

ALMA

FAITH: Mormonism | TEXT: Book of Mormon | VOLUME: 1830 | AUTHOR: Joseph Smith

OVERVIEW

The Book of Alma is the longest book within the Book of Mormon, covering a period of approximately 39 years (91 B.C. to 52 B.C.). It narrates the transition from a monarchy to a system of judges and focuses heavily on the tension between the Nephites (characterized as believers) and the Lamanites (characterized as unbelievers), as well as internal dissenters like Nehor, Amlici, and Korihor who challenge the church's authority. The text is bifurcated into two main themes: missionary work and warfare. The first half details the ministries of Alma the Younger and the sons of Mosiah, who preach repentance and the coming of Christ. Notable theological discourses include Alma's sermon on faith (comparing the word to a seed) and Amulek's debate with Zeezrom regarding the nature of God and the resurrection. The second half is dominated by the 'war chapters,' featuring Captain Moroni, who defends the Nephite nation under the 'Title of Liberty.' The text posits a strict Deuteronomic theology: if the people keep the commandments, they prosper and are preserved; if they transgress, they are scourged by war and destruction. It presents a pre-Christian era church that practices baptism and looks forward to the atoning Messiah.

KEY FIGURES

Alma the Younger, Amulek, Captain Moroni, Helaman, Ammon, Aaron, Korihor, Zeezrom, Pahoran, Teancum

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. MODALISTIC MONOTHEISM

Assertion: The text asserts that the Son is the Eternal Father and that there is only one God, rejecting a plurality of gods while blurring the distinction of persons.

"And Zeezrom said unto him, Thou sayest there is a true and a living God? And Amulek said, Yea, there is a true and a living God. Now Zeezrom said, Is there more than one God? And he answered No... Is the Son of God the very Eternal Father? And Amulek said unto him, Yea, he is the very Eternal Father of Heaven and of Earth (Alma 11:26-29, 38-39)."

Evangelical Comparison: In Alma 11, the text presents a theology that appears Modalistic (Sabellianism), where the Father and Son are not just one in essence, but identified as the same personage. Amulek explicitly answers 'No' to the existence of more than one God and affirms the Son is the Eternal Father. This contrasts with the Evangelical doctrine of the Trinity (Matthew 28:19, 2 Corinthians 13:14), where the Father, Son, and Spirit are distinct persons. It also contrasts with later Mormon theology (D&C 130:22) which teaches the Father and Son have distinct bodies of flesh and bones.

2. FOREORDINATION TO PRIESTHOOD

Assertion: High Priests were called and prepared from the foundation of the world based on their exceeding faith and good works.

"And this is the manner after which they were ordained, being called and prepared from the foundation of the world, according to the foreknowledge of God, on account of their exceeding faith and good works (Alma 13:3)."

Evangelical Comparison: The text suggests a pre-mortal existence where individuals demonstrated 'exceeding faith and good works' which qualified them for the High Priesthood on earth. Evangelical theology generally rejects the pre-existence of human souls (Hebrews 9:27 implies one life) and views election as an act of God's grace (Ephesians 1:4-5), not a reward for pre-mortal merit. This doctrine establishes a hierarchy of spiritual worthiness based on a state of existence prior to birth.

3. RESTORATION OF THE BODY

Assertion: Resurrection is a physical restoration where every hair, limb, and joint is restored to its proper frame.

"The spirit and the body shall be re-united again, in its perfect form; both limb and joint shall be restored to its proper frame... even there shall not so much as a hair of their heads be lost (Alma 11:43-44)."

Evangelical Comparison: The text emphasizes a hyper-literal reconstruction of the mortal body. While Evangelical Christianity affirms a physical resurrection (1 Corinthians 15), Paul describes the resurrected body as a

'spiritual body' distinct in glory from the terrestrial. The Book of Alma emphasizes the restoration of the physical frame to its 'proper and perfect frame' as a universal event for both wicked and righteous prior to judgment.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: While the Book of Alma uses Christian terminology (Christ, atonement, faith), the theological definitions differ. The Godhead is presented in Alma 11 as a single personage (Modalism), contradicting the Trinitarian distinction of persons. Salvation is described as a process of 'retaining a remission of sins' through active benevolence (Alma 4), rather than a finished work of justification by faith. Furthermore, the text introduces a 'Holy Order' of priesthood based on pre-mortal merit (Alma 13), which has no biblical parallel in the New Testament church, violating the Evangelical tenet of Universal Priesthood.

