

SECTION 10

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

OVERVIEW

Doctrine and Covenants Section 10 is a pivotal revelation received by Joseph Smith in the aftermath of the loss of the 116 manuscript pages of the Book of Mormon. The text, voiced as Jesus Christ, addresses the crisis created when Martin Harris lost the initial translation. The revelation asserts that 'wicked men' have not only stolen the pages but have actively altered the wording to entrap Joseph. The logic presented is that if Joseph were to re-translate the same portion, the conspirators would produce the altered stolen version to show discrepancies, thereby claiming Joseph had no divine gift. To circumvent this 'cunning plan' of Satan, the Lord commands Joseph to translate the 'Small Plates of Nephi' instead, which cover the same historical period but with a more spiritual focus. This text establishes the theological premise that God's foreknowledge anticipates human failure and Satanic opposition, having prepared a 'backup' record centuries in advance. It also defines the early Mormon concept of the church and the insufficiency of the Bible without this new record.

KEY FIGURES

Jesus Christ, Joseph Smith, Satan, Martin Harris (implied as the 'wicked man'), Nephi, The 'Wicked Men' (conspirators)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. DIVINE CONTINGENCY PLANNING

Assertion: God prepared the Small Plates of Nephi anciently specifically because He foresaw the loss of the 116 pages in 1828.

"And now, because the account which is engraven upon the plates of Nephi is more particular... I would bring to the knowledge of the people in this account (v. 40-41)"

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, God's sovereignty ensures that His Word is preserved and accomplished (Isaiah 55:11). The idea that Satan could successfully disrupt the transmission of scripture to the point where God requires a 'backup plan' (the Small Plates) to bypass a trap implies a dualistic struggle where Satan has significant power to thwart God's primary intent. Evangelicals view the canon as providentially preserved, not contingent on outwitting human conspirators through alternative texts.

2. THE INSUFFICIENCY OF THE BIBLE

Assertion: The current scriptures (Bible) are misunderstood and cause contention; the Book of Mormon is required to establish the 'true points' of doctrine.

"Satan doth stir up the hearts of the people to contention concerning the points of my doctrine; and in these things they do err... Therefore, I will unfold unto them this great mystery (v. 63-64)"

Evangelical Comparison: This text asserts that the Bible ('that which you have received') is not enough to prevent doctrinal error or contention. It claims the Book of Mormon is necessary to 'bring to light the true points of my doctrine' (v. 62). This violates the Evangelical tenet of Sola Scriptura (2 Timothy 3:16-17), which holds that the Bible is sufficient for all matters of faith and practice. The implication is that the Bible is ambiguous or corrupted, necessitating a new revelation to clarify it.

3. SATANIC CONSPIRACY

Assertion: Satan actively inspires men to alter texts and lay elaborate traps to destroy the reputation of God's servants.

"Satan hath put it into their hearts to alter the words... that by lying they may say they have caught you (v. 10, 13)"

Evangelical Comparison: While Evangelicals believe in spiritual warfare (Ephesians 6), the specific claim here is that Satan organizes detailed conspiracies involving the physical alteration of manuscripts to entrap a prophet. This creates a worldview where criticism or contradictory evidence is dismissed as a satanic plot, insulating the leader from accountability. It contrasts with the biblical test of a prophet, which relies on the truthfulness of the message, not the maneuvering of enemies.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: D&C 10 represents a fundamental divergence from Evangelical Christianity in its doctrine of Scripture. By claiming the Bible is insufficient and that God's plan relies on a 'backup' scriptural record to outwit Satan, it diminishes God's sovereignty and the Bible's authority. Furthermore, the text redefines the 'Church' around the acceptance of this new revelation. The primary gap is the assertion that the Book of Mormon contains 'the only doctrine which is in me' (v. 62), effectively displacing the Bible as the primary source of truth.

Shared Values:

The existence of Satan and spiritual warfare; The necessity of repentance; Jesus Christ as the Light of the World; The desire for the gospel to reach all nations

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Claims the Bible is insufficient and requires the Book of Mormon to clarify doctrine.
2. [Major] Sola Fide – While mentioning repentance, the text ties salvation to the acceptance of the 'work' (Book of Mormon) and enduring in the specific church established by it.
3. [Major] Theology Proper (Sovereignty) – Depicts God as reacting to Satan's moves with backup plans rather than sovereignly preserving His Word.

