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Who are the Lamanites?

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Abstract: The history of the term Lamanite is traced through the scriptures. "The 'Lamanite' nation, which was preserved, included descendants not only of Laman and Lemuel, but also of Nephi and his righteous brethren." A helpful chart shows the intermingling of family lines.

WHO ARE THE LAMANITES?

by Richard O. Cowan

Latter-day Saints can best appreciate the prophesied destiny of today's Lamanites in the light of a correct understanding of who they really are. Writing on this subject, Dean L. Larsen, president of the Texas South Mission, observed:

(For Course 7, lesson of July 28, "The Book of Mormon Is a Record—How We Got It"; for Course 15, lesson of June 30, "The Blessing of Joseph and Its Fulfillment in America"; for Course 17, lessons of June 16 and July 23, "Samuel the Lamanite" and "Righteousness, Division, Degeneracy"; for Course 19, lesson of July 21, "Latter-day Saint Contributions to Scriptures"; for Course 29, lessons of May 5, 13, and June 2, "The Book of Mormon" and "Zion"; and of general interest.)

There are those who, upon reading the account of the cursing of the Lamanites, have concluded that those whom we know as Lamanites today are the direct descendants of [only] the degenerate progeny of Laman and Lemuel. There is a notion entertained by some that there are two separate parallel lines drawn down through Book of Mormon history, one representing the descendants of Laman and Lemuel which continues to the present time, and the other representing the seed of the more favored Nephi; this line ending about 420 A.D.¹

If this were true, one might have good reason to feel embarrassed when presenting a copy of the Book of Mormon to a Lamanite and saying, "Here is the history of your fathers." Larsen points out, however, that the supposedly separate Nephite and Lamanite lines periodically converged, and that for "prolonged periods of time . . . there were not two lines at all, but only one."²

The Book of Mormon records that following Lehi's death his family divided into two contending
(Continued on following page.)

¹Dean L. Larsen, *You and the Destiny of the Indian*; Bookcraft, Salt Lake City, Utah, 1966; pages 13, 14.

²Dean L. Larsen, *You and the Destiny of the Indian*; page 14.

THE BEST FROM THE PAST

Abbreviations on the chart are as follows:
First number is the year; second number is the month; third number is the page. (e.g. 60-3-103 means 1960, March, page 103.)

Fbs—flannelboard story. Cs—centerspread.
Isbc—inside back cover. Osbc—outside back cover.
Conv.—Convention Issue.
CR—Centennial Reprint.
*—not available. Use ward library.

