

SECTION 97 (MODERN D&C 101)

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

OVERVIEW

This revelation, originally cataloged as Section 97 in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants (Section 101 in modern editions), addresses the crisis of the 'Mormon War' in Missouri in late 1833. The Saints had been violently driven from Jackson County, their 'Zion.' Joseph Smith provides a theodicy for this trauma, declaring that God allowed this persecution as a chastisement for the Saints' 'jarrings, contentions, and envyings.' The text utilizes the 'Parable of the Nobleman and the Olive Trees' to explain that the failure to build the temple (the 'tower') left them vulnerable to enemies. It commands the Saints to gather resources to purchase land, importune the US government (judges, governors, and the President) for redress, and affirms the US Constitution as a divinely established document. It foreshadows the paramilitary 'Zion's Camp' expedition, framing the reclamation of Zion as a divine mandate to 'avenge me of mine enemies.'

KEY FIGURES

The Lord (Voice of the Revelation), The Nobleman (God/Christ in the Parable), The Servants (Church Leaders/Joseph Smith), Sidney Gilbert (Storehouse Keeper), Abraham (Archetype of testing), The President of the United States (Target for petition)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. GEOGRAPHIC SOTERIOLOGY (ZION)

Assertion: Salvation and safety from apocalyptic destruction are contingent upon gathering to a specific physical location (Jackson County, Missouri).

"That the wheat may be secured in the garners to possess eternal life... Therefore, a commandment I give unto all the churches, that they shall continue to gather together unto the places which I have appointed."

Evangelical Comparison: The text asserts that 'Zion' is a literal geographic location in America that must be purchased and inhabited for the Saints to be 'secured in the garners' against the burning of the last days. In contrast, Evangelical theology, based on Hebrews 12:22 and John 4:21-24, teaches that the location of worship is irrelevant in the New Covenant; believers are the temple of the Holy Spirit, and security is found in Christ, not in a specific county or 'holy place' on a map.

2. SANCTIFICATION VIA CHASTISEMENT

Assertion: God allows persecution and suffering specifically because the community has sinned, and this punishment is necessary for sanctification.

"They must needs be chastened and tried, even as Abraham... for all those who will not endure chastening, but deny me, cannot be sanctified."

Evangelical Comparison: The text posits a direct causal link between the Saints' 'jarrings and contentions' and their violent expulsion from Missouri. It frames sanctification as a result of enduring this specific punishment. Evangelical theology teaches that while God uses suffering for growth, the believer's standing and sanctification are primarily grounded in the finished work of Christ and the operation of the Holy Spirit, not in the successful endurance of retributive punishment.

3. DIVINE ORIGIN OF THE US CONSTITUTION

Assertion: The US Constitution was established by God through 'wise men' He raised up to maintain moral agency.

"And for this purpose have I established the Constitution of this land, by the hands of wise men whom I raised up unto this very purpose."

Evangelical Comparison: This text elevates American political history to the level of salvation history. It claims God explicitly established the US legal framework to allow for the 'gathering' and the exercise of 'moral agency.' Evangelicalism maintains a distinction between the Kingdom of God and earthly governments (John 18:36), viewing no secular nation's laws as divinely instituted scripture.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in the nature of the Kingdom. The text operates under a 'Latter-day' restoration of Old Testament theocracy, where God's favor is tied to land ownership, physical temples, and political sovereignty. Evangelicalism operates under the New Covenant, where the Kingdom is 'not of this world' (John 18:36), the temple is the believer (1 Cor 6:19), and the 'gathering' is spiritual unto Christ, not geographic. The text's requirement to 'purchase land' to secure 'eternal life' (v9) is a stark departure from Sola Fide.

Shared Values:

Belief in the Second Coming (Millennium); Moral agency; The necessity of endurance in faith; God's sovereignty over nations

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Fide (Faith Alone) – Salvation/Eternal Life is linked to the work of 'gathering' and 'purchasing lands.'
2. [Major] Sola Gratia (Grace Alone) – Sanctification is achieved through enduring punishment (chastening) rather than by the Spirit's work through grace.
3. [Major] Christology (Nature of the Kingdom) – Reverts to a territorial, militaristic kingdom concept ('avenge me of mine enemies') rather than Christ's spiritual kingdom.
4. [Major] Sola Scriptura – Canonizes the US Constitution and political strategy as divine revelation.