Semantic Warnings:

"My Church"

In Text: Initially defined as 'whosoever repenteth and cometh unto me' (v. 67), but contextually tied to the acceptance of the Book of Mormon.

Evangelical: The body of all true believers in Jesus Christ, regardless of denominational affiliation (Ephesians 1:22-23).

Example: In D&C 10:67, 'My Church' sounds inclusive, but verse 56 condemns those who 'build up churches unto themselves,' which is later interpreted to mean all other Christian denominations.

"Gospel"

In Text: The specific teachings found in the Book of Mormon, including the 'true points' of doctrine allegedly missing from the Bible.

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

Example: Verse 62 refers to 'my gospel' as something that needs to be brought to light by the Book of Mormon, implying the biblical gospel is incomplete.

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Inheriting the kingdom of heaven (v. 55) and having eternal life (v. 50).

How Attained: By repenting, coming unto Christ, and belonging to His church (v. 67), which involves accepting the new revelation.

Basis of Assurance: Assurance is conditional on 'enduring to the end' (v. 69) and not being deceived by Satan.

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text emphasizes 'coming unto me' and 'repenting' but frames this within the context of accepting the Book of Mormon as the restoration of the gospel. Evangelicalism posits that justification is by faith alone in Christ's finished work, not contingent on accepting post-biblical revelations.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Do not translate the lost 116 pages again (v. 30)
2. Translate the engravings on the plates of Nephi instead (v. 41)
3. Pray always to conquer Satan (v. 5)
4. Do not run faster than you have strength (v. 4)

5. Hold your peace/keep secrets until the work is finished (v. 37)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Trust that discrepancies in the text are the result of enemy sabotage, not translator error
2. View critics of the work as influenced by Satan
3. Accept the Book of Mormon as the clarifier of biblical doctrine

Ritual Requirements:

1. Repentance and baptism (implied in 'cometh unto me' and 'partake of the waters of life' v. 66-67)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. D&C 10 describes a plot where wicked men altered the handwritten manuscript of the 116 pages. If someone stole a letter you wrote, and then you wrote it again, wouldn't the changes made by the thief be obvious (different handwriting, crossed-out ink) compared to your new copy?
2. Why would God need a 'backup plan' (the Small Plates) for His scripture? Does this imply Satan can successfully thwart God's primary plan for His Word?
3. Verse 62 says the Book of Mormon contains 'the only doctrine which is in me.' How does this relate to the Bible, which Christians have used for centuries to find salvation?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Hen and Chickens – This is a direct quote of Jesus's lament over Jerusalem. It shows Christ's tender, protective love and His desire to save those who are wandering. [Matthew 23:37]
2. Light in Darkness – Christ is the only hope in a dark world. This connects to the biblical promise that darkness cannot overcome the light of Christ. [John 1:5]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Paranoia/Isolation [Moderate] – The text instills a deep suspicion of critics, framing them not as honest skeptics but as agents of a satanic conspiracy. This isolates the believer from outside perspectives.
2. Uncertainty [Moderate] – The narrative suggests that scripture and truth are fragile and can be 'lost' or 'altered' by men, potentially undermining confidence in God's ability to preserve His Word.
3. Performance Pressure [Moderate] – The command to 'conquer Satan' (v. 5) places the burden of spiritual warfare and the success of the work on the individual's faithfulness and prayer life.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Revelation through a prophet (Joseph Smith).

Verification Method: Adherents verify the claim by accepting the narrative that the 'backup' plates (Small Plates of Nephi) were divinely prepared for this specific crisis.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the public, historical verification of the Resurrection and the fixed canon of Scripture (Jude 1:3), rather than secret knowledge about lost manuscripts and conspiracies.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: Spring 1829 (likely April or May).

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated as revelation).

Textual Issues: This section addresses the loss of the 116 pages (Book of Lehi). It serves as a pivot point where the source material for the translation shifts from the 'Large Plates' to the 'Small Plates' of Nephi.