

SECTION 48

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

OVERVIEW

Doctrine and Covenants Section 48, received in March 1831, addresses the logistical crisis of the 'Gathering.' As converts from New York (the 'eastern brethren') arrived in Kirtland, Ohio, Joseph Smith dictated this revelation to manage their settlement. The text instructs resident Saints to share their land with newcomers, while those without land are told to purchase property temporarily. Crucially, the text pivots from immediate logistics to eschatological preparation, commanding the Saints to 'save all the money that ye can' (v. 4) to purchase a permanent 'inheritance'—the City of Zion. The location of this city is explicitly withheld ('not yet to be revealed'), creating a dynamic of suspense and reliance on the hierarchy. The revelation establishes a pattern where the 'presidency and the bishop' hold authority over the physical location and financial resources of the members, framing the accumulation of wealth for the Church not as secular prudence, but as a spiritual mandate for building a literal kingdom on earth.

KEY FIGURES

The Lord (Speaker), Joseph Smith (Prophet/Revelator), Eastern Brethren (Migrating Saints from New York), The Presidency (First Presidency), The Bishop (Edward Partridge)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. THE LITERAL GATHERING OF ISRAEL (ZION)

Assertion: The Kingdom of God is a physical city to be purchased and built in a specific geographic location.

"purchase land for an inheritance, even the city. The place is not yet to be revealed (D&C 48:4-5)"

Evangelical Comparison: In this text, the concept of 'inheritance' and 'city' is strictly geo-political and economic. The Saints are commanded to save money to buy real estate. In contrast, Evangelical theology, grounded in the New Testament, interprets the 'inheritance' of the saints as spiritual, imperishable, and reserved in heaven (1 Peter 1:4). While Evangelicals acknowledge a future New Jerusalem (Revelation 21), they reject the notion that the Church's mandate is to purchase and build a literal sovereign city-state during the church age. The Mormon doctrine here shifts the focus from the spiritual indwelling of Christ to the physical construction of a theocratic society.

2. ECCLESIASTICAL CONTROL OF PERSONAL PROPERTY

Assertion: Church leadership has the authority to dictate where members live and how they use their resources.

"as is appointed to him by the presidency and the bishop of the church (D&C 48:6)"

Evangelical Comparison: D&C 48:6 explicitly places the physical location of a believer's family under the appointment of the 'presidency and the bishop.' This establishes a high-control environment where the hierarchy manages the private lives of adherents. Evangelical Christianity teaches stewardship, where the individual is accountable directly to God for their resources (2 Corinthians 9:7), rather than a system where clergy dictate personal settlement and resource allocation. This text lays the groundwork for the Law of Consecration, moving away from private property rights toward communal, hierarchy-directed ownership.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in the nature of the Kingdom. D&C 48 presents a 'Zion' that is purchased with money and built by human hands under strict authoritarian command. This is a reversion to a geo-political theocracy similar to Old Testament Israel but distinct from the New Testament Church. The New Testament presents the Church as a spiritual body of believers (1 Corinthians 12) whose 'city' is heavenly (Hebrews 11:10, 16). Furthermore, the requirement to 'save all the money that ye can' to buy this inheritance introduces a works-based element to the concept of inheritance, which the Bible describes as a gift of grace (Ephesians 1:11-14).

Shared Values:

Hospitality to fellow believers; Financial prudence (saving); Care for the poor/migrants

Friction Points:

1. [Major] Theology Proper (Kingdom of God) – Replaces the spiritual Kingdom of God with a material, geographic mandate.
2. [Critical] Universal Priesthood – Subjugates individual decision-making (housing, finance) to ecclesiastical hierarchy.
3. [Major] Sola Scriptura – Introduces new, binding revelation regarding logistics and geography as scripture.

Semantic Warnings:

"Inheritance"

In Text: A physical plot of land in the City of Zion (eventually Independence, Missouri).

Evangelical: Eternal life and the Kingdom of God, received through Christ (1 Peter 1:4).

Example: *In D&C 48:4, inheritance is something to be purchased with saved money. In Colossians 1:12, inheritance is a share in the kingdom of light, qualified by the Father.*

"The City"

In Text: A literal, physical New Jerusalem to be built in America.

Evangelical: Often refers to the New Jerusalem (Rev 21) descending from heaven, or the spiritual community of believers.

Example: *D&C 48 commands saving money to build 'the city.' Hebrews 11:10 speaks of a city 'whose builder and maker is God.'*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Implicitly linked to gathering to Zion and obtaining an 'inheritance' there.

How Attained: Through obedience to the 'laws and commandments' (v. 6) and financial sacrifice (v. 4).

Basis of Assurance: Compliance with the Presidency and Bishop's appointments.

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text emphasizes 'obtaining' and 'saving' to purchase an inheritance. This contrasts with Romans 4:4-5, where the inheritance comes to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Remain in current abodes if suitable (v. 1)
2. Share land with migrating brethren (v. 2)
3. Buy temporary land if necessary (v. 3)
4. Save all possible money (v. 4)
5. Obtain all money possible in righteousness (v. 4)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept the assignment of residence by the Bishop/Presidency
2. Wait for future revelation regarding the location of Zion
3. Prioritize the church's real estate goals over personal financial goals

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 4, it says to save money to purchase an inheritance. How does that compare to the inheritance Peter describes as 'reserved in heaven' for us?
2. Do you feel that your spiritual standing is tied to where you live or how much you save for the church?

3. Verse 6 mentions the presidency appointing where families live. How do you balance following leaders with your own personal stewardship and freedom in Christ?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Longing for a City – Humans have a deep longing for a place of belonging and peace (Zion). This longing is fulfilled not by buying land in Missouri, but by the New Jerusalem prepared by God. [Hebrews 11:10, 16 (Abraham looked for a city whose builder is God).]
2. Imparting to Brethren – The desire to care for the family of God is good. In Christ, we are all one family, and our generosity flows from His grace, not legal obligation. [Galatians 6:10 (Do good to all, especially the household of faith).]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Financial Performance [Moderate] – The command to 'save all the money that ye can' places a heavy burden on the adherent to maximize wealth not for family stability, but for institutional expansion. It spiritualizes financial accumulation.
2. Loss of Autonomy [Severe] – The requirement to live 'as is appointed' by the presidency removes the freedom of the individual to follow God's leading for their own family's location and welfare.
3. Uncertainty/Suspense [Moderate] – The location is 'not yet to be revealed,' creating a dependency on the leader for the next step, fostering a psychological reliance on the hierarchy rather than on God's written word.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Prophetic Revelation (Vertical)

Verification Method: Obedience to the appointed men (Presidency/Bishop) and waiting for future disclosure.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the illuminated Word of God (Psalm 119:105) and wisdom (James 1:5), rather than awaiting secret knowledge about geographic locations from a single human channel.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: March 10, 1831

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated)

Textual Issues: Early manuscripts show the fluid nature of these revelations as they were adapted for the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants compilation.