLICAL INSUFFICIENCY

Assertion: The New Testament is currently insufficient and requires a new translation/revelation to be understood.

"it shall not be given unto you to know any farther concerning this chapter, until the new testament be translated"

Evangelical Comparison: The text explicitly halts the revelation of knowledge 'until the new testament be translated' (referring to the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible). This posits that the Bible, as preserved, is inadequate for preparing the Saints for the Second Coming. In contrast, Evangelicals hold that the Scriptures are sufficient (2 Timothy 3:16-17) and that the 'faith was once for all delivered to the saints' (Jude 1:3).

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: While the text opens with high Christology that sounds Evangelical (Christ as Advocate), it quickly pivots to a distinct Mormon eschatology. The fundamental gap lies in the 'Action' required for safety. For the Evangelical, safety from judgment is found in the imputed righteousness of Christ received by faith. For the adherent of this text, safety is found in the 'New Jerusalem' in the American West. Furthermore, the anthropological claim that children in the Millennium will 'grow up without sin' reveals a rejection of the biblical doctrine of the Fall's pervasive effects on human nature (Ephesians 2:3).

Shared Values:

Belief in the Second Coming of Christ; Christ as Advocate with the Father; Resurrection of the dead; Moral imperative to watch and be ready

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Asserts the Bible is incomplete and requires Joseph Smith's 'translation' to be understood.
2. [Major] Sola Fide – Adds the work of 'gathering' (physical migration) as a condition for safety and escaping God's wrath.
3. [Critical] Anthropology (Sin Nature) – Claims human beings (children) can grow up without sin, denying Total Depravity.

Semantic Warnings:

"Zion"

In Text: A literal city to be built in the Western US (Missouri) as a physical refuge.

Evangelical: The spiritual people of God or the heavenly Jerusalem (Hebrews 12:22).

Example: *In this text, 'flee unto Zion' means move to Missouri. In the Bible, coming to Zion means approaching God through the New Covenant.*

"Translated"

In Text: Supernatural revision or expansion of the biblical text by Joseph Smith.

Evangelical: Rendering text from one language to another (e.g., Greek to English).

Example: *Verse 11 refers to the 'new testament be translated,' implying the KJV was insufficient.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Includes 'everlasting life' but emphasizes physical preservation in Zion and eventual exaltation.

How Attained: By believing on Christ's name, but functionally tied to gathering to the New Jerusalem and obeying the new revelations.

Basis of Assurance: Standing in 'holy places' (Zion) and not being moved; having the Holy Spirit to avoid deception.

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text mentions believing on Christ's name (v. 1) but immediately pivots to works-based safety (gathering, building a city, purchasing land). Sola Fide excludes these physical works as necessary for standing before God.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Hearken to the voice of Christ
2. Translate the New Testament (Joseph Smith)
3. Gather out from eastern lands to western countries
4. Purchase land for an inheritance
5. Keep the revelation secret temporarily ('keep these things from going abroad')

Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept Joseph Smith's revision of the Bible as authoritative
2. View the current world/generation as doomed to destruction
3. Prepare financially to move ('gather up your riches')

Ritual Requirements:

1. None explicitly detailed in this text, though 'temple' imagery is invoked.

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 10, it says children will grow up without sin. How does that fit with Romans 3:23 which says 'all have sinned'?
2. Verse 11 suggests we couldn't understand the end times until Joseph Smith translated the New Testament. Do you believe the Bible was insufficient for the Christians who lived before 1831?
3. The text commands gathering to the 'western countries' for safety (v. 13). Since the early Saints were actually driven out of Missouri, how do you interpret that promise of safety today?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The City of Refuge / Zion – The human heart longs for a place of absolute safety where judgment cannot reach. In the Old Testament, cities of refuge protected people from death. [Hebrews 6:18 - We have 'fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us.' Christ is our Zion and our City of Refuge, not a location in Missouri.]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Fear / Insecurity [Severe] – The text creates a binary: gather to the specific location or face 'overflowing scourge' and 'desolating sickness.' This uses fear of physical destruction to compel obedience to the movement.
2. Dependency on Hierarchy [Moderate] – By claiming the Bible is locked/insufficient without the prophet's translation, the believer is made dependent on the leader for access to truth.
3. Perfectionism [Moderate] – The ideal of 'growing up without sin' sets an impossible standard for human nature, potentially leading to shame when sin inevitably occurs.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Prophetic Revelation (mediated through Joseph Smith).

Verification Method: Observation of the 'signs of the times' (wars, rumors of wars) confirming the prophet's words.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the illumination of the written Word by the Holy Spirit (Psalm 119:105). This text relies on a living prophet to 'unlock' or 're-translate' the Bible before truth can be fully known.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: March 7, 1831

Authorship: Joseph Smith (Voice of Christ)

Textual Issues: This text is essentially a commentary/expansion on Matthew 24. It was later canonized as D&C 45.