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## The Promised Land and Its Covenant Peoples

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# *The Promised Land and Its Covenant Peoples*

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Douglas Brinley

At least four groups of covenant people have settled the American continent: the Antediluvians, from Adam to Noah; the people of Jared, called Jaredites; the Lehites and Mulekites; and the present inhabitants of the land, the Gentiles. The Book of Mormon contains an account of the latter three immigrant groups and notes that the Lord's promise to each colony appears to have been the same: serve the God of the land, who is Jesus Christ, and prosper on the land (Ether 2:8; 2 Nephi 1:9). If the inhabitants choose evil, they will be "swept off" the face of the land.

And now, we can behold the decrees of God concerning this land, that it is a land of promise; and whatsoever nation shall possess it shall serve God, or they shall be swept off when the fulness of his wrath shall come upon them. And the fulness of his wrath cometh

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<sup>1</sup> That the ancient patriarchs of the Antediluvian period presided and labored in what is now part of the American continent may be seen from D&C 116, where Joseph Smith indicated that Adam lived in a portion of what is presently the state of Missouri, and from D&C 107:53. See also Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 3:74. For a discussion of Enoch's ministry in this land, see Orson Pratt, *Journal of Discourses*, 12:338. Enoch came from the line of patriarchs, and it is reasonable to suppose that the promised land spoken of in Moses 8:17 and 41 was that of his fathers—part of what is now the American continent. All the land mass was in one place until many years after the Flood. It was divided in the days of Peleg (Gen 10:25). I treat the Lehites and the people of Mulek as one settlement group since we have no records of the history of the people of Mulek prior to the time they joined the Nephites. Although they were contemporaries who arrived in the promised land at different spots, they were unaware of each other's existence until the people in Zarahemla were discovered by Mosiah and united with his people, thus becoming Nephites (Omni 1:13–19; Mosiah 25:12–13).

upon them when they are ripened in iniquity. (Ether 2:9; see also 1 Nephi 2:20; 2 Nephi 1:6–11)

This dominant theme—America is a covenant land reserved for a people who will have Jesus Christ (Jehovah) to be their God—appears again and again in the Book of Mormon. For example, the Jaredite account proclaims this continent to be a “land of promise . . . choice above all other lands which the Lord God had preserved for a righteous people” (Ether 2:7). Lehi reminded his family in a final discourse that the Lord had led them to a “land of promise” (2 Nephi 1:3). The Lord promised Nephi that if he kept the commandments he would be “led to a land of promise; yea, even a land which I have prepared for you; yea, a land which is choice above all other lands” (1 Nephi 2:20).

The Book of Mormon clearly outlines a pattern of the inhabitants settling in the promised land, of establishing laws to maintain political and moral standards, and of God’s covenanting to protect and bless them if they will uphold spiritual and political laws. Unfortunately, the first three civilizations failed to maintain their covenants and standards, and their tragic cycles concluded with each one “ripening in iniquity” and being “swept off” the land. The Jaredites and Nephites passed through a number of stages from the time of their arrival in the promised land until they were ripened in iniquity and destroyed. The Gentiles who now occupy the land, have not yet completed all the stages.

This chapter identifies the covenants between God and the land’s inhabitants and then discusses how they fared. The primary focus, however, will be the Nephites’ passage through ten stages of decline, which are particularly clear in the book of Helaman and the first chapters of 3 Nephi. It will note, briefly, similarities between the Nephite decline and the decline of the other occupants of the land and give some observations on the Lamanites. Summary comments on the future of the Gentiles will conclude the paper.

## The Covenants

The covenants between God and the inhabitants of the promised land may be summarized as follows:

God's Promises	The Inhabitants' Promise
1. America(s) as a land of promise choice above all others (Ether 2:10)	1. To serve the God of the land— Jesus Christ (Ether 2:8, 12)
2. Freedom from bondage (Ether 2:12)	2. To keep his commandments (2 Nephi 1:9)
3. Freedom from captivity from all other nations (Ether 2:12)	3. To repent of any iniquity (Ether 2:11)
4. Prosperity in the land (2 Nephi 1:9)	
5. Sole possession of the land (2 Nephi 1:9)	
6. Safe dwelling forever (2 Nephi 1:9)	
7. Hidden from the knowledge of other nations (2 Nephi 1:9)	

## The Civilizations of the Promised Land

### *The People from Adam to Noah*

The covenants between God and the people who resided in the land from Adam's day to the Flood are not clearly detailed in the Bible. However, the Book of Moses speaks of Cainan as a "land of promise" (Moses 6:17). The fact that God swept the land clean of its inhabitants except for eight souls indicates that the covenants between God and these first inhabitants was similar to those of later colonies where the promises were more explicit. We learn from the Nephite record, for example, that

the inhabitants of this land are never swept off until they have broken covenants, sinned against the fulness of the gospel light, desecrated priesthood, and ignored repeated prophetic warnings that destruction is imminent. Such conditions must have prevailed in Enoch's day for the Lord commanded him to "go to this people, and say unto them—Repent, lest I come out and smite them with a curse, and they die" (Moses 7:10).

