

QA-JOHN

FAITH: Mormonism | TEXT: A Key to the Revelations of St. John (QA-John) | VOLUME: Pearl Of Great Price | AUTHOR: Joseph Smith

OVERVIEW

This text, known in modern Latter-day Saint canon as Doctrine and Covenants Section 77, presents a Q&A session where Joseph Smith provides authoritative interpretations of the Apocalypse of John. Written around 1832 but published in the 1851 Pearl of Great Price, it marks a significant development in Mormon cosmology and ecclesiology. Smith moves away from traditional allegorical or symbolic interpretations of Revelation, instead positing a hyper-literal and materialist view of the afterlife. He asserts that the 'sea of glass' is the earth in a sanctified state, that animals possess eternal spirits and felicity, and that the 144,000 are not merely a symbolic number of the redeemed but a specific quorum of 'High Priests' ordained to administer the gospel. This text establishes the framework for the 'gathering of Israel' as a literal, administrative function of the priesthood and introduces a dispensational timeline of 7,000 years for the earth's temporal existence. It serves to legitimize the restoration of ancient offices and the necessity of priesthood ordinances for salvation.

KEY FIGURES

Joseph Smith, John the Revelator, The Four Beasts, The 144,000 (High Priests), Elias, Two Witnesses

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. SANCTIFICATION OF THE EARTH

Assertion: The 'sea of glass' is the Earth itself in a future sanctified, immortal, and eternal state.

"Q.—What is the sea of glass... A.—It is the Earth, in its sanctified, immortal, and eternal state."

Evangelical Comparison: In standard Evangelical exegesis, the 'sea of glass' in Revelation 4:6 is typically understood either as a literal feature of the third heaven (God's throne room) emphasizing His transcendence and purity, or symbolically representing the separation between the holy God and creation. Joseph Smith's interpretation collapses the distinction between heaven and earth, asserting that the earth itself evolves into this crystal sphere. This reflects the Mormon doctrine of eternal matter and the potential for physical creation to undergo exaltation, contrasting with the Evangelical view of a New Heaven and New Earth created by God after the destruction or renewal of the old order.

2. ETERNAL NATURE OF ANIMALS

Assertion: Animals have spirits, are created in the likeness of their temporal bodies, and enjoy eternal felicity.

"the Spirit of Man in the likeness of his person, as also the spirit of the beast, and every other creature which God has created."

Evangelical Comparison: Smith asserts a specific pneumatology where 'that which is spiritual' is in the exact likeness of 'that which is temporal.' He explicitly extends this to beasts, fowls, and creeping things, granting them 'eternal felicity.' Evangelicalism traditionally teaches that humans are unique in possessing an eternal spirit/soul derived from the breath of God (Genesis 2:7), while animals are 'nephesh' (living beings) but not destined for judgment or eternal life in the same sense. Smith's view elevates the status of the animal kingdom to a form of salvation.

3. THE 144,000 AS HIGH PRIESTS

Assertion: The 144,000 are specifically High Priests ordained to the Holy Order of God to administer the gospel.

"We are to understand that those who are sealed are High Priests, ordained unto the Holy Order of God, to administer the Everlasting Gospel"

Evangelical Comparison: This is a critical ecclesiological divergence. Evangelicalism affirms the Priesthood of All Believers (1 Peter 2:9) and recognizes Christ as the sole High Priest (Hebrews 4:14). Smith redefines this apocalyptic group as an administrative hierarchy holding a specific office ('High Priests'). This implies that salvation and the administration of the gospel are dependent on a hierarchical priesthood structure, rather than the direct agency of the Holy Spirit through the body of believers.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: While using biblical terminology, the text infuses it with a distinct theological framework. The 'Gospel' is described as something administered by High Priests who have power to seal or cast down, shifting the locus of salvation from Christ's cross to Priesthood authority. Furthermore, the cosmology presented (eternal animal spirits, earth becoming a crystal sphere) suggests a materialism that diverges from the classical Christian understanding of God as Spirit and creation as distinct from the Creator. The redefinition of the 144,000 from a symbolic group of the redeemed to a specific hierarchical office (High Priests) creates a barrier between the believer and God that the Veil of the Temple was torn to remove.

Shared Values:

Belief in the Second Coming of Christ; Belief in the existence of angels and their role in judgment; Reverence for the text of Revelation; Belief in a future restoration/millennium

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Universal Priesthood – Establishes a hierarchical class of 'High Priests' necessary to administer the gospel, denying the priesthood of all believers.
2. [Major] Theology Proper (God is Spirit) – Promotes a materialist view of spirit and heaven (earth becoming glass, spirit looking like temporal matter).
3. [Minor] Anthropology – Claims animals have eternal spirits and felicity, blurring the distinction between humans (Imago Dei) and animals.

Semantic Warnings:

"High Priest"

In Text: An office in the Melchizedek Priesthood held by many men (144,000) to administer the gospel.

Evangelical: A title belonging uniquely to Jesus Christ under the New Covenant (Hebrews 4:14-15), or the Levitical office fulfilled and ended by Him.

Example: *In this text, 144,000 men are High Priests; in Hebrews, there is only one High Priest, Jesus.*

"Sealed"

In Text: An ordinance performed by Priesthood authority to secure eternal status.

Evangelical: The work of the Holy Spirit guaranteeing the believer's inheritance (Ephesians 1:13).

Example: *The text implies angels/priests do the sealing; the Bible says the Holy Spirit is the seal.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Being sealed up unto life, entering the Church of the First Born, and inhabiting the sanctified earth.

How Attained: Through the administration of the 'Everlasting Gospel' by ordained High Priests.

Basis of Assurance: The 'seal' placed in the forehead by authorized agents (angels/priests).

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text implies that faith alone is insufficient; one must be 'sealed' by those with power to 'administer' the gospel, introducing a mediator other than Christ.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept Joseph Smith's authoritative interpretation of biblical symbolism
2. Recognize the authority of the 'High Priests' ordained to the Holy Order
3. Participate in the gathering of Israel (implied by the mission of the angels)

Ritual Requirements:

1. Ordination to the 'Holy Order of God' (High Priesthood) for select individuals
2. Sealing ordinances (implied by 'seal up unto life')

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. When you read about the 'sea of glass' being the earth, do you see that as a metaphor or a literal physical transformation?
2. The text mentions the 144,000 are High Priests. How does that relate to the book of Hebrews, which says Jesus is our High Priest?
3. What does it mean to you that angels or priests have the power to 'seal up unto life' or 'cast down'? How does that affect your assurance of salvation?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. Restoration of All Things – Humans long for the world to be made right. The true restoration is the New Creation inaugurated by Christ's resurrection. [Acts 3:21, Revelation 21:5]
2. Sanctified Earth – The Bible promises a New Heaven and New Earth where righteousness dwells, satisfying our longing for a physical, holy home. [2 Peter 3:13]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Dependency on Hierarchy [Severe] – The believer is dependent on 'High Priests' and 'Angels' who hold the power to seal or destroy. This removes the direct access to God's throne of grace and places spiritual security in the hands of an institution.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Direct Revelation through a Prophet

Verification Method: Acceptance of the Prophet's authority to define truth

Evangelical Contrast: Evangelical epistemology relies on the illumination of the Holy Spirit and hermeneutical study of the text (2 Timothy 2:15), not on a single individual's gnostic insight to decode symbols.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: March 1832 (Original dictation), Published 1851.

Authorship: Joseph Smith

Textual Issues: Presented as a translation/revelation key. It is an expansion/midrash on the KJV text of Revelation.