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Abstract Review of *Prophecies and Promises: The Book of Mormon and the United States of America* (2009), by Bruce H. Porter and Rod L. Meldrum.

LOSING THE REMNANT: THE NEW EXCLUSIVIST “MOVEMENT” AND THE BOOK OF MORMON

Matthew Roper

Review of Bruce H. Porter and Rod L. Meldrum. *Prophecies and Promises: The Book of Mormon and the United States of America*. New York: Digital Legend, 2009. xviii + 239 pp., with appendix. \$24.95 (paperback).

There is a movement going through the church.¹

Bruce H. Porter

The exciting new Heartland Model . . . is causing what has been termed a ‘movement’ within the membership of the Church.²

Rod L. Meldrum

In *Prophecies and Promises*, Bruce H. Porter and Rod L. Meldrum present a narrow interpretation of Book of Mormon teachings about the American land of promise and the remnant of Lehi spoken of in the Book of Mormon. The land of promise, the authors claim, refers exclusively to the United States, while they identify the remnant with contemporary Amerindian peoples of the eastern and mid-western region of the United States. The authors also claim that the events of the Book of Mormon narrative were confined to this “heartland” region—a matter, they assert, made known to Joseph Smith

1. Quoted in Kristen Moulton, “Book of Mormon Geography Stirring Controversy,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, 27 March 2010.

2. Accessed 1 September 2010, <http://www.bookofmormonevidence.org>.

through revelation. For several years the authors have promoted their opinions on this and related topics through firesides, conferences, and tours. They glowingly describe their efforts as having generated a new “movement” in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.³

In this article I will focus on two issues relating to *Prophecies and Promises*. I will first address the land of promise mentioned in the Book of Mormon. Do the prophecies found in that record provide a key to Book of Mormon geography? What is the land of promise? Does it refer to the United States alone, or does it have more general application? Second, I will address the question of the “remnant” in reference to the Book of Mormon and Lehi’s posterity. Does the term signify only one Native American group, or does it refer to all Native Americans? In connection with this issue, I will review teachings of Latter-day Saint leaders bearing on the identity of the American remnant of Lehi’s posterity.

I. Promised Lands

Confusing Parts with the Whole

The authors’ discussion of an American promised land confuses the parts with the whole (pp. 36–40). The Book of Mormon, they note, speaks of some events that have occurred or will occur in what is now the United States. Therefore, they conclude, *only* the United States can be the promised land spoken of in the Book of Mormon. There are, they observe, scriptures that speak of the remnant of Lehi in the United States, or in the lands that eventually became the United States; therefore, they reason, *only* those Native Americans in the United States are related to ancient Lamanites. Their argumentation is faulty since prophecies of events that occur in one part of the land do not exclude the fulfillment of other prophecies elsewhere. In the Bible,

3. “‘Very few people out there fully grasp the magnitude of this movement and the powerful influence that it is having and the sweeping nature of its message,’ wrote one prominent supporter. ‘It will sweep the church and most LDS will not even understand what happened until it’s past.’” Quoted in Michael De Groot, “The Fight Over Book of Mormon Geography,” *Deseret News*, 27 May 2010.

Israel obtained a land of promise. “And the Lord gave unto Israel all the land which he sware to give unto their fathers; and they possessed it, and dwelt therein” (Joshua 21:43). That land was a land of promise because of the oath and covenant the Lord made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Deuteronomy 1:8; 34:1–4; 1 Chronicles 16:5–18; Psalm 105:6–11). Hence it has been called a “land of *promise*” (Hebrews 11:9). Similarly, Moroni tells us that the land of the Jaredites was a “land of promise” because of what the Lord had “sworn” unto the brother of Jared (Ether 2:8). The biblical land of promise was Israel’s land of inheritance. “Unto thee will I give the land of Canaan, the lot of your inheritance” (Psalm 105:11). This refers to the entire land itself, but parts of that land were likewise considered and called lands of inheritance within that greater land of promise. Both the parts and the whole are precious lands; hence the prophecies can speak of “*lands of promise*” in the Lord’s land (2 Nephi 24:2). There are in this sense many finite lands of promise in the larger land of promise. This is why the prophet Jacob can speak of the house of Israel in the latter days being “restored to the true church and fold of God; when they shall be gathered home to the lands of their inheritance, and shall be established in all their lands of promise” (2 Nephi 9:2). The covenant the Lord made with Israel concerns their “restoration to the lands of their inheritance” (2 Nephi 6:11; 3 Nephi 29:1). Each part of the land of promise is both *the* land and *a* land since they are parts of the whole. My wife promised the family a banana cream pie. She made it for us on Thanksgiving. The next day I said, “I ate *the* best pie in the world.” In fact, *I* ate only *one piece* of the entire pie, but it was still *the* best pie in the world. The parts were no less good because they were not the whole. Similarly, one can speak of the promised land even if one knows only a part of it.

Porter and Meldrum provide a useful chart of thirty-six prophecies and promises, listing passages that they believe show that the American land of promise can refer only to the United States (pp. 80–82). The chart is, however, selective, and many of the passages are inadequately addressed by the authors. In fact, the passages, insofar as they are intended to refer exclusively to the United States, do

not demonstrate what the authors think they do. Most of them make better sense when understood to include the United States *and* other lands and nations of the Americas as well. Some passages indeed refer to events that occurred, commenced, or will happen in the future within the United States. These events include the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, the restoration of the gospel, the organization of the church, and the commencement of the gathering of Israel. Future events include the building of the New Jerusalem. It is erroneous, however, to conclude that such references confine the American land of promise to the United States.

One prophecy that deserves more attention than the authors give it is Nephi's vision of the promised land (1 Nephi 11–14). Nephi saw the future events that would eventually culminate in the latter-day fulfillment of the Lord's covenants concerning the seed of Lehi in the land of promise.

And I looked and beheld a man among the Gentiles, who was separated from the seed of my brethren by the many waters; and I beheld the Spirit of God, that it 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.
(1 Nephi 13:12)

Latter-day Saints have almost universally understood this verse to refer to Columbus, a reading with which the authors agree (p. 64). Columbus, however, never visited the land now known as the United States and never encountered the people who lived there. During his first and second voyages, Columbus encountered the islands and people of the Bahamas and the Caribbean, including Cuba and Hispaniola.⁴ On his third voyage he sailed to northern South America to what is now known as Trinidad and Venezuela. During his fourth and final voyage, he encountered Mayan traders off the coast of Honduras and

4. "All the peoples of the Caribbean came originally by canoe from the continent of South America along the chain of islands known as the Antilles, or the West Indies, via Trinidad and Tobago." Hugh Thomas, *Rivers of Gold: The Rise of the Spanish Empire, from Columbus to Magellan* (New York: Random House, 2005), 110.

from there continued southward along the coast of Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama.⁵ In his prophecy, Nephi calls those people the seed of his brethren the Lamanites and calls their land “the promised land.” Nephi says that the man went forth “*unto* the seed of my brethren” and that those people were “*in* the promised land” (1 Nephi 13:12). This suggests that the “promised land” of Nephi’s vision must include not just the United States or North America, but parts if not all of Central and South America as well.