The inhabitants of the world in Noah's day reached that stage where "every man [did] evil continually" (Moses 8:22). The scripture explains that before the Flood, the "earth was corrupt before God, and it was filled with violence. And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted its way upon the earth" (vv 28, 29); yet, the people ignored Noah's warnings (vv 20–21). The Great Flood cleansed the wicked from the earth, and the land was prepared for its next occupants, the Jaredites (Ether 13:2).

### *The Jaredites*

Moroni, in abridging the record of this people whom the Lord brought to America from the Tower of Babel, clearly outlined the covenant between God and the land's inhabitants from that time forward. He recorded the Lord's instructions to the brother of Jared:

Thou shalt go at the head of them down into the valley which is northward. And there will I meet thee, and I will go before thee into a land which is choice above all the lands of the earth. And there will I bless thee and thy seed, and raise up unto me of thy seed, and of the seed of thy brother, and they who shall go with thee, a great nation. And there shall be none greater than the nation which I will raise up unto me of thy seed, upon all the face of the earth (Ether 1:42–43).

Noting the Jaredites' arrival in the promised land, Moroni explained the requirements for remaining on the land:

Whoso should possess this land of promise, from that time henceforth and forever, should serve him, the true and only God, or they should be swept off when the fulness of his wrath should come upon them. . . . it is a land of promise; and whatsoever nation shall possess

it shall serve God, or they shall be swept off when the fulness of his wrath shall come upon them. And the fulness of his wrath cometh upon them when they are ripened in iniquity. For behold, this is a land which is choice above all other lands; wherefore he that doth possess it shall serve God or shall be swept off; for it is the everlasting decree of God. And it is not until the fulness of iniquity among the children of the land, that they are swept off (Ether 2:8–10).

Moroni then clearly stated the covenant between God and all future inhabitants:

Behold, this is a choice land, and whatsoever nation shall possess it shall be free from bondage, and from captivity, and from all other nations under heaven, *if* they will but serve the God of the land, who is Jesus Christ, who hath been manifested by the things which we have written (Ether 2:12).

But the Jaredites “ripened in iniquity” and were completely destroyed in a devastating civil war. Of the millions of Jaredites, only the king, Coriantumr, and the prophet, Ether, were left (Ether 15:29, 33).

### *The Lehites/Mulekites*

The next people to inhabitant this land were Lehi’s colony and the people of Mulek, son of Zedekiah. Lehi explained the covenant between God and his seed:

We have obtained a land of promise, a land which is choice above all other lands; a land which the Lord God hath covenanted with me should be a land for the inheritance of my seed. Yea, the Lord hath covenanted this land unto me, and to my children forever. . . . And if it so be that they shall serve him according to the commandments which he hath given, it shall be a land of liberty unto [the inhabitants]; wherefore they shall never be brought down into captivity (2 Nephi 1:5,7).

Soon after Lehi’s death, however, the family split into two factions, the followers of Laman (Lamanites) and of Nephi (Nephites). The Lord warned Nephi to remove his group to another area to avoid confrontation with Laman and his followers who bore a violent hatred for him and his descendants (2 Nephi 5:5–8). In time the Lamanites located the Nephites,

and the two groups warred for many years. During King Mosiah's reign the Nephites moved to another land where they found the people of Zarahemla, descendants of Mulek, a son of Zedekiah, the king of Judah when Lehi and his family departed Jerusalem. These people joined with the Nephites and were integrated into the Nephite culture (Omni 1:12–19; Hel 6:10). Some two centuries after the resurrected Savior visited the Americas, the Nephites had become so ripened in iniquity that God allowed the armies of the Lamanites to annihilate them. Mormon and Moroni led some of those futile final battles that culminated in the Nephites being “swept off” the land.

### *The Gentiles*

The present occupants of the promised land are called Gentiles by Book of Mormon writers (1 Nephi 22:7). The term *Gentile* refers to “latter-day Christians,” and Latter-day Saints are counted as part of the present Gentile culture. Though not mentioning him by name, Nephi foresaw the latter-day Gentile, Columbus, as he was wrought upon by the Spirit of the Lord and “went forth upon the many waters, even unto the seed of my brethren, who were in the promised land” (1 Nephi 13:12). The Gentiles were given this land by the Lord many years after the destruction of the Nephites and the subsequent disintegration of the Lamanites (Mormon 5:19). The Gentiles brought to this land the biblical record of Jesus Christ (1 Nephi 13:29–30). Nephi explained the hand of the Lord in the settlement of the Gentiles:

Nevertheless, thou beholdest that the Gentiles who have gone forth out of captivity, and have been lifted up *by the power of God above all other nations*, upon the face of the land which is choice above all other lands, which is the land that the Lord God hath covenanted with thy father (1 Nephi 13:30; emphasis added).

Nephi told Laman and Lemuel, “The Lord God will raise up a mighty nation among the Gentiles, yea, even upon the face of

this land” (1 Nephi 22:7). Nephi outlined the covenant between God and the Gentiles:

Therefore, wo be unto the Gentiles if it so be that they harden their hearts against the Lamb of God. For the time cometh, saith the Lamb of God, that I will work a great and a marvelous work among the children of men; a work which shall be everlasting, either on the one hand or on the other—*either to the convincing of them unto peace and life eternal, or unto the deliverance of them to the hardness of their hearts and the blindness of their minds unto their being brought down into captivity*, and also into destruction, both temporally and spiritually, according to the captivity of the devil (1 Nephi 14:6–7; emphasis added).

