

SECTION 125

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

OVERVIEW

Doctrine and Covenants Section 125, received in March 1841, addresses the logistical and spiritual organization of Latter-day Saints living across the Mississippi River from Nauvoo, in the Territory of Iowa. In this text, Joseph Smith articulates the 'will of the Lord' regarding these members, commanding them to gather into specific communities rather than scattering. The text explicitly commands the construction of a city to be named 'Zarahemla'—a direct reference to a major capital city in the Book of Mormon—as well as gathering to Nashville (Iowa) and Nauvoo. The revelation frames this physical gathering and city-building as a prerequisite for being prepared for future events ('that which is in store for a time to come'). It underscores the era of Mormonism where the 'Kingdom of God' was viewed as a literal, geo-political theocracy requiring physical relocation and construction as acts of religious obedience.

KEY FIGURES

The Lord (Speaker), Joseph Smith (The Servant/Mediator), Saints in the Territory of Iowa (Audience)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. THE DOCTRINE OF GATHERING

Assertion: God commands believers to physically relocate to specific geographic locations appointed by the prophet to prepare for the future.

"let them gather themselves together unto the places which I shall appoint unto them by my servant Joseph"

Evangelical Comparison: In this text, the 'gathering' is a literal, logistical command to move to specific coordinates in Iowa and Illinois. This contrasts sharply with the New Testament understanding of the church (ekklesia) as a universal body of believers not bound by geography (John 4:21-24). While Evangelicals look forward to a future New Jerusalem, they reject the notion that safety or spiritual obedience requires migrating to a specific American city designated by a modern prophet. The text implies that spiritual standing is tied to physical location and community construction.

2. PROPHETIC MICROMANAGEMENT

Assertion: The Lord reveals specific administrative details, such as city names and settlement locations, through Joseph Smith.

"let the name of Zarahemla be named upon it"

Evangelical Comparison: The text presents God as dictating the specific urban planning of the Iowa Territory, down to the naming of the city 'Zarahemla.' In Evangelical theology, God's special revelation (Scripture) is primarily soteriological and ethical (2 Timothy 3:16). While God is sovereign over all history, the claim that God uses prophetic revelation to dictate municipal zoning and naming conventions blurs the line between divine law and human administrative control, creating a dependency on the prophet for practical life decisions.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in the nature of the Kingdom of God. For the Evangelical, the Kingdom is 'not of this world' (John 18:36) in terms of political boundaries or city-building. For the Mormonism of this text, the Kingdom is a literal, physical society to be constructed in the American Midwest. Furthermore, the text conditions the status of being 'my saints' on adherence to these geographic commands, introducing a works-based element to covenantal standing that contradicts Sola Fide.

Shared Values:

Desire to do God's will; Importance of community among believers

Friction Points:

1. [Major] Sola Scriptura – Adds new, binding commandments regarding geography and city planning not found in the Bible.
2. [Minor] Theology Proper (God's Nature) – Depicts God as a micromanager of real estate rather than the sustainer of the cosmos and redeemer of souls.
3. [Moderate] Universal Priesthood – Believers cannot discern God's will for their residence individually; they must rely on the mediator (Joseph) to appoint the place.

Semantic Warnings:

"Zion/Stakes"

In Text: Physical cities (Nauvoo, Zarahemla) where Saints must gather for safety and community.

Evangelical: Often refers to Jerusalem, the people of God, or the heavenly city (Hebrews 12:22), not settlements in Illinois/Iowa.

Example: *In D&C 125, Zion is a network of cities to be built; in Hebrews, Zion is the heavenly reality believers come to by faith.*

"Saints"

In Text: Those who follow Joseph Smith and gather to the appointed places.

Evangelical: All who are sanctified in Christ Jesus (1 Corinthians 1:2).

Example: *The text implies one is a 'saint' by essaying to do God's will through gathering; the Bible declares one a saint by position in Christ.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Implicitly linked to gathering and obedience to the prophet's logistical commands.

How Attained: By doing God's will, which is defined here as gathering to Zarahemla/Nauvoo.

Basis of Assurance: Compliance with the gathering command.

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text introduces a 'geographic work' (moving to Iowa) as a condition of doing God's will. Sola Fide (Romans 3:28) excludes works, including relocation, as grounds for justification.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Gather to places appointed by Joseph Smith
2. Build up a city opposite Nauvoo
3. Name the city Zarahemla
4. Take up inheritance in Zarahemla, Nashville, or Nauvoo

Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept Joseph Smith's administrative decisions as the direct will of God
2. Relocate families and assets to designated zones
3. Prioritize communal city-building over individual settlement

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. When you read about the command to build 'Zarahemla' in Iowa, how do you reconcile that with the fact that the city doesn't exist today?
2. Do you believe God still requires believers to live in specific geographic locations to be safe or faithful?
3. How does the command to gather to a physical city compare to Jesus' teaching in John 4 that worship is no longer bound to this mountain or that?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Longing for a Holy City – The human heart longs for a place of belonging, safety, and righteousness (Zion). [Hebrews 13:14 - 'For here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come.' We find our true citizenship in heaven (Philippians 3:20), not in Iowa.]

Spiritual Weight:

- 1. Burden of Displacement [Severe] – The requirement to uproot one's family, sell property, and move to a specific location dictated by a leader creates immense financial and emotional stress, making spiritual standing dependent on logistical compliance.
- 2. Fear of Being Left Behind [Moderate] – The text implies that only those who gather are 'prepared for that which is in store,' instilling a fear that remaining in one's home (outside the gathering) invites divine judgment or lack of protection.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Prophetic Revelation (The voice of the Lord through Smith).

Verification Method: Obedience to the command serves as the validation of faith; the text assumes the authority of the speaker is already accepted by the audience.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the fixed canon of Scripture (Jude 1:3) and the internal witness of the Spirit regarding biblical truth, rather than ongoing operational directives from a single leader.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: March 1841

Authorship: Joseph Smith

Textual Issues: No significant textual variants, but the historical context of the short-lived nature of the 'Zarahemla' stake is critical.