

SECTION 36 (MODERN SECTION 10)

FAITH: Mormonism | TEXT: Doctrine and Covenants | VOLUME: 1835 | AUTHOR: Joseph Smith

OVERVIEW

This revelation, received in the spring of 1829, addresses the crisis of the 'Lost 116 Pages' (the Book of Lehi) which Martin Harris had lost. The text, voiced as Jesus Christ, explains that 'wicked men' have obtained the manuscript and, inspired by Satan, have physically altered the words to entrap Joseph Smith. The logic presented is that if Joseph were to re-translate the same portion, the conspirators would produce the altered original to claim discrepancies, thereby proving him a fraud. Consequently, God commands Joseph not to re-translate that portion but to translate the 'Small Plates of Nephi' instead, which cover the same time period but with a more spiritual focus. This text establishes the narrative of a divinely prepared contingency plan (the Small Plates) and asserts that the Book of Mormon is necessary to resolve doctrinal contentions caused by the misunderstanding of the Bible.

KEY FIGURES

Jesus Christ (The Speaker), Joseph Smith (The Recipient), Martin Harris ('The man in whom you have trusted'), Satan (The instigator of the conspiracy), Nephi (Author of the replacement record)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. THE ALTERATION CONSPIRACY

Assertion: Satan inspired wicked men to physically alter the handwritten manuscript of the 116 pages so that a re-translation by Joseph Smith would not match, framing him as a liar.

"Behold, they have altered the words... and on this wise the devil has sought to lay a cunning plan... that by lying they may say they have caught you in the words which you have pretended to translate. (Verse 1)"

Evangelical Comparison: The text asserts that enemies of the work physically changed the words of the stolen manuscript ('they have altered the words'). In Evangelical textual criticism, manuscript evidence is paramount. This doctrine introduces a scenario where physical evidence (the manuscript) is unreliable due to satanic tampering, and only the Prophet's new revelation is trustworthy. This serves as an apologetic shield against the inability to reproduce the lost text verbatim, contrasting with the biblical standard of prophecy where God's word stands forever and does not need to 'run and hide' from empirical checks (Isaiah 40:8).

2. INSUFFICIENCY OF THE BIBLE

Assertion: The Bible (scriptures) is currently misunderstood and wrested, causing contention; the Book of Mormon is required to establish 'true points of doctrine.'

"Satan doth stir up the hearts of the people to contention, concerning the points of my doctrine; and in these things they do err, for they do wrest the scriptures... therefore, I will unfold unto them this great mystery (Verse 15)"

Evangelical Comparison: Evangelicalism holds that the Bible is sufficient for doctrine and godliness (2 Timothy 3:16). This text argues that the Bible has failed to maintain doctrinal unity ('so much contention') and that the solution is not the Holy Spirit illuminating the existing text, but the introduction of a new volume of scripture (Book of Mormon) to 'bring to light the true points of my doctrine.' This displaces the Bible from its position as the final authority.

3. DIVINE CONTINGENCY

Assertion: God prepared the Small Plates of Nephi centuries in advance specifically to cover the loss of the 116 pages.

"For this cause I said, that he is a wicked man... And now, because the account which is engraven upon the plates of Nephi, is more particular... therefore, you shall translate the engravings which are on the plates of Nephi (Verses 1, 9)"

Evangelical Comparison: The text presents a God who prepares a 'backup plan' (the Small Plates) for the specific event of Martin Harris losing the manuscript. While Evangelicals believe in God's foreknowledge (Romans 8:29), this doctrine is used here to explain why the 'translation' will now shift to a different source text rather than reproducing the original, effectively bypassing the test of consistency.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: While the text uses Christian terminology, it fundamentally diverges from Evangelicalism on the doctrine of Scripture. By asserting that the Bible causes contention and requires the Book of Mormon to clarify doctrine, it rejects Sola Scriptura. Furthermore, the text constructs a worldview where empirical evidence (the potential resurfacing of the lost pages) is pre-emptively invalidated by a claim of satanic alteration, insulating the prophet from objective testing—a stark contrast to the biblical standard where a prophet's word must come to pass (Deuteronomy 18:22).

