

ALMA

FAITH: Mormonism | TEXT: Book of Mormon | VOLUME: 2013 | AUTHOR: Joseph Smith

OVERVIEW

The Book of Alma is the longest book within the Book of Mormon, covering a period of approximately 91 B.C. to 52 B.C. It chronicles the transition of the Nephite government from kings to judges and details the spiritual and military struggles of the nation. The text is bifurcated into two main themes: missionary work and warfare. The first half focuses on the ministries of Alma the Younger and the sons of Mosiah, who preach to the Nephites and Lamanites, combating apostate factions like the Nehors and Zoramites. It contains significant doctrinal discourses on the Atonement, the resurrection, the priesthood, and the nature of faith (notably Alma 32). The second half shifts to a military narrative, detailing the campaigns of Captain Moroni against Lamanite aggressors. This section emphasizes the 'Title of Liberty' and the belief that God defends the Nephites only as long as they are righteous. The book concludes with the migration of Nephites northward and the passing of the sacred records to Helaman.

KEY FIGURES

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

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. FOREORDINATION TO PRIESTHOOD

Assertion: Men were called and prepared from the foundation of the world to hold the high priesthood on account of 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: Alma 13 teaches that human high priests are called based on pre-mortal merit ('exceeding faith' from the foundation of the world). Evangelical theology, grounded in Hebrews 7, asserts that the Levitical priesthood is obsolete and that Jesus Christ is the sole High Priest of the New Covenant. Furthermore, the New Testament teaches the 'priesthood of all believers' (1 Peter 2:9), rather than a hierarchical priesthood structure based on pre-mortal righteousness.

2. RESTORATION OF ATTRIBUTES

Assertion: In the resurrection, individuals are 'restored' to exactly what they were in life; wickedness cannot be restored to happiness.

"And if their works are evil they shall be restored unto them for evil. Therefore, all things shall be restored to their proper order... wickedness never was happiness. (Alma 41:4, 10)"

Evangelical Comparison: Alma 41 argues for a strict law of restoration where one receives exactly what one has given. Evangelical soteriology relies on Sola Gratia (Grace Alone), where the sinner receives what they do *not* deserve (Christ's righteousness) rather than a restoration of their own attributes. The text suggests an intrinsic impossibility for a sinner to be happy, which aligns with biblical truth, but the mechanism of salvation described is a restoration of one's own works rather than a covering by Christ's blood.

3. PRE-CHRISTIAN CHRISTIANITY

Assertion: Nephite prophets knew the specific details of Jesus' life, name, and mother centuries before his birth and practiced Christian ordinances.

"And behold, he shall be born of Mary, at Jerusalem... (Alma 7:10); ...they were baptized by the hand of Alma (Alma 4:4)"

Evangelical Comparison: The text claims that full Christian theology, including the name of Jesus, the identity of Mary, and the ordinance of baptism, was practiced by Nephites in 83 B.C. Evangelical scholarship views the Old Testament as containing types and shadows of Christ (Colossians 2:17, Hebrews 10:1), with the 'mystery' of the gospel being revealed only in the New Testament era (Ephesians 3:4-5).

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: While the Book of Alma uses Christian terminology (faith, repentance, baptism, atonement), it situates them in a theological framework that differs from Evangelicalism. It posits a 'probationary state' (Alma 12:24) where men must prepare to meet God through obedience, contrasting with the Evangelical view of justification as a declared righteous status received by faith alone. The text also introduces a 'Holy Order' of high priests (Alma 13) that conflicts with the finished work of Christ and the priesthood of all believers. Furthermore, the text's epistemology (Alma 32) relies on subjective experience rather than historical verification of the resurrection.

Shared Values:

Necessity of repentance; Belief in the resurrection; Moral living and charity to the poor; Opposition to atheism (Korihor); Importance of family

Friction Points:

- 1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Claims authority from lost books (Zenos, Zenock) and asserts new revelation that supersedes biblical timelines.
- 2. [Major] Sola Fide – Emphasizes that salvation is a result of 'restoration' based on one's works and desires (Alma 41), rather than imputed righteousness.
- 3. [Major] Universal Priesthood – Establishes a distinct class of high priests ordained based on pre-mortal faith.

