

SECTION 85

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

OVERVIEW

Doctrine and Covenants Section 85, received in 1832, addresses the administrative and spiritual necessity of the Law of Consecration within the early Latter-day Saint community in Missouri (Zion). The text functions as a strict boundary marker for the community, asserting that spiritual standing is inextricably linked to the physical act of deeding property to the Bishop. It establishes a bureaucratic soteriology where a 'Lord's clerk' records the 'manner of life, faith, and works' of the Saints. Those who fail to consecrate their property are to be expunged from the 'book of the law of God' and denied an inheritance in Zion. The text introduces two significant theological figures/concepts: the prophecy of 'One Mighty and Strong' who will set God's house in order, and the warning against 'steadyng the ark' (unauthorized attempts to correct church leadership), punishable by spiritual or physical death. The revelation concludes by linking this modern exclusion to the exclusion of priests in the book of Ezra, reinforcing a restorationist priesthood lineage dependent on strict obedience and record-keeping.

KEY FIGURES

The Lord God, Joseph Smith, W.W. Phelps, The Lord's Clerk, The Bishop (Edward Partridge), One Mighty and Strong, The Man Who Steadies the Ark

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. CONDITIONAL INHERITANCE VIA CONSECRATION

Assertion: Eternal inheritance in Zion is contingent upon the legal consecration of property and the subsequent recording of this act by the church clerk.

"It is contrary to the will and commandment of God that those who receive not their inheritance by consecration... should have their names enrolled with the people of God. (D&C 85:3)"

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, the believer's inheritance is 'imperishable, undefiled, and unfading' (1 Peter 1:4), secured solely by the finished work of Christ and the sealing of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13-14). D&C 85 posits a material condition for this inheritance: the consecration of physical property to the Bishop. Failure to comply results in the removal of the individual's name from the 'book of the law of God,' effectively equating financial obedience and bureaucratic enrollment with soteriological standing. This reintroduces a Levitical/legalistic framework where standing before God is mediated by adherence to ceremonial and civil law rather than the imputed righteousness of Christ.

2. THE ONE MIGHTY AND STRONG

Assertion: A future figure will be sent to set the house of God in order and arrange inheritances.

"I, the Lord God, will send one mighty and strong, holding the scepter of power in his hand... to set in order the house of God (D&C 85:7)"

Evangelical Comparison: This doctrine introduces a figure distinct from Joseph Smith (and arguably distinct from Jesus in this specific context, though some apologists conflate them) who holds a 'scepter of power.' For the Evangelical, Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church (Colossians 1:18) and has already set the house in order through the New Covenant. The anticipation of another 'mighty and strong' human agent to arrange inheritances implies that the current order is insufficient or chaotic and distracts from the sufficiency of Christ's governance over His body.

3. PROHIBITION ON STEADYING THE ARK

Assertion: Unauthorized individuals who attempt to correct or stabilize the Church (God's work) will be struck down.

"That man... that putteth forth his hand to steady the ark of God, shall fall by the shaft of death (D&C 85:8)"

Evangelical Comparison: The phrase 'steadyng the ark' refers to Uzzah in 2 Samuel 6. In Mormon theology, specifically D&C 85, this is interpreted as a prohibition against anyone without specific authority trying to

correct the leadership or direction of the Church. In Evangelical ecclesiology, while leadership is respected (Hebrews 13:17), the Priesthood of All Believers (1 Peter 2:9) allows for mutual accountability. The Bereans were commended for checking Paul's teaching against Scripture (Acts 17:11). D&C 85 creates a 'don't touch' dynamic that insulates leadership from correction by the laity.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: D&C 85 presents a fundamental incompatibility with Evangelical soteriology. It establishes a 'Book of the Law of God' distinct from the Lamb's Book of Life. Entry into this book—and thus escape from the 'day of vengeance'—is contingent upon the work of consecrating property. This is a return to a Levitical/Theocratic model where civil obedience determines spiritual validity. Furthermore, the text's Christology is diluted by the focus on a human 'Mighty and Strong' deliverer, and its ecclesiology is authoritarian, using the threat of death (stabilizing the ark) to silence dissent.

