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Lamanite Identity and the Book of Mormon

Author(s): Michael R. Ash

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Lamanite Identity and the Book of Mormon

Who were the Lamanites and how do they relate to modern Native Americans? The questions are easier than the answers. In order to properly address these concerns we need to approach the topic with some background information.

The Book of Mormon Does not Deal with All Ancient New World Peoples

Despite common misconceptions among many LDS, the Book of Mormon does not claim to be a record of all those who inhabited the New World. For at least seventy years many (and today probably most) LDS scholars have found evidence within the Book of Mormon text that Book of Mormon geography encompassed a limited geography, generally believed to have transpired in Mesoamerica, and that Book of Mormon peoples interacted with pre-existing populations (see also Chapters 14 and 15).

Critics go to great lengths in their attempt to show that the prophets and most members traditionally interpreted the Book of Mormon as a record of the native inhabitants of all the Americas, but, as noted in previous chapters, tradition is not a substitute for revelation. Speculation, even by prophets, does not constitute official doctrine. Without any reason to question traditional assumptions, most people understand new information according to familiar information.

As new editions of the Book of Mormon have been published, some have added supplementary information to the actual text. In the 1879 edition, for example, Orson Pratt added non-doctrinal explanatory footnotes—including ones based on Pratt's interpretation of Book of Mormon geography. In 1920 James Talmage added more introductory information while removing Pratt's geographical footnotes.

In the 1981 edition Elder Bruce R. McConkie (who was appointed as part of the LDS Church scripture committee) added chapter headings as well as a new introduction that stated that the Lamanites are the “principal ancestors of American Indians.” Like the chapter headings, footnotes, and all other ancillary and explanatory texts added to the volume, the introduction does not carry the same weight as the actual scriptural text. It is also important to note that in his 1966 book, *Mormon Doctrine*, McConkie acknowledged that modern Native Americans would have “had other blood than that of Israel in their veins.”¹ In 2006, the Church clarified the introduction to state that the Lamanites are “among the principal ancestors.”² This change implies that the issue has not been settled by revelation and that there is no doctrinal position on the cultural composition of ancient America.

With this expanded appreciation of New World inhabitants, some members have wondered about the accuracy of the statements (recorded in LDS scriptures or made by prophets and general authorities) that refer to Native Americans as “Lamanites.” There are three different aspects to this issue: genetics, culture, and genealogy.

Genetics

One of the more recent and seemingly sophisticated attacks against the Book of Mormon has come from those who claim to use DNA to demonstrate that there never were any Israelites in the ancient New World.

While DNA science is relatively new, it has proved to be an accurate and valuable tool in a number of research areas. *Nuclear DNA (nDNA)* studies have been useful in criminal and forensic studies (as popularized by shows such as *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*) and even in helping identify victims of the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

Likewise, historical dynamics measured by population genetics methods often rely on the examination of *mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA)*, which is transferred practically unchanged from mother to child. Thus far, the vast majority of all mtDNA data studied to date on Native American populations indicate Asian affinity. This supports the primary scientific theory that the Americas were populated by people migrating from Asia by way of the Bering Strait, in what might have been three primary migrations.³ According to the critics, the genetic Asian connection means that there is no trace of Israelite DNA and therefore the Book of Mormon is false.

It should be noted that those who claim that DNA has demonstrated a non-historical Book of Mormon have not done any actual DNA research on this issue, but have instead used the DNA studies of others who never intended their research to be litmus tests for Book of Mormon historicity.

Some critics have claimed that real scientists—by which, of course, they mean “non-Mormon scientists”—would not agree with LDS scientists on their approach to the DNA issues. Ironically, few critics who have engaged the DNA issue have advanced degrees commensurate with this particular topic. I am aware of only two such critics. The first is Thomas Murphy, an inactive Mormon anthropologist who rejects the historicity of the Book of Mormon and has worked with anti-Mormon groups

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to promote that concept. The second is Simon Southerton, an ex-Mormon biologist with advanced training in plant genetics, who has taken up the DNA argument as a weapon against his former faith. Even Southerton, however, recognizes that in order for the DNA arguments to have any substance, it must be argued that according to the Book of Mormon all Native Americans are the exclusive descendants of Book of Mormon peoples. He once wrote:

In 600 BC there were probably several million American Indians living in the Americas. If a small group of Israelites, say less than thirty, entered such a massive native population, it would be very hard to detect their genes today. However, such a scenario does not square with what the Book of Mormon plainly states and with what the prophets have taught for 175 years.⁴

We see how this quickly shifts from a scientific argument to a theological argument. If the Book of Mormon relates the history of small groups of Israelites who coexisted and intermarried with Native Americans, DNA science—as will be shown in this chapter—does not negate the authenticity of the Book of Mormon.