Though the people of each of these civilizations were clearly taught their covenants with God, still they drifted carelessly into corruption and were destroyed. The Flood took the first settlers, the Jaredites annihilated themselves through civil war, while the Nephites were decimated by the Lamanites in a series of ferocious battles. The destiny of the Gentiles, whether they choose to follow the teachings of Christ and be a favored people of the Lord on the promised land, or whether they will choose the fate of the former inhabitants of the land—is an important issue for the coming years.

### *The Lamanites Preserved*

The exception to this general pattern of destruction has been the Lamanites. Many times over the course of their history the Lamanites became more righteous than the Nephites. And at one point there were neither Nephites nor Lamanites, nor any kind of “ites” (4 Nephi 1:17). However, nearly two centuries following the resurrected Christ’s visit to the promised land, the people again divided themselves into two groups using the old terminology *Nephites* and *Lamanites* (4 Nephi 1:36, 38). The Lord extended mercy to the children of these Lamanite separatists, in part, because they did not have the same advantages of having prophets, revelation, and scripture as did the Nephites. They were consequently not under the same degree



of condemnation as the Nephites, and thus the Lord preserved a remnant of them in the land. Nephi explained:

For behold, [the Lamanites] are more righteous than you [Nephites], for they have not sinned against that great knowledge which ye have received; therefore the Lord will be merciful unto them; yea, he will lengthen out their days and increase their seed, even when thou shalt be utterly destroyed except thou shalt repent. (Hel 7:24)

Samuel the Lamanite outlined the promises extended to these people in the last days:

Yea, I say unto you, that in the latter times the promises of the Lord have been extended to our brethren, the Lamanites; and notwithstanding the many afflictions which they shall have, and notwithstanding they shall be driven to and fro upon the face of the earth, and be hunted, and shall be smitten and scattered abroad. . . .

For behold, had the mighty works been shown unto them which have been shown unto you, yea, unto them who have dwindled in unbelief because of the traditions of their fathers, ye can see of yourselves that they never would again have dwindled in unbelief. Therefore, saith the Lord: I will not utterly destroy them, but I will cause that in the day of my wisdom they shall return again unto me, saith the Lord. (Hel 15:12, 15–16)

Samuel's statement has proved prophetic in our modern era. The latter-day clash between the Lamanites and the Gentiles is an important feature of the modern history of North and South America (see 3 Nephi 16:8–9; 1 Nephi 13:31). But currently it is in the lands of the modern Lamanites that the harvesting of many souls into the latter-day Kingdom of God is taking place.

## Ten Stages from Righteousness to Wickedness

The general evolution from righteousness to wickedness and eventual sweeping from the land involves the following ten stages:

1. The Lord leads the righteous to the Land of Promise (America).

2. He establishes a covenant with the inhabitants of the land.
3. He establishes laws (a constitution) for self-government.
4. When the majority break the laws and begin to choose evil over good, they breach the covenant; the judgments of God begin.
5. The Lord sends out prophets and missionaries to warn the inhabitants to repent or be destroyed.
6. The inhabitants may choose to (1) accept the invitation to repent; (2) reject outright the message of the prophets and seek to destroy them; or (3) ignore the prophetic warnings.
7. If the people reject the message, then initial judgments—natural calamities, wars, plagues, famine, drought—begin to destroy the people.
8. The Spirit of the Lord withdraws from the people.
9. The inhabitants increase in wickedness until they are “fully ripe in iniquity” and have cast out the righteous.
10. The forces of nature, civil war, or conquering hosts destroy the wicked completely; the righteous members of that society having been led elsewhere.

*Stage 1: The Lord leads the righteous to the Land of Promise (America).*

God reserved this land as a habitation for the righteous, those who sought religious freedom and political liberty. The Lehites and Mulekites were led from the Jerusalem area to escape the Babylonian captivity of the Jews (Hel 6:10).

*Antediluvians:* Adam and Eve were placed here in the beginning and lived in what is now known as a part of the present state of Missouri (D&C 116). Enos and his people “dwelt in a land of promise”; Cainan, and Enoch came out of that promised land (Moses 6:17, 41).

*Jaredites:* The Jaredites were guided to this land by the Lord (Ether 1:42–43).

*Gentiles:* The “discovery” of this land by Columbus was the beginning of its being peopled by the latter-day Gentiles (Mormon 5:19; 1 Nephi 22:7–9).

*Stage 2: The Lord establishes a covenant with the inhabitants of the land.*

This covenant is best outlined in the Jaredite record (Ether 2:7–12), but it was clearly taught by Lehi to his sons (2 Nephi 1:5–9). The prophets passed this information to their posterity through their sermons and writings (1 Nephi 2:20–21; 2 Nephi 4:4; Jarom 1:9; Omni 1:6; Mosiah 2:31; Alma 9:13, 18; Alma 36:1, 30; 37:13; 38:1).

