

SECTION 103

FAITH: Mormonism | TEXT: Doctrine and Covenants | VOLUME: 2013 | AUTHOR: Joseph Smith

OVERVIEW

Received in February 1834, Doctrine and Covenants Section 103 serves as the divine commission for 'Zion's Camp,' an expedition intended to forcibly reinstate Latter-day Saints who had been expelled from Jackson County, Missouri. The text reframes this geopolitical conflict as a spiritual test, asserting that the expulsion occurred because the Saints failed to 'hearken altogether' to previous commandments. Joseph Smith is explicitly identified as a type of Moses, tasked with leading modern Israel to redeem their promised land by power. The revelation imposes a heavy burden of performance: if the Saints obey perfectly from that hour forward, they will prevail; if not, the world will prevail against them. It introduces the theological concept of Saints acting as 'saviors of men' and authorizes the cursing of enemies, promising divine vengeance. The text concludes with logistical mandates to recruit 100 to 500 men to march on Missouri.

KEY FIGURES

Joseph Smith (The Modern Moses), Parley P. Pratt, Lyman Wight, Sidney Rigdon, Hyrum Smith, Frederick G. Williams, Orson Hyde, Orson Pratt

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. CONDITIONAL SOVEREIGNTY

Assertion: Victory over worldly enemies is contingent upon the Saints' strict obedience to commandments from 'this very hour.'

"But inasmuch as they keep not my commandments... the kingdoms of the world shall prevail against them. (D&C 103:8)"

Evangelical Comparison: In this text, the success of the divine plan ('prevailing against mine enemies') is inextricably linked to human performance. If the Saints obey, they conquer; if they disobey, the world conquers them. This introduces a volatility to the Kingdom of God that is foreign to Evangelical theology, where the gates of hell cannot prevail against the Church (Matthew 16:18) because the victory is anchored in Christ's finished work, not the fluctuating obedience of believers. The text shifts the burden of kingdom-maintenance from the Messiah to the members.

2. SAINTS AS SAVIORS

Assertion: Latter-day Saints are designated as 'saviors of men' whose function is to redeem Zion.

"For they were set to be a light unto the world, and to be the saviors of men (D&C 103:9)"

Evangelical Comparison: The text elevates the role of the believer from a witness (Acts 1:8) to a 'savior.' While likely intended in a temporal or instrumental sense regarding the redemption of the land, the terminology blurs the distinction between the Redeemer and the redeemed. In Evangelical theology, humans are recipients of salvation and messengers of the gospel, but never saviors. This doctrine contributes to the Mormon emphasis on human participation in the redemptive process, contrasting with the monergistic salvation found in Reformed Evangelical thought.

3. THEOCRATIC RETRIBUTION

Assertion: Saints are commanded to curse their enemies, with the promise that God will validate these curses.

"And whomsoever ye curse, I will curse, and ye shall avenge me of mine enemies. (D&C 103:25)"

Evangelical Comparison: The text reverts to a pre-Christian, imprecatory ethic, authorizing believers to curse those who drive them from their lands. This stands in direct opposition to the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount ('Love your enemies, bless them that curse you,' Matthew 5:44) and Paul's instruction in Romans 12:14. Evangelicalism maintains that the New Covenant ethic forbids personal or ecclesiastical cursing/vengeance, leaving all judgment to God (Romans 12:19).

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: D&C 103 represents a fundamental departure from New Testament ecclesiology. Where Christ established a spiritual kingdom not of this world (John 18:36), this text attempts to establish a geopolitical kingdom through paramilitary means. Theologically, it replaces the finished work of Christ with a 'redemption' that must be achieved by the 'power' of the Saints acting as 'saviors.' The ethical reversal—commanding curses instead of blessings—marks a distinct break from Christian morality, moving the adherent back to a misunderstanding of Old Testament warfare rather than New Testament grace.

