

SECTION 45

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

OVERVIEW

Received by Joseph Smith in March 1831 during a period of external criticism, Doctrine and Covenants Section 45 functions as a comprehensive eschatological framework for early Mormonism. The text begins with a high Christology, depicting Jesus as the Advocate pleading His merits before the Father. It then transitions into a retelling and expansion of Jesus's biblical Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24), explicitly linking the 'times of the Gentiles' to the emergence of Joseph Smith's movement. The revelation asserts that the biblical record is incomplete and commands Smith to begin his translation of the New Testament to restore lost truths. Crucially, the text shifts the focus from a spiritual kingdom to a geo-political mandate: the Saints are commanded to gather in the 'western countries' (Ohio/Missouri context) to build a literal New Jerusalem. This city is promised as a place of physical safety ('Zion') against coming global wars and desolations. The text culminates in a vision of the Millennium where children will grow up without sin, and a command to keep certain aspects of this revelation secret from the world temporarily.

KEY FIGURES

Jesus Christ, Joseph Smith, God the Father, Enoch, The Jews (Remnant), The Gentiles

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. MILLENNIAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Assertion: During the Millennium, children will grow up without sin unto salvation.

"And they shall multiply and wax strong, and their children shall grow up without sin unto salvation. (D&C 45:58)"

Evangelical Comparison: Evangelical theology, grounded in passages like Psalm 51:5 and Romans 5:12-21, teaches that all humans inherit a sin nature and require regeneration regardless of their environment. D&C 45:58 posits that a changed environment (the Millennium/Satan bound) allows human nature to develop without sin, suggesting that sin is primarily environmental or external rather than intrinsic to the fallen human condition. This implies salvation can be a developmental process rather than a regenerative event.

2. GEOGRAPHIC ZION

Assertion: Zion is a literal city to be built in the American West as a refuge from global war.

"Gather ye out from the eastern lands... go ye forth into the western countries... purchase an inheritance... And it shall be called the New Jerusalem... a place of safety. (D&C 45:64-66)"

Evangelical Comparison: While Evangelicals anticipate a New Jerusalem (Revelation 21), it is viewed as a divine creation descending from heaven, not a city built by human hands in Missouri/Ohio. D&C 45 mandates a physical gathering to a specific location for physical safety, conflating spiritual salvation with geographic relocation and survivalism.

3. DISTINCT ADVOCACY

Assertion: Christ pleads his merits to a distinct Father to save his brethren.

"Father, behold the sufferings and death of him who did no sin... Wherefore, Father, spare these my brethren. (D&C 45:4-5)"

Evangelical Comparison: The language of advocacy is highly biblical (1 John 2:1). However, within the broader context of Mormon theology (which rejects the ontological Trinity), this passage is often used to highlight the separate personhood of the Father and Son. The Son pleads ~~to~~ the Father, emphasizing distinct wills and beings, whereas Evangelical Trinitarianism sees the will of the Father and Son as unified in the one essence of God.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: While the Christology of advocacy appears orthodox on the surface, the underlying structure of the text introduces a 'Restorationist' gospel that supersedes the biblical account. The command to re-translate the New Testament implies biblical insufficiency. Furthermore, the soteriology is hybridized with geography: safety and salvation are linked to building a physical city (Zion) in America. The most critical divergence is the anthropological claim in verse 58 that children can grow up 'without sin,' which fundamentally denies the Evangelical doctrine of Original Sin and the universal need for regeneration (Ephesians 2:1-3).

Shared Values:

Belief in the Second Coming of Christ; Christ as Advocate/Intercessor; Resurrection of the dead; Moral imperative to watch and be ready

Friction Points:

1. [Minor] Theology Proper (Trinity) – Implies a functional and potentially ontological separation between Father and Son beyond biblical distinction.
2. [Critical] Anthropology (Original Sin) – Claims children can grow up 'without sin' (v. 58), denying the inherent sin nature of man.
3. [Major] Sola Scriptura – Asserts the Bible is incomplete and commands a new translation via Joseph Smith (v. 60-61).

Semantic Warnings:

"Zion"

In Text: A literal city of safety to be built in the 'western countries' (Missouri/Ohio) by the Saints.

Evangelical: Often refers to Jerusalem, the people of God, or the heavenly city (Hebrews 12:22), not a 19th-century American settlement.

Example: *D&C 45:66 calls for a 'New Jerusalem' to be built now; Revelation 21 sees it descending from heaven after the Millennium/judgment.*

"Gospel"

In Text: The 'everlasting covenant' restored through Joseph Smith, which includes the mandate to gather.

Evangelical: The good news of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection for sinners (1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

Example: *In v. 28, the 'fulness of my gospel' is a light breaking forth in the 1800s, distinct from the historic Christian message.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Includes 'everlasting life' (v. 5) but also physical preservation in Zion (v. 68) and developmental perfection (v. 58).

How Attained: Belief in Christ's name (v. 5), receiving the restored covenant (v. 9), and gathering to Zion (v. 64).

Basis of Assurance: Taking the Holy Spirit for a guide and not being deceived (v. 57).

Comparison to Sola Fide: While 'belief' is mentioned (v. 5), the text adds the necessity of the 'new covenant' and physical gathering, moving away from Faith Alone.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Hearken to the voice of Christ (v. 1)
2. Translate the New Testament (v. 61)
3. Gather out from eastern lands to western countries (v. 64)
4. Purchase riches to buy land for an inheritance (v. 65)
5. Keep these revelations secret from the world temporarily (v. 72)

Implicit Obligations:

1. View the current era as the fulfillment of the 'Times of the Gentiles'
2. Prepare for physical calamities and war

3. Accept Joseph Smith's revision of the Bible as authoritative

Ritual Requirements:

1. Gathering (viewed as a saving ordinance/act in early Mormonism)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 58, it says children will grow up 'without sin.' How does that fit with Romans 3:23 which says 'all have sinned'?
2. The text commands the Saints to gather to the 'western countries' for safety (v. 64). Since that specific gathering didn't result in permanent safety (they were expelled from Missouri), how do you interpret that promise today?
3. Verse 60 says the New Testament needed to be translated to make these things known. Do you feel the Bible is insufficient to understand the Second Coming?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Advocate – This is a beautiful picture of 1 John 2:1. We can agree that we need an Advocate because we are guilty. [1 John 2:1-2]
2. City of Refuge – The text expresses a longing for safety from judgment. In the Bible, Christ Himself is our refuge, not a geographic city. [Hebrews 6:18]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Perfectionism [Severe] – The idea that one can 'grow up without sin' sets an impossible standard of human perfectibility, leading to shame when the believer inevitably struggles with internal sin.
2. Fear/Survivalism [Moderate] – The text emphasizes 'wars in your own lands' and 'desolating sickness,' creating a mindset of fear that drives the adherent to perform rituals (gathering) for physical survival.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Prophetic Revelation (Joseph Smith as channel).

Verification Method: Observation of signs (wars, rumors of wars) and internal spiritual confirmation ('he that feareth me shall be looking forth').

Evangelical Contrast: Evangelicals test prophecy against the fixed standard of the Bible (1 Thessalonians 5:21, Acts 17:11). This text demands the Bible be altered to fit the new revelation.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: March 7, 1831

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated)

Textual Issues: This revelation served as the catalyst for Joseph Smith to begin his translation of the New Testament the very next day (March 8, 1831).