

# The Children of Lehi and the Jews of Sepharad

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The gathering of scattered Israel is a foundational doctrine of the Restoration, as emphasized by the scriptures and reemphasized by Joseph Smith and other prophets in modern times (see, for example, Deut. 30:1–4; A of F 10). The Book of Mormon strongly asserts a gathering, not only of Lehi’s scattered seed but also of the “Jews.”<sup>1</sup> In 2 Nephi 3:12, Lehi apparently quotes from a prophecy by Joseph of Egypt that is now found in the Joseph Smith Translation of Genesis 50:24–38, which says, “Wherefore, the fruit of thy loins shall write; and the fruit of the loins of Judah shall write; and that which shall be written by the fruit of thy loins, and also that which shall be written by the fruit of the loins

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1. A thorough analysis in the Book of Mormon of the use of the title “Jews” seems to indicate that most prophets frequently used the term as a synonym for “Israelite,” particularly when those Israelites were from the southern kingdom of Judah. Thus, although the Nephites were primarily from the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, they also saw themselves as Jews, possibly because they had fled from within the kingdom of Judah. This Book of Mormon usage of the term “Jew” is thus somewhat different than its usage in modern speech. Additionally, Nephi at times distinguished between his own people, who had departed from Judah, and the Jews, who had remained and who would be responsible for the creation of the Bible, including the later creation of the New Testament. It is this understanding of the word “Jews” that will be used in this paper, mirroring to a great degree a modern usage of the term. For analysis of the term “Jews” in the Book of Mormon, see Dennis Largey, ed., *Book of Mormon Reference Companion* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 463–64.

## D. Chad Richardson and Shon D. Hopkin

I (Chad) became interested in the Sephardic Jews while serving from 1985 to 1988 as a mission president in Spain—especially as I visited the old Jewish quarters of Sevilla, Cordoba, and Granada. I also became fascinated with Columbus as I read his biography by Salvador de Madariaga. His life connected my fascination with the Sephardic Jews to my love for the descendants of Lehi that I had acquired while serving as a missionary in Central America and in my professional and academic work with Mexican and Central American immigrants in South Texas. After returning from Spain to South Texas, I became friends with a fellow professor—a Sephardic Jew who still spoke Ladino, the Spanish his forbears spoke when they fled from Spain to Turkey around 1492.

Our discussions led me to historical works on the Sephardim by Gerber and by Gitlitz (cited in the article). One evening as I read of the Jews and the children of Lehi in 2 Nephi 29, I noticed that verse 8 seemed to connect the coming forth of the Book of Mormon with the uniting of these two “nations.” Subsequent research supported that connection, so I put together an early version of the present article.

In 2010, my wife and I were called to serve in the Panama temple. While there, our love for the children of Lehi grew. I also resolved to find a coauthor with expertise in the history of the Sephardim and in Book of Mormon studies to help prepare the article for publication. A friend suggested Shon Hopkin, whose doctoral work in Hebrew studies focused on the medieval Iberian Peninsula and who is currently a member of BYU’s Book of Mormon Academy. We reworked the study together, and the current article is a result of that collaboration.



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of Judah, shall grow together, unto the . . . laying down of contentions, and establishing peace among the fruit of thy loins.”

Biblical accounts depict the antagonism that developed anciently between Joseph, represented by the northern kingdom of Israel with its (approximately) ten tribes, and Judah, represented by the southern kingdom of Judah with its (approximately) two tribes (Isa. 11:13).<sup>2</sup> Ezekiel prophesied, however, that future peace would occur between the descendants of Judah and Joseph:

The word of the Lord came again unto me [Ezekiel], saying, Moreover, thou son of man, take thee one stick, and write upon it, For Judah, and for the children of Israel his companions: then take another stick, and write upon it, For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and for all the house of Israel his companions: And join them one to another into one stick; and they shall become one in thine hand. And when the children of thy people shall speak unto thee, saying, Wilt thou not shew us what thou meanest by these? Say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I will take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel his fellows, and will put them with him, even with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they shall be one in mine hand. . . . And I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king to them all: and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all. (Ezek. 37:15–22)

This paper will propose one way in which this prophesied unification of Joseph and Judah into “one nation” may have been in part fulfilled, namely in a joining of the Jews of Sepharad (Sephardic Jews) with the children of Lehi.

