

SECTION 78 (MODERN SECTION 99)

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

OVERVIEW

This revelation, given in August 1832 (canonized as Section 78 in the 1835 edition and Section 99 in modern editions), addresses John Murdock, a recent widower. The text serves a dual purpose: missiological and domestic. Theologically, it establishes a high view of the Mormon missionary's authority, equating the reception of the missionary with the reception of Jesus Christ. It introduces a specific ritual of judgment—the cleansing of feet—to be performed against those who reject the message, serving as a testimony against them at the Day of Judgment. Domestically, the revelation addresses Murdock's personal crisis; having lost his wife, he is commanded to ensure his children are provided for and sent to the Bishop in Zion (Independence, Missouri) before he departs on his mission. This text illustrates the early Mormon expectation that Kingdom service takes precedence over personal circumstances, while simultaneously asserting that the rejection of the Restoration message carries eternal consequences.

KEY FIGURES

Jesus Christ (The Speaker), John Murdock (Recipient of the revelation), The Bishop in Zion (Edward Partridge), The Father

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. REPRESENTATIVE AUTHORITY OF THE MISSIONARY

Assertion: Receiving the Mormon missionary is the theological equivalent of receiving Jesus Christ; rejecting the missionary results in rejection by the Father.

"whoso receiveth you receiveth me... and whoso rejecteth you shall be rejected of my Father"

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, a messenger is only authoritative insofar as they accurately convey Scripture. Rejection of a messenger is only significant if the hearer is rejecting the Biblical Gospel. In this text, the authority is vested in the person and office of the missionary ('whoso receiveth *you*'). This creates a mediation where the missionary becomes the gatekeeper of the Kingdom. Evangelicalism teaches that men are judged by their response to Jesus Christ directly (John 3:18), not by their hospitality to a specific traveling preacher from a specific sect.

2. RITUAL CONDEMNATION (WASHING OF FEET)

Assertion: Missionaries are authorized to perform a secret ritual of washing their feet as a testimony against those who reject their message.

"you shall cleanse your feet in the secret places by the way for a testimony against them."

Evangelical Comparison: The New Testament mentions shaking dust off feet (Matthew 10:14) as a public sign of disassociation and the cessation of responsibility. However, the D&C transforms this into a 'secret' ritual act ('in the secret places') intended to seal a testimony against the rejecters for the Day of Judgment. This shifts the missionary's role from a herald of good news to a participant in the judicial condemnation of unbelievers, a power Evangelicalism reserves for Christ alone.

3. GEOGRAPHIC ZION

Assertion: Zion is a literal location (Missouri) where believers have an inheritance and where the Bishop resides.

"sent up unto the bishop in Zion... go up also unto the goodly land, to possess thine inheritance"

Evangelical Comparison: This text reflects the early Mormon doctrine of 'The Gathering,' where salvation and safety were geographically tied to assembling in Independence, Missouri ('Zion'). Evangelical theology rejects the idea that any specific earthly city constitutes a holy land for the church age, emphasizing instead that true worship is in spirit and truth (John 4:21-24) and that the believer's inheritance is 'reserved in heaven' (1 Peter 1:4), not a plot of land in the American Midwest.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in the locus of authority and salvation. In this text, salvation is mediated through the acceptance of the Mormon priesthood holder ('whoso receiveth you receiveth me'). Rejection of the messenger triggers a ritual curse. In Evangelicalism, the messenger is a humble pointer to Christ; rejecting the messenger is only dangerous if it entails rejecting the biblical Christ. Furthermore, the concept of 'Zion' as a physical location in Missouri where one must send children and gather for inheritance fundamentally alters the New Testament eschatology of the Kingdom of God being 'not of this world' (John 18:36).

Shared Values:

Zeal for evangelism.; Willingness to suffer persecution for faith.; Responsibility to provide for one's children (1 Timothy 5:8).

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Adds new commandments and rituals (washing feet) not found in the Bible as binding Christian practice.
2. [Major] Sola Gratia – Implies mercy is obtained by receiving the messenger ('blessed are they, for they shall obtain mercy'), conditioning grace on accepting the Mormon missionary.
3. [Major] Universal Priesthood – Establishes a hierarchical priesthood with the power to bind/condemn via secret ritual.
4. [Minor] Theology Proper (Eschatology) – Locates the Kingdom of God in a specific American geography.

Semantic Warnings:

"Gospel"

In Text: The specific message of the Restoration, including gathering to Zion and accepting Joseph Smith's revelations.

Evangelical: The death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins (1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

Example: When the text says 'proclaim mine everlasting gospel,' it implies teaching the Book of Mormon and gathering to Missouri, whereas Paul defines the gospel strictly as the work of Christ.

"Zion"

In Text: Independence, Missouri (Jackson County).

Evangelical: The heavenly city of God or the spiritual body of believers (Hebrews 12:22).

Example: Sending children to 'the bishop in Zion' meant physically transporting them to Missouri.

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Receiving the Kingdom, obtaining mercy, and possessing an inheritance in Zion.

How Attained: By receiving the Lord's servants (missionaries) 'as a little child' and gathering to Zion.

Basis of Assurance: Acceptance of the authorized messenger.

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text conditions 'obtaining mercy' on the reception of the missionary. Romans 3:24-28 teaches justification is by faith in Christ alone, apart from works or the mediation of human agents.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Go to the eastern countries to proclaim the gospel.
2. Go from house to house, village to village, city to city.
3. Cleanse feet in secret places as a testimony against those who reject the message.
4. Provide for children before leaving.
5. Send children to the Bishop in Zion.

Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept persecution as part of the calling.

2. Prioritize the mission over immediate proximity to family (after arrangements are made).
3. Function as a judge of the people encountered.

Ritual Requirements:

1. Washing/cleansing of feet as a ritual of testimony against unbelievers.

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In this passage, missionaries are told to wash their feet as a testimony against people. How do you reconcile that with Jesus' command to 'bless those who curse you'?
2. The text says 'whoso receiveth you receiveth me.' Do you believe a person can receive Jesus Christ directly through prayer and the Bible, or must they receive a Mormon missionary to be accepted by God?
3. Why was it necessary for Murdock to send his children away to Zion? Does God require us to sacrifice our primary family duties for church assignments?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. Receiving the Kingdom as a little child. – This mirrors Jesus' teaching in Matthew 18:3. It is a bridge to discuss that salvation requires humble dependence on God, not earning status through rituals or works. [Matthew 18:3]
2. The Father's care for the motherless. – Just as Murdock sought care for his motherless children, God is the 'father of the fatherless' (Psalm 68:5) and provides for us through Christ. [Psalm 68:5]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Judgmentalism/Superiority [Moderate] – The command to 'cleanse feet' against rejecters places a heavy burden on the believer to judge the spiritual state of others, rather than loving them and leaving judgment to God.
2. Institutional Pressure vs. Family [Severe] – The text prioritizes the mission over the immediate presence of the father, suggesting that faithfulness to the church requires sacrificing family stability. This creates a pressure where 'church work' is seen as more holy than 'family work.'

EPISTEMOLOGY

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

Verification Method: Obedience to the command and the subsequent 'demonstration of my Holy Spirit' promised in the text.

Evangelical Contrast: Evangelicals verify truth by testing it against the closed canon of the Bible (Acts 17:11). This text demands acceptance based on the authority of the modern prophet, independent of biblical verification.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: August 29, 1832

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated)

Textual Issues: This section was originally published in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants as Section 78. In current editions, it is Section 99. The text reflects the specific historical circumstances of 1832 (Murdock's widower status).