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The Gospel to the Lamanites I–II

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Abstract: This series traces the origin, Book of Mormon prophecies regarding, subsequent conditions of, and ultimate destiny of the Lamanites. The first and second parts cover the origin of the Lamanites.

The Gospel to the Lamanites

BY REY L. PRATT, PRESIDENT OF THE MEXICAN MISSION

I—Introduction

The subject at hand is so intimately connected with the great Latter-day work known as “Mormonism,” and forms such a prominent part of the Book of Mormon teachings that one would think that most of the members of the Church would be perfectly familiar with, and enthusiastic over, it. And such is the case, in a general way, but, I fear, and that, too, basing my belief on observations I made while on a recent trip through some of the stakes and wards of Zion, that far too many of our young folks, and, for that matter, of the older members of the Church, are not as familiar with, and as interested in, this great subject as it is their privilege to be.

I hope in this article to show that the work of carrying the gospel to the Lamanites is one of great importance, and one that is worth while to us, as well as to them; one rather to be desired than avoided, and one that *must* be performed by us, because the Lord has promised this people, through their forefathers, that the gospel, and their redemption through it, would come to them through us—through the Church of Christ.

II—Who are the Lamanites, and How Came They to Be Such?

In I Nephi 1:4, Book of Mormon, we read:

For it came to pass in the commencement of the first year of the reign of Zedekiah, king of Judah, (my father Lehi having dwelt at Jerusalem in all his days;) and in that same year there came many prophets, prophesying unto the people that they must repent, or the great city of Jerusalem must be destroyed.

We learn from I Nephi 5:14, that Lehi was a descendant of Jacob, through his son Joseph, who was sold into Egypt. Lehi lifted up his heart in mighty prayer in behalf of his people; as a result of his prayer, he received a wonderful and mighty vision from the Lord, in which he foresaw the destruction of Jerusalem, and her people carried away into captivity. After he had received this vision he went forth among the people and testified unto them of their wickedness and abominations, and also of the things that he had seen and heard; but he was only mocked and persecuted

by the Jews, and they sought to take away his life. Nephi records (1 Nephi 2:1-4) that the word of the Lord again came unto his father, as follows:

For behold it came to pass that the Lord spake again unto my father, yea, even in a dream, and said unto him, Blessed art thou Lehi, because of the things which thou hast done; and because thou hast been faithful and declared unto this people the things which I commanded thee, behold they seek to take away thy life.

And it came to pass that the Lord commanded my father, even in a dream, that he should take his family and depart into the wilderness.

And it came to pass that he was obedient unto the word of the Lord, wherefore he did as the Lord commanded him.

And it came to pass that he departed into the wilderness. And he left his house, and the land of his inheritance, and his gold, and his silver, and his precious things, and took nothing with him, save it were his family, and provisions, and tents, and departed into the wilderness.

This departure of Lehi and his family out of the land of Jerusalem occurred six hundred years before Christ. His family consisted of his wife, Sariah, and his four sons, Laman, Lemuel, Sam, and Nephi. They were afterwards joined by Ishmael and his family, and Zoram, the servant of Laban.

Their history, as recorded in the Book of Mormon, shows that the two older sons, Laman and Lemuel, were rebellious unto their father and unto the Lord, and did not keep the commandments of the Lord; while Sam and Nephi were obedient sons, and faithful in their observance of the commandments of the Lord. Early trouble arose between Nephi and his two older brothers, and on many occasions, because of their great wickedness, they even sought to take away his life. Their conduct caused great anguish, in the heart of Nephi, and he was grieved because of the hardness of their hearts, and he cried unto the Lord in their behalf, and the word of the Lord came unto him as follows (1 Nephi 2:19-24):

* * * Blessed art thou, Nephi, because of thy faith, for thou hast sought me diligently, with lowliness of heart.

And inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments, ye shall prosper, and shall 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.

And inasmuch as thy brethren shall rebel against thee, they shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord.

And inasmuch as thou shalt keep my commandments, thou shalt be made a ruler and a teacher over thy brethren.

For behold, in that day they shall rebel against me, I will curse them even with a sore curse, and they shall have no power over thy seed, except they rebel against me also.

And if it so be that they rebel against me, they shall be a scourge unto thy seed, to stir them up in the ways of remembrance.

From the foregoing quotations we see that all that has happened to the Lamanites was plainly foreseen and foretold when they were scarcely started on their way to the promised land. In fact, all of the conditions that have existed throughout their history, and that still exist among them, were plainly foretold by the prophets of the Lord, and are recorded in the Book of Mormon.

