

SECTION 49

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

OVERVIEW

Doctrine and Covenants Section 49, received in May 1831, is a polemical revelation addressed to the United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing, commonly known as the Shakers. Leman Copley, a convert to Mormonism from the Shakers, retained some of his former beliefs, prompting Joseph Smith to inquire of the Lord. The text systematically dismantles specific Shaker tenets: it rejects the Shaker belief that Christ had returned in the form of Ann Lee, affirms the consumption of meat against Shaker vegetarianism, and declares marriage 'ordained of God' against Shaker celibacy. However, while refuting Shaker legalism, the text imposes its own distinct restorationist requirements. It asserts that salvation requires not only faith and repentance but also baptism and the 'laying on of hands' by Mormon elders. It also introduces specific Mormon eschatology regarding the 'Lamanites' (Native Americans) blossoming before the Second Coming. The revelation serves to consolidate Joseph Smith's authority over rival religious movements by claiming to speak in the first-person voice of Jesus Christ ('I am Jesus Christ', v28).

KEY FIGURES

Jesus Christ (The Speaker), Joseph Smith (The Revelator), Leman Copley (Former Shaker, recipient), Sidney Rigdon (Missionary), Parley P. Pratt (Missionary), The Shakers (Target audience), Ann Lee (Implied target of refutation)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. ORDINANCE-BASED SALVATION

Assertion: Salvation requires baptism and the laying on of hands by authorized elders for the gift of the Holy Ghost.

"Repent and be baptized... for the remission of sins; And whoso doeth this shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost, by the laying on of the hands of the elders of the church. (D&C 49:13-14)"

Evangelical Comparison: While Evangelicals practice baptism, they reject the concept of 'baptismal regeneration' (that the water ritual itself remits sin) and the idea that the Holy Spirit is dispensed only through the 'laying on of hands' by a specific priesthood lineage. In Evangelical theology, the Holy Spirit is the 'seal' given immediately upon believing (Ephesians 1:13). This text creates a sacerdotal barrier between the believer and God, requiring a Mormon elder to mediate the transaction of grace.

2. SANCTITY OF MARRIAGE (MONOGAMY)

Assertion: Marriage is ordained of God, and a man should have one wife.

"Wherefore, it is lawful that he should have one wife, and they twain shall be one flesh (D&C 49:16)"

Evangelical Comparison: In 1831, Joseph Smith taught strict monogamy, aligning with the Biblical standard found in Genesis 2 and Matthew 19. This text explicitly states 'one wife' is lawful. This creates a significant internal contradiction within the Mormon canon when compared to D&C 132 (received later), which claims polygamy is the 'new and everlasting covenant.' For the Evangelical, this text is biblically sound on marriage but historically problematic for Mormon truth claims regarding the consistency of their revelations.

3. LAMANITE IDENTITY

Assertion: Native Americans (Lamanites) are a covenant people who will spiritually flourish before the Second Coming.

"Jacob shall flourish in the wilderness, and the Lamanites shall blossom as the rose. (D&C 49:24)"

Evangelical Comparison: The text asserts a specific ethnic and spiritual identity for Native Americans ('Lamanites'), claiming they are a remnant of Jacob (Israel). Evangelicalism affirms that people from every tribe and tongue will be saved (Revelation 7:9) but rejects the specific historicity of the Book of Mormon's claim that Native Americans are of Israelite descent. This is a theological and historical divergence.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The text presents a classic 'Restorationist' dilemma. It correctly identifies errors in Shaker theology (denial of marriage, denial of physical resurrection) but attempts to correct them with a new error: the necessity of Joseph Smith's authority and ordinances. The gap is not just in the *content* of the theology (ordinances vs. faith) but in the *locus of authority*. For the Evangelical, the Bible is sufficient to refute Shakerism (e.g., 1 Timothy 4). For the adherent of this text, the Bible is insufficient, and a new revelation from Joseph Smith is required to settle the dispute. Furthermore, the text makes salvation contingent on the 'laying on of hands' by Mormon elders, denying the priesthood of all believers.

