

SECTION 117

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

OVERVIEW

Delivered in July 1838 at Far West, Missouri, Doctrine and Covenants Section 117 addresses the hesitation of church leaders William Marks and Newel K. Whitney to leave Kirtland, Ohio, following the financial collapse of the Kirtland Safety Society. The text frames their reluctance to abandon property as 'covetousness' and 'littleness of soul.' Joseph Smith, speaking as the Lord, asserts divine ownership over all creation to minimize the importance of their Kirtland assets. The revelation introduces significant theological geography, identifying Spring Hill, Missouri, as 'Adam-ondi-Ahman,' the place where Adam dwelt. It commands the leaders to gather to Zion (Missouri) immediately. Additionally, it praises Oliver Granger for his willingness to sacrifice for the First Presidency, promising that his name would be held in sacred remembrance. The text serves as a test of loyalty: will the leaders trust the Prophet's directive to relocate and sacrifice their financial stability, or will they cling to their crumbling assets in Ohio?

KEY FIGURES

The Lord (Voice of the text), William Marks, Newel K. Whitney, Oliver Granger, Adam (referenced historically)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. SACRED GEOGRAPHY (ADAM-ONDI-AHMAN)

Assertion: The text asserts that Adam dwelt in what is now Daviess County, Missouri.

"Is there not room enough on the mountains of Adam-ondi-Ahman... or the land where Adam dwelt? (D&C 117:8)"

Evangelical Comparison: This text canonizes a specific Mormon claim that the biblical patriarchs lived in North America. In Genesis 2:10-14, the Garden of Eden is associated with the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in the Near East. D&C 117 relocates this sacred history to Missouri. For the Evangelical, this is a rejection of the historical context of the Bible in favor of a new, American mythology that elevates the United States to the status of a 'Holy Land' equal to or surpassing Israel in primordial importance.

2. THE LAW OF SACRIFICE

Assertion: Sacrifice of material goods for the church is more sacred than the increase (profit) itself.

"For his sacrifice shall be more sacred unto me than his increase, saith the Lord. (D&C 117:13)"

Evangelical Comparison: The text elevates the act of losing money for the cause ('sacrifice') above successful stewardship ('increase'). In Evangelical theology, resources are to be managed wisely for God's glory (stewardship), and giving is a response to grace (2 Corinthians 9:7). In this text, the sacrifice itself is a mechanism of holiness, suggesting that the suffering or loss incurred by obeying the prophet generates spiritual merit. This creates a system where financial ruin, if incurred while obeying church leadership, is reframed as a spiritual virtue.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: While the exhortation against materialism resonates with Christian teaching, the theological gap is immense due to the 'Americanization' of biblical history. By claiming Missouri is where Adam dwelt, Smith decouples the biblical narrative from its actual historical setting. Furthermore, the text equates 'repentance' not just with turning from sin, but with physically moving to a specific location commanded by Smith. In Evangelicalism, repentance is a heart-posture toward God; here, it is a logistical compliance with the Prophet's expansionist goals.

Shared Values:

God's sovereignty over creation; Warning against covetousness; Call to prioritize spiritual things over material wealth

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Adds new historical 'facts' about Adam and new commandments not in the Bible.
2. [Major] Historical/Biblical Inerrancy – Relocates Genesis events to North America, contradicting the biblical geographical record.
3. [Major] Sola Fide – Implies that spiritual standing ('sacred remembrance') is earned through financial sacrifice and obedience to relocation orders.

Semantic Warnings:

"Zion"

In Text: A literal geographic location in Missouri (Far West/Adam-ondi-Ahman).

Evangelical: Historically Jerusalem; theologically the Kingdom of God or the heavenly city (Hebrews 12:22).

Example: When the text says 'come up hither unto... Zion,' it means move to Missouri, not approach God spiritually.

"Nicolaitane band"

In Text: Likely refers to dissenters within the Mormon church in Kirtland who opposed Smith.

Evangelical: A specific heretical sect in the early church mentioned in Revelation 2.

Example: Smith repurposes a biblical heresy label to demonize internal critics.

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Implicitly linked to gathering with the Saints in Zion and obeying the prophet.

How Attained: Through obedience to the command to gather and sacrifice property.

Basis of Assurance: The promise that 'sacrifice shall be more sacred... than increase.'

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text focuses entirely on works (moving, settling debts, presiding) as the basis for God's pleasure. Romans 4:5 states that God justifies the ungodly by faith, not by their 'sacrifices' or geographic relocation.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Settle business speedily in Kirtland
2. Journey to Missouri before the snows come
3. Repent of covetous desires
4. Turn out properties for debts
5. Come up to the land of Adam-ondi-Ahman

Implicit Obligations:

1. Prioritize the Prophet's geographic directives over financial stability
2. Accept the redefinition of American geography as biblical holy land
3. Support the First Presidency financially regardless of personal cost

Ritual Requirements:

1. None explicitly detailed in this text, though 'Bishop' duties are mentioned

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. The text says Adam dwelt in Missouri (Adam-ondi-Ahman). How do you reconcile this with the Bible placing Eden near the Tigris and Euphrates rivers?
2. In verse 13, it says Oliver Granger's sacrifice is 'more sacred' than his increase. Do you feel that your standing with God depends on how much you sacrifice for the church?

3. If a leader commanded you to sell your home and move today, would you consider it a sin ('covetousness') to hesitate?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. Littleness of Soul – The text correctly identifies that humans often cling to petty, temporal things ('littleness of soul') rather than the eternal. This longing for something greater is satisfied not by a move to Missouri, but by being united with Christ. [Philippians 3:7-8 (Counting all things loss for the surpassing worth of knowing Christ)]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Financial/Geographic Instability [Severe] – The believer is under constant pressure that their home and stability are not their own; God (via the prophet) may demand immediate relocation and liquidation of assets at any time.
2. Performance/Sacrifice [Moderate] – The idea that 'sacrifice' is more sacred than 'increase' creates a perverse incentive where suffering and loss are seen as higher spiritual states than wise stewardship, potentially leading to self-inflicted financial harm to prove loyalty.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Prophetic Revelation.

Verification Method: Obedience to the command proves the truth; the text implies that 'tarrying' leads to negative consequences, serving as negative verification.

Evangelical Contrast: Evangelicals test prophecy against Scripture (1 Thessalonians 5:21, Acts 17:11). This text demands obedience based on the voice of the prophet alone, redefining reality (geography) based on that authority.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: July 8, 1838

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated)

Textual Issues: The term 'Olaha Shinehah' is an example of Smith's 'Adamic language' or glossolalia integrated into revelation.