

## SECTION 99

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

### OVERVIEW

Given in August 1832, this revelation addresses John Murdock, a widower whose wife had died the previous year leaving him with young children (including twins whom Joseph and Emma Smith adopted, though the twins died shortly after). The text commands Murdock to proclaim the 'everlasting gospel' in the eastern countries. It establishes a high view of the missionary's authority, equating the reception of the missionary with the reception of the Lord. It introduces the ritual of 'cleansing feet' as a testimony against those who reject the message. Crucially, it addresses Murdock's domestic situation, instructing him not to depart until his remaining children are provided for and sent to the Bishop in Zion (Missouri). The text balances the immediate call to evangelism with the promise of a future inheritance in the 'goodly land' of Zion, contingent on his faithfulness in proclaiming the message until death.

### KEY FIGURES

Jesus Christ (The Speaker), John Murdock (Recipient), Bishop of Zion (Edward Partridge, implied caretaker of children)

### DOCTRINES ANALYZED

#### 1. REPRESENTATIVE AUTHORITY OF THE MISSIONARY

**Assertion:** Receiving the missionary is theologically equivalent to receiving Jesus Christ; rejecting the missionary results in rejection by the Father.

*"And who receiveth you receiveth me... And whoso rejecteth you shall be rejected of my Father and his house (D&C 99:2, 4)"*

**Evangelical Comparison:** In Evangelical theology, the authority rests in the Word of God (Scripture) which the messenger carries. Rejection is tragic because the sinner rejects the Gospel content. In this text, the authority is vested in the person holding the Priesthood keys ('my servant John Murdock'). The text implies that the act of hospitality and deference to the Mormon elder is the mechanism for receiving the Kingdom, blurring the line between faith in Christ and allegiance to His specific authorized representatives. This creates a mediatorial structure rejected by the Protestant doctrine of the Universal Priesthood.

#### 2. RITUAL CONDEMNATION (DUSTING OF FEET)

**Assertion:** Missionaries are authorized to perform a secret ritual of washing/cleansing feet to seal a testimony against those who reject them.

*"you shall cleanse your feet in the secret places by the way for a testimony against them (D&C 99:4)"*

**Evangelical Comparison:** This doctrine transforms a descriptive narrative element from the Gospels into a prescriptive, secret ordinance. In Mormon theology, this act is a formal priesthood procedure that serves as a witness against the rebellious at the Day of Judgment. Evangelicalism rejects the idea that human agents wield the power to ritually seal condemnation upon others; judgment is reserved for God alone based on the individual's response to Christ, not a ritual performed by a missionary.

#### 3. GEOGRAPHIC ZION

**Assertion:** Zion is a literal location ('goodly land') where inheritance is possessed and children are sent.

*"sent up kindly unto the bishop of Zion... go up also unto the goodly land, to possess thine inheritance (D&C 99:6-7)"*

**Evangelical Comparison:** The text reflects the early Mormon doctrine of gathering to Independence, Missouri. The 'Bishop of Zion' refers to the presiding bishop in that location. Evangelicals interpret New Testament references to Zion (e.g., Hebrews 12:22) as spiritual or eschatological (the New Jerusalem), not a geopolitical territory in North America to be possessed as an inheritance during the church age.

### COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

**Divergence Status:** Yes

**Theological Gap:** The fundamental gap lies in the nature of authority and salvation. In this text, salvation (mercy) is linked to receiving the authorized Mormon representative ('who receiveth you... shall obtain mercy'). This reflects the Mormon doctrine of the 'keys of the kingdom' held by the priesthood. Evangelicalism asserts that mercy is obtained solely through faith in Christ, independent of any human mediator or specific denomination. Furthermore, the command to 'cleanse feet' as a testimony against rejecters suggests a judicial authority granted to men that Evangelicals believe belongs to Christ alone at the Final Judgment.

#### **Shared Values:**

Zeal for evangelism; Expectation of the Second Coming ('I come quickly'); Responsibility to provide for one's children; Reliance on the Holy Spirit for preaching

#### **Friction Points:**

1. [Major] Sola Fide / Solus Christus – Implies mercy is contingent on receiving the human messenger ('who receiveth you... shall obtain mercy').
2. [Moderate] Universal Priesthood – Establishes a hierarchical priesthood where the messenger stands in the place of Christ ('receiveth you receiveth me') in a structural/authoritative sense.
3. [Major] God as Sole Judge – Authorizes humans to perform rituals that testify against/condemn others ('cleanse your feet... against them').
4. [Minor] Kingdom of God (Nature) – Locates the Kingdom/Zion in a specific American geography rather than a spiritual reality.