And it came to pass that I beheld the Spirit of God, that it wrought upon *other Gentiles; and they went forth out of captivity*, upon the many waters. And it came pass that I beheld *many multitudes of the Gentiles* upon the land of promise; and I beheld the wrath of God that it was upon the seed of my brethren; and they were scattered before *the Gentiles* and were smitten. And I beheld the Spirit of the Lord, that it was upon *the Gentiles*, and they did prosper and obtain the land for their inheritance; and I beheld that they were white, and exceedingly fair and beautiful, like unto my people before they were slain. (1 Nephi 13:13–15)

Nephi’s reference to American “Gentiles,” according to Porter and Meldrum, can refer only to Gentiles in the United States: “The Gentiles prophesied in the scriptures above cannot include the Spanish military conquests involved in the rapine and plunder of the peoples of Mesoamerica” (p. 69). The authors reach this conclusion by assuming that the “many multitudes of the Gentiles” are the same Gentiles who “went forth out of captivity.” This is not, however, evident from what Nephi says. Again, if the man seen by Nephi in verse 12 is identified as Columbus, then the promised land of Nephi’s vision must include more than North America. A more accurate interpretation of verses 14–15 is that the Gentiles who went forth out of captivity were a subgroup of the “Gentiles” or “many multitudes of the Gentiles” upon the

5. Justin Winsor, *Christopher Columbus* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1892), 372–476; and Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Great Explorers: The European Discovery of America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 475–547.

promised land who would afflict and scatter Lehi's seed and obtain power over the land. This interpretation is consistent with the teachings of latter-day prophets. At an area conference in 1977, President Spencer W. Kimball taught the Saints in Mexico, "Columbus discovered America in 1492. After him came many colonizers and explorers. The Puritans and Pilgrims came from Europe. . . . For four hundred years the Lamanites were scattered throughout America. Cortes came here, and Pizarro went to South America. They had a great influence upon the people. They scattered them and persecuted them."⁶

Nephi continues:

Nevertheless, thou beholdest that the Gentiles who have gone forth out of captivity, and have been lifted up by the power of God above all other nations, upon the face of the land which 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. (1 Nephi 13:30)

Nephi sees that the group of Gentiles who go forth "out of captivity" are "lifted up by the power of God above all *other nations, upon the face of the land.*" Thus there must be other nations upon the land over whom those Gentiles might be so lifted. The land "choice above all other lands" must be more extensive than that possessed by any one group or nation. Clearly, the one group mentioned in verses 13, 16–18 is blessed above others in some way. If we understand this to refer to the United States, it makes sense. In what way was the United States blessed above other nations? It was there that an environment of religious liberty was prepared in which the Book of Mormon could eventually be brought forth, the Church of Jesus Christ could be established, and other aspects of the restoration of the gospel could commence. Nephi's vision, however, did not end there but was expanded to include all Gentiles upon the land to whom the blessings of the Book of Mormon and the restoration would eventually be taken, who

6. Spencer W. Kimball, *Official Reports of the Monterrey Mexico Area Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, held in Monterrey, Mexico, February 19 and 20, 1977* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1978), 2.

would, like that first group, have the opportunity to receive the gospel and help gather and be numbered with the remnant of Lehi's seed. This is an expansive view.

And it shall come to pass, that if the *Gentiles* shall hearken unto the Lamb of God in that day that he shall manifest himself unto them in word, and also in power, in very deed, unto the taking away of their stumbling blocks—and 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. (1 Nephi 14:1–2)

Other Book of Mormon prophecies indicate that the teachings concerning the land of promise apply to all nations there, not one nation only:

- “I will bring to light all their secrets and abominations, unto *every nation* that shall hereafter possess the land” (Alma 37:25).
- “And he said: Thus saith the Lord God—Cursed shall be the land, yea, this land, unto *every nation, kindred, tongue, and people*, unto destruction, which do wickedly, when they are fully ripe; and as I have said so shall it be; for this is the cursing and the blessing of God upon the land, for the Lord cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance” (Alma 45:16).
- “And now, we can behold the decrees of God concerning this land, that it is a land of promise; and *whatsoever nation* shall possess it shall serve God, or they shall be swept off when the fulness of his wrath shall come upon them. And the fulness of his wrath cometh upon them when they are ripened in iniquity” (Ether 2:9).
- “Behold, this is a choice land, and *whatsoever nation* shall possess it shall be free from bondage, and from captivity, and from all other nations under heaven, if they will but serve the

God of the land, who is Jesus Christ, who hath been manifested by the things which we have written” (Ether 2:12).

- “And *whatsoever nation* shall uphold such secret combinations, to get power and gain, until they shall spread over the nation, behold, they shall be destroyed; for the Lord will not suffer that the blood of his saints, which shall be shed by them, shall always cry unto him from the ground for vengeance upon them and yet he avenge them not” (Ether 8:22).

The repeated references to “every nation” and “whatsoever nation” also suggest that there are more nations than one upon the promised land to whom the covenant applies.

A Land of Liberty

Jesus spoke of the role that latter-day Gentiles would play in providing an environment in which the seed of Lehi would be able to hear, receive, and obey the gospel.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, when these things shall be made known unto them [the Gentiles] of the Father, and shall come forth of the Father, from them unto you; for 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, that these things might come forth from them unto a remnant of your seed, that the covenant of the Father may be fulfilled which he hath covenanted with his people, O house of Israel. (3 Nephi 21:3–4)

The authors argue that this passage refers specifically and only to one nation—the United States (pp. 46–48). Certainly the United States provided an essential environment of religious liberty. However, in this passage the Savior speaks of “Gentiles,” not a “nation,” so the prophecy of Gentiles being “set up as a free people by the power of the Father” may be seen as extending beyond the United States. I read it as Jesus referring not only to the Gentiles becoming politically free, but also to their *establishment* in the land of promise. Latter-day scriptures often

use variants of the word *establish* in connection with building up the Church of Jesus Christ and Zion, which occurs when the Saints receive and obey covenants (3 Nephi 21:22; D&C 33:5; Jeremiah 30:20). So the words of Jesus likely refer to the organization and spread of his church in all of the Americas, not the United States alone, where the restoration began. President Spencer W. Kimball emphasized that this work is to extend beyond the borders of the United States:

One of the first efforts of the Prophet Joseph Smith was to take the gospel to the Lamanites. Continuing until now, we have preached the gospel to the Lamanites. There are probably sixty million Lamanites in America. They are all happy for the gospel as it comes to them. . . . In many natural resources, the land of America is rich and will produce abundantly. This is for you, for us, and for all the good people who live upon the land of America. Protection against enemies has been promised. In all the Americas, neither kings nor emperors will combine to take the land. Great promises are given us, if we live the commandments God has given us.⁷

I was introduced to this broader perspective while serving as a missionary in Argentina many years ago. Growing up in the United States, I had always viewed 1 Nephi 13 in reference to the pilgrims and puritans and the War of Independence between the American British colonies and their “mother Gentiles” from Great Britain. On 9 July 1987 I attended a church activity where the branch president spoke movingly to the Saints gathered there of his gratitude for the blessings of freedom that allowed him and his fellow Argentine Saints to worship freely as members of the church, a blessing that they had not always fully enjoyed. Reading from 1 Nephi 13, he noted the same things that I had, but he also spoke of San Martín and Bolívar, whom he saw as men likewise raised up and blessed among the American Gentiles and who also helped their countrymen gain independence from *their* “mother Gentiles”—that is, from Spain, not Great Britain. I found that these Saints could see their blessings as a fulfillment of

7. Kimball, *Official Reports of the Monterrey Mexico Area Conference*, 3.

Nephi's prophecy as much as I could rejoice over those blessings from my own heritage. In an address delivered in 1940, President J. Reuben Clark Jr. of the First Presidency taught:

Clearly, if the people of this land, this whole land of America, all of it, must serve Jesus Christ, "the God of the land," or be swept off, and this is the very gist of all and every blessing promised for, and every judgment uttered against this land, then God must so provide that men in all the Americas could serve Him. *The era of the Gentiles must be an era of freedom of worship throughout the Hemisphere else Zion could not be established. This was God's plan and must be brought about.*⁸

The Lord's plan was to establish an environment of liberty throughout the Americas in which the gospel might be taught and eventually flourish.

Then in the early decades of the last century, both before and after Joseph's First Vision, God moved upon the other peoples, one by one, to assert and win their independence, and as fast as they won it, they one by one—I am speaking with historical accuracy—set up their new governmental systems in the framework of our Constitution, sometimes in the first instance, practically copying it word for word. Different juridical traditions have led them to develop their governmental systems along diverging lines from ours, but in great principles their fundamental document is a replica of our God-given instrument. Thus the hemisphere—Zion in its full area—was becoming "a land of liberty."⁹

In 1979 Ezra Taft Benson, speaking to the Saints in Bolivia, also encouraged this understanding:

God raised up wise leaders among *your* progenitors which afforded Latin American countries political freedom and in-

8. J. Reuben Clark Jr., "America's Divine Destiny," in *Messages of the First Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1975), 6:108.