The history of the travels of Father Lehi and his family, through the wilderness, and the building of a ship in which to cross the mighty waters that separated them from the land of promise, and which they built in obedience to the command of the Lord, and in accordance to the pattern and model given to Nephi by him; and then their long and perilous journey over the mighty waters to the promised land; their landing there, and the establishing of themselves in the land; the great visions received from the Lord by Lehi and his faithful son Nephi, and the remarkable way in which the hand of the Lord was over them, to guide and protect them, is all very interesting history, but space will not permit us to follow it in detail here. It will be seen, however, by a careful perusal of this remarkable and interesting history, that the two older sons of Lehi, Laman and Lemuel, and the daughters of Ishmael, whom they took to wife, and the sons of Ishmael, were often rebellious and disobedient, even to the extent of wanting, and trying, to take the life of their younger brother Nephi who, because of his faithfulness and obedience to his father's counsel, and to the commandments of the Lord, was greatly blessed of the Lord. He was permitted, in fulfilment of promise, to become a teacher and a ruler over his brethren. At times, through great manifestations of the power of the Lord, these rebellious sons were made to feel his power and humble themselves, repenting of their sins. But their repentance and humility were always short-lived, and they continually fell back into their condition of error and rebellion, and consequent state of darkness of mind.

This division in the family of Lehi grew worse after the little colony was established in the promised land, even to the extreme that it was impossible for Nephi and those who listened to his counsel, and who lived in accordance with the commandments of the Lord, to live with their brethren of the other faction in the land where they first settled. Nephi, himself, describes the conditions thus (II Nephi 5):

Behold it came to pass that I, Nephi, did cry much unto the Lord my God, because of the anger of my brethren.

But behold, their anger did increase against me; insomuch that they did seek to take away my life.

Yea, they did murmur against me, saying: Our younger brother thinks to rule over us; and we have had much trial because of him; wherefore, now let us slay him, that we may not be afflicted more because of his words. For behold, we will not have him to be our ruler; for it belongs unto us, who are the elder brethren, to rule over this people.

Now I do not write upon these plates, all the words which they murmured against me. But it sufficeth me to say, that they did seek to take away my life.

And it came to pass that the Lord did warn me, that I, Nephi, should depart from them, and flee into the wilderness, and all those who would go with me.

* * * And all those who were with me did take upon them to call themselves the people of Nephi.

* * * And I, Nephi, did take the sword of Laban, and after the manner of it did make many swords, lest by any means the people who were now called Lamanites should come upon us and destroy us; for I knew their hatred towards me and my children, and those who were called my people.

* * * And behold, the words of the Lord had been fulfilled unto my brethren, which he spake concerning them, that I should be their ruler and their teacher; wherefore, I had been their ruler and their teacher, according to the comandments of the Lord, until the time they sought to take away my life.

Wherefore, the word of the Lord was fulfilled which he spake unto me, saying: That inasmuch as they will not hearken unto thy words, they shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord. And behold, they were cut off from his presence.

And he caused a cursing to come upon them, yea, even a sore cursing, because of their iniquity. For behold, they had hardened their hearts against him, that they had become like unto a flint; wherefore, as they were white and exceeding fair and delightsome, that they might not be enticing unto my people, the Lord God did cause a skin of blackness to come upon them.

And thus saith the Lord God, I will cause that they shall be loathsome unto thy people, save they shall repent of their iniquities.

And cursed shall be the seed of him that mixeth with their seed; for they shall be cursed even with the same cursing. And the Lord spake it and it was done.

And because of their cursing, which was upon them, they did become an idle people, full of mischief and subtlety, and did seek in the wilderness for beasts of prey.

Thus came about the division of the family of Lehi into two factions, which grew into two numerous and mighty nations upon

this continent; and, from the foregoing, we learn that the Lamanites, although a cursed nation, are of the house of Israel, through Lehi, who was a literal descendant of Joseph who was sold into Egypt; and that their curse and their present condition came upon them in fulfilment of prophecy, and because of their disobedience to the Lord and his commandments, and of their hardening their hearts against him.

It is interesting to note, through reading the history of the Lamanites, as contained in the Book of Mormon, how literally the prophecies of the Lord, made concerning them, have been fulfilled. Their descent from a civilized and a "white and exceeding fair and delightsome people," into a "dark and a loathsome and a filthy people, full of idleness and all manner of abominations," was indeed very rapid.

However, the Nephites did not cease to strive to convert their brethren from the error of their ways, and to restore them to the truth and thereby redeem them from their fallen condition. But it seems that for many years their efforts in this direction were in vain, for the Lamanites not only refused to listen to, and obey their teachings, but they sought to destroy the records which Lehi had brought from Jerusalem, and also to destroy the people of Nephi who were striving to live in accordance with the commandments of the Lord.

