

SECTION 2

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

OVERVIEW

Doctrine and Covenants Section 2 is a brief but foundational text in Mormon theology, excerpted from Joseph Smith's history regarding the angelic visitation of Moroni in September 1823. In this text, Moroni quotes the biblical prophet Malachi (Malachi 4:5-6) but with significant textual alterations that change the theological trajectory of the passage. While the biblical text speaks of Elijah turning hearts to avert a curse, Moroni's version explicitly promises the revelation of 'the Priesthood' by the hand of Elijah. It asserts that this restoration is necessary to plant 'promises made to the fathers' in the hearts of children. The text concludes with a dire warning: without this specific priesthood restoration and the subsequent intergenerational turning of hearts, the entire purpose of the earth's creation would be frustrated, resulting in it being 'utterly wasted' at Christ's Second Coming. This section serves as the theological cornerstone for the later development of LDS temple rituals and vicarious work for the dead.

KEY FIGURES

The Lord (Jesus Christ), Moroni (Angelic Messenger), Joseph Smith (Recipient), Elijah (Prophesied Restorer)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. RESTORATION OF THE PRIESTHOOD

Assertion: Priesthood authority was lost and must be revealed/restored specifically by the prophet Elijah before the Second Coming.

"Behold, I will reveal unto you the Priesthood, by the hand of Elijah the prophet" (D&C 2:1)"

Evangelical Comparison: Evangelical theology holds that the Levitical priesthood was fulfilled and superseded by Jesus Christ, the ultimate High Priest (Hebrews 7:11-28), and that all believers now constitute a 'royal priesthood' (1 Peter 2:9) with direct access to God. D&C 2 asserts that priesthood is a specific authority structure that was absent from the earth and required a specific angelic restoration (Elijah) to be valid. This undermines the sufficiency of Christ's ascension and the immediate access believers have to the throne of grace.

2. INTERGENERATIONAL SEALING (THE TURNING OF HEARTS)

Assertion: The 'turning of hearts' refers to a specific requirement to link generations (later defined as temple ordinances for the dead) to validate the earth's purpose.

"the hearts of the children shall turn to their fathers. If it were not so, the whole earth would be utterly wasted at his coming." (D&C 2:2-3)"

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical exegesis, Malachi 4:6 refers to social and spiritual reconciliation between generations or the turning of the Jewish people back to the faith of their patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob) in preparation for the Messiah. D&C 2 reinterprets this as a soteriological necessity involving 'promises' and 'fathers' (ancestors). In later LDS theology, this text is the primary justification for proxy baptisms and sealings. Evangelicalism rejects the necessity of works for the dead, citing Hebrews 9:27 ('appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment').

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in the sufficiency of Christ and Scripture. Evangelicalism holds that Christ's death and resurrection fully secured the redemption of the cosmos and that the 'great and dreadful day' is determined by God's sovereign timeline, not human ritual performance. D&C 2 introduces a 'Restorationist' gap: the idea that essential authority was lost and that the earth's purpose is contingent upon a 19th-century restoration of keys by Elijah. This shifts the focus from 'Sola Fide' (faith in Christ) to faith in the efficacy of the Priesthood and the necessity of sealing ordinances.

Shared Values:

Belief in the Second Coming of the Lord; Importance of family; Reverence for biblical prophets (Elijah)

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – The text modifies Malachi 4:5-6, changing the meaning from social/spiritual reconciliation to priesthood revelation.
2. [Major] Sola Fide – Implies that without the 'promises' and 'turning hearts' (works/rituals), the earth is wasted, adding works to the requirements of God's plan.
3. [Major] Universal Priesthood – Re-establishes a hierarchical, mediating priesthood that must be dispensed by a specific prophet (Elijah).
4. [Critical] Christology (Finished Work) – Suggests Christ's coming would result in a 'wasted' earth without the intervention of Elijah and the subsequent works of man.

Semantic Warnings:

"Priesthood"

In Text: The exclusive authority and power of God delegated to man to act in His name for the salvation of the human family.

Evangelical: The status of all believers who have access to God through Christ (1 Peter 2:5, 9), or the unique High Priesthood of Jesus.

Example: *In D&C 2, 'Priesthood' is a missing key Elijah must bring. In Hebrews 7, Priesthood is fully realized in Christ.*

"Turn the hearts"

In Text: To perform vicarious ordinances (temple work) binding generations together.

Evangelical: Repentance, reconciliation, and returning to the faith of the patriarchs (Luke 1:17).

Example: LDS use this phrase to motivate genealogy; the Bible uses it to describe the effects of John the Baptist's preaching.

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Implicitly defined here as 'Exaltation'—a state requiring the sealing of generations to avoid the earth being wasted.

How Attained: Through the Priesthood revealed by Elijah and the subsequent turning of hearts (ordinances).

Basis of Assurance: Confidence is placed in the restored keys and the performance of these promises.

Comparison to Sola Fide: D&C 2 makes the success of God's plan contingent on Priesthood restoration and human response (turning hearts), whereas Sola Fide asserts that the just shall live by faith alone (Romans 1:17) and that Christ's work is finished (John 19:30).

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Receive the Priesthood from Elijah (directed at Joseph Smith)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept the modified version of Malachi as authoritative
2. Engage in family history and genealogy (implied by 'turning hearts')
3. Participate in temple ordinances to prevent the earth from being 'wasted'

Ritual Requirements:

1. Priesthood ordination (implied)
2. Sealing ordinances (implied foundation for later practice)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. I noticed Moroni quotes Malachi 4 differently than my Bible does. Why do you think he changed the words from 'turn the hearts' to 'reveal the Priesthood'?
2. If the earth would be 'utterly wasted' without the work done in temples, does that mean Jesus's sacrifice on the cross wasn't enough to save the earth on its own?
3. How do you understand Hebrews 7, which says Jesus has an unchangeable priesthood, in light of the need for Elijah to come back and restore priesthood?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. Turning Hearts/Longing for Connection – The human longing for connection and legacy is real. However, the ultimate 'turning' is not to human ancestors, but being adopted as children of God. [Romans 8:15-16 (Spirit of adoption whereby we cry Abba, Father)]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Uncertainty/Instability [Moderate] – By altering the biblical text, the believer loses the stability of a fixed canon. If an angel can change the words of Scripture, the foundation of truth becomes fluid and dependent on the latest revelation.
2. Atlas Complex / Savior Complex [Severe] – The text implies the earth's purpose fails without the believer's participation in this work. This places the weight of the cosmos and the salvation of ancestors on the shoulders of the adherent, rather than resting on the finished work of Christ.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Supernatural visual and auditory revelation (Angel Moroni).

Verification Method: Personal spiritual witness (Moroni's promise in Book of Mormon) and acceptance of Joseph Smith's prophetic narrative.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the fixed, written Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16) tested against the 'faith once for all delivered' (Jude 1:3). D&C 2 relies on a subjective historical claim of an angelic visit that alters previous revelation.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: September 21, 1823 (Event); Recorded in history later; Canonized in D&C in 1876.

Authorship: Joseph Smith (claiming to quote Moroni).

Textual Issues: The text is a variation of the KJV Malachi 4:5-6. The KJV says Elijah will 'turn the heart of the fathers to the children.' D&C 2 changes this to 'reveal unto you the Priesthood' and 'plant in the hearts of the children the promises made to the fathers.'