

SECTION 111

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

OVERVIEW

Doctrine and Covenants Section 111, received on August 6, 1836, addresses Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, Hyrum Smith, and Oliver Cowdery during their trip to Salem, Massachusetts. The historical context, acknowledged in the section heading, is that these leaders traveled to Salem following a rumor that a house there contained hidden treasure which could be used to alleviate the Church's crushing debts in Kirtland. The revelation opens with the Lord stating He is not displeased with their journey despite their 'folly.' It proceeds to promise that there is 'much treasure' in the city for them—both spiritual (converts) and material ('wealth pertaining to gold and silver'). The text explicitly assures them that the city will be given into their hands and that they should not worry about their debts because God will provide the power to pay them. It instructs them to inquire about the city's ancient inhabitants and to stay in the region. Historically, the treasure hunt was unsuccessful, and the leaders returned to Kirtland without the promised gold or silver, leading to increased financial strain and the eventual collapse of the Kirtland Safety Society. This text is significant for its intersection of early Mormon folk magic culture (treasure seeking) with formal revelation.

KEY FIGURES

Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, Hyrum Smith, Oliver Cowdery, The Lord (Voice of the Revelation)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. PROVIDENTIAL WEALTH TRANSFER

Assertion: God will deliver the material wealth (gold and silver) of the wicked or non-believers into the hands of Church leaders to pay ecclesiastical debts.

"And it shall come to pass in due time that I will give this city into your hands... and its wealth pertaining to gold and silver shall be yours. (D&C 111:4)"

Evangelical Comparison: In this text, God is depicted as endorsing a treasure-hunting expedition to solve the practical problem of debt. The promise is specific: 'wealth pertaining to gold and silver.' Evangelical theology generally teaches that God provides through wisdom, stewardship, and the generosity of the church body (2 Corinthians 9:7), rather than through the supernatural revelation of hidden hoards. Furthermore, the New Testament focus is on spiritual treasure (Matthew 6:19-21), whereas this revelation explicitly validates the pursuit of material specie to resolve institutional liabilities.

2. SUBJECTIVE GUIDANCE OF THE SPIRIT

Assertion: The will of God regarding physical location is discerned through feelings of peace and power flowing to the believer.

"And the place where it is my will that you should tarry... shall be signalized unto you by the peace and power of my Spirit, that shall flow unto you. (D&C 111:8)"

Evangelical Comparison: The epistemology here relies on internal emotional states ('peace and power') to determine logistical decisions (where to rent a room). In Evangelical theology, while the 'peace of God' (Philippians 4:7) is a comfort, it is rarely used as a standalone divination tool for geography. The Evangelical baseline emphasizes decision-making through the lens of Scripture (Psalm 119:105), providential circumstances, and wisdom (James 1:5), rather than seeking somatic markers of the Spirit to dictate daily logistics.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in the nature of the revelation and the character of God presented. In D&C 111, God is depicted as validating a folk-magic worldview—specifically, the search for hidden treasure in a cellar—by promising that such wealth belongs to the prophet. When the specific material promises ('gold and silver') failed to manifest, it created a theological crisis regarding the reliability of Joseph Smith's revelations. From an Evangelical perspective, God does not make false promises. Deuteronomy 18:22 states that if

a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord and the thing does not follow, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken. The text's conflation of spiritual mission with a failed financial scheme creates an irreconcilable difference with the biblical portrayal of apostolic ministry.

Shared Values:

God's sovereignty over circumstances.; The desire to evangelize ('gather out' people).; Trusting God with anxieties (debts/needs).

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura (Prophetic Reliability) – The text contains a specific predictive prophecy (acquisition of gold/silver) that historically failed, violating biblical standards for a true prophet (Deut 18).
2. [Critical] Theology Proper (God's Veracity) – Attributes a false promise to God. God promised power to pay debts via this wealth; the debts were not paid, and the church faced financial ruin shortly after.
3. [Major] Sola Scriptura (Sufficiency) – Replaces biblical wisdom on finances and guidance with extra-biblical revelation based on subjective feelings.

