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Taking the Gospel to the Lamanites: Doctrinal Foundations for Establishing  
The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Mexico

Matthew G. Geilman

A thesis submitted to the faculty of  
Brigham Young University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

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## ABSTRACT

### Taking the Gospel to the Lamanites: Doctrinal Foundations for Establishing The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Mexico

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This thesis is a study about the influence of the Book of Mormon message to the Lamanites upon the establishment of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Mexico, primarily focusing upon the years 1875-1950. Several important events, people, and publications from the first seventy-five years of the Church's history in Mexico are evaluated as historical case studies in order to examine the extent to which the message to the Lamanites influenced the beginnings of the Latter-day Saints there. These case studies include the first mission to Mexico in 1875, early publications in Spanish, the dedication of Mexico by Apostle Moses Thatcher, the presidency of Rey L. Pratt, and the Third Convention.

Though this thesis provides pertinent historical background and details, as well as analysis of key primary sources and documents, its main purpose and contribution is its focus on the theme of the Lamanites, within the context of early Latter-day Saint history in Mexico.

Keywords: Mexico, Lamanites, Book of Mormon, Moses Thatcher, Rey L. Pratt, missionary work

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

In 1996, while addressing the full-time missionaries of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Veracruz, Mexico, President Gordon B. Hinckley remarked, “Each of you is a part of the miracle that is Mormonism in Mexico. Never forget it. Never forget it.”<sup>1</sup> The Church has experienced phenomenal growth in Mexico, with membership exceeding one million.<sup>2</sup> The growth, however, becomes even more significant when taken in the context of the beginnings of the Church there. As noted in the *Ensign*, one of the Church’s official magazines, “many members bear testimony that the growth has come as fulfillment of prophecy or in answer to the prayers of the righteous.”<sup>3</sup>

The story of the Latter-day Saints in Mexico is one that is rich, not only in history, but in scriptural and prophetic underpinnings. The Book of Mormon, a volume of Latter-day Saint scripture written anciently in the Americas, and later translated by Joseph Smith, contains a number of teachings, promises, and prophecies regarding the Americas and the descendants of the people whose history the book records.<sup>4</sup> Since the publication of the Book of Mormon, the Latter-day Saints have felt a deep obligation to take the message of the gospel to the descendants

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<sup>1</sup> Gordon B. Hinckley, “Veracruz, Mexico, Missionary Meeting, January 27, 1996,” *Discourses of President Gordon B. Hinckley, Volume 1: 1995-1999* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2005), 301.

<sup>2</sup> Only two nations outside the United States have more than one million Church members: Mexico and Brazil. See *Deseret News 2011 Church Almanac*, 185-187. To put this number into context, the entire membership of the Church did not reach one million members until 1947 during the presidency of George Albert Smith (eighth president of the Church).

<sup>3</sup> Don L. Searle, “One Million in Mexico,” *Ensign*, July 2004, 35.

<sup>4</sup> Chapter 2 of this thesis will address these Book of Mormon teachings in detail.

of the people described within its pages (often designated simply as “Lamanites”).<sup>5</sup> Initially these efforts were directed principally to the Native Americans of North America, but eventually expanded to include Latin America. The theme of the promises made to the Lamanites, as taught in the Book of Mormon, became the context in which The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints began missionary work in Mexico.

### **The First Mission to the Lamanites**

In October 1830, roughly six months after the Book of Mormon was published and the Church officially organized, four missionaries—Parley P. Pratt, Oliver Cowdery, Peter Whitmer, Jun., and Ziba Peterson—received a calling to go “among the Lamanites” to preach the gospel (D&C 32:2). The section heading for this revelation in the Doctrine and Covenants<sup>6</sup> succinctly states, “great interest and desires were felt by the elders respecting the Lamanites, of whose predicted blessings the Church had learned from the Book of Mormon” (see section heading, D&C 32).

The missionaries traveled from New York to the Missouri frontier, preaching along the way to the “Catteraugus tribe, near Buffalo” and the “Wyandot tribe, near Sandusky.”<sup>7</sup> A recent

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<sup>5</sup> According to the Book of Mormon, Lehi and his family (including his son Laman, progenitor of the Lamanites) traveled from Jerusalem to the Americas soon after 600 B.C. Two major civilizations developed from Lehi’s family: the Nephites and the Lamanites. After centuries of war between the two groups, the Nephite civilization was destroyed, leaving behind only the “Lamanites,” thus the term is used in modern times to describe the descendants of the people within the Book of Mormon. “Children of Lehi” or “Lehites” are also used.

<sup>6</sup> The Doctrine and Covenants is Latter-day Saint scripture, comprised of numerous latter-day revelations canonized by the Church.

<sup>7</sup> James B. Allen and Glen M. Leonard, *The Story of the Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1976), 63.



convert, Frederick G. Williams, joined them in Ohio on their journey. Upon reaching Jackson County, Missouri, they entered Indian Territory and taught among the Shawnee and the Delaware Indians. “Other Christian missionaries, however, quickly began to complain about their activities, which seemed to be having an effect upon the Delaware, and federal Indian agents ordered them to leave.”<sup>8</sup> Parley P. Pratt, one of the missionaries in the company recorded: “Thus ended our first Indian Mission, in which we had preached the gospel in its fullness, and distributed the record of their forefathers among three tribes . . . We trust that at some future day, when the servants of God go forth in power to the remnant of Joseph, some precious seed will be found growing in their hearts, which was sown by us in that early day.”<sup>9</sup>

This first effort to bring the message of the Book of Mormon to the Lamanites was not fruitful with regards to baptizing converts, but “it did have a significant impact on the subsequent history of the Church. It not only introduced the gospel for the first time to this remnant of the house of Israel, but it created an awareness of how important these people were in the eyes of the Lord.”<sup>10</sup>

Ultimately, the Saints awaited the fulfillment of ancient and modern prophecy, when the “Lamanites [would] blossom as the rose” (D&C 49:24). This would happen in years to come, in part among the American Indians, but more significantly among the inhabitants of Latin America.

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<sup>8</sup> Summary of mission described by Allen and Leonard, *The Story of the Latter-day Saints*, 63. For more details see Parley P. Pratt, *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*. Edited by his son, Parley P. Pratt, Revised and Enhanced by Scot and Maurine Proctor (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 2000), 61-66.

<sup>9</sup> Pratt, *Autobiography*, 66.

<sup>10</sup> *Church History in the Fullness of Times*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints), 87.

## Looking Southward

The concept of who the Lamanites were began to expand beyond the United States even during the Prophet Joseph Smith's lifetime. While the Church was headquartered in Nauvoo, discoveries of ancient cities in Latin America, such as those made popular by the writings of John Lloyd Stephens, not only excited the Saints and validated their faith in the Book of Mormon, but also helped to emphasize the Lamanite heritage of the inhabitants of Latin America.<sup>11</sup>

The desire to preach the gospel to the Lamanite population of Latin America continued during the early years of Brigham Young's presidency. In 1849, Parley P. Pratt (at this time an Apostle of the Church) began preparing himself and studying the Spanish language so that he could fulfill a mission to Chile. "[Elder Pratt] believed, as did a number of early Church leaders, that the Book of Mormon group under the direction of Lehi had landed on the coast of Chile."<sup>12</sup>

His six-month mission to Chile, from the fall of 1851 through the spring of 1852, was challenging and, like his first mission to the Lamanites of North America, bore little visible fruit.<sup>13</sup> "Language deficiency, cultural shock and isolation, personal tragedies, the political

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<sup>11</sup> Gordon Irving, "Mormonism and Latin America: A Preliminary Historical Survey," Task Papers in LDS History 10, November 1976, 3, Historical Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah. Excerpts from John Lloyd Stephens's publications were reproduced in Church newspapers during the Nauvoo period. See "Incidents of Travel in Central America," *Times and Seasons* 3, no. 22, September 15, 1842. For additional discussion on John Lloyd Stephens, and early excitement about ancient ruins in Latin America see, Terryl L. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture that Launched a New World Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 99-106.

<sup>12</sup> Delbert Palmer and Mark L. Grover, "Hoping to Establish a Presence: Parley P. Pratt's 1851 Mission to Chile." *BYU Studies* 38, no. 4 (1999), 118.

<sup>13</sup> See Elder Pratt's own account of the mission in his autobiography, chapters 48-50.

turmoil in the country, and the grip of tradition on the Chileans combined to thwart the attempt.”<sup>14</sup> Although the Chilean mission was not markedly successful, it showed that even shortly after the Saints arrived in the Salt Lake Valley, Church leaders felt a deep interest in taking the gospel to Latin America. The difficulties Elder Pratt faced with the Spanish language, as well as the lack of receptiveness among the people due to their strong Catholic ties, perhaps explain why Brigham Young waited so many years before sending missionaries again into a Latin American country. The timing and circumstance had to be right in order for missionary work to succeed there.

In 1875, twenty-four years after Elder Pratt’s mission to Chile, the first missionaries were called to Mexico, and then in 1879, Apostle Moses Thatcher dedicated the land for the preaching of the gospel, officially taking the Church into Latin America.<sup>15</sup>

### **Purpose of this Thesis**

This thesis will specifically examine and evaluate the extent to which the Book of Mormon message to the Lamanites influenced the establishment of The Church of Jesus Christ

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<sup>14</sup> *Mormons in Mexico: Dynamics of Faith and Culture* (Logan: Utah State University Press), 7. For a detailed discussion of Elder Pratt’s mission see Palmer and Grover, “Hoping to Establish a Presence,” 115-138.

<sup>15</sup> Mexico experienced a wide variety of changes from 1855-1876 that literally opened the doorway for missionaries to enter the country. During these years, the Liberal Party succeeded in bringing about Reform Laws, which ultimately took political power away from the Catholic Church and laid the groundwork for a new constitution in 1857. In addition, the presidencies of Benito Juárez, Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada, and Porfirio Díaz, led the way to foreign investment and colonization in Mexico as a means for economic growth and modernization. Ultimately, it was *La Reforma* that created a climate in Mexico that would enable missionary success and future colonization by the Latter-day Saints. See Michael Meyer and William Sherman, *The Course of Mexican History*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 376-381; and Tullis, *Mormons in Mexico*, 15-17.

of Latter-day Saints in Mexico, focusing on several key events and time periods as historical case studies.<sup>16</sup> Through analyzing scriptures, journals, publications, and other records of early Latter-day Saint missionaries in Mexico, this thesis will address a number of questions: What do the Book of Mormon and other Latter-day Saint scriptures teach regarding the Lamanites? How have Church leaders, and other significant figures in the Church's history in Mexico, applied these teachings to Mexico (particularly in the early years)? How did these teachings impact the early history of the Church in Mexico? Did this emphasis continue into the twentieth century?

Many dedicated and capable scholars have researched and written about the history of the Church in Mexico, the key people and events, and the overall movement of the Church there.<sup>17</sup> Though this thesis will reference their works, it will also contribute significant historical details, depth, and insights from early primary sources.

In addition, this thesis will differ from other scholarly works written about the Church's history in Mexico due to its particular emphasis on the Book of Mormon message to the

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<sup>16</sup> These case studies will come primarily from the first seventy-five years of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Mexico, from 1875 to roughly 1950. Other pertinent events, teachings, or publications will be integrated within the thesis to add context to the subjects addressed. The thesis will begin by addressing Book of Mormon teachings regarding the Lamanites, and then discuss topics such as the first mission into Mexico, early publications into Spanish, the tenure of Moses Thatcher in Mexico, and the presidency of Rey L. Pratt.

<sup>17</sup> To date, the most comprehensive and clear academic source on early Latter-day Saint history in Mexico is LaMond Tullis's work, *Mormons in Mexico: Dynamics of Faith and Culture* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1987). This publication is foundational as a resource for researching the Church's history in Mexico. For an accurate and insightful overview of the Church's beginnings in Mexico see also Richard O. Cowan, "Mexico Receives the Gospel," in *Unto Every Nation: Gospel Light Reaches Every Land*, eds. Donald Q. Cannon and Richard O. Cowan (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 233-253. Also noteworthy are the researches of several Latter-day Saints from Mexico, including Agrícola Lozano Herrera, *Historia del Mormonismo en México* (México: Editorial Zarahemla, 1983); and Fernando R. Gómez and his associates with the Museo de Historia del Mormonismo en Mexico, America Central.

Lamanites.<sup>18</sup> The theme of the Lamanites, as it appears in both Latter-day Saint scriptures and early writings and journals of missionaries and Church leaders, adds essential context for the history and establishment of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Mexico. In many ways, the question that this thesis will address is not “if” the Book of Mormon message to the Lamanites influenced the establishment of the Latter-day Saints in Mexico, but “how” and “why.”

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<sup>18</sup> Important to note, though the topic of “Lamanites” is often employed in discussions concerning the geography or historicity of the Book of Mormon, this thesis *will not* enter geographical debates (advocating any specific proposed model of Book of Mormon geography), *nor* will it address recent discussions regarding DNA and the Book of Mormon. As a historical analysis, this thesis stands independent of these debates. For a brief, but clear overview of Book of Mormon geography, and attendant models and viewpoints, see “Geography,” *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*, ed. Dennis L. Largey (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 2003), 288-291. For in depth discussions on both the history of Book of Mormon archeological scholarship, and the evolution of geographic theories, see Terryl L. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture that Launched a New World Religion*, chapters 4-5 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 89-154; and Matthew Roper, “Limited Geography and the Book of Mormon: Historical Antecedents and Early Interpretations,” *The FARMS Review* 16, no. 2 (2004), 225-275. For a detailed analysis of early statements from Church leaders about Book of Mormon geography see Matthew Roper, “Joseph Smith, Revelation, and Book of Mormon Geography,” *The FARMS Review* 22, no. 2 (2010), 15-85. With regards to DNA and the Book of Mormon, in recent years some critics of the Book of Mormon have attempted to use DNA as evidence against the historicity of the Book of Mormon, questioning the existence of Lamanites as a remnant of Israel. These claims, however, and the research they were based on, contain a number of shortcomings, and are not conclusive. The Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship recently published a compilation of articles from the *FARMS Review* and the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, which thoroughly addresses the question of DNA and the Book of Mormon, and provides valuable context for current arguments on the subject. See Daniel C. Peterson, ed., *The Book of Mormon and DNA Research : essays from the FARMS review and the Journal of Book of Mormon studies* (The Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship: Provo, 2008).

## **Chapter 2**

### **The Book of Mormon Message to the Lamanites**

Understanding what the Book of Mormon and other Latter-day Saint scriptures teach about the Lamanites is foundational and prerequisite to appreciating the history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Mexico. Scriptural teachings about the Lamanites were the lenses through which early missionaries and Church leaders saw the land of Mexico as well as their role in taking the gospel to its people. Knowing what the scriptures teach about the Lamanites gives deeper meaning to the history, revealing why the missionaries did what they did, and said what they said.

More than just a cursory overview of a few selected verses, this chapter will evaluate many passages from Latter-day Saint scriptures about the Lamanites, defining who they are, and placing them within the larger context of Israel. The depth of the scriptural analysis within this chapter will provide a more complete view and appreciation of Latter-day Saint beliefs regarding the Lamanites than has previously been done in other studies about the Church in Mexico. This scriptural background will lay the foundation for the remainder of this thesis.

#### **Scripturally Defining Lamanites**

By way of brief summary, the Book of Mormon records a thousand years of Lehi's family history, starting around 600 B.C., when they left Jerusalem and came to the Americas, and ending in A.D. 421, with the destruction of the Nephites. Not long after Lehi and his family arrived in the Americas, Lehi passed away, and already existing problems within the family escalated, resulting in a major split: those who followed Laman (Lehi's oldest son) became known as Lamanites, while those who followed Nephi (Lehi's fourth son, yet the spiritual leader

of the family) took upon themselves the name of Nephites (see 2 Nephi 5). Though other subgroups of people existed within these two major groups, the prophets who kept the history contained in the Book of Mormon simply categorized these people as either Nephites or Lamanites throughout the record for simplicity's sake (see Jacob 4:13-14). Generally speaking, the Nephites were considered righteous, and the Lamanites wicked, though there were times when these roles reversed (see Helaman 6). Following the visit of Christ there was even a period of time where there were no "ites" at all, but this lasted less than two hundred years (see 4 Nephi 1:17-20). The interplay between these two groups is a central component of the Book of Mormon. On the one hand, wars between the Nephites and Lamanites were nearly constant throughout the record (see, for example, Alma 43-62). On the other hand, even early on in the Book of Mormon, the Nephites expressed deep spiritual concern for the well being of the Lamanites, even doing missionary work among them (see Enos 1:11, 20; Alma 17-26). Eventually, as the Nephites themselves turned away from the teachings of Jesus Christ and the prophets, they were overcome by the Lamanites around A.D. 385, survived only by Moroni, who completed and buried the record which Nephite prophets had kept for nearly a thousand years, and which Mormon (Moroni's father) had largely compiled and abridged. It was this record, engraved upon plates of gold, that Joseph Smith unearthed in 1823 and translated, and is known today as the Book of Mormon.

Due to the destruction of the Nephites by the hand of the Lamanites in the fifth century A.D., it is only natural to think of the Lamanites as simply the descendants of Laman, Lehi's oldest son. However, the term Lamanite is used within scripture as both a genealogical and an

ideological distinction.<sup>1</sup> Throughout the history contained in the Book of Mormon, to be a Lamanite could mean either that one was born of Lamanite parents, or that one dissented from the Nephites and adopted the life and way of the Lamanites (see 4 Nephi 1:38).

As the Nephite nation was on the edge of destruction, Mormon noted that “when that great day cometh [the destruction of the Nephites] . . . the seed of those who are now numbered among the people of Nephi, shall no more be numbered among the people of Nephi. But whosoever remaineth, and is not destroyed in that great and dreadful day, shall be numbered among the Lamanites, and shall become like unto them” (Alma 45:13-14). Thus, though the Nephites as a nation were destroyed, many Nephites dissented to the Lamanites, contributing to the preservation of Nephi’s lineage.

The Doctrine and Covenants reiterates the fact that some of the seed of Nephi became Lamanites ideologically. Speaking about the prophets of the Book of Mormon, Section 10 indicates that they had prayed that the gospel “might come unto their brethren the Lamanites, and also all that had *become* Lamanites because of their dissensions” (D&C 10:48; italics added).

Nephi was clear that—in addition to the Lamanites—his seed would also be scourged by the hand of the Gentiles in the latter days. “After *my seed* and the seed of my brethren shall have dwindled in unbelief, and shall have been smitten by the Gentiles” then “the prayers of the faithful shall be heard, and all those who have dwindled in unbelief shall not be forgotten” (2 Nephi 26:15; italics added). Prophecies about the destruction of the Nephites did not mean that genealogically the Nephites would be annihilated. The seed of Nephi continued on after their civilization was destroyed, but in an apostate condition.

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<sup>1</sup> Bruce A. Van Orden, “Lamanite civilization,” *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*, ed. Dennis L. Largey (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 2003), 493-494.



Additionally, Doctrine and Covenants 3 (a revelation Joseph Smith recorded after losing 116 pages of manuscript from the translation of the Book of Mormon), reaffirmed, “Nevertheless, [the Lord’s] work” and the “knowledge of a Savior” would go forth “to the Nephites, and the Jacobites, and the Josephites, and the Zoramites, through the testimony of their fathers—And this testimony shall come to the knowledge of the Lamanites, and the Lemuelites, and the Ishmaelites” (D&C 3:16-18). Significantly, this revelation recognized that the descendants of Nephi, Jacob, Joseph, and Zoram, have continued among the Lamanites.

It may seem unimportant to make these distinctions—expanding the scope of the Lamanites to include the seed of Nephi and others—but as will be seen in subsequent chapters within this thesis, Church leaders and missionaries frequently mentioned the seed of Nephi in conjunction with taking the gospel to Mexico. Defining the Lamanites too narrowly can create confusion or limit understanding, while knowing how Latter-day Saint scriptures define the Lamanites opens the door to greater appreciation of what early Church leaders said about Lehi’s descendants in Mexico.

Worth noting, the precedent for referring to Lehi’s posterity in the latter days as simply “Lamanites” began in the Doctrine and Covenants. Sections 3 and 10, as cited above, used this term for Lehi’s descendants in 1828 (before the publication of the Book of Mormon). Later sections from the Doctrine and Covenants (19, 28, 32, 49, 54, and 57, respectively) continued to use the term in conjunction with missionary work and prophecy: “go unto the Lamanites and preach my gospel unto them” (D&C 28:8), “the Lamanites shall blossom as the rose” (D&C 49:24), and “take your journey . . . unto the borders of the Lamanites” (D&C 54:8).

Scripturally, who are the Lamanites? In the simplest terms, they are people of Book of Mormon descent living in the Americas.<sup>2</sup> Literally, they are descendants of Laman, but the term basically refers to anyone who is a descendant of Lehi, who either was born a Lamanite or became one through dissension or apostasy. In modern times the descendants of Lehi (though really comprised of Nephites, Zoramites, etc.) are placed together under the umbrella of “Lamanite” for simplicity’s sake, not unlike the way the term was used in the Book of Mormon.<sup>3</sup> In addition, the Lamanites represent the major group that all of Lehi’s descendants identified with in the end.

These definitions, however, do not capture the entire essence of Lamanite heritage, and the reason for their importance in prophecy and scripture. In its fullest extent, the term Lamanite only makes sense in the context of biblical Israel. The words that Isaiah spoke to the entire house of Israel seem particularly relevant to the Lamanites of the Book of Mormon: “Look unto the rock from whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit from whence ye are digged. Look unto Abraham, your father, and unto Sarah, she that bare you” (2 Nephi 8:2; Isaiah 51:1).

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<sup>2</sup> The Introduction of the Book of Mormon simply states that the Lamanites “are among the ancestors of the American Indians.” The Book of Mormon inherently connects to the indigenous populations of the Americas, as it is an ancient record from the Americas with a remnant surviving to the present. Previous to 2007, the Introduction (which is not part of the Book of Mormon canon itself) stated that the Lamanites “are the principal ancestors of the American Indians.” As Church spokesperson Mark Tuttle stated, the change simply “takes into account details of Book of Mormon demography which are not known” (see “Church responds to one-word change in Book of Mormon Introduction,” *Deseret News*, November 9, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> See Jacob 1:14 and 4 Nephi 1: 36-38.

## A Remnant of Israel

When Moroni, the last contributor to the writings and history contained in the Book of Mormon, penned its title page,<sup>4</sup> he clearly declared the purpose of the record that he, his father Mormon, and many other prophets had carefully kept, protected, and prepared for future generations. It was a book “written to the Lamanites, who are a remnant of the house of Israel; and also to Jew and Gentile.”<sup>5</sup> Its purpose was “to show unto the remnant of the House of Israel what great things the Lord hath done for their fathers; and that they may know the covenants of the Lord, that they are not cast off forever—And also to the convincing of Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God, manifesting himself unto all nations.”<sup>6</sup> According to Moroni, the record was not only an account of the people of Nephi, but “also of the Lamanites,”<sup>7</sup> and though the Book of Mormon would go to Jew and Gentile, the Lamanites would be one of its primary recipients.

Understanding the Lamanites as a “remnant of the House of Israel”<sup>8</sup> is an essential key to unlocking the message of the Book of Mormon. Nephi prophesied that in the latter days, the gospel would be “declared among [the Lamanites]” and that they would “be restored unto the knowledge of their fathers” (2 Nephi 30:5). The title page of the Book of Mormon also emphasizes that the recipients of the record would come to know “what great things the Lord

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<sup>4</sup>Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, compiled by Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1976), 7.

<sup>5</sup> Title page, Book of Mormon.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

hath done for their fathers.”<sup>9</sup> Though the phrase “their fathers” (2 Nephi 30:5) appears to refer simply to the people of the Book of Mormon, there is perhaps a broader meaning to these words and promises.

Lehi and his descendants knew that they, personally, were a remnant of the house of Israel. They understood that the Abrahamic Covenant applied to their people. When Jesus came to the Americas following His Resurrection and Ascension, He taught the inhabitants of this continent: “ye are the children of the prophets; and ye are of the house of Israel; and ye are of the covenant which the Father made with your fathers, saying unto Abraham: And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed” (3 Nephi 20:25).

Near the end of his abridgment, Mormon wrote a testimony to the latter-day Lamanites, which to some degree encapsulated the entire message of the Book of Mormon to the Lamanites.

He stated:

I speak somewhat unto the remnant of this people who are spared, if it so be that God may give unto them my words, that they may know of the things of their fathers; yea, I speak unto you, ye remnant of the house of Israel and these are the words which I speak: Know ye that ye are of the house of Israel. Know ye that ye must come unto repentance, or ye cannot be saved. Know ye that ye must lay down your weapons of war, and delight no more in the shedding of blood, and take them not again, save it be that God shall command you. Know ye that ye must come to the knowledge of your fathers, and repent of all your sins and iniquities, and believe in Jesus Christ, that he is the Son of God (Mormon 7:1-5).

Mormon understood that one of the functions of the Book of Mormon was that the Lamanites would “know that [they] are a remnant of the seed of Jacob; therefore [they] are numbered among the people of the first covenant” (Mormon 7:10). Their fathers were not just Lehi, or even Laman and Lemuel, but literally Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

## A Righteous Branch of Joseph

At one point early in the Book of Mormon, before Lehi and his family traveled to the Americas, Nephi and his brothers were sent back to Jerusalem to retrieve a copy of ancient scriptures engraved upon plates of brass. One of the important discoveries that Lehi made as he studied the brass plates was “the genealogy of his fathers; wherefore he knew that he was a descendant of Joseph; yea even that Joseph who was the son of Jacob” (1 Nephi 5:14). Later in the Book of Mormon, a missionary named Amulek revealed, more specifically, that Lehi, “who came out of the land of Jerusalem, was a descendant of *Manasseh*, who was the son of Joseph who was sold into Egypt by the hands of his brethren” (Alma 10:3; italics added). Erastus Snow, in more recent times, recorded additional insight he received from Joseph Smith regarding the genealogy of Ishmael, whose family accompanied Lehi to the Promised Land: “The Prophet Joseph informed us that the record of Lehi was contained on the 116 pages that were first translated and subsequently stolen, and of which an abridgment is given us in the first Book of Nephi, which is the record of Nephi individually, he himself being of the lineage of Manasseh; but that *Ishmael was of the lineage of Ephraim, and that his sons married into Lehi’s family*, and Lehi’s sons married Ishmael’s daughters.”<sup>10</sup>

Thus, in Latter-day Saint theology, the lineages of both Ephraim and Manasseh (sons of Joseph of Egypt) are associated with Lehi’s descendants. Within a few hundred years after leaving Jerusalem the Nephites also joined and mixed with the people of Zarahemla, who descended from Mulek (son of Zedekiah, king of Judah). Because the exact genealogy of the Mulekites is not recorded in the Book of Mormon (see Omni 1:18), one cannot necessarily

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<sup>10</sup> *Journal of Discourses*, 23:362; italics added.

conclude that they are, by lineage, of the tribe of Judah. At the time of Lehi and Zedekiah, there were “segments of most, if not all, of the Israelite tribes living in Judah . . . [that] considered themselves Judahites, or citizens of the southern kingdom.”<sup>11</sup> When the Doctrine and Covenants says that the gospel would “go to the Jew, of whom the Lamanites are a remnant” (see D&C 19:27), it is not necessarily speaking genealogically (though it certainly could be). Victor Ludlow remarked, “In the Book of Mormon, ‘Jew’ can refer to any Israelite, an inhabitant or descendant of the kingdom of Judah during different historical periods, or someone influenced by Jewish culture.”<sup>12</sup> Another example of this comes from Nephi. Though he was from the tribe of Joseph, Nephi stated that in the latter days, “then shall the remnant of our seed know concerning us, how that we came out from Jerusalem, and that they are descendants of the Jews” (2 Nephi 30:4). Joseph Fielding Smith, clarified this ambiguity, indicating: “The Nephites were of the Jews, not so much by descent as by *citizenship*, although in the long descent from Jacob, it could be possible of some mixing of the tribes by intermarriage.”<sup>13</sup>

Lehi’s lineage is an essential component of the Book of Mormon. Though general promises applied to Lehi’s descendants through the Abrahamic Covenant, the children of Lehi were to fulfill an important function with regards to the house of Joseph. Lehi taught his children that the house of Israel “should be compared like unto an olive-tree, whose branches should be broken off and should be scattered upon all the face of the earth” (1 Nephi 10:12). He then concluded: “Wherefore . . . *we* should be scattered upon all the face of the earth” (1 Nephi

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<sup>11</sup> Victor L. Ludlow, “Jew(s),” *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*, 463.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 463.

<sup>13</sup> Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, compiled by Bruce R. McConkie (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, Inc., 1999), 3:263 (wording original).

10:12; italics added). His son Jacob later taught the people: “Wherefore, thus saith the Lord, I have led this people forth out of the land of Jerusalem, by the power of mine arm, that I might raise up unto me a righteous branch from the fruit of the loins of Joseph” (Jacob 2:25).

Part of the reason, perhaps, that Laman and Lemuel struggled when their family left Jerusalem was because they did not understand their role in fulfilling these prophecies concerning the house of Israel. One of the grievances they expressed to Nephi was that “we cannot understand the words which our father hath spoken concerning the natural branches of the olive-tree” (1 Nephi 15:8). Nephi subsequently taught them that “the house of Israel was compared unto an olive-tree, by the Spirit of the Lord which was in our father; and behold are we not broken off from the house of Israel, and are we not a branch of the house of Israel?” (1 Nephi 15:12). To Nephi and Lehi, their family’s exodus from Jerusalem and the prophecies concerning the scattering of Israel’s branches were one and the same.

Lehi, in his final words to his son Joseph, reaffirmed that he was “a descendant of Joseph who was carried captive into Egypt,” and that “great were the covenants of the Lord which he made unto Joseph” (2 Nephi 3:4). What were these covenants the Lord had made with Joseph of Egypt?

Lehi declared that “Joseph truly saw [their] day. And he obtained a promise of the Lord, that out of the fruit of his loins the Lord God would raise up a righteous branch unto the house of Israel; not the Messiah, but a branch which was to be broken off, nevertheless, to be remembered in the covenants of the Lord” (2 Nephi 3:5). Nephi added his witness that “[Joseph] truly prophesied concerning all his seed. And the prophecies which he wrote, there are not many greater. And he prophesied concerning *us, and our future generations*; and they are written upon the plates of brass” (2 Nephi 4:1-2; italics added).

The King James Version of the Bible contains only hints of these promises to the descendants of Joseph. Genesis 49, in conjunction with the blessings given to the other tribes of Israel, records that “Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall” (Genesis 49:22), and that the blessings Joseph received from his father would reach “unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills” (Genesis 49:26). Church scholars and leaders have interpreted this to refer to the descendants, or branches, of Joseph who have gone beyond the borders of Israel to the Americas,<sup>14</sup> but the King James text offers little commentary to help flesh out this imagery.

The Joseph Smith Translation (JST) of Genesis 50, though, shows that Joseph of Egypt understood the destiny of his seed quite clearly. The JST affirms that the Lord personally visited Joseph, promising that he would “raise up a righteous branch out of [Joseph’s] loins” (JST Genesis 50:24), and that a branch would “be broken off, and . . . carried into a far country” (JST Genesis 50:25). The Lord promised Joseph that the Messiah would be “made manifest unto them in the latter days, in the Spirit of power; and [would] bring them out of darkness into light” (JST Genesis 50:25). Based upon what Lehi taught to his son, it is apparent that the brass plates contained the full prophecy of Joseph, as found in JST Genesis 50. Lehi, though, takes the prophecy a step further than the Joseph Smith Translation does, by saying that Joseph of Egypt had actually seen Lehi’s day as a fulfillment of the prophecies concerning his seed.

Nephi recognized that one of the main purposes for his record was so that “the promise may be fulfilled unto Joseph, that his seed should never perish as long as the earth should stand”

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<sup>14</sup> See Orson Pratt, *Journal of Discourses*, 14:9, as cited in *Old Testament Student Manual: Genesis-2 Samuel*, Church Educational System manual (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2003), 98; LeGrand Richards, “The Book of Mormon,” in Conference Report, April 1967, 18-23; N. Eldon Tanner, “If They Will But Serve the God of the Land,” *Ensign*, May 1976, 48; and Stephen David Ricks, “Joseph,” *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*, 468.



(2 Nephi 25:21). The Book of Mormon is not only the sign that the work of the gathering of Israel, “hath already commenced” (3 Nephi 21:7), but it is “for Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and for all the house of Israel his companions” (Ezekiel 37:16). Even in modern revelation, the Doctrine and Covenants refers to the Book of Mormon as the “stick of Ephraim” (D&C 27:5), showing the strong connection between Joseph and the people of the Book of Mormon.

Moroni (Mormon’s son) even compared the physical salvation that Joseph of Egypt brought to Israel, with what the remnant of the seed of Joseph (who were brought to this land) would do for Israel in the latter days (see Ether 13:4-8). Lehi and his family are a good illustration of this. Through Lehi, the Lord once again led Joseph away from his family (the rest of Israel), in order to save the entire family (or house) of Israel in the last days. This time, it was not food that Joseph would give to Israel, but the words of life, in the form of the Book of Mormon. The Lord foresaw and prepared for physical famine in the days of Joseph of Egypt, just as He foresaw and prepared for spiritual famine in the latter days. In both cases, He saved Israel through Joseph. As Mormon recorded, “Surely [the Lord] hath blessed the house of Jacob, and hath been merciful unto the seed of Joseph” (3 Nephi 5:21).

