

SECTION 116

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

OVERVIEW

Doctrine and Covenants Section 116 is a short but theologically dense revelation given to Joseph Smith on May 19, 1838, in Daviess County, Missouri. In this text, Smith identifies a specific geographic location—Spring Hill—as 'Adam-ondi-Ahman.' The text provides two major theological assertions: first, it establishes an American geography for primeval and eschatological biblical events, claiming this location is where Adam will return to visit his posterity. Second, and most significantly for comparative theology, it explicitly identifies Adam as the 'Ancient of Days' mentioned in the book of Daniel. This identification fundamentally alters the interpretation of Daniel 7, shifting the title from God the Father (the traditional Christian understanding) to the first man, Adam. This revelation served to anchor the early Latter-day Saint community to the Missouri landscape, imbuing the land with sacred history and future prophetic importance.

KEY FIGURES

The Lord, Adam (identified as the Ancient of Days), Daniel the Prophet, Joseph Smith

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. IDENTIFICATION OF ADAM AS THE ANCIENT OF DAYS

Assertion: The text asserts that the 'Ancient of Days' mentioned in Daniel 7 is Adam, the first man.

"...the Ancient of Days shall sit, as spoken of by Daniel the prophet."

Evangelical Comparison: In Daniel 7:9-14, the 'Ancient of Days' is seated on a flaming throne, and the 'Son of Man' (Jesus) comes *to* Him to receive dominion. Evangelical scholarship universally identifies the Ancient of Days as God the Father (or the Triune Godhead in judgment). By identifying Adam as the Ancient of Days, D&C 116 creates a theological hierarchy where the Son of Man (Jesus) would theoretically approach Adam to receive dominion, or at least places Adam in a role of divine judgment reserved for God. This blurs the Creator/creature distinction, elevating Adam to a semi-divine status consistent with later LDS theology (exaltation) but contradictory to the biblical insistence that God alone is the Sovereign Judge and King.

2. SACRED AMERICAN GEOGRAPHY (ADAM-ONDI-AHMAN)

Assertion: A specific hill in Missouri is the site of Adam's future return and implied past dwelling.

"Spring Hill is named by the Lord Adam-ondi-Ahman... it is the place where Adam shall come to visit his people..."

Evangelical Comparison: While the Bible locates the Garden of Eden near the Tigris and Euphrates rivers (Genesis 2:14), D&C 116 asserts that Adam's history and future eschatological role are tied to Missouri, USA. This is part of a broader LDS theological movement to establish the Americas as a promised land equal to or surpassing Israel in dispensational importance. For Evangelicals, this is seen as an extra-biblical innovation that lacks historical or archaeological support and distracts from the Christ-centric geography of the Bible (Jerusalem/Zion).

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The primary theological gap is the identity of the 'Ancient of Days.' In Evangelical theology, this title in Daniel 7 refers to the Eternal God, distinct from the Son of Man. By applying this title to Adam, Mormonism blurs the line between Creator and creature, supporting the LDS doctrine that Adam is an exalted being who holds keys of presidency over the earth. This contradicts the Evangelical view of Adam as a fallen, finite man saved by grace. Furthermore, the 'Americanizing' of biblical geography shifts the focus from the universal scope of the Gospel to a particularistic American exceptionalism.

Shared Values:

Belief in the literal existence of Adam.; Belief in the Second Coming (though the details differ).; Reverence for the book of Daniel.

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Theology Proper / Trinity – Assigning a divine title ('Ancient of Days') and role (Judge of nations) to a created being (Adam).
2. [Major] Sola Scriptura – Reinterprets Daniel 7 via extra-biblical revelation, contradicting the text's internal context.
3. [Major] Christology – Distracts from the centrality of Christ's return by inserting a preliminary return of Adam to Missouri.

Semantic Warnings:

"Ancient of Days"

In Text: Adam, the first man (Michael).

Evangelical: God the Father (or the Triune God), the Eternal Judge (Daniel 7:9).

Example: *In D&C 116, Adam sits as the Ancient of Days. In Daniel 7, the Son of Man comes to the Ancient of Days to receive the Kingdom.*

"Zion"

In Text: A literal city to be built in Independence/Missouri region.

Evangelical: Historically Jerusalem; spiritually the Kingdom of God or the New Jerusalem (Hebrews 12:22).

Example: *D&C 116 reinforces the Missouri location as the center of Zion's future history.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Implicitly linked to the gathering of Israel and the priesthood keys held by Adam.

How Attained: Not explicitly discussed, but implies participation in the gathering at the appointed place.

Basis of Assurance: Confidence in the prophetic roadmap of the end times.

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text focuses on location and lineage (Adam's people) rather than faith in Christ's finished work. It emphasizes a future event involving Adam rather than the completed event of the Cross.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept Missouri as a location of supreme spiritual significance.
2. Accept the reinterpretation of biblical prophecy (Daniel 7) through Joseph Smith's revelation.
3. Prepare for a literal gathering of Adam's posterity in Missouri.

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In Daniel 7, the Son of Man (Jesus) approaches the Ancient of Days to receive the Kingdom. If Adam is the Ancient of Days, does that mean Jesus receives the Kingdom from Adam?
2. Why do you think the Bible places Eden in the Middle East (Genesis 2), while this section places Adam's history in Missouri?
3. How does the role of Adam as the 'Ancient of Days' fit with Isaiah 43:11, where God says, 'I, even I, am the Lord; and beside me there is no saviour'?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Meeting Place – Humanity longs for a place to meet with our ancient father and with God. In the Gospel, Jesus is that meeting place. [John 1:51 - Jesus describes Himself as the ladder between heaven and earth (referencing Jacob's Bethel). He is the true 'place' of meeting.]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Confusion of Deity [Moderate] – By elevating Adam to the role of the 'Ancient of Days,' the believer is burdened with a complex hierarchy of semi-divine beings rather than the simplicity of the Trinity. It creates a theological system where one must reverence Adam in ways that border on worship.

2. Cognitive Dissonance [Moderate] – The believer must maintain that Missouri is the site of biblical antiquity despite all historical, archaeological, and geological evidence pointing to the contrary. This requires a compartmentalization of faith and reason.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Prophetic Revelation

Verification Method: Testimony of the Spirit confirming Joseph Smith's prophetic office.

Evangelical Contrast: Evangelical epistemology relies on the 'analogy of faith' (Scripture interpreting Scripture) and historical-grammatical exegesis. D&C 116 relies on the authority of the modern prophet to define truth, even when it contradicts the plain reading of biblical texts (like Daniel 7).

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: May 19, 1838

Authorship: Joseph Smith

Textual Issues: The text is an extract from Joseph Smith's journal, later canonized. It reflects the specific historical context of the Mormon settlement in Daviess County.