This second stage represents the basic commitment of God to his children whom he led to the land. There are two options: either (1) serve the God of the land, who is Jesus Christ, by living His commandments, or (2) if you refuse to serve him and become grossly wicked, you will not be permitted to remain on the land. It is a decision the inhabitants themselves must make. Unfortunately, all the former peoples chose the second option and were destroyed—the Lamanites excepted.

*Antediluvians:* The Lord promised Enoch that he would bless his followers and curse the wicked (Moses 7:20), and his people would be safe from their enemies because of their faithfulness (Moses 7:16–17).

*Jaredites:* These people were clearly taught the elements of the covenants with God (Ether 9:20; 13:2; Ether 2:7–11).

*Gentiles:* The Gentiles face the same potential blessing or cursing as the former inhabitants (1 Nephi 14:2; 6–7).

*Stage 3: He establishes laws (a constitution) for self-government.*

In the third stage, God inspires people to establish laws so that the inhabitants may govern themselves responsibly.

Accountability is best achieved when people are free from political tyranny, free to determine their own destiny.

Under Nephi, the people were governed by kings. When the kings were righteous, the people had inspired laws—including the Law of Moses. Under King Mosiah, all knew the “laws which have been given you by our fathers, which are correct, and which were given them by the hand of the Lord” (Mosiah 29:25). The Nephites were smitten by the Lamanites because they “had altered and trampled under their feet the laws of Mosiah, or that which the Lord commanded [Mosiah] to give unto the people; and they saw that their laws had become corrupted, and that they had become a wicked people” (Hel 4:22).

*Antediluvians:* These people were governed by patriarchs who received revelation from the Lord on spiritual and practical elements of daily living.

*Jaredites:* The Jaredites were governed by kings. We know little of how the laws were given or carried out, except that when the kings were righteous, the laws were administered fairly (Ether 7:25). However, wicked kings suspended the “constitution” (Ether 9:29).

*Gentiles:* Concerning the law in the present Gentile era, the Lord said that he “suffered [the Constitution] to be established, and [it] should be maintained for the rights and protection of all flesh, according to just and holy principles. . . . And for this purpose have I established the Constitution of this land, by the hands of wise men whom I raised up unto this very purpose, and redeemed the land by the shedding of blood” (D&C 101:77,80).

*Stage 4: When the majority break the laws and begin to choose evil over good, they breach the covenant; the judgments of God begin.*

The principle of the majority choosing evil over good leads to judgments on the inhabitants. Mosiah 29 addresses this topic,

when the Nephites changed the form of government from one of kings to a system of judges, a pattern similar to the present American system (see Mosiah 29:25, 28–29, 38–39). King Mosiah taught his people thusly in this transition:

Let us appoint judges, to judge this people according to our law . . . for we will appoint wise men to be judges, that will judge this people according to the commandments of God. . . . Therefore, choose you by the voice of this people, judges. (Mosiah 29:11, 25)

Judges were chosen to measure the acts of the people against a standard of conduct, a “constitution” of some type (Hel 4:21–22).

Then the king explained that when men are free to choose, some individuals will always clamor on the political left and right, usually agitating for unorthodox views. But the citizens will be safe in following the decision of the majority—as long as most of the people live the gospel and keep their covenants. When people are righteous, they make decisions consistent with the will of God and with correct principles of agency and accountability. Mosiah taught his people,

Now it is not common that the voice of the people desireth anything contrary to that which is right; but it is common for the lesser part of the people to desire that which is not right; therefore this shall ye observe and make it your law—to do your business by the voice of the people. (Mosiah 29:26; emphasis added)

The King then explained how the covenant would be broken when the majority of the people chose evil, thus setting the stage for judgments and destruction upon the inhabitants. “And *if* the time comes that the voice of the people doth choose iniquity, *then is the time he will visit you with great destruction* even as he has hitherto visited this land” (Mosiah 29:27; emphasis added).

The Nephites, in fact, in the days of Helaman reached that level of wickedness:

For as their laws and their governments were established by the voice of the people, and they who chose evil were more numerous than

they who chose good, therefore they *were ripening for destruction*, for the laws had become corrupted. (Hel 5:2; emphasis added)

Having political freedom and economic prosperity often tempt people to seek ever greater worldly possessions. When they fail to yield to spiritual promptings, they begin to covet material things (even to taking them illegally) to distinguish themselves by class and rank. Mormon described the trend:

And the people began to be distinguished by ranks, according to their riches and their chances for learning; yea, some were ignorant because of their poverty, and others did receive great learning because of their riches. . . . And thus there became a great inequality in all the land, insomuch that the church began to be broken up. (3 Nephi 6:12, 14)

Increased prosperity and wealth divided the Nephites (see Hel 3:24,36; 6:17; 3 Nephi 6:4–5). They set their hearts upon riches (see Hel 3:1, 33–34; 4:12; 7:21, 26–28; 13:20–22; 16:10; and 3 Nephi 6:13). They began boasting that they were invincible (see Hel 4:13; 6:16–17; 13:22; 16:12; 3 Nephi 10).