9. Clark, "America's Divine Destiny," 6:109.

dependence. I only mention the names of a few whom God raised up to accomplish His holy and sovereign purposes: *Jose de San Martin, Bernardo O'Higgins, and Simon Bolivar*. These were some of the “*founding fathers*” of your continent.

I believe it was very significant that when independence came to the countries of South America, governments were established on constitutional principles—some patterned after the Constitution of the United States. I believe *this was a very necessary step which preceded the preaching of the gospel in South America*.¹⁰

A year later, addressing priesthood brethren in Puerto Rico, he repeated this theme:

The Lord recognized that truth will only prosper where religious freedom exists. Religious freedom cannot be fully enjoyed without a full measure of political freedom. *So before the gospel was restored, wise and inspired men in North, Central, and South America were raised up who proclaimed the sovereign truth that all men—not just the privileged, the rich, or the rulers—but all men have divine rights. Among these rights are life, liberty (which includes our freedom to worship), and right to property.* (See D&C 101:79)¹¹

Porter and Meldrum cite a talk given by President Benson in 1987 at the two hundredth anniversary of the signing of the Constitution of the United States.¹² “These prophetic statements made by President Benson in General Conference,” according to Porter and Meldrum, “clearly teach that the Promised Land of the Book of Mormon *can only be* the United States of America” (p. 65, emphasis added). But President Benson taught no such thing. During his address, he spoke

10. Ezra Taft Benson, “The Righteous Need Not Fear,” address given in La Paz, Bolivia, 10–18 January 1979, in *The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson: Thirteenth President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1998), 695, emphasis added.

11. Ezra Taft Benson, address given in Puerto Rico, 12–17 December 1980, in *Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson*, 661, emphasis added.

12. Ezra Taft Benson, “Our Divine Constitution,” *Ensign*, November 1987, 4–7.

of the importance of the Constitution of the United States and emphasized how important it was for Latter-day Saints in the United States to defend and support it. He also cited revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants that affirm that this document “belongs to *all* mankind” (D&C 98:5) and “should be maintained for the rights and protection of *all* flesh, according to just and holy principles” (D&C 101:77, emphasis by President Benson). As such, the establishment of the United States under constitutional principles was “the necessary great prologue leading to the restoration of the gospel.”¹³ Even a cursory review of the teachings of Ezra Taft Benson shows that he taught that Book of Mormon prophecies regarding the land apply to *all the Americas* and not the United States alone. For example, in a general conference address in October 1944, he affirmed that “to the peoples who should inhabit *this blessed land of the Americas, the Western Hemisphere*, an ancient prophet uttered this significant promise and solemn warning: ‘Behold, this is a choice land, and whatsoever nation shall possess it shall be free from bondage, and from captivity, and from all other nations under heaven if they will but serve the God of the land, who is Jesus Christ’ [Ether 2:12].”¹⁴

In April 1955 Elder Benson spoke of a recent visit to eleven Latin American countries: “I found they liked to be referred to as Americans. . . . I found they were very happy to learn that to the Latter-day Saints *the Promised Land, the land of Zion, includes all of North and South America.*”¹⁵ In 1960 he stated that “this is a choice land—*all of America—choice above all others.*”¹⁶ In the October 1962 general conference, he spoke of “this choice land of *the Americas.*”¹⁷ He also taught, “When a Book of Mormon prophet referred to the nations of the world, *this hemisphere was designated as ‘good’* (Jacob 5:25–26).”¹⁸ At an area conference held in Mexico City in 1972, he stated that

13. Benson, “Our Divine Constitution,” 4.

14. Ezra Taft Benson, in Conference Report, October 1944, 128, emphasis added.

15. Ezra Taft Benson, in Conference Report, April 1955, 48, emphasis added.

16. Ezra Taft Benson, in Conference Report, April 1960, 99, emphasis added.

17. Ezra Taft Benson, in Conference Report, October 1962, 15, emphasis added.

18. Ezra Taft Benson, Puerto Rico priesthood leadership meeting, 12–17 December 1980, in *Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson*, 123, emphasis added.

it should be comforting to all Latter-day Saints that the Lord has given great promises in that sacred volume, the Book of Mormon, promises that should give us comfort and assurance on the condition that we live the gospel. How I wish that every person in *my country*, in *your country*, in *all of the Americas on this entire continent* would read the Book of Mormon, and in it *the prophetic history of these lands* and the clear warnings for the future.

Read what Father Lehi said in 2 Nephi 1:6–8. Read what his son Jacob said in 2 Nephi 10:10–14. Read also 1 Nephi 22:17. . . . But we must all keep in mind the warning of the Brother of Jared in the second chapter of Ether, verses 9 and 10. . . . Then in the twelfth verse. My beloved brethren and sisters, these things are true.¹⁹

Significantly, he also cited 1 Nephi 22:17, 2 Nephi 1:6–8, 2 Nephi 10:10–14, and Ether 2:9–12 as applying not just to the United States but to all of the Americas.

Other church leaders have also taught that the covenant promises found in the Book of Mormon relating to the land of promise are hemispheric in scope and are not confined to the United States. Brigham Young taught that “the land of Joseph is the land of Zion; and it takes North and South America to make the land of Joseph.”²⁰ Elder George F. Richards testified in 1922 that “the land of North and South America is a very much favored portion of our Father’s footstool, and he has declared with his own mouth that it is a land of promise—a chosen land—above all other lands.”²¹ “I am very thankful,” said President Heber J. Grant in 1937, “that I am not in the least pessimistic or at all alarmed about the work of the Lord. I am a firm believer that this country, both North and South America, is the choice land of the

19. Ezra Taft Benson, *Official Report of the First Mexico and Central America Area General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, held in the National Auditorium Chapultepec Park in Mexico City, Mexico, August 25, 26, 27, 1972* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1972), 131, emphasis added.

20. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 6:296 (15 August 1852).

21. George F. Richards, in Conference Report, October 1922, 80.

world, a land choice above all other lands, according to the words of the prophets in the Book of Mormon. I believe in its final destiny. I believe that there is an over-ruling Providence protecting this country. I believe that this is the only place in the United States of America where the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints could have been established and continued without the most terrible persecution, worse than anything we ever had.²²

Like Ezra Taft Benson, President Grant recognized both the United States and all of the lands of North and South America as parts of the land of promise. In 1940 President George Albert Smith spoke to the Saints in the October general conference. “I recommend,” he counseled,

that not only you Latter-day Saints read the Book of Mormon, but that our Father’s other children read it. They will find that it contains, in addition to what the Bible has told us about the world, what the Lord has said about *this Western Hemisphere*—that *this should be a land of liberty unto the Gentiles* and that no king should dwell upon this land, but that He, the God of Heaven, would be our King and would fortify this land against all the nations, that this should be a land of peace and happiness, on condition that we would honor the God of this earth, the Father of us all. The factor controlling this promise is that we must keep the commandments of our Heavenly Father or it cannot be realized.²³

In 1943 David O. McKay taught that “America, and this includes Canada and the Southern Republics, was a choice land when the Jaredites left the land of Shinar approximately four thousand years ago. So was it fourteen hundred years later when Lehi and his colony formed the nucleus of a nation, prospered on the bounty of the country, and after a thousand years perished because of transgression. America was a great land when the stately Indian chiefs ruled their tribes, which thrived from the Behring Sea in the north to the Panama

22. Heber J. Grant, in Conference Report, October 1937, 97–98.

23. George Albert Smith, in Conference Report, October 1940, 108.

and the towering Andes in the South.”²⁴ Again, the open-ended hemispheric application of the Book of Mormon’s prophecies and promises seems more plausible than, and stands in stark contrast to, Porter and Meldrum’s narrow application.

