

## SECTION 52

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

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### OVERVIEW

Given in June 1831 following a conference in Kirtland, Ohio, Doctrine and Covenants Section 52 serves two primary administrative and theological functions. First, it mobilizes the priesthood leadership by assigning specific pairs of elders to travel to Missouri, which is explicitly identified as the 'land of inheritance' and the future site of the city of Zion. This marks a significant geographic shift in early Mormon eschatology, moving the center of gravity from Ohio to the American frontier. Second, the text addresses the issue of spiritual discernment. Following reports of ecstatic and chaotic spiritual manifestations at the preceding conference, Joseph Smith provides a 'pattern' (verses 14-19) by which the elders can distinguish between true and false spirits. Crucially, this pattern links divine acceptance directly to the obedience of ordinances, establishing a legalistic framework for spiritual validity. The revelation concludes with a warning that faithfulness is the condition for blessing, while unfaithfulness results in being 'cut off,' and mandates care for the poor as a mark of discipleship.

### KEY FIGURES

Jesus Christ (The Speaker), Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, Lyman Wight, Satan (The Deceiver), Simonds Ryder (Recipient of transferred authority)

### DOCTRINES ANALYZED

#### 1. CONDITIONAL ACCEPTANCE VIA ORDINANCES

**Assertion:** God accepts a person only if they possess a contrite spirit AND obey His ordinances.

*"Wherefore he that prayeth, whose spirit is contrite, the same is accepted of me if he obey mine ordinances. (D&C 52:15)"*

**Evangelical Comparison:** In Evangelical theology, a believer is 'accepted in the Beloved' (Ephesians 1:6) solely through faith in the finished work of Christ. Romans 3:28 and Galatians 2:16 explicitly exclude works of the law (including rituals/ordinances) as grounds for justification. D&C 52:15 introduces a 'plus' theology: Contrition + Ordinances = Acceptance. This shifts the basis of standing before God from the sufficiency of the Cross to the necessity of the adherent's compliance with ceremonial law, effectively re-establishing a Levitical-style barrier to God's presence.

#### 2. GEOGRAPHIC ZIONISM

**Assertion:** Missouri is the consecrated land of inheritance for God's people.

*"the next conference, which shall be held in Missouri, upon the land which I will consecrate unto my people... the land of your inheritance (D&C 52:2, 5)"*

**Evangelical Comparison:** While the Old Testament focused on a specific plot of land (Canaan), the New Testament universalizes the Kingdom of God. Jesus told the Samaritan woman that worship would no longer be centralized in Jerusalem or Gerizim but would be 'in spirit and truth' (John 4:21-24). D&C 52 reverts to a geo-centric theology, designating Missouri as a holy land. This creates a theology of 'gathering' to a physical location, whereas the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) commands a 'scattering' or going out to all nations.

### COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

**Divergence Status:** Yes

**Theological Gap:** D&C 52 presents a fundamental clash in soteriology. Verse 15 states, 'the same is accepted of me if he obey mine ordinances.' This creates a 'Covenant of Works' dynamic where grace is accessed through ritual compliance. Evangelical theology asserts that ordinances (sacraments) are outward signs of an inward grace already received, not conditions for acceptance. Furthermore, the text elevates a specific geography (Missouri) to a salvific status ('land of inheritance') that the New Testament reserves for the New Creation/Heaven.

### Shared Values:

Care for the poor and needy (v40); Preaching the gospel; Warning against Satanic deception; The necessity of a contrite spirit

### Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Fide (Faith Alone) – Acceptance by God is explicitly conditional upon obeying ordinances (v15).
2. [Major] Sola Gratia (Grace Alone) – Grace is mediated through the 'pattern' of ritual performance rather than direct access to God.
3. [Minor] Theology Proper (God's Nature/Kingdom) – God's Kingdom is territorialized to Missouri, confusing the spiritual nature of the Church age with a geo-political kingdom.

### Semantic Warnings:

#### "Ordinances"

**In Text:** Essential rituals (baptism, laying on of hands) required for acceptance by God and discerning true spirits.

**Evangelical:** Sacraments or commands observed by the church (Baptism, Lord's Supper) as acts of obedience and remembrance, not prerequisites for justification.

