

SECTION 112

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

OVERVIEW

Received in July 1837 during a period of significant internal strife and apostasy in Kirtland, Ohio, this revelation addresses Thomas B. Marsh, then President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. The text serves a dual purpose: it commissions the Twelve to take the 'warning voice' to all nations (coinciding with the first mission to England), and it strictly reinforces the ecclesiastical hierarchy. The Lord, speaking through Joseph Smith, warns Marsh against pride and instructs him to admonish the Twelve, some of whom were in rebellion against Smith's leadership. Crucially, the text establishes a mediatorial chain of command: receiving the Twelve is necessary to receive the First Presidency, which is necessary to receive Christ. It asserts that the 'keys of the dispensation' are held by Joseph Smith and cannot be taken from him, provided he remains faithful. The text concludes with eschatological urgency, warning that 'darkness covereth the earth' and that judgment will begin at the Lord's house, placing a heavy burden on the Apostles to cleanse themselves of the 'blood of this generation' through diligent missionary work.

KEY FIGURES

Jesus Christ (The Speaker), Thomas B. Marsh, Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, Hyrum Smith, The Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. HIERARCHICAL MEDIATION

Assertion: Acceptance of Christ is contingent upon accepting the First Presidency and the Twelve Apostles.

"Whosoever receiveth my word receiveth me, and whosoever receiveth me, receiveth those, the First Presidency, whom I have sent (D&C 112:20)"

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, based on 1 Timothy 2:5, there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. D&C 112:20 establishes a nested mediation where access to Christ is functionally dependent on receiving the ecclesiastical hierarchy (The Twelve and the First Presidency). This reintroduces a sacerdotal structure similar to the Levitical priesthood but centered on the authority of Joseph Smith and his counselors, rather than the direct access granted to all believers through the torn veil (Hebrews 10:19-20).

2. KEYS OF THE DISPENSATION

Assertion: Specific authority ('keys') has been sent down from heaven and 'the fathers' to Joseph Smith and the Twelve to administer the gospel in the last days.

"The keys of the dispensation, which ye have received, have come down from the fathers, and last of all, being sent down from heaven unto you. (D&C 112:32)"

Evangelical Comparison: This text presents 'keys' as a metaphysical authorization required to operate the Kingdom of God, transmitted from ancient patriarchs ('the fathers') to Joseph Smith. Evangelicalism holds that the 'keys' represent the authority of the Gospel message to open heaven to the repentant and close it to the unrepentant. The Mormon view institutionalizes this authority, making the institution the gatekeeper of salvation, whereas the Evangelical view places the power in the message of the Cross itself.

3. CONDITIONAL SALVATION VIA RITUAL

Assertion: Salvation requires both belief and baptism; lack of baptism results in damnation.

"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, and he that believeth not, and is not baptized, shall be damned. (D&C 112:29)"

Evangelical Comparison: While citing language similar to Mark 16:16, Mormon theology interprets this verse as establishing baptism by proper authority as an absolute necessity for exaltation (salvation). Evangelical soteriology (Ephesians 2:8-9, Romans 10:9) posits that justification occurs at the moment of saving faith, independent of works or rituals. In this text, the ritual is a gatekeeping mechanism controlled by those holding the 'keys.'

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in the mediation of grace. In this text, grace and authority flow from Christ -> First Presidency -> Twelve -> The World. This structure makes the believer's relationship with God dependent on their relationship with Joseph Smith and his successors. Furthermore, the burden of salvation is partially shifted to the believer, who must 'cleanse their garments' of the blood of their generation through works of evangelism, a concept foreign to the Evangelical understanding of the imputed righteousness of Christ.

Shared Values:

The necessity of evangelism; The corruption of the world/sin; Jesus as Alpha and Omega; The need for humility

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Universal Priesthood – Establishes a rigid hierarchy where spiritual access and authority are mediated by the First Presidency and Twelve.
2. [Critical] Sola Fide – Adds baptism and obedience to leaders as requirements for salvation/exaltation.
3. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Asserts new, binding revelation through Joseph Smith that supersedes or adds to the Bible.