Semantic Warnings:

"Saved/Salvation"

In Text: Often refers to deliverance from physical enemies or 'exaltation' contingent on keeping commandments.
Evangelical: Deliverance from the penalty of sin and reconciliation with God by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9).
Example: *Alma 11:37 states Christ cannot save people 'in' their sins, implying a need for personal purification prior to full salvation, whereas Evangelicals believe Christ saves sinners *from* their sins.*

"Priesthood"

In Text: A hierarchical authority structure ('Holy Order') men are ordained to.
Evangelical: The office of Christ (Hebrews 7) and the spiritual status of all believers (1 Peter 2).
Example: *Alma 13 describes men being ordained high priests, whereas Hebrews states there is only one High Priest, Jesus.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Resurrection for all; Eternal Life (Exaltation) for those who keep commandments and ordinances.

How Attained: Through the Atonement, accessed by faith, repentance, baptism, and enduring to the end in righteousness.

Basis of Assurance: Subjective spiritual confirmation (Alma 32) and outward observance of commandments.

Comparison to Sola Fide: Alma 34:37 commands to 'work out your salvation with fear before God,' emphasizing human effort in a way that frictionally contrasts with Romans 4:5 ('to him that worketh not, but believeth').

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

- 1. Repent and be born again (Alma 7:14)
- 2. Be baptized unto repentance (Alma 7:15)
- 3. Plant the word in your heart to experiment on its truth (Alma 32:27)
- 4. Defend families, lands, and religion, even unto bloodshed (Alma 43:47)
- 5. Keep the commandments to prosper in the land (Alma 36:1)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Support the church leaders financially and socially (implied by the rejection of Nehor's paid ministry)
2. Maintain political liberty as a religious duty
3. Avoid wearing costly apparel or being lifted up in pride

Ritual Requirements:

1. Baptism by immersion
2. Ordination of priests and elders by laying on of hands (Alma 6:1)
3. Gathering in synagogues and sanctuaries for worship

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. Alma 13 mentions high priests being called on account of their 'exceeding faith.' How does this compare to the biblical teaching that we are saved by grace, not of ourselves?
2. In Alma 32, faith is verified by a 'swelling motion.' How do you distinguish between emotional elevation and the Holy Spirit's testimony of objective truth?
3. Alma 7:10 says Jesus would be born 'at Jerusalem.' The Bible says Bethlehem (Micah 5:2, Matthew 2:1). How do you reconcile this?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Seed – Just as a seed must be planted to grow, the Gospel must be received. However, the 'fruit' is not just a feeling, but the objective reality of Christ's resurrection. [1 Peter 1:23 'Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God...']
2. Chiasmus of Pain to Joy – Alma's transition from the 'gall of bitterness' to 'marvelous light' upon remembering Christ illustrates the immediate power of calling on Jesus. [Romans 10:13 'For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.']

Spiritual Weight:

1. Uncertainty [Moderate] – The reliance on subjective feelings ('swelling motions') for truth creates anxiety when emotions fluctuate or 'stupor of thought' occurs.
2. Performance [Severe] – The doctrine of 'Restoration' (Alma 41) implies that one's eternal state is a direct result of one's own works and desires, creating immense pressure to perform perfectly.
3. Hierarchy [Moderate] – The 'Holy Order' of priesthood creates a spiritual caste system, distancing the common believer from direct access to God without mediation.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Subjective experience (swelling motions), spiritual witness, and prophetic testimony.

Verification Method: The 'Experiment' (Alma 32): Plant the word/desire, and if it swells and enlightens the mind, it is good/true.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology (Acts 17:11, 1 John 4:1) involves testing spirits against objective Scripture and the apostolic witness. Alma 32 shifts the test to internal, subjective feelings ('it beginneth to be delicious to me') rather than objective historical truth.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: Published 1830; Narrative setting 91–52 B.C.

Authorship: Attributed to Alma, Helaman, and Shiblon; Dictated by Joseph Smith.

Textual Issues: Contains 19th-century revivalist language and KJV New Testament quotations (e.g., 'faith, hope, and charity' in Alma 7:24) purportedly written before the NT existed.