

Journal: The Lamanite

By Larry Richman

Submitted to Jeffrey Simons, Religion 390R, fall semester 1976, Brigham Young University

Introduction

I begin this journal of entries with the purpose of discussing some of the issues, problems, or thoughts I have about Lamanites, This is not my regular journal, but a special one, devoted solely to the purpose stated above.

I have been involved with Lamanites now for about three and a half years. It all began with my mission call to Guatemala and El Salvador in August of 1974, At that time I was frankly ignorant of the people in Central America, I had not the slightest idea that they were Lamanites. My first assignment after arriving in the mission field was a city in El Salvador, There I was working with Latins (those of a mixed Spanish and Indian blood), although I didn't realize that they were Lamanites until much later, I didn't realize that there were pure Indians in Central America until after I had been there for a while, One day my companion and I spotted a Guatemalan Indian on the street, and my companion briefly mentioned to me that there were Indians in Guatemala, There are also a few Indians in El Salvador, Well, a few months later, I was called to go to Guatemala and work in the highlands with the Indians--the Cakchiquel tribe. They are of Mayan descent, and are a relatively pure tribe, There are also many Latins in the highlands and in other parts of Guatemala who are a mixture of Indian blood and the blood of the Spaniards who long ago conquered Guatemala.

I would like to give a background of my experiences with the Lamanites in Guatemala, and then use those experiences to illustrate some current issues facing Lamanites today.

I would like to tell the story of a lady named Elena Miza and her husband Rigoberto. They live in Comalapa, Guatemala. She was married several years ago to Rigoberto, and when they were first married, they were very happy. But, a short while into their married life, Elena found that her husband enjoyed drinking. His drinking became more frequent to the point that he would come home and beat his children and beat his wife. Several times she left him and went back to live with her mother for a few days until her husband would come back around and plead with her to come back, She would go back and live with him for a while, until the next fight, then she would leave him again, One time she got quite desperate and she was really worried about her future life, about her married life, about how things were going to be, about raising her children around the example that her husband was giving them,

She finally decided that it wasn't worth it and that she was going to go back and live with her mother. She had made up her mind and had gone back to her mother's house where she took up residence.

Well, about two or three days later, Rigoberto came around and asked her to come back. She said she wasn't going to put up with his drinking and his carrying on anymore, nor with his mistreating the children. She was going to take the children and live there with her mother and that was that.

Well, he left, but a few days later returned and pleaded again with her, She refused, so Rigoberto talked to her mother, thought about it, and came back and talked to her again, He finally convinced her. So, she went back, and he quit drinking, although he did drink every once in a while. He tried to be nice to her and the children, but she was still worried. She knew that her husband had great potential. He was a leader in that town. All the town admired him and looked up to him because of the good head he had on his shoulders. To show you an example, a few years ago he started a farm cooperative, He convinced six or seven other men to start the cooperative with him, He was elected their president and they started this small cooperative. Within a year's time, they had grown from 6 members to about 300 members. At the time when Rigoberto resigned from being president of the cooperative, there were about 3,000 members. Today, that cooperative, the Flor Chimalteca, is one of the largest cooperatives in that part of the country. And everyone in town knows of this man and that he never gets into anything unless he is sure that it is right. Taking as an example the cooperative, they all stepped back and waited for a little while and made sure that everything was going ok, They had faith in Rigoberto and so people started joining the cooperative; and for that you can account for the phenomenal growth .that they had.

Elena then knew her husband had great potential, but many times he didn't live up to it, But being the good wife that she was, she stuck behind him, She kept trying to prod him along and help him. They say that behind every good man is a good woman. Elena was the good woman behind this good man, Rigoberto.

