

SECTION 136

FAITH: Mormonism | TEXT: Doctrine and Covenants | VOLUME: 2013 | AUTHOR: Brigham Young

OVERVIEW

Doctrine and Covenants Section 136, delivered in January 1847 at Winter Quarters, marks the first and only canonized revelation attributed directly to Brigham Young. It serves a dual purpose: logistical and theological. Logistically, it reorganizes the chaotic exodus of the Latter-day Saints into a disciplined 'Camp of Israel,' utilizing a Mosaic hierarchy of captains over hundreds, fifties, and tens. This structure was designed to ensure the survival of the Saints during their trek to the Great Basin. Theologically, the text reframes the suffering of the Saints not as a defeat, but as a necessary trial for sanctification. It explicitly links the authority of the movement to a chain of dispensation heads—Adam, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Joseph Smith. Crucially, it addresses the theological crisis of Joseph Smith's death, asserting that his martyrdom was 'needful' to 'seal his testimony with his blood,' thereby validating his prophetic office. The text commands strict moral behavior, care for the poor and widows, and communal cooperation, promising the 'glory of Zion' only to those who endure chastisement and remain faithful to the ordinances.

KEY FIGURES

The Lord (Speaker), Brigham Young, Joseph Smith, Ezra T. Benson, Erastus Snow, Orson Pratt, Wilford Woodruff, Amasa Lyman, George A. Smith

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. THEOCRATIC ORGANIZATION (CAMP OF ISRAEL)

Assertion: The Church must be organized hierarchically (captains of hundreds, fifties, tens) under the Twelve Apostles to fulfill God's will.

"Let the companies be organized with captains of hundreds, captains of fifties, and captains of tens... under the direction of the Twelve Apostles. (D&C 136:3)"

Evangelical Comparison: Evangelical Christianity views the church structure as described in the Pastoral Epistles (Elders/Deacons) with Christ as the head. D&C 136 reverts to a Mosaic/Exodus political structure ('Camp of Israel'), merging civil and religious authority. This reinforces the Mormon self-identity as a literal reconstitution of Israel, rather than the spiritual body of Christ (the Church) grafted in by faith.

2. SANCTIFICATION THROUGH SUFFERING

Assertion: Adherents must be 'tried in all things' and bear chastisement to be worthy of the kingdom and glory.

"My people must be tried in all things... and he that will not bear chastisement is not worthy of my kingdom. (D&C 136:31)"

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, worthiness for the kingdom is imputed solely through the righteousness of Christ (Romans 4:5). D&C 136:31 posits a probation-based soteriology where the believer's ability to endure 'chastisement' and trial is a condition for receiving glory. This shifts the focus from Christ's finished work to the believer's endurance.

3. SEALING TESTIMONY WITH BLOOD

Assertion: Joseph Smith's death was a divine necessity to seal his dispensation, paralleling the work of previous prophets and Christ.

"It was needful that he should seal his testimony with his blood, that he might be honored and the wicked might be condemned. (D&C 136:39)"

Evangelical Comparison: Hebrews 9:16-28 teaches that the new covenant was sealed once for all by the blood of Christ. D&C 136 suggests that Joseph Smith's blood has a spiritual efficacy in 'sealing' the restoration. While not claiming Joseph atoned for sin, it structurally places his martyrdom as a necessary component of God's plan for the condemnation of the wicked and the honor of the prophet, creating a 'dual-focus' faith (Jesus and Joseph).

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in the nature of the covenant. In D&C 136, the covenant is a bilateral agreement where God blesses based on the people's performance ('if ye do this... ye shall be blessed'). The text explicitly states that worthiness for the kingdom is contingent on bearing chastisement (v. 31). Evangelical theology holds to the New Covenant as a unilateral work of grace received by faith, where Christ bore the chastisement for our peace (Isaiah 53:5). Furthermore, the text inserts Joseph Smith into the chain of redemption, claiming his blood was needed to 'seal' the work, a concept Evangelicals reserve exclusively for the blood of Jesus.

