

PREFACE (INCLUDING TITLE PAGE AND COPYRIGHT)

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

OVERVIEW

This text comprises the Title Page, Copyright, and Preface of the original 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon. The Title Page asserts the book's ancient origins as an abridgment of records from the people of Nephi, Lamanites, and Jaredites, written to show the 'remnant of the House of Israel' (identified as Native Americans) that they are not cast off and to convince all nations that Jesus is the Christ. Significantly, the 1830 edition legally identifies Joseph Smith as 'Author and Proprietor,' a designation later changed to 'Translator' in subsequent editions. The Preface specifically addresses the 'lost 116 pages' incident (the Book of Lehi). Smith explains that he will not re-translate the missing portion because 'evil designing persons' have stolen the manuscript and Satan has tempted them to alter the words. Smith claims God commanded him to translate the 'plates of Nephi' instead to confound this plot. This section serves as both a claim to divine authority—asserting the text came by the 'gift and power of God'—and a preemptive defense against accusations of fraud or inconsistency regarding the lost manuscript.

KEY FIGURES

Jesus Christ, Joseph Smith, Mormon, Moroni, Nephi, Satan

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. OPEN CANON / CONTINUOUS REVELATION

Assertion: God continues to speak through new written scripture to reveal covenants and clarify doctrine.

"Written by way of commandment, and also by the spirit of Prophecy and of Revelation."

Evangelical Comparison: Evangelical Christianity holds to Sola Scriptura, believing the 66 books of the Bible are the sufficient and final authority for faith and practice (Jude 1:3, Revelation 22:18-19). The Book of Mormon's Title Page asserts that this new volume is necessary to 'show unto the remnant... how great things the Lord hath done' and to convince the world of Christ, implying the Bible is insufficient for these tasks or that God's revelation is ongoing and additive.

2. REMNANT THEOLOGY (LAMANITES)

Assertion: Indigenous peoples of the Americas (Lamanites) are a remnant of the House of Israel and heirs to specific covenants.

"written to the Lamanites, which are a remnant of the House of Israel... that they may know the covenants of the Lord, that they are not cast off forever"

Evangelical Comparison: The text claims a specific ethnic and covenantal identity for Native Americans ('Lamanites') as Israelites. Evangelical theology typically understands the 'remnant' in biblical terms referring to Jews or the spiritual body of believers, not a specific lost tribe in the Americas. This introduces a new covenantal group not found in the Bible.

3. DIVINE TRANSLATION VIA GIFT

Assertion: The text was not translated by linguistic ability but by the supernatural power of God.

"I translated, by the gift and power of God"

Evangelical Comparison: Joseph Smith claims the translation occurred via the 'gift and power of God,' bypassing the need for linguistic expertise. In contrast, Evangelical textual criticism relies on the preservation of manuscripts and scholarly translation of Hebrew and Greek texts. Smith's method creates an epistemology where the translator is a revelator rather than a scholar.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: While the Title Page affirms the divinity of Christ ('Eternal God'), the fundamental gap lies in the source of authority. Evangelicalism rests on the sufficiency of the Bible. The Book of Mormon Preface asserts that the Bible is not enough to 'convince' the world or show Israel their covenants. Furthermore, the Preface introduces a defensive, conspiratorial narrative regarding the text's origin (the lost pages) that requires a high degree of trust in Smith's personal integrity, whereas the Bible invites testing. The requirement to 'condemn not' this specific book to be found spotless adds a work/condition to salvation that violates Sola Fide.

Shared Values:

Jesus is the Christ; Jesus is the Eternal God; Reality of Judgment Day; Reality of Satan and temptation

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Asserts the necessity of a new volume of scripture to clarify covenants and convince the world.
2. [Major] Theology Proper / Anthropology – Redefines the history of God's people to include a hidden Israelite civilization in the Americas.
3. [Critical] Sola Fide – Implies that rejecting this book ('condemning the things of God') endangers one's standing at the judgment seat.

Semantic Warnings:

"The Christ"

In Text: The Messiah who visited the Americas and whose true nature is revealed in this new record.

Evangelical: The Anointed One revealed sufficiently in the Old and New Testaments.

Example: *In the Title Page, 'convincing... that Jesus is the Christ' implies the Bible has failed to do this sufficiently.*

"Covenants"

In Text: Specific promises made to the Lamanite fathers (Native Americans) regarding land and lineage.

Evangelical: The Old Covenant (Mosaic) and New Covenant (Blood of Christ) applicable to all believers.

Example: *The text speaks of Lamanites knowing 'the covenants of the Lord' specific to their ancestry.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Being found 'spotless at the judgment seat of Christ.'

How Attained: Implicitly involves accepting the Book of Mormon ('condemn not'), alongside faith in Christ.

Basis of Assurance: Obedience to the new commandments and acceptance of the new record.

Comparison to Sola Fide: The warning 'condemn not... that ye may be found spotless' suggests that faith in Christ is insufficient if one rejects Joseph Smith's revelation. This contradicts Romans 8:1 ('There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus').

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Condemn not the things of God

Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept the Book of Mormon as a divine record
2. Believe that Joseph Smith is a prophet/author acting under God's command
3. Reject the 'false reports' circulated about the work

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. The Title Page says this book is to convince us that Jesus is the Christ. Do you feel the New Testament is insufficient to do that?

2. In the 1830 edition, Joseph Smith is listed as 'Author and Proprietor.' How do you reconcile that legal claim with the spiritual claim that he was merely a translator?
3. Regarding the lost pages mentioned in the Preface: If God's power allows for perfect translation, why would it matter if enemies altered the stolen copy? Couldn't God just reveal the original words again and expose the alteration?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. Not Cast Off Forever – This reflects the human longing for assurance that God has not abandoned us. The Gospel answers this not with a new book, but with the indwelling Holy Spirit and the promise of Christ. [Hebrews 13:5 ('I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.')]]
2. Manifesting Himself to All Nations – God's desire is indeed for all nations to know Him. This connects to the Great Commission. [Matthew 28:19 ('Go ye therefore, and teach all nations')]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Uncertainty/Confusion [Moderate] – The reader is told that there are 'false reports' and 'evil designing persons' trying to destroy the work. This creates an 'us vs. them' mentality and paranoia, isolating the believer from outside critique.
2. Fear of Judgment [Severe] – The text links the reader's eternal status ('spotless at the judgment seat') to their acceptance of this book. This imposes a heavy burden: if you question the book, you risk your soul.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Direct Revelation and Supernatural Translation.

Verification Method: The text implies verification through the result: if the reader does not condemn it, they may be found spotless. It relies on the reader accepting the 'gift and power of God' claim.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the 'God-breathed' nature of established scripture (2 Timothy 3:16) and testing spirits against that scripture (1 John 4:1). This text demands acceptance of a new, unverifiable subjective experience (Smith's translation process).

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: 1830 (First Edition)

Authorship: Joseph Smith listed as 'Author and Proprietor' (later changed to 'Translator').

Textual Issues: The Preface details the loss of the 116 pages (Book of Lehi). Smith claims Satan inspired thieves to alter the stolen manuscript so that if Smith re-translated it identically, the thieves would produce the altered version to prove him a fraud. Critics argue this indicates Smith could not reproduce the text verbatim, suggesting he was composing it rather than translating a fixed ancient text.