The prophet Enos, in his short writings, after telling of the great desires of his heart for the redemption of his brethren, the Lamanites, says:

For at the present, our strugglings were vain in restoring them to the true faith. And they swore in their wrath, that if it were possible, they would destroy our records and us; and, also, all the traditions of our fathers.

* * * And I bear record that the people of Nephi did seek diligently to restore the Lamanites unto the true faith in God. But our labors were vain; their hatred was fixed, and they were led by their evil nature that they became wild, and ferocious, and a bloodthirsty people; full of idolatry and filthiness: feeding upon beasts of prey; dwelling in tents, and wandering about in the wilderness with a short skin girdle about their loins and their heads shaven: and their skill was in the bow, and in the cimeter, and the ax. And many of them did eat nothing save it was raw meat; and they were continually seeking to destroy us."

Their condition, through all the long ages, from then till now, has remained practically the same. True it is that through the teachings of the Nephites, many of them have been converted to the truth, and the sore curse that was theirs has been removed, because of their change from an evil to a good life. But this only

further proves that the promises of the Lord cannot fail, because he said the curse was only to remain with them as long as they remained disobedient, and wicked, and would not listen to the commandments of the Lord, and obey him. At no time in their history, however, is it recorded of them that all of them have turned from their evil ways, and that the curse has been lifted from them, as a people, except for the two hundred years which preceded the coming of Christ to the people upon this continent, and the establishment of his gospel among them. Of this time spoken of, we are told, in IV Nephi 1, that in the thirty-sixth year after the birth of Christ, "the people were all converted to the Lord, upon the face of the land, both Nephites and Lamanites, and there were no contentions among them, and every man did deal justly one with another."

But, as I have said, this condition did not endure among them; men began to be lifted up in the pride of their hearts, and to forget their God, and ceased to keep his commandments. Class distinctions, secret societies, man-made churches, and wars and strife and bloodshed, and all manner of evil, began to creep in among them. Part of the people remained true to their faith in their God and in his gospel, but many were led away by false teachers into all manner of iniquity, insomuch that in the two hundred and thirty-first year there was a great division among the people, and they began to be known again by the names that had distinguished them of old. Those who remained faithful were called Nephites, and those who turned away into evil paths, and to false religions, were called Lamanites. The curse of old came upon the Lamanites, and the old and terrible spirit of hatred and strife and bloodshed came between the two peoples, and there began to be wars and bloodshed in the land.

Nephi saw in prophetic vision, even before he and his father and his brethren had reached the promised land, that these conditions would overcome his seed, and the seed of his brethren, for, not only did the Lamanites become a wicked people, but not long after the division of these people, just spoken of, the Nephites also became a wicked people and forsook their God. Nephi relates the vision he saw as follows (I Nephi 12:19-23):

And while the angel spake these words, I beheld and saw that the seed of my brethren did contend against my seed, according to the word of the angel; and because of the pride of my seed, and the temptations of the devil, I beheld that the seed of my brethren did overpower the people of my seed.

And it came to pass that I beheld and saw the people of the seed of my brethren, that they had overcome my seed; and they went forth in multitudes upon the face of the land.

And I saw them gathered together in multitudes; and I saw wars

and rumors of wars among them; and in wars and rumors of wars, I saw many generations pass away.

And the angel said unto me, Behold these shall dwindle in unbelief.

And it came to pass that I beheld after they had dwindled in unbelief, they became a dark, and loathsome, and a filthy people, full of idleness and all manner of abominations.

This great climax, spoken of by Nephi, culminating in the extinction of the Nephites, as a race, at the hands of their brethren, the Lamanites, took place in the year four hundred and twenty after Christ, and three hundred and eighty-seven years after the establishment of the true gospel among the people of this land, by no other person than the Christ himself; and the Lamanites went forth in multitudes upon the face of the land, and, having overcome all other enemies, continued to satisfy their thirst for blood by wars and butcheries among themselves. And in this condition they remained until the discovery of America by the Europeans, and in a measure to the present day.

MEXICO CITY, MEXICO

["The Lamanites After the Coming of the Europeans" will be discussed in the next paper.]

Elder W. C. Jefferies writes from Barnsley, England, December 18: "I have spent most of my time in this branch and consider it a very good place to labor. I



find many good people in my travels, among both Saints and friends. Some of the latter, also, generally attend our Sunday night meetings. We hold a cottage meeting each week for the deaf and dumb, and the elders here find much pleasure in speaking to them through Brother

James Benfell, interpreter, who is at the head of the deaf and dumb school in Barnsley. Elders, left to right: J. A. Vannesse, Smithfield; W. C. Jefferies, president of the branch, Grantsville; A. L. Riggs, president of the conference, Logan; L. P. Burt, Brigham City; T. Shepherd, Provo, Utah."