

MOSIAH

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

OVERVIEW

The Book of Mosiah serves as a pivotal hinge in the Book of Mormon narrative, covering the reigns of King Benjamin and his son Mosiah II (approx. 130–91 B.C.). It opens with King Benjamin's valedictory address, a theological discourse establishing that service to fellow beings is service to God, yet asserting that humanity remains 'unprofitable servants' eternally indebted to the Creator. The text then shifts to a complex flashback narrative involving Zeniff's colony, which falls into bondage under the wicked King Noah. This section introduces Abinadi, a prophet who delivers a strong messianic message (quoting Isaiah 53) and is martyred by fire, and Alma the Elder, a priest who converts, baptizes believers at the Waters of Mormon, and establishes a church. The narrative strands converge in Zarahemla, where the church faces internal persecution led by the King's sons and Alma the Younger. Following a dramatic angelic intervention, these persecutors convert. The book concludes with the translation of the Jaredite plates using seer stones and the political transition from kingship to a system of judges, setting the stage for the wars and ideological conflicts in the Book of Alma.

KEY FIGURES

King Benjamin, Mosiah II, Abinadi, King Noah, Alma the Elder, Alma the Younger, Ammon (the explorer), Limhi, Zeniff

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. PERPETUAL INDEBTEDNESS (THE UNPROFITABLE SERVANT)

Assertion: Humans are eternally indebted to God for their creation and preservation; even if they serve Him with their whole souls, they remain 'unprofitable servants.'

"I say unto you that if ye should serve him who has created you... if ye should serve him with all your whole souls yet ye would be unprofitable servants. (Mosiah 2:21)"

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, while believers owe everything to God, the relationship is defined by grace and adoption (Galatians 4:7). The debt of sin is paid in full by Christ (Colossians 2:14). Mosiah 2:21-24 constructs a theological framework where obedience immediately brings blessings, which puts the believer further in debt because God has 'paid' them with those blessings. This creates a cycle where the believer can never 'catch up' or rest in a finished transaction, potentially obscuring the concept of 'It is finished' (John 19:30) by maintaining a status of perpetual deficit that obedience cannot resolve.

2. MODALISTIC CHRISTOLOGY

Assertion: The Father and the Son are one God; the Father becomes the Son by dwelling in flesh.

"And because he dwelleth in flesh he shall be called the Son of God, and having subjected the flesh to the will of the Father, being the Father and the Son... (Mosiah 15:2)"

Evangelical Comparison: Evangelical Christianity affirms the Trinity: one God in three distinct persons (Father, Son, Holy Spirit). Mosiah 15:1-5 argues that God is the Father because He was conceived by the power of God, and the Son because of the flesh. This conflates the persons, suggesting the distinction is based on the mode of existence (spirit vs. flesh) rather than eternal personhood. This contradicts the orthodox understanding that the Father sent the Son (John 3:16), implying distinct relationality, not a single person changing roles.

3. RETAINING REMISSION OF SINS THROUGH ALMSGIVING

Assertion: Retaining a remission of sins is contingent upon imparting substance to the poor.

"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... I would that ye should impart of your substance to the poor... (Mosiah 4:26)"

Evangelical Comparison: Mosiah 4:26 explicitly links the retention of forgiveness to the act of almsgiving. In Evangelical soteriology, justification is a forensic declaration by God based on the finished work of Christ, received by faith (Romans 3:24-28). While caring for the poor is a command for Christians (James 1:27), it is

not the mechanism by which remission of sins is 'retained.' This Mosiah passage implies a maintenance-based salvation where one's standing before God fluctuates based on social performance.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The theological gap is foundational in two areas: Soteriology and Theology Proper. Soteriologically, Mosiah 2 and 4 establish a system where the believer is in a deficit cycle; God pays the believer in blessings for obedience, which increases the believer's debt, requiring more obedience. This differs from the Evangelical view of the believer's status as a fully reconciled child of God by grace (Ephesians 2:8-9). Theologically, Mosiah 15 defines the Son as the fleshly manifestation of the Father, blurring the distinct personhood essential to the biblical Trinity, moving toward a form of Modalism that the early church councils rejected.

