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How Was Lehi a Descendant of the Jews?

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Abstract: This article discusses how Lehi and the Nephites are referred to as “Jews” in several Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants passages (2 Nephi 30:4; D&C 19:27; D&C 57:4), even though they were literal descendants of Ephraim and Manasseh (Alma 10:3). They were Jews not so much by actual descent as by citizenship, having lived in Jerusalem in the kingdom of Judah, or through intermarriage.

THE EDITOR'S PAGE

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met together and decided that whenever they entered the building, they would move and speak reverently. I was interested to observe that when the children entered Sunday School they, too, had a reverential attitude, and so did their fathers and mothers.

Reverence should be manifest in sacrament meetings, in MIA, and in the meetings of all the other auxiliaries

of the Church. This is a missionary Church. People come here for light and knowledge, for instruction, and they have a right to find it when they come.

A prayerful heart will do much to bring reverence into our lives. Our individual and family prayers, and those said in church, will bring us closer to our Heavenly Father, and build our honor and respect for him and for the things which he asks us to hold sacred.

Your Question

by Joseph Fielding Smith

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL OF THE TWELVE

How Was Lehi a Descendant of the Jews?

Question:

"Will you kindly answer a question for our Sunday School class? In 1 Nephi 5:14, we are informed that Lehi was a descendant of Joseph, and in 2 Nephi 30:4, it states that the Nephites were descendants of the Jews. Since the Jews were descendants of Judah, how can these statements be harmonized?"

Answer:

It is true that Lehi and his family were descendants of Joseph through the lineage of Manasseh (Alma 10:3), and Ishmael was a descendant of Ephraim, according to the statement of the Prophet Joseph Smith. That the Nephites were descendants of Joseph is in fulfillment of the blessings given to Joseph by his father Israel. The Nephites were of the Jews, not so much by descent as by citizenship, although in the long descent from Jacob, it could be possible of some mixing of the tribes by intermarriage.

It should be remembered that in the days of Rehoboam, son of Solomon, ten of the twelve tribes of Israel revolted and were known as the kingdom of Israel from that time on until they were carried away into Assyria. The other two tribes of Judah and Benjamin remained loyal to Rehoboam and were known as the kingdom of Judah. Lehi was a citizen of Jerusalem, in the kingdom of Judah. Presumably his family had lived there for several generations, and all of the inhabitants of the kingdom of Judah, no matter which tribe they had descended through, were known as Jews. The condition is comparable to conditions today, for example: Many members of the Church have been gathered out of England, Germany, the Scandinavian countries, and other foreign lands. Coming to this country they have taken out citizenship papers, and then they and their descendants are known as Americans, being citizens

of this country. There is also a comparable example in the case of Paul the apostle. When he was arrested on complaint of the Jews, the chief captain mistook him for an Egyptian who had created a rebellion, and Paul said to the captain, "... I am a man which am a Jew of Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city: and, I beseech thee, suffer me to speak unto the people." When the privilege was granted, Paul spoke to the angry Jews and said: "I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day." (Acts 21:37-39, and Acts 22:3.) In writing his epistles to the Roman saints and also to the saints at Philippi, Paul said: "... For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin." (Romans 11:1, and Philippians 3:5.)

Not only in the Book of Mormon are the descendants of Lehi called Jews, but also in the Doctrine and Covenants. In section 19, verse 27, this is found: "Which is my word to the Gentile, that soon it may go to the Jew, of whom the Lamanites are a remnant, that they may believe the gospel, and look not for a Messiah to come who has already come." Again, in giving instruction to the elders who had journeyed from Kirtland to Missouri, the Lord revealed the place for the building of the temple and gave instruction for the purchase of land "lying westward, even unto the line running directly between Jew and Gentile." (Section 57:4.) This line westward was the dividing line between the whites and Indians.

Joseph Fielding Smith

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