SUNDAY SCHOOL COURSE NUMBER												
JULY	3	5	7	9	11	13	15	17	19	25	27	29
7	54-9-Cs* 54-10-Cs* 60-1-Cover 60-3-Cover 96 60-6-209	64-5-176	50-7-Cs* 62-10-330 66-3-100	58-5-Cs* 61-4-Fbs 62-12-Fbs 63-8-Fbs 63-9-Fbs 64-7-Cs 66-6-Cs*	57-1-Fbs* 62-8-260 63-2-73	62-8-258 64-10-Cs 66-2-Cs* Fbs, Isbc 68-2-Cs	56-8-238* 57-1-31* 57-7-194* 58-2-39 59-9-284 64-7-249	56-9-266* 65-10-Fbs	Review 62-8-284 64-10-Isbc	Review	Review	65-10-Isbc
14	59-6-Fbs* 60-3-96 60-6-209	63-4-Fbs 66-4-153	55-12-Isbc* 60-3-78 60-5-148 60-9-Fbs 63-4-Fbs	63-3-86 66-5-168*	50-10-Cs* 56-8-Cs 62-10-328	63-12-Cs 66-11-Cs* 68-2-Fbs	57-6-169* 60-9-298 64-10-375	60-3-83 60-7-Cs 60-8-Cs 64-4-140	61-1-Cs 62-10-343 63-2-70 64-12-472 65-4-Isbc 66-7-265*	63-2-64 64-3-106 65-10-381 66-8-320*	60-4-109,* Isbc 64-4-132 65-1-Isbc 66-2-Cover* 66-2-Cover*	60-4-109,* Cs, Isbc 64-4-132 66-2-Cover, Cs, Fbs, Isbc 66-2-44* 67-5-202
21	60-3-96 66-5-Fbs* 66-8-Fbs*	60-9-Fbs 62-4-Cover 65-8-Fbs 67-6-Fbs	56-6-Isbc* 60-5-146	66-4-CR 66-12-Fbs*	61-1-Cs 61-6-Cs 62-8-271 62-9-304 66-9-361 66-10-384,* 388	55-3-Cs* 57-9-272* 57-11-324* Review 66-9-361 66-10-384,* 388	Review	61-12-Isbc	63-7-233 64-9-351 65-7-297 66-4-Isbc 66-5-Isbc*	62-7-247 62-8-268 62-10-333, 338 64-4-140	61-10-Isbc 61-11-Isbc 64-4-131	58-2-40 59-9-284, 286 62-9-303 67-5-Cs, 182
28	64-7-Cs 66-4-158	54-11-Cover* 60-5-150 62-7-Fbs 64-5-Cover	59-1-Cs* 60-4-118,* 139 63-6-Cs 66-9-Fbs	Review	Review	54-11-Cover* 62-11-Cs 62-12-Cs 66-11-424*	60-2-Isbc*	64-4-136 66-3-86	62-1-Isbc* 64-4-167 65-1-40	64-4-158 66-3-96	65-2-54 66-10-378*	59-9-284 62-9-303 64-7-249 66-9-358 66-10-380*

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factions. The Lord placed the mark of a dark skin on Laman and Lemuel and their followers to distinguish them from their more righteous brethren. (2 Nephi 5:1-25.)

For several centuries the Nephites and Lamanites maintained their separate courses. Thus the traditional concept of the Nephites as righteous and of the Lamanites as wicked is accurate at least during the early stages of the Book of Mormon record. (See, for example, Enos 20.)

But these two blood strains did not remain unmingled forever. From time to time groups of apostates dissented from the Nephites and went over and joined the Lamanites. The Nephites who remained behind when Mosiah led the righteous out of the land of Nephi were never heard of again; presumably they were either killed or assimilated by the Lamanites who took over that land. About two generations later, Amulon led the wicked Nephite priests of King Noah into the wilderness, where they kidnapped some of the "daughters of the Lamanites." (Mosiah 20:1-5.) This was the beginning of the Amulonites, who like the Amalekites (another group of Nephite dissenters), would subsequently agitate anti-Nephite hatred among the Lamanites. (See Alma 21:1-3; 43:13.) Other Nephite dissenters who joined the Lamanites included the followers of Nehor and Amlici (Alma 1, 2), the Zoramites (Alma 43:4), and the followers of Amalickiah (Alma 47).

Nephite efforts to convert the Lamanites were not successful until the four sons of King Mosiah took the gospel to them about 91 B.C. Thousands were converted (Alma 23:5) and left their own land to go and make their homes among the Nephites in Zarahemla. These converts became known as the People of Ammon; they were all of pure Lamanite blood, no Nephite dissenters having been converted. (Alma 24:29.) Two thousand of the sons of these Lamanites gained distinction through faithful and courageous service in defense of their newly adopted Nephite homeland. (See Alma 56, 57.)

In 30 B.C., another very successful missionary effort on the part of Nephi and Lehi, the sons of Helaman, resulted in the conversion of more than half of the Lamanites. (Helaman 6:1, 2, 7, 8.) This inaugurated a new pattern in Book of Mormon history. The Lamanites increased in righteousness and suppressed the Gadianton robbers, while at the same time the Nephites became more wicked and fostered the robbers' organization among them. (Helaman 6:34-38; see also chapter 15.) The outstanding example of the newly reversed situation was the fact

that Samuel, a Lamanite prophet, was sent to call the Nephites to repentance. (See Helaman 13, 14.)

