

CHAPTER 1

FAITH: Mormonism | TEXT: Words of Mormon | VOLUME: Book of Mormon | AUTHOR: Joseph Smith (attributed to Mormon)

OVERVIEW

The 'Words of Mormon' serves as a critical editorial bridge within the Book of Mormon. Written by the character Mormon in the 4th Century AD, it interrupts the chronological narrative to explain a textual anomaly: the inclusion of the 'Small Plates of Nephi' (covering 600 BC to 130 BC) alongside Mormon's own abridgment of the 'Large Plates.' Mormon states that while abridging the records, he discovered these smaller plates containing prophecies of Christ and felt compelled by the 'Spirit of the Lord' to include them for a 'wise purpose' known only to God. This section is historically significant to the text's production, as it covers the narrative gap created by the lost 116 manuscript pages in 1828. The text then transitions to the reign of King Benjamin, describing his use of the 'Sword of Laban' to defend his people and his strict theocratic measures—including the punishment of 'false Christs' and 'false prophets'—to establish peace and righteousness in the land.

KEY FIGURES

Mormon (Narrator/Editor), King Benjamin, Moroni (Son of Mormon), Amaleki, The Lamanites

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. THE 'WISE PURPOSE' (PROVIDENTIAL PRESERVATION)

Assertion: God directs the compilation of scripture for specific future needs, even if the compiler does not understand the immediate reason.

"And I do this for a wise purpose; for thus it whispereth me, according to the workings of the spirit of the Lord which is in me."

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, the canon is closed and preservation applies to the transmission of the biblical text (Sola Scriptura). In this text, the 'wise purpose' doctrine asserts that God orchestrates the physical compilation of hidden records to be revealed later. This is distinct from biblical preservation because it implies that the 'official' record (the Bible) is insufficient and that God prepared 'backup' scriptures (the Small Plates) to thwart future contingencies (like the loss of the 116 pages). It elevates a subjective spiritual 'whisper' to the level of canonical authority.

2. JUDGMENT BY RECORD

Assertion: Humanity (specifically the Nephites/Lamanites) will be judged based on the contents of the specific plates Mormon is writing.

"out of which my people and their brethren, shall be judged at the great and last day, according to the word of God which is written."

Evangelical Comparison: This doctrine places the Book of Mormon as a standard of judgment alongside or superior to the Bible for this specific people group. In Evangelical thought, judgment is universal and based on one's relationship with Christ (John 5:24) and the evidence of works as recorded in God's omniscient books (Revelation 20:12), but never contingent on a specific, hidden historical record. This text implies that the **existence** and **content** of these plates are the legal statute for the final judgment.

3. THEOCRATIC ENFORCEMENT OF ORTHODOXY

Assertion: Peace is established by physically punishing false religious teachers ('false Christs') and laboring with 'sharpness.'

"false Christs... punished according to their crimes... false prophets... punished according to their crimes... king Benjamin... laboring with all the might of his body... did once more establish peace"

Evangelical Comparison: The text describes a pre-Christian American society that punishes 'false Christs' as criminals. This suggests a state-enforced orthodoxy. Evangelical Christianity, following the New Testament, teaches that false teachers are to be refuted, avoided, or excommunicated from the church (Titus 3:10), but not physically punished by the state 'according to their crimes.' This reflects a fusion of church and state

authority foreign to the New Testament era but present in the 19th-century worldview or Old Testament theocracy models.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The 'Words of Mormon' illustrates a fundamental divergence in authority and soteriology. By claiming that judgment is based on 'these records,' it displaces the Bible's unique authority (Sola Scriptura). Furthermore, the text depicts a 'Christian' church operating in the Americas centuries before Christ's incarnation, complete with 'false Christs' and specific Christian theology. This contradicts the biblical narrative of the mystery of the Gospel being revealed in the fullness of time (Galatians 4:4, Ephesians 3:4-5). The method of establishing righteousness—through the physical punishment of heretics and the 'labor' of the king—contrasts with the evangelical understanding of the Gospel spreading through preaching and the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit (Sola Fide/Sola Gratia).

