

SECTION 58

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

OVERVIEW

This revelation, historically dated to December 1830 and known in modern Latter-day Saint editions as Section 37, marks a pivotal shift in early Mormon history: the first commandment for the Saints to physically gather in a specific location. The text instructs Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon to cease their work on the 'New Translation' of the Bible (JST) temporarily. It cites the presence of 'the enemy' and the welfare of the leaders as the primary reasons for this pause. The central mandate is a directive for the entire church to assemble at 'the Ohio' (Kirtland), establishing the doctrine of the Gathering. It also includes instructions to strengthen the church in Colesville, New York, before departing, acknowledging the faith of the believers there. This text transitions the movement from a localized group in New York to a migrating people seeking a theocratic center.

KEY FIGURES

Jesus Christ (The Speaker), Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, Oliver Cowdery

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. THE DOCTRINE OF GATHERING

Assertion: God commands His covenant people to physically relocate to a specific geographic location (Ohio) to prepare for the Second Coming and escape 'the enemy'.

"And again a commandment I give unto the church, that it is expedient in me that they should assemble together at the Ohio"

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, the 'gathering' of the saints is primarily spiritual (the invisible church) and local (the visible church in any location), based on Jesus' teaching in John 4:21-24 that worship is no longer tied to a specific mountain or city. This text re-introduces a Levitical/Old Testament concept of a physical 'Zion' or holy land. While Evangelicals believe in the future gathering at the return of Christ (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17), they reject the necessity of migrating to a specific American location for spiritual safety or validity.

2. PROPHETIC DIRECTION OF DAILY LIFE

Assertion: The Prophet has the authority to dictate the physical movements, residency, and logistical schedules of the entire church body.

"it is not expedient in me that ye should translate any more until ye shall go to the Ohio"

Evangelical Comparison: Evangelicalism upholds the Priesthood of All Believers (1 Peter 2:5-9), implying that individual Christians have direct access to God for guidance regarding where to live or work. This text establishes a hierarchical structure where the Prophet's revelation supersedes individual agency regarding major life decisions like relocation. It implies that being in the 'wrong' location (New York instead of Ohio) places one outside of God's expedient will.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in the nature of the Kingdom of God. For Evangelicals, the Kingdom is 'not of this world' (John 18:36) and is present wherever two or three gather in Christ's name (Matthew 18:20). This text represents a reversion to a theocratic, territorial model similar to Old Testament Israel, where God's presence and protection are tied to a specific location (Ohio) and a specific leader (Smith). This contradicts the New Testament teaching of the universal priesthood and the indwelling Spirit as the seal of safety and salvation.

Shared Values:

Importance of preaching the gospel; Care for the church community (strengthening the brethren); Reality of spiritual opposition ('the enemy')

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – The text asserts new, binding commandments (move to Ohio) not found in the Bible, treating Joseph Smith's voice as the voice of God.
2. [Major] Christology (Sufficiency of Christ) – Implies that faith in Christ is insufficient for safety/obedience without physical relocation to the prophet's designated city.
3. [Major] Universal Priesthood – Removes the individual's right to determine their own residence under God's guidance, centralizing agency in the leader.

Semantic Warnings:

"The Church"

In Text: The specific group of followers led by Joseph Smith, currently in New York.

Evangelical: The universal body of all true believers in Jesus Christ across all time and space.

Example: *When the text says 'commandment I give unto the church,' it refers to the institutional organization, whereas Evangelicals view the church as an organism not bound by a single human leader.*

"Gathering"

In Text: Physical relocation to a central headquarters.

Evangelical: Spiritual unity in Christ or the eschatological assembly at the end of the age.

Example: *Hebrews 10:25 speaks of assembling for encouragement, not mass migration to a single state.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: In this specific text, 'salvation' (or at least safety/expediency) is defined as escaping the 'enemy' by moving to Ohio.

How Attained: By obedience to the prophet's command to relocate.

Basis of Assurance: Being physically present with the gathered body of Saints.

Comparison to Sola Fide: This text adds a work (migration) to the life of the believer. While not explicitly denying faith, it makes physical obedience to a logistical command a test of fellowship and standing, complicating the simplicity of Sola Fide.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Stop translating the Bible (Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon)
2. Go to the Ohio (Joseph, Sidney, and the whole Church)
3. Preach the gospel in the current regions (New York) before leaving
4. Strengthen the church in Colesville

Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept Joseph Smith's logistical directives as divine command
2. Be willing to uproot family and property for the faith
3. Trust that 'the enemy' is real and dangerous enough to warrant fleeing

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. When you read about the command to move to Ohio, do you see that as a temporary logistical instruction or a permanent pattern for how God leads His people?
2. How do you reconcile the command to gather to a specific physical location with Jesus' teaching in John 4 that worship is no longer tied to 'this mountain nor Jerusalem'?
3. Does the 'enemy' mentioned here refer to spiritual forces or physical persecution, and how does a physical move protect against spiritual enemies?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Longing for Sanctuary – The text taps into the human desire for safety and a community protected from the world. This points to the true refuge found in Christ. [Psalm 46:1 - 'God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.' We gather in Him, not in Ohio.]
2. Strengthening the Brethren – Reflects the biblical mandate to encourage and build up the body of Christ. [1 Thessalonians 5:11 - 'Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.']

Spiritual Weight:

1. Displacement & Instability [Severe] – The requirement to uproot one's family, sell property, and move based on a revelation creates immense social and financial instability. It demands total surrender of one's future to the leader's dictates.
2. Fear of the 'Enemy' [Moderate] – The text motivates through fear ('because of the enemy'), cultivating a siege mentality where the adherent feels unsafe anywhere outside the prophet's designated gathering place.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Prophetic Revelation

Verification Method: Obedience to the command and subsequent experience; the text implies the wisdom will be seen in the safety provided.

Evangelical Contrast: Evangelicals test instruction against the completed canon of Scripture (Acts 17:11). This text requires obedience to a new revelation that cannot be verified by the Bible, as the Bible contains no command to move to Ohio.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: December 1830

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated)

Textual Issues: This text appears as Section 58 in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants but was renumbered to Section 37 in later editions (1876/1921/1981/2013). The content remains largely consistent.