



The Book of Mormon Joseph Smith Jr. (1830)

The Book of Mormon was published by Joseph Smith Jr., a white farmer in New York. He described the book as “an account of the former inhabitants of this continent, and the source from whence they sprang.” The book relates that around 600 BCE, God led an Israelite patriarch named Lehi, with his household, on a transoceanic journey to a promised land in the Americas that God had designated for Lehi’s descendants. There the group split into two warring factions, one led by Lehi’s righteous son Nephi, the other by Lehi’s wicked son Laman. A few centuries later, the resurrected Jesus visited the land and taught the Nephites and Lamanites his message of salvation. Several generations after that, the Lamanites destroyed the Nephites in a total war. Before being killed, a Nephite named Mormon compiled a history of the two peoples, etched on golden plates, which he then buried for safekeeping. Smith claimed to have discovered and translated Mormon’s record—the Book of Mormon—through divine revelation.

According to statements made in the book itself, the Book of Mormon was intended to corroborate the truth of the Bible, to restore teachings that corrupt churchmen had excised from the Bible, and to bring Lamanites—whom Smith and his mostly white followers equated with indigenous Americans—back to faith in Jesus and to the knowledge of their Israelite ancestry. As the following selections show, the book’s portrayal of indigenous Americans is ambivalent. Lamanites are said to be degenerate, deceitful, and lazy; are cursed with dark skin because of their ancestors’ wickedness; and have been justly “scattered” and “smitten” by white colonists (“Gentiles”). Also, though, Lamanites have an immutable divine right to the land, on which they will one day build the New Jerusalem; they will be instruments of God’s wrath to destroy Gentiles who reject the Book of Mormon’s message; and Gentiles in America who receive Christian salvation will be adopted as Lamanites so as to be adopted into Israel, God’s covenant people.

1. Nephi tells how the Lamanites were cursed with “a skin of blackness”

And it came to pass [that] my father Lehi [...] waxed old, and he died and was buried. And not many days after his death, Laman and Lemuel and the sons of Ishmael were angry with me because of the admonitions of the Lord [which] I, Nephi, was constrained to speak unto them [...] Yea, they did murmur against me, saying, “Our younger brother thinks to rule over us, and we have had much trial because of him; wherefore, now let us slay him, so that we may not be afflicted more because of his words. For we will not have him to be our ruler, for it belongs unto us, who are the elder brethren, to rule over this people.” [...]

And it came to pass that the Lord did warn me that I should depart from them and flee into the wilderness [...] Wherefore, I did take my family; and also Zoram and his family; and Sam, mine elder brother, and his family; and Jacob and Joseph, my younger brethren; and also my sisters, and all those who would go with me. And all those who would go with me were those who believed in the warnings and the revelations of God [...]

And after we had journeyed for the space of many days, we did pitch our tents. [...] And we did observe to keep the judgments, and the statutes, and the commandments of the Lord in all things, according to the law of Moses. And the Lord was with us, and we did prosper exceedingly; for

we did sow seed, and we did reap again in abundance, and we began to raise flocks, and herds, and animals of every kind. [...] And I [...] did make many swords, lest by any means the people who were now called Lamanites should come upon us and destroy us, for I knew their hatred towards me, and my children, and those who were called my people. [...]

And behold, the words of the Lord had been fulfilled unto my brethren [...] which he spake unto me, saying that “inasmuch as they will not hearken unto thy words, they shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord.” [...] And he had caused the cursing to come upon them, yea, even a sore cursing, because of their iniquity. For they had hardened their hearts against him, such that they had become like unto a flint; wherefore, as they were white and exceeding fair and delightsome, so that they might not be enticing unto my people, the Lord God did cause a skin of blackness to come upon them. And thus saith the Lord God: “I will cause that they shall be loathsome unto thy people, save they shall repent of their iniquities. And cursed shall be the seed of him who mixeth with their seed, for they shall be cursed even with the same cursing.” And the Lord spake it, and it was done. And because of their cursing which was upon them, they did become an idle people, full of mischief and subtlety, and did seek in the wilderness for beasts of prey.

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2. An angel shows Nephi, in a vision, the future history of the Lamanites

[Jesus visits the Nephites and Lamanites — The Lamanites destroy the Nephites]

And the angel said unto me, “Look and behold thy seed, and also the seed of thy brethren!” And I looked and beheld the land of promise, and I beheld [...] multitudes gathered together to battle one against the other; and I beheld wars, and rumors of wars, and great slaughters with the sword among my people. And I beheld many generations pass away after the manner of wars and contentions in the land; and I beheld many cities, yea, even that I did not number them.

And it came to pass that I saw a mist of darkness on the face of the land of promise; and I saw lightnings, and I heard thunderings, and earthquakes, and all manner of tumultuous noises. And I saw the earth and the rocks rent, and mountains tumbling into pieces, and the plains of the earth were broken up; and I saw that many cities were sunk, and many were burned with fire [...]