Thirteen years after the birth of Christ still another pattern emerged. The righteous Lamanite majority and Nephite minority allied against the robbers, who had gained power, especially among the Nephites. It is important to note that as the Lamanites lived righteously, their former curse and mark were removed. (3 Nephi 2:11-16; 6:10-14.)

Thus, before the appearance of Christ in America, the Nephite and Lamanite blood strains had been mingled extensively. The Book of Mormon records that at the time of the great cataclysms marking Jesus' crucifixion, the righteous were preserved, both those of dominantly Nephite and Lamanite ancestries. (3 Nephi 10:18.) For about two centuries following the Savior's visit the people were wholly united (4 Nephi 17); thus the obliteration of any blood distinction was complete.

Finally, when distinction again arose, it was not along blood lines; those who rejected the Church assumed the name "Lamanites." (4 Nephi 20.) Those who remained faithful were called "Nephites," but by the time of the great battle at Cumorah in 385 A.D., the "Nephites" had apostatized even more completely than the "Lamanites." Even though the "Nephite" nation as such was destroyed, many dissenters saved their lives by joining the "Lamanites." (Moroni 9:24.) Mormon had recorded that the curse and mark of the "Lamanites" had not yet returned but *would* come upon this people because of their wickedness. (Mormon 5:15.)

The "Lamanite" nation, which was preserved, included descendants not only of Laman and Lemuel, but also of Nephi and his righteous brethren. (See Doctrine and Covenants 3:16-20.) Even though this group was less wicked than the "Nephites," still these people would have to repent to enjoy all the blessings the Lord promised them. (2 Nephi 30:3-6.)

Today's Lamanites can be proud of their heritage. Among their ancestors are great Nephite prophets, and righteous Lamanites such as Samuel and the two thousand "sons" of Helaman. The Lord generally uses the name "Lamanite" to refer to these descendants of Lehi. The Lord has promised that "the Lamanites shall blossom as the rose." (Doctrine and Covenants 49:24.) It is the mission of the Latter-day Saints, both Lamanites and non-Lamanites, to be instruments in the hands of the Lord to help this choice people fulfill its great destiny.

Library File Reference: LAMANITES.

WHO ARE THE LAMANITES?

Descendants of Lehi (Manasseh)
Ishmael (Ephraim)

600 B. C.

Falling away of Laman and Lemuel. They are cursed. (2 Nephi 5:20-23.)

Lamanite blood line

Nephite blood line

LAMANITES

NEPHITES

Today's Lamanites are descendants of the original Nephites as well as of the Lamanites. (See article opposite.)

Some Nephites remained behind when Mosiah led the righteous to Zarahemla. (Omni 12, 13.)

Amulon led the wicked priests of Noah. (Mosiah 20:1-5; 23:32-39.)

Apostate followers of Nehor and Amlicites. (Alma 1 and 2.)

Apostate Zoramites. (Alma 31-35.)

More than half of Nephites joined Lamanites. (Helaman 6:2; 7-8, 21.)

Large number of Lamanite converts. People of Ammon. (Alma 23:5; 24:29.)

More than half of Lamanites converted. (Helaman 6:1, 2.)

Righteous Lamanites adopted name "Nephites." (3 Nephi 2:11-16.)

Wicked Nephites and Lamanites combined as Gadianton Robbers. (Helaman 11:24-33.)

1 A. D.

Wicked destroyed at the time of the crucifixion. (3 Nephi 8-10.)

People completely righteous and united as a result of the crucifixion and Jesus' visit. (4 Nephi 17.)

Rebellious adopted the name "Lamanites." (4 Nephi 20.)

Nephite dissenters flee to Lamanites. (Moroni 9:24.)

400 A. D.

Only the people called "Lamanites" remain after Moroni's death.

Nephite nation destroyed in battle at Cumorah. (Mormon 6.)