

ENCYCLOPEDIA OF MORMONISM



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BOOK OF MORMON PEOPLES

At least fifteen distinct groups of people are mentioned in the Book of Mormon. Four (NEPHITES, LAMANITES, JAREDITES, and the people of Zarahemla [Mulekites]) played a primary role; five were of secondary concern; and six more were tertiary elements.

NEPHITES. The core of this group were direct descendants of NEPHI¹, the son of founding father LEHI. Political leadership within the Nephite wing of the colony was “conferred upon none but those who were descendants of Nephi” (Mosiah 25:13). Not only the early kings and judges but even the last military commander of the Nephites, MORMON, qualified in this regard (he explicitly notes that he was “a pure descendant of Lehi” [3 Ne. 5:20] and “a descendant of Nephi” [Morm. 1:5]).

In a broader sense, “Nephites” was a label given all those governed by a Nephite ruler, as in Jacob 1:13: “The people which were not Lamanites were Nephites; nevertheless, they were called [when specified according to descent] Nephites, Jacobites, Josephites, Zoramites, Lamanites, Lemuelites, and Ishmaelites.” It is interesting to note that groups without direct ancestral connections could come under the Nephite sociopolitical umbrella. Thus, “all the people of Zarahemla were numbered with the Nephites” (Mosiah 25:13). This process of political amalgamation had kinship overtones in many instances, as when a body of converted Lamanites “took upon themselves the name of Nephi, that they might be called the children of Nephi and be numbered among those who were called Nephites” (Mosiah 25:12). The odd phrase “the people of the Nephites” in such places as Alma 54:14 and Helaman 1:1 suggests a social structure where possibly varied populations (“the people”) were controlled by an elite (“the Nephites”).

Being a Nephite could also entail a set of religious beliefs and practices (Alma 48:9–10; 4 Ne. 1:36–37) as well as participation in a cultural tradition (Enos 1:21; Hel. 3:16). Most Nephites seem to have been physically distinguishable from the Lamanites (Jacob 3:5; Alma 55:4, 8; 3 Ne. 2:15).

The sociocultural and political unity implied by the use of the general title “Nephites” is belied by the historical record, which documents a long

series of “dissensions” within and from Nephite rule, with large numbers periodically leaving to join the Lamanites (Alma 31:8; 43:13; Hel. 1:15).

The Book of Mormon—a religiously oriented lineage history—is primarily a record of events kept by and centrally involving the Nephites. Since the account was written from the perspective of this people (actually, of its leaders), all other groups are understood and represented from the point of view of Nephite elites. There are only fragments in the Nephite record that indicate directly the perspectives of other groups, or even of Nephite commoners.

LAMANITES. This name, too, was applied in several ways. Direct descendants of Laman, Lehi’s eldest son, constituted the backbone of the Lamanites, broadly speaking (Jacob 1:13–14; 4 Ne. 1:38–39). The “Lemuelites” and “Ishmaelites,” who allied themselves with the descendants of Laman in belief and behavior, were also called Lamanites (Jacob 1:13–14). So were “all the dissenters of [from] the Nephites” (Alma 47:35). This terminology was used in the Nephite record, although one cannot be sure that all dissenters applied the term to themselves. However, at least one such dissenter, Ammoron, a Zoramite, bragged, “I am a bold Lamanite” (Alma 54:24).

Rulers in the Lamanite system appear to have had more difficulty than Nephite rulers in binding component social groups into a common polity (Alma 17:27–35; 20:4, 7, 9, 14–15; 47:1–3). They seem to have depended more on charisma or compulsion than on shared tradition, ideals, or an apparatus of officials. Whether a rule existed that Lamanite kings be descendants of Laman is unclear. Early in the second century B.C. two successive Lamanite kings were called Laman (Mosiah 7:21; 24:3); since this designation was being interpreted across a cultural boundary by a record keeper of Nephite culture, it is possible that “Laman” was really a title of office, in the same manner that Nephite kings bore the title “Nephi” (Jacob 1:9–11). Later, however, Lamoni, a local Lamanite ruler, is described as “a descendant of Ishmael,” not of Laman (Alma 17:21), and his father, king over the entire land of Nephi (originally a homeland of the Nephites, but taken and occupied by the Lamanites throughout much of the remainder of Book of Mormon history), would have had the same ancestry. Evidently, if there

was a rule that Laman's descendants inherit the throne, it was inconsistently applied. Moreover, Amalickiah and his brother, both Nephite dissenters, gained the Lamanite throne and claimed legitimacy (Alma 47:35; 52:3).