Greed and lust for power lead people to tamper with the laws designed to protect and prevent exploitation of all citizens. The wicked desire to change the “constitution,” so they can seek their own ends, but the system of judges and law prevent them from doing so. But because changing the laws requires the consent of the people through popular vote, the wicked are frustrated unless they can get a majority to join their schemes. Also, Satan works to influence people to make evil appear good (2 Nephi 15:20). If the majority permit changes in the laws, either by apathy or through ever growing numbers of people who are tempted and confused about right and wrong, the stage is set for the judgments of the Almighty, for he will not allow such wickedness to continue (see Mosiah 29:27; Hel 4:22; 5:2–3; 6:23; 7:3; 3 Nephi 7:6).

When voting did not give the wicked Nephites their demands, they organized secret combinations, such as the Gadianton band, to “get gain” and obtain political power through clandestine practices and political intrigue. This

particular band of marauders, Mormon lamented, “did prove the overthrow, yea, almost the entire destruction of the people of Nephi” (Hel 2:13).

Mormon summarized the process of the Nephites’ transition from prosperity to gross wickedness:

Yea, and we may see at the very time when he doth prosper his people, yea, in the increase of their fields, their flocks and their herds, and in gold, and in silver, and in all manner of precious things of every kind and art; sparing their lives, and delivering them out of the hands of their enemies; softening the hearts of their enemies that they should not declare wars against them; yea, and in fine, doing all things for the welfare and happiness of his people; yea, then is the time that they do harden their hearts, and do forget the Lord their God, and do trample under their feet the Holy One—yea, and this because of their ease, and their exceedingly great prosperity.

And thus we see that except the Lord doth chasten his people with many afflictions, yea, except he doth visit them with death and with terror, and with famine and with all manner of pestilence, they will not remember him. (Hel 12:2–3)

*Antediluvians:* Not only did this civilization reach a majority of wicked people, but “*every man* was lifted up in the imagination of the thoughts of his heart, being only evil *continually*” (Moses 8:22). Such wickedness paved the way for their destruction.

*Jaredites:* The power of secret combinations led to their destruction (Ether 8:21–22). When the people allowed the wicked to gain the upper hand, they lost control of their own society (see Ether 7:24; 9:29; 11:5–7; 13:15, 18; 14:1).

*Gentiles:* The resurrected Lord revealed to the Nephites that the same options confronting the Nephites would face the latter-day settlers (3 Nephi 16:6–10; 21:4–11).

*Stage 5: The Lord sends out prophets and missionaries to warn the inhabitants to repent or be destroyed.*

Among the Nephites, when the wicked tried to change or modify God-given laws to support wickedness, the prophets and missionaries went forth to warn the people to repent, for the

people were violating the terms and conditions of the covenant. By such actions the people brought upon themselves the judgments of God (Hel 5:2–3). While Nephi, son of Helaman, administered the laws, the people looked for loopholes to carry out their wicked schemes. He grew “weary because of their iniquity; and he yielded up the judgment-seat, and took it upon himself to preach the word of God all the remainder of his days, and his brother Lehi also, all the remainder of his days” (v 4).

The books of Mosiah, Alma, and Helaman record major efforts by the prophets and missionaries to declare repentance to the people, knowing that only repentance could save them from destruction. These prophets warned the Nephites of their impending destruction if they continued in their wickedness. The prophets in Helaman through 3 Nephi Chapter 8, labored among their people full time to preach repentance to turn them from certain destruction. They knew from Alma’s earlier success that their only hope to turn the people back to the Lord was to go among the people and call them to repentance. Mormon wrote of Alma’s ministry,

And this he did that he himself might go forth among his people, or among the people of Nephi, that he might preach the word of God unto them, to stir them up in remembrance of their duty, and that he might pull down, by the word of God, all the pride and craftiness and all the contentions which were among his people, seeing no way that he might reclaim them save it were in bearing down in pure testimony against them. (Alma 4:19)

The early chapters in the book of Helaman record the entire cycle: from a state of prosperity through spiritual decline, to war when the people failed to repent, to a state of compelled humility. To illustrate: At this point in the record, (Hel 3), the Nephites were living the gospel and enjoying great prosperity. They were faithful to their covenants and even brought many converts into the Kingdom. However, with increased prosperity, the people began to set their hearts on greater possessions, yielding to the temptation to obtain them by whatever means they could. Mormon labeled it “exceedingly



great pride,” which, he said, “had gotten into the hearts of the people; and it was because of their exceedingly great riches and their prosperity in the land” (Hel 3:36). To make matters worse, the candidates who lost the election incited the Lamanites to attack the Nephites out of revenge for that loss. Of the ensuing battle, in which many Nephites died, Mormon lamented:

Now this great loss of the Nephites, and the great slaughter which was among them, would not have happened had it not been for their wickedness and their abomination which was among them . . . And it was because of the pride of their hearts, because of their exceeding riches; yea, it was because of their oppression to the poor, withholding their food from the hungry, withholding their clothing from the naked, and smiting their humble brethren upon the cheek, making a mock of that which was sacred, denying the spirit of prophecy and of revelation, murdering, plundering, lying, stealing, committing adultery, rising up in great contentions, and deserting away into the land of Nephi, among the Lamanites. (Hel 4:11–12)

As wickedness increased, the Lord’s servants—Moroni, Nephi, and Lehi—did “preach many things unto the people because of their iniquity, . . . yea, and did prophesy many things unto them concerning their iniquities, and what should come unto them if they did not repent of their sins” (Hel 4:14). The effect of their preaching was “that [the Nephites] did repent, and inasmuch as they did repent they did begin to prosper,” and they were able to recapture much of their land which had been lost to the Lamanites in an earlier skirmish (vv 15–16). The cycle of prosperity to humility was complete. But this cycle, like all cycles, began again before many years had passed away.

