

SECTION 63

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

OVERVIEW

Given in August 1831, shortly after Joseph Smith's return from designating Independence, Missouri, as the site of Zion, Section 63 addresses the rising anxiety among early converts regarding the gathering. The text establishes a strict dichotomy between the 'faithful' and the 'wicked.' It opens with a warning against those seeking signs to generate faith, asserting that signs only follow belief. It transitions to a condemnation of lust and adultery, linking sexual purity directly to the retention of the Spirit. Theologically, it introduces specific eschatological concepts, including the 'transfiguration' of the earth and the state of humanity during the Millennium (where children grow old and die instantly to be changed). Practically, the text is a mandate for resource consolidation, commanding specific individuals to sell property and send money to Zion to purchase land, explicitly linking financial contribution to spiritual inheritance. It concludes with a redefinition of 'taking the Lord's name in vain' as using it without priesthood authority.

KEY FIGURES

Jesus Christ (Alpha and Omega), Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, Oliver Cowdery, Titus Billings, Newel K. Whitney

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. SIGN SEEKING VS. FAITH

Assertion: Faith does not come by signs; signs follow those who believe. Seeking signs is evidence of an adulterous spirit.

"faith cometh not by signs, but signs follow those that believe... signs come by faith... unto mighty works (v9-11)"

Evangelical Comparison: The text echoes the biblical sentiment of Matthew 12:39 ('An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign'). However, D&C 63 creates a specific theological mechanic where signs are a reward for faith ('signs come by faith') rather than solely a sovereign act of God for His glory. Evangelicalism views miracles as sovereign attestations of the Gospel message (Hebrews 2:4), not necessarily a guaranteed result of human faith.

2. PURCHASE OF ZION

Assertion: The establishment of God's kingdom (Zion) requires the physical purchase of land; obtaining it by blood is forbidden and leads to scourging.

"the land of Zion shall not be obtained but by purchase or by blood... if by purchase, behold you are blessed (v29-30)"

Evangelical Comparison: D&C 63 presents a geo-political theology where the Kingdom of God is tied to specific real estate in Missouri. The text mandates financial transactions to secure spiritual inheritance. In contrast, Evangelical theology holds that the Kingdom is currently spiritual, entered by regeneration (John 3:3), and the future inheritance is the New Jerusalem which comes down from heaven (Rev 21), not land purchased by human funds.

3. PRIESTHOOD AUTHORITY AND THE LORD'S NAME

Assertion: Using the name of the Lord without specific priesthood authority constitutes taking His name in vain.

"who use the name of the Lord, and use it in vain, having not authority (v62)"

Evangelical Comparison: Evangelicalism teaches the Priesthood of All Believers (1 Peter 2:9), meaning all Christians have access to God and authority to pray or speak in Jesus' name. D&C 63 restricts this, asserting that those without specific ecclesiastical authority are under condemnation for using the Lord's name. This creates a hierarchy of access to God.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: While sharing moral imperatives against lust, D&C 63 diverges fundamentally from Evangelicalism in its ecclesiology and eschatology. The text constructs a theocratic system where 'Zion' is a physical location to be bought with money, and spiritual inheritance is contingent upon this participation. This contradicts the New Testament teaching that the inheritance of the saints is 'imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven' (1 Peter 1:4), secured by Christ, not by land purchase. Furthermore, the restriction on using the Lord's name to those with specific 'authority' (v62) denies the Universal Priesthood of believers, re-erecting a mediatorial barrier that the Reformation sought to remove.

Shared Values:

Condemnation of adultery and lust; Belief in the Second Coming of Christ; Warning against sign-seeking; Reality of divine judgment

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Claims the Bible is incomplete (v21) and adds new binding revelation.
2. [Critical] Sola Fide – Links eternal reward/inheritance to the work of sending money and purchasing land (v48).
3. [Major] Universal Priesthood – Restricts the use of the Lord's name to those with specific authority (v62).

Semantic Warnings:

"Zion"

In Text: A specific geographic location in Jackson County, Missouri, to be purchased and built up.

Evangelical: Often refers to Jerusalem, the people of God, or the heavenly city (Hebrews 12:22).