Repeatedly, the Lamanites are said to have been far more numerous than the Nephites (Jarom 1:6; Mosiah 25:3; Hel. 4:25), a fact that might appear to be inconsistent with the early Nephite characterization of them as savage hunters, which normally require much more land per person than farmers require (Enos 1:20; Jarom 1:6). The expression "people of the Lamanites" (Alma 23:9–12) may indicate that Lamanite elites dominated a disparate peasantry.

The few direct glimpses that Nephite history allows of the Lamanites indicate a level well beyond "savage" culture, though short of the "civilization" claimed for the Nephites. Perhaps their sophistication was due somewhat to the influence of Nephite dissenters among them (see Mosiah 24:3–7). Apparently some Lamanites proved apt learners from this source; moreover, those converted to the prophetic religion taught by Nephite missionaries are usually described as exemplary (Alma 23:5–7; 56; Hel. 6:1).

THE PEOPLE OF ZARAHLEMLA (MULEKITES). In the third century B.C., when the Nephite leader Mosiah₁ and his company moved from the land of Nephi down to the Sidon river, "they discovered a people, who were called the people of Zarahemla" (Omni 1:13–14) because their ruler bore that name. These people were descendants of a party that fled the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., among whom was a son of the Jewish king Zedekiah, MULEK. Hence Latter-day Saints often refer to the descendants of this group of people as Mulekites, although the Book of Mormon never uses the term. When discovered by the Nephites around 200 B.C., this people was "exceedingly numerous," although culturally degenerate due to illiteracy and warfare (Omni 1:16–17). The Nephite account says the combined population welcomed Mosiah as king.

Mosiah found that the people of Zarahemla had discovered the last known survivor of the Jaredites shortly before his death. By that means, or through survivors not mentioned, elements of Jaredite culture seem to have been brought to the Nephites by the people of Zarahemla (*CWHN* 5:238–47). The fact that the people of Zarahemla

spoke a language unintelligible to the Nephites further hints at an ethnic makeup more diverse than the brief text suggests, which assumes a solely Jewish origin.

The Mulekites are little referred to later, probably because they were amalgamated thoroughly into eclectic Nephite society (Mosiah 25:13). However, as late as 51 B.C., a Lamanite affiliate who was a descendant of king Zarahemla attacked and gained brief control over the Nephite capital (Hel. 1:15–34).

JAREDITES. This earliest people referred to in the Book of Mormon originated in Mesopotamia at the "great tower" referred to in Genesis 11. From there a group of probably eight families journeyed to America under divine guidance.

The existing record is a summary by MORONI₂, last custodian of the Nephite records, of a history written on gold plates by Ether, the final Jaredite prophet, around the middle of the first millennium B.C. Shaped by the editorial hands of Ether, MORONI₂, and MOSIAH₂ (Mosiah 28:11–17), and by the demand for brevity, the account gives but a skeletal narrative covering more than two millennia of Jaredite history. Most of it concerns just one of the eight lineages, Jared's, the ruling line to which Ether belonged, hence the name Jaredites (*see* BOOK OF MORMON PLATES AND RECORDS).

Eventually a flourishing cultural tradition developed (Ether 10:21–27), although maintaining a viable population seems to have been a struggle at times (Ether 9:30–34; 11:6–7). By the end, millions were reported victims of wars of extermination witnessed by the prophet Ether (Ether 15:2). A single survivor, Coriantumr, the last king, was encountered by the people of Zarahemla sometime before 200 B.C., although it is plausible that several remote groups also could have survived to meld unnoticed by historians into the successor Mulekite and Lamanite populations.

