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"Nephites" Found in New Mexico

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Abstract: The author of this article declares he found several tribes that he classified as Nephite (because of their beauty, cleanliness, industry, virtues, and purity of national blood) among the American Indians, including the Zunis, Lagumas, and Isletas.

"NEPHITES" FOUND IN NEW MEXICO

From a letter by Wilford Woodruff to President John Taylor and Council



—An IMPROVEMENT ERA photograph

Two Zuni women, both members of the Church, Sisters Vivian Peywa and Crystal Sheka, dressed in their ceremonial costumes.

SUNSET, APACHE CO., ARIZONA,*
Sept. 15th, 1879.

President John Taylor and Council:

DEAR BRETHREN:—I arrived on Saturday night, the 13th, all well and in good spirits and found Brother Lake, of Brigham City,* and Brother Bates, of Pleasant Valley,* very sick. They had been to the Verde, baptizing some and administering to the sick. Brother Lake has been looked upon as dangerous, but was some better yesterday.

In my short communication of the 2nd inst., I promised to give a fuller account of my visit to the Isletas, which I will now endeavor to do. I view my visit among the Nephites one of the most interesting missions of my life, although short. I say Nephites because if there are any Nephites on this continent we have found them among the Zunis, Lagumas [Lagunas], and Isletas, for they are a different race of people altogether from the Lamanites. I class the Navajos, Moquis [Hopis] and Apaches with the Lamanites, although

they are in advance of many Indian tribes of America. I class the Zunis, Lagumas [Lagunas], and Isletas among the Nephites. (See D. & C. 3:17.) The Zunis are in advance of the Navajos, Apaches, or of any other Lamanites. The Lagumas are much above the Zunis, and the Isletas are far above them all in wealth, in beauty, cleanliness, and order of their homes and persons, the adornment of their dwellings, their industry and indefatigable labors, and in their virtue, and in the purity of their national blood. Their bearing and dignity in their intercourse with strangers, and above all else, the expansion of their minds and their capacity to receive any principle of the gospel, such as endowments or sealing powers, fully equal the minds of any of the Anglo-Saxon race. While I have been standing in the midst of that noble-minded people, teaching them the gospel, I could not make myself believe I was standing in the presence of American Indians or Lamanites; neither was I.

The Isletas of which I speak is a village twelve miles below Albuquerque, on the Rio Del Norte, containing 3,000 souls that stand at the head of this class of men that I call the Nephites. They occupy forty villages, containing a population of 32,000, speaking sixteen distinct languages, but nearly all good Spanish scholars. I look upon this as a great field of missionary labor for some forty good, faithful Mormon elders, who should be able to speak the Spanish; and I hope next conference will call some of them, at least, into the field. I visited this people, located in their homes in company with Brother Ammon M. Tenney, who had visited most of them before, and I think has done much good in opening doors among them. He had baptized 115 of the Zunis on a former mission. My journey and visit with him was a visit of observation, and I was amply rewarded. In what way, I do not know, but in almost every village I visited, they were looking for me. I can only make a brief outline from my journal of our journey. On the 19th of August, we entered the Zuni village, containing about 3,000 souls. The village stood on a piece of elevated ground; many buildings were three stories high; and the upper stories were entered by ladders at the top. * * *

I went all through the village and, for the first time in my life, I had a view of the white Indians called albinos. Their hair, face, and limbs were nearly as white as milk, much whiter than any Americans. I met with many who had been baptized, and they were very glad to see me. They had 2,000 acres of corn, looking well without irrigation. On the day following, we visited their village at their farm called Fish Springs. I was here introduced to Brother Juan Bautista (John Baptist), the first man baptized in the Zuni nation by A. M. Tenney. His son's wife was the most handsome woman I ever saw of the Indian race; had a beautiful child, nearly white. I went through their wheat fields, which they were cutting with sickles. We visited several ruins of the ancient inhabitants; some of the outside walls of

*Sunset was a settlement about four miles northeast of the present town of Winslow, Navajo County, Arizona; Brigham City was a settlement about three miles north of Winslow; Pleasant Valley was a part of northern Arizona, also. The letter is from the book, *Wilford Woodruff*, by Matthias F. Cowley.

