

WORDS OF MORMON

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

OVERVIEW

The 'Words of Mormon' serves as a critical editorial bridge within the Book of Mormon narrative structure. Written by the character Mormon around A.D. 385, it interrupts the chronological flow to explain a textual anomaly: the inclusion of the 'Small Plates of Nephi' (covering 1 Nephi through Omni) alongside Mormon's own abridgment of the 'Large Plates.' Mormon states he is witnessing the destruction of his people but is prompted by the Spirit to include these specific ancient records for a 'wise purpose' known to God but unknown to him. This section effectively connects the early Nephite history to the reign of King Benjamin (approx. 130 B.C.). The text summarizes Benjamin's efforts to establish peace, not only through spiritual leadership but through physical warfare using the 'sword of Laban' and the theocratic punishment of false Christs and prophets. It establishes the continuity of the records as the basis for future judgment.

KEY FIGURES

Mormon, Moroni, King Benjamin, Amaleki, The Lamanites

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. DIVINE FOREKNOWLEDGE AND PROVISIONAL HISTORY

Assertion: God prepares historical records (the Small Plates) centuries in advance for a specific future 'wise purpose' unknown to the compiler.

"And I do this for a wise purpose; for thus it whispereth me... the Lord knoweth all things which are to come (Words of Mormon 1:7)"

Evangelical Comparison: In Mormon theology, this doctrine supports the idea that God micromanages the physical compilation of scripture to circumvent future obstacles (specifically the loss of the Book of Lehi manuscript by Joseph Smith/Martin Harris). Evangelical theology affirms God's sovereignty over the preservation of His Word (Isaiah 40:8) but generally rejects the notion of 'backup' scriptures hidden for thousands of years to replace lost translations. The biblical canon is viewed as providentially preserved for public dissemination, not hidden in the earth.

2. JUDGMENT BY RECORD

Assertion: Final judgment will be conducted based on the specific contents written in the Nephite plates.

"out of which my people and their brethren shall be judged at the great and last day, according to the word of God which is written (Words of Mormon 1:11)"

Evangelical Comparison: This text explicitly links eternal judgment to the contents of the Book of Mormon plates. In Evangelical soteriology, the standard for judgment is God's holy law (Romans 2) and the means of acquittal is the imputed righteousness of Christ received by faith (Romans 3:21-26). While Revelation 20:12 mentions 'books were opened,' the emphasis in this Mormon text on a specific lineage's record (Nephites) determining judgment creates a particularistic soteriology foreign to the universal scope of the Biblical canon.

3. THEOCRATIC ENFORCEMENT OF ORTHODOXY

Assertion: Civil leaders (King Benjamin) are righteous in using state power to punish false prophets and teachers.

"false prophets, and false preachers... having been punished according to their crimes (Words of Mormon 1:16)"

Evangelical Comparison: The text describes a theocracy where religious dissent ('false preachers') is treated as a civil crime punishable by the state. This reflects an Old Testament paradigm. In contrast, the New Testament establishes that the weapons of warfare are not carnal (2 Corinthians 10:4) and that judgment of those outside the church is God's prerogative, while the church handles internal discipline via excommunication, not civil punishment (1 Corinthians 5:12-13).

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: While the text uses Christian terminology ('redemption of Christ'), it situates these terms within a framework that violates the Evangelical understanding of the closed canon (Jude 1:3). The 'Words of Mormon' serves to legitimize the Book of Mormon as a necessary addition to the Bible, claiming that judgment depends on it. Furthermore, the depiction of King Benjamin punishing false prophets with the state's power contradicts the New Testament ethic of religious liberty and spiritual (not physical) warfare.

Shared Values:

Belief in the reality of Christ; Opposition to false teaching; Desire for peace; Sovereignty of God

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Asserts the necessity of additional scripture (the plates) for judgment and history.
2. [Major] Sola Fide – Implies judgment is based on the contents of the books (law/history) rather than faith in Christ alone.
3. [Moderate] Universal Priesthood – Elevates specific 'holy men' and kings as mediators of truth and enforcers of doctrine.

Semantic Warnings:

"Redemption of Christ"

In Text: Restoration to a 'delightsome' state and covenant status, often linked to historical continuity and obedience.

Evangelical: Deliverance from the guilt and power of sin through the substitutionary atonement of Jesus (Ephesians 1:7).

Example: *In v8, redemption is linked to becoming a 'delightsome people' again, implying a cultural/ethnic restoration alongside the spiritual.*

"Word of God"

In Text: The specific record written on the plates of Nephi.

Evangelical: The Bible (Old and New Testaments) and Jesus Christ (The Logos).

Example: *In v11, judgment is according to the 'word of God which is written' on these specific plates.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Coming to the 'knowledge of God' and the 'redemption of Christ' (v8), often framed as a restoration of the people.

How Attained: Through the preservation of records, adherence to the prophets, and eventual judgment by the books.

Basis of Assurance: Reliance on the 'wise purpose' of God and the preservation of the record.

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text emphasizes the collective restoration of a people and judgment by written records (v11), contrasting with the individual, immediate justification by faith found in Romans 5:1.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Pray for the brethren/descendants (v8)
2. Follow spiritual whisperings/promptings (v7)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Keep and preserve physical records of spiritual history
2. Trust in God's foreknowledge even when current actions seem redundant
3. Submit to ecclesiastical and civil authority in matters of doctrine

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 7, Mormon mentions a 'wise purpose' he doesn't fully understand. How do you interpret that purpose in light of the history of the manuscript translation?
2. Verse 11 says people will be judged 'out of' the things written in these plates. How does that relate to the biblical teaching that believers are judged based on Christ's righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21)?
3. King Benjamin punished false preachers for their crimes (v16). How does this compare to how Jesus and the Apostles handled those who disagreed with them?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The 'Whisper' of the Spirit – Just as Mormon listened to a prompting he didn't fully understand, we are called to trust the Holy Spirit. However, the Spirit points us to the finished work of Christ, not to new records. [John 16:13-14 (The Spirit will glorify Christ)]
2. Intergenerational Concern – Mormon's desire for his people's salvation mirrors Paul's anguish for Israel. This deep longing can be a bridge to discussing the true means of salvation. [Romans 9:1-3, Romans 10:1]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Uncertainty/Subjectivism [Moderate] – The reliance on subjective 'whisperings' to determine truth or major life decisions can lead to anxiety about whether one is truly hearing God or just their own thoughts, lacking the objective anchor of Sola Scriptura.
2. Performance/Judgment Anxiety [Severe] – The teaching that judgment is based on the records of one's people and deeds (v11) reinforces a works-based anxiety, contrasting with the rest offered by Christ's finished work.
3. Theocratic Pressure [Moderate] – The validation of punishing religious dissent (v15-16) creates a culture where questioning leadership is equated with criminal or sinful behavior, fostering isolation and fear of honesty.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Subjective Revelation (The Spirit 'whispering') and Historical Compilation.

Verification Method: The text implies verification through the eventual fulfillment of the 'wise purpose' (internal consistency) and the authority of the writer.

Evangelical Contrast: Evangelical epistemology relies on the objective, completed revelation of Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16) illuminated by the Spirit, rather than new subjective revelations that alter or add to the canon.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: Published 1830; Narrative setting ~385 AD.

Authorship: Joseph Smith (Critical); Mormon (Traditional).

Textual Issues: This section is the 'bridge' written after the loss of the 116 pages (Book of Lehi). It connects the Small Plates (translated last) to the Large Plates (Mosiah).