

# SECTION 118

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

## OVERVIEW

Given on July 8, 1838, in Far West, Missouri, Doctrine and Covenants Section 118 addresses a critical crisis in early Mormon leadership. Following the financial collapse in Kirtland and internal strife, several original members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles (including Luke Johnson, Lyman Johnson, John F. Boynton, and William E. McLellin) had been excommunicated or removed for dissent. This revelation directs Joseph Smith to reorganize the Quorum, appointing new members including John Taylor, Wilford Woodruff, and Willard Richards—men who would become pivotal in future LDS history. The text commands the remaining faithful apostles to prepare for a mission 'over the great waters' (to Great Britain). Most notably, verse 5 contains a highly specific prophecy commanding the Twelve to depart for this mission from the temple site in Far West on exactly April 26, 1839. This prophecy became a test of faith, as by that date, the Mormons had been expelled from Missouri under threat of extermination, making a return to Far West to fulfill the literal requirement of the revelation life-threatening.

## KEY FIGURES

Joseph Smith, The Lord (Voice of), Thomas B. Marsh, John Taylor, Wilford Woodruff, Willard Richards, John E. Page

## DOCTRINES ANALYZED

### 1. APOSTOLIC SUCCESSION AND FALLIBILITY

**Assertion:** Apostles can fall from grace and lose their authority, requiring replacement by others appointed through revelation.

"let men be appointed to supply the place of those who are fallen. (D&C 118:1)"

**Evangelical Comparison:** In Mormon theology, the Quorum of the Twelve is a perpetual governing body with keys of authority that must be maintained. If a member apostatizes, they must be replaced to maintain the quorum's integrity. In contrast, Evangelical Christianity holds that the office of Apostle (capital 'A') was limited to eyewitnesses of the resurrected Christ commissioned directly by Him. While the function of 'sent ones' (missionaries) continues, the foundational office does not. The idea that an Apostle can 'fall' and need replacement is only seen in the Bible regarding Judas Iscariot (Acts 1), whereas Mormonism institutionalizes this as a mechanism for maintaining organizational hierarchy.

### 2. PROPHETIC SPECIFICITY

**Assertion:** God provides specific logistical details (dates, locations) for church administration through the prophet.

"Let them take leave... on the twenty-sixth day of April next, on the building-spot of my house (D&C 118:5)"

**Evangelical Comparison:** This text asserts that God dictates specific calendar dates and geographic coordinates for administrative actions. This creates a 'testable prophecy' scenario. In Evangelical theology, the Holy Spirit guides the church (Acts 13:2), but the New Testament generally depicts apostles making wisdom-based decisions about travel and logistics (1 Corinthians 16:5-7) rather than receiving 'Thus saith the Lord' revelations for travel itineraries. This doctrine elevates the Mormon prophet's administrative decisions to the level of divine fiat.

## COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

**Divergence Status:** Yes

**Theological Gap:** The fundamental gap lies in Ecclesiology and Revelation. D&C 118 assumes the necessity of a restored Quorum of the Twelve to administer the 'fulness' of the gospel. Evangelicalism holds that the church is built on the foundation of the \*biblical\* apostles and prophets (Ephesians 2:20), a foundation that does not need to be relaid. Furthermore, the text presents a God who micromanages administrative details through a single prophetic channel, whereas the New Testament presents the Holy Spirit guiding the priesthood of all believers.

The concept of 'fallen' apostles also introduces a precariousness to leadership not found in the New Testament after Pentecost.

#### Shared Values:

Commitment to global evangelism; Importance of humility and meekness in ministry; Trust in God for provision

#### Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Adds binding commandments and prophecies outside the Bible.
2. [Major] Universal Priesthood – Re-entrenches a mediating hierarchy (The Twelve) necessary for the administration of the gospel.

#### Semantic Warnings:

##### "Apostle"

**In Text:** A high-ranking ecclesiastical office in the LDS Church, part of a governing quorum, subject to replacement.

**Evangelical:** A witness of the resurrected Christ, commissioned directly by Him; a foundational office that ceased with the death of the original Twelve and Paul.

