

SECTION 21 (MODERN D&C 64)

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

OVERVIEW

Given in September 1831 during a period of internal criticism against Joseph Smith, this revelation (now known as Section 64 in modern editions) serves a dual purpose: consolidating ecclesiastical authority and managing the temporal resources of the early movement. The text rebukes specific elders (Ezra Booth, Isaac Morley) for their dissent and failure to live the law of consecration. Theologically, it introduces two high-stakes concepts. First, it mandates universal forgiveness among members, asserting that a victim who refuses to forgive carries a 'greater sin' than the perpetrator, effectively silencing internal grievances. Second, it explicitly links financial contribution (tithing) to eschatological survival, stating that 'he that is tithed shall not be burned' at the Second Coming. The text also introduces the concept of the 'blood of Ephraim' as a prerequisite for inheriting the land of Zion, blending spiritual standing with a restorationist view of Israelite lineage. It concludes by framing the church as a judge over the nations, reinforcing the exclusive and authoritative claims of the movement.

KEY FIGURES

Joseph Smith, Jr., Isaac Morley, Ezra Booth, Edward Partridge, Sidney Gilbert, Frederick G. Williams, Newel K. Whitney

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. SOTERIOLOGICAL TITHING (FIRE INSURANCE)

Assertion: Payment of tithing provides physical and spiritual protection from burning at the Second Coming.

"behold now it is called to-day... and verily it is a day of sacrifice, and a day for the tithing of my people; for he that is tithed shall not be burned (at his coming;)"

Evangelical Comparison: This text establishes a direct cause-and-effect relationship between a financial work (tithing) and deliverance from divine judgment (burning). In Evangelical theology, deliverance from the 'wrath to come' (1 Thessalonians 1:10) is exclusively the result of justification by faith in the blood of Jesus (Romans 5:9). To attach eschatological safety to a monetary contribution violates Sola Fide and Sola Gratia, effectively creating a 'pay-to-live' structure regarding the Second Coming.

2. THE GREATER SIN (CONDITIONAL FORGIVENESS)

Assertion: God requires humans to forgive everyone regardless of repentance; failing to forgive makes the victim more guilty than the sinner.

"he that forgiveth not his brother his trespasses, standeth condemned before the Lord, for there remaineth in him the greater sin."

Evangelical Comparison: Biblical teaching emphasizes forgiveness as a response to God's grace (Ephesians 4:32). However, this text creates a legalistic hierarchy of sin where the *reaction* to sin (unforgiveness) is judged more harshly than the *action* of sin itself. This places an immense spiritual burden on victims of severe trauma or abuse, threatening them with condemnation if they do not immediately absolve their abusers, contrasting with the biblical model where God is the avenger (Romans 12:19) and forgiveness is a process of releasing judgment to Him.

3. LINEAGE OF EPHRAIM

Assertion: Rebellious members are identified as not being of the 'blood of Ephraim' and thus lose their inheritance in Zion.

"for verily I say that the rebellious are not of the blood of Ephraim, wherefore they shall be plucked out."

Evangelical Comparison: The text reintroduces a tribal/genetic component to covenant faithfulness. In the New Testament, the 'mystery' of the Gospel is that Gentiles are fellow heirs through the Gospel, not through a specific Israelite bloodline (Ephesians 3:6). By claiming the rebellious are 'not of the blood of Ephraim,' the

text implies that faithfulness is intrinsically linked to a specific lineage (literal or adopted), contradicting the universal priesthood of all believers found in the New Covenant.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in the mechanism of salvation and the nature of the church. Evangelicalism posits a universal church entered by faith in Christ, where safety from judgment is guaranteed by His substitutionary death. This text presents a localized, lineage-based church (Zion/Ephraim) where safety is secured by 'tithing' and adherence to the prophet's temporal commands. Furthermore, the doctrine of the 'greater sin' alters the biblical ethics of forgiveness, prioritizing institutional unity and silence over justice for victims.