stone were standing some eight feet high. On Sunday evening, the 25th, we held a meeting in a village of the Lagumas, called Mosita Negra. We had an interesting talk with the Governor of the place (Jose Carido), and the spiritual adviser (Lorenzo Coreo) and both wanted a meeting. They called the people together, men, women, and children. We opened by singing and prayer, and Brother Tenney spoke to them in Spanish thirty minutes. I spoke a short time. Brother Tenney interpreted and we dismissed, thinking we had kept them long enough. As soon as we dismissed, a Nephite arose, full of the Spirit of the Lord, and said: "Friends, why do you dismiss us and leave us in this way? This is the first time we have heard of our forefathers and the gospel, and the things we have looked for from the traditions of our fathers. If our wives and children are weary, let them go home; we want to hear more. We want you to talk all night, do not leave us so." This speech raised me to my feet, and the next hour was one of the best meetings we had. We all felt inspired: missionaries, Nephite men, women, and children. I spoke, and Brother Tenney interpreted. I never felt the want of tongues more than on this occasion. I taught the things of the kingdom of God and found hearts capable of receiving it. All were deeply interested, and the seeds we had sown in the hearts of that people will bring forth fruit. At the close of the meeting, the man who spoke in the meeting came to me and said, "When you return, drive to my home, and all your wants will be supplied," which we did and held another meeting on the Sunday following. We should have baptized him, the Governor, and many others, I think, but the Governor who had followed us, as did

the spiritual adviser, some sixty miles to Isletas, had not returned. The people did not wish to take any steps until their Governor was with them. On the following morning, my carriage was surrounded by the Governor and people that we had talked to the night before. Some of them took breakfast with us and I had to talk to them on the principles of the gospel and their record and signs of the times, until I left; and the leading men of the village followed us sixty miles to Isletas and stopped with us most of the time we were there.

On the morning of the 26th of August, we drove through Frisco, crossed the Rio Del Norte, which we found very low, and entered Albuquerque, containing about 3,000 inhabitants, Jews, Gentiles, Americans, and Mexicans. I was introduced to Judge Parks, the U S District judge of that district, from Illinois. I went through the city or town. It is quite a place of business. I went through the Catholic cathedral accompanied by an Italian padre, or priest. He took great pains to show us everything in it, robes of the priests and deacons, some robes woven from pure gold thread that cost \$1,000.00. There was much more wealth than I would have looked for in as obscure a place as Albuquerque. We spent the day in the place and left in the evening and camped five miles below on the banks of the river.

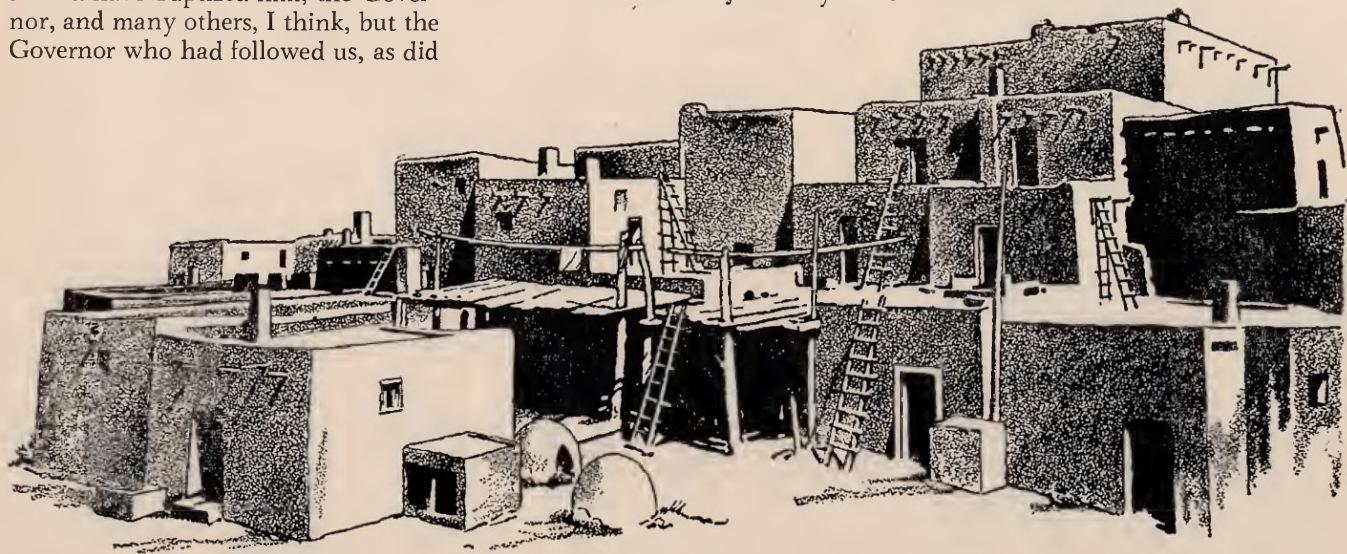
On the 27th of August, we entered the village of Isletas (Ysleta), being the day before the great annual feast of this people. Brother Ammon M. Tenney had visited this people three years ago and had made friends in the place. We called upon an old patriarch that had received him before. His name was Juan Reylocero