**Example:** *In D&C 118, men are 'appointed' to be apostles by a vote and ordination. In the Bible, Paul insists his apostleship was 'not from men nor through man' (Galatians 1:1).*

##### "Fulness of the Gospel"

**In Text:** Often implies the addition of priesthood keys, temple ordinances, and specific LDS doctrines.

**Evangelical:** The complete sufficiency of Christ's death and resurrection for salvation (1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

**Example:** *Promulgating the 'fulness' in D&C 118 involves establishing the LDS church structure, whereas biblical preaching involves proclaiming the Cross.*

## SOTERIOLOGY

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**Salvation Defined:** Implicitly linked to the 'fulness' of the gospel which the Twelve are sent to promulgate.

**How Attained:** Requires the administration of authorized priesthood holders (the Twelve).

**Basis of Assurance:** Obedience to the prophet and faithfulness in church assignments.

**Comparison to Sola Fide:** The text emphasizes 'doing' (preaching, traveling, obeying dates) as the condition for provision and blessing, rather than resting in the finished work of Christ.

## MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

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#### Explicit Commands:

1. Hold a conference immediately
2. Appoint replacements for fallen apostles
3. Thomas B. Marsh to remain in Zion temporarily
4. Preach in meekness and humility
5. Go to Great Britain ('over the great waters') the following spring
6. Depart from the Far West temple site on April 26, 1839
7. Notify John Taylor, John E. Page, Wilford Woodruff, and Willard Richards of their appointments

#### Implicit Obligations:

1. Loyalty to the church leadership is required to maintain office
2. Willingness to face danger to fulfill prophetic commands (returning to hostile Missouri)
3. Financial reliance on God while preaching

#### Ritual Requirements:

1. Ordination of new apostles

## EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

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### Discovery Questions:

1. When you read about the apostles who had 'fallen' in verse 1, what do you think caused men who had seen miracles and been with Joseph Smith to turn away?
2. In verse 5, the Lord gives a specific date and location for a meeting. How does this shape your view of how God guides the church—does He typically manage schedules, or does He guide through wisdom?
3. The apostles had to risk their lives to return to Far West to fulfill verse 5. Do you think God requires us to put ourselves in physical danger to fulfill a logistical instruction?

### Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Faithful Remnant – Just as the remaining apostles were called to be faithful despite the apostasy of their peers, Christians are called to look to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, rather than human leaders who may fail. [Hebrews 12:1-2]
2. Provision for the Called – God promises to care for those who seek His Kingdom first, though in the Gospel this is based on Fatherly love, not just a reward for labor. [Matthew 6:33]

### Spiritual Weight:

1. Performance/Legalism [Moderate] – The burden of exact obedience to logistical commands. The apostles had to risk their lives to be at a specific spot on a specific day to ensure the prophecy didn't fail. This creates a culture where 'faith' is measured by compliance with administrative directives.
2. Fear of Apostasy [Moderate] – The mention of 'fallen' apostles creates an underlying anxiety. If the closest associates of the prophet can fall and be replaced, the average member feels a heightened sense of insecurity regarding their own standing.

## EPISTEMOLOGY

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**Knowledge Source:** Prophetic Revelation (Joseph Smith acting as the mouthpiece of God).

**Verification Method:** Empirical fulfillment of the specific prediction (Verse 5) regarding the date and location of departure.

**Evangelical Contrast:** Evangelicals test truth by Scripture (Acts 17:11). Here, truth is established by the prophet's directive and the subsequent obedience/fulfillment of that directive.

## TEXTUAL CRITICISM

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**Dating:** July 8, 1838

**Authorship:** Joseph Smith (dictated)

**Textual Issues:** No major textual variants, but the historical context of the 'Mormon War' in Missouri is essential for understanding the weight of the command to return to Far West.