

SECTION 66A (MODERN D&C 52)

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

OVERVIEW

This revelation, given in June 1831, marks a pivotal moment in early Mormon history as the focus shifts geographically and theologically toward Missouri as the 'land of inheritance' (Zion). The text functions primarily as an administrative directive, assigning specific missionary pairings to travel 'two by two' to the next church conference. However, embedded within these logistical commands are significant theological assertions regarding discernment and soteriology. Joseph Smith articulates a 'pattern' for discerning true spirits from false ones, a concern prevalent in the charismatic environment of the early restoration movement. Crucially, this pattern links spiritual manifestations (meekness, trembling) directly to institutional compliance ('if he obey mine ordinances'). The text also establishes a stark meritocracy regarding priesthood office and divine favor: those who are faithful are promised further revelation and authority, while those who are not faithful are threatened with being 'cut off.' This is illustrated concretely in the text by the removal of Heman Bassett from office and his replacement by Simonds Rider. The revelation concludes with a high Christology, with the speaker identifying himself as 'Jesus Christ the Son of God,' and mandates social responsibility toward the poor as a test of discipleship.

KEY FIGURES

Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, Lyman Wight, Edward Partridge, Martin Harris, Simonds Rider, Heman Bassett, The Lord (Jesus Christ)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. CONDITIONAL ACCEPTANCE VIA ORDINANCES

Assertion: Divine acceptance is contingent upon the believer obeying specific rituals (ordinances).

"he that prayeth whose spirit is contrite, the same is accepted of me, if he obey mine ordinances (v4)"

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, acceptance by God (justification) is based solely on the finished work of Christ, received through faith (Romans 3:28, Ephesians 2:8-9). Good works and obedience follow as fruit, not as a condition for acceptance. This text reverses that order, stating that a person with a contrite spirit is accepted 'if he obey mine ordinances.' This introduces a sacramental legalism where the internal disposition (contrite spirit) is insufficient for acceptance without the external ritual compliance, effectively denying the sufficiency of faith alone.

2. GEOGRAPHIC ZION

Assertion: Missouri is the consecrated land of inheritance for the saints.

"Missouri, upon the land which I will consecrate unto my people... the land of your inheritance (v1-2)"

Evangelical Comparison: While Evangelicals anticipate a New Jerusalem (Revelation 21), they reject the notion that a specific plot of land in North America has been consecrated as a necessary physical gathering place for the church. The New Testament emphasizes a spiritual gathering of believers into the Body of Christ (Hebrews 12:22-24) rather than a geo-political migration. This text commands a physical migration to Missouri as a divine mandate.

3. LOSS OF STANDING

Assertion: Priesthood authority and divine favor can be revoked due to unfaithfulness.

"In consequence of transgression, let that which was bestowed upon Heman Bassett[t], be taken from him (v8)"

Evangelical Comparison: The text demonstrates a high fluidity in spiritual standing. Heman Bassett is stripped of his position due to transgression, and it is given to another. While Evangelicals practice church discipline, the concept that one's fundamental standing or 'inheritance' is constantly at risk of being 'cut off' (v2) creates a theology of probation rather than assurance. This contrasts with the assurance found in John 10:28-29.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental theological gap lies in the conditions of acceptance. Verse 4 explicitly states that a person is accepted 'if he obey mine ordinances.' This creates a 'Jesus + Ritual' soteriology. In Evangelicalism, ordinances (sacraments) are outward signs of an inward grace already received by faith. In this text, the ordinance is a condition for the acceptance itself. Furthermore, the authority structure places the prophet's current revelation on par with or above biblical mandates, requiring specific geographic movement and administrative compliance to maintain spiritual standing.

Shared Values:

Care for the poor and needy (v9); Zeal for evangelism/preaching; Belief in Jesus as the Son of God; Necessity of personal holiness (meekness, contrition)

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Fide – Acceptance by God is conditioned on obeying ordinances (v4) and personal faithfulness/works.
2. [Major] Sola Scriptura – New revelation adds requirements (Missouri, specific rituals) not found in the Bible.
3. [Major] Theology Proper (Kingdom of God) – The Kingdom is tied to a specific physical location (Missouri) rather than the spiritual reign of Christ.

