



Type: Magazine Article

The Lamanites (A Book of Mormon Sketch)

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Source: *The Latter-Day Saints' Millennial Star*, Vol. 42, No. 26 (28 June 1880)

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

Page(s): 401–404

Abstract: This series sketches out the character of the Lamanites. Reynolds also writes concerning Sariah, Lehi's wife. The second part covers Lamanite history through the escape of Limhi's people.

THE LATTER-DAY SAINTS' MILLENNIAL STAR.

"For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; and there shall be earthquakes in divers places, and there shall be famines and troubles; these are the beginnings of sorrows."—MARK xiii, 8.

No. 26, Vol. XLII.

Monday, June 28, 1880.

Price One Penny.

THE LAMANITES.—(A BOOK OF MORMON SKETCH.)

BY ELDER GEORGE REYNOLDS.

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When two hundred years had passed away the Lamanites, from some unexplained cause, had grown more numerous than the Nephites, they had also sunk yet lower in savagery. They loved murder and drank the blood of beasts (153). Notwithstanding the ill success that attended their expeditions against the Nephites, they made war against them the business of their lives, generation after generation. We can scarcely conceive a people more loathsome and savage than the Lamanites of this age; what little of refinement and civilization their ancestors had brought from Jerusalem had long since been forgotten; they had lost everything that was good, and had retained and accumulated only that which was evil.

The second two hundred years is a repetition of the first. Wars, repeated wars, are the burden of the history of the race; they had nought else to relieve its monotony—art, science and enterprise were unknown. About 320 years after the exodus

from Jerusalem, they appear to have gained great advantage over the Nephites, the Lord having used them, as He had before-time promised, as a scourge to the latter people when they forsook His ways. Amaron (a descendant of Jacob) writing about this time, states that the more wicked portion of the Nephites had been destroyed (154), but afterwards tells us that the Lord had delivered the righteous out of the hands of their enemies, which shows that the destruction which had come upon the wicked Nephites was at the hands of the Lamanites. In the next generation these desolating wars still continued.

We are now coming to a time when the history of the Lamanites is presented to us in greater detail, especially when it is connected by war or missionary enterprise with the annals of the Nephites. Somewhere between 250 and 225 years B.C., the obedient Nephites, by the commandment of God, left the land to which they had been led by Nephi, and, under the guidance of a prophet named Mosiah,

again started northward to seek a new home. What the causes were that led to this migration the Book of Mormon does not inform us, possibly the rapidly increasing Lamanites were crowding so pertinaciously upon the Nephites that quiet possession was no longer possible, therefore another exodus was commanded. At any rate, it is certain that as soon as the Nephites evacuated the country the Lamanites entered it, and possessed themselves of the cities and settlements which Nephite industry had created. This land was called the Land of Nephi by the Nephites in honor of the founder of their race, and by such name is known all through the Book of Mormon. The land to which the Nephites had retired was called the Land of Zarahemla, and thither the restless Lamanites quickly followed, so that in the days of King Benjamin, son of Mosiah, we read of their invading that land also, from which they were driven by its defenders after much blood had been spilt on both sides (157 and 159).

In the days of King Benjamin certain unquiet Nephite spirits became anxious to return to the Land of Nephi, whose lost richness they bewailed. The king finally gave his consent. The first expedition was a disastrous failure—quarrels amongst the leaders of the company ended in a bloody battle and the return of the few survivors to Zarahemla. Nothing daunted, a second company soon after started, which in one sense was more successful, in that it reached the Land of Nephi in safety.

The Nephite evacuation of the cities built in the Land of Nephi had no doubt a beneficial effect on those portions of the Lamanite race that took possession of them. They thereby became acquainted with some of the comforts and excellences of civilization, and, though very slow to learn, their experience at this time laid the foundation for a slight advance of the arts of peace in their midst, and from this time we read of two classes of this people, the one living in cities, the other roaming in the wilderness. However, at the time of the return of this Nephite colony (whose leader was named Zeniff), they had not

learned to keep the Nephite cities they occupied in repair.