Semantic Warnings:

"Treasure"

In Text: Used with a double meaning: literal 'gold and silver' (v4) and spiritual converts (v2).

Evangelical: Usually refers to spiritual rewards in heaven (Matthew 6:20) or the Gospel itself (2 Corinthians 4:7).

Example: In D&C 111:4, 'wealth pertaining to gold and silver' refers to literal currency to pay debts, whereas Evangelicalism would typically interpret 'treasure' in a missiological context as the value of the soul or the Gospel message.

"Follies"

In Text: Refers here to the specific foolishness of the treasure hunt or general human weakness, yet God still validates the journey.

Evangelical: Sin or foolishness that usually requires repentance, not divine accommodation.

Example: The text says God is 'not displeased... notwithstanding your follies,' implying a tolerance for the treasure-hunting motivation that initiated the trip.

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Implied as being 'gathered out' for the benefit of Zion (v2).

How Attained: Through the instrumentality of the priesthood leaders (v2).

Basis of Assurance: Assurance is tied to the success of the gathering and the building up of Zion.

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text focuses on the 'benefit of Zion' and the gathering of people, emphasizing the building of a socio-religious community rather than the individual's justification by faith alone (Romans 3:28).

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Form acquaintance with men in the city (v3)
2. Concern not yourselves about your debts (v5)
3. Concern not yourselves about Zion (v6)
4. Tarry in this place and regions round about (v7)
5. Inquire diligently concerning the more ancient inhabitants and founders (v9)
6. Be wise as serpents and yet without sin (v11)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Trust that the treasure hunt was divinely sanctioned despite being called a 'folly'
2. Believe that the failure to find gold was a matter of timing ('due time') rather than a false prophecy

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 4, the Lord promises that the city's 'wealth pertaining to gold and silver shall be yours.' History records they returned without this wealth. How do you interpret this unfulfilled promise?
2. The section heading mentions they went to Salem to investigate a claim about money. Does it trouble you that a revelation from God was used to validate a treasure hunt?
3. If a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord promising debt relief that doesn't happen (v5), how does that fit with Deuteronomy 18:20-22?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Burden of Debt – The text addresses the crushing anxiety of financial debt. The Gospel addresses the crushing reality of spiritual debt. We cannot pay it, no matter how much 'treasure' we find. [Colossians 2:14 - 'having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross.]'
2. Divine Patience with Folly – The text shows a God who is patient with human foolishness. In the Gospel, God goes further–He doesn't just tolerate folly; He redeems sinners who are enemies of God. [Romans 5:8 - 'But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.]'

Spiritual Weight:

1. Cognitive Dissonance [Severe] – The believer must reconcile a clear promise of 'gold and silver' with the historical reality that it never appeared. This forces the adherent to distrust their own perception of reality or redefine plain language to protect the prophet's authority.
2. Uncertainty of Divine Guidance [Moderate] – If the 'peace and power of the Spirit' (v8) led the prophet to a failed treasure hunt, the believer may struggle to trust their own spiritual impressions or the guidance of current leaders.
3. Financial Anxiety [Moderate] – The text implies that if they were faithful enough or if it were 'due time', the debt would be paid supernaturally. The failure to pay debts can be internalized as a lack of spiritual power or worthiness.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Direct prophetic revelation and subjective internal experience.

Verification Method: The text implies verification would come through the fulfillment of the promise (receiving the gold/silver), though historically this verification failed.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology tests prophecy by its fulfillment (Deuteronomy 18:22). Since the gold was not found and the debts were not paid via this means, an Evangelical analysis would classify this as a failed prophecy, whereas the text relies on the authority of the speaker ('I, the Lord') to override empirical reality.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: August 6, 1836.

Authorship: Joseph Smith.

Textual Issues: The section heading in modern editions admits the leaders went to 'investigate this claim' [of treasure], confirming the historical context of a treasure hunt.