While there are extremely few DNA specialists who support the contra-LDS position, we find that there are several LDS DNA specialists (particularly those with advanced training in population genetics) who have weighed in on the topic. D. Michael Whiting and Dr. John Butler (along with their credentials) were discussed in Chapter 8. Both of these men are scientists of the highest caliber and are engaged in cutting-edge DNA research. To this list I also add the following LDS scientists:

- **Dr. Scott Woodward** was a Professor of Microbiology and faculty member of the Molecular Biology Program at Brigham Young University for sixteen years. He is currently the head of the Sorenson Molecular Genealogy Foundation in Salt Lake City, Utah. In the past, he had been involved with several excavation teams in Seila, Egypt, where he directed the genetic and molecular analysis of Egyptian mummies, both from a commoners' cemetery and from Egyptian Royal tombs. He was also a visiting professor at Hebrew University where he was involved in studying the DNA of the Dead Sea Scrolls. While completing his postdoctoral work in molecular genetics at the Howard Hughes Medical Institute at the University of Utah, Dr. Woodward discovered a genetic marker used for the identification of carriers and the eventual discovery of the gene for cystic fibrosis. He was also involved with the identification of other gene markers for colon cancer and neurofibromatosis. His work has been featured both nationally and internationally on numerous programs including *Good Morning America* and both the *Discovery* and *Learning* channels.

- **Dr. Ryan Parr** has a Ph.D. in biological anthropology from the University of Utah and is currently vice president of Research and Development at Genesis Genomics, a Canadian biotechnical company exploring the use of mtDNA as a “biosensor” for the early detection of prostate and breast cancer. He has authored and coauthored mtDNA studies of Native Americans, specializing in ancient DNA. One of his previous projects involved the DNA sequencing of Egyptian mummies found at the Dakhleh Oasis. Another major project was the use of mtDNA in the identification of the Unknown Child from the 1912 RMS Titanic disaster.
- **Dr. Ugo Perego** (Ph.D., University of Pavia) a population geneticist specialized in the origins of Native Americans who is currently working as one of the senior researchers for the non-profit Sorenson Molecular Genealogy Foundation (SMGF). In ten years with SMGF, Dr. Perego has supervised the worldwide collection of more than 110,000 DNA samples and corresponding genealogical records, and produced nearly 150 lectures and numerous publications on DNA and how it relates to ancestry, history, and population migrations. Dr. Perego has provided me with invaluable assistance in writing this chapter on DNA.

I do not want to make this an argument from authority because even non-experts can make sound arguments, but the claim that Mormon scientists do not have the expertise to competently speak on this matter is simply false.

While it is true that DNA studies thus far support the populating of the ancient New World by Asiatic migrations, they fall short of disconfirming the Book of Mormon narrative. Following are several reasons why.

We Do Not Know What Israelite DNA from Lehi’s Time Looks Like

In order to know if ancient Israelite DNA could be found in the ancient New World, we would have to recognize this DNA. Here we encounter at least two problems. First, most people are probably inclined to think that ancient Israelite DNA should be detectable in current Jewish populations, based on the assumption that the Jews are a race who have remained genetically homogenous since ancient times. The reality, however, is that “Israelite”—like “Jew,” “Mormon,” or “American”—is a cultural rather than biological definition. Other than a few extreme examples, current Jewish populations (from whence samples are drawn for Israelite DNA) do not necessarily reflect the DNA make-up of ancient Israelite populations.

Second, even anciently the Israelites were composed of multiple genetic backgrounds, each carrying different mtDNA markers from their mothers. By the time Jesus was born, the Jews were an even more genetically diverse group, having in-

termarried with Canaanites, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, and Romans, as these outsiders conquered Judah. This intermarriage has only increased to the present day. Under such conditions we should not expect to know what Lehite DNA looked like.

DNA Markers Can Disappear

As already argued several times in this book, the Lehites and Mulekites would have been small incursions into much larger existing populations, probably of Asiatic origin. When small populations mix with large populations we have a significant risk of losing the DNA signatures of the smaller population.