(John King). He was glad to receive us. He furnished us with mutton, fruit, and anything we needed. He was one of the leading spirits, was one of the most influential men in the village, and was over eighty years of age; but by his labor and activity he did not appear more than seventy.

* * * The inhabitants of Isletas stand at the head of these 32,000 Nephites; all the other 40 villages come to them for counsel. They have their own laws, police courts, and judgment seat. They are very rich. The man we stopped with possessed 9,000 sheep, 100 brood mares and horses, 100 mules and asses, 500 cows and oxen, a ranch worth \$8,000.00 and \$25,000.00 of other wealth. He rents many houses in the city, and he is a sample of many of the Isletas nation. They allow no white man or Mexican to mix with them in their blood; all their marriages are in their own tribe. Our friend (Reylocero) said the Americans had called them wild men. If they were wild, they were honest and virtuous. It was very seldom that a case of seduction of a wife or daughter was known in their tribes. Whenever such a case did occur, the penalty of death was executed and had been for centuries.

* * * In fact they were so much afraid of white men coming in contact with their women, that Brothers Tenney and Robert H. Smith, of the 15th Ward, Salt Lake City, three years ago, came nearly starving to death before they got thoroughly acquainted with them. They were not willing for these brethren to go into the presence of their women; but after the old patriarch had reached full

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I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eyes seeth thee.

Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes. (*Ibid.*, 42:2-3, 5-6.)

Job's repentance is accepted, and in spite of and following all his calamities, his integrity is fully rewarded. The power of God to justify his servants and reward their faith and integrity is manifest to him by a restoration of a double portion of all Job had before his testing by Satan began.

So the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning, for he had fourteen thousand sheep, and six thousand camels, and a thousand yoke of oxen and a thousand she asses.

He also had seven sons and three daughters. . . .

And in all the land were no women found so fair as the daughters of Job.

After this lived Job an hundred and forty years, and saw his sons and his sons' sons, even four generations.

So Job died, being old and full of days. (*Ibid.*, 42:12-13, 15-17.)

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confidence in Brother Tenney, he put his granddaughter (a very handsome young woman) in his charge, as he was going away for a season, and a young Mexican wished to court her, and the old gentleman did not wish him to marry her. And as the people in that village had full confidence in him, on our arrival we were kindly received and entertained by all we called upon.

I look upon the Isletas as the most industrious and hard laboring people of any I ever met (the Latter-day Saints not excepted). This Nephite village has a field of corn ten miles in length and one in width. It lies north and south of their village and is irrigated. The corn is quite as good as any I ever saw in Utah, and perfectly clean; not a weed could be found in a hundred acres. They have also twenty-one vineyards bordering on their city and 1,000 vines to each vineyard, some of them 60 years of age, all kept perfectly clean and loaded with the finest of fruit, and as heavy a crop as I ever saw in St. George. The vines stand from two to four feet in height and, in the fall of the year, each vine has a mound of earth formed around it, until it is covered out of sight. In

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the spring it is uncovered and the earth leveled. This is an immense work. They have also many apple, pear, and peach orchards, all ripe, as well as grapes. Isletas is occupied only by the Nephites themselves. There are no Mexicans or white men. The houses generally are made of adobe, cement, or concrete, and plastered. The outside walls are as white as snow, and the floors are made of mortar or plaster, very smooth and many of them very neatly carpeted. We saw some as handsome women and girls as could be found in America, barring their dark complexions.

