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The Gospel to the Lamanites III–VIII

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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 third through eighth parts cover post-Columbian history.

The Gospel to the Lamanites

BY REY L. PRATT, PRESIDENT OF THE MEXICAN MISSION

III—The Lamanites After the Coming of the Europeans.

Awful as had been the curse, and great as had been the sufferings of the Lamanites up till the time that the Nephites were destroyed by them, and during the time that intervened between then and the coming of the Europeans, or Gentiles, to their land, it seems that in the providences of the Lord they had not suffered enough to pay for the evils that they had committed, and to humble them before the Lord, and make them turn from their evil ways unto him. But, according to prophecy contained in the Book of Mormon, great sufferings and trials and the wrath of a just God offended, were still in store for them, and that, too, at the hands of the Gentiles, who were to come among them.

Father Lehi, early after they had left Jerusalem, saw in vision that such would be the case, if his descendants should ever forget the Lord and cease to keep his commandments. In the first chapter of Second Nephi he speaks as follows :

“Wherefore, I, Lehi, have obtained a promise, that inasmuch as those whom the Lord shall bring out of the land of Jerusalem shall keep his commandments, they shall prosper upon the face of this land; and they shall be kept from all other nations, that they may possess this land unto themselves. And if it so be that they keep his commandments, they shall be blessed upon the face of this land, and there shall be none to molest them, nor to take away the land of their inheritance; and they shall dwell safely forever.

“But behold, when the time cometh that they shall dwindle in unbelief, after they have received so great blessings from the hand of the Lord; having a knowledge of the creation of the earth, and all men, knowing the great and marvelous works of the Lord from the creation of the world; having power given them to do all things by faith; having all the commandments from the beginning, and having been brought by his infinite goodness into this precious land of promise; behold, I say, if the day shall come that they will reject the Holy One of Israel, the true Messiah, their Redeemer and their God, behold the judgments of him that is just shall rest upon them;

“Yea, he will bring other nations unto them, and he will give unto them power, and he will take away from them [the inhabitants of this land] the lands of their possessions; and he will cause them to be scattered and smitten.”

Mormon, in his fifth chapter, speaking of the people of this land, says :

“And behold, the Lord hath reserved their blessings, which they might have received in the land, for the Gentiles who shall possess the land.

“But behold, it shall come to pass that they shall be driven and scattered by the Gentiles, * * * ”

Christ, in speaking to the Nephites, in III Nephi 20, says :

“And after that ye were blessed, then fulfillest the Father the covenant which he made with Abraham, saying, in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed, unto the pouring out of the Holy Ghost through me upon the Gentiles, which blessing upon the Gentiles shall make them mighty above all, unto the scattering of my people, O house of Israel;

“And they shall be a scourge unto the people of *this land*. * * ”

To see how literally and terribly these prophecies have been fulfilled, one has but to read the history of the Lamanites since the coming of the Gentiles among them.

Nephi, in a vision that is recorded in the 13th chapter of I Nephi, saw the following :

“And it came to pass that I looked and beheld many waters; and they divided the Gentiles from the seed of my brethren.

“And it came to pass that the angel said unto me, Behold the wrath of God is upon the seed of thy brethren.

“And I looked, and I beheld a man among the Gentiles who was separated from the seed of my brethren by the many waters; and I beheld the Spirit of God, that it came down and wrought upon the man; and he went forth upon the many waters, even unto the seed of my brethren, who were in the promised land.

“And it came to pass that I beheld the Spirit of God, that it wrought upon other Gentiles; and they went forth out of captivity, upon the many waters.

“And it came to pass that I beheld many multitudes of the Gentiles upon the land of promise; and I beheld the wrath of God, that it was upon the seed of my brethren; and they were scattered before the Gentiles, and were smitten.”

Book of Mormon history of the Lamanites shows very plainly that the Lamanites fulfilled every condition stipulated by the Lord, as a result of which they were to receive the sore curse they have labored under for so many years; and it shows how literally the Lord has caused to come upon them all that he said that he would. But for a recounting of the fulfilment of the prophecies just quoted, we have to look to history written since the sealing up of the Book of Mormon by the Angel Moroni, and the hiding of it up

in the hill Cumorah, to come forth in the due time of the Lord. But scarcely does the history of Columbus and his wonderful discovery of America, recount any plainer those events than does the wonderful vision of Nephi, quoted above. And oh! how well do the volumes of history among us testify that those ancient prophets were inspired in what they wrote concerning the way that the people of this land were to be scattered and smitten and trodden down and counted as nought by the multitudes of Gentiles that were to come unto this land. Well does history show the truthfulness of the prophecy uttered so long ago: "And they [the Gentiles] shall be a scourge unto the people of this land."

