

THE BOOK OF MOSIAH

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

OVERVIEW

The Book of Mosiah serves as a theological and political pivot point within the Book of Mormon narrative. It begins with King Benjamin's valedictory address, a discourse that establishes the 'doctrine of Christ' within a Nephite context, emphasizing the 'natural man' as an enemy to God and the necessity of the Atonement. Benjamin introduces a covenantal structure where retaining a remission of sins is contingent upon service to fellow beings and imparting substance to the poor. The narrative then shifts to the colony of Zeniff, which returns to the land of Nephi, only to fall into bondage under the wicked King Noah. This section introduces the prophet Abinadi, whose defense before Noah provides a distinct Christology—often interpreted as modalistic—asserting that God Himself shall come down among the children of men. Abinadi's martyrdom leads to the conversion of Alma the Elder, who establishes a church at the Waters of Mormon, introducing baptismal covenants distinct from the Law of Moses. The text concludes with the deliverance of both Limhi's and Alma's people from Lamanite bondage, the miraculous conversion of Alma the Younger and the sons of Mosiah, and the political transition from kings to a system of judges, setting the stage for the subsequent wars and missionary journeys.

KEY FIGURES

King Benjamin, King Mosiah II, Abinadi, Alma the Elder, King Noah, Zeniff, Limhi, Alma the Younger, Ammon (Descendant of Zarahemla), Gideon

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. MODALISTIC CHRISTOLOGY

Assertion: God the Father and Jesus Christ are the same being; the 'Son' is the flesh/humanity and the 'Father' is the spirit/divinity dwelling within that flesh.

"I would that ye should understand that God himself shall come down among the children of men... being the Father and the Son; the Father, because he was conceived by the power of God; and the Son, because of the flesh; thus becoming the Father and Son: and they are one God"

Evangelical Comparison: Abinadi's explanation in Mosiah 15 strongly resembles Sabellianism (Modalism), an ancient view rejected by orthodox Christianity. While Evangelicalism teaches that the Father sent the Son (John 3:16) and they are distinct persons (Matthew 3:16-17), this text asserts they are one being manifesting in two modes (spirit and flesh). The text claims God is the Father 'because he was conceived by the power of God' and the Son 'because of the flesh,' collapsing the eternal distinction between the persons of the Trinity.

2. RETENTION OF REMISSION VIA WORKS

Assertion: While grace is acknowledged, retaining a remission of sins requires active service and almsgiving.

"And now, for the sake of these things which I have spoken unto you; that is, for the sake of retaining a remission of your sins from day to day... I would that ye should impart of your substance to the poor"

Evangelical Comparison: In Mosiah 4, King Benjamin establishes a soteriology where the initial remission of sins comes through the prayer of faith, but the *retention* of that remission is contingent upon works, specifically caring for the poor. This creates a 'maintenance' model of salvation. In contrast, the Evangelical baseline (Romans 8:38-39, Ephesians 2:8-9) posits that good works are the *fruit* of salvation, not the mechanism for retaining it. The text implies that failing to give to the beggar results in perishing (Mosiah 4:18).

3. SEERSHIP AND TRANSLATION

Assertion: God provides physical instruments (interpreters/stones) to authorized 'Seers' to translate ancient languages.

"I can assuredly tell thee, O king, of a man that can translate the records: for he hath wherewith that he can look, and translate all records that are of ancient date; and it is a gift from God. And the things are called interpreters"

Evangelical Comparison: Mosiah 8 introduces the concept of a 'Seer' as greater than a prophet, possessing specific tools (later identified in Mormon tradition as Urim and Thummim) to translate unknown languages. This introduces a mechanical/tangible element to revelation that is foreign to the New Testament model of spiritual

gifts (1 Corinthians 12), where interpretation of tongues is a spiritual manifestation, not a translation of static text via artifacts.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The Book of Mosiah presents a theological framework that diverges significantly from Evangelical orthodoxy in two main areas: Theology Proper and Soteriology. First, Abinadi's discourse (Mosiah 15) collapses the distinction between Father and Son, describing them as spirit and flesh of the same being, which aligns with the heresy of Patripassianism rather than Trinitarianism. Second, while King Benjamin emphasizes grace, he operationalizes salvation as a conditional state maintained by works ('retaining a remission of sins' via almsgiving). This creates a 'Covenant of Works' disguised as grace, where the believer's standing before God fluctuates based on their social ethics, violating the Evangelical tenet of Sola Fide where justification is a settled legal standing based on Christ's finished work.