In summary, the Book of Mormon message to the Lamanites is not just about the redemption of Lehi’s posterity, but rather the fulfilling of ancient promises and prophecies associated with Joseph of Egypt. Thus, according to the Book of Mormon, preaching the gospel to the Lamanites is part of the latter-day gathering of Israel, specifically the tribe of Joseph.

### **Gathered and Brought Back to Christ**

With the destruction of the Nephites, the “children of Lehi” (3 Nephi 5:22) dwindled in unbelief, ultimately forgetting who they were and where they came from. The prophets of the

Book of Mormon knew that this would be the case, yet they prophesied and prayed that the Lord would be merciful unto their seed and eventually bring them to a knowledge of the truth.

They knew that the Lord would “set [His] hand again the second time to recover [His] people” (2 Nephi 29:1), and “remember the promises” He had made unto Nephi, and his father, “that [He] would remember [their] seed” (2 Nephi 29:2). Though they were to be “driven and scattered by the Gentiles . . . the Lord [would] remember the covenant which he made unto Abraham and unto all the house of Israel. And also the Lord [would] remember the prayers of the righteous, which have been put up unto him for them” (Mormon 5:20).

Nearly one thousand years before the destruction of the Nephites, Lehi’s son Jacob prophesied: “And behold how great the covenants of the Lord, and how great his condescensions unto the children of men; and because of his greatness, and his grace and mercy, he has promised unto us that our seed shall not utterly be destroyed, according to the flesh, but that he would preserve them; and in future generations *they shall become a righteous branch unto the house of Israel*” (2 Nephi 9:53; italics added).

Nephi strongly identified with Isaiah’s prophecies about the scattering and gathering of Israel. Nephi had himself been separated and scattered from Jerusalem, and knew that eventually only a remnant of his seed would survive with the Lamanites. He found comfort that the Lord had promised to gather the remnants of Israel in the latter days.

One of the passages from the Old Testament that Nephi utilized and seemed to take rather personally was Isaiah 49:22-23: “Thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people: and they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders. And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers: they shall bow down to thee with their face toward the

earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet; and thou shalt know that I am the Lord: for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me.”

Nephi first quoted these verses in 1 Nephi 21:22-23. Later, Jacob (Nephi’s brother) quoted them in 2 Nephi 6:6-7 under assignment from Nephi. After explaining their general meaning in the context of the whole house of Israel, Nephi made this personal connection: “*It meaneth us* in the days to come, and also all our brethren who are of the house of Israel” (1 Nephi 22:6; italics added). Nephi knew that the prophecy in Isaiah 49 referred to all of Israel, yet he also knew that it applied directly to his father’s seed (the Lamanites) that would live in the latter days. “After our seed is scattered the Lord God will proceed to do a marvelous work among the Gentiles, which shall be of great worth unto our seed; wherefore, it is likened unto their being nourished by the Gentiles and being carried in their arms and upon their shoulders” (1 Nephi 22:8). When Jacob taught these verses he also reiterated that Isaiah’s words “are concerning all the house of Israel” but that “they may be likened unto [the Nephites] because [they] are of the house of Israel” (2 Nephi 6:5).

Perhaps no story in the Book of Mormon communicates what this means more clearly than the experience of the sons of King Mosiah in the Book of Mormon. Mosiah, king over the Nephites, had four sons—Ammon, Aaron, Omner, and Himni (see Mosiah 27:34). They were royalty, princes and heirs to the Nephite throne. Generally, royalty affords individuals great opportunity, even for luxury, ease, power, and wealth. King Mosiah’s sons, however, were not “willing to take upon them the kingdom” (Mosiah 29:3). Instead, they pled with their father, the king, that they might “go up to the land of Nephi . . . that they might impart the word of God to their brethren, the Lamanites” (Mosiah 28:1). They sacrificed the ease and luxury that their royalty offered them, and used their knowledge and opportunities to serve the Lamanites and

bring them to Christ. They were literal kings who carried the Lamanites—in their arms and on their shoulders—back to Christ, strengthening their faith like nourishing fathers.

These references to the Gentiles carrying the remnants of Israel in their arms and on their shoulders, and to kings as nursing fathers and queens as nursing mothers to Israel, convey a deep sense of responsibility towards the Lamanites. Implicit in these scriptures is the idea that the Gentiles would be blessed temporally and spiritually in the last days, not so that they could live a life of ease, but so that they could bless the nations of the earth, and bring all of Israel home to the lands and promises of their inheritance. Nephi took this very personally: “It meaneth us” (1 Nephi 22:6). It meaneth the remnant of Israel. It meaneth our seed.

President Spencer W. Kimball, one of the Church’s latter-day prophets, applied Isaiah’s statements about “nursing fathers and mothers” to the Lamanites as follows:

Only through us, the “nursing fathers and mothers,” may they [the Lamanites] eventually enjoy a fulfillment of the many promises made to them. . . . The Lord will remember his covenant to them; his Church will be established among them; the Bible and other scriptures will be made available to them; they will enter into the holy temples for their endowments and do vicarious work; they will come to a knowledge of their fathers and to a perfect knowledge of their Redeemer Jesus Christ; they shall prosper in the land and will, with our help, build up a holy city, even the New Jerusalem, unto their God.<sup>15</sup>

The Gentiles and the children of Lehi share an important destiny. Moroni wrote that “a New Jerusalem should be built up upon this land, unto the remnant of the seed of Joseph” and that this “shall be a land of their inheritance” (Ether 13:6, 8). As Joseph Fielding Smith pointed out, “the remnants of Joseph, found among the descendants of Lehi, will have *part* in this great

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<sup>15</sup> Spencer W. Kimball, *The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, ed. Edward L. Kimball (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982), 606.

work.”<sup>16</sup> In the Book of Mormon record, as the Savior ministered unto the inhabitants of this continent, He made known that He would establish His church among the Gentiles, and that as they came unto Him, they would 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, and also as many of the house of Israel as shall come, that they may build a city, which shall be called the New Jerusalem” (3 Nephi 21:22-23). The Gentiles and the remnant of Jacob on this continent are to work hand in hand in building the New Jerusalem. Though the Savior promised this land to the seed of Lehi (see 3 Nephi 15:12-13), He made it clear that the Gentiles would also inherit this land as they accepted His gospel. Lehi taught his children that “the Lord hath covenanted this land unto me, and to my children forever, and also all those who should be led out of other countries by the hand of the Lord” (2 Nephi 1:5).

According to the Book of Mormon, the restoration of the gospel<sup>17</sup> and the coming forth of the Book of Mormon would have a profound effect upon the Lamanites in the last days. Nephi recorded that “the gospel of Jesus Christ shall be declared among them; wherefore, they shall be restored unto the knowledge of their fathers and also to the knowledge of Jesus Christ, which was had among their fathers. And then shall they rejoice . . . and many generations shall not pass away among them, save they shall be a pure and a delightsome people” (2 Nephi 30:5-6). The Book of Mormon contains various accounts of Lamanites converting to the gospel, providing, as it were, a foretaste of things to come. The Lamanite converts were described as a “beloved people, a highly favored people of the Lord” (Alma 27:30). “They were distinguished for their zeal towards God, and also towards men; for they were perfectly honest and upright in all things;

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<sup>16</sup> Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 2:250-51.

<sup>17</sup> The “restoration” is a term used by Latter-day Saints to describe the gospel of Jesus Christ being brought back to the earth through the instrumentality of Joseph Smith.

and they were firm in the faith of Christ, even unto the end” (Alma 27:27). In addition, the Lord “[poured] out his Spirit upon the [them], because of their easiness and willingness to believe in his words” (Helaman 6:36). The experiences and successes of the missionaries who labored among the Lamanites in the Book of Mormon, are not only a partial fulfillment of the Lord’s promises concerning the Lamanites (that He would be merciful unto them and bring them to a knowledge of Christ), but an illustration of what will happen among the Lamanites in the latter days.

Mormon prophesied that “in the latter times the promises of the Lord have been extended to our brethren, the Lamanites . . . [and] they shall again be brought to the true knowledge, which is the knowledge of their Redeemer, and their great and true shepherd, and be numbered among his sheep” (Helaman 15:12-13).

The Doctrine and Covenants reiterates these promises concerning the Book of Mormon: “for this very purpose are these plates preserved, which contain these records—that the promises of the Lord might be fulfilled, which he made to his people; and that the Lamanites might come to the knowledge of their fathers, and that they might know the promises of the Lord, and 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” (D&C 3:19-20).

## **Conclusion**

In Latter-day Saint scripture, the Lamanites are a vital facet of the story of Israel. As a remnant of Israel, the Lamanites are entitled to all of the biblical promises the Lord made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Long before the families of Lehi and Ishmael came to the Americas,

the Lord had promised Joseph that “out of the fruit of his loins the Lord God would raise up a righteous branch unto the house of Israel” (2 Nephi 3:5).

To the Latter-day Saints, the Book of Mormon message to the Lamanites is evidence that the Lord intends to keep His promises to Israel. As Mormon stated, “Yea, and surely shall he again bring a remnant of the seed of Joseph to the knowledge of the Lord their God. And as surely as the Lord liveth, will he gather in from the four quarters of the earth all the remnant of the seed of Jacob, who are scattered abroad upon all the face of the earth” (3 Nephi 5:23-24).

The message of the Book of Mormon to the Lamanites is that they are of Israel and that they must come unto Christ to be saved. They are “not cast off forever,”<sup>18</sup> but the Lord has remembered them. They are among the remnants of His covenant people. Lehi, Nephi, and all of the prophets of the Book of Mormon taught thoroughly and frequently that the Lord’s covenants and promises to Israel, contained in the Bible, would find very specific and literal fulfillment among the seed of Lehi, and that “as [the Lord] hath covenanted with *all* the house of Jacob, even so shall the covenant wherewith he hath covenanted with the house of Jacob be fulfilled in his own due time, unto the restoring *all* the house of Jacob unto the knowledge of the covenant that he hath covenanted with them” (3 Nephi 5:25; italics added).

When the first missionaries for the Church began teaching the Lamanites in 1830, they saw themselves within the context of Book of Mormon teachings. They were going among the remnant of Israel, bringing them back to Christ through the instrumentality of the Book of Mormon. In addition, these teachings became the inspiration of early missionaries to Mexico, laying the foundation for the way they viewed its history, land, and people.

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<sup>18</sup> Title page, Book of Mormon.

Through reading the Book of Mormon, early missionaries and Church leaders became part of scriptural history, helping to fulfill the promises made to Lehi in the Book of Mormon and Joseph in the Old Testament. As will be seen in subsequent chapters, the teachings of the Book of Mormon not only influenced these early missionaries, but deeply motivated them, providing them with faith to sacrifice both time and comfort, and dedicate themselves to the establishment of the Church in Mexico.



## Chapter 3

### The First Latter-day Saint Mission to Mexico

In September of 1875, the first Latter-day Saint missionaries departed for Mexico. Their ten-month journey would take them from Utah, through Arizona, parts of New Mexico, and Texas, and as far south as Chihuahua City, Mexico.<sup>1</sup> This missionary expedition not only laid the groundwork for future missionary work and colonizing by the Latter-day Saints in Mexico, but also reveals key scriptural and historical foundations for their history south of the border. As the first official entrance of the Church into Mexico,<sup>2</sup> this mission frequently receives attention in publications regarding the Church's general history and global expansion.<sup>3</sup> More than a chronology of the mission, this chapter will discuss insights that the records provide regarding the expectations and motives associated with the first missionary venture into Mexico.

Because this mission represents the first official contact of the Latter-day Saints with Mexico, it is an essential indicator of the way that early Church leaders and missionaries viewed Mexico in relation to the Book of Mormon. This mission was the historical and theological basis

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<sup>1</sup> See Tullis, *Mormons in Mexico*, 19-26; and Tullis, "Early Mormon Exploration and Missionary Activities in Mexico," *BYU Studies* 22, no. 3 (1982), 1-2.

<sup>2</sup> Other Latter-day Saints had contact with Mexico earlier than this mission, but not in an official capacity. As noted in the history of the Mexican mission, "The first Latter-day Saints known to have entered the republic of Mexico were members of the Mormon Battalion, who in the latter part of 1846 traveled through a small portion of the northern part of the state of Sonora on their journey from Fort Leavenworth to California" ("Mexican Mission History," Manuscript History and Historical Reports: Mexican Mission, Archives of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah. Hereafter cited as LDS Archives, Salt Lake City).

<sup>3</sup> A few examples include Allen and Leonard, *The Story of the Latter-day Saints*, 388; *Church History in the Fullness of Times*, 413; and M. Russell Ballard, "The Truth of God Shall Go Forth," *Ensign*, November 2008, 81-84.

for missionary work in Mexico during the nineteenth century, and the beginning of the “miracle that is Mormonism in Mexico.”<sup>4</sup>

### **Beginnings of the Mission**

The first mission to Mexico included several phases, starting in June of 1874 when President Brigham Young called Daniel Webster Jones<sup>5</sup> and Henry Brizzee to “prepare for the introduction of the gospel into Mexico.”<sup>6</sup> According to Jones’s account, President Young told them “that the time had come to prepare for the introduction of the gospel into Mexico; that there were millions of the descendants of Nephi in the land, and that we were under obligations to visit them.”<sup>7</sup>

Assuming Jones’s account accurately reflects President Young’s words to him at the time of his call (which is likely due to the accuracy and integrity of Jones’s record throughout), the statement that “there were millions of the descendants of Nephi in the land, and that [they] were under obligations to visit them,”<sup>8</sup> is highly significant, as it establishes a clear context and motive

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<sup>4</sup> Hinckley, *Discourses*, 301.

<sup>5</sup> As Richard Cowan noted, “Jones was born in Missouri in 1830 and should not be confused with the Dan Jones who had been prominent in Britain and Nauvoo” (Cowan, *Unto Every Nation*, 234).

<sup>6</sup> Daniel W. Jones, *Forty Years among the Indians: A True Yet Thrilling Narrative of the Author’s Experience among the Natives* (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1890), 220.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 220.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 220.

for the first mission to Mexico. It shows that this was a mission that Church leaders, particularly the prophet, viewed as reaching out to people of Book of Mormon descent.<sup>9</sup>

When President Young called Jones and Brizzee to begin preparing for their mission, he also instructed them to translate “extracts from the Book of Mormon” and to study the Spanish language.<sup>10</sup> In short, through a less-than-coincidental series of events, an educated Spanish military officer, Melitón G. Trejo (who had been stationed in the Philippines), arrived in Utah, joined the Church, and assisted with the work of translation.<sup>11</sup> The following summer, their one-hundred page translation entitled *Trozos Selectos del Libro de Mormón (Selected Passages from the Book of Mormon)* was ready for publication.

During the months Jones, Brizzee, and Trejo were working on the translation, the remainder of the missionary party was selected. The group consisted of Daniel W. Jones, his son Wiley C. Jones, James Z. Stewart, Helaman Pratt (son of Apostle Parley P. Pratt), Robert H.

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<sup>9</sup> Note that according to Jones, President Young said that there were “millions of the descendants of Nephi in the land [of Mexico].” He did not necessarily call every person in Mexico a descendant of Book of Mormon people, but the scope was sizeable. In addition, President Young called these people of Book of Mormon descent “descendants of Nephi” rather than the more typical “Lamanites.” As discussed in chapter 2 of this thesis, President Young’s identification of the people as “descendants of Nephi” is not only wholly appropriate, but perhaps significant in and of itself, especially because he consistently used the normal term, “Lamanites,” to refer to the heritage of Native Americans in Utah (for example, see *Journal of Discourses*, 1:106-107; 2:143; 4:133-134; 5:236; 8:224; 11:263-266).

<sup>10</sup> Jones, *Forty Years*, 220. The details of their translation, *Trozos Selectos*, will be discussed in chapter four of this thesis within the context of early publications in Spanish.

<sup>11</sup> For more background information about Melitón Trejo, see K.E. Duke, “Meliton Gonzales Trejo: Translator of the Book of Mormon into Spanish,” *Improvement Era* 59, no. 10 (October 1956), 714-715; John Nicholson, “Prophecy Fulfilling,” *Juvenile Instructor* 11 (February 1886): 47, 53, 62; and Tressie M. Post, “Meliton Gonzales Trejo: The First Spanish Translator of the Book of Mormon,” *Improvement Era* 29, no. 5 (March 1926), 429-430.

Smith, Ammon M. Tenney, and Anthony W. Ivins.<sup>12</sup> Neither Henry Brizzee nor Melitón Trejo served during this mission.<sup>13</sup> The seven-man company departed for their mission in September of 1875 and crossed the border into Mexico in January of the following year.

### **Surveying the Land for Colonization**

In addition to preaching the gospel, as the missionaries prepared to depart for their mission, President Young instructed them to “keep a record of their travels and labors and to report to him any places which they thought suitable to establish settlements, giving a careful description of each, and the advantages they offered.”<sup>14</sup> This was an important aspect of their mission which each of the missionaries took seriously.<sup>15</sup>

Their purpose of preparing the way for colonization is clear in Jones’s remarks to a Mexican official he met during the journey: “Our duty was to travel through the country and visit with and explain to the people our principles and make friends with them, in anticipation that

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<sup>12</sup> Jones, *Forty Years*, 233.

<sup>13</sup> Some confusion has been perpetuated regarding which missionaries actually served during this first expedition into Mexico. Allen and Leonard, *The Story of the Latter-day Saints*, 388; as well as *Church History in the Fullness of Times*, 413, both confuse the missionaries of the first and second Latter-day Saint Mexican missions, stating that Melitón Trejo was part of the original group that went to Mexico. A comparison among the journal entries of the missionaries on the first mission show that Daniel W. Jones’s listing is accurate, and that Melitón Trejo was not part of the company.

<sup>14</sup> James Z. Stewart, Report “written by Elder James Z. Stewart, one of the first Latter-day Saint Missionaries to Mexico,” Manuscript History and Historical Reports: Mexican Mission, LDS Archives, Salt Lake City.

<sup>15</sup> Throughout the missionaries’ journals, their entries became markedly longer as the mission progressed, recording very specific details regarding each place they stopped along their journey. Because of the thorough nature of their notes, it is relatively easy to retrace their steps as they traveled through Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, and all the way to Chihuahua City, Mexico.

some of our people would, in time, come into this country and make homes.”<sup>16</sup> The area that most impressed the company of missionaries was Casas Grandes. As Anthony Ivins pointed out, “the town derives its name (Big Houses) from some prehistoric ruins which are near the present village. . . . Some of these ancient buildings have been large and several stories in height.”<sup>17</sup> After describing the deer and turkey available in the area, James Stewart remarked that “everything points to the fact that at some time in by gone generations, quite a prosperous community dwelt here.”<sup>18</sup> Jones noted about Casas Grandes that “the district of country we had been passing through appeared to be the most desirable for colonizing. We made diligent inquiries about lands, titles, conflicting water interests and making notes, all of which were reported to Pres. Young on our arrival home.”<sup>19</sup>

Nine years later, under the direction of President John Taylor, the Church established its first colonies in Mexico,<sup>20</sup> purchasing land in the Casas Grandes area.<sup>21</sup> The Mormon colonies in

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<sup>16</sup> Jones, *Forty Years*, 268.

<sup>17</sup> Anthony Ivins, Journal, May 12, 1876, LDS Archives, Salt Lake City. Note that Anthony Ivins’s journal shows clear preference for another area not in Casas Grandes. On Tuesday, March 28<sup>th</sup> he records, “Traveled 35 miles to Carmen. This is the nicest place we have seen in Mexico for a settlement. The valley is narrow, from a mile to half a mile in width and is 8-10 miles long. The soil appears to be of good quality and there is a stream of clear, pure water running through the valley.” He is the only one from the party who expressed these sentiments about Carmen.

<sup>18</sup> James Z. Stewart, Journal, May 12, 1876, LDS Archives, Salt Lake City.

<sup>19</sup> Jones, *Forty Years*, 290.

<sup>20</sup> John Taylor succeeded Brigham Young as President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in 1877.

<sup>21</sup> The history of the Mormon colonies in Mexico is beyond the scope of this thesis, but represents an essential component of the Church’s foundation in Mexico. See Tullis, “A Place of Refuge—A Place of Gathering,” *Mormons in Mexico*, 51-73 for a general overview of the colonies and their establishment. For more in-depth histories see Thomas Cottam Romney, *The*

Mexico, whose location in Chihuahua was deeply influenced by the first mission into Mexico, provided not only a place of refuge<sup>22</sup> for the Saints as persecution of the Church intensified due to the practice of plural marriage,<sup>23</sup> but became an immeasurable strength to the Church with regards to both missionaries and Church leadership in Latin America for decades to come.

The idea of establishing colonies in Mexico may have been initiated during the lifetime of the Prophet Joseph Smith. Mosiah Hancock (son of Church leader Levi Hancock) recalled hearing Joseph Smith describe where the Saints would eventually establish themselves as a people due to ensuing persecution. The official history of the Church quotes Joseph Smith as teaching “that the Saints would continue to suffer much affliction and would be driven to the Rocky Mountains,”<sup>24</sup> but Hancock’s account contributes intimations that one day the Church would extend even further south.

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*Mormon Colonies in Mexico* (1938; reprint, Salt Lake City, University of Utah Press, 2005); Nelle Spilsbury Hatch, *Colonia Juarez: an intimate account of a Mormon village* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1954); and Annie R. Johnson, *Heartbeats of Colonia Díaz* (Salt Lake City: Publishers Press, 1972). See also LaVon Brown Whetten, *Colonia Juarez: Commemorating 125 Years of the Mormon Colonies in Mexico* (Bloomington, Indiana: AuthorHouse, 2010).

<sup>22</sup> James Stewart recorded that before the missionaries departed for Mexico, Elder Orson Pratt (Apostle and brother of Parley P. Pratt) “gave them [the missionaries] some instruction, which at the time they could not understand the object of, but which later experience has made clear; he said: ‘I wish you to look out for places where our brethren could go and be safe from harm in the event that persecution should make it necessary for them to get out of the way for a season’” (James Z. Stewart, Report “written by Elder James Z. Stewart, one of the first Latter-day Saint Missionaries to Mexico,” Manuscript History and Historical Reports: Mexican Mission, LDS Archives, Salt Lake City).

<sup>23</sup> Plural marriage was practiced by the Latter-day Saints during the latter portion of the nineteenth century, and officially discontinued in 1890.

<sup>24</sup> B.H. Roberts, ed., *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1946), 5:85.

As a boy in Nauvoo, the prophet came to our home and stopped in our carpenter shop and stood by the turning lathe. I went and got my map for him. “Now,” he said, “I will show you the travels of this people.” He then showed our travels through Iowa, and said, “Here you will make a place for the winter; and here you will travel west until you come to the valley of the Great Salt Lake! You will build cities to the North and to the South, and to the East and to the West; and you will become a great and wealthy people in that land. But, the United States will not receive you with the laws which God desires you to live, and you will have to go where the Nephites lost their power. . . .” Placing his finger on the map, I should think about where Snowflake, Arizona is situated, or it could have been Mexico, he said, “The government will not receive you with the laws that God designed you to live, and those who are desirous to live the laws of God will have to go South.”<sup>25</sup>

Though Hancock’s account is reminiscent, his experience with Joseph Smith left an indelible impression upon him: colonization of the Latter-day Saints would one day expand southward to Arizona or Mexico, “where the Nephites lost their power.”<sup>26</sup>

In January of 1876, literally within days of the first missionary party crossing the border into Mexico, President Young wrote the following regarding his hopes and anticipation for Church settlements in Mexico and Central America. He stated: “I look forward to the time when the settlements of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints will extend right through to the City of Old Mexico, and from thence on through Central America to the land where the Nephites flourished in the golden era of their history, and this great backbone of the American Continent be filled, north and south, with the cities and temples of the people of God. In this great work I anticipate the children of Nephi, of Laman and Lemuel will take no small part.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Mosiah Levi Hancock, “The Life Story of Mosiah Levi Hancock,” Special Collections, Brigham Young University, Provo, 28.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>27</sup> Brigham Young to William C. Staines, January 11, 1876, Letterbook 14:124-26, as cited in Leonard J. Arrington, *Brigham Young: American Moses* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), 382.

To Brigham Young, colonization in Mexico was not only part of the Church's expansion, but was deeply connected to Book of Mormon history, prophecies, and teachings. In time, colonization efforts by the Church would lessen, and the emphasis would be more on establishing stakes in Zion.<sup>28</sup> President Young's statement, though, regarding the cities and temples throughout the American continents, finds interesting application in light of modern stakes and temples throughout Latin America.<sup>29</sup>

### **Preaching the Gospel to the Lamanites**

Daniel W. Jones, the leader of the missionary party, was fully committed to the colonization aspect of the mission, and was dedicated in his surveys of the land, yet he himself viewed the mission principally in terms of taking the gospel to the Lamanites. While writing his account of the mission, he paused in his narrative to explain the purpose of their missionary endeavors: "Before writing any further account of our travels and experiences in Mexico, I will explain as briefly as I can the cause of the mission being called and the expectations entertained by many. The Book of Mormon teaches us that the gospel is to be carried to the remnants, that

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<sup>28</sup> "Most geographic areas where the Church is organized are divided into stakes. The term *stake* comes from the prophet Isaiah, who prophesied that the latter-day Church would be like a tent, held secure by stakes (see Isaiah 33:20; 54:2). There are usually 5 to 12 wards and branches in a stake" (*True to the Faith: A Gospel Reference*, 36). The Doctrine and Covenants contains prophecies regarding the expansion of stakes. When the day came that there was "no more room" for the Saints to all gather to Zion (a central location), there would be other places appointed "called stakes" where the people of Zion would gather (D&C 101:21-22). In many regards, stakes in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have performed the function of colonies in the nineteenth century.

<sup>29</sup> When Brigham Young wrote this statement in 1876, there were just ten stakes world-wide and there were no active temples in the Church (though construction continued on the Salt Lake Temple and ground had been broken on the St. George Temple). As of 2010 there were 220 stakes and 12 temples in Mexico alone, and 2449 stakes and over 100 temples throughout North, Central, and South America. See *Deseret News 2011 Church Almanac*, 182-188, 198-200.



is, the natives of America (Indians). The promise is that the natives will receive the gospel and rejoice in it. The census of Mexico shows that there are over six millions of pure blooded Indians or descendants of the ancient races inhabiting this country.”<sup>30</sup>

Helaman Pratt also emphasized the importance of preaching the gospel to the Lamanites in his journal account of the mission. When he was set apart for his mission (by Apostle Orson Pratt) he was counseled to “visit the Lamanites and those who speak in the Spanish language in Old Mexico,” and commissioned to “bear testimony of the Book of Mormon of the ancient record of the Nephites and to reason with the people from the scriptures from the prophecies and from the Book of Mormon, and from the revelations that God has given.” In addition he was blessed to “speedily learn their language, . . . be able to converse in the same” and told that “the Lord [would] open the way before [him] by pouring out his Spirit upon the inhabitants that are honest in heart by giving them visions and dreams.”<sup>31</sup> The major emphasis in the blessing and counsel he received was on preaching to the Lamanites and learning to communicate in the Spanish tongue.

The missionary party traveled several months before entering Mexico, traversing Arizona, New Mexico, and part of Texas. While en route they preached to various groups of Native Americans. As they moved south, Spanish became the common language between the missionaries and the Indian groups that they encountered. As Tenney and Jones were the only two who spoke Spanish, they did most of the preaching. James Stewart noted that in these first meetings held near the border, Brothers Tenney and Jones preached to the Indians in Spanish and

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<sup>30</sup> Jones, *Forty Years*, 273.

<sup>31</sup> Helaman Pratt, Journal, no date provided, LDS Archives, Salt Lake City, 5-7.

that “all seemed pleased with what was said.”<sup>32</sup> Tenney recorded the proceedings of one of these meetings, and although the grammar contains some mistakes, his brief account offers a succinct snapshot of what the missionaries taught as they met with the Lamanites:

Sunday held our first meeting. Hymn sung by Bros Stewart, Pratt, & Ivins after which bro Jones talked to them and followed after then a hymn and Brother Pratt closed by pray [sic] all felt well. I occupied probably 20 minutes. Bore testimony to what had been said, and gave a short history of the angel visiting the Prophet Joseph, his instructions to him relating the promises made to them by the Lord anciently asked if they knew the Lord visited their fathers.<sup>33</sup>

Of particular importance was their use of the Book of Mormon and their emphasis upon the Lord’s visit to “their [the Native Americans’] fathers.” In the Book of Mormon, the most central and climactic event is the personal visitation of Jesus Christ to the inhabitants of the American continent, shortly after His Resurrection and subsequent Ascension in the eastern hemisphere.<sup>34</sup> The phrase “their fathers” draws an immediate and personal connection between the Native Americans and the history and prophecies contained in the Book of Mormon.

The missionaries crossed the border into Mexico on January 7, 1876,<sup>35</sup> and the following Sunday attended a Catholic mass where they received a somewhat disheartening reception. The local priest, Padre Borajo, denounced them openly, warned the people against the “Mormons” and invited the congregation to “get their books and fetch them to [him]” so that he could burn

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<sup>32</sup> James Z. Stewart, Journal, December 4, 1875, LDS Archives, Salt Lake City.

<sup>33</sup> Ammon Tenney, Journal, December 5, 1875, LDS Archives, Salt Lake City.

<sup>34</sup> See Book of Mormon, 3 Nephi 11.

<sup>35</sup> Helaman Pratt, Journal, January 7, 1876, LDS Archives, Salt Lake City. Note that in same entry he mentions that Anthony Ivins was left behind in Texas to care for the horses. See also Anthony Ivins, Journal, no date provided, LDS Archives, Salt Lake City, 51.

them.<sup>36</sup> The experience was shocking to the missionaries. Stewart recorded that “the Padre was very severe in opposing us,”<sup>37</sup> and Tenney wrote that “we have been received very coolly by the Mexicans owing to the Priests’ enthusiasm last Sunday.”<sup>38</sup> In their official missionary report, they described their situation during this time as follows: “We found on our arrival that the priests were disposed to oppose us by every means in their power. The civil authority by their influence refused us the liberty of preaching to the people. Our animals becoming greatly reduced made it necessary for us to stay and winter at their place; part of us remaining in El Paso on the Mexican side: others stopping a portion of the time in Isleta on the Texas side of the River.”<sup>39</sup>

President Young sent them a letter of instruction and encouragement,<sup>40</sup> counseling them to focus upon those of Lamanite blood in their missionary efforts: “I feel that it would be wise for you to visit the old original blood as much as possible.”<sup>41</sup> In addition, he confirmed the importance of their mission stating that “a most excellent spirit prevails with regard to this mission amongst the brethren, and numbers more would have been willing to have gone had they been wanted.”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Jones, *Forty Years*, 256-257.

<sup>37</sup> James Z. Stewart, Journal, January 9, 1876, LDS Archives, Salt Lake City.

<sup>38</sup> Ammon Tenney, Journal, no date provided, LDS Archives, Salt Lake City.

<sup>39</sup> Report on mission, October 5, 1876, Manuscript History and Historical Reports: Mexican Mission, LDS Archives, Salt Lake City.

<sup>40</sup> Brigham Young, Letter to Elder D.W. Jones, January 22, 1876, as cited in Jones, *Forty Years*, 260.

<sup>41</sup> Jones, *Forty Years*, 261.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 261.

The missionaries' first few days in Mexico were eye-opening and created an urgent desire among the party to learn Spanish. The day after the experience with Padre Borajo, James Stewart wrote in his journal, "Commenced in earnest the study of the Spanish language," followed by the next several days of his journal simply stating "studied Spanish."<sup>43</sup>

During the winter months, Jones determined that Ammon Tenney and Robert H. Smith would continue their labors among the Lamanites of Arizona and New Mexico, while the remaining five missionaries pursued their endeavors south of the border.<sup>44</sup> In the early days of spring, on March 20<sup>th</sup>, they commenced their travels southward to Chihuahua City, and subsequently visited other locations including Concepción de Guerrero and Casas Grandes before beginning their trip home in May of 1876.<sup>45</sup>

As the missionaries went south they found a more liberal spirit among the people, in contrast to what they had experienced the few months they had spent close to the border. Speaking of their time in Chihuahua City, the missionaries reported that "on our arrival in that City and getting introduced etc we found a very liberal spirit and a general intelligence among the citizens. We here learned that we had the constitutional right to teach our doctrines and remained among them ten days."<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> See, for example, James Z. Stewart, January 10, 1876, LDS Archives, Salt Lake City, as well as his subsequent entries in January 1876.

<sup>44</sup> See Ammon Tenney, Journal, February 14, 1876, LDS Archives, Salt Lake City; and James Z. Stewart, Journal, February 6, 1876, LDS Archives, Salt Lake City.

<sup>45</sup> For a detailed summary of their travels while in Mexico see Tullis, "Early Mormon Exploration and Missionary Activities in Mexico," 1-2; and Tullis, *Mormons in Mexico*, 24-30.

<sup>46</sup> Report on mission, October 5, 1876, Manuscript History and Historical Reports: Mexican Mission, LDS Archives, Salt Lake City.