**Example:** *In D&C 52:15, a person is only 'accepted' if they obey ordinances. In Romans, a person is accepted by faith before any work is done.*

#### "Faithful"

**In Text:** Obedient to the specific commands of the prophet (traveling, preaching, building Zion).

**Evangelical:** Trusting in Christ; full reliance on God's character.

**Example:** *Verse 6 threatens that those who are not 'faithful' (obedient to the mission) will be 'cut off.'*

## SOTERIOLOGY

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**Salvation Defined:** Being 'accepted' of the Lord, 'crowned with joy,' and 'lifted up at the last day' (v15, 43, 44).

**How Attained:** Through faithfulness to commands, contrition, and specifically obeying ordinances (v15).

**Basis of Assurance:** Adherence to the 'pattern' and successful performance of duties.

**Comparison to Sola Fide:** D&C 52:15 ('accepted... if he obey mine ordinances') is the antithesis of Romans 3:24 ('justified freely by his grace').

## MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

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### Explicit Commands:

1. Go to Missouri (specifically Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, and roughly 30 others)
2. Preach the gospel two by two
3. Baptize by water
4. Lay on hands by the water's side
5. Labor with own hands to prevent idolatry/wickedness
6. Remember the poor and needy

### Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept Joseph Smith's authority to assign personal travel and life changes
2. Discern spirits based on the 'ordinance' pattern provided
3. Believe that Missouri is the biblical land of inheritance

### Ritual Requirements:

1. Baptism
2. Laying on of hands
3. Ordination (mentioned regarding priests)

## EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

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### Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 15, it says we are accepted of God 'if' we obey His ordinances. How does that make you feel about your standing with God on days when you feel you haven't performed perfectly?
2. How do you interpret the 'pattern' for discerning spirits here? If a spirit preached Christ but didn't follow Mormon ordinances, would this text require you to reject it?
3. The text promises Missouri as the land of inheritance. Since the early saints were driven out and the city wasn't built there as expected, how do you view the phrase 'I will hasten the city in its time'?

### Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Need for a Pattern – We all fear deception and crave a standard of truth. Joseph offered a pattern of rituals. Jesus offers Himself as the pattern. [Hebrews 1:3 (Christ is the exact imprint of God's nature); John 14:6 (I am the way, the truth, and the life).]
2. The Desire for an Inheritance – The text speaks to the human longing for a permanent home (Zion). The Gospel promises an inheritance that is imperishable, kept in heaven, not in Missouri. [1 Peter 1:4 (an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away).]

### Spiritual Weight:

1. Performance Anxiety / Uncertainty [Severe] – By linking acceptance to ordinance obedience (v15) and threatening that the unfaithful will be 'cut off' (v6), the text places the burden of salvation on the believer's consistency. This creates a cycle of anxiety: 'Have I done enough? Was I contrite enough during the ordinance?'
2. Displaced Hope [Moderate] – Focusing hope on a physical location (Missouri) creates cognitive dissonance when historical reality (expulsion) contradicts the promise. It grounds spiritual hope in unstable geopolitical soil rather than the finished work of Christ.

## EPISTEMOLOGY

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**Knowledge Source:** Prophetic Revelation (Joseph Smith) and Personal Experience (Manifestations).

**Verification Method:** The 'Pattern' (verses 14-19): Observing if a spirit/person obeys ordinances and exhibits meekness/trembling.

**Evangelical Contrast:** Biblical epistemology tests spirits by their confession of Jesus Christ as come in the flesh (1 John 4:1-3) and alignment with the 'faith once for all delivered' (Jude 3), not by whether the messenger performs specific rituals or trembles.

## TEXTUAL CRITICISM

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**Dating:** June 6, 1831

**Authorship:** Joseph Smith (dictated)

**Textual Issues:** Verse 37 mentions 'Simonds Ryder.' In the original manuscript, his name was misspelled 'Rider.' Historical sources suggest Ryder, a Campbellite preacher, doubted Smith's inspiration because the Holy Spirit presumably would know how to spell his name. He later apostatized.