

SECTION 98 (MODERN D&C 104)

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

OVERVIEW

This text, originally published as Section 98 in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants (now Section 104), addresses the financial and administrative reorganization of the 'United Order'—a communal economic system practiced by early Latter-day Saints. Following the expulsion of Saints from Zion (Missouri), Joseph Smith (referred to here by the code name 'Enoch') dissolves the administrative link between the orders in Kirtland and Zion. The revelation asserts God's absolute ownership of the earth and designates church leaders as 'stewards' rather than owners. Specific properties—including the printing office, tannery, and ashery—are assigned to leaders like Sidney Rigdon, Martin Harris, and Oliver Cowdery using pseudonyms to protect them from legal liabilities. The text imposes a heavy spiritual weight, linking economic faithfulness directly to 'salvation' and threatening that covenant breakers will be 'delivered over unto the buffetings of Satan.' It establishes two distinct treasuries (sacred and secular) and commands the payment of debts, promising divine intervention to soften creditors' hearts if the Saints are humble and diligent.

KEY FIGURES

Enoch (Joseph Smith), Pelagoram (Sidney Rigdon), Mahemson (Martin Harris), Olihah (Oliver Cowdery), Shederlaomach (Frederick G. Williams), Zombre (John Johnson), Ahashdah (Newel K. Whitney), Gazelam (Joseph Smith)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. THEOCRATIC STEWARDSHIP

Assertion: God owns all property; individuals are stewards assigned specific assets by church authority, and they must account for their management to the church.

"I the Lord stretched out the heavens... and all things therein are mine... it is expedient that I the Lord should make every man accountable, as stewards over earthly blessings"

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, stewardship (Psalm 24:1) implies that while God ultimately owns creation, individuals possess private property rights (Acts 5:4) and are personally accountable to God for their generosity and management. This text redefines stewardship as a theocratic assignment where the church hierarchy dictates who holds which property (e.g., the tannery to Rigdon, the printing office to Cowdery). The 'stewardship' here is not merely spiritual accountability but a legalistic, economic arrangement managed by the 'order.'

2. CONDITIONAL BLESSING AND CURSING

Assertion: Blessings are contingent on strict obedience to the economic order; transgression results in being 'cursed' and 'trodden down.'

"inasmuch as those whom I commanded were faithful, they should be blessed... but inasmuch as they were not faithful, they were nigh unto cursing."

Evangelical Comparison: The text operates on a strict Deuteronomic paradigm of blessings for obedience and cursings for disobedience. It explicitly states that those who break the covenant of the United Order will be 'cursed in his life' and 'trodden down.' This stands in sharp contrast to the New Testament teaching of Sola Gratia, where the believer's standing is secured by Christ's finished work, and while discipline exists (Hebrews 12), the threat of a 'grievous curse' and being handed over to Satan for economic failure is foreign to the Gospel of Grace.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental theological gap lies in the nature of the New Covenant. This text constructs a theocratic society where 'salvation' is partially contingent upon adherence to an economic structure (the United Order). It employs the language of the Old Covenant (blessings for obedience, cursings for disobedience) applied

to real estate and business management. Evangelicalism maintains that while Christians should be generous, the specific administration of assets is a matter of Christian liberty, not a condition of covenant faithfulness punishable by the 'buffetings of Satan.' Furthermore, the text elevates the 'voice of the order' to a level of authority that binds the conscience of the believer regarding their personal property.

Shared Values:

God is the ultimate owner of the earth.; Concern for the poor and needy.; Importance of paying debts and honesty.; Accountability to God for resources.

Friction Points:

- 1. [Major] Sola Gratia (Grace Alone) – Reintroduces a merit-based system where blessings are 'multiplied' only 'inasmuch as they are faithful' and curses are applied for failure.
- 2. [Moderate] Universal Priesthood – Centralizes control of resources and decision-making in a hierarchy ('the council') rather than respecting the individual believer's direct accountability to God.
- 3. [Critical] Christology (Finished Work) – Suggests that believers can still be under a 'sore and grievous curse' and delivered to Satan, undermining the security of the believer in Christ.