They held various meetings while in Chihuahua, the first public gathering taking place in the Zaragoza Theatre, a cock-fighting arena. As Brother Jones records, “printed notices were circulated” and “in the evening, at the time of meeting, quite a respectable congregation had gathered. The cock fighting was still going on, but soon closed. Many persons there at their national sport remained to hear us. As I was the only one who could speak Spanish, Brother Tenney having gone north, I had to do the preaching. . . . I understood Spanish quite well, but had never spoken in public and, no doubt, made many blunders. However, our audience seemed pleased.”<sup>47</sup>

There were roughly 500 people in attendance at this first public gathering.<sup>48</sup> A local newspaper reported about the meeting:

A few days ago a remarkable event attracted the attention of the public of this place. Daniel W. Jones, a prominent Mormon Apostle,<sup>49</sup> had printed and distributed handbills announcing that he would preach a sermon on Mormonism at the Zaragoza Theatre. Rumors that Mr. Jones and his co-laborers would be stoned [*apedreados*] incited us to attend the meeting. The audience present was very large, and at first complete order reigned. The preaching commenced in the midst of profound silence, which was evidence that the audience was interested. After a little while a few discontented persons commenced to initiate disorder by throwing small stones and pieces of wood at where the speaker stood, but they had few imitators and were frowned down by the good judgment of the majority. The lecture was not very interesting, the audience diverted itself principally by contemplating the constant struggle of the orator with the difficulties of the Spanish language. The performance concluded with a heterogeneous mixture of applause and hisses.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Jones, *Forty Years*, 276.

<sup>48</sup> Helaman Pratt, Journal, April 8, 1876, LDS Archives, Salt Lake City.

<sup>49</sup> Jones is inaccurately described here as an Apostle.

<sup>50</sup> *El Semanario Oficial* (date and translator unknown), cited in *Deseret Evening News*, June 30, 1876, recorded in *Journal History of the Church*, June 30, 1876, 2, as cited in Tullis, *Mormons in Mexico*, 25.

As a whole, the meeting went well; though not totally accepted, the missionaries were not rejected. The newspaper article verifies Jones's account and shows that he was realistic and forthright in his relation of the event. His Spanish did struggle a little, but he succeeded in delivering his message. A detail not recorded in the newspaper, or in Daniel Jones's account, is that the meeting had a strong impact upon some of the people in attendance. When the missionaries reported to leaders of the Church in Salt Lake City about this experience, they shared that "on Saturday afternoon we held a meeting in the Theatre, which was fairly well attended. One peculiar incident occurred during the meeting, when an Indian or Mexican arose after hearing Pres. Jones remarks, and said that he had been discussing religion with the priests in the part of the state where he lived and he had found out that none of them had authority to preach the gospel and that he had come to the city of Chihuahua to see if he could find any one that had that authority, and he said when he heard Pres. Jones he was sure that he had that authority for which he was seeking."<sup>51</sup>

Helaman Pratt noted that "in the morning two gentlemen came to see us . . . they had attended the meeting and said they believed the testimony given."<sup>52</sup> "They had come from their home in the Sierra Madres to preach but they claimed no divine authority. They seemed to be much interested in our mission."<sup>53</sup> The meeting held by the missionaries was not only significant as the first public gathering of the Church in Mexico, but demonstrated a state of preparation and

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<sup>51</sup> Report on mission, October 5, 1876, Manuscript History and Historical Reports: Mexican Mission, LDS Archives, Salt Lake City.

<sup>52</sup> Helaman Pratt, Journal, April 9, 1876, LDS Archives, Salt Lake City.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., April 9, 1876.

receptiveness among the Mexican people. Time had opened the doorway to an experience distinct from what Elder Parley P. Pratt experienced in Latin America two decades earlier.

Though these men manifested great interest in what the missionaries taught, Helaman Pratt's response to them is quite revealing: "I said that the people where they lived would receive the gospel as soon as it was preached to them."<sup>54</sup> Were the missionaries not preaching the gospel?

Anthony Ivins recorded a similar experience. While the missionaries were in Concepción de Guerrero, they found good success among the people. "We remained twelve days, held several meetings and formed the acquaintance of a number of people who were very friendly and some of them expressed a wish to be baptized, but we thought inasmuch as we did not expect to remain in the neighborhood, it would be better not to baptize them."<sup>55</sup>

It seems like an interesting dichotomy: the missionaries traveled thousands of miles to preach the gospel to the Lamanites, yet did not baptize anyone, even though several people expressed the desire. Both Elder Pratt's and Elder Ivins's remarks allude to the fact that others would come later to baptize and establish the Church in Mexico, and that this was not the role of this first missionary party. They knew that without a solid Church organization in the country, those who were baptized would quickly fall away. Jones recorded his feelings about why they did not baptize as follows:

I remember writing to my wife while in El Paso . . . telling her that many would be disappointed in the mission but that I should not; that I should be satisfied even if we did not baptize a single person; that our mission was more as prospectors going through to prepare the way, and that President Young so understood it. We were to be governed by

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., April 9, 1876.

<sup>55</sup> Anthony W. Ivins, Journal, April 17, 1876, LDS Archives, Salt Lake City.

circumstances and not to feel disappointed if we could get to distribute our books and learn about the country and make friendly acquaintance with the people. That was all that would be expected of us on the trip. This was our calling. We were not sent to baptize and organize branches, neither were we forbidden to do so. That was an open question to be decided upon according to the openings made.<sup>56</sup>

The phrase “prospectors” conveys the perspective of the mission. Not only were the missionaries surveying the land, but they were taking note of the people in the areas they traveled through. They saw their preaching, not as establishing the Church in Mexico, but as preparing the way for future missionary work among the Lamanites in Latin America. Like Paul in the New Testament, their efforts manifested the attitude, “I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase” (1 Corinthians 3:6).

While in Mexico, they not only distributed literature to those they preached to, but mailed hundreds of copies of *Trozos Selectos del Libro de Mormón* to officials in cities throughout the Republic of Mexico. “Each package was directed to the officers of the place with a request to read and distribute them among the people.”<sup>57</sup> Among those that responded to the Church through this effort were Ignacio Manuel Altamirano (a well-known writer in Mexico) and Dr. Plotino C. Rhodakanaty (who later became the first branch president in Mexico).<sup>58</sup>

The efforts of these first missionaries to preach the gospel to the Lamanites in Mexico opened the door and paved the way for missionaries for decades to come. Upon concluding their mission, one of the missionaries (not named) noted in the report of the mission his feelings and

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<sup>56</sup> Jones, *Forty Years*, 274.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 279.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 279. See also Tullis, *Mormons in Mexico*, 34-35. Both the details of *Trozos Selectos* and the reception by the people will be addressed in greater detail in the following chapters of this thesis.



desires for the future of the work in Mexico: “I felt a desire also on our return to have my family with me and remain among them [the Mexican people], as it seemed as though a work of a lifetime was before us.”<sup>59</sup>

Indeed, several of the members of the missionary company would have a lifetime of service intertwined with the Church’s work in Mexico. James Z. Stewart, a teacher by profession, would eventually serve three missions to Mexico, accompanying Elder Moses Thatcher as the work commenced in Mexico City. For a time he also served as an interim mission president. Stewart contributed significantly to translation projects for the Church, including *A Voice of Warning*,<sup>60</sup> and the complete translation of the Book of Mormon into Spanish, published in 1886.<sup>61</sup>

Helaman Pratt also served three missions to Mexico, including his tenure as the president of the Mexican Mission from 1884-1887. Helaman Pratt’s son, Rey L. Pratt, would become one of the most influential mission presidents in the Church’s early history in Mexico, serving for nearly twenty-five years (1907-1931).

Ammon Tenney, though spending most of the first mission to Mexico among the Indians of New Mexico and Arizona, returned to Mexico as the mission president from 1887-1889.

Anthony W. Ivins, just twenty-three years old at the time of the first mission to Mexico, later served as the president of the Mexican Mission from 1883-1884, became the Church’s first

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<sup>59</sup> Report on mission, October 5, 1876, Manuscript History and Historical Reports: Mexican Mission, LDS Archives, Salt Lake City.

<sup>60</sup> *A Voice of Warning*, by Parley P. Pratt, was originally published in 1837 and used extensively as a missionary publication during the nineteenth century.

<sup>61</sup> Jenson, *Biographical Encyclopedia*, 1:416.

stake president in Mexico (Colonia Juarez Stake), and subsequently a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and a counselor in the First Presidency of the Church.<sup>62</sup>

Daniel W. Jones would spend the remainder of his life helping to colonize the frontier of Arizona, continuing his work among the Indians. Though his missionary efforts in Mexico were limited to the first mission, he was a key element of its outcomes. His autobiography, *Forty Years among the Indians*, is the most comprehensive and cohesive account of the mission—their experiences, purpose, and decisions. As LaMond Tullis noted, “Jones was a controversial figure,” yet “Brigham Young especially liked him.”<sup>63</sup> When the missionaries departed for Mexico in September of 1875, President Young wrote the following letter to introduce Jones to government officials, which stands as a tribute to him: “I have great pleasure in introducing to your favorable consideration and esteem Mr. Daniel W. Jones of this territory, a gentleman with whom I have been long and intimately acquainted, and who is about to pay a visit to Mexico and the surrounding regions. I most cordially commend Mr. Jones to your kind attention as a true gentleman, a worthy citizen, and a man of honor, veracity and integrity. Any favor you may show him, whether in the interests of the purposes for which he visits your state, or to himself personally will be highly esteemed and duly appreciated.”<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup>Anthony W. Ivins was called to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles October 6, 1907 at the age of fifty-five. He was called as second counselor in the First Presidency to Heber J. Grant in 1921 and then as the first counselor in 1925. President Ivins served in this position until his death in 1934.

<sup>63</sup> Tullis, *Mormons in Mexico*, 17.

<sup>64</sup> Brigham Young, Letter to the Presidents and Governors of States, September 9, 1875, Brigham Young Letterpress Copybooks, 1844–1879, Box 9, Volume 13, 853, as found in *Selected Collections from the Archives of the Church*, an online BYU Library resource.

## Conclusion

The first Latter-day Saint mission to Mexico was not a baptizing mission, but a trailblazing effort to prepare the way for subsequent groups of missionaries and colonizers. Although it was primarily a prelude to colonization, both the personal records of the missionaries and the instructions they received from Church leaders in conjunction with their mission, reveal that their chief objective was to preach the gospel to the Lamanite inhabitants of Mexico.

As president of the Church, Brigham Young was deeply interested in this mission and its outcomes. He had waited for the right circumstances that would enable the Church to succeed in Mexico, and saw the mission in terms of taking the gospel to the descendants of the people described in the Book of Mormon.

It was appropriate and significant that Helaman Pratt was part of the first mission into Mexico, among the first missionaries into Latin America since his father Parley P. Pratt had gone to Chile in 1851. Daniel Jones deliberately asked that one of Parley P. Pratt's sons come on the mission. Helaman Pratt wrote:

On the 24<sup>th</sup> of July I received a letter from my brother P.P. Pratt [Jr.] stating that Bro. D. W. Jones wished one of father's boys to accompany him on a mission to Old Mexico. Parley asked me how I would like to go. I answered that if I could by the proper authority I would willingly go as the Spirit had seemed to impress me with a desire to go for some time, and I requested an answer immediately, I waited some time and got no reply. The spirit worked upon me to such an extent that I could not rest until I started for Salt Lake City to ascertain whether I was going or not. On arriving in Salt Lake City I ascertained that President Young had been to Cash [sic] Valley. Bro. Jones was anxious to have me accompany him but it was four days before he could see the President. On presenting the matter to the President he was well pleased and desired me to go and accordingly appointed me to said mission.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Helaman Pratt, Journal, no date provided, LDS Archives, Salt Lake City, 3.

It appears that Elder Parley P. Pratt's mission to Chile was on Daniel Jones's mind as he prepared to serve in Latin America, as he "wished one of father's boys to accompany him on a mission to Old Mexico." President Brigham Young also saw the connection between the two missions, as he was "well pleased" that one of Elder Pratt's sons should embark with the group to Mexico.

Although history separates the two missions by nearly twenty-five years, they were inseparable experiences in the minds of those who participated in the second venture into Latin America. This is particularly pertinent in light of the reasons that Elder Pratt originally went to Chile. He went there because of the ties he saw to the Book of Mormon.<sup>66</sup> To Parley Pratt, the mission to Chile was a mission to the people of the Book of Mormon, not just an initial missionary journey into Latin America. Significantly, by including Helaman Pratt in the first mission to Mexico, not only did the familiar bond between father and son link the histories of the first missions into Latin America, but reiterated the purpose for which both father and son went there—to take the gospel to the remnant of the Book of Mormon.

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<sup>66</sup> Palmer and Grover, "Hoping to Establish a Presence," 118. See also Parley P. Pratt, *Key to the Science of Theology* (1855; reprint, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 2000), 29-30.

## Chapter 4

### **The Book of Mormon and other Early Church Publications in Spanish: A Reflection of Doctrinal Emphasis**

As discussed briefly in the previous chapter, when Daniel W. Jones and his missionary party departed for Mexico in 1875, they carried with them several hundred copies of *Trozos Selectos del Libro de Mormón* (*Selected Passages from the Book of Mormon*), a nearly one-hundred page selection of Book of Mormon passages translated into the Spanish language. Early Church literature published in Spanish, particularly the Book of Mormon, was not only an essential component of early and future missionary success in Mexico, but provides a valuable reflection of the doctrinal teachings that motivated early missionary efforts in Latin America. This chapter will discuss several of the earliest Latter-day Saint publications in Spanish and analyze the extent to which the Book of Mormon message to the Lamanites influenced the message of these publications. The writings of early missionaries and Church leaders in Latin America are an important indicator of the way that Latter-day Saint perceptions about the Lamanites were beginning to evolve in the nineteenth century, expanding beyond the North American Indians, and into Latin America.

#### **First Latter-day Saint Publication in Spanish**

In spite of the difficult circumstances that Elder Parley P. Pratt faced during his 1851 mission to Chile, a number of contributions came from his time there, including the first Church publication in the Spanish language. In January of 1852, while still in Chile, he wrote a

pamphlet entitled *¡Proclamación! Extraordinaria, para los Americanos Españoles*.<sup>1</sup> “This proclamation was sixteen pages long, written in two columns, the left column being the Spanish translation of the English text in the right column.”<sup>2</sup> The pamphlet discusses such topics as the Book of Mormon and the restoration of the gospel, and then gives a “strong critique of Catholicism and an even stronger denunciation of the lack of the religious and press freedoms that Parley had generally enjoyed in the United States.”<sup>3</sup> Though it was not published until Elder Pratt returned to San Francisco, it is, nevertheless, a concise summation of his experience in Chile as well as the hope he garnered for missionary work in Latin America.

Of particular interest is the importance Elder Pratt placed upon the Book of Mormon, not only as a tool for missionary work, but as a theological basis for proselytizing among the inhabitants of Latin America. He proclaimed, “Spanish Americans! a vast majority of you are the descendants of the ancient race of the Mexican, Peruviana, Chilena and other nations of original Americans. The origin of that entire race is now revealed by Angels, and by the discovery and translation of their *ancient records*, (the Book of Mormon.)”<sup>4</sup> Note Elder Pratt’s certainty, that the Book of Mormon revealed the origin of the original inhabitants of the Americas.

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<sup>1</sup> Parley P. Pratt, *¡Proclamación! Extraordinaria, para los Americanos Españoles!* (San Francisco: Monson, Haswell, 1852).

<sup>2</sup> Palmer and Grover, “Hoping to Establish a Presence,” 124.

<sup>3</sup> David J. Whittaker, “Parley P. Pratt and the Pacific Mission: Mormon Publishing in ‘That Very Questionable Part of the Civilized World,’” in *Mormons, Scripture, and the Ancient World: Studies in Honor of John L. Sorenson*, ed. Davis Bitton (Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1998), 56.

<sup>4</sup> Pratt, *¡Proclamación! Extraordinaria*, 7.

Elder Pratt's desire to go to Chile was deeply rooted in the teachings found in the Book of Mormon, as he viewed the native inhabitants of the Americas as direct descendants of the people and civilizations described within its pages. Though the Church had sent many missionary expeditions among the Native Americans of North America in previous years (in which Elder Pratt was a key figure), this statement in his proclamation is a clear indicator of the change in focus, now not just to North American Indians, but to "Spanish Americans." According to Elder Pratt, his intended audience, "Spanish Americans," referred to the inhabitants of "California, Mexico, America Central, Colombia, Bolivia, Peru, Chile, [and] Buenos Ayres [sic]."<sup>5</sup>

Although the proclamation discussed various topics, it is significant that the Book of Mormon was the first item Elder Pratt addressed. "A new revelation has been received, in the United States of North America, through the administration of Holy Angels from Heaven. These Angels have revealed an ancient Book, called the Book of Mormon; which Book contains the Gospel in its fulness, and also many historical and prophetic truths of the utmost importance to the present age. This Book is published in English and in several other European languages, and is now about to be translated into Spanish and introduced among you."<sup>6</sup>

Later in the proclamation he reemphasized the role of the Book of Mormon, inviting the people (once the Book of Mormon became available in Spanish) to "use every exertion to obtain a copy of the same, and read it diligently, and with a prayerful heart. Practice its precepts, for they are good, and profit by its instructions, for they are holy, and wise."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 17.

Elder Pratt clearly recognized the need for literature to accompany missionary work in Latin America, but was also realistic about his own limited Spanish abilities, describing himself as “a citizen of the United States, and a stranger among you, not yet perfected in your language, having a great desire to impart to you some things of the utmost importance.”<sup>8</sup> The quality of the pamphlet’s Spanish translation varies somewhat throughout. The name of the Church (correctly translated La Iglesia de Jesucristo de los Santos de los Últimos Días) was printed Yglesía de Jesu Christo de los Posterios dias Santos.<sup>9</sup> In another place in the document “the Spanish translation reads, ‘Sobre del dia 22 de Octubre,<sup>10</sup> A.D. 1827, un Angele restaurar el Evangelio llenamente á los hombre.’ It should read ‘En el día 22 de octubre, [septiembre] D.C. 1827, un ángel restauró al hombre la plenitud del evangelio.’”<sup>11</sup> For the amount of time that Elder Pratt had spent in Chile his Spanish was at an appropriate level, but as Delbert Palmer and Mark Grover pointed out, “this poor translation might have made it difficult for a native Spanish speaker to take the information seriously, making the work even more frustrating for the missionaries.”<sup>12</sup> An analysis of the Spanish translation of *¡Proclamación! Extraordinaria* reveals that Elder Pratt probably only translated (if anything) the second half of the pamphlet, and that someone else,

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>10</sup> The date here should be September, but was incorrectly written as October in the pamphlet.

<sup>11</sup> Palmer and Grover, “Hoping to Establish a Presence,” 126.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 126.



with a higher level of proficiency than he had, helped with the first eight pages. An abrupt shift in translation quality starting on the ninth page of the pamphlet illustrates this point.<sup>13</sup>

While on his return voyage from Chile, Elder Pratt wrote a letter to President Brigham Young in which he described his intention to produce additional Spanish publications: “It is in my heart to translate the Book of Mormon and some other works, and to print the same in Spanish as soon as I have the language sufficiently perfect.”<sup>14</sup> He knew that it would be a difficult process, and require more training and ability than he currently possessed. “It is no small work to become familiar with the entire grammar, words and style of a language, so as to write for publication.”<sup>15</sup>

In the aforementioned letter to President Young, Elder Pratt also indicated the role he viewed Spanish publications playing in the success of missionary work in Latin America. He stated: “I feel as though the Book of Mormon and some cheap publications should be translated into Spanish and printed, and then the key be turned to these nations while a living Priesthood is accompanied by something for them to read—even those writings which have the promises of

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 125-126.

<sup>14</sup> Parley P. Pratt, Letter to President Young, March 13, 1852, as cited in Parley P. Pratt, *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*, edited by his son, Parley P. Pratt, Revised and Enhanced by Scot and Maurine Proctor (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 2000), 504.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 505. This statement is particularly interesting when contrasted with the original sentiments he expressed about the Spanish language as he traveled to Chile. “I am studying Spanish with all diligence, and will, I trust, master it in the course of a few months,” *Autobiography*, 488. His experience in Chile helped Elder Pratt understand the amount of work and effort that quality translation would require.

God, the prayers and faith of the ancients, and the power and Spirit of God to work with them in restoring the house of Israel.”<sup>16</sup>

Elder Pratt’s remarks here are quite significant. The Book of Mormon and other publications needed to be translated before the land was dedicated for the preaching of the gospel; the “living Priesthood” (missionaries) needed to be “accompanied by something” for the people to read, especially the Book of Mormon, because it would carry with it the “power and Spirit of God” to restore Israel (in this case the Lamanites) to Christ.

Elder Pratt’s mission to Chile was not only the beginning of Latter-day Saint missionary work in Latin America, but also represents a change in focus for the Church, bringing the gospel to the Lamanites to the south of the United States. Elder Pratt saw the Book of Mormon as the tool that would gather Israel, of which the Lamanites in Latin America were a part.

Though Elder Pratt never did translate the Book of Mormon into Spanish, nor return to Latin America, he set the tone and precedent for what would happen in conjunction with the mission to Mexico nearly twenty-five years later.

### **Preparing for Mexico**

In June of 1874, when President Young called upon Daniel W. Jones and Henry Brizzee to begin preparing for a mission into Mexico, Jones recorded: “Brother Young said he would like to have some extracts from the Book of Mormon translated to send to the people of Mexico; advised us to get our private affairs arranged, also to study up our Spanish and prepare ourselves for translating and report to him, and when the proper time came and all was ready he would let

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<sup>16</sup> Parley P. Pratt, Letter to President Young, March 13, 1852, as cited in *Autobiography*, 505.

us know.”<sup>17</sup> Though Jones had learned Spanish while a soldier in the Mexican-American War<sup>18</sup> and Brizzee, who had been a member of the Mormon Battalion,<sup>19</sup> knew the language as well,<sup>20</sup> translating the scriptures was a daunting task for the two of them. Jones expressed similar sentiments as those of Parley P. Pratt: “We began to study and prepare for translating. My own feelings were that it would require considerable study, although I understood Spanish quite well. Still to translate for publication required a more thorough scholarship than either of us possessed.”<sup>21</sup> The arrival of Melitón González Trejo (a native of Spain), just one month after Jones and Brizzee commenced translating the Book of Mormon into Spanish, was key to their ability to complete the translation.<sup>22</sup>

President Brigham Young advised them “to have printed about 100 pages of selections from the Book of Mormon, and get them ready to take to Mexico, and be ready to start about the

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<sup>17</sup> Jones, *Forty Years*, 220.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 17-19.

<sup>19</sup> Andrew Jensen, March 21, 1898, *Church Chronology: A Record of Important Events Pertaining to the History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1899).

<sup>20</sup> Jones, *Forty Years*, 220, 222.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 220.

<sup>22</sup> As noted in chapter 3 of this thesis, for background information about Melitón Trejo see K.E. Duke, “Meliton Gonzales Trejo: Translator of the Book of Mormon into Spanish,” *Improvement Era* 59, no. 10 (October 1956), 714-715; John Nicholson, “Prophecy Fulfilling,” *Juvenile Instructor* 11 (February 1886), 47, 53, 62; and Tressie M. Post, “Meliton Gonzales Trejo: The First Spanish Translator of the Book of Mormon,” *Improvement Era* 29, no. 5 (March 1926), 429-430.

1<sup>st</sup> of September.”<sup>23</sup> A committee was organized to select which portions of the Book of Mormon to include in the publication. President Young furnished Jones with a copy of the Book of Mormon in English with this counsel: “Take this, go home and get a few days’ rest. Read the book and when you feel impressed to do so, mark the places and they will be the proper selections, for you have the spirit of this mission and you will be directed a right.”<sup>24</sup> The committee approved Jones’s selections.

Once the translation was completed, *Deseret News* printed 1,500 copies of *Trozos Selectos del Libro de Mormón*. For the first time since Elder Pratt’s mission to Chile, missionaries again traveled south to work among the Spanish-speaking Lamanites, this time with the Book of Mormon in the language of the people.

### **Content of *Trozos Selectos del Libro de Mormón***

By the time *Trozos Selectos* was completed in 1875, the Book of Mormon in English had gone through multiple publications including in 1830, 1837, 1840, 1841, 1849, and 1852. The 1852 edition, edited by Franklin D. Richards, was quite significant because he “added numbers to the paragraphs to aid in finding passages, thereby creating the first—although primitive—versification for the Book of Mormon.”<sup>25</sup> Though Elder Richards added verse numbers to the text in 1852, the original chapter divisions of the 1830 edition were not adjusted until 1879 (by

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<sup>23</sup> Jones, *Forty Years*, 224. At this time Henry Brizzee was released from his work with Jones and Trejo due to reasons not entirely explained by Jones in his account, though he alludes to a disagreement of sorts between President Young and Brizzee.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.

<sup>25</sup> Royal Skousen, “Book of Mormon Editions,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow, vol. 1 (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1992), 1:175.

Orson Pratt).<sup>26</sup> *Trozos Selectos* employed the same format as the 1852 English edition (versification, but with the original chapter divisions of the 1830 edition) but was only 96 pages in length (as opposed to the 573 pages of a typical Book of Mormon in circulation at that time), and was printed in a smaller, pamphlet format, with either blue or yellow covers.

Following is a chart of each section of *Trozos Selectos del Libro de Mormon*:

<b>Order of appearance</b>	<b>Title/Heading</b>	<b>Page range</b>	<b>Equivalent in current (1981) Book of Mormon Formatting</b>
1	(Title Page)	2	Title Page
2	NOTA DEL EDITOR (Editor's Note)  Note: this is a brief overview of the contents of <i>Trozos Selectos</i> .	3-4	n/a
3	TESTIMONIO DE TRES TESTIGOS (The Testimony of Three Witnesses)	5	The Testimony of Three Witnesses
4	TESTIMONIO DE OCHO TESTIGOS (The Testimony of Eight Witnesses)	6	The Testimony of Eight Witnesses

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<sup>26</sup> The 1879 edition included “major changes in the format of the text” such as “division of the long chapters in the original text, a true versification system (which has been followed in all subsequent LDS editions), and footnotes (mostly scriptural references). See Skousen, “Book of Mormon Editions,” 175.

5	<p>PRIMER LIBRO DE NEPHI</p> <p>(The First Book of Nephi)</p> <p>Note: at this point the spelling had not been changed to “Nefi” to facilitate easier pronunciation in Spanish.</p>	7-58	1 Nephi
6	<p>SEGUNDO LIBRO DE NEPHI</p> <p>(The Second Book of Nephi)</p> <p>Note: this included only Chapter 12 (according to original Book of Mormon chapter divisions).</p>	58-64	2 Nephi 28-30
7	<p>LIBRO DE OMNI</p> <p>(Book of Omni)</p>	64-67	Omni
8	<p>LIBRO DE NEPHI: NIETO DE HELAMAN</p> <p>(The Book of Nephi: Grandson of Helaman)</p> <p>Note: this included only Chapters 5-9 (according to original Book of Mormon chapter divisions).</p>	67-91	3 Nephi 11-21
9	<p>EL LIBRO DE MORMON</p> <p>(The Book of Mormon)</p> <p>Note: this included only Chapter 3 (according to original Book of Mormon chapter divisions).</p>	91-94	Mormon 6-7

10	<p style="text-align: center;">INSTRUCCIONES PARA PRACTICAR LAS PRIMERAS ORDENANZAS DE LA IGLESIA</p> <p>Instructions for performing the first ordinances of the Church</p> <p>Note: these included the baptismal prayer, confirmation, and how to ordain priests and teachers.</p>	94-95	<p>Though no equivalent is found in the current Book of Mormon edition, part of the instructions, regarding ordaining priests and teachers, mirrors the wording in Moroni 3:1-3</p>
11	<p style="text-align: center;">MANERA DE ADMINISTRAR LOS SACRAMENTOS</p> <p>Way (or procedure) to administer the sacrament.</p> <p>Note: this included instructions as well as the sacramental prayers.</p>	95	<p>The instructions are almost identical to the wording of Moroni 4-5.</p>
12	<p style="text-align: center;">ORGANIZACION Y FUNDACION DE LA IGLESIA</p> <p>Organization and establishment of the Church</p> <p>Note: this is a brief history of the Church and restoration.</p>	96	n/a

*Source:* Chart created by Matthew Geilman and based upon analysis of *Trozos Selectos del Libro de Mormón: que es una narracion escrita por la mano de Mormón, sobre placas de Nephi*, traducido al Ingles por José Smith, Jun.; traducido al Español por Melitón G. Trejo y Daniel W. Jones (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1875). Original spelling, grammar, and punctuation.

### Analysis of Content

The contents of *Trozos Selectos del Libro de Mormón* merit analysis and attention not only because *Trozos Selectos* represents the initial contact the people of Mexico had with the Book of Mormon, but because it provides insights into the parts of the Book of Mormon that early missionaries and Church leaders felt were most important for the people of Mexico. What

they selected for the translation was, in essence, their “Book of Mormon message” for Latin America. Like Parley P. Pratt’s *¡Proclamación! Extraordinaria, para los Americanos Españoles*, the first edition of the Book of Mormon in Spanish reveals a shift of focus, emphasizing the Lamanite heritage of the inhabitants of Latin America, particularly Mexico. *Trozos Selectos* was their tool for teaching others about the Church and its doctrine, and provides a valuable reflection about the teachings and doctrines motivating the first missionaries as they entered Mexico.

The majority of the material in *Trozos Selectos* was a direct translation from the English Book of Mormon, except for a few additions included before and after the scriptural text, mostly to clarify the format of *Trozos Selectos*, as well as to explain a few basic practices of the Church.

Among these additions, in the closing paragraphs of the pamphlet, is a personalized invitation to the people of Mexico to receive the Book of Mormon and its message. Note the specific application of the Book of Mormon message to the people of Mexico and the emphasis upon their heritage:

The hour has arrived for the Mexicans and natives of this continent to receive, if they so desire, the knowledge of their fathers, and to hear the fulness of the gospel, as taught to their ancestors in times past. Rejoice Mexico, and the ancient races of this continent; because they are the chosen seed; they are Israelites by blood. Your fathers came from Jerusalem; you are descendants of that Joseph who ruled in Egypt. The day of your redemption is near; and glorious is your future. Awake, then, to the high destiny that awaits you, and receive the writings of your prophets, and the God of your fathers will fulfill all of his prophecies concerning you.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> *Trozos Selectos*, 96. Citation translated by Matthew Geilman (original spelling, grammar, and punctuation): “Ha llegado la hora para que los Mejicanos y los aborígenas de este continente reciban, si quieren, los recuerdos de sus padres, y para que oigan la plenitud del Evangelio, en otro tiempo enseñado á sus antecesores. Regocíjese Mejico y las antiguas razas de este continente; porque ellos son la simiente escogida; ellos son Israelitas por sangre. Vuestros padres vienen de Jerusalem; vosotros sois descendientes de aquel Joseph que mandó en Egipto. El día de vuestra redencion está encima; y glorioso es vuestro porvenir. Despierta, pues, á el alto



Several elements of this invitation are significant. First, the ancestral ties between the Book of Mormon and the people of Mexico are preeminent in the citation. “The hour has arrived” to come to a “knowledge of [your] fathers, and to hear the fullness of the gospel, as taught to [your] ancestors in times past.” Interestingly, the citation makes the distinction two times between the people of Mexico and the indigenous population living there: “The hour has arrived for the Mexicans and natives of this continent” and then later, “Rejoice Mexico, and the ancient races of this continent.” In the invitation, whether the audience was the natives of the Americas, or people of mixed indigenous descent (the Mexican people in general) the Book of Mormon connection to them was considered the same.

Second, in the citation the heritage and lineage of the people does not originate in the Americas, but goes further back, “[you] are the chosen seed; [you] are Israel by blood. Your fathers came from Jerusalem; you are descendants of that Joseph who ruled in Egypt.” As discussed previously, the concept of Lamanites and their prophetic destiny only makes sense in the context of Israel, and the promises made to Joseph. This point is reaffirmed in this citation from *Trozos Selectos*.

Third, the prophetic destiny of the people of Mexico is proclaimed by way of invitation: “The day of your redemption is near; and glorious is your future. Awake, then, to the high destiny that awaits you, and receive the writings of your prophets, and the God of your fathers will fulfill all of his prophecies concerning you.” The prophecies referred to are those contained within the Book of Mormon itself concerning the Lamanites. Note the application and certainty, “glorious is your future,” and “high destiny . . . awaits you.”

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destino que te aguarda, y recibe los escritos de vuestros profetas, y el Dios, de vuestros padres cumplirá todas sus predicciones respecto á vosotros.”

*Title Page, Testimony of Witnesses, and Editor's Note*

The title page and the Testimony of Three Witnesses and the Testimony of Eight Witnesses are standard inclusions within Book of Mormon publications. As stated by Joseph Smith, the Title Page is part of the Book of Mormon record itself, the last leaf of the plates of gold upon which the Book of Mormon was recorded.<sup>28</sup> As noted earlier, the title page indicates that the Book of Mormon was “written to the Lamanites, who are a remnant of the house of Israel” and that one of the purposes of the Book of Mormon was to “to show unto the remnant of the House of Israel what great things the Lord hath done for their fathers; and that they may know the covenants of the Lord, that they are not cast off forever—And also to the convincing of Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God, manifesting himself unto all nations.”<sup>29</sup> These words in the title page concerning the Book of Mormon message to the Lamanites would find poignant application as *Trozos Selectos* was prepared and translated to go among the people whom Brigham Young referred to as remnants of the Book of Mormon.<sup>30</sup>

Like the title page written by Moroni, the Testimony of Three Witnesses and the Testimony of Eight Witnesses, were both included in every edition of the Book of Mormon since its original publication. For the Latter-day Saints, the testimony of these eleven men is a vital witness to the veracity of the Book of Mormon, not only as scripture but also as an ancient record. All eleven witnesses bore testimony “unto all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people” that they saw the plates upon which the Book of Mormon record was written. The Three

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<sup>28</sup> Smith, *Teachings*, 7.

<sup>29</sup> Title page, Book of Mormon.

<sup>30</sup> Jones, *Forty Years*, 220.