Most of the DNA studies done on Native Americans (the root of Book of Mormon DNA criticisms) are based on mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) which is inherited from the mother. MtDNA lineages are divided in branches (*haplogroups*) on a large tree called *phylogeny*, with a built in “molecular clock” that measures mtDNA changes (mutations) over time. While science adapts and modifies according to newer discoveries, the current molecular clock tells us that the ancestors of most modern Native Americans migrated to the Western Hemisphere about 15,000–17,000 years ago.

This molecular clock, however, has some limitations. We might wonder, for example, how the DNA of modern Native Americans was impacted by the arrival of many different groups that came to the New World following the arrival of the Spaniards. In theory, the currently accepted molecular clock would not be able to differentiate between pre- and post-Columbian mtDNA lineages brought to the Americas within the last 2,000–3,000 years. In other words, any mtDNA found at great frequencies in today’s Middle East as well as in living Native Americans could have arrived in 600 B.C. (by a group such as the Lehites) or in the sixteenth century by Spaniards (who had large Jewish population for centuries in the Iberian Peninsula). There is currently no way to tell the difference.

Although mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) is passed from mother to child, all population geneticists understand that worldwide certain markers (known as *haplotypes* which help define *haplogroups*) will disappear because of bottlenecks and genetic drift. For example, geneticists trace all modern human mtDNA to a common maternal ancestor (the “Mitochondrial Eve”); a single haplogroup that originated in Africa dating to about 200,000 years ago. Other women carrying different and unknown mtDNA lineages existed as well and would also have had sons and daughters, but their mtDNA eventually disappeared because of genetic drift and bottlenecks. When the first anatomically modern humans left Africa about 70,000 years ago they undoubtedly had several women in the initial group. Yet only one mtDNA lineage (L3) is the maternal ancestor of all the non-African people living today. That is only one single common female ancestor for all the people of Europe, Asia, Oceania, and the Americas. Surely she was not the only woman to leave Africa, but the other mtDNA lineages disappeared due to genetic drift and bottlenecks.

Genetic Bottleneck

Genetic bottleneck occurs when a significant portion of a population does not reproduce or at least does not pass on mtDNA (which is only passed on by the mother). Sariah would have passed her mtDNA on to her sons and daughters but only the daughters would have continued to pass Sariah's mtDNA on to the grandchildren. The grandchildren who were born to Lehi and Sariah's sons (such as Nephi, Laman, etc.) would *not* have had Sariah's mtDNA but would have carried the mtDNA of their mothers (Lehi and Sariah's daughter-in-laws). And we know that many of Lehi's sons married the daughters of Ishmael (1 Nephi 16:7). If Lehi's and Sariah's daughters had sons and no daughters, then Sariah's mtDNA would have come to an abrupt end after only two generations.

Another cause for a bottleneck is when a large portion of a population dies (often due to war, famine, or disease) and the DNA traits of the surviving group does not accurately represent the diversity of the larger group from which they emerged. Such a bottleneck occurred when diseases introduced by the Spaniards and other Europeans wiped out millions of Native Americans (perhaps up to 80%–90% of pre-Columbian populations). In fact, non-LDS molecular anthropologist Dr. Michael H. Crawford says that the Spanish Conquest, “squeezed the entire Amerindian population through a genetic bottleneck. ...This population reduction has forever altered the genetics of the surviving groups, thus complicating any attempts at reconstructing the pre-Columbian genetic structure of most New World groups.”⁵

Founder Effect

This type of genetic bottleneck happens when a small (founder) group leaves a larger group (as with the Lehites/Mulekites leaving a larger Israelite group). In some of these occurrences, the smaller group contains only a small fraction of the genetic markers of the larger group. In such instances, the smaller group's DNA signature is significantly different than that of the group's origin. Thus, for the Book of Mormon, the DNA sampling of the Lehites/Mulekites (if we had it) may not accurately reflect the DNA markers of their Israelite heritage.

Genetic Drift

With mtDNA we have a problem with “lucky genes.” MtDNA follows a single line of transmission (mother to child), obscuring the fact that founding mothers have many other descendants whose mtDNA may be different. For example, if you go back two generations to your grandparents, there are four individuals (two parents for each of your parents), two of which are female (grandmothers on both sides). Only one of these grandmothers will have passed on her mtDNA to you, regardless of whether you are male or female. You will not have the mtDNA of one of your grandmothers. If we go back ten generations, you have 1,024 ancestral slots or number of possible contributors to your genetic makeup, yet only a single female ancestor will provide your mtDNA. The further we go back the more ancestral slots are

available. The actual number of progenitors—due to *coalescence* (the intermarrying of relatives, including distant relatives)—is actually lower. Of these 1,024 ancestral slots, half are female. You will inherit the mtDNA of only one of these 512 female ancestral slots. Small populations are more susceptible to drift and the smaller the population the faster the drift. Since there are (conservatively) at least 100 generations between modern Native Americans and Sariah, there are more ancestral slots than there have been people on Earth.

