

SECTION 113

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

OVERVIEW

Doctrine and Covenants Section 113, received in March 1838, takes the form of a catechism or Q&A session between Joseph Smith and Elias Higbee regarding the interpretation of specific passages in Isaiah (chapters 11 and 52). The text serves a critical theological function in early Mormonism by anchoring the movement's authority in Old Testament prophecy. While the text identifies 'the Stem of Jesse' as Christ, it significantly diverges from traditional Christian exegesis by identifying the 'Rod' and 'Root' of Jesse not as Christ, but as a 'servant' in the hands of Christ—understood in LDS theology to be Joseph Smith or a future prophetic figure. This servant is claimed to possess the 'keys of the kingdom' and 'priesthood' by right of lineage (descending from both Jesse and Ephraim/Joseph). Furthermore, the text redefines the 'strength' of Zion mentioned in Isaiah 52:1 as the 'authority of the priesthood.' This revelation effectively shifts the focus of Messianic prophecy from a singular Christological fulfillment to a dual fulfillment involving a latter-day restorer, thereby validating the hierarchical structure and priesthood authority of the LDS Church as essential for the 'gathering' and redemption of Israel.

KEY FIGURES

Christ (The Stem of Jesse), The Servant (The Rod/Root - implicitly Joseph Smith), Elias Higbee (The questioner), Isaiah (The ancient prophet referenced)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. THE DUAL MESSIANIC FIGURES

Assertion: While Christ is the Stem of Jesse, the 'Rod' and 'Root' are a distinct servant (Joseph Smith) who holds the keys of the kingdom.

"Behold, thus saith the Lord: It is a servant in the hands of Christ... on whom there is laid much power. (D&C 113:4)"

Evangelical Comparison: In standard Evangelical exegesis, Isaiah 11 is a cohesive Messianic prophecy where the Stem, Rod (Shoot), and Branch all refer to the Messiah, Jesus Christ (Romans 15:12, Revelation 5:5). D&C 113 splits these titles, assigning the 'Stem' to Christ but the 'Rod' and 'Root' to a human servant with specific lineage (Ephraim/Jesse). This introduces a necessary human intermediary in the eschatological plan who holds 'keys' and 'power' distinct from, though subservient to, Christ. This diminishes the sufficiency of Christ's office as the sole mediator between God and man (1 Timothy 2:5).

2. PRIESTHOOD AS ZION'S STRENGTH

Assertion: The 'strength' Zion must put on (Isaiah 52:1) is defined specifically as the authority of the priesthood.

"to put on her strength is to put on the authority of the priesthood, which she, Zion, has a right to by lineage (D&C 113:8)"

Evangelical Comparison: The Evangelical understanding of Isaiah 52:1 is that Zion (Jerusalem/the people of God) is called to clothe herself in the strength of the Lord for redemption. D&C 113 institutionalizes this metaphor, equating spiritual strength with 'priesthood authority.' Furthermore, it claims this authority is a 'right by lineage.' This contradicts the New Testament teaching that the Levitical priesthood is obsolete and that all believers constitute a 'royal priesthood' through Christ (1 Peter 2:9, Hebrews 7:11-12), removing the need for lineage-based authority.

3. LINEAGE-BASED AUTHORITY

Assertion: Authority and keys belong to specific individuals based on their descent from Jesse and Ephraim (Joseph).

"it is a descendant of Jesse, as well as of Joseph, unto whom rightly belongs the priesthood (D&C 113:6)"

Evangelical Comparison: The New Testament explicitly moves away from genealogical qualifications for ministry (1 Timothy 1:4, Titus 3:9). D&C 113 re-establishes a quasi-Levitical requirement where spiritual rights and 'keys'

are tied to physical lineage (specifically the House of Joseph/Ephraim). This creates a theological aristocracy that is foreign to the 'whosoever will' nature of the Gospel and the qualification of elders based on character rather than bloodline (1 Timothy 3).

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental theological gap lies in the sufficiency of Christ. In Evangelical theology, Jesus is the Stem, the Root, and the Branch; He holds the keys of David (Revelation 3:7) and shares his authority with the church generally, not a specific lineage. D&C 113 bifurcates this authority, positing that while Christ is the source, the administration of salvation ('gathering,' 'keys') requires a specific human servant and a specific priesthood structure. This effectively replaces the 'Priesthood of All Believers' with a hierarchical, necessary mediation system that mirrors the Old Covenant rather than the New.