Witnesses—Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris—heard the voice of God affirming Joseph Smith’s role as the translator of the record, and then “saw the plates and the engravings thereon.”<sup>31</sup> The Eight Witnesses—Christian Whitmer, Jacob Whitmer, Peter Whitmer, Jun., John Whitmer, Hiram Page, Joseph Smith, Sen., Hyrum Smith, and Samuel H. Smith—were shown the plates by Joseph Smith. The Eight Witnesses declared that the plates had the “appearance of gold; and as many of the leaves as the said Smith has translated we did handle with our hands; and we also saw the engravings thereon, all of which has the appearance of ancient work, and of curious workmanship.”<sup>32</sup> The Testimony of Three Witnesses and the Testimony of Eight Witnesses confirm what Joseph Smith had taught concerning the origin of the Book of Mormon. The voice of God, the visitation of an angel, and the plates themselves, were evidence to the witnesses that the record was not just a historical record, but scripture—not a product of the nineteenth century, but an ancient record. Both of these points added validity to the message to the Lamanites in *Trozos Selectos* both prophetically and historically. Though these testimonies are included in each publication of the Book of Mormon, *Trozos Selectos* is an example of why the witness of these eleven men is so significant to the message of the Book of Mormon.

The Editor’s Note at the beginning of *Trozos Selectos* is unique to this edition of the Book of Mormon. Its function is mostly practical, providing an outline of what is contained in *Trozos Selectos*, and explaining that this edition of the Book of Mormon represented only a selected portion of the book. At the same time, the Editor’s Note provides valuable insights into the way in which the missionaries applied the message of the Book of Mormon to the people of

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<sup>31</sup> The Testimony of Three Witnesses, Book of Mormon, 1981.

<sup>32</sup> The Testimony of Eight Witnesses, Book of Mormon, 1981.

Mexico and Latin America. For example, it speaks about how the plates “contained the history of the indigenous people of all of the Americas”<sup>33</sup> and identifies the Israelites as their ancestors.<sup>34</sup> It speaks of the great importance that the Book of Mormon would have for all mankind and especially for the descendants of Nephi and his brothers,<sup>35</sup> and indicates that the portions of the Book of Mormon included in *Trozos Selectos* “would be of great interest for the people among whom the editor [Melitón Trejo] and his missionary companions would work.”<sup>36</sup>

### *The First Book of Nephi*

The reason for including the First Book of Nephi<sup>37</sup> in its entirety in *Trozos Selectos* is self-evident. It is the first book in the Book of Mormon and is the context for the rest of the record. This book introduces Nephi and his family—his father Lehi, and his brothers Laman and Lemuel. It records their lineage (see 1 Nephi 5), their origin (see 1 Nephi 1:4) and their travels to the Americas (see 1 Nephi 17-18), which was their land of promise (see 1 Nephi 2:20; 1 Nephi 18:23). The First Book of Nephi establishes the tone and purpose of the record, as a witness of Christ and the fundamentals of His gospel (see 1 Nephi 11). The words, “I Nephi, having been

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<sup>33</sup> *Trozos Selectos*, 3. Citation translated by Matthew Geilman (original spelling, grammar, and punctuation): “las antiguas placas . . . contenian la historia del pueblo indigena de toda la America.”

<sup>34</sup> See *Trozos Selectos*, 3.

<sup>35</sup> See *Trozos Selectos*, 3.

<sup>36</sup> *Trozos Selectos*, 3. Citation translated by Matthew Geilman (original spelling, grammar, and punctuation): “Las partes eligidas del Libro de Mormón “serán de gran interés para el pueblo entre el que el Editor y sus compañeros de misión intentan trabajar.”

<sup>37</sup> 1 Nephi (1981 Edition). All textual analysis will derive from the current (1981) formatting, with both chapters and versification.

born of goodly parents” (1 Nephi 1:1) have come to be the first words “spoken from the dust” (Isaiah 29:4; 2 Nephi 26:16) to every reader of the Book of Mormon, including the first recipients of *Trozos Selectos* in Mexico.

### *The Second Book of Nephi*

Up to this point in *Trozos Selectos*, the content of the Spanish translation seems to follow the English version of the Book of Mormon. It is here, in the Second Book of Nephi, that the content becomes much more selective. Following the original 1830 chapter divisions of the Book of Mormon (though with the 1852 versification), only chapter 12 was included from the Second Book of Nephi (which is the equivalent of 2 Nephi 28-30 in the 1981 edition).

The deliberate selection of this portion of 2 Nephi (three out of the current thirty-three chapters in 2 Nephi) is an important reflection of the doctrinal motivation behind the first mission of the Church in Mexico. This selection from the Book of Mormon contains many prophecies regarding the last days, particularly about false churches, vain and foolish doctrines, apostasy, the Book of Mormon, judgment, the latter-day conversion of the Lamanites, and the restoration of Israel.

Chapter 28 begins with an appeal from Nephi that “the things which shall be written out of the book [the Book of Mormon] shall be of great worth unto the children of men, and especially unto our seed, which is a remnant of the house of Israel” (2 Nephi 28:2). Nephi then described the day when the Book of Mormon would come forth. He spoke of churches teaching false doctrine and denying the power and miracles of God (see 2 Nephi 28:3-6), of people giving way to sin and false doctrine (see 2 Nephi 28:7-12), of the work of the devil (see 2 Nephi 28:18-

23), and the need to receive more truth; “wo be unto him that shall say: We have received the word of God, and we need no more of the word of God, for we have enough!” (2 Nephi 28:29).

Chapter 29 continues with the theme of receiving more of the Lord’s word. Again Nephi reiterated the promises made to his seed, that the Lord would remember His covenants and set His “hand again the second time to recover [His] people, which are of the house of Israel” (2 Nephi 29:1), and “remember the promises which I have made unto thee, Nephi, and also unto thy father, that I would remember your seed; and that the words of your seed should proceed forth out of my mouth unto your seed; and my words shall hiss forth unto the ends of the earth, for a standard unto my people, which are of the house of Israel” (2 Nephi 29:2). The remainder of this chapter discusses the Bible and the way people would react to additional scripture in the last days, some objecting to the idea of having more words from the Lord (see 2 Nephi 29:3-10). It concludes with the Lord establishing the scope of the words that will come forth in the last days, including the writings of the Jews, the Nephites, and all of the tribes of Israel (see 2 Nephi 29:11-13).

Chapter 30 contains one of the clearest prophecies regarding the latter-day destiny of the Lamanites within the Book of Mormon. In 2 Nephi 30:3, Nephi prophesied that there would be many Gentiles in the last days who would “believe the words” of the Book of Mormon, and “carry them forth unto the remnant of our seed.” Earlier missions to the remnant of the Book of Mormon among the North American Indians could be seen as a partial fulfillment of this, but these words must have taken on additional meaning to the missionaries as they literally carried hundreds of copies of the Book of Mormon unto the remnant of Lehi’s seed.

Nephi continued: “and then shall the remnant of our seed know concerning us, how that we came out from Jerusalem, and that they are descendants of the Jews. And the gospel of Jesus

Christ shall be declared among them; wherefore, they shall be restored unto the knowledge of their fathers, and also to the knowledge of Jesus Christ, which was had among their fathers” (2 Nephi 30:4-5). The remainder of the chapter places this prophecy concerning the descendants of Lehi within the context of millennial events in conjunction with the Second Coming of Christ (see 2 Nephi 30:7-18).

### *The Book of Omni*

Omni is an interesting choice to be included among their selected passages, because it is not typically a book viewed as containing important doctrine in the Book of Mormon. It does, however, provide valuable pieces of historical background from the Book of Mormon in relatively few verses. The Editor’s Note clarifies why Omni was included among the other passages: “The book of Omni, in which is given a simple idea of the first inhabitants of this land that came from the tower of Babel, those that were destroyed for their wickedness; it speaks also of the inhabitants of the land of Zarahemla that originate from the Jews, whose land they left in the day in which King Zedekiah, King of the Jews was taken captive to Babylon; it shows how the people of the Nephites stayed united as they became part of King Mosiah’s kingdom.”<sup>38</sup>

In short, among the historical information provided by the Book of Omni is the knowledge that other groups were led to the Americas besides Lehi and his family, including the Jaredites

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<sup>38</sup> *Trozos Selectos*, 4. Citation translated by Matthew Geilman (original spelling, grammar, and punctuation): “El Libro de Omni, en el que se da una ligera idea de los primeros habitantes de este país que vinieron de la torre de Babel, los que fueron destruidos por sus iniquidades; háblase también en él de los habitantes del país de Zarahemla que provenían de los Judíos, cuyo país dejaron en la época en que el rey Sedecías rey de Judá fue llevado cautivo a Babilonia; manifiéstase como quedó unida este pueblo a los Nefitas constituyendo el reino del rey Mosiah.”

and Mulekites.<sup>39</sup> As *Trozos Selectos* did not contain other portions of the Book of Mormon that would have explained the backgrounds or historical connection between the Book of Mormon and these groups of people, the Book of Omni was a clear and brief way to introduce them.

*The Book of Nephi (Grandson of Helaman)*

The chapters selected from the Book of Nephi (3 Nephi 11-21 in the 1981 edition) contain the central event and climax of the Book of Mormon, the personal visit of Jesus Christ to the Americas, with several pages of His teachings to the people who were present at His appearance. This portion of the Book of Mormon discusses baptism, the sacrament, and reiterates the teachings that Christ gave during the Sermon on the Mount in Galilee. These chapters are a natural inclusion within *Trozos Selectos* as they represent the spiritual culmination of Book of Mormon teachings. This was an event long prophesied and anticipated in the Book of Mormon by both prophets and believers alike.

During Christ's three-day ministry among the Nephites, He identified the people of the Americas as the "other sheep" (John 10:16) that He had promised to visit while among His disciples in Jerusalem: "Ye are they of whom I said: Other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd" (3 Nephi 15:21). Christ also referred to the people as a "remnant of the house of Joseph" (3 Nephi 15:12) and called the Americas the "land of [their] inheritance" (3 Nephi

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<sup>39</sup> See the Book of Ether in the Book of Mormon for a history of the Jaredites. Mulekites is a name frequently used to describe the descendants of Mulek, son of King Zedekiah (see 2 Kings 24-25), who came to the Americas and established themselves in the land of Zarahemla (see Omni 1:15; Helaman 8:21).



15:13). These words reinforced the identity of the people of the Americas, and the scriptural link between the Book of Mormon and Bible.

The selections from the Book of Nephi included in *Trozos Selectos* conclude with what is currently 3 Nephi 21, which speaks of the role that the Book of Mormon would play in the gathering of Israel, and identifies the Book of Mormon as the sign that the latter-day gathering has commenced (see 3 Nephi 21:1-7).

The final verses of 3 Nephi 21 also speak about the building of the New Jerusalem on the American Continent, and the interplay between the Gentiles and the remnant of Jacob in building this city. The New Jerusalem and its prophetic ties to the Lamanites makes the inclusion of this chapter in *Trozos Selectos* quite significant.<sup>40</sup>

### *Mormon*

The portions included from the writings of Mormon<sup>41</sup> provide closure to the history and events described in the Book of Mormon. The first part portrays the destruction of the Nephites under the hands of the Lamanites, as well as Mormon's lament over his lost people. It concludes with Mormon speaking to a latter-day remnant of the Nephites and Lamanites, inviting them to recognize their roots and destiny: "Know ye that ye are of the house of Israel. Know ye that ye must come unto repentance, or ye cannot be saved . . . Know ye that ye must come to the knowledge of your fathers, and repent of all your sins and iniquities" (Mormon 7:2-5).

These words from Mormon are essentially the message that the first missionaries proclaimed to the people of Mexico. The emphasis in Mormon's words is upon the Lamanites

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<sup>40</sup> This subject will be addressed more fully in chapter 6 of this thesis.

<sup>41</sup> Mormon 6-7 (1981 Edition).

knowing their Israelite heritage and coming to Christ through repentance and baptism (see Mormon 7:1-10).

### *Ordinances and the History of the Church*

The concluding pages of *Trozos Selectos* were not actual translations from the Book of Mormon itself, but rather a summation of various ordinances and procedures in the Church, including specific guidelines regarding how to baptize, perform confirmations, ordain men to priesthood offices, and administer the sacrament. Though portions of these translations were apparently based upon the current Moroni 3-5 (which are chapters that describe several of these priesthood ordinances), this section of *Trozos Selectos* is independent from Book of Mormon scriptural context. In essence, these instructions served as a priesthood manual and conveyed to Latin America that a living Church organization with living authority would accompany the Book of Mormon into Mexico.

The final section of *Trozos Selectos* gives a brief history of the Church, and speaks of how Joseph Smith obtained the gold plates (the source of the Book of Mormon) as well as how he received the priesthood authority to baptize and organize the Church. In addition, it describes the persecutions that had led the Church out of the eastern United States and into the Rocky Mountains in the west, and ends with an invitation to the people of Mexico to hear the gospel and learn of their fathers.<sup>42</sup>

### **Distribution of *Trozos Selectos***

As discussed in chapter 3 of this thesis, while journeying in Mexico, the missionaries not only distributed *Trozos Selectos del Libro de Mormón* to those to whom they preached, but they

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<sup>42</sup> See page 58 of this thesis.

mailed hundreds of copies to officials in cities throughout the Republic of Mexico. Elder Jones recorded the process as follows: “While in Chihuahua we sent out copies of the book, five in a package, to each town and city throughout the republic, wherever there was a mail. The clerks in the post office assisted us for three days. All their spare time they were packing and directing. Each package was directed to the officers of the place with a request to read and distribute them among the people. We sent to all the head officers of the different departments a package. I received letters of acknowledgement from some of the principal men.”<sup>43</sup>

These copies of the Book of Mormon played a crucial role in future growth and missionary success in Mexico during the nineteenth century.<sup>44</sup> As the missionaries mailed the copies of *Trozos Selectos* throughout the nation, they were planting seeds that would, in a short time, yield valuable fruit.

### **Other Early Publications in Spanish**

Many of the publications of the Church in Spanish are best understood and analyzed within the context of the time periods in which they were produced and will be addressed in later chapters. In short, while Apostle Moses Thatcher was in Mexico City between 1879-1881, the missionaries immediately went to work in order to produce additional translations and publications in Spanish, including, to name a few, *A Voice of Warning (Voz de Amonestación)*,<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Jones, *Forty Years*, 279.

<sup>44</sup> The contacts made through *Trozos Selectos* will be addressed in chapter 5 of this thesis.

<sup>45</sup> *A Voice of Warning* was originally published in 1837, and the first Spanish edition was produced in 1880. The translators listed on the title page were Trejo, Stewart, and Rhodakanaty (the first convert in Mexico).

by Parley P. Pratt, *The Only Way to be Saved (El Único Medio de Salvarse)*, by Lorenzo Snow,<sup>46</sup> and “Divine Origin of the Book of Mormon,” a 32-page pamphlet by Moses Thatcher—originally written for the *Contributor*<sup>47</sup> while he was in Mexico, and subsequently translated and published in Spanish.<sup>48</sup> In addition, they produced the complete translation of the Book of Mormon into Spanish in 1886.

### *A Voice of Warning*

Translating *A Voice of Warning* was a project the missionaries were particularly anxious about during the Church’s early history in the heart of Mexico. Originally published in 1837, this work by Parley P. Pratt was a staple of missionary work for years to come. It “became a model for other writers. The format, which employed descriptions of basic LDS doctrines and biblical references, arguments, and examples, was used by most Church writers for the next century.”<sup>49</sup>

As Peter Crawley put it, “[*A Voice of Warning*] was not quite the first Mormon tract nor was it the first outline of the tenets of Mormonism” but it was “the first use of a book other than the standard works to spread the Mormon message.”<sup>50</sup> Over forty years after its publication in

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<sup>46</sup> *The Only Way to be Saved* was originally published in London, 1841. Stewart is credited as the translator of the Spanish version in 1880. See “Publications Received,” *Contributor* 2, no. 3 (1880), 96.

<sup>47</sup> The *Contributor* was an official Church magazine from 1879-1892, and was replaced by the *Improvement Era*.

<sup>48</sup> Jenson, *Biographical Encyclopedia*, 1:134.

<sup>49</sup> Larry C. Porter, “Parley Parker Pratt,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 3:1117.

<sup>50</sup> Peter L. Crawley, “Parley P. Pratt: Father of Mormon Pamphleteering,” *Dialogue* 15 (Autumn 1982), 13-26.

English, *A Voice of Warning* also became the first book, “other than the standard works to spread the Mormon message” in Mexico.

The book outlines a variety of key doctrines of the Church, such as prophecy, the kingdom of God, the Book of Mormon, the Resurrection, the dealings of God with all nations, and the doctrine of Christ. The chapter on the Book of Mormon is of particular interest to this thesis, as it is one of the first publications about the Book of Mormon used as a missionary tool in Mexico, and because of Elder Pratt’s connection to the beginnings of the Church’s work in Latin America.

Much of Elder Pratt’s section on the Book of Mormon resembles traditional teachings about its contents, history, and spiritual significance. A few noteworthy aspects of this chapter include his emphasis on the Israelite heritage of the indigenous people of the Americas, and the use of “evidence from American antiquities”<sup>51</sup> to substantiate the Book of Mormon message.

Elder Pratt’s perspective on the Book of Mormon’s relation to the Americas appears clearly in statements where he describes America as “a land promised to the seed of Joseph,”<sup>52</sup> and refers to Lehi and his family as a “colony of Israelites . . . descendants of the tribe of Joseph.”<sup>53</sup>

His view on the historical significance of the Book of Mormon can be seen in the following:

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<sup>51</sup> Parley P. Pratt, *A Voice of Warning* (1837; reprint, Salt lake City: Deseret Book Company, 2000), 72.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

“Well,” said the objector, “if it were not for the marvelous, the book would be considered one of the greatest discoveries the world ever witnessed. If you had been ploughing, or digging a well or cellar, and accidentally dug up a record containing some account of the ancient history of the American continent, and of its original inhabitants, together with the origin of the Indian tribes who now inhabit it; had this record nothing to do with God, or angels, or inspiration, it would have been hailed by all the learned of America and Europe as one of the greatest and most important discoveries of modern times, unfolding a mystery which had, until then, bid defiance to all the researchers of the learned world. Every newspaper would have been filled with the glad tidings, while its contents would have poured upon the world a flood of light, on subjects before concealed in the labyrinth of uncertainty and doubt.”<sup>54</sup>

Throughout this chapter from *A Voice of Warning*, Elder Pratt draws upon archeological discoveries that would validate the Book of Mormon record as historically accurate, and he even quotes substantial portions of 3 Nephi 9-10 to draw correlations between the Book of Mormon text and archeological evidence.

Elder Pratt did not write *A Voice of Warning* as a book intended for the people of Mexico, but as the first book besides the scriptures published in Latin America it stands as a valuable reflection of the doctrines and teachings that influenced missionaries during the early years of the Church’s history in Mexico.

When originally establishing the Church in Mexico City, Elder Thatcher recorded that he and his companions had “read a great deal with the view of ascertaining what work would be best translated into the Spanish for circulation.”<sup>55</sup> To them, the decision of which literature should be provided first was not a casual matter, nor automatic. Their selections were deliberate. “*Voice of Warning* is better adapted to the understanding of the people of this Nation than any

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>55</sup> Moses Thatcher, Journal, December 2, 1879, Journals, Available through “Mormon Missionary Diaries,” Brigham Young University, Harold B. Lee Library, Digital Collections, 1:69 (some spelling standardized). Hereafter cited as BYU Digital Collections.

other. . . . We have therefore concluded to commence the translation and with the blessings of the Lord, and if we do not receive contrary instructions from Pres. Taylor and the Council will complete and publish it.”<sup>56</sup>

*Complete Spanish Translation of the Book of Mormon*

By 1883, after returning from their mission to Mexico City, James Z. Stewart and Melitón G. Trejo were asked by the Church to finish the translation of the Book of Mormon into Spanish. Their personal records do not say much regarding this experience, other than journal entries from Stewart indicating when they started and finished the translation, and notes about the progress they were making.<sup>57</sup> On June 21, 1884, he tersely wrote, “Finished our translation of the Book of Mormon in Spanish.”<sup>58</sup>

The complete translation into Spanish was published in 1886.<sup>59</sup> This Spanish edition followed the format of the 1879 English edition of the Book of Mormon, including chapter divisions and versification, but did not include the footnotes. Also, all of the additional sections included in *Trozos Selectos* were removed to more closely follow the English edition of the Book of Mormon.

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<sup>56</sup> Moses Thatcher, Journal, December 2, 1879, BYU Digital Collections, 1:71.

<sup>57</sup> See James Z. Stewart, Journal, 1882-1884, LDS Archives, Salt Lake City.

<sup>58</sup> James Z. Stewart, Journal, June 21, 1884, LDS Archives, Salt Lake City.

<sup>59</sup> See Eduardo Balderas, “How the Scriptures Came to Be Translated into Spanish,” *Ensign*, September 1972, 27.

## Conclusion

From the beginning of missionary work in Latin America, Parley P. Pratt knew that Church literature in Spanish, particularly the Book of Mormon, would be essential in order for the Church to flourish. The efforts of Parley P. Pratt, Daniel W. Jones, Melitón G. Trejo, and later Moses Thatcher and James Z. Stewart, to publish in Spanish, created interest in the Church, and laid the groundwork for further missionary work in that part of the world.

Early publications in Spanish, particularly *Trozos Selectos del Libro de Mormón*, reveal that the Book of Mormon message to the Lamanites strongly influenced the first missionaries as they brought the gospel to Mexico. The portions of the Book of Mormon they selected to translate—combined with other messages they wrote or translated into Spanish—reflect the way in which Church leaders and missionaries applied scriptural teachings regarding Israel and the Lamanites directly to the people of Mexico as the Church moved southward into Latin America. These early publications are evidence of a transition happening within the Church, seeing Mexico and other areas of Latin America as places where the promises within the Book of Mormon would be fulfilled.



## Chapter 5

### Dedicating the Land: An Apostle in Mexico City

The first mission into Mexico in 1875-1876 opened the way south of the border and was quickly followed by another brief excursion into Sonora, in northern Mexico.<sup>1</sup> The Church had not, however, really established itself in Mexico up to this point, nor penetrated the heart of the country—Mexico City. In the commencement of 1878, almost a year and a half after the missionaries sent out the copies of *Trozos Selectos*, Dr. Plotino C. Rhodakanaty,<sup>2</sup> who later became the first branch president in Mexico, contacted the Church in response to the copy he had received through the mail.

After several months of correspondence with Rhodakanaty,<sup>3</sup> President John Taylor, successor of Brigham Young, decided to send newly ordained Apostle Moses Thatcher to Mexico accompanied by James Z. Stewart and Melitón G. Trejo. Elder Thatcher did not know Spanish, yet he responded in the affirmative to the call. Leaving Utah in the latter part of October 1879, he met Stewart in Chicago and then Trejo in New Orleans. The group then took a steamer across the Gulf of Mexico, arriving in Veracruz on November 14, 1879.<sup>4</sup> The following

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Jenson, *Encyclopedic History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City, Deseret News, 1941), 494.

<sup>2</sup> Tullis, *Mormons in Mexico*, 48.

<sup>3</sup> Andrew Jenson recorded, “In the fall of 1878 Pres. John Taylor received a number of letters from Dr. Plotino C. Rhodakanaty, a resident of the City of Mexico, making inquiry concerning the doctrines of the Church. In response to these inquiries a number of the Church works were sent and through them a score of people became interested in the work and believed it so far as they could understand it from books” (Jenson, *Encyclopedic History of the Church*, 494).

<sup>4</sup> Tullis, *Mormons in Mexico*, 36.

day they took a train to Mexico City.<sup>5</sup> As Church historian Andrew Jenson noted, “this second mission really grew out of the first mission to Mexico since it was through one of the pamphlets containing translations from the Book of Mormon by Elder Trejo which fell into the hands of Dr. Rhodakanaty that the correspondence with Pres. John Taylor was started.”<sup>6</sup>

Elder Thatcher would spend a total of twelve months in Mexico (though this time was divided by a nine-month stay in Utah to discuss mission matters with the presiding leaders of the Church).<sup>7</sup> The year of Elder Thatcher’s tenure in Mexico is an invaluable portion of the Church’s history there. The office of an Apostle carries particular weight within the Church for a number of reasons, including that the Twelve Apostles hold the key to “open the door,” or dedicate lands, for the preaching of the gospel (see D&C 107:35). These months of Elder Thatcher in Mexico are the official opening of the door in that nation, and a manifestation of apostolic keys. The work he and his companions would do in Mexico would lay the foundation upon which future growth in the heart of Mexico would be built in years to come. Book of Mormon teachings regarding the Lamanites were fundamental to Elder Thatcher’s experience in Mexico. The history and prophecies of the Book of Mormon were the lenses through which Elder Thatcher saw the people of Mexico and their destiny, influencing not only his personal records and missionary work, but even the dedication of Mexico for the preaching of the gospel. This chapter will analyze and evaluate some of Elder Thatcher’s experiences while in Mexico, particularly the influence of the Book of Mormon upon the work. Moses Thatcher expended

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<sup>5</sup> James Z. Stewart, Journal, November 15, 1879, LDS Archives, Salt Lake City.

<sup>6</sup> Andrew Jenson, *Encyclopedic History of the Church*, 494.

<sup>7</sup> He was in Mexico from November 14, 1879 to February 5, 1880 before returning home to report to Church leaders on colonization opportunities. He returned to Mexico from December 5, 1880 to September 16, 1881.

great effort to not only keep a detailed record of his time in Mexico, but to write it in literary prose. His three journals written during this time period will be the primary source of this chapter, as they provide the most thorough account of the 1879 mission to Mexico City.<sup>8</sup>

### **Plotino Rhodakanaty**

Plotino Rhodakanaty's personal history, contact with the Church, political views, and eventual disaffection, could be treated at great length.<sup>9</sup> In short, Rhodakanaty was a highly educated individual of Greek origin, his mother from Mexico and father from Greece, and had moved to Mexico in pursuit of professional and ideological goals.<sup>10</sup> He was a teacher at a Presbyterian college,<sup>11</sup> and is "considered by some Mexicans to be a father of their country's socialist, agrarian, and syndicalist movements as well as a leading thinker whose ideas on

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<sup>8</sup> Moses Thatcher's personal journals are the most detailed account of the 1879-1881 mission to Mexico. His journals are thorough and well written, representing a deep level of commitment and sacrifice to write and keep an accurate history of the mission in Mexico. By and large they have been under-utilized in histories regarding early missionary work in Mexico, especially in regards to direct citations from Moses Thatcher. As evidence of the importance of these journals, the official manuscript history of the Mexican mission draws heavily upon them for the work in Mexico during this time period (see "1879-1881," Manuscript History and Historical Reports: Mexican Mission, LDS Archives, Salt Lake City). Kenneth W. Godfrey's article "Moses Thatcher and Mormon Beginnings in Mexico," *BYU Studies* 38, no. 4 (1999), 139-155 is a good source for correspondence between Moses Thatcher and others during his mission to Mexico, but emphasizes more his personal experience rather than discussing the details and motives of the mission itself.

<sup>9</sup> For more information on Plotino Rhodakanaty, see Raymundo Gómez González, *El águila mormón o el anarquista cristiano : Plotino Constantino Rhodakanaty, primer miembro de la Iglesia de Jesucristo de los Santos de los Ultimos Días en México* (México, D.F.: Museo de Historia del Mormonismo en México), 1997; and Carlos Illades, *Rhodakanaty y la formación del pensamiento socialista en México* (México: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, 2002).

<sup>10</sup> Tullis, *Mormons in Mexico*, 35.

<sup>11</sup> B.H. Roberts, ed., *A Comprehensive History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1930), 5:569.

freedom and liberty helped to precipitate the Mexican revolution of 1910.”<sup>12</sup> The principal interest of this thesis, however, is his experience with the Book of Mormon, and the impetus he created for the Church to enter Mexico City.

On December 15, 1878, Rhodakanaty and a group of individuals who had become interested in the Church through his efforts, wrote a letter to President Taylor describing their experience as they learned about the Book of Mormon:

Having been convoked to a private meeting in the home belonging to Dr. Plotino Constantino Rhodakanaty, managing promoter of the same Church, for the purpose of organizing a small circle or congregation of religious and social persuasion in this capital city, said gentleman read to us for such purpose a work entitled Choice Selections from the Book of Mormon, translated into Spanish by the reverend Elder Melitón G. Trejo and Daniel W. Jones, the mystical and highly transcendent meaning of which was later elucidated to us by the same Doctor, who proved unto us and fully convinced us of the evidence of the divine origin of such a precious book, and of the lofty mission that its doctrine has to accomplish in the world.<sup>13</sup>

From their words it is evident that Rhodakanaty and his associates sensed the importance of the Book of Mormon and were convinced of its divine origin and mission. Later in the letter Rhodakanaty pled for the Church to send missionaries to their country so that he and his followers could be baptized and ordained to the Aaronic priesthood, the lesser of the priesthoods within the Church.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Tullis, *Mormons in Mexico*, 35. For more on Rhodakanaty’s political background see Tullis, *Mormons in Mexico*, 48, endnote 64.

<sup>13</sup> Plotino C. Rhodakanaty, Letter to John Taylor, December 15, 1878, translated by Eduardo Balderas, as cited in F. LaMond Tullis, “Early Mormon Exploration and Missionary Activities in Mexico,” *BYU Studies* 22, no. 3 (1982), 13-15.

<sup>14</sup> Tullis, *Mormons in Mexico*, 35. See also Tullis, “Early Mormon Exploration and Missionary Activities in Mexico,” 13-15.

On Sunday, November 16<sup>th</sup>, the day following their arrival in Mexico City, Moses Thatcher, James Stewart, and Melitón Trejo met with Rhodakanaty and his small group of followers. James Stewart recorded in his journal for that day: “Met Dr. Plotino Rhodakanaty who welcomed us, and in the evening we held a meeting with those who had gathered around him.”<sup>15</sup> Moses Thatcher noted: “During the afternoon Dr. Plotino Constantino Rhodakanaty called upon and gladly and warmly welcomed us to Mexico. . . . I was very favorably impressed with his appearance and with his open frank warm hearted manners. There have been some 15 or 20 believers in the gospel as revealed on the latter days, who have occasionally met together and talked to one another about our doctrines.”<sup>16</sup>

On Thursday, November 20<sup>th</sup>, the missionaries held the first baptismal service in Mexico City. They went to Rhodakanaty’s home early in the morning and knelt in prayer with him and two others, imploring that “from the commencement of the work of the Lord which we expect this morning to open up by the baptism of two persons, it may go forth in spirit and power and by demonstration of the Holy Spirit to the convincing of many souls in this land, and to the honor and glory of God in the salvation of the honest and good.”<sup>17</sup> Later in the morning, “Bro. Thatcher baptized Dr. Plotino L. [C.] Rhodakanaty and Silviano Arteaga in a private bath in the

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<sup>15</sup> James Z. Stewart, Journal, November 16, 1879, LDS Archives, Salt Lake City.

<sup>16</sup> Moses Thatcher, Journal, November 16, 1879, BYU Digital Collections, 1:48. Note, some minor spelling and grammar from Moses Thatcher’s journals has been standardized in this thesis. Most changes involved standardizing the proper names of places (like Popocatépetl), or names of people (like Rhodakanaty) that were consistently spelled differently throughout his journals. In addition, words that were crossed out in his journal, or other obvious typos, were removed from the citations. Most grammatical errors were retained in the citations to maintain the integrity of his writings. All of Moses Thatcher’s missionary journals, both the scans of handwritten pages, and their accompanying detailed transcription, are available through “Mormon Missionary Diaries,” BYU, Harold B. Lee Library, Digital Collections.

<sup>17</sup> Moses Thatcher, Journal, November 20, 1879, BYU Digital Collections, 1:54.

garden of olives and confirmed them in the house of Bro. P. L. [C.] Rhodakanaty.”<sup>18</sup> The private garden where they performed the baptisms, designated by both Elder Thatcher and Elder Stewart as the “Garden of Olives,”<sup>19</sup> was close to the “causeway over which Cortés was driven by the people of Montezuma A.D. 1520,”<sup>20</sup> near the famous “Árbol de la Noche Triste.”<sup>21</sup> It is unclear whether the missionaries or Rhodakanaty and his associate selected the place for the baptisms,<sup>22</sup> but choosing to perform the baptisms so close to a landmark of significant Mexican history, specifically a moment of triumph for the Aztecs, had to be more than coincidental.

Elder Thatcher recorded his experience at the baptism as follows:

I entered the water first by means of stone steps and was followed by Plotino Constantino Rhodakanaty. With the watery element surrounding our bodies from just below the arm pits and with the clear blue sky of heaven above us on which the sun was shining brightly and while all nature was smiling around us and I believe angels were rejoicing above I baptised, in the name of the Father Son and Holy Ghost the first person ever baptised in this part of the world by the authority of the Holy Priesthood since the days of the Nephites to whom Jesus gave authority to baptise. This person was Plotino Constantino Rhodakanaty. The 2<sup>nd</sup> whom I baptised was Silviano Arteaga, who is a descendant of Joseph through the loins of Nephi.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> James Z. Stewart, Journal, November 20, 1879, LDS Archives, Salt Lake City.

<sup>19</sup> Moses Thatcher, Journal, November 20, 1879, BYU Digital Collections, 1:54.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:54.