II. “Looking Beyond the Mark” and Losing the Remnant

Book of Mormon prophets speak of the latter-day “remnant” of Lehi’s people. Does that term signify only one Native American tribe or group of tribes, or does it refer to all Native Americans? Porter and Meldrum embrace an exclusivist view, appealing to recent DNA studies of Native American groups as evidence that only those Native Americans currently found in the central and eastern United States are that remnant. The authors, however, have grossly misunderstood and misrepresented these studies.²⁵

By erroneously equating some of the findings on mtDNA with the broader question of ancestry, Porter and Meldrum encourage the false expectation that those DNA studies should be able to verify or refute the Israelite ancestry of contemporary Amerindian populations. This false expectation fosters the mistaken conclusion that any true contemporary remnants of Book of Mormon people must be shown to carry an identifiable genetic marker indicative of such ancestry or they are not Lehite; hence Porter and Meldrum conclude that *only* those tribes within the confines of the United States who carry the haplotype X in their mtDNA are Lamanite. This restrictive interpretation of the remnant of Lehi, one that excludes most Amerindians in the American hemisphere, is said by the authors to support the teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith—but Joseph Smith and subsequent church leaders never held this restrictive view.

The earliest Mormon missionaries visited Indians in New York, Ohio, and Missouri. Joseph Smith, Porter and Meldrum argue, sent

24. David O McKay, in Conference Report, April 1943, 17.

25. Gregory L. Smith, “Often in Error, Seldom in Doubt: Rod Meldrum and Book of Mormon DNA,” *FARMS Review* 22/1 (2010): 17–161; and Ugo A. Perego, “The Book of Mormon and the Origin of Native Americans from a Maternally Inherited DNA Standpoint,” *FARMS Review* 22/1 (2010): 191–227.

missionaries to the Indians on the borders of Missouri, not to Central or South America:

It must be realized and accepted that the Lord knew, and therefore Joseph knew, where the Lamanites were located and that a remnant was left in fulfillment of the Prophecies and Promises that are revealed in the Book of Mormon. These first missionaries to the Lamanites were sent to where the Lord commanded and meant them to go. There is no indication in Church History of dissatisfaction by the Lord in their mission, nor is there any reason to think that they did not preach to the “Lamanites” as directed by the Lord. (p. 97)

Porter and Meldrum are not merely arguing that some North American Indians are Lamanites, a matter that Latter-day Saints would not dispute. Rather, they mean that North American Indians are Lamanites while other Native Americans are not. “It was 117 years later that the gospel was taken to Guatemala. The promises of the Savior at Bountiful to those who gathered there emphatically stated that when the Gentiles received ‘these things’ [the Book of Mormon] they would then be taken to the Lamanite remnant” (p. 97). This delay is supposed to be further evidence that Guatemalans and other descendants of pre-Columbian peoples in Central and South America are not really Lamanites, and also that those who claim that the prophecies about Lehi’s seed in the land of promise are hemispheric in scope are wrong. Those who favor a Mesoamerican setting for the Book of Mormon are deceived by “the allure and enticement of Mesoamerican ruins and a desire for physical proof [which] seems to determine the interpretation and interpolation of the words of the Prophet Joseph Smith. It is regrettable that so many cannot simply take Joseph Smith at his word” (p. 102). The authors admit the *faint* possibility that Native Americans in Central and South America are descendants of the lost tribes of Israel (pp. 189–91) or some other unknown nation (pp. 192–93); but to their way of thinking it is essentially impossible that those south of U.S. borders could be descended from Lehi (p. 161).

It is ironic that a book concerning Lehi's children entitled *Prophecies and Promises* would exclude the vast majority of Amerindians who are Latter-day Saints from those very promises. Porter and Meldrum heap scorn and ridicule upon those who have a more expansive view of the seed of Lehi, which would include peoples throughout the American hemisphere and the isles of the sea. They speak with disdain of Latter-day Saints for whom a Mesoamerican setting makes sense, but in doing so they tar the Saints and their prophets with the same brush, for no prophet restricted Lehite ancestry or promises as they do.

The First Lamanite Mission

In the early months following the publication of the Book of Mormon and the restoration of the Church of Jesus Christ in the latter days, the Lord commanded the Prophet Joseph Smith to send missionaries to the "borders by the Lamanites" (D&C 28:9), which the early Saints understood to mean the Indian territories adjoining the western borders of Missouri and eastern Kansas. (By Joseph Smith's day the term *Indian*, as Webster's 1828 dictionary shows, included Amerindians of the United States but was also a general designation "particularly applied to *any* native of the American continent.")²⁶ Previously, several eastern tribes had been persuaded to relocate in this region. This first mission to the Lamanites, in which these missionaries presented the Book of Mormon to Native American groups for the first time, signaled the commencement of the great work in question (see 3 Nephi 21:1–3, 7).

The lack of initial success (there were apparently no conversions, and the missionaries did not build up the church among the Lamanites at this time) may have signaled to the Saints that the work would be much longer and harder than they initially anticipated.

On 14 February 1831 Oliver Cowdery wrote to William Clark, the superintendent of Indian affairs, requesting permission to visit the

26. Noah Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language* (1828), s.v. "Indian," emphasis added.

local tribes in the Indian Territories.²⁷ Richard Cummins, an Indian agent, wrote to Clark on 15 February informing him of the missionaries' intentions: "I am informed that they intend to apply to you for permission to go among the Indians, if you refuse, then *they will go to the Rocky Mountains, but . . . they will be with the Indians.*"²⁸ In a letter to church leaders written from Missouri, Oliver Cowdery reported news of the Navajo Indians in what would eventually become the southwestern United States. "Why I mention this tribe is because I feel under obligations to communicate to my brethren any information concerning the Lamanites that I meet with in my labors and travels; believing, as I do, that much is expected from me in the cause of our Lord."²⁹ This indicates that while the early missionaries wanted to visit Indian peoples along the Missouri border, they did not see their mission, nor the revelations and prophecies regarding the Lamanites, as being confined to that region.

Wilford Woodruff in later years recalled a meeting in Kirtland, Ohio, in 1834, shortly after his own conversion. Joseph Smith prophesied of the future growth of the church and explained that once the Saints were able to gather to the Rocky Mountains in significant strength and numbers, they then would be enabled to establish the church and the gospel among the Lamanites:

He said "it is only a little handful of Priesthood you see here tonight, but this Church will fill North and South America—it will fill the world." Among other things he said, "it will fill the Rocky Mountains. There will [b]e tens of thousands of Latter-day Saints who will be gathered in the Rocky Mountains and there they will *open the door for the establishing of the Gospel among the Lamanites, who will receive the Gospel and their endowments and the blessings of God.*"³⁰

27. Oliver Cowdery to William Clark, 14 February 1831, reprinted in LeLand Gentry, "Light on the 'Mission to the Lamanites,'" *BYU Studies* 36/2 (1996–97): 233.

28. Richard W. Cummins to William Clark, 15 February 1831, reprinted in Gentry, "Light on the 'Mission to the Lamanites,'" 234, emphasis added.

29. Oliver Cowdery to "Our Dearly Beloved brethren," Kaw Township, Missouri, 7 May 1831, reprinted in *History of the Church*, 1:182.

30. Wilford Woodruff, in Conference Report, April 1898, 57, emphasis added.

The Prophet Joseph did not live to see this take place, but it is clear that the early efforts to take the gospel to the Lamanites on the borders of Missouri were thought to be only the beginning of their labors. The Prophet and the Saints looked well beyond the heartland region of the United States to the West and the South. “Joseph,” explained Brigham Young, “contemplated the move [to the Rocky Mountains] for years before it took place, but he could not get here, for there was a watch placed upon him continually to see that he had no communication with the Indians.”³¹ After the Saints’ removal to Iowa and Illinois, the Prophet attempted to foster good relations with local Indians, but these efforts again did not result in the establishment of the church among them. Continually harassed by his enemies and limited in what he could publicly say and do so as not to arouse suspicion and further persecution, the Prophet was unable to actively pursue direct missionary efforts to the Lamanites, although he laid the foundation for the work of the restoration that would lead to the gathering and redemption of Lehi’s descendants.³² “Could we have preached to the Lamanites, if we had staid in Nauvoo?” Brigham Young, in 1853, gave an answer: “No, we could not; but the people have driven us to a place where we can do much more good, than we could have accomplished by remaining in Nauvoo; they have driven us into the midst of the Lamanites, where we can preach the Gospel unto them.”³³

The 1845 Proclamation of the Twelve Apostles

In a revelation given to the Prophet Joseph Smith on 19 January 1841, now known as section 124 of the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord commanded that a proclamation be written to all the kings and rulers of the world. “Let it be written in the spirit of meekness and by

31. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 4:41 (31 August 1856).