Semantic Warnings:

"Zion"

In Text: A specific geographic location (Independence, Missouri) to be built as a physical city.

Evangelical: The heavenly Jerusalem (Hebrews 12:22) or the people of God.

Example: *In this text, 'redeeming Zion' means buying back real estate; in the Bible, redemption refers to Christ buying back sinners.*

"Salvation/Saved"

In Text: Includes physical preservation from millennial destruction by being in the right location.

Evangelical: Deliverance from the penalty and power of sin through Christ's blood.

Example: *Verse 9 implies gathering is necessary so 'wheat may be secured... to possess eternal life.'*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Possessing eternal life, being crowned with celestial glory, and physical safety during the apocalypse.

How Attained: Faith, repentance, enduring chastening, and 'gathering' to the appointed holy places.

Basis of Assurance: Being found 'upon the watch tower' (obedient to leadership) and physically gathered.

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text adds the work of 'gathering' (migration) and 'purchasing land' as prerequisites for being 'secured' for eternal life, contradicting Romans 3:28.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Gather to the appointed places (Missouri)
2. Purchase all available land in Jackson County
3. Importune (lobby) judges, governors, and the President for redress
4. Do not sell the storehouse (Sidney Gilbert)
5. Prepare for the revelation of the Lord

Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept that personal/community suffering is a result of personal/community sin
2. Participate in the physical/financial redemption of Zion
3. View the US Constitution as a religious document

Ritual Requirements:

1. Build a 'tower' (Temple) for protection
2. Gather in 'holy places'

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. The text says the Saints were expelled because of their 'jarrings and contentions.' How does that make you feel about the victims of that persecution?
2. In the Parable of the Nobleman, the servants are blamed for not building the tower. If the 'tower' represents the Temple, does this mean God's protection is conditional on our building projects?
3. Verse 9 suggests gathering is necessary to 'possess eternal life.' How does this fit with the thief on the cross who couldn't gather anywhere but was with Christ in Paradise?
4. How do you interpret the command to 'avenge me of mine enemies' in light of Jesus's command to 'love your enemies'?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Longing for a Safe Home (Zion) – This reflects the human heart's longing for the New Earth. Jesus offers this peace not through geography, but through His presence. [Revelation 21:1-4 (God dwelling with man, wiping away tears)]
2. The Nobleman's Vineyard – In Isaiah 5, God is the vineyard owner who looks for fruit. In the Gospel, Jesus is the True Vine. We don't build the tower to protect the vineyard; Jesus ***is*** the tower and the hedge. [John 15:1-5 (I am the vine)]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Victim Blaming [Severe] – The text explicitly states the persecution happened 'in consequence of their transgressions.' This places the heavy psychological burden of the tragedy directly on the victims, suggesting their lack of holiness caused their suffering.
2. Performance Anxiety [Moderate] – Safety and salvation are contingent on 'gathering' and 'building.' If the temple isn't built, the 'enemy' breaks in. This creates a perpetual pressure to perform works to ensure divine protection.
3. Theocratic Pressure [Moderate] – The command to 'avenge' and 'redeem' the land places a political and potentially violent burden on the believer to establish God's kingdom by force or finance.

EPISTEMOLOGY

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

Verification Method: Obedience to the commands (gathering, purchasing land) is the test of faith; the fulfillment of the 'redemption of Zion' is the promised validation.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the testing of spirits against Scripture (1 John 4:1, Acts 17:11). This text demands obedience to new revelation that has no biblical precedent (e.g., building a tower in Missouri).

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: December 16-17, 1833

Authorship: Joseph Smith

Textual Issues: Originally Section 97 in the 1835 edition; renumbered to Section 101 in modern editions. The text responds to the immediate crisis of the Missouri expulsion.