The history of the Indian, or Lamanite, since the coming of the Gentiles among them, is the saddest it has ever been my lot to study. Until a person has lived for years among them, and has read and studied their history, not only from the written versions, but in their traditions, in their countenances, and in their very lives, and has learned to feel, through contact with them, in a measure as they feel, he can not appreciate what I say when I say that the history of the Indian is the saddest history written. One author said: "If my pen might have the gift of tears, I would write a book and call it *The Indian*, and I would make the whole world weep." But the pen of mortal man is too feeble to paint, in all its vividness and sadness, the true history of the Indian. Man, in writing history, can only set down plain facts; he cannot set down the feelings of those who have suffered; he may attempt a description of them, but oh, how far short he will fall of the genuine, as experienced in the breasts of those who suffer.

My readers are as well acquainted, perhaps, with the history of the Indians within the confines of the United States, commonly called the North American Indians, as I am, so I will not attempt to describe all that they have gone through in the course of their being reduced from their position as the veritable lords of the land, to the narrow confines of the government reservations, upon which they are held, virtually speaking, prisoners, today. I only ask you to review this history in your own minds, and see if you can see, from an Indian's point of view, anything but sorrow and sadness in it.

It is my desire, in this article, to bring to the attention of my readers some of the sufferings and sadness endured by the Indians (and that, too, in fulfilment of prophecy) throughout the Latin-American republic, south of the Rio Grande.

IV—History of the Aztecs

Let us review briefly the history of the Aztecs, that mighty people found by the Spanish conquerors in the country now known as Mexico. When Cortes and his adventurous followers

landed upon the sand-swept and barren shores of Vera Cruz, he landed within the confines of an empire that had a population of thirty millions of people. Today, three hundred and ninety years later, the astounding fact confronts us that, of that thirty millions of people, there only remain, of the unmixed native race, between six and seven millions, and within the confines of modern Mexico there are only fifteen millions, counting the pure blood natives, the Indian and Spanish mixture, and all of the foreign inhabitants of the country. This represents a reduction of fifty per cent of the population of the country, if we compare the present total population with that at the coming of the Spaniards, and a reduction of seventy-five per cent of the pure blood native population.

What has become of this people? In the answer to this question lies part of the sadness of which I have spoken.

Had the native races known with whom they had to deal, Cortes and his followers might have been crushed upon landing upon the barren shores of Vera Cruz, and never have lived to reach the heart of that great country and cause the suffering and ruin that they did. But Providence had willed it otherwise. The coming of the Savior among the people of this land, and the establishment by him of a reign of peace and prosperity among them, which was no other than the two hundred years that the gospel endured among them, as established by the Savior himself, left a deep-rooted and vivid tradition among them that prepared the way for their overthrow and utter subjugation at the hands of this handful of Spanish adventurers. Quetzalcoatl, which was the name that tradition had given to the personage who was perhaps none other than the Christ himself, who had visited them, promised, before he sailed away on the eastern sea, that some day he would return to them, and through all the years of dark gloom and suffering that intervened between the time that he made this promise and the coming of the Spaniards, this tradition and the hope of its fulfilment were handed down from father to son and cherished among them; and so it is not surprising that, in the landing of these fair strangers upon their shores, they thought they beheld the fulfilment of their long-cherished dream. But alas, how different was the reality!

For cruelty to those conquered, the conquest of the native races of America by the Spaniards is perhaps without parallel.

To insure the non-desertion of his followers, Cortes burned in the harbor of Vera Cruz, the ships that had brought him to his land of conquest, and then started on his bloody march to the capital of the Aztecs. Space will not permit of a detailed following of him in his march to the capital. It is sufficient to say that the resistance he met with, on the part of most of the natives, was only half-hearted owing to the half fear, half hope, that was in