A recent DNA study of over 131,000 modern Icelanders, for example, found that many DNA markers disappeared in just over a century. According to DNA tests, over 86% of Icelandic males descended from just 26% of potential male ancestors in their family tree who were born between 1848 and 1892 and also lived in Iceland. Among the female population, nearly 92% descended from only 22% of potential female ancestors in their family tree who were born between the same years as the male ancestors. Thus we see that the vast majority of the Icelandic ancestors just 150 years ago did not contribute mtDNA or Y-chromosome DNA (DNA from the father) to their descendants (see more on Y-chromosomes in the next section). Conversely, a small minority of Icelandic ancestors from 150 years ago contributed the bulk of DNA markers to their now-living descendants. Most of the Icelandic people living today who have genealogical records showing that their ancestors lived in Iceland 150 years ago could not detect DNA for those ancestors. Is it really any wonder that we find the same scenario with Book of Mormon peoples?

Y-Chromosome DNA

While mtDNA focuses on females passing on their DNA to their offspring, some critics have also examined studies of the Y-chromosome (*Ycs*) which is passed from father to son. Critics claim that the more limited *Ycs* studies support the mtDNA conclusions that Israelites did not migrate to the ancient New World. More recent studies, however, have shown that such a position may be inaccurate and premature.

Ycs markers can have the same problems as mtDNA markers. Population geneticist Dr. Ugo Perego, who for a time lived in Utah, was born and raised in Italy where he traces his ancestry back to the mid-seventeenth-century. His *Ycs*, however, is rare among Europeans and is mostly found in East Asia. Perego has three young sons, all of whom carry this same *Ycs* marker. If data was collected from Perego, his sons, and other Italians in his former Utah neighborhood, this “founder effect” would incorrectly suggest that a large portion of Italians are paternally related to eastern Asian populations.

In the Americas, we have another problem in trying to find a *Ycs* affinity to Book of Mormon peoples. Based on DNA studies using samples from modern mixed and indigenous population, it is possible to observe that the male *Ycs* suffered a bottleneck at least tenfold that of mtDNA—probably because the relatively few surviving males (*Ycs* lineages) were not given the same chance to reproduce as indigenous women who most likely had children with male colonists from the Old World.⁶

Lastly, two of the dominant Y-chromosome lineages in Native American populations are actually also found in modern Jews but that does not prove that they are descended from Near Eastern populations.

The Lemba Tribe

In South Africa there is a black Bantu-speaking tribe known as the *Lemba*. For many generations these people have claimed to descend from Jews and they practice a religion similar to Judaism.

Recent DNA studies show that over 50% of Lemba males carry a specific genetic signature, known as the *Cohen marker*. This identifier strongly correlates to an ancient priestly Jewish clan descended from Aaron.⁷ This demonstrates, claim critics, that small Jewish groups can still be identified even after many centuries of intermingling with a larger foreign population. They claim that we should find the same thing among Native American descendants of the Lehites.

This argument, however, is specious and not analogous to the Lehites and Mulekites (the two Israelite groups mentioned in the Book of Mormon). Unlike the Lemba who descended from Aaron (from whom the Cohen marker supposedly derived), Lehi was a descendant of Joseph and Mulek was a descendant of Judah. Jewish Cohen priests were specifically forbidden to intermarry with other Israelites, which is partly why there are such frequent Cohen markers among today's Jewish Cohens and why only about 2% of Jews have this marker today. There is no reason to believe that the Cohen marker should be found among Book of Mormon peoples. By the critics' reasoning, the 98% of Jews without the Cohen marker are not Israelites!

If the Cohen marker had not been found among the Lemba, scientists would have no reason to suspect that the oral traditions of Jewish lineage were accurate. Based on mtDNA studies, the Lemba were indistinguishable from other Bantu-speaking tribes. The identification of a Cohen marker is currently the only scientific evidence for the possible Jewish ancestry of this South African group. If, like the Lehites and Mulekites, this group had not had ancestors with the Cohen marker, their Jewish lineage might never have been identified.