Semantic Warnings:

"Keys"

In Text: Exclusive administrative authority/permission granted to church leaders to govern the Kingdom of God.

Evangelical: The authority of the Gospel message to open the Kingdom of Heaven to believers (Matthew 16:19).

Example: *In D&C 112:16, Thomas Marsh holds 'keys' regarding the Twelve. In Evangelicalism, no man holds authority over another's access to God.*

"Saved"

In Text: Exaltation in the celestial kingdom, contingent on baptism and priesthood ordinances (v29).

Evangelical: Justification and deliverance from the penalty of sin by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8).

Example: *Verse 29 links salvation directly to the act of baptism, whereas the thief on the cross was saved without it.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Escape from the 'day of wrath' and entry into the kingdom via belief and baptism.

How Attained: Through belief, baptism (v29), and loyalty to the priesthood keys (v15-20).

Basis of Assurance: Assurance is found in obedience to the hierarchy and active participation in the 'work' (v33-34).

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text explicitly adds baptism as a condition for salvation (v29), contradicting the evangelical understanding of Sola Fide where works are fruit, not root.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Gird up loins and take up the cross (v14)
2. Rebel not against Joseph Smith (v15)
3. Preach the gospel to every creature (v28)
4. Admonish the Twelve sharply for their sins (v12)
5. Cleanse hearts and garments (v33)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Submit to the First Presidency as a proxy for receiving Christ
2. Accept the 'warning voice' mandate to avoid blood guilt
3. Recognize the exclusive authority of the Mormon priesthood

Ritual Requirements:

1. Baptism (v29)
2. Washing/Cleansing of garments (metaphorical and potentially literal reference to washing rituals) (v33)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 20, it says receiving the First Presidency is how we receive Christ. How does that fit with Jesus' invitation in Matthew 11:28 to come directly to Him?
2. Verse 33 mentions the 'blood of this generation' being required at your hands. Do you feel a personal weight or anxiety that if you don't share the gospel enough, you might be held responsible for others' salvation?
3. If salvation comes by 'belief and baptism' (v29), what happens to someone who believes in Jesus with all their heart but dies before being baptized?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Warning Voice – Just as a watchman warns of danger out of care, the Holy Spirit warns us of sin. However, Christ took the penalty of that danger upon Himself. [Colossians 1:28 (We proclaim Him, admonishing every man...)]
2. Abasing Oneself – This mirrors the biblical truth that we must come to the end of ourselves to find Christ. The difference is that in Christ, we are exalted by His merit, not our subsequent works. [James 4:10, Philippians 2:8-9]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Works-Righteousness / Blood Guilt [Severe] – The text imposes a crushing burden (v33) that the missionary is responsible for the salvation of others. If they fail to warn, the 'blood' of the lost is on their hands. This creates anxiety and a performance-based relationship with God.
2. Institutional Dependence [Severe] – The believer is told they cannot fully receive Christ without receiving the specific men in the First Presidency (v20). This creates a fear of questioning leadership, as it equates to rejecting Jesus.
3. Fear of Judgment [Moderate] – The text emphasizes 'vengeance,' 'burning,' and 'desolation' (v24) coming upon the earth, fostering a siege mentality where safety is only found within the institutional structure.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Prophetic Revelation (Joseph Smith speaking for God).

Verification Method: Obedience to the revelation promises the Spirit's guidance (v10, v22).

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the objective standard of written Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16) to test spirits. This text demands submission to a living prophet's voice as the primary source of truth, with the text itself being the evidence of that authority.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: July 23, 1837

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated as revelation)

Textual Issues: The revelation was received during a time when Thomas B. Marsh was faithful, but he later apostatized. The text anticipates this tension.