<sup>21</sup> The “Noche Triste” (Sad Night) was the night of July 1, 1520 when Cortés lost 450 men in a battle against the Aztecs in Tenochtitlán. The “Árbol de la Noche Triste” (the Tree of the Sad Night) was where Cortés, following the destruction of his army, “was so moved by the disaster that he sat under a great tree and wept” (Meyer and Sherman, *The Course of Mexican History*, 122-124). See also Lozano, *Historia del Mormonismo en México*, 30.

<sup>22</sup> Moses Thatcher, Journal, November 19, 1879, BYU Digital Collections, 1:53.

<sup>23</sup> Moses Thatcher, Journal, November 20, 1879, BYU Digital Collections, 1:54-55.

Note the historical context in which Elder Thatcher placed the baptisms. They were not just the first baptisms in Mexico City, but the first “in this part of the world by the authority of the Holy Priesthood since the days of the Nephites to whom Jesus gave authority to baptise.”<sup>24</sup> To Elder Thatcher, the establishment of the Church in Mexico was far more than beginning missionary work in a new vineyard; it was the continuation of a work commenced in the Americas by the Savior in 3 Nephi 11.<sup>25</sup> Reiterating these prophetic and scriptural ties between their current baptisms and the promises made to those of Book of Mormon descent, Elder Thatcher described Silviano Arteaga, as a “descendant of Joseph through the loins of Nephi.”<sup>26</sup> Apparently, Brother Arteaga was a “pure Aztec,”<sup>27</sup> reinforcing the significance of where the baptisms took place near the “Árbol de la Noche Triste.”<sup>28</sup>

Just three days after the baptisms, on November 23<sup>rd</sup>, they baptized six more individuals and conferred the priesthood upon four men, including Plotino Rhodakanaty, Silviano Arteaga, and José Ybarola, who were set apart to serve as the first branch presidency in Mexico (with Rhodakanaty as president).<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 1:54-55.

<sup>25</sup> This chapter in the Book of Mormon speaks of Christ appearing to the people following His death and Resurrection, bestowing upon them the power and authority to baptize in his name.

<sup>26</sup> Moses Thatcher, Journal, November 20, 1879, BYU Digital Collections, 1:54-55. Once again, the designation of “descendant of Nephi” appears here rather than the more expected “Laman.” See pages 8-12 of this thesis for commentary on why it would not only be appropriate to designate someone as a descendant of Nephi (rather than Laman), but also significant.

<sup>27</sup> Roberts, *Comprehensive History of The Church*, 5:569.

<sup>28</sup> See footnote 21 of this chapter.

<sup>29</sup> James Z. Stewart, Journal, November 23, 1879, LDS Archives, Salt Lake City.

Though many factors undoubtedly influenced Rhodakanaty and the others in their decision to join the Church, the Book of Mormon was a key component. Elder Moses Thatcher returned to Utah for a short period during his mission, and delivered an address during general conference in which he described an experience that had helped Rhodakanaty believe in the Book of Mormon and join the Church. As Elder Thatcher recounts, Rhodakanaty had been searching for the truth and had received a dream as an answer to his prayers that prepared his heart to accept the Book of Mormon.

During the night he dreamed that a person came and presented to him a book, pressing it emphatically upon his forehead. On the following day, while teaching his class in the college, wherein he was Greek professor, a little boy entered and asked him to buy a book. “No,” said he to the boy, “I do not want your book.” “But,” says the boy, “you do want this book, and it is only a riel” (twelve and a half cents). He told the boy again that he did not want the book, but the boy still insisted that he did, and finally he took it. When he came to read the book, it proved to be that part of the Book of Mormon which has been translated into the Spanish language.<sup>30</sup>

In Rhodakanaty’s dream, the Book of Mormon was central to his experience, reiterating its importance in his conversion. It was what led him to contact the Church, and conversely, what led the Church to him. Interesting to note, as mentioned in chapter 3 of this thesis, when Helaman Pratt was set apart to begin missionary work in Mexico, Orson Pratt blessed him that “the Lord [would] open the way before [him] by pouring out his Spirit upon the inhabitants that are honest in heart by giving them visions and dreams.”<sup>31</sup> As a direct result of Helaman Pratt’s mission to Mexico, in which he helped to distribute *Trozos Selectos*, it was ultimately a dream

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<sup>30</sup> Moses Thatcher, in Conference Report, April 1880, 19.

<sup>31</sup> Helaman Pratt, Journal, no date provided, LDS Archives, Salt Lake City, 5-7.



that led a man to accept the Book of Mormon and become one of the Church's first converts and leaders in Mexico.

Another simple attestation to the importance of the Book of Mormon in Rhodakanaty's conversion is the name he gave to his newborn son, who was blessed by Elder Moses Thatcher the day of the baptism. As recorded by both James Stewart and Moses Thatcher, the name of the child was *Nephi* Moses Rhodakanaty.<sup>32</sup> *Nephi* is the name of several key prophets and leaders in the Book of Mormon, and is unique to this volume of scripture. For Rhodakanaty to choose this as his son's name shows his faith in the Book of Mormon, as well as the value he placed upon its contents.

For several months Rhodakanaty played an important role in the establishment of the Church, helping to translate *A Voice of Warning*<sup>33</sup> and providing contacts for the missionaries. In spite of this, he soon became disaffected towards his new faith. All of the reasons for this are impossible to know,<sup>34</sup> but perhaps the most salient would be his disappointment that the Church would not provide means "to serve the ideal of communitarianism,"<sup>35</sup> which he so strongly advocated. In spite of their genuine interest in the Book of Mormon, it appears that Rhodakanaty and his followers had incorrect expectations with regards to receiving temporal benefit from the Church, which became manifest early on as Elder Thatcher was in Mexico.

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<sup>32</sup> See James Z. Stewart, Journal, November 20, 1879, LDS Archives, Salt Lake City; and Moses Thatcher, Journal, November 20, 1879, BYU Digital Collections, 1:57.

<sup>33</sup> See Moses Thatcher, November 16, 1879, BYU Digital Collections, 1:49; and Moses Thatcher, January 8, 1880, BYU Digital Collections, 2:15. Rhodakanaty is acknowledged as one of the translators on the title page of the first Spanish edition of *A Voice of Warning*.

<sup>34</sup> For a brief review of Rhodakanaty's reasons for leaving the Latter-day Saints, see Illades, *Rhodakanaty y la formación del pensamiento socialista en México*, 106-107.

<sup>35</sup> Tullis, *Mormons in Mexico*, 39. See also Tullis, *Mormons in Mexico*, 48, endnote 64.

In a letter Elder Thatcher sent to a family member at this time, he described the practice of many religious denominations in Mexico who used money to secure their converts. Then he noted that “now, to our deep regret, after we had baptized 12 persons we learned that they, and many others, who wanted to be baptised if the things worked well, expected us to do likewise.”<sup>36</sup> Among other things, Rhodakanaty and his followers requested that the Church build schools, pay them as ministers, and even build a home where the Saints could live together.<sup>37</sup> Elder Thatcher simply noted, “we are sorry to learn that some of the brethren who have been baptised here, were evidently lead to do so more by a hope of temporal aid than by a true love of truth and a desire of salvation. And that it more was, we fear, sordid motives which first promoted a request for Missionaries to be sent here.”<sup>38</sup> Using New Testament imagery, Elder Thatcher frequently described some of these first converts as “lovers of ‘loaves and fishes.’”<sup>39</sup> As one historian observed, to Elder Thatcher’s credit, he “was willing to sacrifice spectacular numerical success on the altar of steady, sound, more secure patterns of conversion.”<sup>40</sup>

In spite of the difficulties that arose from the expectations of Rhodakanaty and his followers, the missionaries tried to motivate him to fulfill his calling as branch president. Elder

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<sup>36</sup> Moses Thatcher, Letter to William B. Preston, December 22, 1879, as cited in Godfrey, “Moses Thatcher and Mormon Beginnings in Mexico,” 141.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 141. See also Moses Thatcher, Journal, December 21, 1879, BYU Digital Collections, 1:118; and Moses Thatcher, Journal, January 29, 1881, BYU Digital Collections, 3:10-12.

<sup>38</sup> Moses Thatcher, Journal, December 17, 1879, BYU Digital Collections, 1:114.

<sup>39</sup> See Moses Thatcher, Letter to William B. Preston, December 22, 1879, as cited in Godfrey, “Moses Thatcher and Mormon Beginnings in Mexico,” 141; and Moses Thatcher, Journal, January 30, 1881, BYU Digital Collections, 3:15.

<sup>40</sup> Godfrey, “Moses Thatcher and Mormon Beginnings in Mexico,” 142.

Thatcher met with him a year after his baptism, reminding him that “it was through his supplications written to Pres. Taylor that we had been sent here,”<sup>41</sup> and invited him “to repent of his slackness and turn again to the Lord and he should be blessed otherwise there was no promise for him. Told him to boldly confess Jesus and be true and then when in need Christ would confess him . . . [and] told him plainly but kindly that he had failed to do his duty both to himself and the little branch over which [they] had placed him to preside, and that improvement was in order.”<sup>42</sup> After their meeting, Elder Thatcher recorded, “I think that he finally felt the justness of my remarks, for the Spirit of the Lord prompted them.”<sup>43</sup> Unfortunately, by August of 1881, eight months after Elder Thatcher had called upon Rhodakanaty to repent, the situation had not improved. Elder Thatcher remarked, “I have never seen him since the day several months since, when I talked so plainly to him.”<sup>44</sup> Rhodakanaty even began to write antagonistic materials towards the Church.<sup>45</sup>

On August 28, 1881, a little less than two years since Rhodakanaty was baptized, he was removed as branch president, and was replaced by his counselor, Silviano Arteaga.<sup>46</sup>

Many years later, Agrícola Lozano Herrera, himself a prominent Latter-day Saint in Mexico and the first Mexican stake president there, perhaps described best Rhodakanaty’s short time in the Church: “The end of the first branch president in Mexico was tragic, the same as

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<sup>41</sup> Moses Thatcher, Journal, January 29, 1881, BYU Digital Collections, 3:11.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:11-12.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:11-12.

<sup>44</sup> Moses Thatcher, Journal, August 27, 1881, BYU Digital Collections, 3:82.

<sup>45</sup> Moses Thatcher, Journal, May 2, 1881, BYU Digital Collections, 3:61.

<sup>46</sup> Moses Thatcher, Journal, August 28, 1881, BYU Digital Collections, 3:84-85.

many of the first [Church] leaders of this dispensation, he apostatized.”<sup>47</sup> This comparison between Rhodakanaty and early Church leaders in the United States who apostatized is keenly insightful. To begin with, like early Church leaders who fell away in the United States, even though he left the Church it does not negate the contribution he made to early Church history in Mexico. Second, the Church constantly uses spiritual experiences of early Church members as part of its heritage, regardless of whether the people stayed true to the Church or not. Their experiences before apostasy are considered valid and are a manifestation of God’s influence and power, independent of later decisions made by said individuals. Such is the case with Rhodakanaty. His time in the Church was short, but his experiences with the Book of Mormon led him to contact Salt Lake City, and as a result, an Apostle was sent to Mexico. Regardless of his later decisions, this first convert and branch president in Mexico helped open the way for others to come, literally thousands upon thousands.

### **Influence of *Trozos Selectos* on Another Early Contact**

Aside from Rhodakanaty and his associates, *Trozos Selectos* made its way to other influential individuals, including Ignacio Manuel Altamirano, “master of letters of nineteenth-century Mexico.”<sup>48</sup> Altamirano was “an Indian who started studying Spanish at age sixteen and thereafter mastered it, [and] was highly receptive not only to the pro-Indian Liberal rhetoric but

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<sup>47</sup> Lozano, *Historia del Mormonismo en México*, 34. Citation translated by Matthew Geilman. The original in Spanish reads: “El final del primer Presidente de Rama de México fue trágico, le pasó como a algunos de los primeros líderes de esta Dispensación, apostató.”

<sup>48</sup> Tullis, *Mormons in Mexico*, 34.

also to the Mormons' beliefs about the Lamanites' historical importance."<sup>49</sup> According to Daniel Jones, Altamirano received a copy of *Trozos Selectos* through the mail and subsequently sent a letter of acknowledgment to him.<sup>50</sup>

Though Jones indicates that Altamirano wrote to him, Moses Thatcher did not visit Altamirano until February 1, 1880 (nearly three months after his arrival in Mexico City). It would appear that Thatcher and his missionary party contacted Altamirano, not because of his letter to Daniel Jones, but because of his political and intellectual status. B.H. Roberts attributes the missionaries' visit to him as a contact made "through the American minister, Mr. Foster" who was instrumental in setting up meetings between Elder Thatcher and "some of the leading men of the City of Mexico and of the republic."<sup>51</sup> In addition, Moses Thatcher's journal makes it appear that when he and his party went to Mexico City, they were unaware of Altamirano's response to Daniel Jones. When they first visited Altamirano, Thatcher noted that he was an "eminent self made scholar" who was the "the second Justice of the Supreme Court" and "a pure blooded Indian,"<sup>52</sup> but made no mention of previous contact from Altamirano that would have instigated their visit to him. The missionaries also seemed somewhat surprised when they discovered the following during their first visit with him: "After a conversation of over an hour and a half, I presented him with a copy of the Book of Mormon so far as translated in the

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 34. For more information on Altamirano's background, see Salvador Reyes Nevares, "Prólogo," in Ignacio Manuel Altamirano, *Obras literarias completas* (México, D.F: Ediciones Oasis, S. A., 1959), xi-xxv. See also Chris N. Nacci, *Ignacio Manuel Altamirano* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1970); and Vicente Fuentes Díaz, *Ignacio M. Altamirano: triunfo y viacrucis de un escritor liberal* (México: Casa Altamirano, 1988).

<sup>50</sup> Jones, *Forty Years*, 279.

<sup>51</sup> Roberts, *Comprehensive History of the Church*, 5:571.

<sup>52</sup> Moses Thatcher, Journal, February 1, 1880, BYU Digital Collections, 2:61.

Spanish language, and promised him the full text in English. On looking at the copy handed to him, ‘Why:’ he exclaimed, ‘somebody sent me (I think he said four copies) of this work over a year ago: I never knew who sent them. I gave them all away to my friends except one copy which I have.’<sup>53</sup>

It would appear that fate (or divine providence) brought Altamirano and the missionaries together. Although there is no record of Altamirano joining the Church, a warm and open friendship was established between him and the missionaries, and they maintained frequent contact for several months. When the missionaries later expanded their efforts into regions outside of Mexico City, Elder Thatcher noted that on at least one occasion Altamirano wrote “for us a very nice letter of introduction, by means of which we hope to secure an opening and do good.”<sup>54</sup>

Elder Thatcher was deeply impressed with Altamirano, and wrote a detailed description of him in his journal. His words provide an insightful reflection of how the Book of Mormon influenced the missionaries’ perspective as they interacted with the indigenous population of Mexico: “I have met no such a man as this Lamanite friend and brother. I say friend and brother; for thus I do and shall esteem him, not knowing however fully what views he may have towards me. But this I know—He is a noble man upon whose heart the power of God has and will continue to work. The moment I saw him and grasped his hand, I felt that he was like a brother. There is no mixed blood about him. He is a pure descendent of Israel through Joseph.”<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Moses Thatcher, Journal, February 1, 1880, BYU Digital Collections, 2:65.

<sup>54</sup> Moses Thatcher, Journal, January 29, 1881, BYU Digital Collections, 3:9.

<sup>55</sup> Moses Thatcher, Journal, February 1, 1880, BYU Digital Collections, 2:62.

To Elder Thatcher, the visit the missionaries made to Altamirano proved to be one of the most rewarding of his time in Mexico. “Thus concluded the happiest visit, to me, which I have made since reaching this country. And one from which, I most earnestly hope, and humbly pray results I may develop which will lead many of the descendants of Joseph to a knowledge of the gospel of Jesus, that they may be quickened by the power of God as predicted by the Prophets.”<sup>56</sup>

### **Impressions of Mexico**

As the first missionaries went to Mexico City, they saw themselves on a journey not only into a strange land and culture, but literally into the lands of the Book of Mormon. The epic feeling of this journey is captured in the articles Elder Thatcher wrote for the *Contributor*<sup>57</sup> from October 1880 through March of 1881, under the title, “Mexico and the Mexicans.”<sup>58</sup>

Within days of arriving in Mexico City, before they had even performed the first baptisms, they went to the National Museum.<sup>59</sup> “I visited the National Museum and was greatly interested, particularly in the collection of the antiquities pertaining to Aztack [sic].”<sup>60</sup> Their purpose in going to the Museum was not casual sightseeing. Elder Thatcher noted of this visit to the museum, “I shall not now name any thing which I saw in the public part of the museum as

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 2:67.

<sup>57</sup> The *Contributor* was an official Church magazine from 1879-1892, and later replaced by the *Improvement Era*.

<sup>58</sup> Moses Thatcher, “Mexico and the Mexicans,” *Contributor* 2, no. 1-6, October 1880 through March 1881.

<sup>59</sup> The National Museum in Mexico City housed many pre-Columbian artifacts from Aztec history that were of interest to Moses Thatcher as he drew connections between the Book of Mormon and history of Mexico.

<sup>60</sup> Moses Thatcher, Journal, November 19, 1879, BYU Digital Collections, 1:51.

we will visit that again and make some notes of such things as we deem of particular interest.”<sup>61</sup>

They not only visited the museum again, but did so with great frequency throughout Elder Thatcher’s time in Mexico.

On another occasion, Elder Thatcher indicated, “We three visited the Museum today and spent two hours most happily in the library. What a wealth of knowledge is there relating to the ancient inhabitants of this land. How beautifully do the writings of Lord Kingsborough and others confirm the Divine Origin of the Book of Mormon.”<sup>62</sup> As the missionaries searched through maps and ancient artifacts they concluded that what they were seeing “[illustrated] the owned cities of Central America and Mexico, as well as monuments and pyramids and also the ancient line of fortification of the Nephite people as they passed up the Ohio Valley and thence into the State of New York.”<sup>63</sup>

In an interview with Mexico’s minister of foreign affairs, the missionaries revealed their interest in the history of Mexico. “We spoke to him . . . freely regarding our searches for Spanish histories confirmatory of the divine truths contained in the Book of Mormon referring to

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 1:53.

<sup>62</sup> Moses Thatcher, Journal, January 28, 1880, BYU Digital Collections, 2:54. Lord Kingsborough (1795-1837) was responsible for a nine-volume work entitled, *Antiquities of Mexico* (the first volume appearing in 1831) which contained a series of facsimiles and reproductions of ancient Mayan and Aztec codices. See Sylvia D. Whitmore, “Lord Kingsborough and his Contribution to Ancient Mesoamerican Scholarship: The *Antiquities of Mexico*,” *The PARI Journal* 9, no. 4 (Spring 2009), 8-16. Interesting to note, one of Kingsborough’s chief motivations for producing *Antiquities of Mexico* was his belief that “the indigenous Mexicans were the direct descendants of the ten Lost Tribes of Israel” (Whitmore, “Lord Kingsborough,” 11-12).

<sup>63</sup> Moses Thatcher, Journal, January 19, 1880, BYU Digital Collections, 2:36.



the ancient inhabitants of America.”<sup>64</sup> As shown in this interview, the missionaries saw the search of “confirmatory” evidence of the Book of Mormon as part of their mission.

On December 27, 1879, just a little over a month after arriving in Mexico, Elders Thatcher, Trejo, and Stewart spent a day going to the pyramids of San Juan Teotihuacan, twenty-seven miles from Mexico City. These ruins were of particular interest to them because they were considered to be among “the most ancient remains, probably, on the Mexican soil.”<sup>65</sup>

Elder Thatcher’s own impressions of the ruins convey the direct link he and his companions saw between the Book of Mormon and the land they were in. He felt certain regarding the origin of these people.

What thoughts must crowd on the mind of the traveler, as he wanders amidst these memorials of the past; as he treads over the ashes of the generations who reared these colossal fabrics, which take us from the present into the very depths of time! But who were their builders? Was it the shadowy Olmecs, whose history, like that of the ancient Titans, is lost in the midst of fable? or, as commonly reported, the peaceful and industrious Toltecs, of whom all that we can glean rest on traditions hardly more secure? What has become of the races who built them? Did they remain on the soil, and mingle and become incorporated with the fierce Aztecs who succeeded them? Or did they pass to the south, and find a wider field for the expansion of their civilization, as shown by the higher character of the architectural remains in the distant regions of Central American and Yucatan?<sup>66</sup>

He goes on to answer his inquiry—some may say “it is all a mystery, over which time has thrown an impenetrable veil, that no mortal hand may raise.’ True indeed, but an immortal

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<sup>64</sup> Moses Thatcher, Journal, January 12, 1880, BYU Digital Collections, 2:22-23.

<sup>65</sup> Moses Thatcher, Journal, December 27, 1879, BYU Digital Collections, 1:123-140.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:128-129.

hand directed the prophet Joseph to the hill Cumorah<sup>67</sup> from whence comes the voice and records of ages past, telling of nations long since passed away but they have not ‘perished without a name’ nor have they ‘died and made no sign!’ Ye wise men, historians and antiquarians your wisdom has failed you and your knowledge shall be counted as foolishness before the Lord. But the ‘words of the book that speaks with a familiar spirit out of the ground’ [the Book of Mormon] will go to the meek, poor, and honest who will know the voice of the Shepherd.”<sup>68</sup>

To Elder Thatcher, the Book of Mormon not only provided answers to the mysteries surrounding the history of the ancient races of the Americas, but the Americas themselves stood as evidence of an ancient link to the Holy Land. As he observed his surroundings in Mexico City and the society and culture of the people, this connection became fortified and unmistakable to him.

The male water carriers to whom I have alluded universally wear sandals the soles of which are of leather and are strapped on by means of things *just as the Ancients* wore them. Immense loads of lumber goods wood hay and even rocks are carried in the same manner as the water is carried; that is upon the back, suspended by means of a strap across the forehead. These and many other traits show to my mind even if it were not for the knowledge given us in the Book of Mormon, that this people (I have been speaking of the Indian race) are from, or *their progenitors were from Palestine* and their remarkable love for leeks onions and garlic which fairly stinks one out upon every hand, ought to convince one that *they are of Israel*.”<sup>69</sup>

Even in the customs and simple actions of the Mexican people Elder Thatcher saw attestations to the origin and story of the Book of Mormon. He felt that “even if it were not for

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<sup>67</sup> This is the hill from which Joseph Smith retrieved the gold plates upon which was written the record contained in the Book of Mormon.

<sup>68</sup> Moses Thatcher, Journal, December 27, 1879, BYU Digital Collections, 1:134.

<sup>69</sup> Moses Thatcher, Journal, December 6, 1879, BYU Digital Collections, 1:89. Italics added for emphasis.

the knowledge given us in the Book of Mormon” there is enough evidence to “convince one that they [the people of the Americas] are from Israel.”<sup>70</sup>

On another occasion, when teaching about Matthew 24:41 (“Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left”), he remarked to a small group of new converts that the fulfillment of this New Testament prophecy would surely be “in this land: certainly not in Europe or in the United States, for in those countries women do not grind.”<sup>71</sup> The practice of the women in Mexico grinding their corn, as well as that “of transporting fluids in the skins of goats & pigs and many others: aside from the knowledge which we have received through the restoration of the Book of Mormon, was very plain and conclusive evidence to [his] mind that the forefathers of the Indian races who once bore sway over this land, were descendants of that people to whom God had given the land of Palestine.”<sup>72</sup>

Elder Thatcher continually reflected upon the promises made to the Lamanites, as evident in his prayers, teachings, and personal observations recorded in his journal. One evening, with over twenty people present for a meeting at Brother Arteaga’s home (first counselor in the branch presidency) the missionaries passed the time “reading from the Bible and Book of Mormon and explaining therefrom.”<sup>73</sup> During the course of this meeting Elder Thatcher shared his feelings that though many of the Indian races were looked down upon, “yet we knew them to be of the house of Israel and as the descendants of Joseph to whom the promise was made, they would yet arise and Nations would be born (baptised) in a day. And receiving the gospel with the

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<sup>70</sup> Moses Thatcher, Journal, December 6, 1879, BYU Digital Collections, 1:89.

<sup>71</sup> Moses Thatcher, Journal, November 30, 1879, BYU Digital Collections, 1:67.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:67.

<sup>73</sup> Moses Thatcher, Journal, December 4, 1879, BYU Digital Collections, 1:82.

light and power thereof would not only claim this, but the lands of Central and South America and the United States, as theirs and would have it through the blessings of God as their inheritance.”<sup>74</sup>

Of particular interest in this entry is his emphasis upon the claims of inheritance the remnant of Joseph had upon Mexico, Central and South America, as well as the United States. Elder Thatcher’s remarks are clear, “we knew them to be of the house of Israel and . . . descendants of Joseph to whom the promise was made.”<sup>75</sup>

Elder Thatcher was in Mexico on New Year’s Day both at the commencement of 1880 and 1881. On each of these occasions he began the year by imploring the Lord for his help with the work in Mexico. On January 1, 1880, he offered this prayer, “Have pity upon the poor Lamanite, and speedily terminate his sorrow and dispel his darkness with thy divine rays of joy and births.”<sup>76</sup>

The following year he offered this prayer to begin the new year, “Remember the remnants of Joseph, Oh Lord, that they also, may see and hear and understand and caused to rejoice with the Saints, that their feet may become beautiful upon the Mountains, and their light Shine in the valleys – Amen.”<sup>77</sup> In some regards, these prayers he offered to begin a new year were similar to the dedicatory prayers of Mexico offered in February 1880 and April 1881 to be discussed later in this chapter.

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 1:82.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 1:82.

<sup>76</sup> Moses Thatcher, Journal, January 1, 1880, BYU Digital Collections, 2:2.

<sup>77</sup> Moses Thatcher, Journal, January 10, 1881, BYU Digital Collections, 3:3.

### **Publications by Moses Thatcher while in Mexico**

Elder Thatcher dedicated a great deal of time to writing while in Mexico, both his personal history of the mission as well as articles for the *Contributor*. These writings, much like *Trozos Selectos*, provide a valuable reflection of the way he saw both the land and people of Mexico, and the certainty of the origin of the Book of Mormon in conjunction with that land.

One of the first pieces that Elder Thatcher wrote after entering Mexico was “Montezuma,” published in the April 1880 *Contributor*, a work he dedicated, in person, to Manuel Altamirano. Montezuma (more correctly known as Moctezuma II) was the famed emperor of the Aztecs at the height of their civilization when the Spaniards came to the Americas, conquering and largely destroying the Aztec nation.

Elder Thatcher wrote this piece on Montezuma just two months after arriving in Mexico, even though it was not published until the April edition of the *Contributor*.<sup>78</sup> This short poetic tribute to Montezuma meditates upon the former Aztec king, both his glory and foreboding future. Elder Thatcher apparently received his inspiration for the work while sitting under the same “time-scarred cypress trees”<sup>79</sup> where Montezuma would have sat before his kingdom fell to the incoming Spaniards. This short work is not a historical piece, but rather a glance into the past and a memorial to Montezuma.

Elder Thatcher’s feelings about Montezuma and his people in relation to the Book of Mormon shine through the brief treatise. He saw Montezuma as a “Royal prince, descendant of

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<sup>78</sup> Moses Thatcher, Journal, January 3, 1880, BYU Digital Collections, 2:4.

<sup>79</sup> Moses Thatcher, “Montezuma,” *Contributor* 1, no. 7 (April 1880), 145-146.

Israel.”<sup>80</sup> Then, in unmistakable language, he conveyed his sentiments concerning the fall of Montezuma’s empire. “The eye of Jehovah was upon thee—and fate, with an unfaltering hand, was engraving on thy innermost parts thy approaching end. It forebode sorrow, tears and death! The cry of Nephite martyred prophets, whose souls thy ancestors sent to dwell under the altar of God, was being heard, and the answer told thy doom, proud Lamanite king, and that of millions of thy people.”<sup>81</sup>

This short treatise demonstrates the way Elder Thatcher viewed the history of Mexico and its people, and the certain ties to the history contained within the Book of Mormon. It was in February of 1880, a month after writing his tribute to Montezuma, that Elder Thatcher visited Manuel Altamirano for the first time. Elder Thatcher remarked:

I had been prompted to respectfully inscribe it to him [Altamirano], in memory of those whom the Book of Mormon taught us to believe were his forefathers. On his request, at the conclusion of the fore given explanation I proceeded to read slowly the tribute, silently and earnestly praying that I might do so in a manner that would touch his heart with sympathy for the Memory of Montezuma; and at the same time gain, for good, his affectionate friendship for us, and above all an interest in the great cause of Our Heavenly Father, in bringing to pass the redemption of the remnants of Israel now scattered in darkness throughout North, South, & Central America. Wandering as lost sheep, without the voice of the True Shepherd. Before concluding the first pages, he said “it is poetical,” and before concluding it, he repeated the same several times adding the word “very.” He was greatly pleased with the piece and with its dedication, and said he would translate it, making a note of our belief regarding his “forefathers,” and have it published.<sup>82</sup>

Note the purposes for which Elder Thatcher wrote the piece. It was “in memory of those whom the Book of Mormon taught us to believe were his forefathers” and that he hoped it would

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>82</sup> Moses Thatcher, Journal, February 1, 1880, BYU Digital Collections, 2:66-67.

help Altamirano gain interest “in the great cause of Our Heavenly Father, in bringing to pass the redemption of the remnants of Israel now scattered in darkness throughout North, South, & Central America.”<sup>83</sup>

Elder Thatcher continued to write other works for the *Contributor*, including “Mexico and the Mexicans” and “Divine Origin of the Book of Mormon.” Neither of these articles was written specifically to identify Mexico with the lands of the Book of Mormon, yet this perspective is evident throughout. As an example of this, at one point while describing the land of Mexico in “Mexico and the Mexicans,” Elder Thatcher referred to the Aztecs as the “Lamanite Empire,”<sup>84</sup> and identified the Nephites as the more peaceful Toltecs.<sup>85</sup> These were side comments, not even the purpose of his article, but display his feelings about the Book of Mormon and the lands he was in.

“Divine Origin of the Book of Mormon” contains Elder Thatcher’s analysis of the history of the Americas, particularly Mexico, and its relevance to the Book of Mormon. He spent months researching and preparing the manuscript. During his second trip to Mexico, he noted, “since our arrival in Mexico I have read every opportunity from the following works, viz ‘North Americans of Antiquity’ by John T Short 1880 ‘Ancient America’ by J D Baldwin ‘Foot Prints of vanished Races’ by A. J. Conant. These very diligently with the view of writing a series of articles in proof historically of the Divine Origin of the Book of Mormon.”<sup>86</sup> His research and

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 2:66-67.

<sup>84</sup> Moses Thatcher, “Mexico and the Mexicans,” *Contributor* 2, no. 5 (February 1881), 132.

<sup>85</sup> Moses Thatcher, “Mexico and the Mexicans,” *Contributor* 2, no. 6 (March 1881), 164.

<sup>86</sup> Moses Thatcher, Journal, January 29, 1881, BYU Digital Collections, 3:12.

careful analysis provided the basis for the thirty-two page “Divine Origin of the Book of Mormon” published in the *Contributor* as a series from April to August of 1881.

Though these writings represent his own hypothesis and not the official position of the Church, and the research he based his conclusions upon is long outdated, this work is a valuable indication of his own orientation towards to the Book of Mormon and Mexico. The emphasis of “Divine Origin” was not on the teachings of the Book of Mormon, nor upon the destiny of the Lamanites, rather the historicity of the Book of Mormon, and its parallels with other ancient writings, such as the *Popol Vuh*.<sup>87</sup> In some regards, his articles on the “Divine Origin of the Book of Mormon” have the same tone and feel of later works produced by the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (associated with Brigham Young University).<sup>88</sup>

He stated that his purpose was to quote from “copies and abridgments of original records still remaining, and from the writings of early Spanish historians” and “endeavor to carefully compare them with facts, as recorded in the Book of Mormon.”<sup>89</sup> Through his writing he hoped to “advance sufficient historical evidence to establish, in the mind of every thoughtful and unprejudiced reader, the divine origin of the Book of Mormon, which has been preserved,

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<sup>87</sup> “The *Popol Vuh* is a collection of traditions and histories written down soon after the Spanish conquest by one or more Quiche Indians” (Paul R. Cheesman, *The World of the Book of Mormon* (Bountiful, Utah: Horizon Publishers and Distributors, Inc, 1984). See Allen J. Christenson, translator and editor, *Popol Vuh: The Mythic Sections—Tales of First Beginnings from the Ancient K’iche’-Maya* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2000).

<sup>88</sup> For a brief background of LDS apologetics for the Book of Mormon, see Richard L. Bushman, *Mormonism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 32-34.

<sup>89</sup> Moses Thatcher, “Divine Origin of the Book of Mormon,” *Contributor* 2, no. 7 (April 1881), 193.



brought forth and translated by the gift and power of God.”<sup>90</sup>

He felt the *Popol Vuh* account of the creation closely mirrored the creation account given by Moses in the Old Testament, and then concluded that “the two accounts are too nearly identical to indicate separate or distinct original sources,”<sup>91</sup> the source in the Americas being the brass plates brought by Nephi and his family containing the five books of Moses.<sup>92</sup>

Following his analysis of ancient writings, Elder Thatcher concluded that “the more [people] search the historical records of the ancient inhabitants of America, the more clearly manifest to them will be the divine origin of the Book of Mormon. For the evidences are such that they cannot fail to carry conviction to every honest, unprejudiced mind.”<sup>93</sup>

### **The First Dedication of Mexico: Hotel Iturbide**

When Elders Thatcher, Stewart, and Trejo arrived in Mexico City they took up residence at the Hotel Iturbide in Mexico City.<sup>94</sup> They remained there during Elder Thatcher’s first stay in Mexico City from November 1879 to February 1880. There the missionaries wrote, translated, and conducted other mission business, and at this hotel Elder Thatcher first dedicated Mexico for the preaching of the gospel.