*Antediluvians:* Noah went forth to preach the gospel (Moses 8:19). The people of his day were so wicked that “every man was lifted up in the imagination of the thoughts of his heart, being only evil continually” (Moses 8:22). The entire civilization was filthy and corrupt. Yet, Noah was obedient to the Lord’s command to lift a warning voice to the people of his time.

*Jaredites:* Many prophets came to warn the people that they faced the judgments of God. Before the final battle scenes where millions were killed, the prophet Ether presented to the king the options of repenting and retaining his kingdom, or losing everything (Ether 13:20–21).

*Gentiles:* In 1974, President Spencer W. Kimball, as the Lord’s prophet, called “every young man” into missionary service (*Ensign* [Oct 1974] 9). The Gentiles are clearly “ripening in iniquity,” and the youth of this generation are called to stem the tide of evil. The first section of the Doctrine and Covenants calls for the Saints to take up spiritual arms and go forth among the Gentiles, warning them of their need to repent (D&C 1:4–5, 8–9).

*Stage 6: The inhabitants may choose to (1) accept the warning and repent, (2) reject outright the message of the prophets, or (3) ignore the prophets and their warnings.*

As prophets warn the inhabitants of the consequences of their sins, the people must choose to repent or change, accept or reject the counsel of the prophets. If the inhabitants choose to repent, the covenant with God is reestablished, returning to Stage 2. If they reject the message, wickedness increases and the society begins to “ripen in iniquity.” If the people choose to ignore or just tolerate the prophets’ warnings—then the ripening process is inevitable.

The sons of Helaman went forth to preach repentance with these results:

And it came to pass that they did preach with great power, insomuch that they did confound many of those dissenters who had gone over from the Nephites, insomuch that they came forth and did confess their sins and were baptized unto repentance, and immediately returned to the Nephites to endeavor to repair unto them the wrongs which they had done. . . . Therefore they did speak unto the great astonishment of the Lamanites, to the convincing them, insomuch that there were eight thousand of the Lamanites who were in the land of Zarahemla and round about baptized unto repentance, and were

convinced of the wickedness of the traditions of their fathers. (Hel 5:17, 19)

Most of these converts, however, were Lamanites. Few among the Nephites were touched by the power of the Spirit of the Lord because of their wickedness, and they cast the prophets into prison.

*Antediluvians:* The people in Noah's day rejected his message (Moses 8:21, 24, 30).

*Jaredites:* The Jaredites rejected the counsel of Ether, their prophet, and continued in their murderous and destructive ways (Ether 13:20–22).

*Gentiles:* The Gentiles are not accepting the gospel as rapidly as the remnants of the House of Israel (Lamanites). Yet Americans have tolerated religious groups canvassing the populace, allowing the word of the Lord to spread in the land. As long as some people accept the message of repentance and join the Kingdom of God, the Lord will delay his judgments.

*Stage 7: If the people reject the message, initial judgments—natural calamities, plagues, famine, drought—begin to destroy the people.*

The prophets preach repentance as the only solution to spiritual decadence. When the citizens choose not to repent, they strive to change the laws of God to justify their wickedness. The righteous are called to labor against this evil, because the Lord will not allow the population to remain on the land except on conditions of righteousness. The ripening process quickens.

Following the miracle of their being released from prison, Nephi and Lehi

did go forth, and did minister unto the people, declaring throughout all the regions round about all the things which they had heard and seen, insomuch that the more part of the Lamanites were convinced of them, because of the greatness of the evidences which they had received. And as many as were convinced did lay down their weapons of war, and also their hatred and the tradition of their

fathers. And it came to pass that they did yield up unto the Nephites the lands of their possession. (Hel 5:50–52)

Changing hearts is more effective in winning the souls of men than winning physical battles (Alma 31:5). In time the Lamanites became more righteous than the Nephites. The wicked among the Nephites rejected the prophets' warnings, and soon divine judgments began (3 Nephi, Chapter 8); the righteous were preserved and enjoyed the spirit and power of God (3 Nephi 7:18–19).

*Antediluvians:* “And there came forth a great famine into the land, and the Lord cursed the earth with a sore curse, and many of the inhabitants thereof” (Moses 8:4). The Lord used judgments to humble the people, desiring to prevent their “utter destruction.” In the days of Noah, the people rejected his message, and some even sought his life (Moses 8:18, 20–21, 26, 30).

*Jaredites:* The Jaredites experienced drought and famine (Ether 9:28–30), wars and dissensions, as the judgments commenced (Ether 11:6–7, 12–13, 20–21; 13:20–22; 14:1, 25).