Shared Values:

Necessity of Atonement; Reality of human depravity (Natural Man); Call to repentance; Concern for the poor; Rejection of idolatry

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Theology Proper (Trinity) – Teaches Modalism (Father and Son are one person in different modes/forms).
2. [Critical] Sola Fide – Makes the retention of forgiveness dependent on financial generosity and obedience.
3. [Major] Sola Gratia – Grace is the entry point, but works are the sustaining mechanism.
4. [Major] Sola Scriptura – Introduces new authoritative records, seers, and instruments necessary for full understanding.

Semantic Warnings:

"Salvation"

In Text: Deliverance from bondage (physical) and eternal torment (spiritual), contingent on keeping commandments and covenants.

Evangelical: Deliverance from the penalty and power of sin, secured by Christ alone, received by faith alone.

Example: In Mosiah 4:26, salvation (retaining remission) is linked to feeding the hungry. In Ephesians 2:8-9, it is explicitly not of works.

"Born of God"

In Text: A change of heart resulting in no more disposition to do evil (Mosiah 5:2).

Evangelical: Regeneration by the Holy Spirit, initiating a new nature that still wars against the flesh (Galatians 5:17).

Example: Mosiah 5:2 claims the people had 'no more disposition to do evil,' a state of perfectionism rarely claimed in Evangelical theology.

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Being 'spiritually begotten' of Christ, name not blotted out, dwelling with God in never-ending happiness.

How Attained: Through the Atonement, accessed by faith, repentance, baptism, and maintained by keeping commandments and service.

Basis of Assurance: Subjective feeling of peace ('mighty change') and the evidence of good works (lack of desire to sin).

Comparison to Sola Fide: Mosiah 2:21 teaches that even if one serves God with their whole soul, they are still 'unprofitable servants.' While this highlights grace, the text simultaneously demands strict obedience to 'prosper,' creating a tension where faith is never quite enough without the accompanying labor.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Believe in God and that man does not comprehend all God comprehends
2. Repent of sins and forsake them
3. Impart substance to the poor (beggars) to retain remission of sins
4. Take upon the name of Christ
5. Establish judges instead of kings
6. Stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all places

Implicit Obligations:

1. Submit to the administrative authority of the High Priest (Alma)
2. Avoid contention regarding doctrine
3. Labor with own hands for support (even priests)
4. Gather in families to hear the word of the leader

Ritual Requirements:

1. Baptism by immersion (Waters of Mormon)
2. Gathering to the temple/tower for instruction
3. Offering sacrifice and burnt offerings according to the Law of Moses (transitional context)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In Mosiah 3:19, it says the natural man is an enemy to God. How do you see that connecting to Paul's teaching that we are 'dead in trespasses and sins'?
2. King Benjamin teaches that we must impart of our substance to 'retain a remission of our sins.' How does that make you feel about your standing with God during times when you might struggle to give or serve?
3. Abinadi teaches that God Himself came down to be the Son. How do you distinguish between the Father and the Son in your prayers?
4. If we are 'unprofitable servants' even after doing everything (Mosiah 2:21), on what basis can we have confidence that we are accepted by God?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Beggar – This is a perfect bridge to the Gospel of Grace. It acknowledges total spiritual bankruptcy. We cannot buy bread; it must be given. [Matthew 5:3 ('Blessed are the poor in spirit'), Ephesians 2:8-9.]
2. The Natural Man – Acknowledges Original Sin and the inability of humans to please God without divine intervention. [Romans 8:7 ('The carnal mind is enmity against God').]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Performance Anxiety / Uncertainty [Severe] – The teaching that remission of sins must be 'retained' through daily acts of service and giving creates a treadmill of works. The believer can never be sure if they have done enough to 'retain' their standing, leading to chronic spiritual anxiety.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Revelation via angels, authoritative translation of ancient records, and spiritual confirmation (burning/joy).

Verification Method: Adherents are told that the Spirit of the Lord causes a 'mighty change' in their hearts (Mosiah 5:2) as proof of truth.

Evangelical Contrast: While Evangelicals affirm the Spirit's witness (Romans 8:16), this text elevates subjective experience ('mighty change') and extra-biblical angelic messages to a level of authority equal to or surpassing the written Law of Moses, contrasting with the Berean model of verifying claims against established Scripture (Acts 17:11).

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: Published 1830; Narrative setting approx. 130 B.C. to 91 B.C.

Authorship: Joseph Smith (claimed translation of Mormon's abridgment).

Textual Issues: The 1830 edition contains chapter breaks that differ from modern editions. The text includes extensive quotations of KJV Isaiah. The 'Adieu' in Jacob is not in this specific text, but Mosiah contains Greek-influenced terms like 'Alpha and Omega' (though not in this specific excerpt, the concept of Christology is highly developed for a BC text).