Example: *In D&C 63, you 'purchase' Zion. In the Bible, you are born into Zion (Psalm 87) or come to it spiritually (Hebrews 12).*

"Transfiguration"

In Text: A future physical change of the earth (v20-21) and a reference to a 'fuller' account of the event on the Mount.

Evangelical: Specifically the event where Jesus revealed His glory to Peter, James, and John (Matt 17).

Example: *D&C 63 claims the earth itself will be transfigured, a concept distinct from the biblical 'new heaven and new earth.'*

"Mysteries"

In Text: Additional revelation given to the obedient (v23).

Evangelical: Truths once hidden but now fully revealed in Christ (Colossians 1:26).

Example: *Paul says the mystery IS Christ; D&C implies mysteries are further secrets to be earned.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Includes 'inheritance' on a transfigured earth and resurrection.

How Attained: Through faith, repentance, enduring, and specific works like gathering to Zion and financial contribution.

Basis of Assurance: Based on obedience to commandments and the validation of the prophet (v41).

Comparison to Sola Fide: D&C 63:48 states 'He that sendeth up treasures... his works shall follow him, and also a reward in the world to come.' This suggests a merit-based reward system tied to financial sacrifice, contrasting with Ephesians 2:8-9 where salvation is a gift, not of works.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Repent of adultery and lust immediately (v15)
2. Assemble in Zion, but not in haste (v24)
3. Purchase lands in Zion (v27)
4. Titus Billings must sell his land and prepare to travel to Zion (v39)
5. Send all spare money to Zion (v40)

6. Newel K. Whitney must keep his store for a time but send money (v42-43)

7. Sidney Rigdon must rewrite his description of the land of Zion (v56)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept Joseph Smith's discernment on who is worthy to go to Zion (v41)

2. Accept that the Bible is incomplete regarding the Transfiguration (v21)

Ritual Requirements:

1. Ordination required to warn sinners (v57)

2. Ordination required to manage temporal concerns (v45)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 21, it says the 'fulness' of the Mount of Transfiguration account hasn't been received. What do you think is missing from Matthew 17 that is essential for our salvation?

2. Verse 48 connects sending money to Zion with receiving an inheritance in the world to come. How do you reconcile this with the biblical teaching that our inheritance is kept in heaven by Christ's work, not our own?

3. Verse 62 says using the Lord's name without authority is using it in vain. Does this mean a believer without LDS priesthood cannot truly pray in Jesus' name?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Longing for a Safe Home (Zion) – Humans have a deep longing for a place where righteousness dwells and they are safe. The text seeks this in Missouri. [Hebrews 11:10, 16 - Abraham looked for a city whose builder is God, a heavenly country, not an earthly plot of land.]

2. The Need for Inner Purity – The text correctly identifies that sin starts in the heart. The Gospel offers a new heart (regeneration), not just a threat of judgment. [Ezekiel 36:26 - 'I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you.']}

Spiritual Weight:

1. Financial/Transactional Salvation [Moderate] – The text explicitly links spiritual inheritance to the ability and willingness to send money to Zion. This places a burden on the poor or those unable to contribute, potentially causing doubt about their standing.

2. Uncertainty/Fear [Severe] – The text emphasizes God's willingness to destroy 'when he pleases' (v4) and the threat of the 'lake of fire' for those who are fearful or unbelieving (v17). This creates a relationship based on fear of volatile judgment rather than assurance of grace.

3. Disenfranchisement [Moderate] – By stating that using the Lord's name without authority is sin (v62), the text disempowers the individual believer, making their connection to God dependent on the hierarchy.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Prophetic Revelation. Truth is known through the voice of the Lord delivered by Joseph Smith.

Verification Method: Obedience to the commandments yields 'mysteries of the kingdom' (v23).

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the illuminated Word of God (Psalm 119:105) and the witness of the Spirit consistent with Scripture (Acts 17:11). D&C 63 relies on the current prophet's utterance, even when it claims the Bible is incomplete (v21).

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: August 30, 1831

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated)

Textual Issues: The text reflects the immediate historical pressure of the Missouri gathering. The rebuke of Sidney Rigdon (v55-56) highlights internal leadership tensions.