

SECTION 69

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

OVERVIEW

Doctrine and Covenants Section 69, received in November 1831, addresses a practical logistical concern within the early Latter-day Saint movement with theological weight. Oliver Cowdery was tasked with transporting the manuscript revelations (which would become the Book of Commandments) and church funds to Independence, Missouri ('Zion'). Joseph Smith dictates a revelation stating it is 'not wisdom' for Cowdery to travel alone, appointing John Whitmer as his traveling companion for safety and accountability. Beyond the travel logistics, the text reinforces John Whitmer's role as the Church Historian. He is commanded to travel, preach, and actively collect historical data and stewardship accounts to preserve for the 'rising generations' who will inhabit Zion 'forever and ever.' This text highlights the early Mormon emphasis on record-keeping, the physical gathering to Missouri, and the belief that administrative decisions regarding personnel and travel were subject to direct divine revelation.

KEY FIGURES

Joseph Smith (Revelator), Oliver Cowdery (Carrier of funds/scripture), John Whitmer (Church Historian/Companion)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. THE GATHERING TO ZION

Assertion: Independence, Missouri is the central gathering place ('seat') where accounts are received and where the church will dwell forever.

"For the land of Zion shall be a seat and a place to receive and do all these things... for the rising generations that shall grow up on the land of Zion, to possess it from generation to generation, forever and ever. (D&C 69:6, 8)"

Evangelical Comparison: In this text, 'Zion' is explicitly geographic (Independence, Missouri) and political/administrative. It is the place where church funds and reports are sent. In contrast, Evangelical theology, drawing on Hebrews 12:22 and Revelation 21, views Zion as the heavenly city of God or the spiritual body of believers. The assertion that a specific American location would be possessed 'forever and ever' conflicts with the Evangelical understanding of the New Earth and creates a historical friction point, as the Saints were expelled from this land shortly after this revelation.

2. SACRED RECORD KEEPING

Assertion: Recording the history of the church is a divine mandate essential for future generations.

"Continue in writing and making a history of all the important things which he shall observe and know concerning my church (D&C 69:3)"

Evangelical Comparison: The text elevates the role of the Church Historian to a divine calling. John Whitmer is told to 'hearken' to the Lord regarding his note-taking. In Evangelicalism, while church history is valuable for instruction, it is not generated via direct revelation, nor is the administrative history of the church viewed as binding scripture. This reflects the Mormon tendency to canonize the organizational development of their institution.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in the nature of the Kingdom of God. D&C 69 presents a Kingdom that is physical, bureaucratic, and geographically centered in Missouri, requiring divine micromanagement of travel plans. Evangelical theology presents the Kingdom as spiritual, universal, and centered on the finished work of Christ, guided by the sufficient Scriptures and the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, the open canon demonstrated here—where God speaks new binding words about John Whitmer's travel itinerary—undermines the finality of God's speech in the Son (Hebrews 1:1-2).

Shared Values:

Wisdom in financial accountability (2 Corinthians 8:20-21).; Concern for the 'rising generation' (Psalm 78:4).; The value of recording God's dealings with His people.

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – The text presents a modern administrative directive as the 'Word of the Lord,' equal in authority to the Bible.
2. [Major] Eschatology / Kingdom of God – Locates the eternal inheritance in Missouri, contradicting the biblical teaching of a New Heaven and New Earth not built by human hands.

Semantic Warnings:

"Zion"

In Text: Independence, Missouri; a physical gathering place and administrative headquarters.

Evangelical: The dwelling place of God; historically Jerusalem, prophetically the New Jerusalem or the spiritual community of believers (Hebrews 12:22).

Example: *In D&C 69, Zion is a place to send reports. In the Bible, Zion is the city of the Great King (Psalm 48:2).*

"Stewardship"

In Text: A formal report or account of one's church assignment sent to headquarters.

Evangelical: The responsible management of God-given resources (time, talent, treasure) accountable to God directly (1 Peter 4:10).

Example: *D&C 69:5 commands stewards to send written accounts to Zion; Biblical stewardship is a spiritual posture before God.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Implicitly linked to the gathering to Zion and the preservation of the community for future generations.

How Attained: Through obedience to the commandments (including these administrative ones) and participation in the building of Zion.

Basis of Assurance: Faithful discharge of duties (stewardship).

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text focuses entirely on works (traveling, writing, copying, preaching) as the will of the Lord. There is no mention of grace or faith in Christ's atonement as the basis for their standing, only their utility to the church organization.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. John Whitmer must accompany Oliver Cowdery to Missouri.
2. John Whitmer must continue writing the history of the church.
3. Missionaries/Servants abroad must send stewardship accounts to Zion.
4. John Whitmer must travel to various churches to collect information.

Implicit Obligations:

1. Financial accountability (two-person rule for transport).
2. Submission to central authority (Zion) regarding stewardship.
3. Acceptance of Joseph Smith's administrative decisions as God's voice.

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 8, it says the rising generations would possess the land of Zion (Missouri) 'forever and ever.' How do you reconcile this promise with the fact that the Saints were expelled from Missouri just two years later?

2. Why do you think God used direct revelation to organize travel companions and money transport? How does this compare to how we see the Apostles making decisions in Acts (e.g., Acts 15:28)?
3. The text emphasizes recording history for the 'rising generations.' What is the most important thing the next generation needs to know to be saved?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Need for a Faithful Companion – Just as Oliver needed a faithful companion to guard the treasure, we need the 'Friend that sticks closer than a brother' (Proverbs 18:24). Ultimately, Christ is the only one 'true and faithful' (Revelation 19:11) who can guard our souls. [Ecclesiastes 4:9-10, Hebrews 13:5]
2. Concern for the Rising Generation – The desire to pass down truth is God-given. The ultimate truth to pass down is not administrative history, but the 'faith that was once for all delivered to the saints' (Jude 1:3). [Psalm 78:4-7]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Performance/Stewardship Anxiety [Moderate] – The requirement to 'send forth accounts' creates a culture of surveillance and reporting. The believer is constantly under administrative scrutiny, fearing that their stewardship will be found wanting.
2. Cognitive Dissonance [Severe] – The believer must reconcile the text's promise that they would possess Missouri 'forever and ever' with the historical reality that they do not possess it. This requires mental gymnastics to spiritualize or postpone a prophecy that was explicitly physical and immediate.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Prophetic Revelation (Joseph Smith) and Empirical Observation (John Whitmer).

Verification Method: Obedience to the revelation validates the authority; Whitmer is to 'observe and know' (verse 3).

Evangelical Contrast: Evangelicals test truth claims against the fixed standard of the Bible (Acts 17:11). Here, truth is established by the current utterance of the prophet regarding administrative logistics.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: November 11, 1831

Authorship: Joseph Smith

Textual Issues: This revelation was part of the compilation process for the 'Book of Commandments,' which was later destroyed by a mob, then republished as Doctrine and Covenants.