32. Ronald K. Esplin, “A Place Prepared: Joseph, Brigham, and the Quest for Promised Refuge in the West,” in *Window of Faith: Latter-day Saint Perspectives on World History*, ed. Roy A. Prete (Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2005), 71–95; and Ronald W. Walker, “Seeking the ‘Remnant’: The Native American During the Joseph Smith Period,” *Journal of Mormon History* 19/1 (Spring 1993): 1–33.

33. Brigham Young, 9 October 1853, *Millennial Star*, 25 March 1854, 187–89, accessed 30 August 2010, <http://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/u?/MStar,5938>.

the power of the Holy Ghost, which shall be in you at the time of the writing of the same” (D&C 124:4). Although several aborted attempts were made, this commandment could not be fulfilled until a year after the death of Joseph Smith with the 1845 “Proclamation of the Twelve Apostles.”³⁴ In it they state:

We also bear testimony that the “Indians” (so called) of North and South America are a remnant of the tribes of Israel; as is now made manifest by the discovery and revelation of their ancient oracles and records.

And that they are about to be gathered, civilized, and made one nation in this glorious land.

They will also come to the knowledge of their forefathers, and of the fulness of the gospel; and they will embrace it, and become a righteous branch of the house of Israel.³⁵

This 1845 proclamation is doctrinally significant in that it represents the united testimony of the Twelve Apostles, who were at the time the presiding quorum of the church, and it is clear that they viewed the Native Americans of both North and South America as the remnant of the people spoken of in the Book of Mormon.

Subsequent Lamanite Missions

In 1851, seven years after the death of Joseph Smith, Parley P. Pratt, the apostle presiding over the Pacific Mission, traveled to South America, where he labored for nearly six months in Chile. His autobiography shows that he and other church leaders considered the native peoples of South America to be the seed of Lehi. In a letter to President Brigham Young, Pratt wrote:

34. Lyndon W. Cook, *The Revelations of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Provo, UT: Seventy’s Mission Bookstore, 1981), 243.

35. *Proclamation of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. To All the Kings of the World; To the President of the United States of America; To the Governors of the several States; And to the Rulers and People of all Nations* (New York: 6 April 1845), 2–3, emphasis added.

Should Peru sustain her liberties, a field is opened in the heart of Spanish America, and in the largest, best informed and most influential city and nation of South America, for the Bible, the Book of Mormon, and the fulness of the Gospel to be introduced.

Four-fifths, or perhaps nine-tenths of the vast population of Peru, as well as of most other countries of Spanish America, are of the blood of Lehi.³⁶

Even though he was unable to continue his labors there for more than six months due to limited resources and political instability in the region, the apostle was able to gain knowledge and experience that would be useful to future missionaries. Pratt was undaunted by his lack of immediate success: “I feel to labor with patience, and to take time to prepare the way before me and before those who will, in due time, be sent unto them in power; *knowing that God, who has said certain things, will cause those things to be performed in due time.*”³⁷ With this end in mind, he learned Spanish and began to encourage other Saints in California and elsewhere to do the same. Pratt served faithfully as an apostle until his death in 1857.

Early efforts to take the gospel to the Native American peoples of the American Southwest are well known. Latter-day Saint settlements along the Little Colorado in northern Arizona and New Mexico for years were considered part of the Lamanite mission. In addition to preaching to Native American peoples of the Southwest, these early colonies helped prepare the way for further efforts to carry the message of the restoration southward to Mexico and Central America. In 1883 apostle Brigham Young Jr. told the Saints living in settlements along the Little Colorado, “The time is now come to preach to the Lamanites. The leaders of the Church have in view the 5,000,000 of

36. Parley P. Pratt to Brigham Young, 13 March 1852, in Parley P. Pratt, *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 368, emphasis added.

37. Parley P. Pratt to Brigham Young, 13 March 1852, in Pratt, *Autobiography*, 369, emphasis added.

Lamanites located in Mexico.”³⁸ Toward this end, Mormon settlements were eventually established in northern Mexico during the late nineteenth century. Efforts to take the gospel to Latin America were hindered for a time by political instability, limited resources, and persecution of the church by the United States government.³⁹ Church leaders, however, did not forget their mission to carry the gospel to all the children of Lehi. Addressing the Saints in 1923, Elder Melvin J. Ballard testified:

For this very purpose, therefore, were these plates preserved, to bring to pass the redemption of the children of father Lehi, known in North and South America, in Central America, and in Mexico, as the American Indians and some of the natives upon the isles of the sea. . . . I wish to bear witness to you that their redemption shall come, and that the day of their redemption is near at hand, when these thousands, yea these millions of Lamanites on this Western Continent who have the blood of Lehi in their veins, or of his descendants, shall be touched by the power of the Almighty, and the day of their redemption, when it does come, will be one of power.⁴⁰

In 1925, seventy-four years after Parley Pratt’s earlier mission, Elder Ballard was sent by the First Presidency of the church to South America to dedicate that land for the preaching of the gospel. On Christmas Day in 1925, Elder Ballard and several other brethren met together at a park in Buenos Aires, Argentina, where he offered that prayer:

And we also pray that we may see the beginning of the fulfillment of thy promises contained in the Book of Mormon to the Indian of this land, who is a descendant of Lehi, millions of whom reside in this country, who have long been downtrod-

38. Minutes of Eastern Arizona Stake Conferences, 1883–1885, 25 March 1883, in Charles W. Peterson, *Take Up Your Mission: Mormon Colonizing Along the Little Colorado River 1870–1900* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1973), 216.

39. F. LaMond Tullis, *Mormons in Mexico* (Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 1987).

40. Melvin J. Ballard, in Conference Report, October 1923, 28–29.

den, and have borne many afflictions and suffered because of sin and transgression, even as the prophets of the Book of Mormon did foretell. But thou didst inspire these prophets to promise their descendants that thou wouldst bring forth, in the latter days, the records of their fathers; and that when these records were presented to their children, they would begin to believe, and when they would do this, thy favor would return to them; and then thou wouldst remember the promises made to their fathers, that if their descendants would repent and receive the gospel, they would begin to be prospered and blessed on the land and would again become a white and delightsome people. O Father, let thy Spirit work upon them, and manifest the truth of these things unto them, as we, and thy servants who shall follow us, shall bear witness of thy precious promises unto this branch of the house of Israel.⁴¹

Elder Ballard wrote that in this meeting

each of the brethren spoke briefly concerning their mission here, and of their willingness to do their best to establish this mission; of their perfect love for one another, and for the work of the Lord. They blessed one another, and felt that, as the result of opening this mission, many Europeans in this land would receive the gospel, but that ultimately the great import of the mission would be to the Indians, the descendants of father Lehi, and that this was a momentous day. A wonderful spirit was present, which visibly affected us all, and our joy expressed in tears was manifest.⁴²

At a subsequent meeting, Elder Ballard prophesied that

work will go slowly for a time just as an oak grows slowly from an acorn—not shoot up in a day as does the sunflower that grows quickly and thus dies. Thousands will join here; it will

41. Melvin J. Ballard, "Prayer Dedicating the Lands of South America to the Preaching of the Gospel," *Improvement Era*, April 1926, 575–76.

42. Ballard, "Prayer Dedicating the Lands of South America," 577.

be divided into more than one mission, and will be one of the strongest in the Church. The work here is the smallest that it will ever be. The day will come when the Lamanites here will get the chance. The South American Mission is to be a power in the Church.⁴³

Five years after offering this dedicatory prayer, Elder Ballard continued to speak of the important work to be done among Native American peoples and the role they were to play in the fulfillment of latter-day prophecy.