Shared Values:

The necessity of the Atonement; The reality of human sinfulness; The obligation to care for the poor; The need for a 'born again' experience

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Fide – Mosiah 4:26 makes 'retaining a remission of your sins' dependent on almsgiving and works.
2. [Major] Sola Gratia – Mosiah 2:21-24 teaches that obedience puts one further in debt to God, creating a system of obligation rather than free grace.
3. [Minor] Christology (Sufficiency) – The focus on Gethsemane (bleeding from every pore, Mosiah 3:7) shifts focus from the finished work of the Cross.
4. [Major] Theology Proper (Trinity) – Mosiah 15 teaches the Father and Son are one person in different modes (flesh vs spirit), denying distinct personhood.

Semantic Warnings:

"Salvation"

In Text: Deliverance from spiritual and physical bondage, often contingent on keeping commandments and covenants.

Evangelical: Deliverance from the penalty and power of sin, secured solely by Christ's work.

Example: *In Mosiah 4:6-7, salvation comes to him who 'continues in the faith even unto the end of his life,' emphasizing endurance as a condition for the result.*

"Born Again"

In Text: A mighty change of heart where one loses the desire to sin (Mosiah 5:2).

Evangelical: Regeneration by the Holy Spirit, imparting new life, though the struggle with the flesh remains (Romans 7).

Example: *The people in Mosiah 5 claim they have 'no more disposition to do evil,' a state of perfectionism rarely claimed in Evangelical experience.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Being spiritually begotten of Christ, changed from a natural state, and eventually exalted.

How Attained: Through the Atonement, but accessed via repentance, baptismal covenant, and 'diligence in keeping his commandments' (Mosiah 4:6).

Basis of Assurance: Based on the subjective feeling of the 'mighty change' and the objective evidence of good works (imparting substance).

Comparison to Sola Fide: Mosiah 2:22 states 'if ye do keep his commandments he doth bless you,' establishing a conditional covenant structure that contrasts with the unconditional promise of justification by faith (Romans 4:5).

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Believe in God and His wisdom (Mosiah 4:9)

2. Repent and forsake sins (Mosiah 4:10)
3. Impart substance to the poor (Mosiah 4:16)
4. Do not allow children to go hungry or naked (Mosiah 4:14)
5. Return borrowed items (Mosiah 4:28)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Maintain a sense of worthlessness/nothingness before God (Mosiah 4:5)
2. Submit to church discipline and judgment by priesthood leaders (Mosiah 26)
3. Labor for one's own support (Mosiah 27:5)

Ritual Requirements:

1. Baptism by immersion as a covenant witness (Mosiah 18:10-14)
2. Gathering to the temple/tower to hear the king (Mosiah 2)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In Mosiah 2, King Benjamin says that even if you serve God with your whole soul, you are still an 'unprofitable servant.' How does that make you feel about your standing with God?
2. Mosiah 5:2 describes people having 'no more disposition to do evil.' Do you feel that describes your daily reality, or do you still struggle with sin?
3. Mosiah 4:26 says we retain a remission of sins by imparting substance to the poor. If you have a month where you can't give as much, does your forgiveness from God fluctuate?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Mighty Change of Heart – This deep desire for internal transformation bridges to the biblical promise of a new heart (Ezekiel 36:26) and the New Birth (John 3:3), clarifying that God performs this work, not our own efforts. [Ezekiel 36:26-27]
2. Abinadi as a Type of Christ – Abinadi stands alone, speaks truth to power, and is killed for his testimony, mirroring Christ's rejection. This narrative can help transition to the sufficiency of Christ's suffering. [Acts 7 (Stephen) / Hebrews 12:2]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Performance Anxiety / Uncertainty [Moderate] – The teaching that retaining forgiveness requires constant social performance (almsgiving) creates anxiety that one has never done enough to be secure.
2. Debt/Guilt [Severe] – The 'Unprofitable Servant' doctrine (Mosiah 2) imposes a crushing weight of unpayable debt. The believer is told that every blessing from God only increases their indebtedness, making true rest in Christ impossible.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Revelation through authorized leaders and the 'mighty change' of heart (experiential).

Verification Method: Spiritual confirmation resulting in a loss of disposition to do evil (Mosiah 5:2).

Evangelical Contrast: While Evangelicals value spiritual transformation (2 Corinthians 5:17), truth is verified by Scripture (Acts 17:11). Mosiah relies heavily on subjective internal change and the authority of the seer as the primary epistemological anchors.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: Internal dating: ~130-91 B.C. Published: 1830.

Authorship: Attributed to Mormon (abridging records of Mosiah, Zeniff, Alma). Critical view: Joseph Smith.

Textual Issues: Mosiah 14 contains extensive KJV quotations of Isaiah 53. The theology of 'God himself' coming down (Mosiah 15) reflects 19th-century Modalist debates.