

SECTION 67 (MODERN D&C 54)

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

OVERVIEW

This revelation, cataloged as Section 67 in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants (Section 54 in modern editions), addresses a specific crisis in the early Mormon community. The Colesville Saints, led by Newel Knight, had moved to Thompson, Ohio, to live the 'Law of Consecration' on the farm of Leman Copley. When Copley reneged on his agreement (breaking the covenant), the community was left destitute and without land. In this text, Joseph Smith speaks as the Lord to declare the previous covenant 'void' due to this transgression. The text commands the Saints to repent, flee the hostile environment of Ohio, and journey westward to Missouri ('borders of the Lamanites'). It underscores the fragility of these early communal covenants, which could be nullified by human agency, and promises mercy specifically to those who 'kept the covenant,' while pronouncing woe upon the transgressor.

KEY FIGURES

Jesus Christ (The Speaker), Newel Knight (Recipient/Leader), Leman Copley (Implied as 'him by whom this offence cometh'), The Colesville Saints ('your brethren')

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. NULLIFICATION OF COVENANTS

Assertion: Covenants made with God can become 'void and of none effect' if broken by human participants.

"as the covenant which they made unto me, has been broken, even so it has become void and of none effect"

Evangelical Comparison: This text presents a theological framework where a covenant with God is a bilateral contract that dissolves upon human failure ('become void'). In contrast, Evangelical soteriology emphasizes the Unconditional Covenant of Grace or the New Covenant, which is secured by the finished work of Christ. While the Mosaic covenant had conditional blessings, the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34, Hebrews 8:6-13) is viewed as eternal and secure because God binds Himself to the believer through the Son. The idea that a covenant 'made unto me' becomes void due to human sin undermines the evangelical understanding of God's immutable promises (2 Timothy 2:13).

2. GEOGRAPHIC ZION

Assertion: God commands a physical gathering to a specific location (Missouri) as a religious duty.

"take your journey into the regions westward, unto the land of Missouri, unto the borders of the Lamanites"

Evangelical Comparison: The text commands a specific migration to the 'borders of the Lamanites' (Missouri) as a divine directive. In Evangelical theology, the Kingdom of God is spiritual and universal, accessible anywhere through the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). The New Testament explicitly moves away from holy sites (Jerusalem/Gerizim) to worship 'in spirit and truth' (John 4:21). This text reverts to a geo-centric theology where safety and obedience are tied to a physical location.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental theological gap lies in the nature of the covenant and the means of mercy. In this text, the covenant is a fragile agreement that is 'void' when humans fail, and mercy is the reward for those who 'observed the commandment.' This is a re-entrenchment of a works-based or obedience-based framework. Evangelical theology posits that the New Covenant is unbreakable because it is founded on the blood of Christ (Hebrews 9:12) and that mercy is the cause of our obedience, not the result of it. Furthermore, the text elevates Joseph Smith's voice to that of the Risen Lord, creating a new locus of authority that supersedes the Bible.

Shared Values:

Necessity of repentance; Jesus as Alpha and Omega; Patience in tribulation; Expectation of Christ's return

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Fide (Faith Alone) – Mercy is explicitly tied to 'observing the commandment' and 'keeping the covenant' rather than faith in Christ alone.
2. [Major] Theology Proper (God's Sovereignty) – God's covenant is rendered 'void' by human action, suggesting God's purposes can be thwarted by man.
3. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Adds new, binding commandments and revelations outside the biblical canon.

Semantic Warnings:

"Covenant"

In Text: A specific agreement regarding property and community living (United Order) that can be voided by sin.

Evangelical: A binding relationship; specifically the New Covenant, which is an eternal bond of grace sealed by Christ's blood.

Example: *In this text, the covenant is 'void' because a man broke it. In the Bible, 'If we are faithless, he remains faithful' (2 Timothy 2:13).*

"Lamanites"

In Text: A specific group of people (Native Americans) viewed as descendants of Israelites.

Evangelical: Term not present in the Bible.

Example: *The text directs them to the 'borders of the Lamanites' as a prophetic fulfillment location.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Implied as 'obtaining mercy' and finding 'rest to their souls'.

How Attained: Through repentance, humility, and specifically 'keeping the covenant' and 'observing the commandment'.

Basis of Assurance: Assurance is based on successful obedience to the specific commands (standing fast, fleeing).

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text says 'blessed are they who have kept the covenant... for they shall obtain mercy.' Romans 3:24 says we are 'justified freely by his grace.' The text makes mercy the result of keeping the covenant; the Bible makes keeping the covenant (obedience) the result of mercy.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Stand fast in the office appointed
2. Repent of all sins
3. Flee the land (Ohio)
4. Appoint a leader and a treasurer
5. Journey westward to Missouri
6. Seek a living like unto men (work for survival)
7. Be patient in tribulation

Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept Joseph Smith's directive as the voice of Alpha and Omega
2. Sever ties with the current location immediately
3. Submit to the appointed leader for financial and logistical management

Ritual Requirements:

1. None explicitly detailed in this text, though 'keeping the covenant' implies previous ritual commitments.

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. The text says the covenant became 'void' because it was broken by men. How does this compare to the New Covenant in the Bible, where God promises to be faithful even when we are not?
2. Verse 1 says those who kept the covenant 'shall obtain mercy.' Do you see mercy as something we earn by keeping covenants, or something given to us so that we can keep covenants?
3. How does the command to move to a specific location (Missouri) fit with Jesus' teaching in John 4 that worship is no longer about a specific mountain or location?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Broken Covenant – The text honestly admits that humans break covenants. This creates a need for a covenant that humans cannot break. [Hebrews 8:7-12 (God establishes a New Covenant because the people broke the old one; the New one is based on 'I will', not 'If you will').]
2. Seeking a Place – The longing for a prepared place is fulfilled in Christ, not in Missouri. [John 14:2-3 ('I go to prepare a place for you... that where I am, there ye may be also').]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Uncertainty/Insecurity [Severe] – The believer lives under a covenant that can become 'void' at any moment due to the sins of others or themselves, removing the assurance of God's standing.
2. Collective Guilt [Moderate] – The entire group suffers ('flee the land') because of the offense of one man. This creates intense social pressure and policing within the community.
3. Performance Pressure [Moderate] – Mercy is contingent on 'standing fast' and 'observing the commandment,' creating a works-righteousness anxiety.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Prophetic Revelation.

Verification Method: Obedience to the prophet's voice is the test; the outcome (mercy vs. woe) serves as confirmation.

Evangelical Contrast: Evangelicals verify truth by testing it against the closed canon of Scripture (Acts 17:11). This text demands obedience based on the immediate authority of the speaker (Smith as God's mouthpiece) without appeal to biblical precedent for the specific commands given.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: June 1831

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated)

Textual Issues: This text appears as Section 67 in the 1835 edition but is Section 54 in modern editions. The 1835 edition was the first to canonize these revelations as 'Doctrine and Covenants'.