And, as a matter of note, non-LDS DNA scientists actually have found the Cohen haplotype in Columbia.⁸ The problem, as discussed above, is that according to the current molecular clock we cannot tell precisely when it was introduced, but theoretically it was introduced within the last 2,000–3,000 years. Most scientists presume that it was introduced by post-Columbian Europeans (and this is likely the case) because there was a lot of Jewish DNA in Spain, but we cannot currently say with absolute certainty that it did not come from a seafaring incursion of Old World travelers in 600 B.C.

Great Lakes DNA

What about claims that Israelite DNA has been discovered in the “heartlands” or Great Lakes region of the United States? Because the pro-DNA argument is closely tied to a specific geographical model, it needs repeating that there is no official geography for Book of Mormon events. I believe that the Mesoamerican model fits best but it is important to understand that believing Latter-day Saints can respectfully disagree as to where the events described in the Book of Mormon took place.

Elder Dallin H. Oaks, speaking of those who participate in non-official venues wherein Church-related topics are discussed, observed

[Sometimes]... a volunteer will step forward to present what he or she considers to be the Church’s position. Sometimes these volunteers are well-informed and capable, and they contribute to a balanced presentation. Sometimes they are not, and their contribution makes matters worse. When attacked by error, truth is better served by silence than by a bad argument.⁹

I wish to “liken” Elder Oaks’ comment to the arguments made by those who claim that DNA studies offer evidence or proof for the historicity of the Book of Mormon. Briefly outlined, here is the position taken by those who make such a claim:

1. DNA evidence for the Lehites should be discernible in modern DNA studies.
2. All Native Americans belong to one of the following five mitochondrial lineages (haplogroups): A, B, C, D, and X.
3. Haplogroup X, the least common of the five groups, appears to be traceable to the ancient Middle East.
4. Ergo, haplogroup X provides evidence or proof for the existence of Lehites.

The first part of this argument is based on the faulty assumption that we should expect to find Lehite DNA (as pointed out in this chapter). The second and third parts of the argument are somewhat accurate (with some caveats). The fourth part, however, is a faulty conclusion unsupported by what we actually know about the origin and distribution of haplogroup X.

Not long after the initial haplotypes A–D were identified in Native American populations, a fifth and more rare haplotype (dubbed “X”) was also found among some Native Americans. Sister lineages to the Amerindian haplogroup X are found at low frequencies in many geographic regions of the world including Western Europe, North Africa, East Asia, and the Middle East. The presence of haplogroup X in the Americas is primarily limited to the Great Lakes area (which is one of the pro-

posed models for Book of Mormon geography), but it is also found to lesser extents in other parts of North America.

Thanks to an improved analysis of mtDNA genomes and a greater number of samples available, the Native American haplogroup X is currently termed X2a, a lineage that is not found anywhere else in the world.

As noted earlier, mtDNA mutations are measured by molecular clocks used to calculate age estimates of the different branches in the mtDNA tree. Currently, there are five different molecular clocks that have been proposed using all or a considerable section of the mtDNA genome. All five clocks provide close estimates for haplogroup X2a indicating that it pre-dates the Lehites arrival to the Americas by several thousands of years. So, in reality, based on current DNA science and the lack of additional evidence, X2a cannot be linked to the Lehites.

The conclusions we can draw from the DNA issue are as follows: There has never been a scientific DNA study intended to test the authenticity of the Book of Mormon. Reports claiming to use DNA to refute (or prove) the Book of Mormon are based on studies never designed to answer the question of Book of Mormon historicity.

We do not know what a Lehite gene would have looked like, so we do not know what to look for. It is likely that the Middle Eastern DNA of Lehi's day looked completely different from the "Israelite" DNA available today. Population genetics demonstrate that the DNA signature of small populations can disappear when infused into larger populations, and even modern Jews cannot always be detected by DNA testing.

Current research suggests that the X haplogroup found in the Great Lakes area of the United States does not point to the correct time frame required to support a Lehite incursion into that region of the country. Therefore, current DNA evidence is not incompatible with a belief that the Book of Mormon is an authentic ancient document but also does not prove that the Lehites arrived in the Americas around 600 B.C.

Culture

Culture is learned and generally passes from parents to children.¹⁰ Sometimes, however, people change or assimilate into different cultures or, at least, their children become part of the new culture. Thus we have Americans who are culturally American, although they (or their ancestors) might have come from Africa, Europe, Asia, or many other parts of the world. Terms such as *African*, *Asian*, *Jew*, *LDS*, *Indian*, and so forth are social constructs, not biological or genetic classifications.