SECONDARY GROUPS. The same seven lineage groups are mentioned among Lehi's descendants near the beginning of the Nephite record and again 900 years later (Jacob 1:13; Morm. 1:8). Each was named after a first-generation ancestor and presumably consisted of his descendants. Among the Nephites there were four: Nephites proper, Jacobites, Josephites, and Zoramites. Within the Lamanite faction, Laman's own descendants were joined by the Lemuelites and Ishmaelites. These divisions disappeared after the appearance of

Christ at Bountiful (there were neither “Lamanites, nor any manner of -ites” [4 Ne. 1:17]), but that descent was not forgotten, for the old lineages later reappeared (4 Ne. 1:20, 36–37). What might have happened was that some public functions that the groups had filled were taken over for several generations by the Christian church, which they all had joined. Based on analogy to social systems in related lands, it is possible that membership in these seven groups governed marriage selection and property inheritance, and perhaps residence (Alma 31:3). The Lemuelites evidently had their own city (Alma 23:12–13), and descent determined where the Nephites and the people of Zarahemla sat during Mosiah₂'s politico-religious assembly (Mosiah 25:4; cf. 25:21–23). Such functions may also have been filled by groups other than the seven lineages.

The seven lineage groups may be referred to as “tribes,” as in 3 Nephi 7:2–4. Immediately before the natural disasters that signaled the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, Nephite social unity collapsed, and they “did separate one from another into tribes, every man according to his family and his kindred and friends; . . . therefore their tribes became exceedingly great” (3 Ne. 7:2–4).

The **Jacobites** are always listed first of the three secondary peoples among the Nephites. They were descendants of Nephi's younger brother, Jacob. Nothing is said of them as a group except that they were counted as Nephites politically and culturally. Since Jacob himself was chief priest under the kingship of his brother Nephi, and since he and his descendants maintained the religious records begun by Nephi, it is possible that the Jacobites as a lineage group bore some special priestly responsibilities.

The **Josephites** are implied to have been descendants of Joseph, Nephi's youngest brother. The text is silent on any distinctive characteristics.

The **Zoramites** descended from Zoram, Laban's servant who agreed under duress to join the party of Lehi following the slaying of Laban in Jerusalem (1 Ne. 4:31–37). Both early and late in the account (Jacob 1:13 and 4 Ne. 1:36), the Zoramites are listed in alignment with Nephi's descendants, although around 75 B.C. at least some of them dissented for a time and joined the Lamanite alliance (Alma 43:4). As they were then “appointed . . . chief captains” over the Lamanite armies (Alma 48:5), they may earlier have played a formal military role among the Nephites. A reason for

their split with the Nephites was evidently recollection of what had happened to their founding ancestor: Ammoron, dissenter from the Nephites and king of the Lamanites in the first century B.C., recalled: “I am . . . a descendant of Zoram, whom your fathers pressed and brought out of Jerusalem” (Alma 54:23).

During their dissidence, their worship, characterized as idolatrous yet directed to a god of spirit, was conducted in “synagogues” from which the wealthy drove out the poor (Alma 31:1, 9–11; 32:5). Their practices departed from both Nephite ways and the LAW OF MOSES (Alma 31:9–12). Shortly after the signs marking the birth of Christ and almost eight years after the earliest mention of their separation from the Nephites, these Zoramites were still dissident and were luring naive Nephites to join the Gadianton robbers by means of “lyings” and “flattering words” (3 Ne. 1:29). Yet two centuries later they were back in the Nephite fold (4 Ne. 1:36).

The list of secondary peoples among the Lamanites starts with the **Lemuelites**. Presumably they were the posterity of Lehi's second eldest son, Lemuel. Nothing is said of the group as a separate entity other than routine listings among the Nephites' enemies (Jacob 1:13–14; Morm. 1:8–9), although a “city of Lemuel” is mentioned in Alma 23:12.

The **Ishmaelites** were descendants of the father-in-law of Nephi and his brothers (1 Ne. 7:2–5). Why Ishmael's sons (1 Ne. 7:6) did not found separate lineages of their own is nowhere indicated. As with the other secondary groups, there is little to go on in characterizing the Ishmaelites. At one time they occupied a particular land of Ishmael within the greater land of Nephi, where one of their number, Lamoni, ruled (Alma 17:21).

Somehow, by the days of Ammon and his fellow missionaries (first century B.C.), the Ishmaelites had gained the throne over the entire land of Nephi as well as kingship over some component kingdoms. (Alma 20:9 has the grand king implying that Lamoni's brothers, too, were rulers.) Yet the king recited the familiar Lamanite litany of complaint about how in the first generation Nephi had “robbed our fathers” of the right to rule (Alma 20:13). Evidently he was a culturally loyal Lamanite even though of a minor lineage.