Shared Values:

Belief in the reality of God; Desire for peace and righteousness; Opposition to false teaching; Reverence for scripture (records)

Friction Points:

- 1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Asserts the necessity of additional scripture for final judgment.
- 2. [Major] Christology/History of Redemption – Posits explicit knowledge of 'Christ' (name and office) and 'False Christs' in 130 BC, contradicting the progressive revelation of the Messiah in the Old Testament.
- 3. [Major] Sola Fide – Peace and righteousness are established through 'laboring with all the might of the body' and legal punishment, rather than faith and the Spirit.
- 4. [Moderate] Universal Priesthood – Elevates specific 'Holy Prophets' and Kings as mediators who establish peace through authority and sharpness.

Semantic Warnings:

"Redemption"

In Text: Associated with becoming a 'delightsome people' and returning to the knowledge of God, often linked to cultural/ethnic restoration.

Evangelical: Deliverance from the guilt and power of sin through the blood of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:7).

Example: *Mormon prays for the 'redemption' of his brethren, implying a restoration of their heritage and standing, whereas biblical redemption is the purchase of the sinner from slavery to sin.*

"False Christs"

In Text: Individuals in 130 BC Americas claiming to be the Messiah.

Evangelical: Deceivers appearing in the 'last days' (Matthew 24:24) or those denying Jesus is the Christ (1 John 2:22).

Example: *The text punishes 'false Christs' before the true Christ has even been born, creating a chronological and theological anomaly compared to biblical history.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Coming to the 'knowledge of God' and the 'redemption of Christ,' resulting in becoming a 'delightsome people.'

How Attained: Through the preservation of records, the labor of prophets, and adherence to the law (punishment of sin).

Basis of Assurance: Reliance on the 'wise purpose' of God and the preservation of the physical records.

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text emphasizes the 'labor' of the king and prophets to 'establish peace,' contrasting with the peace with God that comes through justification by faith (Romans 5:1).

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

- 1. Deliver the records to the next generation (Moroni)

2. Punish false Christs and false prophets
3. Labor with the 'faculty of the whole soul' to establish peace

Implicit Obligations:

1. Follow spiritual promptings ('whisperings') even without intellectual understanding
2. Revere the physical records (plates) as the basis of future judgment
3. Accept the authority of the King/Prophet figure

Ritual Requirements:

1. Preservation and transmission of sacred plates

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. Mormon mentions following a 'whispering' of the Spirit without knowing the 'why.' How do you distinguish between a true spiritual prompting and a personal feeling, especially if it contradicts established scripture?
2. The text says people will be judged out of 'these records.' How does that relate to the Bible's teaching that we are judged by the standard of Christ's righteousness?
3. King Benjamin punished 'false Christs' in 130 BC. How do you understand the presence of people claiming to be 'Christ' so long before Jesus was actually born?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Longing for a Permanent Record – Mormon labored to preserve a physical record for judgment. The Gospel offers a better record: The Lamb's Book of Life, where our names are written not by our works or history, but by God's grace. [Revelation 21:27, Luke 10:20]
2. The Desire for Peace – Benjamin fought wars and punished sinners to get peace. Jesus, the Prince of Peace, established peace by taking the punishment upon Himself. [Ephesians 2:14-15]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Uncertainty/Subjectivism [Moderate] – The believer must rely on subjective 'whisperings' and 'feelings' to validate truth, rather than the objective standard of the Bible. This creates anxiety about whether one is truly 'hearing' the Spirit correctly.
2. Judgment by Record [Severe] – The fear that judgment is based on the accumulation of records and works contained in books, rather than the finished work of Christ.
3. Performance/Labor [Moderate] – The example of King Benjamin implies that peace and righteousness are the result of intense human labor ('faculty of whole soul') and strict enforcement, placing the burden of societal and spiritual purity on human effort.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Subjective spiritual impression ('whisperings') and historical compilation.

Verification Method: The text implies verification through the eventual fulfillment of the 'wise purpose' (retrospective validation) and the authority of the writer.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the objective, completed Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16) tested by the Berean standard (Acts 17:11). This text elevates subjective internal impressions to the level of divine command, even when the rationale is hidden.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: Published 1830; Narrative setting approx. 385 AD (Mormon) and 130 BC (Benjamin).

Authorship: Joseph Smith (Traditional: Mormon).

Textual Issues: This book is widely recognized by critics as a 'bridge' text written after the loss of the 116 pages (Book of Lehi) to connect the replacement text (1 Nephi-Omni) to the remaining manuscript (Mosiah).