

# SECTION 57

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

## OVERVIEW

Received on July 20, 1831, in Jackson County, Missouri, Doctrine and Covenants Section 57 is a pivotal text in early Mormon history that transitions the movement from a spiritual gathering to a literal, geographic empire-building project. Joseph Smith, claiming the voice of the Lord, definitively identifies Independence, Missouri, as the 'center place' of Zion and the 'land of promise.' The revelation provides specific instructions for the physical layout of this New Jerusalem, pinpointing a spot for a temple 'westward' of the courthouse. It establishes an economic and logistical framework for the community, appointing Sidney Gilbert to establish a store to generate funds for land acquisition and W.W. Phelps to establish a printing operation. The text underscores a theology of 'inheritance,' where spiritual standing is intrinsically linked to the acquisition of physical territory in the designated holy land. This revelation set the stage for the massive migration of Latter-day Saints to Missouri, resulting in severe social conflict with local settlers and the eventual expulsion of the Saints, making the unfulfilled command to build the temple in this specific generation a significant point of historical and theological tension.

## KEY FIGURES

Joseph Smith, Sidney Gilbert, Edward Partridge, William W. Phelps, Oliver Cowdery

## DOCTRINES ANALYZED

### 1. GEOGRAPHIC ZION

**Assertion:** The biblical Zion is a literal city to be built in Independence, Missouri, which is the 'center place' for the gathering of Saints.

"This is the land of promise, and the place for the city of Zion... Independence is the center place (D&C 57:2-3)"

**Evangelical Comparison:** In Evangelical theology, the concept of Zion is transposed from the Old Testament physical location to a New Testament spiritual reality. Hebrews 12:22 states, 'But you have come to Mount Zion... the heavenly Jerusalem.' Furthermore, Revelation 21 describes the New Jerusalem descending from heaven at the end of the age. D&C 57 reverts to a geo-political theocracy, locating the Kingdom of God in a specific American municipality to be bought with money. This contradicts Jesus' teaching in John 18:36 ('My kingdom is not of this world') and the Samaritan woman discourse in John 4:21, where Jesus de-emphasizes geographic worship locations.

### 2. PHYSICAL INHERITANCE

**Assertion:** Believers are to receive a physical plot of land in Missouri as an 'everlasting inheritance' distributed by the bishop.

"Divide unto the saints their inheritance... that they may obtain it for an everlasting inheritance (D&C 57:5, 7)"

**Evangelical Comparison:** D&C 57 literalizes the concept of inheritance, tying it to land ownership in Jackson County. In contrast, the Evangelical understanding of inheritance is soteriological and eschatological. Ephesians 1:14 describes the Holy Spirit as the guarantee of our inheritance, which is full redemption and eternal life with God. By focusing on temporal land acquisition as a religious duty and reward, the text shifts the focus from the finished work of Christ to a works-based community building project.

### 3. LAMANITE IDENTITY

**Assertion:** Native Americans living west of Missouri are identified as 'Jews' (Israelites), distinct from 'Gentiles' (white settlers).

"The line running directly between Jew and Gentile (D&C 57:4)"

**Evangelical Comparison:** The text refers to the border of the Indian Territory (modern Kansas/Oklahoma) as the line between 'Jew and Gentile.' This relies on the Book of Mormon claim that Native Americans are descendants of Israelites (Lamanites). Evangelical anthropology and secular genetics agree that Native Americans are not Semitic peoples. This misidentification alters the missiological approach, as Mormonism views evangelizing them

as 'restoring' them to their covenant, whereas the Bible views all nations as needing adoption into the family of God through Christ (Galatians 3:28).

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in the nature of the Kingdom and the Temple. Evangelicalism, grounded in the New Testament, teaches that Christ fulfilled the temple system (Hebrews 9:11-12) and that the Kingdom of God is 'within you' (Luke 17:21) or a spiritual reality until the Eschaton. D&C 57 reverts to a Mosaic-style theocracy, demanding a physical temple, a specific holy land, and a gathering of people to a geographic center. This 'Geographic Eschatology' creates a works-based system where salvation (exaltation) becomes tied to location and ritual participation rather than faith in the finished work of Christ.