The final information known about both Ishmaelites and Lemuelites is their presence in the combined armies fighting against the Nephites in

Mormon's day (Morm. 1:8). Presumably their contingents were involved in the final slaughter of the Nephites at CUMORAH.

TERTIARY GROUPS. Six other groups qualify as peoples, even though they did not exhibit the staying power of the seven lineages.

The earliest described are the **people of Zeniff** (Zeniffites). Zeniff, a Nephite, about half a century after Mosiah had first discovered the people and land of Zarahemla, led a group out of Zarahemla who were anxious to resettle "the land of Nephi, or . . . the land of our fathers' first inheritance" (Mosiah 9:1). Welcomed at first by the Lamanites there, in time they found themselves forced to pay a high tax to their overlords. A long section on them in the book of Mosiah (Mosiah 9–24) relates their dramatic temporal and spiritual experiences over three generations until they were able to escape back to Zarahemla. There they became Nephites again, although perhaps they retained some residential and religious autonomy as one of the "seven churches" (Mosiah 25:23).

Two groups splintered off from the people of Zeniff. The **people of Alma₁** were religious refugees who believed in the words of the prophet Abinadi and fled from oppression and wickedness under King Noah, the second Zeniffite king (Mosiah 18, 23–24). Numbering in the hundreds, they maintained independent social and political status for less than twenty-five years before escaping from Lamanite control and returning to Nephite territory, where they established the "church of God" in Zarahemla (Mosiah 25:18) but soon disappeared from the record as an identifiable group.

The second Zeniffite fragment started when the priests of King Noah, headed by Amulon, fled into the wilderness to avoid execution by their rebellious subjects. In the course of their escape, they kidnapped Lamanite women and took them as wives, thus founding the **Amulonites** in a land where they established their own version of Nephite culture (Mosiah 24:1). In time, they adopted the religious "order of Nehor" (see below), usurped political and military leadership, and "stirred up" the Lamanites to attack the Nephites (Alma 21:4; 24:1–2; 25:1–5). They and the Amalekites (see below) helped the Lamanites construct a city named Jerusalem in the land of Nephi. Judging from brief statements by the Nephites (Mosiah 12–13; Alma 21:5–10), both

Amulonites and Amalekites saw themselves as defenders of a belief system based on the Old Testament, which no doubt explains the naming of their city.

One of the earliest groups of Nephite dissenters was the **Amlicites**. Ambitious Amlici, a disciple of Nehor, likely claiming noble birth (Alma 51:8), gathered a large body of followers and challenged the innovative Nephite system of rule by judges instituted by Mosiah₂; Amlici wished to be king. When his aim was defeated by "the voice of the people," he plotted an attack coordinated with the Lamanites that nearly succeeded in capturing Zarahemla, the Nephite capital. Loyal forces under ALMA₂ finally succeeded in destroying or scattering the enemy (Alma 2:1–31). Amlici was slain, but the fate of his forces is unclear. Likely, elements of them went with the defeated Lamanite army to the land of Nephi. The name Amlicite is not used thereafter.

Another group of Nephite dissenters, the **Amalekites**, lived in the land of Nephi (Alma 21:2–3; 43:13). Their origin is never explained. However, based on the names and dates, it is possible that they constituted the Amlicite remnant previously mentioned, their new name possibly arising by "lamanitization" of the original. They were better armed than common Lamanites (Alma 43:20) and, like some Zoramites, were made military leaders within the Lamanite army because of their "more wicked and murderous disposition" (Alma 43:6). From the record of the Nephite missionaries, we learn that they believed in a god (Alma 22:7). Many of them, like the Amlicites, belonged to the religious order of Nehor and built sanctuaries or synagogues where they worshipped (Alma 21:4, 6). Like the Amulonites, they adamantly resisted accepting Nephite orthodox religion (Alma 23:14). Instead, they believed that God would save all people. From their first mention to the last, only about fifteen years elapsed.