In 1975, the mission president asked two missionaries to go into the town of Comalapa and open it up to missionary work for the first time—the first time the gospel had been preached in that town for thousands of years. Well, the missionaries went into the town. They tracted and tracted, and found several different people they taught the gospel to, but for one reason or another they would not be baptized. There was a lot of prejudice in the town and a lot of problems. The town was very strong Protestant, and those who were not Protestants were very strong Catholics, So the missionaries really didn't have much success, until one day, towards the end of December (1975), two missionaries met Rigoberto Miza out in his field. He and his wife Elena were out working. The missionaries sat down and talked with them, gave them part of a missionary discussion, and asked them if they could come by his house. He invited them to come by. They went by his house and taught him the "C" discussion, which is about the Restoration of the Gospel. They went back later and taught Rigoberto and his wife all of the discussions. They were eventually baptized, and Rigoberto was baptized because he had a good strong wife behind him, who helped him and prodded him along. When the missionaries taught him about the Book of Mormon, they offered him a Book of Mormon and asked him if he wanted to buy one. His wife was right there beside him saying "get it, get it." So, he bought the book and they read it. She was a guiding influence behind them sitting down every night

and reading from the Bible and the Book of Mormon, until they finally gained a testimony.

I would like to relate one instance to show the faith of this woman. I had the privilege of interviewing both of them before their baptism. They were the first people to be baptized in Comalapa. There is one part in the discussions which mentions the Doctrine and Covenants and the Pearl of Great Price and explains what they are—that they are scripture just like the Bible and the Book of Mormon. Well, for some reason the Elders forgot to mention this, or the Mizas didn't remember them talking about it. It is just a short part of the discussions, During the interview I mentioned the Doctrine and Covenants and the Pearl of Great Price and Brother and Sister Miza didn't know what they were. While I was interviewing Sister Miza, I explained to her what the Doctrine and Covenants and the Pearl of Great Price were. (Of course, when someone gets baptized they don't have to have a complete testimony of everything, but they do have to have faith, and they do need to feel that these things are right. Then after the months and years of study that come ahead, they gain a real strong testimony.) So I had to ask them, after I explained what these books were, if they thought these books could be the word of God just like the Bible and the Book of Mormon (to see if there was a base so they could go forth after reading and studying and gain a strong testimony that they were true). Well, I asked Sister Miza if she thought that the Doctrine and Covenants and the Pearl of Great Price could be the word of God like the Bible and the Book of Mormon, Her reply was, "Yes, they are." Well, that just shows a little of the faith that this woman had, the faith in the message, faith in the Lord and His gospel.

Rigoberto Miza has changed his ways completely. He hasn't tasted a drop of alcohol since being baptized. One day we were talking to Elena and she told us how much her husband had changed in his whole attitude towards the children. He is a lot more loving, understanding, considerate husband and father. She feels now that through his conversion... [4 pages missing]

Every man shall hear the gospel in his own language. D&C 90:11.
How will this come to pass?

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Future of the Lamanites

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Why Discrimination?

I have been writing a culture book for the Language Training Mission. It is for the missionaries who are called to serve among the pure Lamanites in Guatemala--those who speak an Indian

language other than Spanish. Their culture is not the same as that of the Latins, and therefore the necessity of two books: one for the culture of the Latins, of Latin America; and another for the Indians. A topic discussed in that book is Class Consciousness. I pointed out that the Spanish Conquest and subsequent "Christianization" of the Indians actually produced a feudal social structure, with the Spaniards dominating the Indians. That has continued to some degree today, with the Latins dominating the Indians in social life, business, politics, and just about every facet of life. It is a mutually dependent society with the Latins being largely parasitic on the Indians. The Indians produce almost all the food and artifacts. They make the major work force of the country. In turn, they receive from the Latins some manufactured articles, legal rights, and military protection (although the Indians make up the fighting force of the military). The Latins control the business world. Indians find it very hard to get credit. This makes it hard for the Indian to continue with his small farm year after year, let alone expand. The class division between the Latins and the Indians is marked and continued by social and economic exclusion, racial discrimination, fraud, and exclusion from government credit and technical aid programs. (This is according to a study by the Comité Interamericano de Desarrollo Agrícola.) The Latins run the government and often favor those who are wealthy and influential, which is unfortunate for the Indian who is exploited through such a system, It is interesting to note that nearly everyone is proud to claim that they have "some Indian blood", but none of the Latins admit that they are an Indian. Somehow by having Indian blood, they feel royal because of the rich Indian heritage. But they cannot profess to be an Indian, for that places them in the lower class; that would mark them as uneducated, unintelligent, and somehow inherently inferior.

