

MORMON

FAITH: Mormonism | TEXT: Book of Mormon | VOLUME: 2013 | AUTHOR: Mormon (Chapters 1-7) and Moroni (Chapters 8-9)

OVERVIEW

The Book of Mormon, specifically the book titled 'Mormon,' serves as the tragic climax of the Nephite narrative. It covers the period from approximately A.D. 321 to 421. Mormon, the military commander and record-keeper, describes a society in total spiritual collapse, where the 'day of grace' has passed. Despite leading the Nephite armies, Mormon witnesses their destruction at the Hill Cumorah, where hundreds of thousands are slaughtered by the Lamanites. Following Mormon's death, his son Moroni concludes the record (Chapters 8-9). Moroni writes directly to future readers (Gentiles and the remnant of Israel), warning against denying miracles, rejecting revelations, and prioritizing wealth over the poor. The text asserts that the cessation of miracles is solely the result of unbelief and establishes the Book of Mormon as a necessary witness alongside the Bible to convince the world that Jesus is the Christ.

KEY FIGURES

Mormon, Moroni, Ammaron, Jesus Christ, The Three Nephites, The Lamanites

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. THE DAY OF GRACE

Assertion: A people can sin to the point where the 'day of grace' is passed, resulting in the withdrawal of the Spirit and inevitable destruction.

"I saw that the day of grace was passed with them, both temporally and spiritually (Mormon 2:15)."

Evangelical Comparison: In this text, the 'day of grace' is a distinct boundary line. Once the Nephites crossed it, their destruction was sealed, and Mormon's prayers for them were 'without faith' (Mormon 3:12). Evangelical theology generally emphasizes that as long as it is 'today,' repentance is possible (Hebrews 3:13), though hearts can be hardened. The Book of Mormon presents a corporate probation that, once failed, results in the total removal of the Holy Spirit and inevitable physical annihilation.

2. CAUSALITY OF MIRACLES

Assertion: Miracles only cease due to unbelief; God is bound to perform them if faith exists.

"And the reason why he ceaseth to do miracles among the children of men is because that they dwindle in unbelief (Mormon 9:20)."

Evangelical Comparison: Moroni argues in Chapter 9 that if miracles are absent, it is proof of a lack of faith or understanding of the Gospel. This places the burden of supernatural intervention squarely on the believer's performance of faith. Evangelical theology (1 Corinthians 12:11) teaches that the Spirit distributes gifts 'as He wills.' While unbelief can hinder work (Matthew 13:58), the absence of a miracle does not necessarily prove the absence of faith or God's favor (e.g., Paul's thorn in the flesh).

3. BIBLICAL INSUFFICIENCY

Assertion: The Bible (record of the Jews) is insufficient alone and requires the Book of Mormon to establish truth.

"For behold, this [Book of Mormon] is written for the intent that ye may believe that [the Bible] (Mormon 7:9)."

Evangelical Comparison: Mormon 7:8-9 presents a circular dependency: one must believe the Book of Mormon to fully believe the Bible, and believing the Bible should lead one to the Book of Mormon. This undermines the Evangelical doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16-17), implying that the Biblical canon is incomplete or lacks the power to convince without this additional revelation.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: While the text uses Christian terminology, the theological framework diverges significantly. The Book of Mormon presents a history where the 'remnant of Joseph' (Native Americans, in LDS theology) are a covenant people distinct from the Jews, requiring a separate record. Theologically, the text emphasizes that miracles are a necessary proof of the true church, implying that the cessation of miracles in mainstream Christianity is proof of apostasy. This contradicts the Evangelical understanding of the sufficiency of Scripture and the sovereignty of God in dispensing gifts. Furthermore, the judgment described is intensely works-focused ('judged according to your works', Mormon 6:21), lacking the robust Pauline articulation of justification by faith alone.

Shared Values:

Jesus is the Christ and Son of God; Necessity of repentance; Reality of the Resurrection; Concern for the poor and warning against materialism; God is unchangeable

Friction Points:

- 1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Claims the Bible is not enough and requires the Book of Mormon to be fully believed.
- 2. [Major] Sola Gratia – Suggests grace can be exhausted ('day of grace was passed') and salvation is contingent on 'working out' one's own salvation through specific obedience.
- 3. [Major] Theology Proper (Sovereignty) – Binds God's actions (miracles) strictly to human faith, denying His sovereign right to withhold signs.