*Gentiles:* As people accept the message of repentance, the work moves forward. At present, many good people in America and other Gentile lands are accepting the gospel and thereby delaying divine judgments.

*Stage 8: The Spirit of the Lord withdraws from the people.*

As people reject the warning voices of the prophets and the message of famine, pestilence, and war, they become spiritually insensitive. When the Spirit of God withdraws, the carnal, sensual man is left to his own greed; contention becomes inevitable, as men exploit each other for gain, or seek each other's life.

Mormon describes the stage: “And thus we see that the Spirit of the Lord began to withdraw from the Nephites, because of the wickedness and the hardness of their hearts” (Hel 6:35).

The more the Nephites made evil choices, the more determined they became to follow wickedness.

*Antediluvians:* After seeking the life of Noah, the people were left without excuse and were subject to divine judgment (Moses 8:26). The Lord explained the outcome to Enoch: “Among all the workmanship of mine hands there has not been so great wickedness as among thy brethren . . . These which thine eyes are upon shall perish in the floods” (Moses 7:36, 38). To Noah the Lord said, “My Spirit shall not always strive with man, for he shall know that all flesh shall die . . . I will send in the floods upon them” (Moses 8:17).

*Jaredites:* Coriantumr refused to repent, but he sought Ether’s life, and a great spirit of warring began in the land (Ether 14:24; 15:22). Of the climactic struggle between Coriantumr and Shiz, Moroni lamented: “And thus we see that the Lord did visit them in the fulness of his wrath, and their wickedness and abominations had prepared a way for their everlasting destruction” (Ether 14:25). Because a spirit of war and death gripped the survivors, “the Spirit of the Lord had ceased striving with them” (15:19), and they were left to suffer their own fate.

*Gentiles:* The Gentiles have not reached this stage of decline though many people are choosing evil. No doubt a loss of the spirit of repentance contributes to our present physical and spiritual condition. Abortion, immorality, murder, abuse, hardness of heart, a great disparity in economic levels, materialism—all take a toll among the wicked and hasten the ripening process.

*Stage 9: The Inhabitants increase in wickedness until they are “fully ripe in iniquity” and have cast out the righteous.*

The metaphor of “ripening” occurs frequently in the Book of Mormon. Bananas, for example, as they ripen, do not return to a condition of green or unripe; rather they continue to ripen until they are overripe and finally rotten. Such is the term as it

applies to the level of wickedness among the inhabitants. The term “ripening” is also connected to casting out of the righteous (Hel 13:14). The Lord’s servants raise the warning voice to the inhabitants of the land, but the wicked do not tolerate what they consider to be a “self-righteous” judgment of their actions by the prophets. Mormon recorded, “And thus we see that they were in an awful state, and ripening for an everlasting destruction” (Hel 6:40).

Samuel the Lamanite, during a missionary tour, explained to the wicked majority:

Yea, wo unto this great city of Zarahemla; for behold it is because of those who are righteous that it is saved. . . . If it were not for the righteous who are in this great city, behold, I would cause that fire should come down out of heaven and destroy it. But behold, it is for the righteous’ sake that it is spared. But behold, the time cometh, saith the Lord, that *when ye shall cast out the righteous from among you*, then shall ye be ripe for destruction. (Hel 13:12, 14; see also Hel 8:26; 11:36–37; 13:12–14; 16:12, 15; 3 Nephi 6:18; Ether 2:9; D&C 18:6; 29:9; and 62:31)

*Antediluvians*: These people justified their lifestyles and rejected the message of Noah (Moses 8:21).

*Jaredites*: Ether was forced into hiding, because the Jaredites “esteemed him as naught, and cast him out; and he hid himself in the cavity of a rock by day” (Ether 13:13).

*Gentiles*: The Gentiles have not yet reached Stage 9. Many Gentiles accept the gospel around the world today. But in the main, the Gentiles will reject the Restoration message (2 Nephi 28:32; D&C 45:28–29). Many Gentiles resist street or home contacting. Referrals from members seem to be the most successful way to bring the gospel to the Gentiles. But, as long as the Lord’s servants are not “cast out” of countries and communities, and Church members continue to share the gospel with friends and associates, God will withhold devastating judgments.

*Stage 10: The forces of nature, civil war, or conquering hosts destroy the wicked completely; righteous survivors are led elsewhere.*

If the warning cries of the prophets go unheeded and the Spirit of the Lord withdraws from the people, there is little hope of survival. People become emotionally aroused to fight for what they think are just causes. When repeated warnings go unheeded and their own lives are threatened, the prophets withdraw and let the people face the consequences of their own evil desires (Ether 11:13; See the warning voices in Hel 10:11, 14; 13:5–10, 30, 32, 38; 3 Nephi 2:13, 19). The curse upon the land and the destruction of the inhabitants are sure and absolute unless there is swift repentance. But at this point there is no desire to repent, only the drive to seek enemy blood and avenge the loss of their dead.