Shared Values:

Sanctity of marriage (vs. celibacy); Goodness of creation/food (vs. asceticism); Belief in the literal Second Coming of Christ; Necessity of repentance

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Joseph Smith speaks new commandments and prophecies in the first person of Jesus, adding to the canon.
2. [Critical] Sola Fide – Salvation/Remission of sins is tied to the physical act of baptism and the laying on of hands (v13-14).
3. [Major] Universal Priesthood – The Holy Ghost is dispensed only through the 'laying on of the hands of the elders' (v14), creating a mediator class.

Semantic Warnings:

"Lamanites"

In Text: Native Americans, viewed as a remnant of the House of Israel (Jacob).

Evangelical: Term not found in the Bible.

Example: When the text says 'Lamanites shall blossom,' it refers to a specific racial/covenantal restoration of Native Americans, not a general spiritual revival.

"Everlasting Covenant"

In Text: The fullness of the gospel as restored through Joseph Smith (v9).

Evangelical: Usually refers to the Abrahamic Covenant or the New Covenant in Christ's blood (Hebrews 13:20).

Example: In this text, the 'everlasting covenant' is something 'sent unto you' (v9) via the restoration, implying it was previously lost.

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Remission of sins and reception of the Holy Ghost leading to exaltation.

How Attained: Faith, Repentance, Baptism (by authority), Laying on of Hands (by authority).

Basis of Assurance: Compliance with the ordinances administered by the elders.

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text explicitly adds ritual requirements ('whoso doeth this shall receive...') to the receipt of the Holy Ghost, denying the evangelical view that the Spirit is received by hearing with faith (Galatians 3:2).

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Go and preach the gospel to the Shakers (v1)
2. Repent and be baptized (v13)
3. Receive the laying on of hands (v14)
4. Marry and have one wife (v15-16)
5. Eat meat/do not forbid meat (v18-19)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept Joseph Smith's revelations as the voice of Jesus Christ
2. Reject Shakerism and other competing restorationist movements
3. Prepare for the imminent Second Coming

Ritual Requirements:

1. Water Baptism for remission of sins
2. Laying on of hands by elders for the Holy Ghost

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 16, the Lord commands that a man should have 'one wife.' How do you reconcile this eternal law with the later command for polygamy in D&C 132?
2. Verse 14 says the Holy Ghost comes by the laying on of hands by elders. How does this compare to Acts 10:44, where the Holy Ghost fell on Gentiles *before* they were baptized or had hands laid on them?
3. The text mentions 'Lamanites' blossoming (v24). Since DNA evidence suggests Native Americans are not Israelites, how do you interpret who this prophecy is about?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. Affirmation of Creation – Just as this text rejects the Shaker idea that we must punish our bodies to please God, the Gospel affirms that God gives us all things richly to enjoy (1 Tim 6:17). We don't need to earn God's favor through asceticism OR through Mormon rituals. [1 Timothy 4:3-5]
2. Desire for Truth – Like the Shakers, we all have partial understanding. But the fullness of truth is not found in a new law, but in the person of Jesus Christ who is the Truth. [John 14:6]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Uncertainty of Truth [Moderate] – The believer is subjected to 'progressive revelation' where a command today (monogamy) can be overturned tomorrow (polygamy), creating an unstable foundation for morality.
2. Ritual Dependence [Severe] – The believer cannot access the Holy Spirit or remission of sins directly through prayer and faith; they are dependent on the availability and worthiness of a human priesthood hierarchy.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Prophetic Revelation (Joseph Smith acting as the mouthpiece of God).

Verification Method: Obedience to the revelation leads to blessings; rejection leads to being 'confounded' (v27).

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the illuminated Word of God (Psalm 119:105) and the Berean spirit of testing teachings against Scripture (Acts 17:11). This text demands acceptance based on the authority of the speaker (Smith) rather than scriptural alignment.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: May 7, 1831

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated)

Textual Issues: The text reflects the theology of 1831 (monogamy). Later editions of the D&C retained this section despite the later practice of polygamy, creating a canonical tension.