Many years ago while doing missionary work in Montana I was given to understand by the whispering of the Spirit, as I wondered why the Lamanites had not been brought into the Church at an earlier period—the Lord made known to me that there were many things that he had to do for them before they were prepared to accept the Gospel message. I believe that the things the Lord had in mind are being accomplished and that their day dawns also. I was impressed with it on that memorable Christmas morning in 1925 in South America when Brother Wells, Brother Pratt and I knelt in that beautiful grove of weeping willow trees on the banks of the Rio de la Plata and dedicated the land for the spreading of the Gospel, and the Spirit of the Almighty was upon us. We were made to know that the Gospel message would find thousands who had the blood of Israel in their veins in South America. Then we saw the day when it would go to the fifteen million of Father Lehi's children who are in that land, and that the shackles, politically, would be broken, the day of retribution would come, the day of deliverance, and that they would come into a full realization of the promises of the Almighty. For, for that very purpose, we read in the third section of the book of Doctrine

43. J. Vernon Sharp Diary, 4 July 1926, in A. Theodore Tuttle, "South America . . . Land of Prophecy and Promise," *Improvement Era*, May 1963, 358.

and Covenants, was the Book of Mormon given, to bring them, the Lamanites, to a knowledge of the truth.⁴⁴

When J. Reuben Clark was appointed United States Ambassador to Mexico, the First Presidency “blessed him that he might ‘do great good among the descendants of Lehi in that country.’ The Presidency also declared that ‘there is perhaps no other place in all the world that should be of the same interest and importance to the Latter-day Saints as Mexico, where the majority of the people are of Lamanitish descent.’”⁴⁵ While serving as the senior apostle over Lamanite affairs for the church, Elder Boyd K. Packer spoke at the proceedings of the annual Indian Week at Brigham Young University. While acknowledging the Book of Mormon heritage of North American Indians, he reminded his audience that to the south there are “millions who have an equal claim on that destiny spoken of in the revelations.” He contrasted the relatively few North American groups that could claim this heritage (then about 1.3 million), with the far more numerous people of Mexico, Yucatán, Guatemala, and South America. “In all . . . there are seventy-five million six hundred thousand who share in your birthright, of whom thirty-one million nine hundred ninety thousand are pure Indians.”⁴⁶

Spencer W. Kimball repeatedly spoke of the relationship of Amerindian peoples to Book of Mormon prophecy:

44. Melvin J. Ballard, in Conference Report, April 1930, 156. “To the descendants of Father Lehi, who have suffered so long, for whom we received the precious record of the Book of Mormon,—it did not come to us for our sake, it was committed into our hands to hold in custody for these millions who are in Mexico, Central America and South America—their day must come. It is coming, and I see the hand of God preparing for their deliverance. But you, you must lead the way.” Melvin J. Ballard, in Conference Report, April 1938, 44.

45. Blessing given to J. Reuben Clark Jr., 6 November 1930, First Presidency Letterbooks, LDS Church Archives, cited in *Unto Every Nation: Gospel Light Reaches Every Land*, ed. Donald Q. Cannon and Richard O. Cowan (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 249.

46. Boyd K. Packer, from an untitled address to an Indian student assembly during BYU Indian Week, February 1979, cited in Armand L. Mauss, *All Abraham’s Children: Changing Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 96.

I should like to address my remarks to you, our kinsmen of the isles of the sea and the Americas. Millions of you have blood relatively unmixed with gentile nations. Columbus called you “Indians,” thinking he had reached the East Indies. Millions of you are descendants of Spaniards and Indians, and are termed “*mestizos*,” and are called after your countries, for instance: Mexicans in Mexico; Guatemalans in Guatemala; Chilianos in Chile.

You Polynesians of the Pacific are called Samoan or Maori, Tahitian or Hawaiian, according to your islands. There are probably sixty million of you on the two continents and on the Pacific Islands, all related by blood ties.

The Lord calls you “*Lamanites*.”⁴⁷

The term *Lamanite* includes all Indians and Indian mixtures, such as the Polynesians, the Guatemalans, the Peruvians, as well as the Sioux, the Apache, the Mohawk, the Navajo, and others. It is a large group of great people. . . . There are no blessings, of all the imaginable ones, to which you are not entitled—you, the Lamanites—when you are righteous. You are of royal blood, the children of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and Lehi.⁴⁸

In 1977, as president of the church, he spoke of revelation he had received years before about the future of Lehi’s people in Mexico and elsewhere:

I was in Arizona at the temple. As I thought and prayed and studied, I had what I thought was a dream, maybe a vision. There were many Mexican people in the temple on that same day. As I looked into the future, I saw that the Lamanites were going to grow and develop.⁴⁹

47. Spencer W. Kimball, “To You . . . Our Kinsmen,” *Improvement Era*, December 1959, 938.

48. Spencer W. Kimball, “Of Royal Blood,” *Ensign*, July 1971, 7, 10.

49. Kimball, *Official Reports of the Monterrey Mexico Area Conference*, 3.

When I was in Mexico in 1946, I was dreaming for the people of Mexico. I had a dream of your progress and development. Now, this is precisely what I dreamed; this was my vision for the people of the Lamanites. I got up from my bed and wrote my dream. Maybe it was a vision rather than a dream. This is what I wrote:

As I looked into the future, I saw the Lamanites from the isles of the sea and the Americas rise to a great destiny. I saw great numbers of Lamanites and Nephites in beautiful homes that have all the comforts that science can afford.

I could see you children of Lehi with your herds and flocks on a thousand hills. . . .

I saw the Church growing with rapid strides, and I saw them organized in wards and stakes. (I think there was not a single stake or ward in all of Mexico when I dreamed this dream.) I saw a temple of God and expect to see it filled with men and women and young people.⁵⁰

More recently, President Gordon B. Hinckley spoke of visiting with Native American Saints in a conference in Window Rock, Arizona:

It was difficult to hold back the tears as we mingled with these sons and daughters of Father Lehi. In my imagination I have seen him weeping for his progeny who for so long have walked in poverty and pain.

50. Spencer W. Kimball, *Official Reports of the Mexico City Area Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, held in the Sports Palace in Mexico City, Mexico, February 13, 1977* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: 1978), 31. The promises concerning the descendants of Lehi are not confined to those on the lands of North and South America either, but include many who are upon the isles of the sea. Elder Mark E. Peterson taught, “As Latter-day Saints we have always believed that the Polynesians are descendants of Lehi and blood relatives of the American Indians, despite the contrary theories of other men” (in Conference Report, April 1962, 112). Elder Howard W. Hunter likewise stated: “It has been the position of the Church that Polynesians are related to the American Indians as descendants of Father Lehi, having migrated to the Pacific from America. . . . Our belief in this regard is scriptural (see Alma 63:4–10)” (Howard W. Hunter, “Islands of the Pacific,” Beneficial Life Insurance Company Convention, Waikokloa, Hawaii, 19 July 1984; reprinted in *The Teachings of Howard W. Hunter*, ed. Clyde J. Williams [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1997], 57).

But the shackles of darkness are falling. Some of them now are men and women of achievement. They have partaken of the fruits of education. They have come to know and love the gospel. They have become pure and delightful.

But there is so much more to do among them. Alcohol and drugs literally destroy many of them. We must do more to help. As I look to the future, I envision the Spirit of the Lord being poured out upon these people. Education will unlock the door of opportunity, and the gospel will bring new light and understanding into their lives.

We have been with thousands of these wonderful people in South America. . . . Our missionaries are working with these good people, bringing the light of the everlasting gospel into their lives. . . .