And after these things, the vapor of darkness passed from off the face of the earth, and I saw multitudes who had fallen because of the great and terrible judgments of the Lord. And I saw the heavens open, and the Lamb of God descending out of heaven; and he came down and showed himself unto them. [...]

And the angel said unto me, “Look!” And I looked and beheld three generations pass away in righteousness, and their garments were [...] made white in the blood of the Lamb because of their faith in him. And I also saw many of the fourth generation who passed away in righteousness. [...]

And the angel said unto me, “Behold thy seed, and also the seed of thy brethren!” And I looked and beheld the people of my seed gathered together in multitudes against the seed of my brethren; and they were gathered together to battle. And [...] because of the pride of my seed, and the temptations of the devil, the seed of my brethren did overpower the people of my seed.

And it came to pass that [...] the people of the seed of my brethren [...] went forth in multitudes upon the face of the land [...]; and in wars, and rumors of wars, I saw many generations pass away. And the angel said unto me, “Behold, these shall dwindle in unbelief.” And after they had dwindled in unbelief, they became a dark, and loathsome, and a filthy people, full of idleness and all manner of abominations.

[Gentiles colonize the Lamanites' land]

And the angel spake unto me, saying, “Look!” And I looked and beheld many nations and kingdoms. And the angel said unto me, [...] “These are the nations and kingdoms of the Gentiles.” And I saw, among the nations of the Gentiles, the foundation of a great church. And the angel said unto me, “Behold the foundation of a church which is most abominable above all other churches, which slayeth the saints of God, yea, and tortureth them, and bindeth them down, and yoketh them with a yoke of iron, and bringeth them down into captivity.” [...]

And I looked and beheld many waters, and they divided the Gentiles from the seed of my brethren. And the angel said unto me, “Behold, the wrath of God is upon the seed of thy brethren!” And I beheld a man among the Gentiles, who was separated from the seed of my brethren by the many waters; and the Spirit of God came down and wrought upon the man, and he went forth upon the many waters, even unto the seed of my brethren, who were in the promised land.

And the Spirit of God wrought upon other Gentiles, and they went forth, out of captivity, upon the many waters. And it came to pass that I beheld many multitudes of the Gentiles upon the land of promise; and the wrath of God was upon the seed of my brethren, and they were scattered before the Gentiles and were smitten. And the Spirit of the Lord was upon the Gentiles, and they did prosper and obtain the land for their inheritance; and I beheld that they were white and exceeding fair and beautiful, like unto my people before they were slain.

And the Gentiles who had gone forth out of captivity did humble themselves before the Lord, and the power of the Lord was with them. And their mother Gentiles were gathered together upon the waters, and upon the land also, to battle against them; and [...] the wrath of God was upon all those who were gathered together to battle against them. And I beheld that the Gentiles who had gone out of captivity were delivered, by the power of God, out of the hands of all other nations; and they did prosper in the land.

[Gentiles bring the Bible and the Book of Mormon to the Lamanites]

And I beheld a book, and it was carried forth among them. And the angel [...] said unto me, “The book that thou beholdest is a record of the Jews, which contains the covenants of the Lord which he hath made unto the house of Israel, and it also containeth many of the prophecies of the holy prophets [...]; wherefore, they are of great worth unto the Gentiles.”

And the angel said unto me, “Thou hast beheld that the book proceeded forth from the mouth of a Jew; and when it proceeded forth from the mouth of a Jew, it contained the plainness of the gospel of the Lord, of whom the twelve apostles bear record [...]; wherefore, these things go forth in purity from the Jews unto the Gentiles [...But] after they go forth from the Jews unto the

Gentiles by the hand of the twelve apostles of the Lamb, thou seest the foundation of a great and abominable church [...]; and [...] after the book hath gone forth through the hands of the great and abominable church, there are many plain and precious things taken away from the book, which is the book of the Lamb of God. And after these plain and precious things were taken away, it goeth forth unto all the nations of the Gentiles [...], yea, even across the many waters which thou hast seen, with the Gentiles who have gone forth out of captivity. [And] because of the many plain and precious things which have been taken out of the book [...], an exceeding great many do stumble, yea, insomuch that Satan hath great power over them.

“Nevertheless, thou beholdest that the Gentiles who have gone forth out of captivity have been lifted up by the power of God above all other nations, upon the face of the land that is choice above all other lands—which is the land that the Lord God hath covenanted with thy father that his seed should have for the land of their inheritance; wherefore, thou seest that the Lord God will not suffer that the Gentiles will utterly destroy [...] the seed of thy brethren. Neither will the Lord God suffer that the Gentiles shall forever remain in that awful state of blindness which they are in because of the plain and most precious parts of the gospel of the Lamb which have been kept back by that abominable church [...].”

The angel spake unto me [further], saying, “‘Behold,’ saith the Lamb of God, ‘[...] I will manifest myself unto thy seed, so that they shall write many things which I shall minister unto them, which shall be plain and precious. And after thy seed shall be destroyed and dwindle in unbelief, and also the seed of thy brethren, these things shall be hid up to come forth unto the Gentiles by the gift and power of the Lamb; and in them shall be written my gospel,’ saith the Lamb [...].”