Latter-day Saints generally read these verses from Ezekiel as a prophecy of the coming forth of the Bible and the Book of Mormon, typically picturing the image of two scrolls held on sticks that would be joined

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2. This antagonism is referred to explicitly in biblical references that discuss a future healing of that breach, as in Isaiah 11:13 and Ezekiel 37:22. It began with the division of the tribes of Israel into two rival kingdoms during the reign of Rehoboam (see 1 Kgs. 12). The two kingdoms did cooperate at times over the course of their history, but prior to its destruction and deportation by Assyria, the northern kingdom of Israel had threatened the kingdom of Judah with war (see Isa. 7). This interaction was thus the last and perhaps defining relationship that existed between Judah and Joseph anciently, since the northern tribes essentially disappeared from history at the time of their deportation to Assyria.

into one<sup>3</sup>—an understanding encouraged by the words of Lehi, “wherefore, the fruit of thy loins shall write; and the fruit of the loins of Judah shall write; and that which shall be written . . . shall grow together” (2 Ne. 3:12; see also 2 Ne. 29:13). An additional understanding of Ezekiel’s manner of prophecy arises if he acted out this prophecy by taking a “stick” (Heb. *ṣēṣ* ‘ēś), likely a writing tablet,<sup>4</sup> and wrote the name of Judah upon it, and took a second stick, on which he wrote the name of Joseph, and then joined those “sticks” together in his hand to symbolically represent the restoration, gathering, and unification of Israel in the last days. Judah, representing the southern kingdom of Judah and all the tribes within it, would be reunited with Joseph, representing the northern kingdom of Israel and the tribes within it. Thus, Ezekiel’s prophecy foretells the incidence of two concurrent events: the Book of Mormon being unified with the Bible and the creation of “one nation in the land” (Ezek. 37:22) from these two scattered peoples (Judah and Joseph).

### **Book of Mormon Prophecies of a “Running Together” of Two Peoples and Their Two Records**

Nephi’s vision of the future of his people mirrors Ezekiel’s view that these two scattered houses of Israel would come together, each with its own scriptural record.

O ye Gentiles, have ye remembered the Jews, mine ancient covenant people? . . . I the Lord have not forgotten my people. Thou fool, that shall say: A Bible, we have got a Bible, and we need no more Bible. Have ye obtained a Bible save it were by the Jews? Know ye not that there are more nations than one? Know ye not that I, the Lord your God, have created all men, and that I remember those who are upon the isles of the sea . . . ? Know ye not that the testimony of two nations is a witness unto you that I am God, that I remember one nation like unto another? Wherefore, I speak the same words unto one nation like unto another. *And when the two nations shall run together the testimony of the two nations shall run together also.* (2 Ne. 29:5–8, emphasis added)

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3. Largey, *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*, 246. See also Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1957), 279–81.

4. Keith H. Meservy, “Ezekiel’s Sticks and the Gathering of Israel,” *Ensign* 17 (February 1987): 4–13; M. E. L. Mallown, “Excavations at Nimrud: 1953,” *IRAQ* 16 (1956): 98–107.

Here Nephi proposes a more specific identification of the two nations—the Jews through whom the Bible would come forth and the children of Lehi through whom the Book of Mormon would come. This text also seems fairly specific about the *timing* of the coming together of these two nations and their respective records. Verse 8 can be read as indicating that the coming together of the two nations would precede or prepare the way for the coming together of their records: “And when the two nations shall run together the testimony of the two nations shall run together also.” The two records were first “joined together” in one hand with the publication of the Book of Mormon in 1830.

This paper will ask if it is possible to identify a “running together” of the two “nations” of Joseph and Judah at the time when the Book of Mormon came forth. In response, this paper proposes a possible fulfillment of Nephi’s and Ezekiel’s prophecies by illuminating a portion of the history of one of the two major branches of Judaism—the Jews of Sepharad (or Sephardic Jews)—and by showing how they “ran together” with a portion of the descendants of Lehi. That historical coming together of these two “nations” fits the timeline suggested by Nephi’s prophecy, though that fulfillment does not preclude broader or still-future reunifications of Joseph and Judah and their respective records.

### The Jews of Sepharad

For many Jewish people today, the origin of the Sephardic Jews has its legendary beginnings with a biblical prophecy recorded in Obadiah 1:20: “And the captivity of this host of the children of Israel shall possess that of the Canaanites, even unto Zarephath; and *the captivity of Jerusalem, which is in Sepharad*, shall possess the cities of the south” (emphasis added). The captivity of Jerusalem, as suggested by the LDS Bible Dictionary reference on Obadiah, likely refers to the Babylonian exile of 586 B.C. If this interpretation is appropriate, then the timing of Lehi and Nephi’s departure for the promised land coincides with the beginning of a Jewish community in Sepharad—apparently caused by the Babylonian disruption.<sup>5</sup>

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5. Though biblical scholars generally suggest two other possible interpretations of the name Sepharad in Obadiah 1:20 (a city Sardis in Asia Minor, known as Sfarid in Persian times, and a city named Saparda, located east of Assyria in Media), its identification with the Iberian peninsula has been strengthened in Jewish tradition by the strong Jewish community that continued in relative prosperity there for many centuries and that looked to the Bible for its divine

According to Jane S. Gerber, a professor of Jewish history and director of the Institute of Sephardic Studies at the City University of New York Graduate Center:

The history of the Jews of Spain [and Portugal] is a remarkable story that begins in the remote past and continues today. For more than a thousand years, Sepharad (the Hebrew word for Spain) was home to a large Jewish community. . . . One particular folk tradition has lasted virtually to the present day: the legend that some of ancient Jerusalem's aristocratic families, deported first by the Babylonians in 586 [BCE] and then again by the Roman conqueror Titus in 79 CE, resettled on the Spanish shore. . . . According to some estimates, the total Jewish population at the beginning of the common era may have been eight million.<sup>6</sup>

The Jews of Sepharad, or the "Sephardic Jews," came to think of the Iberian Peninsula (now Spain and Portugal)<sup>7</sup> as a second Jerusalem (or homeland) following their multiple expulsions from the land of Israel.