A king named Laman governed the Lamanites at this time. On Zeniff's arrival a treaty was made between the two parties, and the Nephites re-occupied the cities of Lehi-Nephi and Shilom, and the country immediately surrounding. Laman's subjects were an idle and idolatrous people, and he readily perceived the advantages that would accrue from the presence of an industrious people in their midst, but who were not sufficiently strong to be a menace to his authority. Twelve years were thus passed by the Nephites in repairing the cities and developing the resources of the lands adjoining, during which time Laman had been watching their progress and noting their growing powers, and which, by the conclusion of this period, so alarmed him, that he intrigued with his people to make a sudden attack on the people of Zeniff. A battle ensued in which the Lamanites were defeated with a loss of 3,043 warriors. After this there was an armed peace of twenty-two years duration.

Before the end of this twenty-two years King Laman died. He was succeeded by his son, who soon after his ascension again sought the chances of war in the effort to stay the continually increasing strength of Zeniff's people, who formed a kingdom within a kingdom, and were an annoyance and an eye-sore to all loyal Lamanites. The young king was no more successful than his father—he also was ignominiously defeated with great loss and driven out of the region held by Zeniff.

Shortly after this war Zeniff died and his son Noah succeeded him. In process of time the war was renewed, the Lamanites commencing by sending in bands of marauders who cut off small or isolated bodies of Noah's subjects, and drove their flocks and herds away. Noah was at first successful in resisting these encroachments, but being given over to drunkenness and debauchery, he did not take effectual steps to defend his frontier. With his false priests, courtiers and courtizans, he gave himself up to the gratification of the appetites of the flesh,

and under his rule a great prophet of the Lord, named Abinadi, was martyred. Such was the condition of affairs (about B.C. 150) when the hosts of the Lamanites suddenly appeared in the Land Shemlon. King Noah ordered instant flight, and the desertion of the women and children to the mercies of the ruthless Lamanites, and set the cowardly example by fleeing in all haste. Some of his people refused to obey this disgraceful command, and, through the intercession of their wives and daughters (the Lamanite respect for woman still being observable), were able to save their lives, though at a heavy cost. They made an ignominious treaty, in which they agreed to pay to the conquerors one-half of all they possessed, and one-half of their increase year by year (205). Noah was afterwards killed by some of his own people, and one of his sons, named Limhi, reigned in his stead. In some respects his rule may be said to have been little more than nominal, as the Lamanites set guards all round the land to prevent the Nephites escaping into the wilderness, which guards were paid out of the tribute exacted from the subjects of King Limhi. This state of things continued for two years.

In these times there was a romantic spot in the Land Shemlon (on the Nephite borders) where the Lamanite maidens were in the habit of gathering on pleasure bent. Here they sang, danced and made merry with all the gaiety of youthful innocence and overflowing spirits. One day when a few were thus gathered they were suddenly surprised, and twenty-four of their number carried off by strange men who, from their appearance, were unmistakably Nephites. On learning of this act of teachery the Lamanites were stirred to uncontrollable anger and, without seeking an explanation, they made a sudden incursion into the territory held by King Limhi. This attack, however, was not successful, for their movements, though not understood, had been discovered, and their intended victims were pouring forth to meet them. With Limhi and his people it was a war for existence, to

be defeated was to be annihilated; his warriors therefore fought with superhuman energy and desperation, and eventually they succeeded in driving the Lamanites back. So speedy did the flight become, that in their confusion the Lamanites left their wounded king lying amongst the heaps of slain. There he was discovered by the victors. In the interview between him and Limhi that followed, mutual explanations ensued. The Lamanite king complained bitterly of the outrage committed on the daughters of his people, whilst Limhi protested that he and his subjects were innocent of the base act. Further investigation developed the fact that some of the iniquitous priests of King Noah, who had fled from the dreaded vengeance of their abused countrymen into the wilderness, were the guilty parties. Being without wives, and fearing to return home, they had adopted this method to obtain them. On hearing this explanation, King Laman consented to make an effort to pacify his angry hosts. At the head of an unarmed body of Nephites he went forth and met his armies who were returning to the attack. He explained what he had learned, and the Lamanites, possibly somewhat ashamed of their rashness, renewed the covenant of peace.