Shared Values:

Jesus Christ is the Messiah (Stem of Jesse); The Bible (Isaiah) is the Word of God; God desires to redeem His people

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Christology – Attributes Messianic titles (Rod, Root) and functions (Ensign, Gathering) to a human servant.
2. [Major] Universal Priesthood – Re-establishes a lineage-based, hierarchical priesthood as necessary for Zion's redemption.
3. [Major] Sola Scriptura – Authoritatively reinterprets biblical text via new revelation to support extra-biblical doctrines.
4. [Major] Sola Fide – Implies that 'putting on strength' (redemption/restoration) requires priesthood authority, not just faith.

Semantic Warnings:

"Priesthood"

In Text: The power and authority of God delegated to man, held by right of lineage, necessary to redeem Zion.

Evangelical: The status of all believers who have direct access to God through Christ (1 Peter 2:5); or the unique High Priesthood of Jesus (Hebrews 7).

Example: In D&C 113, 'putting on strength' means getting ordained to an office. In Christianity, it means relying on God's grace.

"Zion"

In Text: A specific gathered community/location established by priesthood authority in the last days.

Evangelical: The heavenly city of God (Hebrews 12:22) or the spiritual body of believers.

Example: D&C 113 implies Zion is a physical gathering requiring priesthood governance.

"Rod/Root of Jesse"

In Text: A servant (Joseph Smith) descended from Jesse and Ephraim.

Evangelical: Messianic titles referring to Jesus Christ (Romans 15:12).

Example: D&C 113 claims the Rod is a servant 'in the hands of Christ,' whereas Isaiah 11 implies the Rod *is* the King/Judge.

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Redemption of Zion, gathering of Israel, and loosing of bands (curses).

How Attained: Through the 'servant' who holds the keys and by 'putting on' the authority of the priesthood.

Basis of Assurance: Connection to the authorized priesthood lineage and gathering.

Comparison to Sola Fide: D&C 113 presents a corporate and hierarchical salvation where the 'remnants' must return to the Lord *and* the Priesthood authority to be loosed from curses. This contrasts with Sola Fide, where the curse of the law is broken by Christ alone (Galatians 3:13) through faith.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Put on the authority of the priesthood (interpreted from Isaiah 52:1)
2. Return to the Lord (scattered remnants)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Recognize the 'Servant' (Joseph Smith) as the holder of the keys
2. Accept the lineage-based claim to priesthood authority
3. Gather as Zion

Ritual Requirements:

1. Priesthood ordination (implied by 'put on the authority')

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In D&C 113, the 'Rod' is described as a servant in the hands of Christ. How do you reconcile this with Romans 15:12, where Paul identifies the 'Root of Jesse' specifically as Jesus Christ who rules the Gentiles?
2. The text says Zion's strength is the 'authority of the priesthood.' How does this compare to the New Testament teaching that our strength comes from the 'power of his might' (Ephesians 6:10) and the Holy Spirit, rather than an office?
3. If the priesthood belongs to the lineage of Jesse and Ephraim, how does that fit with Hebrews 7, which says the priesthood has changed from a lineage-based system to an indestructible life in Christ?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. Loosing the Bands – The text correctly identifies a human need: to be free from the 'bands' or curses that bind us. This is a powerful bridge to the Gospel. [John 8:36 - 'If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.]
2. The Desire for a Champion (The Rod) – The text looks for a 'servant' with 'much power' to set things right. This longing for a powerful leader is fulfilled in Jesus. [Revelation 19:11-16 - Jesus is the true Champion with all power.]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Intermediary Dependence [Moderate] – The believer is taught that access to the full blessings of Zion and the 'keys' of the kingdom requires submission to a human servant/lineage. They cannot bypass the 'Rod' to get to the 'Stem.'
2. Performance/Authority Anxiety [Moderate] – Spiritual strength is equated with holding priesthood authority. This places a burden on men to obtain and maintain office to be 'strong,' and on women to be dependent on that authority.
3. Epistemological Uncertainty [Severe] – By redefining plain biblical texts to mean something entirely different (e.g., Rod = Joseph Smith), the adherent loses confidence in their ability to understand the Bible without the Prophet's interpretation.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Prophetic Revelation (The Prophet asks God, God answers the Prophet).

Verification Method: Acceptance of the Prophet's testimony and the internal consistency of the LDS worldview.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the illumination of the Holy Spirit to understand the sufficient Scriptures (1 Corinthians 2:12-13), rather than requiring a modern prophet to decode hidden meanings or add new referents (like Joseph Smith) to ancient prophecies.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: March 1838

Authorship: Joseph Smith

Textual Issues: The text assumes the KJV wording of Isaiah is the precise text to be analyzed.