

SECTION 27 (MODERN D&C 57)

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

OVERVIEW

This revelation, given in July 1831, marks a pivotal moment in early Mormon theology where the abstract concept of 'Zion' is grounded in a specific geographical location: Independence, Missouri. Joseph Smith, speaking in the voice of the Lord, identifies this location as the 'center place' and the 'land of promise' for the gathering of the Saints. The text provides specific instructions for the construction of a temple 'lying westward upon a lot which is not far from the court house.' It establishes a theocratic economic order, appointing Sidney Gilbert to establish a store and Edward Partridge to divide land inheritances among the believers. The revelation underscores the immediate expectation of building a physical New Jerusalem in the American frontier, blending spiritual aspirations with real estate acquisition and mercantile licensing. It represents the transition of the movement from a purely spiritual revival to a socio-political colonization effort intended to prepare for the Second Coming.

KEY FIGURES

Joseph Smith (Prophet/Revelator), Sidney Gilbert (Church Agent/Storekeeper), Edward Partridge (Bishop), William W. Phelps (Printer), Oliver Cowdery (Editor/Scribe)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. GEOGRAPHIC ZION

Assertion: The City of Zion (New Jerusalem) is a physical location in Independence, Missouri, to be built by the Saints.

"Behold the place which is now called Independence, is the center place, and the spot for the temple is lying westward"

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, Zion is typological of the church (Hebrews 12:22) or eschatological as the Heavenly Jerusalem (Revelation 21). This text literalizes Zion as a specific plot of land in North America that must be purchased. This shifts the focus from a spiritual kingdom 'not of this world' (John 18:36) to a geo-political project requiring land deeds and construction, fundamentally altering the nature of the Kingdom of God from spiritual reign to territorial possession.

2. CONSECRATED INHERITANCE

Assertion: Spiritual inheritance is tied to physical land ownership in Zion, assigned by the Bishop.

"divide the saints their inheritance, even as I have commanded... that they may obtain it for an everlasting inheritance."

Evangelical Comparison: The text redefines 'inheritance'—a term used in the New Testament for the believer's eternal security in Christ (Ephesians 1:11-14)—as physical property in Missouri. While the Old Testament involved land inheritance for Israel, the New Testament universalizes this to a spiritual inheritance for all believers in Christ. This text reverts to a Levitical/territorial model where a human mediator (Bishop Partridge) determines a believer's portion, conflating temporal assets with spiritual standing.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in the nature of the Kingdom. Evangelicalism asserts a Kingdom that is 'already but not yet,' spiritual in nature, and accessible to all believers everywhere through the Holy Spirit (John 4:21-24). This text asserts a Kingdom that is material, geographic, and administrative. It conflates the 'City of God' with a frontier settlement project. Furthermore, it introduces a 'line between Jew and Gentile' (referring to Native Americans) based on Book of Mormon racial theology, which is foreign to biblical anthropology.

Shared Values:

Desire for a holy community; Stewardship of resources; Care for the poor (implied in 'good of the saints'); Evangelism ('preached unto those who sit in darkness')

Friction Points:

1. [Major] Theology Proper (God's Nature) – Depicts God as a micromanager of real estate and retail licenses rather than the transcendent Creator.
2. [Critical] Sola Fide / Sola Gratia – Inheritance in Zion is contingent upon purchasing land and gathering, adding works/location to salvation.
3. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Adds a new holy land and new commandments not found in the Bible.

Semantic Warnings:

"Zion"

In Text: Independence, Missouri; a physical city to be built.

Evangelical: The dwelling place of God; historically Jerusalem, typologically the Church, eschatologically the New Jerusalem from Heaven.

Example: *In this text, you 'buy' Zion. In the Bible, you are born into Zion (Psalm 87:5) or come to it spiritually (Hebrews 12:22).*

"Inheritance"

In Text: A plot of land assigned by the Bishop.

Evangelical: Eternal life and the Kingdom of God received through Christ.

Example: *Ephesians 1:14 calls the Holy Spirit the guarantee of our inheritance; D&C 57 makes the inheritance a tract of land west of the courthouse.*

"Jew"

In Text: In this context ('line between Jew and Gentile'), it refers to Native Americans (Lamanites), whom early Mormons believed were Israelites.

Evangelical: Descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; the people of Judah.

Example: *The text refers to the Indian Territory border as the line between Jew and Gentile.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Implicitly linked to gathering to Zion and receiving an inheritance in the Holy City.

How Attained: Through obedience to the gathering command and the purchase of land.

Basis of Assurance: Having a physical inheritance planted in Missouri.

Comparison to Sola Fide: Directly opposes Sola Fide by making the 'gathering' (a physical work) a prerequisite for full participation in God's promises. In Romans 4:13, the promise is through the righteousness of faith, not through the law or land acquisition.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Purchase land in Independence, Missouri
2. Purchase every tract westward to the 'line between Jew and Gentile'
3. Sidney Gilbert must establish a store
4. Sidney Gilbert must obtain a license
5. Edward Partridge must divide inheritances
6. W.W. Phelps must be established as a printer

Implicit Obligations:

1. Relocate families to Missouri (The Gathering)
2. Submit financial resources to the Bishop/Agent for land purchase
3. Accept the specific geographic location of the temple as divinely mandated

Ritual Requirements:

1. Consecration of properties (implied through the role of the Bishop dividing inheritance)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. When you read that Independence, Missouri is the 'center place' and 'everlasting inheritance,' how do you reconcile that with the fact that the Saints were expelled two years later and never built the temple there?
2. Does the New Testament teach that we must buy land to have an inheritance in God's Kingdom, or is our inheritance kept in heaven for us (1 Peter 1:4)?
3. Why would God require a retail license and land purchases as part of His holy revelation?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Longing for Zion – Humans have a deep longing for a place of belonging and peace where God rules. This text tries to build it on earth. [Hebrews 13:14 - 'For here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come.']

Spiritual Weight:

1. Financial/Material Pressure [Moderate] – Believers are burdened with the requirement to buy land and fund church operations to secure their spiritual standing. The 'gospel' becomes a financial transaction.
2. Displacement/Instability [Severe] – The command to gather physically creates instability for families, uprooting them for a promise that historically failed, leading to trauma and loss.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Prophetic Revelation (Joseph Smith speaking as God).

Verification Method: Obedience to the directive constitutes acceptance of the truth; the text implies that 'wisdom' is found in following these specific logistical commands.

Evangelical Contrast: Evangelical epistemology relies on the illuminated interpretation of the closed canon of Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16). This text relies on ongoing, specific revelation regarding administrative and geographical details, requiring trust in the contemporary prophet's voice as the voice of God.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: July 20, 1831

Authorship: Joseph Smith

Textual Issues: The 1835 version contains minor edits from the original manuscript (Book of Commandments) to clarify roles, but the core geographical claims remain consistent.