This peace, unfortunately, was of short duration. The Lamanites grew arrogant and grievously oppressive, and under their exactions and cruelty the condition of Limhi's subjects grew continually worse, until they were little better off than were their ancestors in Egypt before Moses, their deliverer, arose. Three times they broke out in ineffectual rebellion, and just as often their task-masters grew more cruel and exacting, until their spirits were entirely broken; they cowered before their oppressors, and bowed "to the yoke of bondage, submitting themselves to be smitten, and to be driven to and fro, and burdened according to the desires of their enemies" (209).

How many years this state of things existed is uncertain, but eventually the Lord delivered Limhi's people, and, with the aid of some of their friends from the Land of Zarahemla

who had sought them out, they escaped into the wilderness.

Their escape was a severe blow to the semi-savage Lamanites, who for years, because of their much greater numbers, had been able to hold these Nephites in a state of subjugation most favorable to their own partial barbarism and improvident, idle habits. They obtained from them all the advantages derived from slave labor with none of its responsibilities. Now that they had escaped, the great source of local national revenue was lost, besides the gratification of race animosities could no longer be indulged in. By this one movement their pride, their passions and their pockets were alike disastrously affected. They re-occupied the deserted cities, and sent an army to overtake and re-capture the fugitives. The expedition was a failure, it lost its way in the wilderness, and wandered aimlessly about in the vain endeavor to capture the Nephites or find their way home. Whilst thus wandering backwards and forwards they came upon the hiding-place of King Noah's priests. These vile creatures sought mercy at the hands of the Lamanites, and being joined in this appeal by their wives, the abducted daughters of the Lamanites, the hearts of the soldiers were softened, and the miscreants' prayers were granted, whereupon they joined the Lamanites in their search. After a time they wandered into the region occupied by the Christians, who a few years previously, to escape the persecutions of King Noah, had fled into the wilderness, and, under the guidance of Alma, had there built up new homes. The Lamanites gained from Alma the information they needed as to their way back, took possession shortly after of the country occupied and improved by Alma's people, and before long placed them under the rule of Amulon, the leader of the priests, who was appointed a kind of tributary prince or ruler over the region occupied by his own people and the colony of Alma. Amulon soon commenced to treat his Christian subjects with

great severity and harshness. He had known Alma in the days when they were both priests to King Noah, and vented all the hate engendered of a false and bloody faith on the followers of the man who, he considered, more than any other, had been the means of the overthrow of himself and his priestly associates in crime. This reign of tyranny did not last long; the condition of Alma's people became intolerable, and under the guidance of their heaven-directed leader they escaped to the Land of Zarahemla. The Lamanites were now undisputed possessors of all the southern continent outside that land, and their chief ruler was named Laman, a son of the previous king of that name.

The Lamanites now took a very important step in civilization. King Laman appointed the former priests of Noah to be teachers of his people in every land over which he ruled. These men who were learned in the knowledge of the Nephites, taught the Lamanites the language of their race, that of the Lamanites having become corrupted by long use without a written literature. They also taught them to write, that they could correspond with each other and keep national historical records. This epoch may be considered as the dawn of learning amongst this nation, and appears to have been coeval with the first infusion of the more vigorous Nephite blood in their veins. The astute priests, however, studiously avoided teaching them anything regarding the true God, the Law of Moses, or the words of the prophets. But from this time the Lamanites, according to the testimony of the Book of Mormon (216), began to increase in riches, and began to trade one with another and wax great, and began to be a cunning people, delighting in all manner of wickedness and plunder, except it were among their own brethren. It is also recorded that the Lamanites were much more numerous than the united people of Mosiah and Zarahemla.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

The less we parade our misfortunes the more sympathy we command.