Shared Values:

Importance of record keeping; Holiness of God; Reality of Apostasy

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Fide – Salvation/Inheritance is dependent on the work of consecration and the administrative act of recording it.
2. [Critical] Sola Gratia – Grace is not mentioned; standing is earned through obedience to the law of consecration.
3. [Major] Christology (Sufficiency of Christ) – Anticipation of a human 'One Mighty and Strong' to set God's house in order implies Christ's current work is insufficient.
4. [Major] Universal Priesthood – Strict hierarchy enforced by death threats for 'stabilizing the ark'; laity cannot correct leadership.

Semantic Warnings:

"Inheritance"

In Text: A physical plot of land in Zion (Missouri) and celestial glory, contingent on works.

Evangelical: Spiritual adoption as heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, contingent on faith (Romans 8:17).

Example: *In D&C 85, you lose your inheritance if you don't deed your property. In the Bible, the inheritance is 'kept in heaven for you' (1 Peter 1:4) through faith.*

"Tithing"

In Text: In this context, synonymous with consecration (giving all deeded property to the Bishop and receiving a stewardship back).

Evangelical: OT: 10% tax for Levites; NT: Generous, cheerful giving (2 Cor 9:7).

Example: *D&C 85:3 mentions tithing as a preparation against burning, linking financial giving directly to eschatological survival.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Escaping the 'day of vengeance and burning' and receiving an inheritance among the Saints.

How Attained: By consecration of property and having one's name recorded in the church ledger.

Basis of Assurance: The physical presence of one's name in the 'book of the law of God.'

Comparison to Sola Fide: Directly opposes Sola Fide. D&C 85:9 states those not found in the record 'shall find none inheritance.' Romans 4:5 states 'to the one who does not work but believes... his faith is counted as righteousness.'

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Consecrate properties to the Bishop
2. Receive inheritances legally

3. Keep a history and general church record
4. Do not attempt to 'steady the ark' (correct leadership)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Submit to the Bishop's assessment of one's property
2. Maintain a 'manner of life' worthy of recording
3. Accept the hierarchy of the High Priesthood

Ritual Requirements:

1. Legal transfer of property deeds to the Church
2. Enrollment in the 'Book of the Law of God'

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 9, it says those not found in the record book are 'cut asunder' and assigned with unbelievers. Does this mean a clerical error or a lost record could jeopardize a person's salvation?
2. How does the requirement to have your name in the 'book of the law of God' through property consecration fit with the biblical promise that our names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life through faith?
3. Who do you understand the 'One Mighty and Strong' to be, and why is another figure needed to set God's house in order if Christ is the head of the church?
4. The text warns against 'steadyng the ark.' Does this mean a member cannot question a leader even if the leader is acting contrary to scripture?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Book of Remembrance – The text highlights a deep human need to be 'remembered' by God to escape judgment. The Gospel answers this not with a book of works, but with the Lamb's Book of Life. [Revelation 21:27, Luke 10:20]
2. Setting the House in Order – The text acknowledges the church is often messy and needs ordering. Jesus Christ cleansed the temple and builds His church, ensuring the gates of hell do not prevail. [Matthew 16:18, Hebrews 3:6]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Works-Righteousness / Financial Anxiety [Severe] – The believer must fear that if their financial consecration is deemed insufficient by the Bishop, their eternal inheritance is voided. Salvation is transactional.
2. Bureaucratic Legalism [Moderate] – Spiritual security is tied to the accuracy of human record-keeping. If the clerk fails, or the record is lost, the 'genealogy is not to be kept,' leading to exclusion.
3. Uncertainty [Mild] – The prophecy of the 'One Mighty and Strong' creates a perpetual looking forward to a new leader or a fear that the current church is 'out of order,' fostering instability.
4. Fear of Authority [Severe] – The 'steadyng the ark' warning creates a culture of silence where members are afraid to voice concerns about leadership for fear of being 'smitten' by God.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Subjective experiential revelation ('still small voice') that has physical effects.

Verification Method: Somatic confirmation: 'pierceth all things, and often times it maketh my bones to quake' (D&C 85:6).

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the objective Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16) illuminated by the Spirit, rather than somatic markers like quaking bones, which are subjective and unreliable (Jeremiah 17:9).

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: November 27, 1832

Authorship: Joseph Smith (Extract from a letter to W.W. Phelps)

Textual Issues: This is an extract from a letter canonized as scripture. The identity of the 'One Mighty and Strong' has been a subject of intense debate and revisionism within LDS history.