There is one practice that exceeds that of any civilized city on the globe that I ever heard of. No man, woman, or child is allowed to sweep a particle of dirt or dust from the floors into the dooryards or streets, under penalty of a fine. It all has to be gathered in cloths or baskets and carried to mounds which are located in different parts of the city. The room we occupied was in the center of the town, and the mound formed from

the sweepings of the floors in that part of the town measured 150 yards at the base and some thirty feet high, which had probably been 100 years in collecting, for they did not appear to cart it away. I found in the Isletas and in other villages of the Nephites the same kind of crockery and stone was painted in all its brilliant colors that we find in the remains of their ancient cities or in ruins of the ancient inhabitants. All of their water jugs and main crockery are of this material, for they still hold the art of making and painting it.

We visited quite a number of the families in the village and were kindly entertained. Among others, we visited Mrs. Pascual Avieta, a Nephite lady, I should judge 50 years of age, a large portly woman, with a large, fine home. Her floors were neatly carpeted, and settees were covered with Navajo blankets, worth \$15 each. She was neatly dressed. I was introduced to her by Brother Tenney and to her daughters and sons. She received me and treated me with all the cordiality that any

refined lady could, and presided over her household with all the dignity and grace of a Martha Washington. When her daughters were introduced to me, after bowing and shaking hands, they very reservedly and modestly retired across the room, sat down upon a settee and listened in silence to what was said. The matron sat down beside me and conversed with great freedom. While the family could speak good Spanish, the son, a fine young man of 20, could speak good English, which was a godsend to me, and I thoroughly improved it by preaching the gospel of Christ and blessings of the kingdom of God to him, which he gladly received and promised to deliver the same to his father and mother. The matron invited us into her pear, peach, and apple orchard, and grape vineyard where fruit was ripe. We feasted to our satisfaction, and repeated by invitation the same ceremony each day while in Isletas. The feast was on the 27th of August. There were hundreds of Mexicans from all the surrounding country gathered. The Mexican women and girls had their long trains. Most of the drinking,

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gambling, and fighting, which lasted all night, was done by the Mexicans, while the Isletas were in their homes with doors locked at an early hour. The Governor and leading men of Mosita Negra, where we preached, were with us and did not take part in the Mexican carousal.

Thus, dear brethren, I have given you an outline, merely, of the field of labor which I consider the God of Israel has opened up to us and which I consider the revelations of God require us to perform. I think there is element sufficient for forty good, faithful elders. There is need for a goodly number of elders who can speak the Spanish language or who will be able to learn it. I have already sent Brother Taylor a small list of names, including the Indian missionaries that are already in this country, as far as I can remember them, and if there are any in St. George or Southern Utah, northern, who can speak the Spanish, or who will learn it, I would like Brother Taylor to consider them at the October conference.

I am happy to be able to state that most of the settlements I have visited of the Saints have been blessed with fair crops of grain, notwithstanding the dry season. They were just finishing threshing as I left Snowflake. They will have over 3,000 bushels of grain, mostly wheat, and I am confident they will have over 4,000 bushels of wheat at Sunset. ***

Your brother in the gospel,
WILFORD WOODRUFF

Arthur Elijah Morgan

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spent, he recalls barely gasping, "This is the night; I want baptism now, fetch your lantern." When the elders had dressed Elijah felt sufficiently rested to go to the creek where, as the first rays of dawn appeared on July 18, 1896, he was baptized. Elijah was the only Latter-day Saint to be found for miles around.

"Ot" was Elijah's nickname; it now became "Ot, the Mormon." This appellation Elijah accepted with a great deal of pride and further distinguished it when, despite the barbs hurled at him, he often plucked his

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