their hearts, that he was their *Fair God* returned to them, to restore to them again that reign of peace and happiness that they had so long prayed and hoped for. To the few tribes that offered resistance, Cortes administered severe lessons, and he afterwards generally succeeded in making allies of them, and thus increasing his army as he marched on towards the capital. The Tlaxcalans were the most formidable tribe that he encountered, and they offered a really heroic resistance, but, as they were the hereditary and hated enemies of the Aztecs, once won over, they became his most powerful, efficient allies. It is said that when he reached the capital, he had six thousand of these warriors with him. Montezuma, the emperor of all the Aztecs, although by nature a brave and courageous prince, was so wrought upon by the tradition he held in common with his people, and by the accounts of the great power and cruelty exhibited by these fair strangers against all who dared to oppose them, that, lest he be found fighting against the decrees of the gods, he offered no resistance to the Spaniards, but allowed them a free entrance to his capital, where, after some weeks of hospitable treatment at the hands of Montezuma and his people, they treacherously seized him and held him prisoner in one of his own palaces. All the indignities possible were heaped upon him, and his nobles. He was made to give up much of his royal treasure, and the Spaniards, in their thirst for gold, which was their dominant characteristic, even profaned the temples of the Aztecs, in their eager search. This was more than the people could stand; and, with their minds now cleared of the illusion that the Spaniards were the fair gods of their dreams, they now made a relentless war upon them. Cortes and his followers were forced to fly from the city, and on that eventful night that they did so, it is indeed marvelous that they were not annihilated. But Providence willed it otherwise; and, once upon the mainland, they rallied their forces, and then ensued a series of the bloodiest strifes for conquest ever waged. Montezuma did not long survive a wound he received from his own angered people, when trying to dissuade them from hostilities against the Spaniards. He was succeeded on the throne by his brother Cuitlahua, who succeeded in driving the Spaniards from the city and country round about. His reign, though glorious, was only for a brief four months, when he died of smallpox. He, in turn, was succeeded on the throne by a nephew of the two former monarchs by the name of Cuatemoc or Cuatemotzin. He is the monarch that is pointed to, even to this day, by the real natives of the land, with pride as the most valiant of the Aztec rulers. Had he ruled, instead of his uncle Montezuma, when Cortes came to the land, the history made by that gentleman very likely would have been a very different one. Taking over the affairs of the empire at the time he did, it was not possible for him to long stem the tide that was

already working the ruin of his country. But his vigorous campaign against the Spaniards was by far the most severe that those audacious adventurers had to encounter. After the siege and capture of the capital of the Aztecs by the Spaniards, in which thousands of its inhabitants were slain (it is recorded in history that, as a vengeance wrought out upon the Mexicans for holding out so long, forty thousand men, women and children were slaughtered by the Spaniards after the city had fallen into their hands); Cuatemoc was captured by the Spaniards. He was tortured by them in the most cruel manner to make him tell where he had hidden the treasure of the city, before it was surrendered. Bound, and with his feet soaked in oil, he was held with his feet over a slow fire as a means to make him divulge his secret. He was afterwards taken to Honduras, by Cortes, and there, on a trumped up charge, foully murdered at his captor's orders.

The fall of the Aztec capital into the hands of the Spaniards practically ended the conquest, but an indescribable condition of the most abject subjugation was to follow for the conquered.

VI—Condition Today One of Slavery.

The conquering Spaniards not only considered that the country now belonged to the crown of Spain, but that all the inhabitants were rightfully its slaves. In recompense for the part these adventurers took in the conquest of this great country, they were given great grants of land, and, in every instance, were awarded great numbers of the natives as slaves with whom to work their lands. In some cases men were given whole fertile valleys and as many as twenty or thirty thousand vassals or slaves. Thus we see how the people were smitten by the Gentiles, and were brought down into a condition of serfdom and slavery, the effects of which stretch like a pall over their few remaining descendants even to this day. Stripped and peeled of the land that had been theirs and their forefathers' for centuries, they have never been able to regain any of it, practically speaking, for today, almost as much as in the day that the original grants were made in favor of the Spanish conquerors, the land remains in the possession of them and their descendants; and today, almost as much as then, the natives are their slaves. True, the name has changed, but the condition is about the same; for the condition can be compared with little else than slavery where men have to work for so small a wage as twelve cents a day, and, out of that wage, support themselves and those dependent upon them, being forced to buy, all they do buy, out of the company store, and that, at prices where things are sold at from one to five hundred per cent more than their value. As a natural consequence they over-draw their wages and contract debts which they can never hope to pay; and, in de-

fault of payment, their labor and their lives, and those of their children, if they have any, must stand between them and the man they owe, who, therefore, virtually owns them.

Conditions even worse than these, up till very recently, at least, have prevailed on some of the tropical plantations in southern Mexico, where men, on account of the rigors of the climate, are loath to work of their own free will. A system of slavery and traffic in human beings has been carried on, right in the face of the whole world, and in this civilized and enlightened age, that was far worse than any of the conditions of slavery that existed in the south of the United States. Unscrupulous labor contractors plied their trade right in the heart of the great cities, and in every place. Men and women were enticed into signing contracts that they could not read nor understand, and in so doing virtually sold themselves into lifelong slavery, because, in connection with signing the contract, they were induced to receive a small amount of money, and the contract stipulated that as long as this amount was not repaid the signer must stay in the employ of the contractor, or anyone to whom he might sell his contract; and the law upheld the contractor in his claim! The contractors were sure to see to it that the poor, deceived one was never given a chance to pay back the amount. Thus he continued to entrap unsuspecting ones until he had enough gathered together to make a car load. And, to hold the first ones until he had secured the number that he wanted, they were held prisoners, not even being allowed the freedom of the streets. When his number was complete he would charter a car and put his human cattle aboard and never let them set foot on the ground again until they were unloaded on the plantation, or near it, of some plantation holder who had contracted for a certain number of laborers from the contractor, and then paid him an agreed price per head for them. The contractor would then return to ply his trade in human souls once more.