Shared Values:

Desire to evangelize ('preached unto those who sit in darkness'); Ethical business practices ('sell goods without fraud'); Community care

Friction Points:

- 1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Adds a new holy land and temple command not found in the Bible.
- 2. [Critical] Christology (Finished Work) – Re-institutes the need for a physical temple, implying Christ's sacrifice and the tearing of the veil were insufficient.
- 3. [Major] Theology Proper (Kingdom of God) – Localizes the omnipresent God's work to a specific American county.

Semantic Warnings:

"Zion"

In Text: A literal city to be built in Independence, Missouri.  
Evangelical: The heavenly city of God (Hebrews 12:22) or the people of God; historically Jerusalem.  
Example: When a Mormon sings 'Zion,' they may be thinking of a gathered community in America; an Evangelical thinks of Heaven or the Church Universal.

"Inheritance"

In Text: A parcel of land assigned by the Bishop in Missouri.  
Evangelical: Eternal life and the Kingdom of God (1 Peter 1:4).  
Example: In D&C 57, inheritance is bought with money; in the Bible, inheritance is bought by the blood of Christ.

"Jew"

In Text: In this context (v. 4), refers to Native Americans (Lamanites).  
Evangelical: Descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; the tribe of Judah.  
Example: The 'line between Jew and Gentile' refers to the Missouri/Indian Territory border, misidentifying Native Americans as Israelites.

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Implicitly linked to gathering to Zion and participating in the building of the Kingdom.  
How Attained: Through obedience to commandments, including migration and consecration of property.  
Basis of Assurance: Obedience to the Prophet and standing in the community (receiving an inheritance).  
Comparison to Sola Fide: Directly opposes Sola Fide by making the physical act of gathering, buying land, and building a city a prerequisite for full obedience and blessing. Romans 4:5 states faith is counted as righteousness to him who does not work.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

- 1. Purchase land in Independence and westward

2. Sidney Gilbert must establish a store
3. William W. Phelps must establish a printing press
4. Edward Partridge must divide land among the Saints
5. Oliver Cowdery must assist in editing and copying text

**Implicit Obligations:**

1. Migrate to Missouri (The Gathering)
2. Submit financial resources to the Bishop/Agent for land purchase
3. Accept the specific geographic location as divinely mandated

**Ritual Requirements:**

1. Preparation for the building of a physical temple

**EVANGELISM TOOLKIT**

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**Discovery Questions:**

1. The text says Independence is the center place and the temple spot is west of the courthouse. Since the temple hasn't been built there in nearly 200 years, how do you interpret the 'speedily' command in verse 14?
2. Hebrews 13:14 says we have 'no lasting city' here on earth. How does the command to buy an 'everlasting inheritance' of land in Missouri fit with the New Testament teaching that our citizenship is in heaven?
3. Why does the revelation call the Native American border the line between 'Jew and Gentile'?

**Redemptive Analogies:**

1. The Longing for Zion (Home) – Humans have a deep longing for a true home and a holy city. This longing is not satisfied by Missouri real estate but by the New Jerusalem and the presence of God secured by Christ. [Hebrews 11:10, 16 - Abraham looked for a city whose builder is God; they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one.]

**Spiritual Weight:**

1. Performance/Financial Pressure [Severe] – The text places a heavy burden on adherents to uproot their lives, migrate to a frontier, and use their financial resources to buy land to secure their spiritual 'inheritance.'
2. Cognitive Dissonance [Moderate] – Believers must reconcile the explicit command to build a temple in Independence with the historical reality that it never happened and the land is not currently in LDS possession.

**EPISTEMOLOGY**

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**Knowledge Source:** Prophetic Revelation (Joseph Smith acting as the mouthpiece of God).

**Verification Method:** Adherents are expected to accept the geographic designation based on the Prophet's word and the 'wisdom' asserted in the text.

**Evangelical Contrast:** Biblical epistemology tests prophecy against Scripture (Acts 17:11). This text demands acceptance of a new holy land based solely on Smith's authority, contradicting the New Testament's de-emphasis on holy sites (John 4:21-24).

**TEXTUAL CRITICISM**

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**Dating:** July 20, 1831

**Authorship:** Joseph Smith

**Textual Issues:** The 'line running directly between Jew and Gentile' (v. 4) is a historical marker referencing the Indian Removal Act of 1830, which defined the border of the Unorganized Territory. This anchors the text in 19th-century American politics.