

are mentioned, there is no tribe of Sam (Jacob 1:13; 4 Nephi 1:35–38). Why? Apparently because when one is numbered with a people, one takes upon oneself the name and identity of that people. Similarly, Gentiles, once numbered with Israel or Lehi, are thereafter identified with their covenant fathers without respect to biological origin. From then on, they too are simply Israel.

Nephi's emphasis on the universal nature of God's love is even more meaningful if written and taught to a people grappling with issues of ethnic and social diversity. "And he inviteth them all to come unto him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; and he remembereth the heathen; and all are alike unto God, both Jew and Gentile" (2 Nephi 26:33). Nephites would understand Jews to be those who came out from Jerusalem, yet the additional reference to Gentiles and heathen would only make sense to a Nephite if there were others in the land.

Likening Isaiah unto the Nephites

If there were others in the land, it would also help explain why many of Nephi's people had difficulty understanding Isaiah, although not all of them did (2 Nephi 25:1–6). Converts who had never lived in the ancient Near East would have lacked the historical and cultural background that made the words of Isaiah "plain" to Nephi. It is also apparent that some Isaiah passages cited by Nephite prophets would make better sense to a Nephite if there were others in the land. Here we will mention just three.

- *Strangers join the house of Israel.* "For the Lord will have mercy on Jacob, and will yet choose Israel, and set them in their own land; and the strangers shall be joined with them, and they shall cleave to the house of Jacob" (2 Nephi 24:1). Such prophecies may quite properly be applied to latter-day readers of the Book of Mormon as we liken the scriptures to ourselves, but they need not refer to us exclusively. How would the Nephites have likened this scripture to their own situation, as their prophets invited them to do? They would no doubt recognize

the great mercy of the Lord in bringing them out from Jerusalem and saving them from destruction, and they would also see the Lord's hand in setting them in a new land of promise where they could establish Zion. Significantly, this prophecy would also suggest to the ancient audience that there were "strangers" in the land who had joined or would join with them in accepting the teachings of Nephi and could be numbered with the house of Jacob.

- *Temples and people.* "And it shall come to pass in the last days, when the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills, and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths; for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (2 Nephi 12:2–3, quoting Isaiah 2:2–3). While there are several ways of reading this passage, the Nephites would likely have thought about their own temple, recently constructed at the direction of Nephi "after the manner of the temple of Solomon" (2 Nephi 5:16). This was the temple at which Jacob taught (Jacob 1:17; 2:11) and likely the one at which Nephi's own teachings to his people and his quotations of Isaiah were presented. Isaiah's reference to "many people" coming up to be taught would evoke the idea of people joining the Nephites and accepting their traditions and beliefs.

- *A confederacy against Zion.* Nephi cites Isaiah's prophecy concerning the alliance of Rezin, king of Syria, and Pekah, king of Israel, against Ahaz, king of Judah (2 Nephi 17–22, quoting Isaiah 7–12). Ephraim, Judah's brother-tribe, has allied itself with a non-Israelite nation (Syria), and they seek to depose Ahaz and replace him with someone of their choosing (2 Nephi 17:1–6, quoting Isaiah 7:1–6). Responding to the crisis and the fears of the king and the people of Judah, Isaiah prophesies that the conspiracy of their enemies "shall not stand, neither shall it come to pass" (2 Nephi 17:7, quoting Isaiah 7:7) and urges Ahaz simply to have faith and be faithful (2 Nephi 17:9, quoting Isaiah 7:9). The application to Nephi's day is plain: In his ambition to gain power and assert his claims to rulership, Laman, leader

of the brother-tribe of “the people who were now called Lamanites” (2 Nephi 5:14), has very possibly, like Pekah of Israel, acquired non-Israelite allies and made war on another ruler of Israelite descent, Nephi, and his people (2 Nephi 5:1–3, 14, 19, 34). Perhaps frightened by the superior numbers of their enemies, the people are counseled to trust in the Lord.

Although, as Sorenson posits, the Book of Mormon may be a lineage history with an accordingly narrow focus, scriptural evidences hinting at the presence of other peoples in the New World are abundant within the Book of Mormon and other scriptures. Many of these passages, in fact, take on a clearer meaning when their wording, content, and context are considered with the possibility in mind that Lehi's family and the Mulekites were merely two groups among many others in the land of promise.

Conclusion

It is true that the assumption that Native Americans are of exclusively Israelite heritage has been around for a number of years. Unfortunately for those who would like to use it to denounce the Book of Mormon, it is neither revelatory nor canonical. Regardless of who may have believed or propounded it in the past or under what circumstances they may have done so, it has never been anything more than an uncanonized, unscriptural assumption.

On the other hand, many Latter-day Saints over the years, including a number of church leaders, have acknowledged the likelihood that before, during, and following the events recounted in the Book of Mormon, the American hemisphere has been visited and inhabited by nations, kindreds, tongues, and peoples not mentioned in the text. They also concede that these groups may have significantly impacted the populations of the Americas genetically, culturally, linguistically, and in many other ways. Latter-day Saint interest in historical and scientific evidence for such migrations began early in the history of the restored church and has not waned appreciably since then.