

SECTION 12

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

OVERVIEW

Doctrine and Covenants Section 12, received in May 1829, is a revelation directed to Joseph Knight Sr., an early benefactor of Joseph Smith who provided material support during the translation of the Book of Mormon. The text utilizes heavy agricultural metaphors ('field is white already to harvest') common to Smith's early revelations (parallel to Sections 4, 6, 11, and 14). The central argument of the text is a call to action: Knight is commanded to 'thrust in his sickle' with all his might. Theologically, the text is significant for its early soteriological formulation found in verse 3, which posits a direct causal link between active labor in the movement ('reaping') and the acquisition of personal salvation ('treasure up for his soul everlasting salvation'). It establishes the 'cause of Zion' as the primary objective and delineates the character qualifications (humility, love, temperance) required to participate in this divine work. The text asserts Joseph Smith's voice as indistinguishable from God's, opening with the pronouncement 'Behold, I am God.'

KEY FIGURES

God (The Speaker), Joseph Smith (The Revelator), Joseph Knight Sr. (The Recipient)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. SALVATION THROUGH LABOR

Assertion: Personal salvation is treasured up (accumulated/secured) by the act of laboring in the 'harvest' of the Restoration.

"whoso desireth to reap let him thrust in his sickle with his might... that he may treasure up for his soul everlasting salvation in the kingdom of God. (D&C 12:3)"

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, good works are the fruit of salvation, not the root or the means of acquiring it (Ephesians 2:8-10). D&C 12:3 inverts this order by suggesting that the act of 'reaping' (missionary or church work) is the mechanism by which one 'treasures up' salvation. This implies a merit-based soteriology where eternal life is contingent upon the intensity of one's service ('with his might') rather than the sufficiency of Christ's finished work. While the Bible speaks of storing up 'rewards' in heaven (Matthew 6:20), it never speaks of storing up 'salvation' itself, which is a present possession of the believer upon faith (John 5:24).

2. THE CAUSE OF ZION

Assertion: The primary objective of the believer is to establish a specific socio-religious movement called 'Zion'.

"seek to bring forth and establish the cause of Zion. (D&C 12:6)"

Evangelical Comparison: For the Evangelical, the 'work of the Lord' is the spread of the Gospel of grace and the discipleship of nations. In D&C 12, the 'work' is specifically defined as the 'cause of Zion,' which in 1829 referred to the coming forth of the Book of Mormon and the subsequent organization of the LDS church. This shifts the focus from the universal body of Christ to a specific restorationist project. The command to 'establish' Zion implies that God's kingdom is not currently established on earth and requires human agency to 'bring it forth.'

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental theological gap lies in the relationship between works and salvation. D&C 12:3 explicitly instructs the adherent to work 'that he may treasure up for his soul everlasting salvation.' This phrasing suggests a transactional relationship: the believer provides the labor (reaping), and God provides the payment (salvation). This is diametrically opposed to the Evangelical understanding of Sola Gratia and Sola Fide, where salvation is a free gift (Romans 6:23) and works are the subsequent evidence of a regenerated heart.

Furthermore, the 'work' mentioned is not merely general Christian charity, but the specific advancement of Joseph Smith's restoration movement ('the cause of Zion').

Shared Values:

Urgency of evangelism ('field is white'); Necessity of Christian virtues (faith, hope, charity, love); Importance of prayer; God as the source of light and life

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Fide – Salvation is presented as a reward to be 'treasured up' through the work of reaping.
2. [Critical] Sola Gratia – The text implies that God's acceptance is conditional upon the adherent's 'might' in thrusting in the sickle.
3. [Major] Sola Scriptura – Joseph Smith speaks in the first person as God, adding to the canon of Scripture.

Semantic Warnings:

"Salvation"

In Text: A future state secured through 'reaping' and keeping commandments.

Evangelical: Deliverance from sin and death, accomplished solely by Christ, received by faith, and possessed presently by the believer (Ephesians 2:8).

Example: *In D&C 12:3, one reaps *to* get salvation. In the Bible, one reaps *because* they have salvation.*

"Word of God"

In Text: The immediate revelation given through Joseph Smith (v2).

Evangelical: The closed canon of Scripture and the person of Jesus Christ (John 1:1, Hebrews 1:1-2).

Example: *When D&C 12 says 'give heed to my word,' it refers to the text Joseph Smith is dictating, not necessarily the Bible.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Everlasting salvation in the kingdom of God, viewed here as a reward to be accumulated.

How Attained: By 'thrusting in the sickle with might' (works/missionary labor) and keeping commandments.

Basis of Assurance: Assurance is based on the intensity of one's labor ('with his might') and adherence to virtues.

Comparison to Sola Fide: Directly conflicts with Romans 4:4-5 ('Now to the one who works, his wage is not counted as a gift but as his due'). D&C 12 treats salvation as the 'due' for the work of reaping.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Give heed to my word (v2)
2. Thrust in his sickle with his might (v3)
3. Ask of God (v5)
4. Keep my commandments (v6)
5. Seek to bring forth and establish the cause of Zion (v6)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept Joseph Smith's words as the direct words of God
2. Commit fully to the specific 'work' of the Restoration
3. Cultivate specific virtues (humility, love, temperance) as prerequisites for service

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 3, it says we reap to 'treasure up' salvation. How do you balance that with the idea that salvation is a free gift from Christ?

2. When this section talks about the 'marvelous work,' what specific work was it referring to in 1829?
3. If my salvation depends on me thrusting in my sickle 'with my might,' how can I ever know if I have done enough?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The White Field – We agree the world is ready for the truth. The 'harvest' is indeed urgent, but the seed we plant must be the true Gospel of Grace, not a new law of works. [Matthew 9:37-38]
2. Desire to Serve – God uses those who are willing. However, our qualification comes from Christ's righteousness, not our own temperance or might. [2 Corinthians 3:5]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Performance Burden [Severe] – The text links the eternal security of the soul to the intensity of the adherent's labor ('with his might'). This creates a treadmill where the believer can never be sure they have worked hard enough to secure their salvation.
2. Authority Dependence [Moderate] – By accepting Smith's voice as God's (v2), the adherent surrenders their conscience to the dictates of the prophet, removing the safeguard of checking leaders against the Bible.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Direct revelation through a prophet (Joseph Smith) and personal subjective confirmation ('ask... receive').

Verification Method: The adherent is told to ask God (v5) and is promised that if they knock, it shall be opened, implying a subjective spiritual experience will confirm the text.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the objective standard of written Scripture (Acts 17:11, 2 Timothy 3:16). While prayer is vital, Evangelicals do not use subjective prayer to test new doctrinal revelations that claim to supersede or add to the Bible.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: May 1829

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated)

Textual Issues: The text relies heavily on KJV phraseology (Hebrews 4, John 4, Revelation 14), indicating the author's dependence on the King James Bible for vocabulary and authority markers.