Semantic Warnings:

<p>"Stewardship"</p> <p>In Text: A specific assignment of property by the church hierarchy to an individual, revocable by the order.</p> <p>Evangelical: The responsibility of an individual to manage their God-given resources (time, talent, treasure) for God's glory (1 Peter 4:10).</p> <p>Example: <i>In this text, 'stewardship' is a plot of land assigned to Oliver Cowdery. In the Bible, stewardship is a principle of accountability for whatever one has.</i></p>
<p>"Salvation"</p> <p>In Text: Used here in context of the success of the order and the preservation of the church ('for the salvation of men until I come').</p> <p>Evangelical: Deliverance from sin and its consequences through faith in Christ alone (Ephesians 2:8).</p> <p>Example: <i>The text links the 'united order' directly to the 'salvation of men,' implying the economic system is a vehicle for redemption.</i></p>

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: The text links 'salvation of men' to the establishment and maintenance of the United Order.

How Attained: Implies that faithfulness to these economic covenants is necessary to escape the 'buffetings of Satan' and 'wrath.'

Basis of Assurance: Assurance is based on obedience to the order and the absence of transgression.

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text is antithetical to Sola Fide in this context; it threatens that those who break the economic covenant 'cannot escape the buffetings of satan until the day of redemption,' suggesting a purgatorial or punitive state for unfaithful believers, contrary to Romans 8:1 ('There is therefore now no condemnation').

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

- 1. Organize the United Order of the stake of Zion.
- 2. Deliver unrepentant transgressors to the buffetings of Satan.
- 3. Assign specific lots and houses to named leaders.
- 4. Establish a 'sacred treasury' for printing scriptures.
- 5. Establish a 'secular treasury' for general proceeds.
- 6. Pay all debts.
- 7. Write to New York (Cainhannoch) for debt relief.

Implicit Obligations:

1. Total submission of personal financial agency to the 'voice of the order'.
2. Acceptance of the prophet's authority to distribute real estate.
3. Secrecy regarding the identities involved (implied by use of code names).

Ritual Requirements:

1. Consecration of properties.
2. Ordination of a treasurer.
3. Placing a 'seal' upon the treasury.

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. When you read about the threat of being 'delivered over unto the buffetings of Satan' for breaking an economic covenant, how does that impact your sense of peace in Christ?
2. The text says blessings are given 'inasmuch as he is faithful.' How do you balance this conditional promise with the biblical teaching that we are blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ by grace (Ephesians 1:3)?
3. Do you view your property as something you own and steward for God, or as something the church hierarchy has the authority to reassign?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. Deliverance from Debt – Just as the early Saints sought deliverance from crushing financial debt, all humanity is under a crushing debt of sin we cannot pay. [Colossians 2:14 ('having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness... nailing it to the cross').]
2. God as Owner of All – Acknowledging God's ownership is the first step to surrender. If He owns us, He has the right to save us His way. [1 Corinthians 6:19-20 ('You are not your own; you were bought at a price').]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Performance Anxiety [Moderate] – The repeated phrase 'inasmuch as he is faithful' creates a burden where blessings are constantly at risk of being withdrawn due to human failure.
2. Fear of Divine Retribution [Severe] – The explicit threat of being 'cursed' and delivered to Satan creates a fear-based relationship with God, rather than one based on the security of adoption.
3. Loss of Agency [Moderate] – The requirement to submit all property decisions to the 'voice of the order' removes personal autonomy and creates dependency on the hierarchy.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Prophetic Revelation (The voice of the Lord through Joseph Smith).

Verification Method: Pragmatic results (if you obey, debts will be cleared/hearts softened) and internal spiritual witness.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the fixed canon of Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16) as the final rule of faith. This text relies on ongoing, fluid revelation that dictates temporal/business affairs, blurring the line between spiritual truth and administrative management.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: April 23, 1834

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated)

Textual Issues: This text famously uses 'code names' (Enoch, Pelagoram, etc.) which were inserted into the 1835 edition to replace real names (Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon) to protect the leaders from creditors. Modern editions (since 1981) usually include the real names in brackets or headers.