

SECTION 97

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

OVERVIEW

Given in August 1833, during a period of escalating persecution in Jackson County, Missouri, this revelation addresses the spiritual state of the 'Saints in Zion.' Joseph Smith, speaking as the voice of the Lord, commends Parley P. Pratt and the 'school in Zion' but issues a stern warning to the community. The central mandate is the immediate construction of a temple ('house of the Lord') in Independence, Missouri. The text imbues this building project with soteriological necessity, stating the house is required 'for the salvation of Zion' and for the perfection of the ministry. The revelation redefines Zion not merely as a location, but as a people who are 'the pure in heart.' It concludes with a stark conditional covenant: if the Saints observe 'all things' commanded and 'sin no more,' they will escape coming judgments. Conversely, failure to obey will result in divine visitation through pestilence, plague, and sword. This text establishes the Mormon paradigm that physical safety and spiritual salvation are contingent upon temple ordinances and strict obedience to prophetic command.

KEY FIGURES

The Lord (Speaker), Joseph Smith (Prophet/Voice), Parley P. Pratt (Commended Servant), The Saints in Zion (Missouri)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. TEMPLE-DEPENDENT SALVATION

Assertion: The construction of a physical temple is necessary for the salvation of the community (Zion).

"Behold, this is the tithing and the sacrifice which I, the Lord, require... that there may be a house built unto me for the salvation of Zion (D&C 97:12)"

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, the 'temple' is the body of the believer and the collective church, indwelt by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19). Salvation is a finished work accomplished by Christ's atonement. D&C 97 shifts the locus of salvation to a physical structure and the ordinances performed therein. Verse 12 explicitly links the building of the house to the 'salvation of Zion,' suggesting that without this human work, the community's salvation is incomplete or jeopardized. This reintroduces a sacred space requirement that the New Testament declares fulfilled in Jesus (John 4:21-24).

2. CONDITIONAL PRESERVATION VIA PERFECTION

Assertion: Divine protection from judgment is contingent upon total obedience and the cessation of sin.

"Nevertheless, Zion shall escape if she observe to do all things whatsoever I have commanded her... and if she sin no more none of these things shall come upon her (D&C 97:25, 27)"

Evangelical Comparison: Evangelicalism teaches that while obedience is a fruit of faith, a believer's standing before God and ultimate security rests on the imputed righteousness of Christ (Romans 8:1). D&C 97 establishes a covenant of works where safety from 'pestilence, plague, and sword' is earned through observing 'all things' and the demand to 'sin no more.' This creates a theology of probation where divine favor is constantly at risk based on human performance, contradicting the assurance found in 1 John 1:8-9 which acknowledges believers still struggle with sin.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: D&C 97 illustrates the fundamental divergence between Mormon Covenantalism and Evangelical Grace. In this text, God's presence and the community's salvation are transactional: 'If Zion do these things she shall prosper' (v18). The requirement includes building a physical structure and achieving a state where they 'sin no more' (v27). This is a re-entrenchment of the Mosaic principle of blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience (Deuteronomy 28). Evangelical theology holds that the New Covenant breaks this cycle; Christ absorbed the curse (Galatians 3:13), and the believer's standing is based on His righteousness, not their ability to build temples or perfect themselves.

Shared Values:

Desire for purity of heart; Belief in divine judgment; Importance of tithing/giving; God's omniscience regarding human hearts

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Fide – Salvation and escape from judgment are conditioned on works (building a temple) and moral perfection ('sin no more').
2. [Major] Christology – The sufficiency of Christ is diminished by the requirement of a physical temple for the 'salvation of Zion.'
3. [Major] Sola Gratia – Blessings are strictly merit-based ('if she observe to do all things').

Semantic Warnings:

"Zion"

In Text: Both a specific location (Jackson County, MO) and a spiritual status ('the pure in heart').

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

Example: *In D&C 97:19, Zion is a city that 'cannot fall,' yet historically the Mormon Zion in Missouri did fall/was evacuated.*

"Salvation"

In Text: In v12, 'salvation of Zion' implies preservation, exaltation, and establishment of the Kingdom through temple ordinances.

Evangelical: Deliverance from the penalty and power of sin through Christ's death and resurrection.

Example: *The text links salvation to a building project; the Bible links salvation to the person of Jesus.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Salvation encompasses physical protection from 'scourge' and spiritual acceptance by God, contingent on temple ordinances.

How Attained: By tithing, building the temple, observing all commandments, and becoming 'pure in heart.'

Basis of Assurance: Assurance is low and conditional; it exists only 'if' the adherent sins no more.

Comparison to Sola Fide: Directly opposes Sola Fide. D&C 97:25 says Zion escapes 'if she observe to do all things.' Romans 3:28 says a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Build a house (temple) in Zion speedily (v11)
2. Pay tithing to fund the construction (v11-12)
3. Do not allow any unclean thing into the temple (v15)
4. Observe to do all things commanded (v25)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Achieve a state of sinlessness ('sin no more') to ensure community safety
2. Submit to the 'school in Zion' for instruction
3. Accept the redefinition of Zion as a moral status ('pure in heart')

Ritual Requirements:

1. Tithing as a requisite sacrifice
2. Temple ordinances (implied by 'keys' and 'ministry' in v14)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 27, the Lord promises blessings 'if she sin no more.' How do you interpret that requirement in your daily life?
2. Verse 12 says the temple is built for the 'salvation of Zion.' How does the temple contribute to salvation in a way that Jesus's sacrifice on the cross didn't already accomplish?
3. The text defines Zion as 'the pure in heart.' Do you feel you have achieved the purity of heart required to see God (v16) without the intercession of Christ?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Pure in Heart – This acknowledges the high standard God requires. No human is naturally pure in heart (Jeremiah 17:9). This longing for purity is only satisfied when God gives us a 'new heart' (Ezekiel 36:26) and purifies us through faith in Jesus (Acts 15:9). [Matthew 5:8; Acts 15:9]
2. A Place of Refuge/Instruction – The text expresses a desire for a safe place to meet God. In the Gospel, Christ Himself is that temple (John 2:19-21) and our refuge (Hebrews 6:18). We don't need to build a building to find safety; we run to Him. [John 2:19-21; Hebrews 6:18]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Perfectionism/Impossible Standard [Severe] – The command to 'sin no more' (v27) as a condition for escaping 'devouring fire' places an unbearable burden on the believer. It ties physical safety and spiritual acceptance to flawless performance.
2. Fear of Judgment [Moderate] – The graphic threats of 'pestilence, plague, sword, vengeance' (v26) for non-compliance create a relationship with God based on terror rather than love or grace.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Prophetic Revelation confirmed by internal spiritual witness.

Verification Method: The text implies verification through the 'voice of my Spirit' (v1) and the resulting blessings/cursings based on obedience.

Evangelical Contrast: Evangelical epistemology tests all claims against the fixed standard of the Bible (Acts 17:11). This text demands acceptance based on the authority of the speaker (Joseph Smith speaking as God) and subjective spiritual experience, rather than objective scriptural alignment.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: August 2, 1833

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated)

Textual Issues: The revelation was received amidst the outbreak of violence in Missouri. The 'agreement' to leave Jackson County had been signed under duress just days prior (July 23), though Smith in Kirtland may not have known the full extent of the capitulation yet.