Shared Values:

Reality of Satan and spiritual warfare; Necessity of repentance; Jesus Christ as the Son of God and Redeemer; God's foreknowledge

Friction Points:

1. [Major] Truthfulness/Veracity of God – God commands Joseph not to re-translate because He cannot protect the integrity of the truth against human alteration, or implies God uses a conspiracy theory to protect His prophet.
2. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Claims the Bible is insufficient and the cause of contention, requiring the Book of Mormon to fix it.

Semantic Warnings:

"My Church"

In Text: Whosoever repented and cometh unto me (Verse 16).

Evangelical: The body of all true believers justified by faith in Christ (Ephesians 1:22-23).

Example: In this early text, 'Church' is defined broadly. Later LDS theology defines 'The Church' exclusively as the institutional organization led by the LDS priesthood.

"Gospel"

In Text: The specific new revelations contained in the Book of Mormon (Verse 10-12).

Evangelical: The good news of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection for sin (1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

Example: The text refers to 'this part of my gospel' referring to the historical record of the Nephites, conflating history/record with the Kerygma (Gospel message).

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Inheriting the kingdom of heaven (Verse 13), partaking of the waters of life (Verse 15).

How Attained: Repentance, coming to Christ, enduring to the end, and keeping commandments (Verse 13, 16).

Basis of Assurance: Membership in the church (defined by repentance) and not fearing man.

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text emphasizes 'enduring' and 'keeping commandments' alongside repentance. While not explicitly denying faith, it sets a trajectory toward works-righteousness by linking salvation to the acceptance of the new 'work' (Book of Mormon).

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Do not re-translate the lost 116 pages (Verse 6)
2. Translate the engravings on the plates of Nephi instead (Verse 9)
3. Do not run faster or labor more than you have strength (Verse 1)
4. Pray always to conquer Satan (Verse 1)
5. Hold your peace until God sees fit to make things known (Verse 7)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept the narrative that the lost manuscript was altered by enemies
2. Distrust those who might produce the original manuscript (pre-emptive delegitimization)

3. View the Bible as a source of contention that requires the Book of Mormon to fix

Ritual Requirements:

1. Repentance and baptism (implied in 'cometh unto me' and 'partake of the waters of life')

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. The text says wicked men altered the 116 pages so they wouldn't match Joseph's re-translation. But wouldn't scratching out ink and rewriting words on 116 pages of paper be obvious to anyone looking at it?
2. If God knew the pages would be lost and prepared the Small Plates of Nephi 2,000 years prior, why did He allow Joseph to translate the 116 pages at all, knowing it would result in a 'loss of the gift'?
3. Verse 15 says the Bible causes contention because people 'wrest' (twist) it. Does the Book of Mormon actually solve this, given that there are many different splinter groups within Mormonism who also disagree on doctrine?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Divine Backup Plan – Just as God made a provision for the lost manuscript before the error occurred, God made a provision for our sin before the foundation of the world through the Lamb of God. [Revelation 13:8, 1 Peter 1:19-20]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Paranoia / Us vs. Them [Severe] – The text cultivates a mindset that 'wicked men' are actively conspiring, lying, and altering evidence to destroy the believer's faith. This creates deep suspicion of any critical evidence or historical documentation that contradicts the narrative.
2. Uncertainty of Scripture [Moderate] – By teaching that the Bible is 'wrested' and insufficient, the believer loses the anchor of Sola Scriptura and becomes dependent on the Prophet's ongoing revelations for certainty.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Direct Revelation (The voice of the Lord through Joseph Smith).

Verification Method: Internal spiritual confirmation and trust in the Prophet's explanation of events.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology encourages testing spirits (1 John 4:1) and relies on public, historical verification (1 Corinthians 15:3-8). This text demands acceptance of a conspiracy theory (altered manuscript) that cannot be verified and serves to explain away a failure (loss of pages).

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: Spring 1829 (Revelation received); 1835 (Published in D&C).

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated).

Textual Issues: The 'Alteration Theory' is the central critical issue. Critics argue this revelation was an ad hoc invention to prevent Joseph from having to reproduce the 116 pages, which he likely could not do verbatim. If he produced a different text, and the original (unaltered) pages surfaced, he would be exposed. This revelation pre-emptively brands the original pages as 'altered' to inoculate his followers against that potential exposure.