

SECTION 104

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

OVERVIEW

Doctrine and Covenants Section 104, received in April 1834, addresses the financial crisis facing the early Latter-day Saint movement. The 'United Firm' (later edited to 'United Order' in the text), a consecration-based economic system, is dissolved and reorganized due to the transgression and covetousness of some members. The text functions simultaneously as a spiritual decree and a legal administrative document. It assigns specific properties (lots, tanneries, printing offices) to key figures like Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, and Martin Harris, designating these assets as 'stewardships.' Theologically, the text asserts God's absolute ownership of the earth and mandates that the rich be made low and the poor exalted. It introduces severe spiritual consequences for breaking these economic covenants, including being 'cursed' and delivered to the 'buffetings of Satan' until the day of redemption. The revelation also commands the payment of debts and promises divine intervention to soften the hearts of creditors if the Saints are humble.

KEY FIGURES

Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, Martin Harris, Frederick G. Williams, Oliver Cowdery, Newel K. Whitney, John Johnson

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. THE LAW OF STEWARDSHIP

Assertion: God owns the earth; humans are stewards who must account for their management of earthly blessings to the church.

"I, the Lord, stretched out the heavens, and built the earth... and all things therein are mine. (D&C 104:14)"

Evangelical Comparison: Evangelical Christianity teaches stewardship (Psalm 24:1) as a principle of recognizing God's sovereignty over one's resources. However, D&C 104 elevates this to a 'covenant' where specific real estate holdings are assigned by revelation. In Evangelicalism, stewardship is a matter of individual conscience and discipleship; in this text, it is a matter of ecclesiastical assignment and compliance, where failure to manage church-assigned property results in spiritual cursing.

2. CONDITIONAL CURSING AND BUFFETINGS OF SATAN

Assertion: Those who break the economic covenant of the United Order are cursed and delivered to Satan's power until redemption.

"Inasmuch as ye are cut off for transgression, ye cannot escape the buffetings of Satan until the day of redemption. (D&C 104:9)"

Evangelical Comparison: The text introduces a terrifying spiritual state—'buffetings of Satan'—as a penalty for economic unfaithfulness. While Paul uses similar language in 1 Corinthians 5:5 regarding sexual immorality for the purpose of repentance, D&C 104 applies this to financial covenants and implies a duration of punishment ('until the day of redemption'). This suggests a purgatorial concept or a suspension of grace that contradicts the Evangelical understanding of justification, where there is 'no condemnation' for those in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1).

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in the relationship between works and salvation. D&C 104:1 explicitly states the United Order is 'for the salvation of men.' In Evangelical theology, salvation is accomplished solely by Christ's atoning work (Sola Fide). Here, salvation is functionally tied to participation in and obedience to a communal economic system. Furthermore, the text threatens 'cursing' and 'buffetings of Satan' for those who fail in this order, reintroducing a law-based relationship with God where temporal performance dictates spiritual standing.

Shared Values:

God's ultimate ownership of the world; Responsibility to care for the poor; Integrity in paying debts; Stewardship of resources

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Fide (Faith Alone) – Salvation and spiritual standing are tethered to obedience to an economic code and church hierarchy.
2. [Major] Sola Scriptura – Canonizes 19th-century real estate assignments as the binding Word of God.

Semantic Warnings:

"Stewardship"

In Text: A specific property or responsibility assigned by the church hierarchy which one does not own but manages for the church.

Evangelical: The general principle that believers manage their own God-given resources (time, talent, treasure) for His glory.

Example: *In D&C 104, a 'stewardship' is a literal lot of land assigned to Martin Harris. In the Bible, stewardship is a mindset of faithfulness.*

"Salvation"

In Text: In this context (v1), it implies a comprehensive deliverance that includes temporal welfare and exaltation, contingent on the Order.

Evangelical: Deliverance from sin and death through faith in Jesus Christ alone (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Example: *The text claims the economic order is 'for the salvation of men,' linking financial structure to soteriology.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Linked to the 'everlasting order' (v1) and deliverance from the 'buffetings of Satan' (v9).

How Attained: Through faithfulness to covenants, specifically including economic consecration and obedience to the order.

Basis of Assurance: Compliance with the council and successful stewardship.

Comparison to Sola Fide: Directly contrasts with Sola Fide by adding the necessity of the United Order for 'the salvation of men' (v1). Evangelicalism rejects the idea that economic structures are necessary for salvation.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Organize and appoint every man his stewardship (v11)
2. Pay all debts (v78)
3. Separate the United Orders of Kirtland and Zion (v47-48)
4. Establish a sacred treasury for printing scriptures (v58-66)
5. Establish a general treasury for operating expenses (v67-71)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept property assignments from church leadership as divine will
2. Report financial increases to the church treasury
3. Maintain humility to secure financial deliverance

Ritual Requirements:

1. Consecration of properties
2. Common consent voting on treasury usage

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 1, it says this order is 'for the salvation of men.' How does managing property relate to the salvation Jesus accomplished on the cross?
2. Verse 9 mentions being delivered to the 'buffetings of Satan until the day of redemption.' How does this fit with the idea that believers are 'sealed' by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13)?
3. If a person in 1834 failed in their stewardship of a tannery, were they spiritually lost? What does that say about the basis of our standing before God?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The desire for equity (Rich made low, poor exalted) – This reflects the Kingdom of God where the first shall be last. However, true equity comes through the voluntary love of Christ, not forced redistribution. [2 Corinthians 8:9 ('For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor...')]
2. Deliverance from Bondage (Debt) – The text promises deliverance from financial bondage. The Gospel offers deliverance from the greater bondage of sin. [Galatians 5:1 ('Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free...')]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Fear of Cursing [Severe] – The believer lives under the threat that administrative or financial failure constitutes breaking a covenant, leading to a 'sore and grievous curse' and being handed over to Satan.
2. Performance Anxiety [Moderate] – Spiritual standing is measured by the successful management of 'stewardships' and the ability to pay debts, conflating net worth and business acumen with righteousness.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Prophetic Revelation.

Verification Method: Obedience to the revelation and observation of subsequent blessings (or cursings).

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the illuminated Word of God (Psalm 119:105). This text relies on the 'voice of the Spirit' (v36) mediated through the Prophet's specific administrative directives.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: April 23, 1834

Authorship: Joseph Smith

Textual Issues: The original 1835 Doctrine and Covenants used code names (e.g., 'Alam' for Newel K. Whitney) to protect the identity of the firm members due to debt/legal threats. These were later replaced with real names. The term 'United Firm' was changed to 'United Order.'