

SECTION 72 (MODERN D&C 62)

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

OVERVIEW

This revelation, originally cataloged as Section 72 in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants (Section 62 in modern editions), addresses a group of elders traveling from Ohio to Independence, Missouri ('Zion'). The text opens with a high Christological assertion, presenting Jesus as the Advocate who understands human weakness. Significant to the text's theology is the immediate linkage between the elders' missionary labors ('testimony which ye have borne') and the forgiveness of their sins, suggesting a soteriology where justification is maintained or ratified through active service. The revelation provides specific administrative commands regarding the journey, the holding of a sacramental meeting in Missouri, and the subsequent return to preach to the 'congregations of the wicked' (non-Mormons). Notably, the text exhibits a pragmatic theology regarding logistics ('it mattereth not' whether they travel together or two-by-two), emphasizing the internal state of the heart over external procedural rigidity in non-essential matters. It reinforces the early Mormon concept of a literal, geographic Zion in Missouri where the faithful must physically assemble.

KEY FIGURES

Jesus Christ (The Lord/Advocate), Elders of the Church, Angels, Inhabitants of the Earth/Congregations of the Wicked

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. CONDITIONAL FORGIVENESS THROUGH SERVICE

Assertion: Forgiveness of sins is declared in the context of, and seemingly as a result of, the missionary testimony borne by the elders.

"nevertheless ye are blessed, for the testimony which ye have borne is recorded in heaven... and your sins are forgiven you."

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, justification is a forensic declaration by God based on the imputed righteousness of Christ (Romans 3:21-26), independent of the believer's subsequent works. This text, however, syntactically links the forgiveness of the elders' sins to the fact that their 'testimony... is recorded in heaven.' This suggests a progressive or functional forgiveness contingent upon obedience and the fulfillment of one's calling, rather than a finished work received at conversion. It implies that spiritual standing fluctuates with missionary performance.

2. GEOGRAPHIC ZION

Assertion: Zion is a literal physical location in Missouri where the faithful must assemble.

"Assemble yourselves upon the land of Zion... faithful among you should be preserved and rejoice together in the land of Missouri."

Evangelical Comparison: While the Old Testament focused on a geographic Jerusalem, the New Testament universalizes the concept of God's people. Jesus told the Samaritan woman that worship would no longer be centralized in a specific mountain (John 4:21). This text reverts to a geo-political understanding of the Kingdom, designating Missouri as a necessary physical gathering place for preservation and rejoicing, re-establishing a 'holy land' paradigm that the New Covenant fulfilled and expanded.

3. DIVINE PRAGMATISM (AGENCY)

Assertion: God is indifferent to specific logistical details (travel methods), granting autonomy to believers.

"it mattereth not unto me, only be faithful... These things remain with you to do according to judgment"

Evangelical Comparison: This doctrine allows for human agency in non-moral decisions ('it mattereth not'). While Evangelicalism affirms Christian liberty in non-essentials (Romans 14), this text frames it as a specific permission from a modern revelation rather than a general principle of wisdom derived from scripture.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: While the Christology regarding Jesus as Advocate is biblically sound in isolation, the functional theology of the text creates a gap. In Evangelicalism, the 'Advocate' pleads His own blood for the sinner's justification. In this text, the Advocate forgives based on the sinner's 'testimony borne.' Furthermore, the command to gather to a physical Zion (Missouri) contradicts the New Testament teaching that the Kingdom of God is spiritual and universal, not tied to a specific earthly location until the New Earth.

Shared Values:

Jesus as Advocate; Jesus succoring the tempted; Importance of gratitude; Gathering of believers

Friction Points:

- 1. [Critical] Sola Fide – Forgiveness is linked to the work of bearing testimony.
- 2. [Major] Sola Gratia – Blessings and preservation are contingent on being 'faithful' in the mission.
- 3. [Major] Theology Proper (Kingdom of God) – Reverts to a geo-political kingdom requiring physical gathering.

Semantic Warnings:

"Zion"

In Text: Independence, Missouri; a physical gathering place for the Saints.
Evangelical: The dwelling place of God; historically Jerusalem, prophetically the New Jerusalem/Heaven, ecclesiastically the Church.
Example: *Hebrews 12:22 says we have come to Mount Zion (heavenly), whereas D&C 72 commands travel to Missouri as Zion.*

"Congregations of the wicked"

In Text: Non-Mormon assemblies, likely including other Christian denominations.
Evangelical: Those in rebellion against God; usually distinguished from the visible church.
Example: *The text implies that preaching to anyone outside the LDS movement is preaching to the 'wicked.'*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Implied as forgiveness of sins and preservation in the land of Zion.
How Attained: Through faith in Christ, but operationally contingent on bearing testimony and gathering to Zion.
Basis of Assurance: The prophetic declaration that 'your sins are forgiven you' because of the work performed.
Comparison to Sola Fide: In Romans 4:5, God justifies the ungodly by faith. In D&C 72:1, God justifies the missionary because of their recorded testimony.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

- 1. Hearken to the Lord
- 2. Continue the journey to Zion
- 3. Assemble in Zion
- 4. Hold a meeting
- 5. Offer a sacrament
- 6. Return to bear record/preach
- 7. Receive blessings with a thankful heart

Implicit Obligations:

- 1. Travel to Missouri (Zion)
- 2. Bear testimony to non-believers ('congregations of the wicked')
- 3. Exercise judgment in logistical matters

Ritual Requirements:

1. Offer a sacrament (Communion/Lord's Supper) specifically in the land of Zion

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 1, the Lord says sins are forgiven and links it to the testimony the elders bore. Do you feel your forgiveness depends on how active you are in sharing your testimony?
2. The text mentions Jesus is our Advocate who knows our weakness. How does that comfort you when you feel you haven't done enough 'faithful' work?
3. Verse 2 commands gathering to Missouri. Since that isn't practiced now, how do you interpret the 'commandments' in the D&C—are they temporary or eternal?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Advocate – This acknowledges the human need for representation before God due to weakness. It bridges to the true Gospel where Christ is the Advocate not because we bear testimony, but because He bore our sins. [1 John 2:1-2]
2. Succor for the Tempted – Shows a desire for a God who empathizes with human struggle, fulfilled in the Incarnation. [Hebrews 4:15-16]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Performance-Based Acceptance [Moderate] – The text links the angels' rejoicing and the forgiveness of sins to the 'testimony which ye have borne.' This places a burden on the believer to constantly perform missionary work to ensure their standing with God is secure.
2. Geographic/Physical Displacement [Severe] – The command to physically move to Missouri ('Zion') creates a burden of uprooting life and family for salvation/preservation, rather than finding rest in Christ wherever one is.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Direct prophetic revelation.

Verification Method: Obedience to the revelation and 'directions of the Spirit' in decision making.

Evangelical Contrast: Evangelicals verify truth by testing it against the closed canon of Scripture (Acts 17:11). This text relies on the immediate authority of the revelator (Smith) speaking as God.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: August 13, 1831

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated)

Textual Issues: This text was combined with another revelation to form the modern D&C Section 62. The 1835 edition presents it as Section 72.