Shared Values:

Necessity of Atonement; Reality of Satan and sin; Importance of repentance; Resurrection of the dead; Final Judgment

Friction Points:

- 1. [Major] Theology Proper (Trinity) – Teaches Modalism (Father and Son are the same person).
- 2. [Major] Sola Gratia – Teaches pre-mortal merit as the basis for earthly priesthood authority.

Semantic Warnings:

"Saved"

In Text: Resurrected and brought to God's presence; often conditional on keeping commandments.
Evangelical: Justified by faith and regenerated by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 2:8-9).
Example: *Alma 11:37 states Christ cannot save people 'in their sins,' implying a need for personal purification prior to salvation, whereas Romans 5:8 states Christ died for us 'while we were yet sinners.'*

"God"

In Text: In Alma 11, the Father and Son are identified as the same being (Eternal Father).
Evangelical: One God in three distinct persons (Matthew 3:16-17).
Example: *Amulek affirms the Son is the 'very Eternal Father' (Alma 11:38-39).*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Being raised to happiness, inheriting the Kingdom of God, and having garments washed white.

How Attained: By faith, repentance, baptism, and keeping commandments until the end. 'Retaining' remission of sins requires care for the poor (Alma 4:13-14).

Basis of Assurance: Based on the 'swelling' of the seed (faith) and the visible evidence of works/prosperity.

Comparison to Sola Fide: Alma 7:14 commands baptism 'unto repentance' as a prerequisite for salvation, adding a ritual requirement to faith. Alma 11:37 emphasizes one cannot be saved 'in' sins, suggesting a need for moral perfectionism that conflicts with Sola Fide (Romans 4:5).

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

- 1. Repent and be born again (Alma 7:14)
- 2. Lay aside every sin which easily doth beset you (Alma 7:15)
- 3. Plant the word in your hearts like a seed (Alma 32)
- 4. Defend families, lands, and religion, even unto bloodshed (Alma 43:47)

Implicit Obligations:

- 1. Support the church leaders financially and politically

2. Maintain a free government as a religious duty
3. Avoid 'costly apparel' and pride
4. Distinguish oneself from the 'wicked' traditions of the Lamanites

Ritual Requirements:

1. Baptism unto repentance (Alma 7:14)
2. Ordination of priests and elders by laying on of hands (Alma 6:1)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. Alma 7:10 mentions Jesus would be born 'at Jerusalem.' How do you reconcile this with the biblical account of Bethlehem?
2. In Alma 11, Amulek says the Son is the Eternal Father. How does this fit with the belief that they are separate beings with distinct bodies?
3. Alma 34:32 says 'this life is the time for men to prepare to meet God.' How does this relate to the doctrine of baptism for the dead or post-mortal salvation?
4. If priesthood authority is based on pre-mortal righteousness (Alma 13), does that imply those without it were less valiant before birth?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Seed – Just as a seed must be planted to grow, the Word of God (the Gospel) must be received. However, the Bible identifies the Seed ultimately as Christ (Galatians 3:16). [1 Peter 1:23]
2. The Title of Liberty – The desire for freedom is strong; the Gospel offers true freedom from the slavery of sin, not just political enemies. [Galatians 5:1]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Uncertainty [Moderate] – The modalistic view of God in Alma 11 creates confusion about who exactly the believer is praying to or relating with, complicating the relational aspect of the Trinity.
2. Performance/Merit [Severe] – The doctrine of pre-mortal merit (Alma 13) places a burden on the believer to prove their worthiness, implying that current status is a result of past performance, potentially leading to pride or despair.
3. Fear of Failure [Severe] – The text links temporal survival directly to righteousness. This creates a burden where any personal misfortune or national calamity is interpreted as a direct result of personal sin.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Spiritual witness (swelling motions), prophecy, and angelic visitation.

Verification Method: The 'experiment' of faith: planting the word/seed and observing if it swells and enlightens the understanding (Alma 32).

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the objective revelation of Scripture confirmed by the Spirit (2 Timothy 3:16). Alma 32 proposes a subjective, experiential test ('it beginneth to be delicious to me') as the primary verification of truth, rather than testing spirits against the objective standard of God's Word (1 John 4:1).

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: 1830 (Publication)

Authorship: Joseph Smith (Translator/Author)

Textual Issues: The text contains 19th-century revivalist language and themes (e.g., 'born again,' 'plan of salvation'). It quotes New Testament phrasing (e.g., 'gall of bitterness') prior to the New Testament era.