

Logical arguments for existence of 'others' in Book of Mormon times

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As discussed last week, the Book of Mormon doesn't mention "others" for at least two reasons: 1) the early material from Large Plates -- which may have mentioned "others" -- was not included in our English translation, and 2) the Small Plates were focused on the ethnogenesis and religious ministry of the Nephite people and would have been unconcerned with any "others" in such a narrative.

Once the Lehiters arrived in the New World, Nephi, like other people in most ancient societies, divided virtually all of the inhabitants into categories of "them" and "us."

Shortly after the Nephites and Lamanites separated, for example, Jacob -- Nephi's brother - tells us that anyone who is not a Lamanite and "those who are friendly to Nephi" were called Nephites (Jacob 1:14), whereas those who "seek to destroy the people of Nephi," were called "Lamanites" (v. 13).

Jacob, like most people in ancient cultures (and even in modern cultures), made use of "exonyms" to refer to those outside his own group. An exonym is a name by which one group refers to a foreign group -- a name not used by the foreign group themselves. For instance, people of the United States refer to one European group with the exonym "Germans." The Germans, however, call themselves "Deutsch." We also refer to the native people of the Americas as "Native Americans" or "Indians" -- neither of which is applied from within their own groups.

From a close reading of the Book of Mormon text, we find that Nephites and Lamanites were sociopolitical names. The Book of Mormon writers were Nephites, and virtually everyone else is referred to with the exonym Lamanite (the term "Lamanite" will be discussed in greater detail in the near future).

Also, as noted last week, there are no explicit statements in the Book of Mormon denoting the existence of "others" in the Nephite record. However, a number of implicit references logically suggest the existence of "others."

For example, when Nephi separated from Laman, Lemuel and the sons of Ishmael over contentions, Nephi took his family, Zoram, Sam and their families with him, as well as "all those who would go with me ... those who believed in the warnings and the revelations of God" (2 Nephi 5: 6). Who were these others who, in addition to those already mentioned, followed Nephi? It is at this point that we get the terms "people of Nephi" and "the people who were now called Lamanites" (2 Nephi 5:9, 14). These terms were cultural designators for those who aligned themselves with Nephi or his contentious brothers.

In Jacob 7:1-26 we read of Sherem's encounter with Jacob. Since Jacob was one of the

original Lehites in the New World, the maximum adult population among the Lehites couldn't have been more than a dozen people. Yet Sherem had come from another settlement and had never met Jacob, the chief Nephite priest.

Within 15 years, Joseph and Jacob were made priests and teachers "over the land of my (Nephi's) people" (2 Nephi 5:26). We read that within 25 years of their New World arrival, the Nephites were at "war" with the Lamanites. What kind of "war" could possibly exist with the few adults that may have been around without the infusion of pre-existing cultures?

Fifteen years later, some of the Nephite men began desiring "many wives and concubines" (Jacob 1:15). How many women could there have been if there were no others besides the original Lehite party?

During Alma's visit to the city of Ammonihah, Amulek introduced himself by saying, "I am a Nephite" (Alma 8:20). Considering that Ammonihah, a city of land of Zarahemla, was under Nephite rule, it would seem obvious that Amulek was a Nephite unless there were non-Nephite people living in the land as well.

By about 200 B.C. "corn" (American maize) is mentioned as the grain of preference among the Lamanites (Mosiah 7:22, 9:14). Corn, a uniquely American grain, could not have been brought from Lehi's world and could not have been discovered wild upon arrival because of its complex cultivating techniques that will only reproduce new corn with human care. This strongly implies that others already were cultivating corn and taught the technique to Book of Mormon peoples.

Beginning about 500 years after the Lehites arrived, we read about "thousands" or even tens of thousands of warring soldiers. Such a rapid population growth would not have been possible without the presence of "others."

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