And I beheld [...] that the book of the Lamb of God, which had proceeded forth from the mouth of the Jew, came forth from the Gentiles unto the remnant of the seed of my brethren. And after it had come forth unto them, other books came forth from the Gentiles unto them by the power of the Lamb, unto the convincing of the Gentiles, and the remnant of the seed of my brethren, and also the Jews who were scattered upon all the face of the earth, that the records of the prophets and of the twelve apostles of the Lamb are true.

And the angel spake unto me, saying: “[...]If the Gentiles [...] harden not their hearts against the Lamb of God, they shall be numbered among the seed of thy father, yea, they shall be numbered among the house of Israel; and they shall be a blessed people upon the promised land forever. They shall be no more brought down into captivity, and the house of Israel shall no more be confounded [...].”

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3. While visiting America, Jesus prophesies that Lamanites will receive the Book of Mormon from Gentiles, will destroy unrepentant Gentiles, and will build the New Jerusalem

[V]erily I say unto you that these things which I declare unto you [...] shall be made known unto the Gentiles, so that they may know concerning this my people, who are a remnant of the house of Jacob and who shall be scattered by them [...F]or it is wisdom in the Father that they should be established in this land and be set up as a free people by the power of the Father, so that these

things might come forth [...] from the Gentiles unto your seed, who shall dwindle in unbelief because of iniquity. [And] it behooveth the Father that it should come forth from the Gentiles, so that he may show forth his power unto the Gentiles for this cause: so that the Gentiles, if they will not harden their hearts, may repent and come unto me, and be baptized in my name, and know of the true points of my doctrine, so that they may be numbered among my people, O house of Israel [...]

Therefore, it shall come to pass that whosoever will not believe in my words, [...] which the Father shall [...] bring forth unto the Gentiles, [...] shall be cut off from among my people of the covenant. And my people who are a remnant of Jacob shall be among the Gentiles, yea, in the midst of them, as a lion among the beasts of the forest, as a young lion among the flocks of sheep, who, if he go through, both treadeth down and teareth in pieces, and none can deliver. Their hand shall be lifted up upon their adversaries, and all their enemies shall be cut off. Yea, wo be unto the Gentiles except they repent; for it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Father, that I will cut off thy horses out of the midst of thee, and I will destroy thy chariots, and I will cut off the cities of thy land and throw down all thy strongholds [...] For it shall come to pass, saith the Father, that whosoever at that day will not repent and come unto my beloved Son, them will I cut off from among my people, O house of Israel; and I will execute vengeance and fury upon them even as upon the heathen, such as they have not heard.

But if they will repent, and hearken unto my words, and harden not their hearts, I will establish my church among them, and they shall come in unto the covenant and be numbered among this the remnant of Jacob, unto whom I have given this land for their inheritance. And they shall assist my people, the remnant of Jacob, [...] so that they may build a city, which shall be called the New Jerusalem; and then shall they assist my people, who are scattered upon all the face of the land, so that they may be gathered in unto the New Jerusalem. And then shall the power of heaven come down among them, and I also will be in the midst [...]

Source: Joseph Smith Jr., *The Book of Mormon* (Palmyra, NY: E. B. Grandin, 1830), 26-32, 69, 71-73, 499-501, <https://archive.org/details/bookofmormonacco1830smit>. Free eBook from the Internet Archive.

Grammar, spelling, capitalization, and some phrasing emended based on the revised 1840 edition: Joseph Smith Jr., *The Book of Mormon*, 3rd ed. (Nauvoo, IL: Robinson and Smith, 1840), 27-33, 69, 71-73, 485-487, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.ah4kqx>. Public domain, Google-digitized.

Excerpts edited by John-Charles Duffy. Italicized section headings in square brackets added by Duffy. Frequent emendations have been made by Duffy, beyond those already made in the 1840 edition, for the sake of readability. These include cutting back repetitive or redundant wording; simplifying recursive syntax; relocating modifying phrases within sentences for clarity; converting dangling subordinate clauses into complete sentences; emending some instances of *that* or *which* to *so that*, *who*, etc., for clarity; adjusting paragraph and sentence breaks; and modernizing spelling and punctuation. To reduce textual clutter, such emendations have not been marked with square brackets or ellipses, which are reserved to indicate where more substantive content has been elided. The words *Satan* and *Spirit*, lowercase in both the 1830 and 1840 editions, have been capitalized here for the sake of modernization.

The quotation in the shaded headnote about the Book of Mormon being “an account of the former inhabitants of this continent” comes from an account Smith published in 1842 of the visions that led him to unearth the golden plates. [Joseph Smith Jr.], “History of Joseph Smith (Continued),” *Times and Seasons*, April 15, 1842, 753; digital scan available from the Joseph Smith Papers, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/times-and-seasons-15-april-1842/3>.

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