The book of Helaman outlines this stage of wickedness among the Nephites before the resurrected Lord's advent among them. As the wicked were destroyed, the Lord preserved the righteous. Samuel's prophecies of signs of the birth of the Messiah were all fulfilled. After Christ's visit to the Nephites, the people remained righteous for at least two hundred years. After two more centuries, however, the Nephites passed through the same stages again; and this time, despite Mormon's and Moroni's preaching and pleading for repentance, the Nephites rebelled and sealed their own doom. They were swept off the face of the earth. Samuel had earlier predicted, "The sword of justice hangeth over this people; and four hundred years pass not away save the sword of justice falleth upon this people . . . and there shall be those of the fourth generation who shall live, of your enemies, to behold your *utter* destruction" (Hel 13:5, 10; emphasis added). Such was the outcome.

*Antediluvians:* The people of Noah were drowned in the great worldwide flood.

*Jaredites:* The Jaredites were destroyed to the last man.

*Gentiles:* The inhabitants of the land are “ripening in iniquity” (D&C 18:6; 61:31). Latter-day scriptures mention many judgments that will come upon the Gentiles on this land unless they repent (D&C 29:15–21; D&C 45:28–31). If Gentile nations cast out the missionaries, or if the Church feels the need to call them home for their own safety, or if faithful Saints are persecuted and killed for their beliefs, then the judgments of God will fall upon the wicked in great force, even unto their destruction.

### Conclusion: The Future of the Gentiles

To the Gentiles who now live on the promised land, the relevant question is “Which choice will we make?” The Book of Mormon is a warning voice to them to repent and live God’s laws or be destroyed (Mormon 8:34–35; Ether 2:12). Will these latter-day Christians choose the same path as the land’s former inhabitants did? Are the violations of God’s laws (abortion, sabbath-breaking, immorality, dishonesty, pollution, political corruption, spouse and child abuse) equal to or greater than those which led to the destruction of earlier peoples? Mormon warned the Gentiles:

Hearken, O ye Gentiles, and hear the words of Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, which he hath commanded me that I should speak concerning you, for, behold he commandeth me that I should write, saying: Turn, all ye Gentiles, from your wicked ways; and repent of your evil doing, of your lyings and deceivings, and of your whoredoms, and of your secret abominations, and your idolatries, and of your murders, and your priestcrafts, and from all your wickedness and abominations, and come unto me, and be baptized in my name, that ye may receive a remission of your sins, and be filled with the Holy Ghost, that ye may be numbered with my people who are of the house of Israel. (3 Nephi 30:1–2)

And Moroni reminded the Gentiles,

And this cometh unto you, O ye Gentiles, that ye may know the decrees of God—that ye may repent, and not continue in your iniquities until the fulness come, that ye may not bring down the



fulness of the wrath of God upon you as the inhabitants of the land have hitherto done. (Ether 2:11)

Prophets and modern scripture warn the latter-day people of similar dangers. Though predicted calamities are conditioned upon repentance, it appears that, in general, the Gentiles are little interested in repentance. They appear to be treading the path of the former inhabitants, but have not entered the final stages yet. However, people living the laws of the land are often ridiculed and scorned as foolish, naive, or unrealistic. While prophets are still protected under “freedom of speech” in America, persecution in more subtle ways exists and, one might argue, is becoming more and more flagrant.

In 1975, Ezra Taft Benson, as the President of the Quorum of Twelve, warned the Gentiles:

Destruction, even more terrible and far-reaching than attended the last great war, will come with certainty unless rulers and people alike repent and cease their evil and godless ways. God will not be mocked. He will not permit the sins of sexual immorality, secret murderous combinations, the killing of the unborn, and disregard for all his holy commandments and the messages of his servants to go unheeded without grievous punishment for such wickedness. The nations of the world cannot endure in sin. The way of escape is clear. The immutable laws of God remain steadfastly in the heavens above. When men and nations refuse to abide by them, the penalty must follow. They will be wasted away. Sin demands punishment. (“A Message to the World,” *Ensign* [Nov 1975] 5:34; CR [Oct 1975] 48)

The same judgments—sword, famine, and pestilence—that afflicted the Nephites will be repeated in the latter days among the Gentiles if they do not repent. The Lord said to a modern prophet, “And thus, with the *sword* and by bloodshed the inhabitants of the earth shall mourn; and with *famine*, and *plague*, and *earthquake* . . . shall the inhabitants of the earth be made to feel the wrath and indignation, and chastening hand of an Almighty God” (D&C 87:6; emphasis added).

Though the final destiny of the Gentiles is beyond the scope of this paper, it should be remembered that these principles govern all the inhabitants who live upon the land. Mormon,

reflecting on the tragedies of which he was writing, seemed to confirm the Lord's words to Lehi:

Blessed art thou and thy children; and they shall be blessed, inasmuch as they shall keep my commandments they shall prosper in the land. But remember, inasmuch as they will not keep my commandments they shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord.

And we see that these promises have been verified to the people of Nephi; for it has been their quarrelings and their contentions, yea, their murderings, and their plunderings, their idolatry, their whoredoms, and their abominations, which were among themselves, which brought upon them their wars and their destructions.

And those who were faithful in keeping the commandments of the Lord were delivered at all times, whilst thousands of their wicked brethren have been consigned to bondage, or to perish by the sword, or to dwindle in unbelief (Alma 50:20–22)

The Gentiles have yet to make their final choice.