Once on the plantation these poor unfortunates are starved and beat and made to work in the tropical sun so hard and so long that few of them survive more than one or two years. When asked why they do not take better care of their men, the plantation holders say it is cheaper to work them for all they are worth while they are strong, and buy more when these are dead. The horrors of what they pass through cannot be described in a short article like the present one.

Perhaps some of my readers will think that the picture presented is overdrawn, but, having seen and heard, I know whereof I speak.

VII—A Recent Example

I will only recount one particular incident that came under my observation. The young man who is the subject of it, and

also his family, are members of the Church. Their home is in a little Indian village about fifty miles from the City of Mexico. In order that he might help his parents in the support of a large family, the young man went to the city where he was in hopes that he could earn better wages than he was able to do in his native town. While looking for work, he was accosted by one of the labor contractors described, and, on being offered what seemed to him good work, and at a very fair wage (for the contractor always offered more wages verbally than was stipulated in the contract), he was enticed into signing the contract, and, unsuspecting, followed the contractor to a place where he said he was to meet some more men who were going to work on the same job. And meet them he did, but only to find that they had been for some time, what he was now, a prisoner, not to escape from his present place of confinement until the contractor had secured the number of laborers that he had contracted to some plantation holder way off down in the state of Oaxaca, and then not to escape, but only to be transferred from his prison in the city to the plantation of his future master. The young man had promised to write to his parents, from the city, telling of his fortunes there, and they, on not receiving any word from him, for he was not permitted to even write to his friends after he was once imprisoned, felt that some evil had befallen their son, and set out to the city to find him. But their search was all in vain, for no trace of him could they find, nor did they ever hear of him again for three long years. The young man was carried to the tropics and landed on a plantation in the way that I have already described. What he passed through during the three long years that he stayed there, only he, and other unfortunates like himself who have passed through the same ordeal, can ever tell. Being young and strong, he did not succumb so readily to work and hardship as many of his unfortunate companions did; but even his rugged constitution could not stand forever the strain put upon it, and, one morning, racked with fever, he told the foreman, who, on horseback, was driving his men out to work as he would a herd of oxen, that he was sick and could go no further. The only answer he received was an oath and a blow from the heavy whip carried by the foreman. He staggered on until nature refused to go further, and he laid down by the road. The infuriated foreman tried to arouse him and goad him on, but to no avail; his tired and disease-ridden body was now at a stage where the curses and blows of the brutal overseer could not arouse him to further action. The overseer, enraged at his inability to arouse him, brutally kicked him over the edge and down the steep bank of a ravine, on the bank of which he was lying. To this, perhaps, he owes his life, for he fell near the water and in the shade of the jungle, and the overseer, to whom such sights were common, never gave him another thought, supposing

him dead. But, after a long sleep of unconsciousness in the shade of the jungle, he revived and regained consciousness. Realizing what had befallen him, he preferred to face the jungle, with all its perils, to going back to the plantation where worse than death awaited him. After wandering aimlessly about for some time he was found by some friendly natives, and by them nursed back to life. Once restored, he made his way back to his family and friends in his own native village. He is still alive, and I have heard him tell his story often, but he has never been the same in body or in mind that he was before he experienced slavery in a Mexican jungle. He says that, of the unfortunate party that were taken to the plantation at the same time he was, only three or four were alive at the time he made his escape.

VIII—The Underlying Cause of Revolutions.

People from the outside, and who are not acquainted with conditions as they exist in Mexico, and in most of the Latin-American republics, wonder why there are so many revolutions among them, and so much war and strife. But to those on the inside and who are acquainted with the terrible conditions as they do really exist, the wonder is why the poor, oppressed Indians do not rise up *en masse* and rid the country of their cruel oppressor or die in the attempt. The present revolution in Mexico, as all others like it have had, has as its basic cause the world-old desire for freedom, the desire of the oppressed to throw off the yoke of the oppressor.

MEXICO CITY, MEXICO

["Hope for the Lamanites, who are not to be utterly destroyed," is the topic of the next chapter.]

Elders laboring in Chemnitz, Germany: Front row—Louis L. Driggs, Driggs, Idaho; William H. Smart, conference president, Vernal, Utah; Chauncey L. White, branch president, Salt Lake City. Back row—Frank Murri, St. Anthony, Idaho; J. William Christensen, Mount Pleasant; Georgius Y. Cannon, Salt Lake City, Utah.