Semantic Warnings:

<p>"Gospel"</p> <p>In Text: A system including repentance, baptism, and enduring to the end to receive the Holy Ghost and judgment.</p> <p>Evangelical: The good news of Jesus's finished work of atonement (1 Corinthians 15:1-4).</p> <p>Example: <i>In Mormon 9:22-23, the 'gospel' includes the command to be baptized as a condition for salvation, whereas Paul separates the gospel from the act of baptism (1 Corinthians 1:17).</i></p>
<p>"Saved"</p> <p>In Text: Often implies resurrection (universal) or exaltation (conditional on works/ordinances).</p> <p>Evangelical: Deliverance from the penalty of sin and reconciliation with God by grace through faith.</p> <p>Example: <i>Mormon 7:3 says 'come unto repentance, or ye cannot be saved,' linking salvation directly to the act of repentance and subsequent obedience.</i></p>

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Resurrection for all; Eternal Life (dwelling with God) for those found guiltless.

How Attained: Faith in Christ, Repentance, Baptism, Holy Ghost, and Enduring to the End (Mormon 7:8-10).

Basis of Assurance: Based on 'worthiness' and the presence of miracles/signs following faith.

Comparison to Sola Fide: Mormon 9:27 commands 'work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,' interpreted here as a command for active merit, contrasting with the Evangelical view of works as the fruit, not the root, of salvation (Ephesians 2:8-10).

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

- 1. Repent and be baptized (Mormon 7:8)
- 2. Lay down weapons of war (Mormon 7:4)
- 3. Believe in Jesus Christ (Mormon 9:21)
- 4. Do not deny the revelations of God (Mormon 9:7)
- 5. Search the prophecies of Isaiah (Mormon 8:23)

Implicit Obligations:

- 1. Accept the Book of Mormon as a companion witness to the Bible
- 2. Believe that miracles must occur today if one has true faith

3. Prepare for a judgment based on works

Ritual Requirements:

1. Baptism by water (Mormon 7:10)
2. Baptism by fire and the Holy Ghost (Mormon 7:10)
3. Partaking of the sacrament worthily (Mormon 9:29)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. Mormon 9:20 says miracles cease only because of unbelief. How do you process this when faithful members of your church suffer from illness or tragedy without being healed?
2. In Mormon 2:13, Mormon describes the 'sorrowing of the damned.' How do you distinguish between sorrowing because of consequences and sorrowing that leads to true repentance?
3. Mormon 8:37 warns against loving money and adorning churches more than the poor. How does this warning apply to the modern church landscape?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Sorrowing of the Damned – This perfectly illustrates 'worldly sorrow' described in 2 Corinthians 7:10. It is a bridge to explain that salvation isn't about regretting consequences, but a change of heart toward God. [2 Corinthians 7:10]
2. The Desire for a Savior – Mormon's lament shows the tragedy of rejecting Christ. It highlights that Jesus stands with 'open arms' (Mormon 6:17), echoing the Biblical invitation. [Matthew 23:37]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Performance/Faith Pressure [Severe] – The teaching that miracles cease *only* due to unbelief places an immense psychological burden on the believer. If a child is not healed or a problem is not solved, the text implies the fault lies in the believer's insufficient faith, leading to guilt and spiritual insecurity.
2. Uncertainty/Fear [Moderate] – The narrative of the 'day of grace' passing creates a fear that one might cross a line of no return with God, contrasting with the assurance of salvation found in Christ.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Direct revelation, sensory experience ('tasted and knew', Mormon 1:15), and the physical reality of the plates.

Verification Method: Adherents are told that if they believe the Bible, they will believe this record (Mormon 7:9).

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the illuminated Word of God (Psalm 119:105) and the internal witness of the Spirit regarding the Son (1 John 5:10), not on the discovery of hidden gold plates or a new prophetic line.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: Internal date: AD 321-421. Published: 1830.

Authorship: Attributed to Mormon and Moroni; Critical view assigns authorship to Joseph Smith.

Textual Issues: Mormon 9:22-24 closely mirrors the 'Long Ending' of Mark (Mark 16:9-20), which many textual critics believe was a later addition to the Gospel of Mark, not in the earliest manuscripts. This suggests the author used the KJV Bible as a source.