This discrimination has produced in the Indian a sense of fatalism, or lack of faith in the future. This fatalistic attitude unfortunately stifles their reaching their potentials. It makes it difficult for them to realize the promises made to them in the Book of Mormon, They see themselves only as backward, uneducated, and ignorant, They cannot picture themselves as anything but the mold they have been formed into throughout the years. This pessimistic attitude is difficult to overcome, and only through a true conversion to the gospel of Jesus Christ can they truly understand their future and their potentials and rise to meet those challenges.

I guess, though, that all this will work together for the good of the righteous Lamanites. The Lord is testing and trying them. If they are successful in withstanding this discrimination, they will be better people for having had these trials. They will be more humble, teachable, and stronger inside. The trick is to help them see how they can progress in the face of this domination—to do what they can with what they have, and not become overly pessimistic and stagnate.

Lamanites to Believe in the Book of Mormon

I believe that the Book of Mormon is and will be the key to the conversion of the Lamanites. It has a "familiar spirit" that the Lamanites really can feel when they read it. Orson Pratt said, The American Indians, who are a...

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The Day of the Lamanite

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“The day of the Lamanite is surely here, and we are God's instruments in helping to bring to pass the prophecies of renewed vitality, acceptance of the gospel, and resumption to a favored place as a part of God's chosen people.” (BYU Speeches of the Year, 1972-73, 7 Nov. 1972.)

Yes, the day of the Lamanites surely is here. God has a special mission for us to perform, and we must be ready and willing to perform that mission in bringing the Lamanites to a knowledge of the gospel. They are about to be taken from their afflictions and rise to a great people. (See the Proclamation of the Twelve Apostles of the Church, New York, Prophet Office, 1845, p. 3,9.)

In the April Conference of 1954, President Kimball said, speaking of the Lamanites, “These people can rise to the loftiness of their fathers when opportunity has knocked at their door a few generations. If we fully help them, they can eventually soar to greatness. The ungerminated seeds are waiting for the rains of the kindness and opportunity; the sunshine of gospel truth; the cultivation through the Church program of tending and activity, and the seeds will be fabulous, for the Lord has promised it repeatedly.” (Conference Reports, 6 April 1954, p. 105.) Five years later, President Kimball said the following in Conference, “You will arise from your bed of affliction and from your condition of deprivation if you will accept fully the Lord, Jesus Christ, and his total program. You will rise to former heights in culture and education, influence and power. You will blossom as the rose upon the mountains. Your daughters will be nurses, teachers, and social workers, and, above all, beloved wives and full-of-faith mothers of a righteous posterity.

“Your sons will compete in art, literature, and medicine, in law, architecture, etc. They will become professional, industrial, and business leaders, and statesmen of the first order. Together you and we shall build in the spectacular city of New Jerusalem the temple to which our Redeemer will come.” (Spencer W. Kimball, Conference Reports, 10 October 1959, p. 59.)

The Lamanites and the New Jerusalem

Orson Pratt said that the Lamanites will be the main ones to build up the New Jerusalem. Orson Pratt explained it this way: “What says the Book of Mormon in relation to the building up of the New Jerusalem on this continent—one of the most splendid cities that ever was or ever will be built on this land? Does not that book say that the Lamanites are to be the principal operators