The first Lamanite group was a cultural classification. Both Laman and Lemuel (and those who joined them) were called *Lamanites*. While the original Lamanite party would certainly have had Lehite DNA, anyone who joined the Lamanites would be called *Lamanite* by the Nephites (2 Nephi 5:14).

Intertwined with cultural identification is a concept from anthropology known as *emic* vs. *etic* discourse—basically perceptions of insider vs. outsider. *Emic* is how

a people understand themselves, whereas *etic* is how a people are understood by outsiders. Often these two views are very different. Romans, for example, called one people “Greeks” who called themselves “Hellenes.” Those called “Egyptians” by the Greeks were “Mizraim” to the Hebrews and neither term to the Egyptians themselves. To us, some Europeans are “German,” to the Italians “Tedesco,” to the French “Allemand,” but to themselves they are “Deutsch.” We call the early inhabitants of this continent “Native Americans” or “Indians,” but that is not how they referred to themselves. To the Nephites virtually all non-Nephites were “Lamanites,” while to Latter-day Saints, all Native Americans are “Lamanites.”

Not only can these cultural conceptualizations be different depending on an insider or outsider perspective, they also can shift over time or circumstance. Jews in Utah, for example, can also be referred to as “Gentiles”—that is, a non-LDS person. Even outside of Utah the term “Jew” is dependent on circumstances. A Jew is someone who is descended from Judah as well as someone who adopts the Jewish culture and religious life. Someone can be born a Jew as well as become a Jew through conversion. Likewise, in 1 Nephi 14:2 we read that righteous Gentiles would become numbered among the “house of Israel” as well as the “seed” of Lehi.

The term *Lamanite* meant different things to Nephi, Alma, Mormon, and even Joseph Smith (which is what we would expect—and happen to find—if the Book of Mormon is an authentic ancient text written by multiple authors over many centuries). As with Jews, we read in the Book of Mormon that someone could become a Lamanite. After Christ’s visit to the New World, Book of Mormon peoples lived in harmony for many decades. During that time, there were “no Lamanites, nor any manner of –ites; but they were one, the children of Christ” (4 Nephi 1:17). Several decades later we read of a small revolt of people who had “taken upon them the name of Lamanites; therefore there began to be Lamanites again in the land” (v. 20).

Genealogy

Finally, we have genealogy, or one’s ancestry. Everyone has two parents, and each parent has two parents. If you go back to two generations (to your grandparents) you have four ancestral slots filled by two grandfathers and two grandmothers. As we go further back in our genealogy the number of ancestral slots increases geometrically. These slots do not represent the actual number of ancestors, however, because intermarriage among relatives will cause some ancestors to fill multiple ancestral slots.

If we were able to do the genealogy for a modern Native American back to Lehi’s generation, we would have approximately 90 generations. This Native American would have over 1.2 octillion ancestral slots (that is more than 1.2 trillion x 1 quadrillion). Now obviously he would not have 1.2 octillion ancestors (there have not been that many people in the entire history of the world). Some ancestors would fill many of these ancestral slots. Nevertheless, on a giant genealogy chart, there would be 1.2 octillion ancestral slots. From how many slots would our Native American be descended? All of them. If Laman (or a descendant of Laman) was an ancestor in just

one of these 1.2 octillion ancestral slots, then it can legitimately be claimed that our Native American is a Lamanite descendant.

Recent studies suggest that we are related in several ways and that many large groups of humans are often related in distinct ways as well. Current research, for instance, posits that all 6.5 billion people on the earth today have a common ancestor who may have lived as recently as the time of Christ. Furthermore, if we were to do a worldwide family tree back to about the fifth millennium B.C. we would find that all people living today would have the same set of ancestors.¹¹ Other studies indicate that a large percentage of all people may have traces of Israelite ancestry, and that most people may be descendants of Abraham (see Genesis 22:17). Regarding the Book of Mormon, one scholar who has studied this concept notes:

The numerical dynamics of population mixing make it easily feasible...that most Amerindians are descended from Book of Mormon peoples, even if Book of Mormon peoples were originally a minority of ancient American populations and are thus only a part of the ancestry of most individuals.¹²

In summary, while there is no evidence for a genetic link between modern Native Americans and the Lehite/Lamanites (and there is no reason to suspect that Lehite DNA would be detectable in modern native peoples), LDS scriptures and prophets are justified in referring to them as “Lamanites” due to the likelihood of cultural and genealogical affiliations.

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