

SECTION 81 (MODERN D&C 97)

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

OVERVIEW

Given on August 2, 1833, this revelation (cataloged as Section 81 in the 1835 edition and Section 97 in modern editions) addresses the 'brethren in the land of Zion' (Independence, Missouri). Speaking in the voice of the Lord, Joseph Smith commands the 'School in Zion' and Parley P. Pratt, but quickly pivots to a stern mandate: the immediate construction of a 'house' (temple) unto the Lord. The text establishes a strict covenantal dynamic: if the Saints build the temple using their tithing and keep it undefiled, God's glory will rest upon it and Zion will be unmovable. However, the text imposes a heavy burden of perfectionism, warning that if Zion does not 'observe to do all things' commanded and 'sin no more,' she will be visited with 'sore affliction,' 'pestilence,' and 'devouring fire.' The revelation conflates spiritual salvation with physical protection, asserting that the temple is necessary for the 'salvation of Zion.'

KEY FIGURES

The Lord (Speaker), Parley P. Pratt (Presider over the School), The Brethren in Zion (Recipients), The School in Zion

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. TEMPLE-BASED SALVATION

Assertion: The construction of a physical temple is required for the 'salvation of Zion.'

"build an house unto me... for the salvation of Zion"

Evangelical Comparison: The text explicitly links the 'salvation of Zion' to the construction of a material house (temple). In Evangelical theology, the 'temple' is the body of the believer individually (1 Corinthians 6:19) and the Church corporately (Ephesians 2:21), inhabited by the Holy Spirit upon regeneration. The requirement to build a physical structure to secure salvation or divine presence regresses to a pre-New Covenant paradigm, contradicting Acts 17:24 ('God... dwelleth not in temples made with hands') and the finished work of Christ which tore the temple veil.

2. CONDITIONAL SECURITY VIA PERFECTION

Assertion: Divine protection and blessing are contingent upon the Saints 'sinning no more' and doing 'all things' commanded.

"if she observe not to do whatsoever I have commanded her, I will visit her... with sore affliction... and if she sin no more, none of these things shall come upon her"

Evangelical Comparison: This text presents a stark 'Law' covenant: do everything commanded and sin no more, and you will live/prosper; fail, and you will be destroyed. This mirrors the Old Covenant conditionality (Deuteronomy 28) rather than the New Covenant assurance found in Romans 8:1 ('There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus'). The demand to 'sin no more' as a condition for escaping judgment places an impossible burden on the adherent, contradicting 1 John 1:8 ('If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves').

3. LOCALIZED DIVINE PRESENCE

Assertion: God's presence and glory are contingent on the purity of a physical location.

"if it be defiled I will not come into it... for I will not come into unholy temples"

Evangelical Comparison: The text asserts that God's presence is revocable based on the ritual purity of a building ('if it be defiled I will not come into it'). This contradicts the New Testament teaching of the omnipresence of God and the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the believer (Ephesians 1:13-14). It re-establishes a Levitical distinction between holy and profane spaces that Christ abolished.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: While using biblical language ('Zion,' 'salvation,' 'tithing'), the text redefines these terms within a framework of 19th-century restorationism. The fundamental gap is soteriological: Salvation is here depicted as a cooperative effort involving human construction of sacred space and perfect adherence to law ('observe to do all things'). This stands in direct opposition to the Evangelical understanding of the New Covenant, where the believer is justified by faith apart from works of the law (Romans 3:28) and worship is no longer tied to a specific mountain or city (John 4:21).

Shared Values:

Desire for wisdom and truth; Importance of humility and contrition; Concept of tithing/giving; Holiness of God

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] **Sola Fide** (Faith Alone) – Salvation and protection are conditioned on works (building a house) and perfect obedience ('sin no more').
2. [Major] **Sola Gratia** (Grace Alone) – Mercy is shown to 'whomsoever I will' based on their works and sacrifice, rather than being a free gift to the unworthy.
3. [Major] **Christology / Priesthood of Believer** – Re-establishes a physical temple as the locus of interaction with God, obscuring Christ's role as the true Temple and Mediator.
4. [Major] **Sola Scriptura** – Adds new requirements for salvation (temple building) not found in the Bible.

Semantic Warnings:

"Salvation"

In Text: Preservation of the community (Zion) and spiritual exaltation, contingent on temple building.

Evangelical: Deliverance from sin and death through faith in Jesus Christ alone.

Example: *Text: 'house built unto me for the salvation of Zion.'* *Bible: 'Receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls'* (James 1:21).

"Zion"

In Text: A specific geographic location (Independence, Missouri) and the community of Saints there.

Evangelical: Often refers to Jerusalem, the people of God, or the heavenly city (Hebrews 12:22), not a frontier American town.

Example: *Text: 'Zion is the city of our God... surely Zion cannot fall.'*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Ambiguous blend of physical safety for the community and spiritual access to God's presence.

How Attained: Through tithing, sacrifice, building the temple, and 'observing to do all things' commanded.

Basis of Assurance: None provided; assurance is undermined by the threat of 'sore affliction' for any failure.

Comparison to Sola Fide: Directly contradicts Sola Fide by stating 'if she observe not to do whatsoever I have commanded her, I will visit her... with vengeance.' Compare to Romans 8:33-34.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Build a house (temple) in Zion speedily
2. Do not suffer any unclean thing to come into the house
3. Observe to do all things whatsoever commanded
4. Sin no more

Implicit Obligations:

1. Pay tithing (identified as the means to build the house)
2. Submit to the 'School in Zion' for instruction

3. Accept chastening/judgment as divine will

Ritual Requirements:

1. Tithing
2. Sacrifice (covenants by sacrifice)
3. Temple ordinances (implied by 'keys' and 'ministry')

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. The text says if Zion sins no more, she will escape judgment. How do you interpret 'sin no more' in your daily life?
2. This section links the 'salvation of Zion' to building a physical house. How does this relate to the New Testament teaching that we are the temple of the Holy Spirit?
3. If God's presence depends on a place being undefiled, how does that affect your confidence in God's presence with you personally when you struggle with sin?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The desire for a 'place of thanksgiving' and instruction. – Humans long for a place to meet God and learn truth. Jesus is the meeting place. [John 2:19-21 (Jesus as the Temple); Hebrews 4:16 (Throne of Grace)]
2. The need for a refuge ('Zion'). – The text taps into the desire for safety and a 'high tower.' Christ is the true refuge and high tower for the believer. [Psalm 18:2; Proverbs 18:10]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Perfectionism / Legalism [Severe] – The command to 'sin no more' and 'observe to do all things' creates a crushing burden where any failure threatens the individual and the community with 'devouring fire.'
2. Uncertainty / Fear [Severe] – The text offers no assurance of salvation, only a conditional promise that can be revoked by 'unclean things' or disobedience, leading to a fear of judgment.
3. Financial/Ritual Obligation [Moderate] – Salvation is tied to the financial ability to build a temple ('tithing of my people'), linking spiritual standing to material contribution.

EPISTEMOLOGY

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

Verification Method: Internal spiritual confirmation ('voice of my Spirit') and empirical results (prosperity vs. pestilence based on obedience).

Evangelical Contrast: Evangelical epistemology tests all prophecy against the closed canon of Scripture (Acts 17:11, 1 Thessalonians 5:21). This text demands obedience to new revelation that alters New Testament soteriology.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: August 2, 1833

Authorship: Joseph Smith

Textual Issues: Published in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants as Section 81. In modern editions (1876 onwards), it is Section 97. The text reflects the specific historical crisis in Missouri.