These are strong and wonderful Latter-day Saints in whose hearts beat the same testimonies of Jesus and this work as beat in yours.⁵¹

In 1996 Elder Henry B. Eyring spoke of the importance of parents sharing their testimonies of the truth with their children. He spoke of meeting missionaries from South America and being “nearly overwhelmed with the confirmation that these children of Father Lehi and of Sariah were there in the Lord’s service because our Heavenly Father honors his promises to families. To nearly his last breath, Lehi taught and testified and tried to bless his children. Terrible tragedy came among his descendants when they rejected his testimony, the testimonies of other prophets, and of the scriptures. But in the eyes and faces of those missionaries I felt confirmation that God has kept His promises to reach out to Lehi’s covenant children and that He will reach out to ours.”⁵² Elder C. Scott Grow, who recently served in the Mexico North Area Presidency, noted the remarkable growth of the church in that country over the last several decades:

51. Gordon B. Hinckley, in Conference Report, October 1997, 91.

52. Henry B. Eyring, in Conference Report, April 1996, 88.

The Mexico of today is much different from that of 36 years ago. . . . Mexico has 200 stakes and a million members of the Church. Many stake and ward leaders are highly educated and financially secure. Thousands of young men and women from Mexico are serving full-time missions.

Truly the vision seen by Lehi and interpreted by Nephi is coming to pass. “And at that day shall the remnant of *our seed* know that they are of the *house of Israel*, and that *they* are the *covenant* people of the Lord; and then shall they *know* and come to the knowledge of their *forefathers*, and also to the knowledge of the *gospel* of their Redeemer, which was ministered unto their *fathers by him*; wherefore, they shall come to the knowledge of their *Redeemer* [1 Nephi 15:14].”

Truly the people of Mexico and other Latin American countries are among the descendants of prophets. The Book of Mormon is their inheritance. Jesus Christ did minister unto their fathers.

After his resurrection, Jesus Christ descended out of heaven, clothed in a white robe, and stood in the midst of their ancestors here in the Americas.⁵³

The evidence demonstrates that the teaching that the remnant of Lehi is found throughout the Americas was not just a matter of personal opinion. Many of these apostles and prophets spoke and testified of what the Lord had revealed to them about the subject.

The Covenant People of the Lord

One of the great promises of the restoration is that the Lord would again make known sacred gospel covenants to Lehi’s seed. In this light it is instructive to read the inspired dedicatory prayers for temples built in North, Central, and South America. Some extracts (ordered from north to south) follow.

53. C. Scott Grow, in Conference Report, October 2005, 34.

Cardston Alberta Temple

We beseech Thee, O Lord, that Thou wilt stay the hand of the destroyer among the *descendants of Lehi, who reside in this land*, and give unto them increasing virility and more abundant health, that they may not perish as a people, but that from this time forth they may increase in numbers and in strength and in influence, that all the great and glorious promises made concerning the *descendants of Lehi*, may be fulfilled in them; that they may grow in vigor of body and of mind, and above all in love for Thee and Thy Son, and increase in diligence and in faithfulness in keeping the commandments which have come to them through the gospel of Jesus Christ, and that many of them may yet have the privilege of entering this holy house and receiving ordinances for themselves and their departed ancestors.

We pray Thee, O Father, to bless this land that it may be fruitful, that it may yield abundantly, and that all who dwell hereon may be prospered in righteousness.⁵⁴

Mesa Arizona Temple

We beseech Thee, O Lord, that Thou wilt stay the hand of the destroyer among the *descendants of Lehi who reside in this land* and give unto them increasing virility and more abundant health, that they may not perish as a people but that from this time forth they may increase in numbers and in strength and in influence, that all the great and glorious promises made concerning the *descendants of Lehi* may be fulfilled in them; that they may grow in vigor of body and of mind, and above all in love for Thee and Thy Son, and increase in diligence and in faithfulness in keeping the commandments which have come to them through the gospel of Jesus Christ, and that many of them may have the privilege of entering this

54. Heber J. Grant, dedicatory prayer for the Cardston Alberta Temple, 26–29 August 1923, emphasis added.

holy house and receiving ordinances for themselves and their departed ancestors.⁵⁵

Thou didst acknowledge the role of *the Lamanite*, especially in this temple, and numerous of the sons and daughters of Lehi have found in these sacred precincts peace, knowledge and solace to their souls.

Through this nearly half century millions of people have seen and have been caused to wonder and deliberate on the sacred purposes of such a structure. Through these gates and doors, by these sparkling pools, people have walked and loved and gloried. They have wept with joy. They have watched the shrubs and trees grow from spindling plantings to maturity, covered with green verdure and golden fruit to bring joy and gladness. . . .

We are grateful, our Father, that in these years have come to this temple numerous of *Thy beloved Indian people* of many tribes in their newly discovered way of life. *Many children of Lehi have traveled long distances from other lands at great expense and sacrifice, especially in the borders of old Mexico*, and numerous families have been welded together for eternity. . . .

We are grateful for the preservation of the sacred records from which the Book of Mormon came to the *Lamanites* and to us with all its glorious untrammelled truths, to show to the House of Israel “. . . that they may know the covenants of the Lord . . . and also to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God.” . . .

Our Father in heaven, our hearts go out to the *Lamanites*, Thy chosen of Israel. Give them listening ears and understanding hearts. Let them believe that they may commune with Thee and rid themselves of all “other gods” and superstitions and fears; let them grow mighty in Thy cause. Bless them that they may know Thy covenants, that they may believe the

55. Heber J. Grant, dedicatory prayer for the Mesa Arizona Temple, 23–26 October 1927, emphasis added.

gospel and rely upon the mercies of Thy Son, Jesus Christ, and be glorified through faith in His name, and that through their repentance they may be exalted.⁵⁶

San Diego California Temple

This temple will be used by many of the *sons and daughters of Father Lehi*. We thank thee for their faithfulness. We thank thee for this day when thou art remembering thine ancient covenant in behalf of these thy children, from whose eyes the shackles of darkness are now falling. Bless the posterity of Lehi, we pray thee. Lift from their weary shoulders the burdens of the past. Grant unto those who walk in faith an enlarged understanding of things divine as well as blessings of temporal peace and prosperity.⁵⁷

Snowflake Arizona Temple

We are grateful that this Thy house will be available to *the sons and daughters of Lehi who live nearby*. Let the scales of darkness fall from their eyes and bring a fulfillment of the ancient promises made concerning them. May this house become a hallowed sanctuary for many of these, our brothers and sisters.⁵⁸

Colonia Juárez Chihuahua México Temple

Bless Thy Saints that they may continue to live here without molestation. May they live in peace and security. May they be prospered as they cultivate their farms and pursue their vocations. May the *sons and daughters of father Lehi* grow

56. Spencer W. Kimball, rededicatory prayer for the Mesa Arizona Temple, 15–16 April 1975, emphasis added.

57. Gordon B. Hinckley, dedicatory prayer for the San Diego California Temple, 25–30 April 1993, emphasis added.

58. Gordon B. Hinckley, dedicatory prayer for the Snowflake Arizona Temple, 3 March 2002, emphasis added.

in strength and in fulfillment of the ancient promises made concerning them. May there be constant peace between the cultures and may they dwell together with love and respect one for another.⁵⁹

México City México Temple

Bless thy Saints in *this great land and those from other lands who will use this temple. Most have in their veins the blood of Father Lehi.* Thou hast kept Thine ancient promise. Many thousands “that walked in darkness have seen a great light.”⁶⁰

Villahermosa México Temple

May Thy eternal purposes concerning *the sons and daughters of Lehi* be realized in this sacred house. May every blessing of the eternal gospel be poured out upon them, and may the suffering of the centuries be softened through the beneficence of Thy loving care.⁶¹

Tuxtla Gutiérrez México Temple

We invoke Thy blessings upon *this nation of Mexico where so many of the sons and daughters of Father Lehi dwell. Bless these Thy children.* Lift them out of the depths of poverty. Bring new light and understanding into their minds. Cause them to rejoice at Thy watchcare over them. May there be food upon their tables and clothing on their backs, shelters over their heads, and all that which their hearts can desire in righteousness. As they pay their tithes and offerings, open the windows

59. Gordon B. Hinckley, dedicatory prayer for the Colonia Juárez Chihuahua México Temple, 6–7 March 1999, emphasis added.

