

SECTION 62

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

OVERVIEW

Doctrine and Covenants Section 62, received on August 13, 1831, captures a moment of intersection between Joseph Smith's group returning from Independence, Missouri, and other elders traveling toward it. The text functions primarily as a missiological directive and a source of assurance for early Mormon missionaries. Theologically, it presents a high Christology in the opening verse, identifying Jesus as the Advocate who understands human weakness. However, it quickly pivots to a distinctively Mormon soteriology in verse 3, where the forgiveness of sins is explicitly connected to the act of bearing testimony, which is said to be 'recorded in heaven for the angels to look upon.' The revelation underscores the physical, geographic nature of the early Mormon concept of Zion (Independence, Missouri) as a place of gathering and preservation. It balances strict commands to preach with a surprising degree of administrative flexibility regarding travel logistics ('it mattereth not unto me'), emphasizing personal judgment guided by the Spirit. The text concludes with eschatological promises regarding the kingdom and the preservation of the faithful.

KEY FIGURES

Jesus Christ (The Advocate), Joseph Smith, Traveling Elders (Missionaries), Angels (Witnesses of testimony)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. MERITORIOUS FORGIVENESS

Assertion: Forgiveness of sins is granted as a result of bearing testimony and missionary service.

"ye are blessed, for the testimony which ye have borne is recorded in heaven... and your sins are forgiven you. (D&C 62:3)"

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, forgiveness is a judicial act of God based on the substitutionary atonement of Christ, received by faith alone (Ephesians 1:7). D&C 62:3 introduces a transactional element where the 'testimony borne' is the antecedent cause for the declaration 'your sins are forgiven.' This implies that missionary labor and public confession of the tenets of the faith contribute to the believer's justification, creating a 'treasury of merit' dynamic where acts recorded in heaven secure spiritual standing.

2. GEOGRAPHIC ZION

Assertion: Zion is a specific physical location (Missouri) where the faithful must gather for preservation.

"Assemble yourselves upon the land of Zion... faithful among you should be preserved and rejoice together in the land of Missouri. (D&C 62:4, 6)"

Evangelical Comparison: The New Testament reinterprets Old Testament geographic promises through the lens of Christ and the Church (Hebrews 12:22). Evangelicalism rejects the notion of a holy geographic center in the church age (John 4:21). Mormonism, conversely, retains a literal, territorial understanding of Zion, specifically identifying Independence, Missouri, as the center place for gathering and safety, effectively re-Judaizing the concept of the Kingdom.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The primary theological gap lies in the mechanism of justification. D&C 62:3 suggests a 'ledger' theology where angels record human acts (testimonies) which then trigger divine forgiveness. This is a fundamental violation of Sola Fide, which posits that forgiveness is based solely on Christ's merit, received by faith, independent of human works or service. Additionally, the ecclesiology is divergent; the text focuses on a physical gathering in Missouri as a requirement for the 'fullness' of a mission, whereas Evangelicalism emphasizes the spiritual gathering of the Church into Christ.

Shared Values:

Jesus as Advocate (1 John 2:1); Compassion for human weakness (Hebrews 4:15); Imperative to evangelize/preach glad tidings; Gratitude to God

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Fide – Forgiveness is linked to the work of bearing testimony.
2. [Major] Sola Gratia – Divine favor (angels rejoicing) is earned through recorded acts.
3. [Minor] Theology Proper (Kingdom of God) – The Kingdom is tied to a specific American geography (Missouri).

Semantic Warnings:

"Advocate"

In Text: Jesus as one who pleads for the elders based on their faithfulness and testimony.

Evangelical: Jesus as one who pleads for the sinner based on His own propitiatory sacrifice (1 John 2:1-2).

Example: *In D&C 62, the Advocate succors those who are working for Zion; in the Bible, the Advocate is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world.*

"Zion"

In Text: Independence, Missouri.

Evangelical: The City of God, the heavenly Jerusalem, or the people of God (Hebrews 12:22).

Example: *The command to 'assemble upon the land of Zion' refers to a road trip to Missouri, not a spiritual state.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Implicitly defined here as forgiveness of sins and preservation in the land of Zion.

How Attained: Through faith in Christ (Advocate) coupled with active obedience (bearing testimony, traveling to Zion).

Basis of Assurance: The knowledge that one's testimony is 'recorded in heaven' (v3).

Comparison to Sola Fide: Directly contrasts with Romans 4:5 ('to him that worketh not, but believeth... his faith is counted for righteousness'). D&C 62:3 implies 'to him that beareth testimony, his sins are forgiven.'

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Harken to the Lord (v1)
2. Continue the journey to Zion (v4)
3. Assemble and hold a meeting (v4)
4. Offer a sacrament (v4)
5. Declare glad tidings to the inhabitants of the earth (v5)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Bear testimony frequently so it can be recorded in heaven
2. Exercise personal judgment in logistical matters (v8)
3. Accept blessings (like transportation) with a thankful heart (v7)

Ritual Requirements:

1. Offer a sacrament (specifically in the land of Zion)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 3, it says sins are forgiven and angels rejoice because the testimony is recorded. How do you balance that with the biblical teaching that we are forgiven solely through Christ's blood?

2. Verse 6 promises that the faithful would be preserved in the land of Missouri. Since the Saints were expelled from Missouri historically, how do you interpret this promise?
3. When you bear your testimony, do you feel it is adding to your standing before God, or is it a response to the standing you already have in Christ?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Advocate – Just as the text identifies Jesus as the Advocate, the Bible teaches He is our only defense. However, He pleads His own blood, not our testimonies. [1 John 2:1-2]
2. Recorded in Heaven – The Bible speaks of names being written in the Lamb's Book of Life, not because of what we did, but because of who He is. [Luke 10:20]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Performance/Works-Righteousness [Moderate] – The believer carries the burden of knowing their forgiveness is tied to the frequency and quality of their 'testimony bearing.' If they are silent, are they unforgiven?
2. Geographic/Physical Displacement [Mild] – The pressure to physically relocate or gather to a specific location (historically Missouri, later Utah) to find 'preservation' creates anxiety about one's physical location rather than spiritual condition.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Prophetic Revelation (Joseph Smith) and Subjective Confirmation (The Spirit).

Verification Method: Adherents are told to act according to 'judgment' and 'directions of the Spirit' (v8), implying an internal subjective confirmation of the external prophetic command.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology tests spirits against the closed canon of Scripture (1 John 4:1, Acts 17:11). Here, the 'Spirit' is invoked to confirm extra-biblical instructions about travel and geography.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: August 13, 1831

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated)

Textual Issues: Part of the compilation of revelations originally published in the Book of Commandments, later the Doctrine and Covenants. Editing of these texts was common in early Mormon history to clarify or expand meaning.