During a fourteen-year mission in the land of Nephi, the Nephite missionaries Ammon and his brothers gained many Lamanite converts (Alma 17–26). A Lamanite king, Lamoni, who was among these converts, gave the Lamanite converts the name **Anti-Nephi-Lehies**. These people were singularly distinguished by their firm commitment to the gospel of Jesus Christ, including, most prominently, the Savior's injunctions to love one's enemies and not to resist evil (3 Ne. 12:39, 44; Matt. 5:39, 44). Ammon maintained that in Christlike

love this people exceeded the Nephites (Alma 26:33). After their conversion, the Book of Mormon says, they “had no more desire to do evil” (Alma 19:33) and “did not fight against God any more, neither against any of their brethren” (Alma 23:7). Having previously shed human blood, they covenanted as a people never again to take human life (Alma 24:6) and even buried all their weapons (Alma 24:17). They would not defend themselves when attacked by Lamanites, and 1,005 of them were killed (Alma 24:22). Ammon urged the vulnerable Anti-Nephi-Lehies to flee to Nephite territory. Among the Nephites they became known as the **people of Ammon** (or **Ammonites**; see Alma 56:57). They ended up in a separate locale within the Nephite domain, the land of Jereshon (Alma 27:26). Later, they moved en masse to the land of Melek (Alma 35:13), where they were joined from time to time by other Lamanite refugees.

Some years later, desiring to assist the Nephite armies in defending the land but not wishing to break their covenant (Alma 53:13), the people of Ammon sent 2,000 of their willing sons to be soldiers, since their sons had not taken the covenant of nonviolence that they had. These “two thousand stripling soldiers” (Alma 53:22) became known as the sons of Helaman, their Nephite leader, and had much success in battle (Alma 56:56). Although they were all wounded, none were ever killed, a remarkable blessing ascribed “to the miraculous power of God, because of their exceeding faith” (Alma 57:26; cf. 56:47).

According to Helaman 3:11, a generation later some of the people of Ammon migrated into “the land northward.” This is the last mention of them in the Book of Mormon.

OTHER GROUPS. Among the other groups mentioned in the Book of Mormon are the widespread secret combinations or “robbers.” Yet these groups do not qualify as “peoples” but as associations, which individuals could join or leave on their own volition.

Another group, the “order of Nehor,” was a cult centered around the ideas that priests should be paid and that God would redeem all people. They were not really a “people” in the technical sense—the term implies a biological continuity that a cult lacks.

The inhabitants of separate cities were also sometimes called peoples. Local beliefs and customs no doubt distinguished them from each

other, but insufficient detail prohibits describing units of this scale.

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BOOK OF MORMON PERSONALITIES

[The experiences, thoughts, feelings, and personalities of several individuals are brought to light in the Book of Mormon. Jesus Christ is central in the book; see Jesus Christ in the Book of Mormon.]

The founding prophet was Lehi. For articles concerning him and members of his family, see Lehi; Laman; Nephi₁; Jacob; and Ishmael. Concerning Lehi’s wife, Sariah, and the other women of the Book of Mormon, see Women in the Book of Mormon.

The last Nephite king (153–90 B.C.) was Mosiah₂. For articles on his grandfather, father, and brother, see Mosiah₁, Benjamin, Helaman₁. From 90 B.C. to A.D. 321 the Nephite records were kept by descendants of Alma₁; see Alma₁; Alma₂; Helaman₂; Helaman₃; Nephi₂; Nephi₃; Nephi₄. The last Nephite prophets, military leaders, and historians were Mormon and his son, Moroni₂, named after an earlier chief captain Moroni₁.

Four other prophets figure prominently in the Book of Mormon; see Abinadi; Amulek; Samuel the Lamanite; and Brother of Jared. Prophets from the Old World quoted in the Book of Mormon include Ezias; Isaiah; Joseph; Moses; Neum; Zenock; and Zenos. Regarding the various groups of people in the Book of Mormon, see Book of Mormon Peoples; Jaredites; Lamanites; Mulek; and Nephites. See also Book of Mormon Names.]

BOOK OF MORMON PLATES AND RECORDS

The Book of Mormon is a complex text with a complicated history. It is primarily an abridgment of several earlier records by its chief editor and namesake, MORMON. All these records are referred to as “plates” because they were engraved on thin