Shared Values:

Belief in divine providence; Willingness to sacrifice for faith; Concept of a chosen people

Friction Points:

- 1. [Critical] New Covenant Ethics – Commands cursing enemies, contradicting Christ's command to love and bless enemies.
- 2. [Major] Sola Gratia – Victory and 'prevailing' are conditioned entirely on human obedience ('hearken from this very hour'), ignoring grace.
- 3. [Major] Solus Christus – Elevates Joseph Smith to a Moses-like mediator role and calls Saints 'saviors,' diminishing the uniqueness of Christ.

Semantic Warnings:

"Redemption"

In Text: The physical recovery of land in Jackson County, Missouri.
Evangelical: Deliverance from the guilt and power of sin through the blood of Christ (Ephesians 1:7).
Example: In D&C 103:15, 'redemption of Zion' refers to land ownership; in Hebrews 9:12, 'eternal redemption' refers to salvation from sin.

"Saviors"

In Text: Saints who rescue the church's temporal interests and land.
Evangelical: Exclusively Jesus Christ (Titus 2:13).
Example: The text calls men 'saviors of men' (v9); the Bible says there is 'no other name under heaven... by which we must be saved' (Acts 4:12).

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: In this specific text, salvation is framed as 'redemption of Zion' (land recovery) and prevailing over enemies.

How Attained: By strict obedience to commandments, gathering, and monetary sacrifice.

Basis of Assurance: Assurance is low and conditional; it depends on 'hearkening from this very hour' (v5).

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text operates on a 'blessings for obedience' covenant structure (Deuteronomic), completely bypassing the New Testament concept of justification by faith alone (Romans 3:28). Success is earned, not gifted.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

- 1. Gather young and middle-aged men to the land of Zion (v22)
- 2. Purchase lands with consecrated money (v23)
- 3. Curse enemies who drive Saints from the land (v24-25)
- 4. Recruit a company of 500 men (or at least 100) (v30-34)
- 5. Lay down life for the cause if necessary (v27)

Implicit Obligations:

- 1. Absolute military and spiritual obedience to Joseph Smith

2. Financial sacrifice for the purchase of Missouri lands
3. Acceptance of persecution as a result of personal/collective sin

Ritual Requirements:

1. Consecration of monies (v23)
2. Prayers of faith for victory (v36)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 9, the text calls the Saints 'saviors of men.' How does that fit with Acts 4:12, which says there is salvation in no one else but Jesus?
2. Verse 25 commands you to curse your enemies so God will avenge you. How do you reconcile that with Jesus' command in Matthew 5:44 to 'bless them that curse you'?
3. The text says victory depends on the Saints hearkening 'altogether' to the commandments. Does this place the burden of the Kingdom's success on your performance or on God's power?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Longing for a Promised Land – Humans long for a place of belonging and rest. The text seeks this in Missouri. [Hebrews 11:10, 16 (Abraham looked for a city built by God, a heavenly country, not an earthly territory).]
2. The Need for a Deliverer – We do need a deliverer to lead us out of bondage, but the bondage is sin, not geography. [John 8:36 ('If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed').]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Performance Anxiety [Severe] – The text blames the persecution of the Saints on their own lack of obedience (v4) and conditions future victory on perfect hearkening (v7-8). This creates a crushing burden where every external setback is interpreted as a result of personal or collective sin.
2. Spiritual Dissonance [Moderate] – The command to curse enemies forces a believer to violate the conscience formed by the New Testament, creating internal conflict between loyalty to the prophet and the plain teachings of Jesus.
3. Messianic Burden [Moderate] – Being told they are 'saviors of men' (v9) places the weight of redemption on the shoulders of the adherents, rather than allowing them to rest in the finished work of the true Savior.

EPISTEMOLOGY

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

Verification Method: Obedience to the revelation is the method of verification; success validates the message, failure is attributed to lack of obedience.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology tests prophecy against Scripture (Acts 17:11, 1 John 4:1). This text demands obedience to a new revelation that contradicts biblical ethics (cursing vs. blessing), creating a closed loop where the prophet cannot be questioned.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: February 24, 1834

Authorship: Joseph Smith

Textual Issues: The text repurposes the 'Salt of the Earth' saying (Matt 5:13) to threaten Saints who fail to redeem the land, changing the metaphor from spiritual influence to political efficacy.