#### **Semantic Warnings:**

##### **"Gospel"**

**In Text:** The specific message of the Restoration, including the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith's prophetic office.

**Evangelical:** The good news of Jesus Christ's death, burial, and resurrection for the forgiveness of sins (1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

**Example:** *When Murdock proclaims the 'gospel', he is proclaiming Mormonism's unique claims, not just the biblical kerygma.*

##### **"Zion"**

**In Text:** A literal city to be built in Independence, Missouri.

**Evangelical:** The dwelling place of God; historically Jerusalem, spiritually the Church, eschatologically the New Jerusalem.

**Example:** *Sending children to the 'Bishop of Zion' meant sending them physically to Missouri.*

## **SOTERIOLOGY**

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**Salvation Defined:** Implicitly defined here as entering the 'kingdom' and obtaining 'mercy' (v3).

**How Attained:** For the hearer: By receiving the missionary 'as a little child'. For the missionary: By obedience to the call until death.

**Basis of Assurance:** For the missionary: 'Demonstration of my Holy Spirit' and fulfilling the mission.

**Comparison to Sola Fide:** The text suggests a works-based component (receiving the messenger/hospitality) as a prerequisite for mercy, contrasting with Romans 3:28 (justification by faith apart from deeds).

## **MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS**

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#### **Explicit Commands:**

1. Go into the eastern countries
2. Proclaim the gospel from house to house
3. Cleanse feet in secret places against those who reject the message
4. Provide for children before leaving
5. Send children to the Bishop of Zion

#### **Implicit Obligations:**

1. Accept persecution as part of the calling

2. Prioritize ministry assignment over raising children personally (once provided for)
3. Rely on the Spirit for power in preaching

**Ritual Requirements:**

1. Cleansing of feet (ordinance of judgment)

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## EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

**Discovery Questions:**

1. When the text says 'who receiveth you receiveth me,' do you see that as receiving the message of Christ, or receiving the authority of the Priesthood holder?
2. How do you interpret the command to 'cleanse feet' against people? Does that practice still happen today?
3. Verse 6 talks about providing for children before leaving. How does your faith balance the call to ministry with the biblical mandate to care for one's own family (1 Timothy 5:8)?

**Redemptive Analogies:**

1. Father to the Fatherless – Just as God ensured Murdock's children were cared for, God presents Himself as the Father to the fatherless (Psalm 68:5, James 1:27)
2. Urgency of the Return – The shared belief in the imminent return of Christ drives us to share the Gospel. The difference is the content of that Gospel. [Revelation 22:20]

**Spiritual Weight:**

1. Burden of Judgment [Moderate] – The missionary is placed in a position of judicial authority, responsible for testifying **\*against\*** people. This creates a heavy psychological burden where the missionary feels responsible for the condemnation of others.
2. Institutional Pressure vs. Family [Severe] – While the text mandates provision for children, the solution offered is institutional (send them to the Bishop) rather than parental presence, potentially creating guilt or family fragmentation for the sake of the mission.
3. Performance-Based Acceptance [Moderate] – The missionary's ultimate reward (inheritance) is contingent on continuing 'until thou be taken' (v8), creating a pressure to perform until death to ensure salvation.

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## EPISTEMOLOGY

**Knowledge Source:** Prophetic Revelation (Joseph Smith) and Subjective Confirmation (Holy Spirit)

**Verification Method:** The text promises power to declare the word 'in the demonstration of my Holy Spirit' (v2), implying experiential confirmation.

**Evangelical Contrast:** Evangelicals test spirits by the objective standard of the written Bible (1 John 4:1, Acts 17:11). This text relies on the authority of the modern prophet and subjective spiritual experience.

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## TEXTUAL CRITICISM

**Dating:** August 29, 1832

**Authorship:** Joseph Smith (dictated)

**Textual Issues:** No major textual variants, but the historical context of Murdock's family situation is critical for interpretation.