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 193.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 198.

<sup>92</sup> Moses Thatcher, “Divine Origin of the Book of Mormon,” *Contributor* 2, no. 8 (May 1881), 228.

<sup>93</sup> Moses Thatcher, “Divine Origin of the Book of Mormon,” *Contributor* 2, no. 11 (August 1881), 322.

<sup>94</sup> This hotel, still standing in historic Mexico City, is now called The Palace of Iturbide.

There was a room upstairs where the missionaries would frequently retire for solace and privacy. “We get the key that opens the door at the foot of the stairs, and locking every body out and ourselves in, we have a quiet peaceful time of reflection communication and prayer. The place seems purposely reserved for us, for when there we are above and out of the sound of the busy hum of the City and are entirely relieved from possibility of interruption, thus enabling us to gather in our thoughts and place them upon our Father in heaven.”<sup>95</sup>

On January 25, 1880, the missionaries planned to retire to the room together to dedicate Mexico for the preaching of the gospel. For the Latter-day Saints, this is a significant event during the beginning of missionary work in a nation. As Apostles offer a special dedicatory prayer, a figurative key unlocks the door for preaching the gospel in that land under divine sanction. Of this special day, Elder Thatcher recorded, “today we especially desired to visit this room and while there, dedicate this country, the republic of Mexico, countries and states, to the interest of Colonization by the Latter Day Saints, and again to the servants of God who are and may be sent to preach & publish the gospel of peace to the inhabitants of this land & Country.”<sup>96</sup>

To their disappointment, they were unable to get the key until about five o’clock in the evening, but at last gained access to their treasured upper room. They “bowed down side by side and humbly besought the Lord God of Israel to hear [their] prayers and accept [their] dedication beseeching in the name of Jesus Christ.”<sup>97</sup> The first to pray was Elder Moses Thatcher. After “[dedicating] the land of Mexico to God,”<sup>98</sup> he expressed his desire for the Saints to colonize in

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<sup>95</sup> Moses Thatcher, Journal, January 25, 1880, BYU Digital Collections, 2:47.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 2:47.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 2:48.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 2:48.

Mexico so that through their influence “Salvation [might] come to many of the inhabitants of the republic, and especially to the remnants of Israel, the poor forsaken Lamanites, who for so many centuries have known ought but bondage and sorrow.”<sup>99</sup>

The remainder of Elder Thatcher’s prayer specifically focused upon the Lamanites, praying for them and the nation of Mexico.

I prayed, that from this hour the fetters which have so long bound their [the Lamanites’] body & souls, might be by the power of God broken and shaken off: that their leading thoughtful men might have dreams, visions & manifestations to prepare them & their brethren for the truths of the gospel and a knowledge of their fathers, who knew God. That as the coming of the Spanish Conquerors foreshadowed their downfall, so might the coming of the messengers of peace, bringing tidings of great joy, foreshadow their near approaching deliverance and quickly establish, under God, their supremacy. That as the first thoroughly conquered them with the sword, so may the latter even more effectually conquer their hearts with the words of truth and the love of Christ Jesus our Lord. I dedicated unto this end and for the good of God’s servants the lands the waters the timbers and all surroundings and prayed that peace might hover over the face thereof, that violence might be removed and revolutions and the shedding of blood removed and that to this end the hearts of government officials and influential men of the nation might be softened and inclined to peace, instead of hardened and given to intrigues & wars.”<sup>100</sup>

Following this dedicatory prayer both Elders Stewart and Trejo offered their supplications. “Elder Stewart followed expressing similar desires being moved by the same Spirit, which was truly of God. Elder Trejo then prayed pleading earnestly for the Lamanites, and for the way to be opened up so that the land can be settled by the Saints who thereby might teach the down-trodden remnants of Israel, temporal and spiritual salvation.”<sup>101</sup>

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 2:48.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 2:48-49.

<sup>101</sup> Moses Thatcher, Journal, January 25, 1880, BYU Digital Collections, 2:49. Note, James Z. Stewart’s journal confirms not only the date, but that this experience was a dedication of Mexico. “Jan, 25. We, Pres. M. Thatcher, M. G. Trejo and I blessed and dedicated the land

Two crucial elements formed the central theme of this initial dedication of Mexico: first, the desire to colonize the land, and second, supplication in behalf of the Lamanites. These were the two themes that motivated the first mission into Mexico five years earlier. The difference, however, during this mission was that colonization was not necessarily one of the specific reasons they had come to Mexico City. Elder Thatcher acknowledged as much in his journal and in his April 1880 conference address.<sup>102</sup> Yet during their time in Mexico City opportunities regarding colonization presented themselves about which both Elder Thatcher and his companions became excited. In fact, to some extent, they felt that missionary work in Mexico could ultimately succeed only through the means of colonization.<sup>103</sup>

Just days before dedicating Mexico, Elder Thatcher had met with Emelio Biebuyck, a Belgian with a contract to develop government lands in northern Mexico.<sup>104</sup> Elder Thatcher felt compelled by the opportunities for colonization he presented. After his meeting with Biebuyck, yet before the dedication of Mexico, Elder Thatcher noted, “It seems quite clear to my mind that the Spirit for more than ten days has led straight in the direction of colonization by some of our

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of Mexico to the Lord for the benefit of its people and the colonization of the saints and the spread of the gospel” (James Z. Stewart, Journal, January 25, 1880, LDS Archives, Salt Lake City).

<sup>102</sup> Moses Thatcher, Journal, January 23, 1880, BYU Digital Collections, 2:43. In addition to this, while speaking in general conference, Elder Thatcher remarked concerning those who had offered them lands in Mexico, “I told them we had no such mission, and that indeed if we had come to buy we had not yet seen sufficient of the country or people; adding that our mission was to preach, and to publish the word of the Lord to the people” (Moses Thatcher, in Conference Report, April 1880, 16).

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:43.

<sup>104</sup> The contact with Emelio Biebuyck came as a result of newspaper articles published in New York and Mexico stating that the Church was going to colonize in Mexico (See Tullis, *Mormons in Mexico*, 37; as well as Moses Thatcher, in Conference Report, April 1880, 16).

people in this land, and has opened every thing in this direction.”<sup>105</sup>

Elder Thatcher knew, however, that it was not his place to commit to anything as of yet. “I feel almost certain that the Council [of the Twelve] would want my views, and information on many points before taking action on a matter of such importance.”<sup>106</sup> Now, just a few months after arriving in Mexico, Elder Thatcher found himself at an important junction, which required that he meet with the leading councils of the Church. He wrote, “Bros Stewart and Trejo both urge me to go. We will see. I know but one way, in a case of this nature, and that is to seek wisdom from above, by earnest prayer. If I should go, I have faith that the Spirit of God will so plainly manifest it that there will be no doubt; otherwise I will remain.”<sup>107</sup>

After offering their dedicatory prayers for the land of Mexico, the elders prayed concerning this matter to know if Elder Thatcher should “return on the next steamer by way of New Orleans, in order to send word to Mr. Biebuyck to meet the brethren of the Twelve at Salt Lake City and join them there; or continue to remain here.”<sup>108</sup> Following their prayer they felt impressed that he should make arrangements to return to Utah and have Biebuyck meet him there to officially present his proposal.

Of Elder Thatcher’s unexpected return to Utah he wrote: “I hope and pray that my brethren of the Twelve may also take a similar view of it on my arrival and consultation with them. Otherwise I should feel greatly disappointed and grieved. For I have arranged prayerfully to pursue the course which the Spirit has indicated forcibly to all three of us to be right. I shall

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<sup>105</sup> Moses Thatcher, Journal, January 23, 1880, BYU Digital Collections, 2:43.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:44.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:44.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:47-49.

therefore trust in the Lord and my brethren for approval. And I have faith that I shall receive it.”<sup>109</sup>

On February 5, 1881, within just eleven days of the first dedication of Mexico, Elder Thatcher departed from Mexico City on his journey to Utah. His statements upon leaving indicate the hope he had for future missionaries who would serve in Mexico. “I trust this commencement of a new departure may prove the forerunner of many more such times of enjoyments for the Elders whose duty may cause them to labor in Mexico.”<sup>110</sup> His statement would prove prophetic.

### **Interim Back in Utah**

Upon returning to Utah, Elder Thatcher said he “at once proceeded to the Office of President Taylor and reported myself to him. Met subsequently with him and the brethren of the Apostles, when explaining to them the reasons for my return, they by unanimous vote of those present approved and fully sanctioned the course pursued by me in the matter.”<sup>111</sup>

Some time would pass before Emelio Biebuyck would meet him in Utah and they would make their official presentation to the Brethren. Of this meeting he simply wrote, that “Mr. [Biebuyck’s] ideas and proposals for colonization of some of our people in Mexico were fully submitted, discussed, and were finally rejected: the brethren considering such a move at this time on our part would be premature. Mr. [Biebuyck] while greatly disappointed, (and I, must confess was somewhat so likewise) took in good part and expressed the hope that the future might

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<sup>109</sup> Moses Thatcher, Journal, February 4, 1880, BYU Digital Collections, 2:79-80.

<sup>110</sup> Moses Thatcher, Journal, February 2, 1880, BYU Digital Collections, 2:73.

<sup>111</sup> Moses Thatcher, Journal, December 14, 1880, BYU Digital Collections, 2:100.

develop something that would lead to a reconsideration & a change of views on the matter.”<sup>112</sup>

This was a defining experience for Moses Thatcher. He and the other missionaries had felt confident that this was the direction in which they should move. They had prayed and sought divine guidance and were sure enough in the answers they had received that Elder Thatcher left the mission in order to present their ideas and feelings to the presiding authorities of the Church. Rather than be crushed or discouraged by what happened, to Elder Thatcher’s credit, he focused on the bigger picture. In a letter he wrote to James Stewart and Melitón Trejo, Elder Thatcher expressed his feelings about why their proposal had been rejected: “Regarding this matter I have reflected much since my return. And came to the final conclusion that the Spirit of God prompted us while expressing our views before I left you. But I now understand and think tolerably fully that when the Elders are inspired to have even a peep into the future the Holy Ghost ever by a partial removal of the veil, makes things that may actually, in a natural way, be distant, seem very, very close to us. . . . We were only a little overanxious as to time.”<sup>113</sup>

Time has a way of clarifying events and experiences. Though the timing was not right in 1881 for colonization, four years later the Church did decide to start colonies in Northern Mexico, providing some of the members of the Church with a place of refuge during the heat of anti-polygamist persecution in Utah.<sup>114</sup> In fact, “between 1885 and 1895 six of the Mormon

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 2:101-102. Tullis noted that perhaps the reason Elder Thatcher and Emelio Biebuyck’s proposal was rejected had to do with a warning given to the first missionary party years earlier about not purchasing public lands in Mexico due to their poor quality (see Tullis, *Mormons in Mexico*, 38).

<sup>113</sup> Moses Thatcher, Letter to James Z. Stewart, April 5, 1880, James Z. Stewart Collection, LDS Archives, Salt Lake City.

<sup>114</sup> The practice of plural marriage among the Latter-day Saints during portions of the nineteenth century brought the Church under heavy persecution, both socially and politically. Anti-polygamy legislation such as the Edmunds Act of 1882, and the Edmunds-Tucker Act of

church's Twelve Apostles lived in the colonies"<sup>115</sup> showing the value these colonies had for the Church at that time.

During the several months Elder Thatcher was in Utah before returning to Mexico he spoke in the Church's general conference. Throughout his address he talked about the experiences he and the other missionaries had had in Mexico up to that point, describing both the land and the people. He touched upon many of the points he had made in his publications in the *Contributor*, speaking about not only the customs and ways of the Mexican people, but the "remarkable historical evidence in confirmation of the truths contained in the Book of Mormon."<sup>116</sup> He contrasted the work in Mexico with the work among the Indians of North America: "We have been seeking for years to extend this knowledge to the Lamanites, to the remnants of the House of Israel, to the fruit of the loins of Jacob through Joseph, but until recently it has been apparent to us that their hearts have not been opened to receive the testimony which is contained in the Book of Mormon."<sup>117</sup> He noted that there were "more than one-half of the entire population" that were of "pure Indian stock, numbering, [he believed], a little in excess of five millions,"<sup>118</sup> and that they seemed to be "different in many respects from the Indians who roam in these mountain regions."<sup>119</sup>

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1887, created serious legal complications for the Saints, ultimately leading the president of the Church, Wilford Woodruff, to issue a Manifesto to end the practice among Church members (see Official Declaration 1, LDS scriptures).

<sup>115</sup> Tullis, *Mormons in Mexico*, 57.

<sup>116</sup> Moses Thatcher, in Conference Report, April 1880, 14.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.



He expressed his optimism in the work they would accomplish in Mexico. “We believe that the Lord will yet open up the way by which thousands and hundreds of thousands will receive a knowledge of the truth.”<sup>120</sup> He then predicted, “there will be a great work accomplished in Mexico. I feel that the Lamanites in that land will receive the Gospel by thousands . . . [God] will manifest himself unto them as he did to their forefathers, the children of Israel.”<sup>121</sup>

In addition to his conference address, Elder Thatcher’s correspondence to Stewart and Trejo during this time reveals some of the feelings of the Brethren about the work in Mexico. He wrote about how the leaders of the Church instructed the missionaries to follow “always the counsels of the Holy Spirit. They heartily approve our past labors and believe that God through his servants will accomplish a mighty work in that land especially among the remnant of Israel there.”<sup>122</sup> Then, regarding Elder Orson Pratt, at the time one of the senior Apostles, he wrote: “Bro. Orson Pratt thinks that we have been the instruments . . . in the hands of God in opening up one of the greatest works of this dispensation, and said with a high regret, ‘I wish I was a young man again that I might labor with you in that great field.’”<sup>123</sup> Of Elder Pratt’s remarks, Elder Thatcher noted, “such an expression from such a man was a source of consolation, comfort, and encouragement to me, and so I am confident it will be to you. I was and am still surprised at the manifestations of deep interest everywhere exhibited by the Saints here in regard to the mission

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>122</sup> Moses Thatcher, Letter to James Z. Stewart, March 15, 1880, James Z. Stewart Collection, LDS Archives, Salt Lake City.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

and your labors.”<sup>124</sup>

In another letter to the missionaries, Elder Thatcher reiterated, “you are engaged in opening up one of the most important missions of this dispensation,” and then, commenting on his general conference address, he reported, “while talking yesterday, I was constrained to predict that a great and mighty work would yet be done in Mexico and that God would perform mighty wonders to the convincing of many.”<sup>125</sup>

### **The Second Dedication of Mexico: Mount Popocatépetl**

In November 1880 Moses Thatcher, accompanied by Feramorz L. Young,<sup>126</sup> returned to Mexico, after being nearly ten months away from the mission. Elder Young would replace Melitón Trejo who had returned home during Elder Thatcher’s absence.<sup>127</sup> Elder Thatcher remained in Mexico City this time until August of 1881, in total spending a year in Mexico. His second tenure in Mexico City was somewhat more discouraging than the first—as many of their first converts started to struggle and fall away—yet Elder Thatcher continued in his efforts to study, write, teach, and build relationships. Many of the events of his first and second periods in

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<sup>124</sup> Moses Thatcher, Letter to James Z. Stewart, April 15, 1880, James Z. Stewart Collection, LDS Archives, Salt Lake City.

<sup>125</sup> Moses Thatcher, Letter to James Z. Stewart, April 5, 1880, James Z. Stewart Collection, LDS Archives, Salt Lake City.

<sup>126</sup> Feramorz L. Young was a son of the late prophet Brigham Young. He was 22 at the time he was called on this mission. Tragically, he became ill with yellow fever, and while returning to the United States from his mission in company with Moses Thatcher, died at sea. See Andrew Jenson, *Biographical Encyclopedia*, 3:742. See also Moses Thatcher, “Feramorz L. Young,” *Contributor* 3, no. 2 (November 1881), 38-42.

<sup>127</sup> “1879-1881,” Manuscript History and Historical Reports: Mexican Mission, LDS Archives, Salt Lake City, 9.

Mexico were combined in previous portions of this chapter and thus a historical overview or distinction between events in the first and second periods is unnecessary other than to discuss the second dedicatory prayer offered in Mexico on April 6, 1881.

There is some ambiguity as to why Elder Thatcher dedicated Mexico twice: once in the Hotel Iturbide during his first period in Mexico, and once on Mount Popocatepetl during his second period in Mexico. Why two dedications? One possibility could be the emphasis in the first dedicatory prayer upon colonization. Perhaps Elder Thatcher felt it was necessary to rededicate the land, with the emphasis more squarely upon preaching the gospel, especially in light of his experience with Church leaders in Salt Lake City with regards to colonization. Another possibility could simply be that this second dedication was a new beginning for the work. Many of the initial converts had fallen away, and this dedication could be marked as the beginning of the next phase of growth, a redirection of where they had been heading as well as a renewal of commitment. Elder Thatcher never specified why they dedicated the land again, but gives hints throughout his journals. Only hindsight shows that *both* dedicatory prayers were relevant to the future of the Church's work in Mexico.

From early on in his time in Mexico City, Elder Thatcher felt a special connection to Mount Popocatepetl. Mount Popocatepetl is a large, active volcano in the state of Puebla, Mexico, forty miles to the southeast of Mexico City. On December 4, 1879, just a few weeks after arriving in Mexico, Elder Thatcher described his view of the Valley of Mexico. "Sitting on a rock at the highest point on the hill behind the Village of Guadalupe with my face south I see the Valley of Mexico."<sup>128</sup> In this panoramic view he saw two Mountains, "the Volcanic peak of Old Popocatepetl 17,800 feet above the sea" and "Mount Iztaccihuatl (or the Woman in

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<sup>128</sup> Moses Thatcher, Journal, December 4, 1879, BYU Digital Collections, 1:77.

White).”<sup>129</sup> He then noted, “these grand old Mountains make a majestic view as I now behold them, belted by white billowy clouds out of which their snow clad crests rise grandly up into the blue sky tinged beyond with gray, but through which the bright rays of the sun came glimmering with threads of gold to mingle with the pure white and blue.”<sup>130</sup>

On another occasion, while traveling outside the city, he described the way he felt about these mountains. “Every peak and sloping range and gaged precipice was as sharply outlined as possible; while grand old Popocatépetl and Iztaccihuatl (White Woman) loomed majestically in the golden morning light, seeming not more than 15 or 20 miles distant. To my mind there is nothing so beautiful in the surroundings of the Valley of Mexico as these snow covered mountains suggesting as they do straight and endurance and at the same time that chaste purity which so much reminds one of the white robed mountains of the Wasatch range which lock the Saints in their quiet peaceful heaven blessed homes.”<sup>131</sup>

Note what he felt these mountains represented: endurance, purity. During his second sojourn in Mexico, Elder Thatcher struggled a little with the realities of the work, and the challenges the missionaries were facing. During these difficult months, Mount Popocatépetl became a beacon to him of hope, and a place he viewed as providing sanctuary and renewal. “I now feel almost as anxious for the coming of another day with its tiresome labors as I did before for the coming of night with its promises of repose. I shall try and get out to Popocatépetl next week, for I feel to wish to get out of this corrupt City where I can once more breathe pure air and find some secret place, uncorrupted by man, where I can pour out, my heart burdens, in prayer to

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 1:78-79.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 1:79.

<sup>131</sup> Moses Thatcher, Journal, December 27, 1879, BYU Digital Collections, 1:124.

God.”<sup>132</sup> Though Elder Thatcher never mentions directly why they selected Mount Popocatepetl for the dedicatory service, his journals leave hints that it was a place to him that was considered sacred ground, away from the city, above the noise of life, where they could commune with God.

As early as December of 1879 the missionaries had been doing missionary work “in the vicinity of Popocatepetl” and had had some baptisms in the Ozumba area.<sup>133</sup> On April 4, 1881, Moses Thatcher, James Z. Stewart, and newly arrived missionary Feramorz L. Young, accompanied by Silvano Arteaga and Ventura Páez, left Mexico City to go to Ozumba where they stayed in the home of Lino Zárate (one of the Ozumba converts).<sup>134</sup>

Their purpose of going to Ozumba, and more specifically Mount Popocatepetl, was two-fold: to hold a mission conference, and to dedicate the land of Mexico again. After arriving in Ozumba, they went out shooting to make sure their firearms were in good order for their journey up the mountain. Before returning to the Zárate residence for the evening, the little group prayed together. Elder Thatcher recorded, “Before returning we retired in a nice secluded pine grove the leaves of which thickly carpeted the ground and prayed each in turn that the Lord would bless us, the Mexican Mission, and all honest people among the remnants of Israel throughout the land, our families in our absence, that no harm come near them: for the speedy universal rule of God's kingdom, and that we might be blest and prospered on our journey on the mountain to hold Conference and otherwise serve the Lord.”<sup>135</sup>

As the evening fell they returned to Brother Zárate's home. In Elder Thatcher's own quiet

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<sup>132</sup> Moses Thatcher, Journal, March 31, 1881, BYU Digital Collections, 3:35.

<sup>133</sup> Moses Thatcher, Journal, December 16, 1879, BYU Digital Collections, 1:113.

<sup>134</sup> Moses Thatcher, Journal, April 4, 1881, BYU Digital Collections, 3:39-40.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:41.

reflection he noted that “Popocatépetl looms up in the east like a beautiful star. What a grand glorious mountain it is!”<sup>136</sup> The following day he reiterated these feelings: “To mind nothing conveys to the human understanding and so forcibly impresses the human heart with the wonderful greatness of God and insignificance and puny littleness of man as a contemplation of a glorious work of the Creator like Mount Popocatépetl (smoking mountain, so called by the Aztecs) towering . . . above the sea.”<sup>137</sup>

They began their trek to the mountain on the morning of April 5, 1881, at 5:00 am. At 8:00 am they were joined by a few others, their party now numbering nine in total, and began their ascent of Mount Popocatépetl.<sup>138</sup> On the evening of April 5<sup>th</sup>, they stopped to camp for the night and held a campfire meeting. Several of the company participated, including Elder Stewart, who reiterated to the group that they would “worship God on the morrow as it would be 51 years since the church was organized.”<sup>139</sup> During this campfire meeting Elder Thatcher spoke concerning the purpose for which the missionaries had come to the land of Mexico. “I followed explaining why we came to this land as missionaries, and said that nothing but obedience to the gospel which we brought, would ever free the remnants of Israel—the Lamanitish race of this land from their degradation superstition and bondage; that if they would receive obey and live by

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 3:41.

<sup>137</sup> Moses Thatcher, Journal, April 5, 1881, BYU Digital Collections, 3:49.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 3:43. The list of who was there is somewhat difficult to piece together from the records. Tullis noted that the names of two of the participants were unknown at the time he wrote his book *Mormons in Mexico* (Tullis, *Mormons in Mexico*, 41); but as noted by Kenneth Godfrey, “The group included Elders Feramorz L. Young and James Z. Stewart, as well as Church members Silviano Arteaga, Fernando Lara, Ventura Páez, and Lino Zárate. Marciano Pérez, Lino’s brother-in-law, and Florentino Páez, Ventura’s nephew, also took part in the climb” (Godfrey, “Moses Thatcher and Mormon Beginnings in Mexico,” 154).

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 3:49.

the truth, God would accomplish their deliverance and make the wise, good, and great.”<sup>140</sup>

Elder Thatcher’s remark here is one of the clearest indications of the terms in which the missionaries saw their labors. Their purpose was to “free the remnants of Israel—the Lamanitish race” from bondage.<sup>141</sup>

In spite of the great promises made to the Lamanites they had felt burdened by the task at hand. Part of their reason for coming to Mount Popocatépetl was to get away from the challenges they had faced and to regain their grasp of the reasons for which they were in Mexico. “We were sad because of the indifference of many, and we had come upon the mountain, away above the deceit, hypocrisy and corruptions prevailing among the people below in order to worship the Lord while breathing pure air and to supplicate Him in places that were undefiled, that the people might be blessed, and that their eyes and ears might be opened to hear and see and their hearts prepared for rejoicing in the salvation of the Holy One.”<sup>142</sup>

After remarks from others in the party including Elder Stewart, Brother Arteaga, Elder Feramorz Young, Brother Páez, and Brother Lara, the meeting was adjourned. “An excellent spirit prevailed and our meeting lasted about 90 minutes. I sought a private spot and in secret prayed a long time for such things as were in my heart. Remembering earnestly before the Lord this mission, the promises made to the remnants, Zion, the holy priesthood, my family and all the honest everywhere.”<sup>143</sup> This would be one of many prayers Elder Thatcher would offer while on the mountain in behalf of the Lamanites.

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 3:49-50.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 3:49-50.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 3:50-51.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 3:51.

After a nearly sleepless night—cold, and interrupted by the “mountain lions . . . howling around [them] most of the night,”<sup>144</sup> they recommenced their ascent at 5:00 am, April 6, 1881. They hiked for three hours and then due to the fatigue of several of the brethren decided to discontinue their march and hold the conference, at a place known as the “Pico del Fraile.”<sup>145</sup> Sheltering themselves “under the rocks from the piercing north winds” with the sun just rising, they commenced their conference at 8:00 am.<sup>146</sup>

Elder Stewart offered the opening prayer and then “Bro. Arteaga by his own request followed praying, while tears flowed down his wrinkled cheeks, for the deliverance of his race and people. With both hands extended heavenward, the sun shining on his brown face while the wind played among his gray hair and his knees pressed under his prone body the yielding sand of the mountains.”<sup>147</sup> Of his prayer, Elder Thatcher remarked, “I never heard any man pray more earnestly, and though praying in a language which I do not comprehend, yet I seemed to understand by the Spirit, all that he was pleading for.”<sup>148</sup>

Then, upon the heights of Mount Popocatépetl, following a few remarks by Elder Stewart, the missionary party presented the names of the president of the Church, his counselors, and all other general authorities of the Church for a sustaining vote. Next they sustained Brother Lino Zárate as an Elder and then ordained him to that office. After these few remarks and simple

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 3:51.

<sup>145</sup> James Z. Stewart, “1879-1881,” *Manuscript History and Historical Reports: Mexican Mission*, LDS Archives, Salt Lake City, 19.

<sup>146</sup> Moses Thatcher, *Journal*, April 6, 1881, *BYU Digital Collections*, 3:52-53.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 3:53.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 3:53.



proceedings, the first official conference held in Mexico was adjourned.<sup>149</sup>

With the conference concluded, Elder Thatcher, Feramorz Young, and two of the Mexican members,<sup>150</sup> continued their ascent of Mount Popocatépetl to dedicate the land of Mexico.<sup>151</sup>

They worked their way up the mountain for another two hours, to roughly 16,000 feet. Elder Thatcher's own account of this experience describes the deep desires he and his companions felt for the land of Mexico and the promises contained within the Book of Mormon. Note the emphasis on the Book of Mormon and the promises made to the Lamanites, not only as descendants of Lehi, but as the remnant of Joseph:

Here crowding close up to the frozen snow under the rocky cliff I read a few selections from the Book of Mormon, referring to the promises made to the remnants of Israel on this Continent, and to the Covenants made with their forefathers, and then bowing down upon our knees I earnestly besought God in the name of Jesus to speedily fulfill these things and bring the oppressed remnants to a knowledge of the truth as understood by their ancestors who served the Lord. I dedicated the land to Peace that the seed of Jacob through the loins of Joseph might learn the truth and rejoice in the gospel of their salvation. I dedicated the Mountain upon which we were praying that it might become a holy place of worship when the sons of Joseph should hereafter upon it, seek the Lord; that they might knock it have the door open, ask and receive. That prophets might arise among the Lamanites to lead the people to the light; that visions dreams and manifestations might be had in their midst; that their bondage might speedily end, their shackles be broken and they be made to rejoice in the freedom of the gospel. Unto this end I prayed for blessing to rest upon the Church, upon the priesthood, upon this mission and upon our administrations therein. I prayed that the day might speedily come when the scepter of power should pass from the hands of the unjust into the hands of the righteous, that the people might not longer mourn under the rule of the wicked; that Zion might arise and shine while God's Kingdom bore rule."<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 3:53-54.

<sup>150</sup> Feramorz Young indicates in his journal that these two men were Ventura Páez, and Marciano Pérez. See Feramorz Young, Journal, April 6, 1881, BYU Digital Collections, 36.

<sup>151</sup> Moses Thatcher, Journal, April 6, 1881, BYU Digital Collections, 3:54.

<sup>152</sup> Moses Thatcher, Journal, April 6, 1881, BYU Digital Collections, 3:56-57. For a very brief, yet confirming eyewitness account of the dedication of Mexico on Mount Popocatépetl see Feramorz Young, Journal, April 6, 1881, BYU Digital Collections, 36-37. The manuscript history of the Mexican mission speaks of the dedication on Mount Popocatépetl (see "1879-

Significantly, before dedicating Mexico, Elder Thatcher read passages from the Book of Mormon, “referring to the promises made to the remnants of Israel on this Continent, and to the Covenants made with their forefathers.”<sup>153</sup> This was the paradigm through which they saw their labors. It was the backdrop of this new dedication of Mexico. Elder Thatcher then “earnestly besought God in the name of Jesus to speedily fulfill these things and bring the oppressed remnants to a knowledge of the truth as understood by their ancestors who served the Lord.”<sup>154</sup>

He prayed for peace in the land of Mexico, so that “the seed of Jacob through the loins of Joseph might learn the truth and rejoice in the gospel of their salvation.”<sup>155</sup> The words “seed of Jacob through the loins of Joseph” express the idea that teaching the gospel to the Lamanites was much more than fulfilling promises made to Lehi concerning his seed. The Lamanites were of Israel.

He prayed that Mount Popocatépetl would become a holy place for the “sons of Joseph” to worship, and then implored that “prophets might arise among the Lamanites to lead the people to the light; that visions dreams and manifestations might be had in their midst; that their

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1881,” Manuscript History and Historical Reports: Mexican Mission, LDS Archives, Salt Lake City), but for the most part, the details in the Manuscript History are taken from Moses Thatcher’s journal. James Z. Stewart adds a few remarks of his own concerning the missionary conference in the manuscript history (see “1879-1881,” Manuscript History and Historical Reports: Mexican Mission, LDS Archives, Salt Lake City, 19).

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 3:56. For an in depth analysis of these promises see chapter 2 of this thesis.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 3:56.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 3:56.

bondage might speedily end, their shackles be broken and they be made to rejoice in the freedom of the gospel.”<sup>156</sup>

The first dedication of Mexico in the Hotel Iturbide had emphasized both colonization and preaching the gospel to the remnants of Joseph in the Americas. As the missionaries came off of Mount Popocatepetl their charge and mission was clear before them. In the heights of a mountain overseeing Mexico City they got away from the stresses and difficulties of missionary work in order to realign themselves with the purposes for which they had come to Mexico. They were seeking that “the seed of Jacob through the loins of Joseph [the Lamanites] might learn the truth and rejoice in the gospel of their salvation.”<sup>157</sup>

As LaMond Tullis observed, dedicating the land of Mexico on Mount Popocatepetl was symbolic in and of itself. “Because of the volcano’s poetic and historical significance to most of Mexico’s Indians, the ascent to its summit held enormous symbolic significance. There was no question in the missionaries’ minds to whom their gospel message was to be taken.”<sup>158</sup>

## **Conclusion**

After spending over a year in Mexico, dedicating the land and laying the foundation of the Church in the nation’s capital, Elder Thatcher left for Utah in September of 1881. Though he would never return to Mexico in person he continued to be interested and involved in the work that was happening there, even being assigned by President John Taylor to be the “apostolic

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 3:57.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 3:56.

<sup>158</sup> Tullis, *Mormons in Mexico*, 41.

contact for the new mission president, August Wilcken.”<sup>159</sup>

At times the work was discouraging and was not as successful with regards to converts as the missionaries anticipated. Elder Thatcher himself noted, “our work appears thus far to bear but little fruit.”<sup>160</sup> In spite of these discouraging moments, Elder Thatcher firmly believed that things would improve in the land. After expressing some of his discouragement caused by the condition of the people, Elder Thatcher said, “Yet I know that all will be as the Lord shall order, for it is His work and He alone can sustain it. Thank God its success does not depend on the feeble efforts of puny man.”<sup>161</sup> Later on he bore his witness that “We feel that God is overruling many important matters in this land for the interest of His Kingdom and people.”<sup>162</sup> They sensed and felt they were on an errand that went beyond their own capacity to accomplish, an errand that would be accompanied by divine intervention. “Whenever this people are brought to salvation through a realization of their actual condition and consequent repentance the glory and honor must be to God, for puny man can never accomplish it. We can only, as we are willing and trying to do labor humbly to the best of our ability, hoping, praying, and trusting in Him for the increase. In weakness we will do our best to plow, sow and water, leaving Him to determine what the harvest shall be.”<sup>163</sup>

In spite of discouraging moments, there *were* fruits of their labors. These first missionaries would ultimately baptize dozens of individuals while in Mexico City and the areas round about

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<sup>159</sup> Godfrey, “Moses Thatcher and Mormon Beginnings in Mexico,” 146.

<sup>160</sup> Moses Thatcher, Journal, March 31, 1881, BYU Digital Collections, 3:27.

<sup>161</sup> Moses Thatcher, Journal, December 21, 1879, BYU Digital Collections, 1:119-120.

<sup>162</sup> Moses Thatcher, Journal, January 24, 1880, BYU Digital Collections, 2:46.