Shared Values:

Care for the poor and widows (James 1:27); Moral integrity (not stealing, not drinking); Trusting God in times of persecution; Importance of praise and prayer

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Christology / Solus Christus – Joseph Smith is presented as a necessary figure who 'seals' the work with his blood, paralleling Christ.
2. [Major] Sola Fide – Worthiness for the kingdom is conditional on enduring chastisement and keeping ordinances.
3. [Major] Universal Priesthood – Establishes a strict hierarchy where access to God's will is mediated through the 'Twelve Apostles' and captains.
4. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Adds new revelation to the canon, claiming equal authority with the Bible.

Semantic Warnings:

"Ordinances"

In Text: Rituals and laws required for covenant keeping and eventual exaltation.

Evangelical: Usually refers to Baptism and the Lord's Supper; outward signs of inward grace, not saving mechanisms.

Example: v. 4 '*walk in all the ordinances*' implies a legalistic requirement for standing with God.

"Zion"

In Text: A literal geographic location (the American West) to be built by human hands.

Evangelical: The spiritual Kingdom of God or the heavenly Jerusalem (Hebrews 12:22).

Example: v. 18 '*Zion shall be redeemed*' refers to the socio-political establishment of the church.

"Saints"

In Text: Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Evangelical: All true believers in Jesus Christ, set apart by the Holy Spirit.

Example: v. 2 '*people of The Church...*'

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Entering the 'kingdom' and receiving the 'glory of Zion' (v. 31).

How Attained: Through faithfulness, keeping ordinances, and successfully enduring chastisement/trials.

Basis of Assurance: Based on performance: 'If ye do this with a pure heart... ye shall be blessed' (v. 11).

Comparison to Sola Fide: Directly contradicts Sola Fide by making 'bearing chastisement' a condition of worthiness (v. 31). Romans 5:1 teaches we have peace with God through faith, not through our capacity to endure suffering.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Organize into companies with captains
2. Provide wagons and teams for the poor and widows

3. Plant crops for those following behind
4. Restore borrowed items
5. Cease drunkenness and contention
6. Praise the Lord with singing and dancing
7. Keep all pledges

Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept the succession of the Twelve Apostles (Brigham Young) as the governing authority
2. View the migration to the West as a divine mandate
3. Accept Joseph Smith's death as God's will

Ritual Requirements:

1. Walk in all the ordinances of the Lord (v. 4)
2. Covenant making (v. 2)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 31, it says we must be 'tried in all things' to be worthy of the kingdom. How do you know when you have been tried enough to be sure of your standing with God?
2. Verse 39 says Joseph Smith needed to seal his testimony with his blood. How would you explain the difference between Joseph's blood and Jesus's blood to a non-member?
3. The text focuses heavily on organizing the camp for the trek. Do you see the Christian life more as a physical journey we must complete to be saved, or a spiritual rest we enter into because of Jesus?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Journey/Exodus – Humanity is on a journey through a wilderness of sin. We need a leader. [Hebrews 11:13-16 speaks of believers as 'strangers and exiles' seeking a heavenly country prepared by God, not one built by human hands.]
2. Care for the Vulnerable – God's heart for the helpless points to our spiritual helplessness. We are all spiritual orphans until adopted by the Father. [James 1:27, Galatians 4:4-7]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Uncertainty / Lack of Assurance [Severe] – The requirement to be 'tried in all things' to be proven worthy creates a perpetual anxiety that one has not suffered enough or has failed the test.
2. Performance Legalism [Moderate] – Blessings are strictly conditional on 'pure heart' and 'all faithfulness' (v. 11), placing the burden of provision on the adherent's moral perfection.
3. Institutional Dependence [Moderate] – The believer is entirely dependent on the hierarchy (Captains/Apostles) for direction, creating a spiritual dependency on man rather than the Holy Spirit.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Prophetic Revelation (Vertical) and Obedience (Horizontal).

Verification Method: Adherents verify truth by humbling themselves and calling upon God (v. 32), but this is framed within the context of already accepting the leadership's direction.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology tests all prophecy against Scripture (1 Thessalonians 5:21, Acts 17:11). D&C 136 assumes the authority of the speaker is self-authenticating as the voice of God.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: January 14, 1847

Authorship: Brigham Young (though the text speaks in the first person as the Lord).

Textual Issues: This is the only section in the Doctrine and Covenants explicitly attributed to Brigham Young as the revelator. It marks the transition of prophetic authority from Smith to Young.