



Type: Magazine Article

The Lord's Promise to the Lamanites

Author(s): E. Cecil McGavin

Source: *Improvement Era*, Vol. 30, No. 12 (October 1927)

Published by: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Page(s): 1095–1097

Abstract: This article contrasts the benighted condition of the Indians when the European colonists arrived in America with the glorious promises that are yet to come as prophesied in the Book of Mormon.

THE LORD'S PROMISE TO THE LAMANITES

BY E. CECIL MCGAVIN, PRINCIPAL BEAVER STAKE SEMINARY

For centuries the American Indians have felt the weight of the chastening hand of God. For a millennium they were left to themselves, the only inhabitants on the Western Hemisphere, engaging in internecine warfare to decide supremacy in the extensive hunting grounds. Then came the cruel colonists from Europe who considered them as natural enemies to be killed with little regard for their property rights. The story of their numerous contests is written in blood across the valleys and plains of America.

A new era dawns upon the Red Men of the forest. The long night of darkness is being dispelled by the rosy light of dawn. The divine sun of clemency approaches the horizon ready to burst upon them in full glory. "The fathers have eaten sour grapes and their children's teeth have been set on edge." The children have now partly atoned for their fathers' mistakes and shall soon be reinstated in their former condition as the "Children of Promise."

The Book of Mormon contains many promises which are beginning to be enjoyed by the children of Lehi.

After the apostasy of the children of Laman a dark skin was placed upon them, to endure until they forsook their evil ways and returned to the Lord. This condition was not to be permanent. Its existence was determined by the faithfulness of the people upon whom it rested.

Early in their history the promise was made that they would not be utterly destroyed. Despite the Lord's displeasure with the irreligious Lamanites, he displayed more patience, perhaps, with them in the end than with their brothers with the fair skin, to whom he sent the prophets continually. The Lamanites who had been almost completely forgotten by the prophets, by miracles and other divine agencies which had been frequently given to the Nephites to keep them in the faith, were more faithful comparatively than were the Nephites. For this reason the latter were destroyed and the former were preserved.

In speaking of their condition in the last days, the Prophet Nephi says:

"And the gospel of Jesus Christ shall be declared among them; wherefore, they shall be restored unto the knowledge of their fathers, and also to the knowledge of Jesus Christ, which was had among their fathers.

"And then shall they rejoice; for they shall know that it is a blessing unto them from the hand of God; and their scales of darkness shall begin to fall from their eyes; and many generations shall not pass away among them, save they shall be a white and delightsome people." 2 Nephi 30:5-6.

This promise was not only held out to those living in the last

days, but was partly fulfilled during the Nephite period when the persons with the dark skin repented and joined the Church. A later prophet says of those who had been faithful in the gospel: "And their curse was taken from them, and their skin became white like unto the Nephites." 3 Nephi 2:15.

The Prophet Alma speaks of the union of many Lamanites with the Nephites in these words: "And they began to be a very industrious people; yea, and they were friendly with the Nephites; therefore, they did open a correspondence with them, and the curse of God did no more follow them." Alma 23:18.

The words of Helaman add joy to the hearts of the prodigals. "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." Helaman 15:16.

This is the day of God's wisdom. The great discoveries, the progress in all fields of learning and in general the knowledge man has acquired in this age are due to the wisdom God has sent into the world incidental to the restoration of his gospel. In this day we may look for the fulfilment of these promises.

There were times when the Nephites were going headlong to destruction and the diligent labors of their dark brethren recalled them to their former condition of righteousness. Foremost in this valiant service was the Prophet Samuel, the Lamanite who came into the Nephite towns about six years before the birth of Christ, warned them of the judgments awaiting them if they did not repent. During this period the Lamanites excelled their white brethren in faithfulness, keeping the law of Moses with far greater devotion. Samuel was treated with disdain and finally cast out of their cities. While preparing to return to his own land, he was met by an angel who requested that he go to the city of Zarahemla and preach the words that would be given to him by the Lord. Upon being refused entrance into their city he mounted the wall and there preached with the power of an angel. Many of his hearers were so impressed by his inspired remarks that they sought out Nephi and were baptized, while others shot arrows at him and threw stones at him as he warned them of the impending judgments they should try to avert. He was miraculously protected from their missiles and returned in safety to his own people. The prophecies of Samuel are among the most sacred revelations the world has ever been permitted to receive. He told the unbelieving Nephites of the signs that were to accompany the birth and death of Christ, who should be born into the world in five years from that time. He told them that unless they repented the Lord would utterly destroy them by the fourth generation. Samuel was the bulwark of the Church, the instrument in the hands of the Lord in regenerating faith in the Nephite nation. (Read Helaman, chapters 13 to 15, inclusive.)

Another Lamanite convert deserves our attention. This was Zelph, who, however, is not mentioned in the Book of Mormon. During the journey of Zion's Camp into Missouri, the Prophet Joseph Smith and others found the skeleton of a man with an arrow head between two ribs. Upon inquiry of the Lord, it was revealed to the Prophet that this man's name was Zelph. He was a converted Lamanite, "was a warrior and chieftain under the great prophet Onandagus, who was known from the eastern sea to the Rocky Mountains. The curse was taken from Zelph, or at least in part." This great leader had been killed in the last great battle between the two peoples. (*History of the Church*, Vol. 1, pp. 79-80.)

In spite of the benighted condition of the Red Men, if their complete history were known we would undoubtedly find many stalwart leaders like Samuel.

Just six months after the Church was organized the following revelation was given through the Prophet Joseph and Oliver Cowdery: " * * * And now, behold, I say unto you that you shall go unto the Lamanites and preach my gospel unto them; and inasmuch as they receive thy teachings, thou shalt cause my Church to be established among them. * * * " This was the first mission in the Church to go West of the state of New York. Four of the Leading Elders were sent upon this important mission. Here, as in subsequent work among the natives, the elders met with success. (*History of the Church*, pp. 110, 118-120 182-3.)

The Lord has reiterated the promises made by the Nephite prophets. In March, 1831, the Lord said, " * * * But before the great and dreadful day of the Lord shall come, Jacob shall flourish in the wilderness, and the Lamanites shall blossom as the rose."

For centuries the Indians have been destitute of divine guidance. Since the coming of the Europeans the copper-colored natives have been smitten, subjugated and slaughtered without mercy. Yet the Lord has not forgotten the blood of Joseph in the veins of the American aborigines. He is beginning to pour out blessings upon them and prepare them for the important position they must occupy in Israel.

The time is not fully ripe for all the Lamanites to accept the gospel, but that time is fast approaching. Many have lost the scales of darkness from their eyes which obscured their vision of things spiritual. Among their number is found some of the most faithful members of the Church.

The following excerpt is taken from a recent patriarchal blessing: " * * * Yea, the Lamanites shall come forth by the hundreds and receive their blessings, and shall labor in the midst of Zion, and shall consecrate their lives and all that they have for the kingdom of God * * * ."

The Lamanites are preparing themselves for their many responsible positions in Zion. The Lord's promises shall all be realized.