<sup>163</sup> Moses Thatcher, Journal, March 31, 1881, BYU Digital Collections, 3:32.

in Ozumba.<sup>164</sup> The history of these early converts is complex. Many of them did not remain strong and faithful to the Church, for a number of reasons, including periods where the Church had to withdraw American missionaries from Mexico.<sup>165</sup> With this said, some of the initial converts had a “lasting significance to the church.”<sup>166</sup> Though not everyone the missionaries taught stayed in the Church, the missionaries established a legitimate presence and an enduring foothold within the heart of Mexico.

The subsequent years would bring many more mission presidents to Mexico, and Apostles of the Church would frequent the land. Nevertheless, Elder Thatcher’s tenure there stands apart. He was the trailblazer and laid the prophetic groundwork for those who would come later. Perhaps his time in Mexico did not produce the fruits he was expecting, especially compared to what would come in later years, but his labors provide a valuable source for understanding the doctrines and teachings motivating the missionaries as they entered Mexico City and dedicated the land.

Because of Elder Moses Thatcher’s careful and well-written personal record of the mission, the details of his time in Mexico are preserved. More than dates and facts, he captured the feelings and emotions of his mission, the hopes he garnered for the work in that land, and the commencement of the Latter-day Saints in Mexico.

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<sup>164</sup> See Moses Thatcher, Journal, “List of Baptisms in Mexico,” BYU Digital Collections, 3:96-105.

<sup>165</sup> Tullis, “Reopening the Mexican Mission in 1901,” *BYU Studies* 22, no. 4 (1982), 1-10; and Dale F. Beecher, “Rey L. Pratt and the Mexican Mission,” *BYU Studies* 15, no. 3 (1975), 1-13.

<sup>166</sup> Tullis, *Mormons in Mexico*, 40.

## Chapter 6

### **The First Half of the Twentieth Century: Theme of the Lamanites Continued**

As has been shown in the previous chapters, during the nineteenth century the Book of Mormon provided the lenses through which the first Latter-day Saint missionaries in Mexico saw themselves, the land, and the people among whom they served. They went to Mexico not only to share the message of the Book of Mormon, but because of the Book of Mormon's message to the Lamanites. Clearly, the promises and prophecies contained in the Book of Mormon about the descendants of Lehi (and more broadly all the seed of Joseph) were the theological foundation for early missionary work in Mexico in the nineteenth century. This theme was dominant in early records, journals, discourses, and publications of the missionaries and Church leaders regarding Mexico.

The question that this chapter will address is whether or not the emphasis upon the Book of Mormon message to the Lamanites continued into the first half of the twentieth century. This will be accomplished by evaluating the role that the theme of the Lamanites played in both the presidency of Rey L. Pratt over the Mexican mission,<sup>1</sup> and then later in the "Third Convention."<sup>2</sup>

#### **The Presidency of Rey L. Pratt**

During the years from Elder Moses Thatcher's time in Mexico City to Rey L. Pratt's presidency, the Church in Mexico passed through turbulent times. From 1889 to 1901 the

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<sup>1</sup> Rey L. Pratt (son of Helaman Pratt and grandson of Parley P. Pratt) was mission president from 1907-1931.

<sup>2</sup> The "Third Convention" was a time following the death of Rey L. Pratt when approximately one third of the members of the Church in Mexico desired a Mexican mission president, and from 1936-1946 were separated from the Church over the matter.

mission was closed due to “political problems and a shortage of missionaries,”<sup>3</sup> caused by the “worsening persecution in the polygamy crisis.”<sup>4</sup> The mission was reopened in 1901, but understandably, the twelve-year absence of missionaries from Mexico had its effect on the mission. In spite of the hardships that had been faced and the loss of many Church members, remarkably, several of the original converts remained strong and faithful throughout this time.<sup>5</sup>

In 1907, as the Church was still trying to find traction again in Mexico, Rey Lucero Pratt was called to be the new mission president. Rey L. Pratt was perhaps the most influential mission president in the Church’s history in Mexico, presiding from 1907-1931.<sup>6</sup>

Rey Pratt’s father was Helaman Pratt, and his grandfather was Parley P. Pratt, both important contributors to the history of the Church in Latin America and Mexico.<sup>7</sup> As one scholar observed, the choice of Rey L. Pratt as mission president at that time “was a wise one.”<sup>8</sup> He was prepared for the work, and although born in Salt Lake City, had grown up mainly in the Mormon colonies in Northern Mexico. He was just twenty-nine years of age at the time of his

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<sup>3</sup> Dale F. Beecher, “Rey L. Pratt and the Mexican Mission,” *BYU Studies* 15, no. 3 (1975), 1. See also Tullis, *Mormons in Mexico*, 70-71.

<sup>4</sup> Boanerges Rubalcava, “Mexico and Central America, the Church in,” *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 2:900. For a brief explanation about the Latter-day Saints and polygamy, see chapter 5 of this thesis, footnote 114.

<sup>5</sup> See Tullis, “Reopening the Mexican Mission in 1901,” *BYU Studies* 22, no. 4 (1982), 1-10.

<sup>6</sup> For detailed information regarding Rey L. Pratt’s tenure as president over the Mexican Mission, see his journals in Rey L. Pratt, Papers, 1878-1931, LDS Archives, Salt Lake City.

<sup>7</sup> As discussed in previous chapters, Parley P. Pratt was the first Apostle to go to Latin America, serving a mission in Chile from 1851-52. Helaman Pratt was part of the first missionary group to enter Mexico in 1875 and then he later served as a mission president in Mexico from 1884-87.

<sup>8</sup> Beecher, “Rey L. Pratt and the Mexican Mission,” 2.

call as mission president, but was “grounded in language, culture and the goals to be pursued” and “was the right man to lead the Mexican Mission through the most turbulent years of that nation’s history.”<sup>9</sup>

Indeed, in his presidency he faced difficult obstacles, yet he succeeded as a mission president in spite of them. Though the mission had only been reopened for about a decade since missionaries were first withdrawn from the country, once again, from 1913-1917, the mission was closed, this time due to dangerous political circumstances surrounding the Mexican revolution. Later, in 1924, Elder Pratt was called upon to help open the South American Mission, spending another year away from the Mexican Mission. Then in 1926, “the Mexican government deported all foreign clerics from the country, including Mormon missionaries,”<sup>10</sup> and President Pratt was no longer able to remain in Mexico in his official capacity.

In the face of seemingly overwhelming challenges, President Pratt worked relentlessly to keep the Church together and help it to grow in strength and numbers. During his time outside of Mexico, under the assignment of the First Presidency he established missionary work among the Spanish-speaking population of the southwestern United States,<sup>11</sup> and “worked hard to be worthy of his Mexican flock, traveling frequently—and, necessarily, unofficially—to Mexico to encourage the Mexican Mormons.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Beecher, “Rey L. Pratt and the Mexican Mission,” 2.

<sup>10</sup> Tullis, *Mormons in Mexico*, 111.

<sup>11</sup> Beecher, “Rey L. Pratt and the Mexican Mission,” 8.

<sup>12</sup> Tullis, *Mormons in Mexico*, 114.



In addition, as LaMond Tullis noted, “Rey Pratt had uncommon language and literary skills in both Spanish and English.”<sup>13</sup> His publications and writings to the Saints in Mexico were a powerful tool that helped him maintain contact and foster spiritual growth among Church members.

During the twenty-five years Rey Pratt served as mission president he was the face of the Church in Mexico. Though not called as a general authority until his 1925 mission to Argentina, at which time he was called as a member of the Presidency of the Seventy, he spoke frequently in general conference during his tenure as mission president. He brought Mexico to the forefront of Church members’ minds, and conversely represented the Church to Mexico. He published numerous articles about the work in Mexico, as well as the restored gospel, translated the hymnbook into Spanish,<sup>14</sup> and helped to produce the 1929 Spanish edition of the Book of Mormon (replacing the 1886 edition).<sup>15</sup> In addition, his influence extended beyond Mexico into the rest of Latin America as he accompanied Elder Melvin J. Ballard to dedicate South America for the preaching of the gospel in 1925.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>14</sup> For a few of the original translations of the hymns into Spanish see Rey L. Pratt, Papers, 1878-1931, LDS Archives, Salt Lake City.

<sup>15</sup> The translation by Melitón G. Trejo and James Z. Stewart was retained for this edition, but the 1920 English footnotes were included (whereas previously the Spanish Book of Mormon had not included footnotes). This edition indicates that it had been revised after a careful comparison with previous editions and translations, and had added chapter headings, references, chronological data, and a brief analysis of the origin of the Book of Mormon.

<sup>16</sup> The dedication of South America for the preaching of the gospel was a significant event in Church history, and though beyond the scope of this thesis, is intimately tied to the Church in Mexico. A few valuable sources for studying the beginning of the Church’s work in South America include Frederick Salem Williams and Frederick G. Williams, *From Acorn to Oak Tree* (Fullerton, California: Et Cetera, Et Cetera Graphics, 1987); and Néstor Curbelo, *Historia de los Mormones en Argentina: Relatos de pioneros* (Buenos Aires: Néstor Curbelo,

His discourses and publications are valuable tools for seeing the way the theme of the Lamanites continued with force into the twentieth century as an influence in the Church's growth in Mexico.

### *General Conference Addresses*

President Rey L. Pratt's general conference addresses were filled with his faith and enthusiasm for missionary work in Mexico and the promises contained in the Book of Mormon regarding the destiny of the Lamanites. He quoted verses from the Book of Mormon about the Lamanites and openly asserted, like Elder Moses Thatcher had, that the people of Mexico were descendants of Lehi and that the promises to the Lamanites were extended to them.

Speaking of his feelings towards his mission in Mexico, in April 1930 President Pratt conveyed the following about the way the Book of Mormon had influenced his mission: "I have been laboring among Book of Mormon people. There is no book in the world that has so appealed to me, and that so absorbs me, in its contemplation, as the Book of Mormon. And my heart has gone out through these long years, nearly a quarter of a century that I have labored

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2000). The theme of the Lamanites was also central to the dedication of the South America: "We also pray that we may see the beginning of the fulfillment of thy promises contained in the Book of Mormon to the Indians of this land, who are descendants of Lehi, millions of whom reside in this country, who have long been downtrodden and 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 those prophets to promise their descendants that thou wouldst bring forth in the latter-day the records of the 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 unto 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" (Melvin J. Ballard, "History of the South American Mission, 1925," unpublished manuscript, Church Historian's Office, Salt Lake City, Utah, as cited in Frederick Salem Williams and Frederick G. Williams, *From Acorn to Oak Tree*, 24).

without ceasing, in the interest of the people who are the descendants of the prophets who wrote that book.”<sup>17</sup>

He then reminded the Church about the dedication of Mexico for the preaching of the gospel: “For fifty-one years has the Gospel been preached in the Spanish language to the Mexican people. In the year 1879 an apostle of the Lord, Moses Thatcher, climbed nearly to the summit of the great volcano Popocatépetl that overlooks all of the country, nearly from sea to sea, in the interior of Mexico, at an elevation of perhaps eighteen thousand feet. There, stretching out his hands, he dedicated the land of Mexico to the preaching of the Gospel and to the redemption of the Lamanites, in that land.”<sup>18</sup> Significantly, fifty years after Elder Thatcher had ascended Mount Popocatépetl, President Pratt knew for what purpose the land had been dedicated: “to the redemption of the Lamanites.”<sup>19</sup>

Elder Thatcher, referring to the prophecy found in Isaiah 66:8, had prophesied that the time would come when so many people would come into the Church in Mexico that a nation would be born in a day.<sup>20</sup> President Pratt recognized that as of 1930, “maybe thousands have not come in, maybe nations have not been born in a day, but I thank God that the roots of the everlasting Gospel have struck deep in the soil of the hearts of the Lamanite people of

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<sup>17</sup> Rey L. Pratt, in Conference Report, April 1930, 127.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>20</sup> Moses Thatcher, Journal, December 4, 1879, BYU Digital Collections, 1:82. Church leaders had frequently applied Isaiah 66:8 to the redemption of the Lamanites. See, for example, Wilford Woodruff, *Journal of Discourses* 4:231.

Mexico.”<sup>21</sup> In time, the work in Mexico would find huge success, part of which began during his presidency.

President Pratt was deeply motivated by the Book of Mormon and saw the direct parallels between the work being done in Mexico and its teachings. In the October 1929 conference he referred to his experience preparing the 1929 Spanish edition of the Book of Mormon:

During the past six months my mind has been centered very much upon the Book of Mormon. It has fallen to my lot to publish an edition of that book in the Spanish language. . . . We shall soon have in circulation the third edition of the Book of Mormon in the Spanish language. My hope and desire is that this edition may soon be exhausted and that the circulation of that book among the Spanish-speaking people may increase, for in the Spanish language are to be reached the descendants, many millions of them, of those people who wrote the book. It seems to me that in the work that I have been engaged in—getting out this particular edition of the book—there has come a vision of a very wide distribution of that book among the seed of Father Lehi, who dwell in the land south of us. Many thousands of copies have been distributed in the past, and a very great many people have been made to know of the truthfulness of that record.<sup>22</sup>

Note the certainty with which he spoke. His hope was for the book to be circulated more among the “descendants, many millions of them of those people who wrote the book . . . among the seed of Father Lehi, who dwell in the land south of us.”<sup>23</sup> In the same discourse he went on to bear his witness and testimony that he knew that the Book of Mormon was true and that it was “consuming in its nature” making him “tremble to contemplate what this knowledge [meant] to [him].”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Rey L. Pratt, in Conference Report, April 1930, 130.

<sup>22</sup> Rey L. Pratt, in Conference Report, October 1929, 18-19.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 18-19.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

He frequently reminded the Church of its duties to the Lamanites, according to the teachings and prophecies within the Book of Mormon. “I testify to you that I know that the Book of Mormon is the word of God, it contains the gospel of the Redeemer, and it speaks of our duties towards the descendants of this people.”<sup>25</sup>

One of the passages from the Book of Mormon about the destiny of the seed of Lehi (the Lamanites) that he quoted often was from 2 Nephi 30.

I want to read to you something that has given to me a great deal of faith and hope, and if the book is true as we declare it to be, these promises that have not yet had their fulfillment will most surely be fulfilled in behalf of that people. I read to you now from the thirtieth chapter of Second Nephi, beginning with the third verse:

“And now, I would prophesy somewhat more concerning the Jews and the Gentiles. For after the book of which I have spoken shall come forth, and be written unto the Gentiles, and sealed up again unto the Lord, there shall be many who shall believe the words which are written; and they shall carry them forth unto the remnant of our seed.

“And then shall the remnant of our seed know concerning us, how that we came out from Jerusalem, and that they are descendants of the Jews.

“And the gospel of Jesus Christ shall be declared among them; wherefore, they shall be restored unto the knowledge of their fathers, and also to the knowledge of Jesus Christ, which was had among their fathers.

“And then shall they rejoice; for they shall know that it is a blessing unto them from the hand of God; and their scales of darkness shall begin to fall from their eyes; and many generations shall not pass away among them, save they shall be a white and delightsome people.”

I believe that prediction. I am working earnestly, my brethren and sisters, for its fulfillment. It would be almost easier, looking at the thing from a natural standpoint, to believe in the extermination of the people rather than that any of them would be spared. But they are to enjoy this great redemption.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Rey L. Pratt, in Conference Report, June 1919, 133.

<sup>26</sup> Rey L. Pratt, in Conference Report, April 1929, 75.

On other occasions, speaking of these same verses, he stated, “In Second Nephi 30, you will find that the Lord revealed that this book should be restored unto the Gentile people, and that many should believe the words of the book that should be written, and that it should be taken back to the descendants of those who wrote it, and by that means they should come to a knowledge of the fact that they were of Israel, that they are of the covenant people of the Lord.”<sup>27</sup> And again, “If you will turn then to 2 Nephi 30, you will find wherein the Lord said that there should be a church established among the Gentile people, and a book should come forth. Many among the Gentiles should believe the words of the book that was to be written, and they should carry it back to the descendants of those who wrote it, for their redemption, for it should contain the fulness of the Everlasting Gospel, and it should be preached among the descendants of those who wrote the book.”<sup>28</sup>

President Pratt not only firmly believed in the Book of Mormon and its message, but saw in the ancient ruins of the Americas a confirmatory witness that the Book of Mormon was true:

The truth of these statements of the Prophet Joseph Smith has been borne in upon me, my brethren and sisters, as I have stood among these majestic ruins of Mexico and Central and South America. I have, stood there and tried to imagine that the Book of Mormon was not true, but I have prayed that I might know of a surety for myself whether it be true or not. I want to tell you that in those solemn places, in those beautiful ruins, among majestic stones, larger than any I have ever seen in any other architecture of this modern day, I have had borne in upon my soul this truth that the Book of Mormon is true; that it is a new witness for God upon the earth, and that Joseph Smith was and is a Prophet of God.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Rey L. Pratt, in Conference Report, April 1924, 143-144.

<sup>28</sup> Rey L. Pratt, in Conference Report, October 1925, 172.

<sup>29</sup> Rey L. Pratt, in Conference Report, April 1927, 170.

The conference talks from Elder Rey L. Pratt are a clear example of the way the Book of Mormon message to the Lamanites continued to influence the establishment of the Church in Mexico into the twentieth century. Though serving in Mexico decades after work began there, President Pratt continued to preach and find inspiration from the words of the Book of Mormon, just as his grandfather had in Chile in 1852, and just as Elder Moses Thatcher had in Mexico City in 1879.

### *Publications*

As mentioned previously, Rey L. Pratt was a gifted writer and communicator. His writings both for the Church in general, as well as those specifically published for members in Mexico, are another valuable source to understand his feelings about the Church in Mexico, and its connection to Book of Mormon promises.

In 1913 he wrote an extensive series of articles for the *Improvement Era*.<sup>30</sup> What he wrote for that Church magazine is evidence of the way that he, as the president of the Mexican Mission, hoped to motivate and excite members of the Church about the missionary opportunities in Mexico.

The first of these articles, all of which were under the title, “The Gospel to the Lamanites,” introduced with no uncertain terms the direct link between the Book of Mormon and the people of Mexico.

The subject at hand is so intimately connected with the great latter-day work known as “Mormonism,” and forms such a prominent part of the Book of Mormon teachings that one would think that most of the members of the Church would be perfectly familiar with, and

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<sup>30</sup> The *Improvement Era* was an official Church magazine from 1897-1970, replacing the *Contributor* for which Elder Moses Thatcher had written his articles.

enthusiastic over, it. And such is the case, in a general way, but, I fear, and that, too, basing my belief on observations I made while on a recent trip through some of the stakes and wards of Zion, that far too many of our young folks, and, for that matter, of the older members of the Church, are not as familiar with, and as interested in, this great subject as it is their privilege to be.<sup>31</sup>

Throughout the articles he discussed a variety of subjects including emphasizing the Israelite heritage of the Lamanites, as well as prophecies about their scattering and redemption. “And oh! how well do the volumes of history among us testify that those ancient prophets were inspired in what they wrote concerning the way that the people of this land were to be scattered and smitten and trodden down and counted as naught by the multitudes of Gentiles that were to come unto this land. Well does history show the truthfulness of the prophecy uttered so long ago: ‘And they [the Gentiles] shall be a scourge unto the people of this land.’”<sup>32</sup>

He spoke of the history of the Aztecs and the cruelty of their conquerors, and the harsh conditions to which the people of Mexico and the rest of Latin America had been subjected. With these remarks, he expressed his hopes that their bondage would come to an end: “My constant prayer to the Lord is, that he will hasten the day when these conditions shall cease, and when the glorious restoration and redemption promised this people shall come.”<sup>33</sup> He saw that the conditions in Latin America and Mexico would one day improve because of these promises: “Hope for them lies in the fact that the same God who, through his prophets, foretold these very

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<sup>31</sup> Rey L. Pratt, “The Gospel to the Lamanites,” *Improvement Era* 16, no. 5 (March 1913), 497.

<sup>32</sup> Rey L. Pratt, “The Gospel to the Lamanites,” *Improvement Era* 16, no. 6 (April 1913), 579.

<sup>33</sup> Rey L. Pratt, “The Gospel to the Lamanites,” *Improvement Era* 16, no. 7 (May 1913), 689.



conditions, has also foretold, through them, that he would not permit the utter destruction of his people upon this continent, at the hands of the Gentiles.”<sup>34</sup>

After quoting the same verses from 2 Nephi 30 which he so often did in his conference addresses, President Pratt concluded that “one of [the Gentiles’] grand missions was to carry that grand and glorious gospel to the remnant of the seed of Lehi and Nephi who dwell upon this land and who are a covenant people of the Lord’s.”<sup>35</sup>

In his articles, President Pratt also sought to help Church members overcome their social biases concerning the Lamanites.

And if we are those who should believe the word which was to be written, and who should carry it forth unto the seed of those who wrote it, I ask, why are there so many of us who are averse to doing the Father's work among the Lamanites? Why so many young men among us who, when the subject is mentioned to them of taking a mission to Mexico, for instance, where millions of the remnant of the seed of Nephi dwell, say: “O let me go anywhere except to Mexico; I wish to go to a country that is civilized, and come in contact with people where I can gain education and polish?” And why will so many parents who say to their sons and to the sons of other parents, who are called to fill missions to the Lamanites, “I would prefer to have my son go anywhere rather than to Mexico.”<sup>36</sup>

Important to note, in spite of his strong feelings about taking the gospel to the Lamanites, he recognized that missionary work among this people was only one of the areas where the Church needed to concentrate its efforts throughout the world. “It is not my desire to try to show that the work of the Lord and the preaching of the gospel among the Lamanites is any greater

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<sup>34</sup> Rey L. Pratt, “The Gospel to the Lamanites,” *Improvement Era* 16, no. 7 (May 1913), 689.

<sup>35</sup> Rey L. Pratt, “The Gospel to the Lamanites,” *Improvement Era* 16, no. 8 (June 1913), 797.

<sup>36</sup> Rey L. Pratt, “The Gospel to the Lamanites,” *Improvement Era* 16, no. 10 (August 1913), 1021.

than the work of the Lord and the preaching of the gospel among any other people, but it is my desire to show that it is all the Lord's work, and that this part of it is as important as any other part.”<sup>37</sup>

In 1914, the following year, he wrote an article for the *Young Woman's Journal*, entitled “Book of Mormon Prophecies and the Mexican Situation” in which he once again reiterated the prophetic role of the Book of Mormon with regards to Mexico,<sup>38</sup> tying events of Mexico's history directly to prophecies contained within the Book of Mormon.

From 1927-1930, during a period of time when President Pratt could not proselyte in Mexico due to the legal restrictions dealing with foreign ministers of religion, he published an official monthly pamphlet for the Mexican mission entitled *El Evangelio Restaurado (The Restored Gospel)*. As LaMond Tullis noted, “*The Restored Gospel* evidences his great ability.”<sup>39</sup> Though sent to members of the Church in Mexico, the articles were written in the style of missionary tracts to teach and explain the restored gospel in a logical and scripturally based context. In many ways, the roughly two hundred pages President Pratt wrote for these articles mirror previous missionary publications, like *The Voice of Warning*, written by his grandfather Elder Parley P. Pratt. The articles are based upon an infrastructure of scriptures and reasoning that shows not only the biblical precedent for a restoration, but the necessity for the restored gospel.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 1022-1023.

<sup>38</sup> Rey L. Pratt, “Book of Mormon Prophecies and the Mexican Situation,” *Young Woman's Journal* 25, no. 9 (September 1914), 529-540.

<sup>39</sup> Tullis, *Mormons in Mexico*, 114.

From September 1927 to December 1929, each article formed part of a discussion under the title, “La Autenticidad divina del Libro de Mormón” (“The Divine Authenticity of the Book of Mormon”). His writings about the Book of Mormon were well articulated, thought-out, and profound, reflecting much of the same sentiments he had expressed in his conference addresses and previous publications, yet in a more expanded form.

He saw the Americas as a fulfillment of the promises made to Joseph by his father Jacob in the Old Testament, as the land of the “collados eternos”<sup>40</sup> (everlasting hills), fruitful, and large enough to hold the “diez millares de Efraín, los millares de Manasés” (the ten thousands of Ephraim, the thousands of Manasseh).<sup>41</sup>

He emphasized the archeological and historical evidences of the Book of Mormon, proclaiming that if the events described in the Book of Mormon really happened, they “must have left behind some footprints, and we should be able to find something tangible to prove it.”<sup>42</sup>

He wrote of learning of the past through written history and tradition<sup>43</sup> and paralleled the teachings of the Book of Mormon with traditions from Mexican oral history. He found a deep connection between the traditions of Quetzalcoatl and the Book of Mormon, and saw the Book of

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<sup>40</sup> Genesis 49:26. Rey L. Pratt, *El Evangelio Restaurado* 1, no. 11 (February 1928), 1.

<sup>41</sup> Deuteronomy 33:17. *Ibid.*, 2-3.

<sup>42</sup> Rey L. Pratt, *El Evangelio Restaurado* 3, no. 7 (October 1929), 1. Translated by Matt Geilman. Original in Spanish reads, “estos acontecimientos deben haber dejado sus pisadas, y debemos encontrar algo físico para comprobarlo.”

<sup>43</sup> Rey L. Pratt, *El Evangelio Restaurado* 3, no. 6 (September 1929), 1.

Mormon as the reason why accounts of the creation and flood in Mexican tradition so closely paralleled the biblical account of said events.<sup>44</sup>

When all was said and done, he firmly believed that the Book of Mormon was “a sacred history of the ancient inhabitants of the American continents.”<sup>45</sup> Yet at the same time, he did not see the question of the historicity of the Book of Mormon as an end in itself, but rather as a means to religious dedication and spiritual devotion: “The Book of Mormon deserves the most careful investigation of all men, so that if it is true, they can accept it, and through bringing their lives into harmony with the teachings of truth contained in it, gain their salvation in the kingdom of God.”<sup>46</sup>

#### *Influence of President Pratt's Views*

Elder Rey L. Pratt's official addresses, as well as his discourses, express the faith that he had in the promises in the Book of Mormon and the certainty with which he applied those promises to the missionary work he was overseeing in that country. From 1907-1931 his vision of the redemption of the Lamanites was a driving force, not only motivating him as a mission

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<sup>44</sup> See Rey L. Pratt, *El Evangelio Restaurado* 3, no. 5 (August 1929), 1-4; *El Evangelio Restaurado* 3, no. 6 (September 1929), 1-4; *El Evangelio Restaurado* 3, no. 7 (October 1929), 1-4.

<sup>45</sup> Rey L. Pratt, *El Evangelio Restaurado* 1, no. 6 (September 1927), 1. Translated by Matt Geilman. Original in Spanish reads, “El Libro de Mormón reclama ser una historia sagrada de los antiguos habitantes de los continentes de América.”

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-2. Translated by Matt Geilman. Original in Spanish reads, “El Libro de Mormón merece la investigación más cuidadosa de todos los hombres, para que si es verdadero puedan aceptarlo, y, por medio de armonizar sus vidas con las enseñanzas de verdad en él contenidas, ganar su salvación en el reino de Dios.”

president, but was an inspiration to others in the Church with regards to how they saw Mexico and Latin America.

Indicative of the way his vision of the Book of Mormon and the lands of Mexico influenced the Church, in 1921, Church Historian Andrew Jenson accompanied President Pratt on a mission into Mexico City.<sup>47</sup> The following general conference, Elder Jenson spoke of their experience. “I have always been interested in the Book of Mormon, having read it over and over again since I was a boy, and while visiting old Mexico, together with President Rey L. Pratt and others, on my late mission, I began to study with greater interest than ever before the predictions contained in the Book of Mormon regarding the Lamanites and the possible fulfillment of these predictions.”<sup>48</sup>

Elder Jenson then discussed the difficulties that the Church had faced during the previous century while seeking to take the gospel to the north American Indians, and the relatively little success that they had had in spite of their efforts among them. Though things had not gone particularly well among the north American Indians, Elder Jenson maintained faith that “those of us, however, who have accepted the Book of Mormon as an inspired record will not concede for a moment that the words of the Lord will fail; hence, we naturally extend our vision and researches to other tribes of Indians, besides these once powerful tribes within the boundaries of the United States.”<sup>49</sup>

What he said next is an interesting commentary on the role that he foresaw Mexico playing with regards to Book of Mormon prophecies:

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<sup>47</sup> Beecher, “Rey L. Pratt and the Mexican Mission,” 9.

<sup>48</sup> Andrew Jenson, in Conference Report, October 1921, 119.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 120.

I therefore look for the Mexican mission, now by many considered of but little importance, to flourish by and by, and become one of the best and most important missions of the Church, and I would further suggest that whenever the time comes that these Lamanites in the south shall embrace the Gospel, there will be a sufficient number of them to fulfill every prediction contained in the Book of Mormon concerning the Lamanites, and justify every expectation that we have had in regard to the help which these remnants of the house of Israel shall render in building up Zion in these last days. I desire to present this matter to you as my testimony and my faith in all that God has ever spoken through the mouths of his holy prophets. Heaven and earth may pass away, but not one jot or tittle of that which God has spoken will ever fail. Every word of prophecy contained in the Bible, the Book of Mormon, the D&C and the Pearl of Great Price, and perhaps many others not contained in these four standard works of the Church, will surely be fulfilled in the own due time of the Lord.<sup>50</sup>

Elder Jenson's words here are filled with assurance, not only about the prophecies contained within the Book of Mormon, but regarding where those prophecies would be fulfilled,<sup>51</sup> and show the way the Church was beginning to see Mexico, and the rest of Latin America with relation to the Book of Mormon during the first part of the twentieth century.

### **The Third Convention**

In April of 1931, just days after speaking in a general conference in Salt Lake City, President Pratt went in to have what seemed to be a relatively routine surgery performed. Complications arose, however, and within a few days of the surgery, he passed away unexpectedly. The months and years following his death were difficult ones for the Church in Mexico. Because of his love, devotion, and the number of years he had presided over the mission, the members of the Church in Mexico experienced deep feelings of loss. For some, his death opened a door of crisis, even questioning the Church's choice for his successor.

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 120.

The full experience and analysis of what occurred has been carefully researched and discussed by various scholars.<sup>52</sup> In brief, due in part to a growing nationalistic sentiment in Mexico,<sup>53</sup> combined with the multiple times the Church had been forced to withdraw missionaries from Mexico, some of the Church members in Mexico broke with Church protocol, and held a convention to petition the First Presidency of the Church for a new mission president of Mexican ethnicity, ultimately rejecting the man the Church had placed in that position. In Latter-day Saint ecclesiastical structure, such requests fall outside of the established order of the Church and would naturally be declined, as was the case in this situation. The group of “conventionists” persisted, however, holding a second convention to request a new mission president, again to be denied. Ultimately a third convention was held in which those members of the Church seeking a Mexican mission president ended up separating from the Mexican Mission and selecting a new mission president from among their group. For ten years, those who were part of the Third Convention (roughly one-third of Church membership in Mexico), and the Church-sponsored Mexican Mission, remained separate entities. This schism lasted until the mid-1940’s, when the groups were unified and reconciled once again under the able leadership of mission president Arwell Pierce, and a timely visit from President George Albert Smith, the

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<sup>52</sup> Perhaps the best, most comprehensive resources on the Third Convention are F. LaMond Tullis’ article, “A Shepherd to Mexico’s Saints: Arwell L. Pierce and the Third Convention,” *BYU Studies* 37, no. 1 (1997-1998), 127-157; and Elizabeth Hernandez, “Mormonism Comes of Age: The Third Convention in Mexico,” unpublished university scholar project, Brigham Young University, 1975, available at BYU library. See additionally Tullis, *Mormons in Mexico*, 109-168; Lozano, *Historia del Mormonismo en México*, 61-84; and Fernando R. Gómez, *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the Lamanite Conventions: From Darkness to Light* (México: El Museo de Historia del Mormonismo en México, 2004).

<sup>53</sup> Gómez, *Lamanite Conventions*, 23-24.

first president of the Church to go to Mexico.<sup>54</sup> In the end, love overcame misunderstanding, brotherhood replaced enmity, forgiveness removed blame, and the Church in Mexico became welded together in purpose and loyalty, stronger than ever before.

This decade-long schism, simply known as the “Third Convention,” is complex. Some aspects and causes are clearly defined, yet others, like a feud within a family, are steeped in emotion and complicating factors. The conventionists were unique from other groups who have left the mainstream of the Church in that they affirmed their loyalty to the Church, and even continued with its programs and procedures, accepting the president of the Church as their leader and prophet. Yet their insistence on having a Mexican mission president led to division and even estrangement from the Church for a time.

One of the aspects of the Third Convention germane to this thesis is the role that Lamanite identity played in the division.<sup>55</sup> Until this point in the Church’s history in Mexico, emphasizing that the people of Mexico were a people of promise had been a powerful strength and motivator to the Church both in the United States and in Mexico. The experience with the Third Convention provided a counter-balance, bringing to light some potential problems that

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<sup>54</sup> See Tullis, “A Shepherd to Mexico’s Saints: Arwell L. Pierce and the Third Convention,” 127-157.