in that important work, and that those who embrace the Gospel from among the Gentiles are to have the privilege of assisting the Lamanites to build up the city called the New Jerusalem? This remnant of Joseph, who are now degraded, will then be filled with the wisdom of God; and by that wisdom they will build that city; by the aid of the Priesthood already given, and by the aid of Prophets that God will raise up in their midst, they will beautify and ornament its dwellings; and we have the privilege of being numbered with them, instead of their being numbered with us." (Orson Pratt, Salvation of the House of Israel, Discourse, 15 July 1855 in Journal of Discourses, vol. 9, pp. 178-179.) I think that his last comment is very interesting. Many of us think that we will build the New Jerusalem (speaking of the members of the church as a whole). The members of the church I think don't realize that the Lamanites will play a major role in building the New Jerusalem. In 1875, Orson Pratt gave another address entitled "Redemption of Zion" (see Journal of Discourses, vol. 17, pp. 300-301). In that address, he stated that the Latter-day Saints "never can have the privilege of going back to Jackson County and building that city which is to be called the New Jerusalem...until quite a large portion of the remnants of Joseph go back with us." He then went on to say that the Latter-day Saints have a great work to do in bringing many of the Lamanites to a knowledge of the gospel and in instructing and helping them, Until that work is done, he said, we have no need to pray the Father to return us to Jackson County. "The Lord says, —'They,' the Gentiles, who believe in the Book of Mormon, 'shall assist my people, the remnant of Jacob, that they may build a city, which shall be called the New Jerusalem.'" Again, mention is made that the Lamanites will be the major ones to build the city, and that the 'gentiles' will help them.

However, we know that the tribe of Ephraim received the richer blessings at the hand of Jacob. The tribe of Ephraim holds the keys of presidency. They are they who are to commence the Lord's work in the earth in the last days. All others, including the Lamanites, are to be crowned with glory in Zion at the hands of Ephraim. Joseph Fielding Smith said that he couldn't see how some people interpret the scriptures that the Lamanites would build up the New Jerusalem, and the rest would merely watch on. (See *Doctrines of Salvation*, vol. 2, 1955, pp. 248-249.) The truth is that it will be a joint effort. Spencer W, Kimball said, "They, the Ten Tribes, you, the Lamanites, and the believing of us, also carrying the blood of Israel, will jointly build the city to our God, the New Jerusalem, with its magnificent temple." (*Conference Report*, 10 October 1959, p. 61.)

The Lamanites to be Our Shield

The Lamanites will be our shield from damage and harm, Spencer W, Kimball said, speaking in a Seminar for Mission Presidents and Regional Representatives, 27 June 1974, p. 18, "If we wanted to be selfish, we could emphasize the fact that the Indian will be our shield, When trouble comes, they can shield us from damage and harm." Orson Pratt said, "I believe with all my heart, as expressed by our President, that this people will be our shield in days to come; and I believe that if we lose this shield by our carelessness, or by settling down at ease in Zion, it will be woe to us that call ourselves Latter-day Saints." (Salvation of the House of Israel,

Discourse, 15 July 1855, in *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 9, p. 178-179.)

Conclusion

We as members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have a great responsibility to teach the gospel to the Lamanites. "The prophecies of the Lord must be fulfilled. He expects us, His people, to make possible these fulfillments. There is much for us to do.

"We have a burden upon our backs to help them rid themselves of their economic, physical and spiritual burdens. When we shall have done all in our power to bring them to this great day of conversion in the true Church of Christ, with all other blessings like these a few have begun to receive, then will the happy day have come and, as the apostles proclaimed to the world concerning the Lamanites." (Spencer W, Kimball, "The Lamanites--Their Burden, Our Burden," Address given to the BYU Student Body, 25 April 1967.) "This work is of the greatest importance of any work of the present day." (Orson Pratt, "Salvation of the House of Israel," Discourse, 15 July 1855, in *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 9, pp. 178-179.)

This is an important work. My patriarchal blessing says that the Lord has a special mission in this life for me to do. I believe that my work with the Lamanites during my mission in El Salvador and Guatemala, and now my work with translation in Cakchiquel, is part of that mission that the Lord has for me. I believe that there is also more to come.

Comment from instructor Jeffrey Simons: "I thoroughly enjoyed hearing of the great work you are doing, and I fully agree that you are fulfilling prophecy. I sense that the Lord is blessing both you and the people you are serving. May He continue to bless as he has promised to do to those who get involved in this great work. Thanks so much. Jeff"