

SECTION 122

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

OVERVIEW

Doctrine and Covenants Section 122 is a pivotal text in Mormon history and theology, dictated by Joseph Smith in March 1839 while imprisoned in Liberty Jail, Missouri. Written during a time of intense persecution and the expulsion of Saints from Missouri, the text functions as a divine theodicy—a justification of God's ways to man. It reframes Smith's acute suffering not as a sign of divine abandonment, but as a necessary pedagogical tool for spiritual exaltation ('all these things shall give thee experience'). The text bifurcates humanity into two camps regarding their view of Smith: 'fools' who deride him, and the 'pure in heart' who seek blessings from his hand. It culminates in a profound Christological comparison, reminding Smith that the Son of Man 'descended below them all,' thereby validating Smith's trials as a participation in the divine narrative. This section is foundational to the LDS concept of the 'suffering prophet' and reinforces the necessity of enduring tribulation for spiritual development.

KEY FIGURES

Joseph Smith, The Son of Man (Jesus Christ), Joseph Smith III (The 'elder son'), The Pure in Heart (Faithful Adherents), Traitors/Enemies

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. PROPHETIC CENTRALITY AND MEDIATION

Assertion: The 'pure in heart' are defined by their seeking of counsel, authority, and blessings specifically from Joseph Smith's hand.

"The pure in heart... shall seek counsel, and authority, and blessings constantly from under thy hand. (D&C 122:2)"

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, the 'pure in heart' (Matthew 5:8) are those cleansed by Christ who seek God directly through the Scripture and the Holy Spirit. D&C 122:2 reorients this pursuit, placing the Prophet as the necessary conduit for counsel and blessings. This creates a mediatorial structure where access to divine authority is contingent upon adherence to the Prophet, violating 1 Timothy 2:5 ('For there is one God, and one mediator... the man Christ Jesus').

2. REDEMPTIVE SUFFERING (THEODICY)

Assertion: Extreme tribulation, persecution, and peril are designed to give 'experience' and are ultimately for the believer's good.

"Know thou, my son, that all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good. (D&C 122:7)"

Evangelical Comparison: While Evangelicals believe God uses suffering for sanctification (James 1:2-4), D&C 122 frames suffering as a requisite rite of passage for priesthood power and authority. The text implies that the depth of Smith's suffering correlates to the height of his calling. In contrast, Evangelicalism views suffering as a result of the Fall that God redemptively repurposes, but not as a merit-based requirement for spiritual authority.

3. CHRISTOLOGICAL DESCENT

Assertion: Jesus Christ (The Son of Man) has descended below all possible human suffering.

"The Son of Man hath descended below them all. Art thou greater than he? (D&C 122:8)"

Evangelical Comparison: The statement that Christ 'descended below them all' is a profound theological truth compatible with Philippians 2:5-8. However, the rhetorical question 'Art thou greater than he?' is used to enforce stoicism in Smith. In Evangelicalism, Christ's descent is primarily soteriological (to save) rather than merely exemplary (to set a standard of endurance for prophets).

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: While the text contains moving language about suffering that resonates with Christian experience, the theological gap is structural. D&C 122:2 establishes an ecclesiology where the 'pure in heart' are identified by their allegiance to Smith. In Evangelicalism, the 'pure in heart' are those justified by faith in Jesus. The text effectively replaces the 'Imitation of Christ' with the 'Vindication of Joseph,' suggesting that loyalty to the messenger is synonymous with loyalty to God.

Shared Values:

God's sovereignty in suffering; The reality of Christ's suffering (descending below all); The promise of divine presence in tribulation

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Christus (Christ Alone) – Inserts Joseph Smith as a necessary mediator for blessings and counsel.
2. [Major] Sola Scriptura – Presents post-biblical revelation as binding and authoritative.
3. [Minor] Theology of Suffering – Frames suffering as a path to exaltation/authority rather than a result of the Fall redeemed by grace.

Semantic Warnings:

"Pure in heart"

In Text: Those who seek counsel and authority from Joseph Smith.

Evangelical: Those cleansed by God who seek Him with sincerity (Matthew 5:8, Psalm 24:4).

Example: In D&C 122, a 'pure in heart' person is a loyal Mormon; in the Bible, it is a regenerate believer regardless of denominational affiliation.

"Priesthood"

In Text: A literal power and authority held by Smith that can 'remain' or be lost.

Evangelical: The status of all believers who have access to God through Christ (1 Peter 2:9).

Example: Smith is told the priesthood shall remain with him; Evangelicals believe priesthood is not a transferable 'power' but a standing in Christ.

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Implicitly linked to enduring to the end and maintaining the priesthood.

How Attained: Through loyalty to the prophet and endurance of trials.

Basis of Assurance: The promise that 'God shall be with you forever and ever' (Verse 9) is contingent on 'holding on thy way'.

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text emphasizes endurance and works (holding on) over resting in the finished work of Christ. It suggests a 'probationary' view of salvation where one must prove oneself through suffering.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Hold on thy way (Verse 9)
2. Fear not what man can do (Verse 9)
3. Know that these things are for thy good (Verse 7)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Seek counsel and blessings from the Prophet (Verse 2)
2. Reject the testimony of 'traitors' (Verse 3)
3. Endure persecution without losing faith
4. Accept Joseph Smith's controversial reputation as a sign of his calling

Ritual Requirements:

1. Maintenance of the Priesthood (Verse 9 implies the priesthood is a possession to be retained)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 8, it says the Son of Man descended below all things. How does that specific truth bring you comfort in your own struggles?
2. Verse 2 mentions the 'pure in heart' seeking counsel from Joseph Smith. How do you balance seeking counsel from a leader versus seeking counsel directly from God through the Bible?
3. The text says 'fools' will deride Joseph Smith. Do you think it's possible for someone to have honest, intellectual disagreements with Joseph Smith's claims without being a 'fool' or a 'traitor'?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Descending Savior – This is a beautiful bridge to the Gospel. Christ didn't just suffer **like** us; He suffered **for** us. [Hebrews 4:15-16 (We have a high priest who sympathizes... therefore let us draw near to the throne of grace).]
2. Suffering for Good – Christians also believe God wastes no pain, but the ultimate 'good' is conformity to Christ, not personal exaltation. [Romans 8:28-29 (All things work together for good... to be conformed to the image of His Son).]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Loyalty/Isolation [Severe] – The text creates a binary world: you are either 'pure in heart' (loyal to Smith) or a 'fool/traitor.' This makes leaving the faith or questioning leadership psychologically equated with betraying God and becoming an enemy of truth.
2. Persecution Complex [Moderate] – Adherents are conditioned to interpret opposition or criticism not as valid feedback, but as proof of their righteousness. This isolates them from corrective truth.
3. Performance/Endurance [Moderate] – The believer must 'hold on' to retain the priesthood and blessings. The assurance of God's presence is linked to the successful endurance of trials, rather than the unconditional covenant of grace.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Subjective Revelation and Authoritative Dictation.

Verification Method: Adherents verify the text by accepting the premise that Smith is a suffering prophet comparable to Christ.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the objective standard of written Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16). D&C 122 relies on the emotional resonance of Smith's suffering and his self-proclaimed divine reassurance.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: March 20, 1839

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated)

Textual Issues: Excerpted from a longer letter. The canonized version is a segment of a much larger correspondence to the church.