<sup>55</sup> Important to note, Fernando Gómez, expert on Church history in Mexico, refers to the conventions as “the Lamanite Conventions,” as part of the title of his book, *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the Lamanite Conventions: From Darkness to Light* (México: El Museo de Historia del Mormonismo en México, 2004). As a contributing factor to the conventions, Gómez noted that “in the post-revolutionary years, the Mexicans were proud of their origin and indigenous past which to the Mormon Saints was easily reinforced by the Nephite and Lamanite episodes narrated in the Book of Mormon” (Gómez, *Lamanite Conventions*, 23).



could arise from overemphasizing Lamanite heritage, and the subsequent need to keep teachings about the Lamanites within the context of all the house of Israel.<sup>56</sup>

***La Evolución de México: Sus Verdaderos Progenitores y su Origen***

Though many factors influenced the Third Convention, one component was a book written by Church member Margarito Bautista entitled, *La Evolución de México: Sus Verdaderos Progenitores y su Origen, El Destino de América y Europa*.<sup>57</sup> Published in 1935, this lengthy book (564 pages) was the first major doctrinal, scriptural commentary about the Book of Mormon and Mexican history written by a member of the Church from Mexico.<sup>58</sup>

In short, Bautista, a gifted speaker and writer, had long been a member of the Church in Mexico and lived for a time in Utah, even serving as a temple worker. “An avid scriptionist, Bautista agreed with Rey Pratt and many other Mormon leaders who had preceded him that the Mexicans, their Lamanite history, and the promises to them in the Book of Mormon were inseparable.”<sup>59</sup> Bautista dedicated vast amounts of time to writing a book correlating the Book of Mormon with Old Testament teachings as well Mexican history. Though not made known to the Church until after he had completed the book, his anticipation was that the Church would

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<sup>56</sup> Gómez, *Lamanite Conventions*, 23.

<sup>57</sup> Margarito Bautista, *La Evolución de México: Sus Verdaderos Progenitores y su Origen, El Destino de América y Europa* (México: Impreso de los Talleres Gráficos Laguna, 1935).

<sup>58</sup> For a thorough history of Bautista’s book and its publication see Tullis, *Mormons in Mexico*, 122-125.

<sup>59</sup> Tullis, *Mormons in Mexico*, 122.

publish it.<sup>60</sup> After a review of the book by “various Spanish-speaking Mormons,”<sup>61</sup> including Harold Pratt (brother of Rey Pratt and soon-to-be mission president in Mexico) the Church politely declined the offer to publish the book. According to LaMond Tullis, “[Harold Pratt] did not have to read too far to know that the Mormon church could not publish the book. It was very polemical, and many of its conclusions had been derived from apocryphal literature such as the Book of Jasher. Moreover, Bautista went beyond official Mormon church doctrine in many cases, as for example, in his mapping of Book of Mormon locations on the American continent.”<sup>62</sup>

On one hand, Bautista’s book is thorough, thoughtful, features erudite literary style and prose, and is replete with citations from scripture, as well as testimony of the Book of Mormon. On the other hand, however, though based upon scripture and history, the book represents Bautista’s interpretation of events and scriptures, his extrapolations and interpretations coming more from his own reasoning than the teachings of the Church or its leaders. Throughout much of the book he quoted either scriptures or scholars and then intermittently made his own commentary of what was said, often going far beyond what the Church had taught.

When the Church did not publish his book, Bautista was deeply disappointed and returned to Mexico. While Bautista was in route he met with Harold Pratt briefly. Of this experience, Pratt wrote the following in his journal: “had a long talk with Margarito about his plans to publish his writings. Also, about his former difficulties, and requested him to evade

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 123.

making trouble this time. Demonstrated a good spirit, he is capable of doing much good if he will just stay in line.”<sup>63</sup>

Unfortunately, Bautista did not follow Pratt’s counsel. With the help of donations from members of the Church in and around Mexico City, he raised the necessary funds to have his book published and distributed among Church members. “Alarmed lest the Mexican Saints confuse Bautista’s doctrines with those of the Mormon church, [Harold Pratt, now the mission president in Mexico] issued a circular letter proclaiming that the church had not authorized the book and that its contents were not in any way church doctrine. Later, Pratt’s missionaries counseled all members ‘not to buy the book and not to read it.’”<sup>64</sup>

One of the problems that arose from the book was the way the message was received by some of the Saints in Mexico. “Mexican Mormons did not read Bautista’s book in the detached way most North Americans then and now would read it, but fully emotionally, as if they were reading their own family history.”<sup>65</sup> This was troublesome because it was planting teachings within the Church in Mexico that were overstated, and sometimes not representative of the Church’s teachings about the Book of Mormon. Until this point, articles and teachings about Book of Mormon geography or the destiny of the Lamanites had been a powerful motivator for the Church, but with Bautista, it went beyond where the Church felt comfortable and created issues that needed to be addressed.

With regards to Book of Mormon geography, previous publications of Church leaders (even by Elders Moses Thatcher and Rey L. Pratt) had made general connections between Book

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<sup>63</sup> Harold Pratt, Journal, February 16, 1935, LDS Archives.

<sup>64</sup> Tullis, *Mormons in Mexico*, 123.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

of Mormon history, locations, and peoples within the Americas, yet Bautista, not in a position of leadership within the Church, identified specific locations of events and people within the Book of Mormon, with seeming authority. For example, Maps 1 and 2 at the end of the book, with their accompanying explanation on pages 553-564 describe, rather matter-of-factly, the location of key events and cities within the Book of Mormon, even claiming to have “la llave para encontrar a Zarahemla” (the key to find Zarahemla).<sup>66</sup>

This created issues because the official position of the Church was to not advocate a particular map of Book of Mormon lands. In 1890, Elder George Q. Cannon of the Twelve wrote, “there is a tendency, strongly manifested at the present time among some of the brethren, to study the geography of the Book of Mormon. . . . The Brethren who lecture on the lands of the Nephites have often been asked to prepare a suggestive map illustrative of Nephite geography, but have never consented to do so. Nor are we acquainted with any of the Twelve Apostles, who would undertake such a task. The reason is, that without further information they are not prepared even to suggest [a solution].”<sup>67</sup> Joseph F. Smith declined to prepare a map of where Lehi landed in the Americas, saying “the Lord had not yet revealed it.”<sup>68</sup>

Beyond the geographical assertions, Bautista’s emphasis on the Lamanites was another issue, at times not only overstating the role of the Lamanites in the latter days but inaccurately

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<sup>66</sup> Bautista, *La Evolución de México*, 564. Zarahemla was the capital of the Nephite kingdom for the large majority of the Book of Mormon narrative.

<sup>67</sup> George Q. Cannon, *Juvenile Instructor* 25 (January 1890), 18-19, as cited in John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1985), 4.

<sup>68</sup> *The Instructor* 73 (April 1938), 160, as cited in John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, 4.

representing the doctrines of the Church in a way that would naturally create division and misunderstanding.

Rather than seeing the Lamanites as a branch of Israel, among other Israelites within the Church, Bautista advocated that the “‘chosen people’ . . . were none other than the Latin Americans and particularly the Mexicans. ‘Gentiles,’ those not of the House of Israel, were somehow second-class,”<sup>69</sup> suggesting that Church members of Latin America were direct descendants of Israel through their Lamanite (Joseph) bloodlines, but their North-American counterparts in the Church were Gentiles, and were only considered Israel by adoption, attaching “a certain stigma to the lineage of the North Americans” and “driving a wedge between [the Mexican Saints] and the North American authorities.”<sup>70</sup>

He affirmed that the Gentiles, by definition, were “other people brought to this continent [apart from Lehi’s seed],”<sup>71</sup> and that if they repented, the time would come that they would be “counted among us [Lehi’s seed], but they would not appear as a people, or legally represented as a group as they currently are.”<sup>72</sup> His reasoning for this was based upon 3 Nephi 16:13, “but if the Gentiles will repent and return unto me, said the Father, behold they shall be numbered among my people, O house of Israel.”

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<sup>69</sup> Tullis, *Mormons in Mexico*, 125.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

<sup>71</sup> Bautista, *La Evolución de México*, 190. Translated by Matt Geilman. Original in Spanish reads, “Los Gentiles u otra gente que fuese traída a este continente . . .”

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 190. Translated by Matt Geilman. Original in Spanish reads, “serían contados entre nosotros, pero no aparecerían como pueblo, o legalmente representados en masa como los que son actualmente.”

Bautista then asserted that, “our prophets spoke much about the white people that they called Gentiles. That in future times, perhaps when the Gentile dominance had ended, their opportunity would disappear, and as a consequence, our sovereignty in all of its fullness would be restored.”<sup>73</sup>

In his perspective, all those who had come to the Americas in the latter days were Gentiles, and temporary custodians of the land. The New Jerusalem and its temple in the latter days were to be built “by the natives of the Americas. By the descendents of the patriarch Lehi.”<sup>74</sup> In Bautista’s view, these interpretations of scripture placed the seed of Lehi in an entitled and prestigious situation within the Church.<sup>75</sup>

The position that Margarito Bautista took on the descendants of Israel and the Gentiles, as well as the Lamanites being the true descendants of Israel, not the North American counterparts, created some major issues. The timing of his book was critical. Not only had Church leaders not granted the request of some of the Mexican members for a mission president from Mexico, but now they would not publish a book that emphasized the latter-day role of the

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 41. Translated by Matt Geilman. Original in Spanish reads, “nuestros profetas hablaron mucho de la gente blanca que ellos llamaron ‘Gentiles.’ De que en lo futuro de los tiempos, quizá cuando el dominio Gentílico habrá terminado, su oportunidad desaparecerá y, por consecuencia, nuestra Soberanía en toda su plenitud se habrá restaurado.”

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 415. Translated by Matt Geilman. Original in Spanish reads, “La construcción de tan magnífico edificio será llevado a cabo, como ya se dijo, por el ABORIGEN de las Américas. ¡Por los descendientes del Patriarca Lehi!”

<sup>75</sup> As indicated in 3 Nephi 21:22-29 and Ether 13:1-11 a New Jerusalem is to be built on the American continent. Third Nephi 21:23 teaches that the Gentiles would assist “the remnant of Jacob, and also as many of the house of Israel as shall come, that they may build a city, which shall be called the New Jerusalem.” Though a simple point, Bautista overemphasized the role of the Lamanites in this experience, not recognizing that there would be other members of the house of Israel that would also accompany the remnant of Jacob and the Gentiles as they built the New Jerusalem.

Lamanites. The natural, yet unfounded, conclusion was that the leaders of the Church were “afraid such Israelite leaders would challenge them for the highest positions in the church.”<sup>76</sup>

There is some debate about the extent to which members of the Church read Margarito’s book,<sup>77</sup> yet there is little question that his thoughts influenced the Third Convention.<sup>78</sup> The promises made to the Lamanites and their special destiny within the Church, were important aspects of the request for a mission president of “Raza y Sangre” (race and blood).<sup>79</sup>

In spite of his writings and initial contribution, Margarito’s direct influence in the Third Convention was short-lived. Manifesting his doctrinally dangerous inclination, shortly after the Third Convention members officially split from the Church, Bautista tried to argue for the reinstatement of plural marriage among the third conventionists (a practice the Church had officially disbanded in 1890). To the credit of the conventionists, they quickly removed Bautista from their organization,<sup>80</sup> not wanting to “separate [themselves] even more from the mainline Church.”<sup>81</sup> Bautista went on to form his own polygamous colony called the New Jerusalem.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Tullis, *Mormons in Mexico*, 126.

<sup>77</sup> In 1997 the Museo de Historia del Mormonismo en Mexico prepared a second edition of LaMond Tullis’s book, *Mormons in Mexico*, with half the book in English, the other half in Spanish. As part of this edition, Fernando Gómez included a section called “Additional Data” with corrections and additions to what Tullis had originally published. On page 9, Gómez argues that Bautista’s book could not have gained as much popularity as Tullis indicated. He felt Tullis was “too generous to Bautista, his book and the capacity of the members of that time.” He then indicates that few members of the Church at that time “had an education that would allow them to read such a complex book.”

<sup>78</sup> Tullis, *Mormons in Mexico*, 137, Gómez, *Lamanite Conventions*, 30.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

The question of the role of the Lamanites and the Gentiles in the last days, continued to be an important aspect of the Third Convention, as seen in their official magazine *El Sendero Lamanita (The Lamanite Path)*.<sup>83</sup>

The articles published by the conventionists reveal that they were not only committed to Latter-day Saint scripture and doctrine, but found great strength and a deep sense of identity in their Book of Mormon heritage. The problem, though, that put them at odds with the Church doctrinally, came with some of the conclusions that they drew about the Lamanites and the Gentiles.<sup>84</sup> Like Bautista, they saw the Mexican people as members of the house of Israel, while their North American counterparts were simply Gentiles, of a lesser spiritual destiny (even if they were adopted into Israel through accepting the gospel).<sup>85</sup>

Granted, the role of the Lamanites within the house of Israel is an aspect of Book of Mormon teachings that can be difficult to discern at times. For example, often when the prophets in the Book of Mormon speak of the remnant of Israel in the last days it sounds like they are referring exclusively to Lehi's seed. The following statement from Elder Bruce R. McConkie helps to clarify this ambiguity:

It is, of course, the most natural thing in the world for the Book of Mormon prophets to take the words spoken by Isaiah and the other prophets—words spoken relative to the

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>83</sup> There were only four issues published of the magazine, starting in 1937 and ending in 1942. Copies of these four issues are available in the LDS Church Archives, Salt Lake City.

<sup>84</sup> See, for example, the letter of the First Presidency replicated in the *El Sendero Lamanita* 1, no. 3 (December 1941), 6-8; as well as the response of the conventionists on pages 9-16.

<sup>85</sup> Perhaps the clearest example of this comes from an article published by the conventionists entitled, "Decís vosotros que no sois gentiles? Si esto es así . . .," *El Sendero Lamanita* 1, no. 2 (June 1940), 1-8.



whole house of Israel—and show how they are fulfilled in their own seed whom we and they know as the Lamanites. Where better should their interests have been centered than in their own family members? Should we not do the very same thing and make a specific application of the prophetic word to our own children who also are of Israel, though, in fact, they are only a small part of the whole nation?<sup>86</sup>

Thus, even though the Book of Mormon focuses so much upon the destiny of the Lamanites, this emphasis was only representative of the Lord's promise to bring the gospel to all of His children in the last days, and gather them back to the covenant, inviting "all to come unto him and partake of his goodness" (2 Nephi 26:33).

In addition, the term "Gentile," as used in the Book of Mormon, does not always mean, non-descendants of Israel. The LDS Bible Dictionary states that "as used throughout the scriptures [Gentile] has a dual meaning, sometimes to designate peoples of non-Israelite lineage, and other times to designate nations that are without the gospel, even though there may be some Israelite blood therein. This latter usage is especially characteristic of the word as used in the Book of Mormon."<sup>87</sup> Some of the conclusions that Bautista and the conventionists made were based upon the assumption that because North American members of the Church were part of a Gentile nation, they were not of Israel.

Ultimately, the Latter-day Saints have taught that the promises made to Abraham in the Old Testament—that his seed would be as numerous as the stars in the heavens (see Genesis 15:5)—has been literally fulfilled and that Israel has been scattered throughout the earth. Though many of the Latter-day Saints are living in nations that are Gentile by origin, they themselves are considered members of the house of Israel, much like citizens of one nation

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<sup>86</sup> Bruce R. McConkie, *The Millennial Messiah: The Second Coming of the Son of Man* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1982), 214.

<sup>87</sup> "Gentile," LDS Bible Dictionary, 679.

moving to another yet retaining their roots and national heritage. Joseph Fielding Smith reminded the Saints that the majority of Church members today are from the tribe of Ephraim (Joseph), and that the prophecies concerning the seed of Joseph, as contained in the Book of Mormon, apply to all of Joseph's posterity, and not exclusively to the Lamanites.<sup>88</sup> In addition, everyone who accepts the gospel is adopted into Israel as a part of the gospel covenant (see 3 Nephi 16:13), becoming "no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God" (Ephesians 2:19).

In this way, though the descendants of Book of Mormon peoples are considered remnants of Israel, or direct descendants of Israel through Joseph, the Latter-day Saints believe that there are remnants of Israel spread throughout all of the Americas, and for that matter, the world.

Thus the Book of Mormon message to Israel has application to all members of the Church, whether they be descendants of Lehi or not. Lineage within Israel is a responsibility. Rather than engender a sense of superiority, it is seen as a fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant and an injunction to bless "all the families of the earth" (Abraham 2:11).

As mentioned before, fortunately the problems with the Third Convention were ultimately resolved and the members of the Church in Mexico were united once again in brotherhood and loyalty, finding resolution to the problems that had divided the Church for over a decade. This experience seasoned the Church in Mexico and brought about a greater understanding among Church members about the role and importance of the Lamanites within the Book of Mormon. Fulfillment of prophecy? Yes. Ancient heritage and beautiful destiny? Yes. The key, though, was placing the Lamanites properly within the context of the rest of the House of Israel (both literal and adopted).

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<sup>88</sup> Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 2:247-251.

## Conclusion

In the first half of the twentieth century the Church in Mexico found great identity and strength from the Book of Mormon message to the Lamanites. President Rey L. Pratt kept the responsibility to take the gospel to the Lamanites strongly in the minds of members of the Church and used this message as a powerful motivator in the missionary efforts in that land. The Third Convention, on the other end of the spectrum, tempered the Church's teachings about the Lamanites and served as a poignant reminder to not overemphasize Lamanite heritage or take it out of context of the scriptural teachings regarding all of Israel in the last days. The Lamanites are not the whole story of Israel, but are an essential component.

These experiences in the first half of the twentieth century led to decades of extraordinary growth of the Church in Mexico in the second half of the century. The Church in Mexico had been led by inspirational leaders and had weathered difficult storms. Its foundation was now firmly set for the Church to grow, with an identity still firmly tied to the history and teachings of the Book of Mormon, yet with boundaries now more clearly defined.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this thesis was to examine and evaluate the extent to which the Book of Mormon message to the Lamanites influenced the establishment of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Mexico. Case studies from the first seventy-five years of the Church there were evaluated in the previous chapters, including the first mission to Mexico, early publications in Spanish (specifically *Trozos Selectos del Libro de Mormón*), the dedication of Mexico by Apostle Moses Thatcher, the presidency of Rey L. Pratt, as well as the lessons learned from the Third Convention. Preliminary to the case studies, this thesis also provided an in-depth scriptural foundation for understanding who the Lamanites are, as well as the promises that are associated with them in Latter-day Saint theology.

Through examining scriptures, journals, publications, and other records of early Latter-day Saint missionaries in Mexico, this thesis sought to answer questions such as the following: What do the Book of Mormon and other Latter-day Saint scriptures teach regarding the Lamanites? How have Church leaders, and other significant figures in the Church's history in Mexico, applied these teachings to that land (particularly in the early years)? How did these teachings impact the early history of the Church in Mexico? Did this emphasis continue into the twentieth century?

### **Brief Overview**

Latter-day Saint scriptures are replete with references about the promises made to the Lamanites. Evaluation of these scriptures reveals that the prophecies and promises made to the Lamanites in the Book of Mormon have several levels to them. According to Latter-day Saint

scripture, “Lamanites” consist of all of Lehi’s descendants (including the seed of Nephi). Most importantly, however, the Lamanites are a remnant of the house of Israel, through Joseph of Egypt. The scriptures teach that through the instrumentality of the Book of Mormon, the Lamanites in the last days would come to a knowledge of their fathers, as well as Jesus Christ and His gospel. Missionaries in the latter days would bring this message to the descendants of Lehi, fulfilling a key aspect of the gathering of Israel.

From the very first mission to Mexico these promises and teachings were on the minds and in the hearts of the Church leaders and missionaries who opened the work there. Though the first missionary group served as an exploratory party, preparing the way for later colonization, taking the gospel to the descendants of the people described in the Book of Mormon was their primary objective, as shown in their accounts of the mission.

Publications and Church literature played a key role in taking the gospel to Latin America, particularly Mexico. These early publications were a reflection of the way that the concept of the Lamanites began to transition from a narrow focus on the Native Americans of North America, to the inhabitants throughout Latin America, emphasizing that all these lands were places where the promises in the Book of Mormon would be fulfilled. *Trozos Selectos* and other writings manifested deep faith in the teachings and prophecies of the Book of Mormon and directly linked the people of Mexico with these promises.

When Elder Moses Thatcher, as an Apostle, officially dedicated Mexico for the preaching of the gospel, he expressed faith and hope that the promises made to the Lamanites in the Book of Mormon would find fulfillment in the lands of Mexico. Scriptural teachings regarding the Lamanites inspired the missionaries to overcome difficulties in their efforts and strengthened them to continue forward. Elder Thatcher studied the history of Mexico, finding personal

validation of the message and authenticity of the Book of Mormon. His publications, labors, and dedicatory prayers, welded missionary work in Mexico to the promises made to Lamanites.

As missionary work in Mexico continued into the twentieth century, President Rey L. Pratt spent nearly three decades building and strengthening the Church there. President Pratt not only continued to emphasize the connection between the people of Mexico and the Book of Mormon, but he magnified the application of these teachings through his numerous general conference addresses and publications. President Pratt solidified what had begun in the nineteenth century, and built upon it, creating excitement within the Church about the promises to the Lamanites being fulfilled in Mexico.

The Third Convention was a difficult period in the Church's history, yet it serves as a valuable reminder about the importance of placing the Lamanites within the context of the entire house of Israel.

Like the first missionaries among the North American Indians in 1830, the missionaries who went to Mexico during both the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, saw themselves as fulfilling ancient prophecies regarding the people they were teaching. It was a sacred responsibility to them, weaving them and the people they taught into scriptural history.

They saw the land they travelled in, the archeological sites they visited, the history they studied, and the condition of the people, as a fulfillment of prophecy, and as a validation of their faith in the Book of Mormon. This book filled them with hope, love, and a desire to serve the people of Mexico, in order to see the day when the Lamanites would be redeemed.

They used the Book of Mormon as a tool to teach the people of Mexico about their heritage and destiny, and to motivate members of the Church in the United States to participate in missionary work among the people of promise found south of the border.

Though the Church grew relatively slowly during its first seventy-five years in Mexico, these early missionaries, as well as Church leaders, set the stage for what was to come, not only through the converts they brought into the Church, but by the way they spiritually connected the work in Mexico with the teachings found in the Book of Mormon. They saw Mexico as an exciting field of labor, helping engender within missionaries and members alike, the feeling that they were a part of something prophetic, something that was significant to the kingdom of God.

The foundation they laid has borne remarkable fruit, far beyond what the early missionaries experienced, yet somehow within the scope they anticipated. The first seventy-five years of the Church in Mexico represent the establishment phase. The latter half of the twentieth century is the growth phase, taking the Church from a few thousand members to over a million, in the space of just fifty years.<sup>1</sup> As stated at the beginning of this thesis, “many members bear testimony that the growth has come as fulfillment of prophecy or in answer to the prayers of the righteous.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The second half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first is an area of the Church’s history in Mexico that deserves further research and review. The author of this thesis recommends this era as a future field of study for students of Latter-day Saint history in Mexico, as there is much that still needs to be done to record and synthesize the history during those years.

<sup>2</sup> Don L. Searle, “One Million in Mexico,” *Ensign*, July 2004, 35.

## Since the Mid-Twentieth Century

As the Church passed into the growth phase during the latter-part of the twentieth century, the question arises if the emphasis upon the Book of Mormon message to the Lamanites has continued. The simple answer is yes. Church leaders have continued to connect the Church in Mexico with the promises made to the Lamanites in the Book of Mormon, in area and general conferences, temple dedications, and other official publications.<sup>3</sup> For example, in 1977 President Spencer W. Kimball presided over two large area conferences in Mexico—one in Mexico City and the other in Monterrey—just a week apart from one another.

While in Monterrey he reiterated to the Saints in attendance, “As we read the Book of Mormon, your book, we find the Lord has made many promises to you. He has called you Lamanites. I hope that no one here is ashamed of that name. It is one of the noblest and most glorious of all names.”<sup>4</sup> Note President Kimball’s emphasis on “your book,” “promises to you,” the Lord “has called you Lamanites.” To President Kimball there was no question about the connection between the Book of Mormon and the growth of the Church in Mexico: “The prophecies that the prophets had made concerning you are now being fulfilled.”<sup>5</sup> He then

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Spencer W. Kimball, “Lamanite Prophecies Fulfilled,” Brigham Young University Devotional Address, April 13, 1965; Spencer W. Kimball, Mexico and Monterrey Area Conference Reports, February 1977, available at the LDS Church Archives, Salt Lake City; C. Scott Grow, “The Book of Mormon, the Instrument to Gather Scattered Israel,” *Ensign*, November 2005, 33–35; Robert J. Whetten, “Strengthen Thy Brethren,” *Ensign*, May 2005, 91–93. For examples of temple dedications mentioning the promises made to the seed of Lehi see Gordon B. Hinckley, Mexico City Temple dedicatory prayer, 1983; Colonia Juarez Mexico Temple dedicatory prayer, 1999; Tuxtla Gutierrez Mexico Temple dedicatory prayer, 2000; and Thomas S. Monson, Villahermosa Mexico Temple dedicatory prayer, 2000, all available on [www.ldschurchnews.com/temples](http://www.ldschurchnews.com/temples).

<sup>4</sup> Spencer W. Kimball, in Conference Report, Monterrey Area Conference, February 1977, 2.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.



reiterated the connection that the descendants of the Book of Mormon had with the rest of Israel: “Great promises have been made to you by the Lord. You are of the house of Israel.”<sup>6</sup>

The next question would be if the message to the Lamanites has been emphasized perhaps less, or even evolved from the early days of the Church? Indications would also say yes. From preliminary research, it appears that the subject of taking the gospel to the Lamanites is not addressed as much in recent years as it was during the first seventy-five years of the Church in Mexico (except perhaps during President Kimball’s administration).<sup>7</sup> Though some have tried to conclude that the Church is perhaps pulling away from some of its Book of Mormon assertions,<sup>8</sup> other factors must be taken into consideration before drawing such conclusions.

As the Church has become increasingly a world-wide organization, it is only natural to make its message applicable to as wide a variety of people and cultures as possible. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Book of Mormon message to the Lamanites is only a part of the book’s overall message. The teachings of Christ and the promises to Israel are for everyone. When President Dieter F. Uchtdorf was called into the First Presidency, a reporter asked him about the significance of an international member of the Church being called into such a position. President Uchtdorf responded that “I learned quickly in the church that we’re not

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>7</sup> For a brief background about Spencer W. Kimball and his connection to the Lamanites, see Spencer W. Kimball, *Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1982), 594-620; and Edward L. Kimball and Andrew E. Kimball, *Spencer W. Kimball: Twelfth President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1977), 236-248.

<sup>8</sup> See for example, John-Charles Duffy, “The Use of ‘Lamanite’ in Official LDS Discourse,” *Journal of Mormon History* 34, no. 1 (Winter 2008), 118-167. See also Thomas W. Murphy, “Imagining *Lamanites*: Native Americans and the Book of Mormon” (Ph.D. diss., University of Washington, 2003).

representing a nation or country or ethnic group. We are . . . representing the Church of Jesus Christ. We are representatives of Him.”<sup>9</sup> He then described the universal message of the Church to the world, “Recently I was asked whether it is a global church. No, it’s a universal church. It is a message of universal power. It is the message that will connect and combine and unite and bless all the countries, all the nations, all the ethnic groups.”<sup>10</sup> Perhaps one reason for emphasizing Lamanite heritage somewhat less in the second half of the twentieth century is due to the desire to keep the Church’s message universally applicable to all people throughout the world.

In the same line of reasoning, early on in Latter-day Saint history, members and leaders of the Church alike were deeply excited about geographical discoveries that would validate the history of the Book of Mormon. It was reflected in their publications, conference addresses, and journals, as was the case with Elders Moses Thatcher and Rey L. Pratt. The reasons for the Church not taking an official stance on such matters are various. For example, the Church is certain about the divine authenticity of the Book of Mormon, yet theories about geography and archeology are constantly changing. Rather than connect certainty (the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon) with uncertainty (geographic models) the Church has chosen to hold the subject in abeyance. The writings of Margarito Bautista are a classic example of the dangers of making conjectures and having Church membership accept it as truth.<sup>11</sup> Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve has stated, “I would like to add my testimony of the divinity of this book.

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<sup>9</sup> As cited in Carrie A. Moore, “16<sup>th</sup> President of the LDS Church—President Monson,” *Deseret News*, February 5, 2008.

<sup>10</sup> As cited in Adam C. Olsen, “President Dieter F. Uchtdorf,” *Ensign*, April 2008, 16.

<sup>11</sup> See pages 139-145 of this thesis.

I have read it many times. I have also read much that has been written about it. Some authors have focused upon its stories, its people, or its vignettes of history. Others have been intrigued by its language structure or its records of weapons, geography, animal life, techniques of building, or systems of weights and measures. Interesting as these matters may be, study of the Book of Mormon is most rewarding when one focuses on its primary purpose—to testify of Jesus Christ. By comparison, all other issues are incidental.”<sup>12</sup> The Church has not backed away from assertions about the Book of Mormon’s historical accuracy, but has rather chosen to emphasize the “primary purpose” of the Book, which is “to testify of Jesus Christ.”<sup>13</sup>

In addition to keeping the message of the Church and Book of Mormon universal in its application, there are other factors that may be more complex. Have cultural factors and changing perceptions of race, not only religiously, but socially, played a role in perhaps highlighting the promises to the Lamanites less? This is a complicated subject deeply tied to the latter part of the twentieth century, not just in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, but in the religious world at large, and needs to be considered.<sup>14</sup> In some ways, the experience with the Third Convention fits directly under this umbrella.<sup>15</sup>

Connected to the question of race, and perhaps another reason for emphasizing the role of the Lamanites less, is the difficulty of identifying specifically who the Lamanites are today. In

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<sup>12</sup> Russell M. Nelson, “A Testimony of the Book of Mormon,” *Ensign*, November 1999, 69.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>14</sup> For an example of the complexities of race and lineage, see Armand L. Mauss, *All Abraham’s Children: Changing Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003); specifically chapters 4-5, “The Return of the Lamanites,” and “Old Lamanites, New Lamanites, and the Negotiation of Identity.”

<sup>15</sup> See pages 136-148 of this thesis.

1972, Harold Brown (raised in the Mormon colonies in Mexico, and a former mission president in Latin America) wrote an article for the *Ensign* entitled, “What is a Lamanite?” discussing some of the difficulties connected to the concept of Lamanites. Using an imaginary discussion as the format of his remarks, he drew several conclusions, conveying, to some degree, the complexity of the subject of Lamanites in the Church:

1. The redemption of the Lamanite as a remnant of scattered Israel, in accordance with Book of Mormon prophecy, is one of the vital responsibilities and opportunities of the restored Church.
2. Although many of the Lamanites in the world are nationals of Spanish-speaking countries, by no means are all Spanish-speaking members of the Church Lamanites.
3. As the gospel is taught in various nations of the Americas and on the Pacific islands, missionary programs for Lamanite and mestizo segments of the population might well be adapted to the language and the ethnic position of the descendants of Father Lehi in each nation. Missionary work in Bolivia, for instance, is done in Spanish and in two Indian languages, Quechua and Aymará.
4. Emphasis on the “chosen people” heritage of the Lamanites is fruitful where national leaders have been inspired to help dignify the Indian heritage, where tribal groups have retained a sense of ethnic dignity on their own, and where Lamanites have had an opportunity to understand and respond to the message of the Book of Mormon; but where ethnic differences have hardened into class distinctions, the Lamanite question has to be handled with sensitivity on both sides.
5. When we refer to our Indian or mestizo brethren as Lamanites, we do need to be aware . . . that the rebellious and wicked Book of Mormon people were generally called Lamanites as an indication of their spiritual degeneracy. However, Samuel, a Lamanite prophet, and other righteous Lamanites during a period of Book of Mormon history called the then more wicked Nephites to repentance, and during this period they continued to be identified by their respective ethnic designations, even though their spiritual positions were reversed.<sup>16</sup>

The foregoing points from Harold Brown, combined with other insights offered in this concluding chapter help to illustrate why perhaps the Church has not emphasized Lamanite

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<sup>16</sup> Harold Brown, “What is a Lamanite?” *Ensign*, September 1972, 62-63.

identity as much in recent years as it did early on in the Church's establishment in Mexico. With this said, as Latter-day Saint scholar Robert Millet observed, there are several factors that indicate whether something that was taught in Church history is still considered doctrine in the present.<sup>17</sup> "Is it found within the four standard works? Within official declarations or proclamations? Is it discussed in general conference or other official gatherings by general Church leaders today? Is it found in the general handbooks or approved curriculum of the Church today? If it meets at least one of these criteria, we can feel secure and appropriate about teaching it."<sup>18</sup> Under these qualifications, associating Latin America, particularly Mexico, with the teachings found in the Book of Mormon regarding the Lamanites, is still appropriate today.

Latter-day Saint scriptures about the destiny of the Lamanites have not changed. The scriptures teach the same doctrine and contain the same prophecies that they did when missionaries first entered Mexico. Perhaps early Church leaders and missionaries drew conclusions and comparisons about specifics in history or archeology that Church leaders would not necessarily advocate today, but the general themes of the Lamanites in connection to the Latter-day Saints in Mexico have continued to be a part of the Church's identity there to the present.

As stated in the beginning of this thesis, the story of the Latter-day Saints in Mexico is one that is rich, not only in history, but in scriptural and prophetic underpinnings. To what extent did the Book of Mormon message to the Lamanites influence the establishment of the Latter-day Saints in Mexico? As has been shown through the teachings and writings of early missionaries and Church leaders, at its inception, missionary work in Mexico and the Book of

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<sup>17</sup> Robert L. Millet, "What Is Our Doctrine?" *The Religious Educator* 4, no. 3 (2003), 15-33.

<sup>18</sup> Millet, "What Is Our Doctrine?" 19.

Mormon message to the Lamanites were inseparable. This influence has continued to the present and undoubtedly will continue in the future. From early on, the Book of Mormon message to the Lamanites was sown into the fabric of the Church's history in Mexico, becoming a vital facet of the "miracle that is Mormonism in Mexico."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Hinckley, *Discourses*, 301.

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