

SECTION 87

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

OVERVIEW

Received on Christmas Day 1832, during the Nullification Crisis involving South Carolina, this revelation is Joseph Smith's most famous prophecy regarding the American Civil War. The text predicts that war will begin with the rebellion of South Carolina and eventually result in the 'death and misery of many souls.' It outlines a domino effect: Southern States against Northern States, the South calling on Great Britain, and eventually war being 'poured out upon all nations.' The prophecy includes specific eschatological elements distinct to Mormon theology, such as the 'remnants' (Lamanites/Native Americans) vexing the Gentiles. It frames these calamities as the wrath of God to avenge the 'blood of the saints.' The revelation concludes with a directive to 'stand ye in holy places' until the Lord comes. For Latter-day Saints, this text is often cited as proof of Joseph Smith's prophetic calling due to the accurate prediction of the Civil War's starting location, though critics point to the unfulfilled predictions regarding immediate global consumption and the specific nature of the slave uprisings and Native American involvement.

KEY FIGURES

The Lord (Jehovah), Joseph Smith, Southern States, Northern States, Great Britain, Slaves, Remnants (Native Americans/Lamanites), The Saints

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. PROPHETIC FOREKNOWLEDGE

Assertion: God reveals specific political and military future events to His prophet to warn the faithful.

"Verily, thus saith the Lord concerning the wars that will shortly come to pass... (D&C 87:1)"

Evangelical Comparison: Evangelical Christianity affirms that God knows the future (Isaiah 46:10) and has spoken through biblical prophets. However, the Evangelical view of 'Sola Scriptura' implies that the canon of Scripture is closed. Therefore, while God may grant wisdom or insight, specific, binding, extra-biblical prophecies given by modern individuals (like Joseph Smith) are rejected. Evangelicals test such claims by Deuteronomy 18:22—if a prophecy fails in any detail, the prophet is not from God. This contrasts with the Mormon view that accepts Joseph Smith as a revelator for the latter days.

2. DIVINE RETRIBUTION FOR PERSECUTION

Assertion: Global calamities are sent specifically to avenge the blood of the Saints (Mormons).

"That the cry of the saints, and of the blood of the saints, shall cease to come up into the ears of the Lord... to be avenged of their enemies. (D&C 87:7)"

Evangelical Comparison: In this text, the motivation for global catastrophe is linked to the persecution of the 'saints' (specifically early Mormons). Evangelical theology acknowledges God's justice and defense of His people (Romans 12:19), but it does not view the American Civil War or global wars primarily as vengeance for the treatment of the LDS Church. Furthermore, the New Testament emphasis is often on praying for persecutors (Matthew 5:44) rather than awaiting their destruction as a primary theological focus.

3. IDENTITY OF THE REMNANT

Assertion: The 'remnants' (Indigenous peoples) are a covenant people destined to punish the Gentiles.

"remnants who are left of the land will marshal themselves... and shall vex the Gentiles with a sore vexation. (D&C 87:5)"

Evangelical Comparison: This doctrine relies on the Book of Mormon narrative (e.g., 3 Nephi 20:16) where the 'Lamanites' (associated with Native Americans) are prophesied to tear through the Gentiles like a lion among sheep. Evangelical Christianity views Native Americans as people created in God's image who need the Gospel, not as a specific covenant group ethnically distinct from other nations in terms of eschatological role. The concept of them 'vexing' the Gentiles is unique to Restorationist theology.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in the source of authority and the teleology of history. For Evangelicals, history moves toward the return of Christ to judge the living and the dead, as revealed in the Bible. In D&C 87, history is manipulated by God specifically to avenge the 'blood of the saints' (Mormons), elevating the LDS Church to the center of cosmic history. Furthermore, the text violates the Evangelical understanding of the closed canon by introducing specific political predictions as binding scripture. The 'Remnant' theology also introduces a racial/ethnic eschatology (Lamanites vs. Gentiles) absent from and contradictory to the New Testament's 'one new man' in Christ (Ephesians 2:15).

Shared Values:

Sovereignty of God over nations; Reality of divine judgment; Expectation of the Day of the Lord

Friction Points:

- 1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Adds new, binding prophecy to the canon.
- 2. [Major] Prophetic Reliability (Deut 18) – Contains unfulfilled elements (global consumption, remnant uprising) alongside fulfilled ones.
- 3. [Moderate] Theology Proper (God's Justice) – Depicts God's global judgment as primarily a mechanism for sectarian vengeance.

Semantic Warnings:

"Saints"

In Text: Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.
Evangelical: All true believers in Jesus Christ, set apart by the Holy Spirit (Romans 1:7).
Example: *When the text speaks of avenging the 'blood of the saints,' it refers to Joseph Smith and early Mormons, not Christian martyrs generally.*

"Remnants"

In Text: Native Americans/Lamanites, viewed as a covenant people of Israel.
Evangelical: Usually refers to the faithful minority of Israel or the Church (Romans 11:5).
Example: *The text expects 'remnants' to vex Gentiles physically; the Bible does not assign this role to Native Americans.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: In this context, salvation is physical preservation ('stand in holy places') and ultimate vindication against enemies.

How Attained: By obedience to the command to gather/stand in holy places.

Basis of Assurance: Proximity to the 'holy places' designated by the prophet.

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text focuses on survival through obedience to prophetic warning rather than justification by faith. While not explicitly denying Sola Fide here, the focus is on works (standing, gathering) to escape wrath.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

- 1. Stand ye in holy places (D&C 87:8)
- 2. Be not moved (D&C 87:8)

Implicit Obligations:

- 1. Believe in Joseph Smith's ability to predict the future
- 2. View current events/wars as divine judgment for the persecution of Mormons
- 3. Prepare for global calamity

Ritual Requirements:

1. Gathering to Zion (historically)
2. Temple attendance (modern interpretation of 'holy places')

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. When you read about the 'full end of all nations' in verse 6, do you see that as having happened after the Civil War, or is it still future?
2. How do you interpret the role of the 'remnants' (Native Americans) vexing the Gentiles in verse 5? Has that happened historically?
3. The text says these calamities are to avenge the 'blood of the saints.' How does this compare to Jesus' command to forgive our enemies?
4. What does 'standing in holy places' mean to you personally today?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Need for a Holy Place – The text recognizes the need for a shelter from wrath. In the Gospel, Christ is our shelter and our 'Holy Place.' We are hidden in Him. [Psalm 32:7, Colossians 3:3]
2. The Storm is Coming – The world is indeed broken and facing judgment. The solution is not a geographic location, but a person—Jesus Christ. [John 16:33]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Fear/Anxiety [Moderate] – The text creates a worldview of imminent, violent destruction and persecution. The believer must constantly scan geopolitical events for signs of the end, fostering a siege mentality.
2. Cognitive Dissonance [Moderate] – The believer must reconcile the accurate parts of the prophecy (Civil War/SC) with the inaccurate parts (Global end/Remnants), often leading to complex mental gymnastics to maintain faith in the prophet.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Prophetic Revelation.

Verification Method: Observation of historical fulfillment (Civil War) and internal spiritual witness.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the sufficiency of Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16). Evangelicals verify truth by comparing it to the Bible, whereas this text asks to be accepted based on the authority of the speaker and subsequent historical correlation.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: December 25, 1832.

Authorship: Joseph Smith.

Textual Issues: The revelation was not included in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants; it was added to the Pearl of Great Price in 1851 and the D&C in 1876. This delay is significant as it was canonized *after* the Civil War began/concluded, leading to accusations of retroactive emphasis.