Shared Values:

Importance of forgiveness; Reality of the Second Coming; Concept of tithing (though applied differently); Church discipline for unrepentant sin

Friction Points:

- 1. [Critical] Sola Fide (Faith Alone) – Salvation from burning is contingent on tithing.
- 2. [Critical] Sola Gratia (Grace Alone) – Protection is earned through sacrifice and obedience to ordinances.
- 3. [Major] Biblical Ethics/Justice – The 'greater sin' doctrine condemns the unforgiving victim more than the perpetrator.
- 4. [Major] Universal Priesthood/Unity in Christ – Reintroduces ethnic/lineage distinctions (Ephraim) as a basis for standing.

Semantic Warnings:

"Tithing"

In Text: A mandatory sacrifice that prevents being 'burned' at the Second Coming.
Evangelical: A practice of stewardship (OT law or NT generosity) never linked to salvation from eternal judgment.
Example: *In this text: 'he that is tithed shall not be burned.' In Bible: 'being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him' (Rom 5:9).*

"Zion"

In Text: A literal geographic location (Missouri/Kirtland) to be inherited by the 'blood of Ephraim.'
Evangelical: The spiritual city of God, the church, or the future New Jerusalem, not a piece of real estate purchased in Ohio.
Example: *The text discusses selling farms to build Zion; Hebrews 12:22 describes Zion as the 'heavenly Jerusalem.'*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Overcoming the world, inheriting the land of Zion, and escaping the burning at the Second Coming.

How Attained: Through obedience to ordinances, paying tithing, forgiving others, and following the prophet.

Basis of Assurance: Compliance with the law: 'justified in the eyes of the law' (v2).

Comparison to Sola Fide: Directly contradicts Sola Fide. The text states one is 'justified in the eyes of the law' (v2) and saved from burning by tithing (v5). Romans 3:20 states 'by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight.'

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

- 1. Forgive all men
- 2. Pay tithing to avoid burning
- 3. Labor while it is called to-day
- 4. Do not get in debt to enemies

5. Sidney Gilbert must return to business
6. Newel K. Whitney and Sidney Gilbert must not sell their store yet

Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept Joseph Smith's authority as absolute to avoid being 'cut off'
2. Accept that financial directives regarding personal property (selling farms) come from God through the prophet
3. View internal critics of the prophet as 'sinning without cause'

Ritual Requirements:

1. Tithing
2. Confession of sins before the Lord (and potentially the church for unrepentant sinners)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 5, it says 'he that is tithed shall not be burned.' How do you reconcile this with the biblical teaching that Jesus's blood saves us from the wrath to come (Romans 5:9)?
2. Verse 2 mentions that if someone struggles to forgive, they have the 'greater sin.' How does this impact someone who has been deeply abused? Does God really view their struggle as worse than the abuse itself?
3. The text says Joseph Smith holds the keys 'inasmuch as he obeyeth.' Does this mean his authority was conditional on his personal obedience?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Foundation of a Great Work – Humans have a longing to be part of something eternal. The true 'great work' is the finished work of Christ on the cross. [Philippians 1:6 - 'He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.']
2. The Need for Forgiveness – We struggle to forgive because of the debt of sin. The Gospel provides the resources to forgive because we have been infinitely forgiven by Christ. [Colossians 3:13 - 'even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.']

Spiritual Weight:

1. Financial Fear / Legalism [Severe] – The belief that failing to pay tithing will result in physical destruction (burning) at the Second Coming creates a relationship with God based on fear and payment rather than grace.
2. Emotional Suppression / Shame [Severe] – The 'greater sin' doctrine forces victims to suppress their pain and offer premature forgiveness under threat of divine condemnation, often bypassing the necessary processing of trauma.
3. Identity Anxiety [Moderate] – The requirement to be of the 'blood of Ephraim' creates anxiety about one's spiritual pedigree and belonging within the covenant community.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Prophetic Revelation.

Verification Method: Obedience to the revelation is the test; failure to obey results in being 'plucked out' or 'burned.'

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the illuminated Word of God (Psalm 119:105) tested against the closed canon (Acts 17:11). This text relies on the immediate voice of a prophet regarding temporal details (selling farms), demanding obedience to man as the voice of God.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: September 11, 1831

Authorship: Joseph Smith

Textual Issues: This section was edited for the 1835 publication. The phrase 'keys... shall not be taken from my servant Joseph Smith, jr... while he liveth, inasmuch as he obeyeth mine ordinances' suggests a conditional authority that was later interpreted as unconditional in Mormon theology.