60. Gordon B. Hinckley, dedicatory prayer for the México City México Temple, 2–4 December 1983, emphasis added.

61. Thomas S. Monson, dedicatory prayer for the Villahermosa México Temple, 21 May 2000, emphasis added.

of heaven and shower blessings upon them according to Thine ancient promise spoken by Malachi.⁶²

Guatemala City Guatemala Temple

Thou kind and gracious Father, our hearts swell with gratitude for Thy remembrance of the *sons and daughters of Lehi*, the many generations of our fathers and mothers who suffered so greatly and who walked for so long in darkness. Thou hast heard their cries and seen their tears. Now there will be opened to them the gates of salvation and eternal life.⁶³

Lima Peru Temple

We are particularly mindful this day of *the sons and daughters of Lehi*. They have known so much of suffering and sorrow in their many generations. They have walked in darkness and servitude. Now Thou hast touched them by the light of the everlasting gospel. The shackles of darkness are falling from their eyes as they embrace the truths of Thy great work. Surely *Father Lehi has wept with sorrow over his posterity*. Surely he weeps today with gladness, for in this holy house there will be exercised the fulness of the priesthood to the blessing, not only of those of this and future generations, but also to the blessing of those of previous generations.⁶⁴

Cochabamba Bolivia Temple

We remember before Thee the *sons and daughters of Father Lehi*. Wilt Thou keep Thine ancient promises in their behalf. Lift from their shoulders the burdens of poverty and cause

62. James E. Faust, dedicatory prayer for the Tuxtla Gutiérrez México Temple, 12 March 2000, emphasis added.

63. Gordon B. Hinckley, dedicatory prayer for the Guatemala City Guatemala Temple, 14–16 December 1984, emphasis added.

64. Gordon B. Hinckley, dedicatory prayer for the Lima Peru Temple, 10–12 January 1986, emphasis added.

the shackles of darkness to fall from their eyes. May they rise to the glories of the past. May they recognize their Redeemer and be faithful and true Saints of the Most High. May they seek learning out of the best books (see D&C 88:118). May the enlightenment of education bring new and wonderful opportunities into their lives.⁶⁵

Buenos Aires Argentina Temple

Wilt Thou, our Father, continue to bless the seed of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and likewise the *descendants of Lehi and Nephi*, that the promises contained in the Holy Bible and in the Book of Mormon may be brought to fulfillment and our homes and families blessed abundantly.⁶⁶

Hamilton New Zealand Temple

We express gratitude that to these fertile Islands Thou didst guide *descendants of Father Lehi*, and hast enabled them to prosper, to develop and to become associated in history with leading and influential nations among mankind.⁶⁷

Laie Hawaii Temple

We thank Thee for raising up Thy servant Elder J. H. Napela, that devoted Hawaiian, who assisted Thy servant President Cannon in the translation of the Book of Mormon, which is the sacred history of the Nephites, the Lamanites, and the Jaredites. We thank Thee that the plates containing the Book of Mormon were preserved so that they could be translated, and that Thy words to the Prophet Joseph Smith might be fulfilled; namely,

65. Gordon B. Hinckley, dedicatory prayer for the Cochabamba Bolivia Temple, 30 April 2000, emphasis added.

66. Thomas S. Monson, dedicatory prayer for the Buenos Aires Argentina Temple, 17–19 January 1986, emphasis added.

67. David O. McKay, dedicatory prayer for the Hamilton New Zealand Temple, 20–22 April 1958, emphasis added.

“That the Lamanites might come to the knowledge of their fathers, and that they might know the promises of the Lord, that they may believe the gospel and rely upon the merits of Jesus Christ, and be glorified through faith in His name, and that through their repentance they might be saved.”

We thank Thee, *that thousands and tens of thousands of the descendants of Lehi, in this favored land*, have come to the knowledge of the gospel, many of whom have endured faithfully to the end of their lives. We thank Thee, our Father and our God, that those who are living and who have embraced the gospel are now to have the privilege of entering into this holy house, and laboring for the salvation of the souls of their ancestors.”⁶⁸

A “Movement” to What?

Those who may not closely follow the miracle that is the growth of the Church of Jesus Christ in the latter days may be unaware that there are almost as many operating temples in Mexico as there are in Utah or any other nation in the world, a fact that cannot be insignificant in terms of what the Latter-day Saint prophets and apostles have told us. Speaking to the Saints in Venezuela in 1999, President Gordon B. Hinckley gave an additional hint of what the future yet holds:

Where there are now hundreds of thousands, there will be millions and our people will be recognized for the goodness of their lives and they will be respected and honored and upheld. We shall build meetinghouses, more and more of them to accommodate their needs, and we shall build temples in which they may receive their sacred ordinances and extend those blessings to those who have gone beyond the veil of death.⁶⁹

68. Heber J. Grant, dedicatory prayer for the Laie Hawaii Temple, 27–30 November 1919, emphasis added.

69. “President Hinckley Urges More Missionary Effort in Venezuela,” *Church News*, 14 August 1999, 3.

Reflecting upon the tragic history of Native American peoples and the blessing and promises of the restoration, can one read such words without rejoicing? Somehow, the authors manage it: “The nations of Central and South America *do not* and *cannot* fulfill the prophecies, nor can they attain the promises that are declared in the Book of Mormon” (p. 89, emphasis added). The authors’ erroneous conclusions on the nature of DNA studies lead them to exclude most people of pre-Columbian origins from the promises of Father Lehi and thereby discount what Latter-day Saint prophets and apostles have consistently taught. If the peoples of Central and South America “do not and cannot fulfill the prophecies, nor can they attain the promises that are declared in the Book of Mormon,” then what is one to make of the declarations and teachings of these apostles and prophets and other church leaders to the contrary? Some statements by church leaders might conceivably be interpreted as personal opinion. Others, however, such as the 1845 Proclamation of the Twelve, inspired dedicatory prayers, and personal testimonies of revelation through church leaders are more difficult to dismiss. In fact, such a dismissal seems entirely unjustified, but this is where the authors’ chain of faulty and dogmatic assumptions will lead to if accepted. These implications are not lost on their readers. On a blog hosted by Rod Meldrum, one supporter recently wrote:

The church has been in Mexico and Central America for over 50 years (longer in some areas), I don’t see the “promises for a geographical area” stated in the Book of Mormon being fulfilled in that country. . . . Spencer W. Kimball probably was the most influential person in changing the setting from the USA to south of the border. He once said the “choice land” included all the Western Hemisphere and all the islands before Asia. And *it seems like our current leaders will remain silent on this issue because it potentially could offend many Western Hemisphere members. It would seem like they were misled by*

*people meaning well who wanted inclusion for them. . . . But I'm with Mr. Meldrum here.*⁷⁰

I find such comments disconcerting. “Whatever else it is,” writes one observer, “the Heartland movement looks like a ripple of nativism, a twitch of insecurity among Americans in a globalizing faith.” Echoing Porter and Meldrum, the writer also speaks of it as “a swelling movement within the Church.”⁷¹ Perhaps, but if it is a “movement,” it is clearly a movement *away from* the teachings of Joseph Smith and Latter-day Saint prophets and apostles, for whom the promises and prophecies have historically been an expansive and open-ended matter. Unlike Book of Mormon geography, an issue on which the church takes no position, the identity of the American remnant of Jacob *is* a matter about which Latter-day Saint prophets and apostles appear to have expressed no uncertainty. The diversity of Native American ancestors makes it unreasonable to expect that contemporary DNA studies might prove or disprove the prophetic ancestry of Lehi’s people. Attempts to do so are unwise and ill grounded and reflect a misunderstanding of what those studies were intended and not intended to do.

70. Comment by Jeff H., 11 September 2008 at 6:54 pm, emphasis added, accessed 1 September 2010, <http://bookofmormonevidenceblog.wordpress.com/2008/09/04/initial-response-to-fairs-reviews-of-this-research/#comments>.

71. Seth Perry, “Here Be Nephites,” *Sightings*, University of Chicago Divinity School, 29 April 2010.