Semantic Warnings:

"Ordinances"

In Text: Rituals (baptism, laying on of hands) required for divine acceptance and discernment of spirits.

Evangelical: Sacraments or statutes given by God, usually viewed by Evangelicals as symbolic or memorial, not salvific conditions.

Example: *In v4, 'accepted... if he obey mine ordinances' implies salvation depends on the ritual. In Romans 4:10-11, Abraham was justified *before* the ordinance of circumcision.*

"Faithful"

In Text: Obedient to specific commands (traveling, preaching) and loyal to the church leadership.

Evangelical: Trusting in Christ; full of faith.

Example: *In v2, 'inasmuch as they are faithful' implies a performance standard to receive revelation, whereas biblical faithfulness is often a fruit of the Spirit.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Implicitly defined as being 'accepted' by the Lord, 'crowned with joy,' and 'lifted up at the last day' (v9).

How Attained: Through faith, repentance (contrite spirit), and specifically obeying ordinances (v4) and enduring in faithfulness.

Basis of Assurance: Assurance is based on the 'pattern' of obedience and the promise that 'he that is faithful shall be made ruler.'

Comparison to Sola Fide: Directly contradicts Sola Fide. Verse 4 adds 'if he obey mine ordinances' as a qualifier to being accepted, whereas Romans 3:24 states justification is 'freely by his grace.'

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Journey to Missouri (v2)
2. Preach the word two by two (v3)
3. Baptize by water (v3)
4. Lay on hands (v3)
5. Labor with own hands (v9)

6. Obtain a recommend from the church (v9)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Discern spirits using the prescribed pattern
2. Maintain a contrite and meek spirit
3. Avoid building on another's foundation

Ritual Requirements:

1. Baptism
2. Laying on of hands
3. Ordination (Priest/Elder)
4. Obeying 'mine ordinances' generally

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 4, it says a person is accepted 'if he obey mine ordinances.' How does that relate to the biblical teaching that we are accepted in the Beloved solely through his blood (Ephesians 1:6-7)?
2. The text mentions that if these elders are not faithful, they will be 'cut off.' How do you personally know if you have been faithful enough to avoid being cut off?
3. Verse 9 says true disciples must remember the poor. Do you feel your standing with God is secure even when you fail in these duties, or does your acceptance fluctuate with your performance?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The desire for a 'Pattern' to avoid deception. – We all fear deception. The ultimate pattern is not a set of rules, but the person of Jesus Christ. He is the Truth. [John 14:6, Hebrews 1:1-3]
2. The command to care for the poor. – This highlights our failure. We all fail to love perfectly. This law condemns us, driving us to Christ who became poor for our sakes so we might be rich in grace. [2 Corinthians 8:9]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Performance Anxiety [Severe] – The believer must constantly perform duties (travel, labor, ordinances) to maintain their 'inheritance' and avoid being 'cut off.'
2. Uncertainty of Acceptance [Moderate] – Since acceptance is conditional ('if he obey'), the believer can never be fully assured of their standing, as future disobedience could revoke it.
3. Legalism [Moderate] – The definition of spiritual fruit is tied to institutional compliance (ordinances) rather than purely moral or spiritual transformation.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Direct revelation via the Prophet and personal spiritual experience verified by a 'pattern.'

Verification Method: Adherents verify truth by checking if a spirit/messenger is 'contrite,' 'meek,' and 'obeys ordinances' (v4).

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology tests spirits by their confession of Jesus Christ (1 John 4:1-3) and alignment with written Scripture (Acts 17:11). This text adds 'obedience to ordinances' as a truth test, making ritual conformity a measure of truth.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: June 6, 1831.

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated).

Textual Issues: The spelling of 'Simonds Rider' (v8) is historically notable. In some manuscripts/histories, it was spelled 'Ryder.' The misspelling is cited in historical accounts as a reason for Ryder's doubt of Smith's inspiration.