The major pattern experienced by the Sephardic Jews during their long sojourn in the Iberian Peninsula was persecution and forced assimilation—first under the Romans and then continuing for another three

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origins. The tradition connecting Obadiah 1:20 with the Jews of Iberia also finds support in the *Targum of Jonathan*. See D. Neiman, "Sefarad: The Name of Spain," in *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 22 (1963): 128–32, and John D. Wine-land, "Sepharad," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman and others, 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 5:1089–90. The thesis of this paper does not depend on the connection between the biblical Sepharad and the Jews in Iberia. Although it is unknown when Jews arrived in the peninsula, their ancestry there is not disputed. Neither is there scholarly dispute that the term "Sephardic" came to be identified in Jewish folklore as designating a Jewish homeland in the Iberian Peninsula for over a thousand years.

6. Jane S. Gerber, *The Jews of Spain: A History of the Sephardic Experience* (New York: Free Press, 1992), vii, 2–3.

7. Portugal did not become established as an independent kingdom until the thirteenth century. From the thirteenth century, the history of the Jews and their conversions to Christianity in Spain and in Portugal shows broad similarities but has many significant differences in detail. This article will generally speak of Spain and Portugal together, although doing so is a significant oversimplification of the history. When historical differences between the two kingdoms have bearing on the discussion, they will be noted. As David Gitlitz has written, "The Jewish and *converso* experience in Portugal was in broad strokes similar to that of Spain, but the details tended to differ significantly." David M. Gitlitz, *Secrecy and Deceit* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 48. On the whole, the political climate in Portugal was less inclined to cause mass conversions of Jews to Christianity until much later than in Spain.

hundred years under Germanic Visigoths. As many as 90,000 Jews were forced to convert to Catholicism in AD 613. Similar forced mass conversions were ordered in AD 680 and again in AD 694.<sup>8</sup> In AD 711, the Germanic Visigoths were defeated by the Moors of Africa, who overran southern Iberia. The Sephardic Jews then experienced a seven-hundred-year period of relative peace at the hands of their Muslim rulers. Toward the end of this period, the population of Sephardim in Iberia may have reached as high as ninety percent of the total world Jewish population.<sup>9</sup>

Then, in the twelfth century, heavy persecutions began again, as Catholic monarchs began reconquering the Iberian Peninsula from the Moors. In 1306, the persecution of Jews in France forced many Jews to move to Cataluña and Aragón. These and other Jews throughout the Iberian Peninsula were proselytized and pressured to convert, including restrictions on where they could live or work. In some cities, Jews were forced to listen to Catholic proselytizers in their synagogues. In 1378, a popular archbishop in Seville began to advocate a holy war against Jews, even calling for the destruction of Seville's twenty-three synagogues. In 1391, the animosity of Catholics in Seville resulted in riots that left the Jewish Quarter in shambles—with a similar fate occurring in other cities of Andalucía. In the reconquered lands, additional pressures forced approximately 100,000 Jews (known in Hebrew as אֲנוּסִים, *ʾanûsîm*, from a verb meaning “to force”) to convert in 1391 and another 50,000 to do so in 1415.

Prior to 1492, Ferdinand and Isabella had adopted a policy of “*convivencia*” (religious tolerance) in their kingdom. In 1491, however, as the last Muslim city of Granada was conquered, their policy changed to a new and even more severe round of forced conversions and expulsions of the Jews from the conquered territories.<sup>10</sup> Often, these conversions were accomplished by forcibly taking children from any Jewish parents who refused to convert. These children were then given to Catholic families.<sup>11</sup>

With all these forced conversions, just how much of the population of the Iberian Peninsula was descended from Jewish ancestry? One

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8. Gerber, *Jews of Spain*, 12–14.

9. Gerber, *Jews of Spain*, xxiv. This declined to only 50 percent by 1700 and the decline was steady thereafter.

10. For an excellent summary of the forced conversions leading up to and following the 1492 expulsion, in both Spain and Portugal, see Gitlitz, *Secrecy and Deceit*, 37–53.

11. See, for example, Gitlitz, *Secrecy and Deceit*, 49.

scholar, Howard M. Sachar, author of *A History of the Jews in America*, proposes that the amount of Jewish blood was not only “high,” but very high.<sup>12</sup> As stated above, prior to 1492 many forced conversions (and an even greater number of more voluntary conversions) had already taken place over a period of at least a thousand years. Gitlitz says, “It has proven impossible to quantify precisely the demography of the Sephardim at significant moments in their Iberian history.”<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, he attempts to consolidate varying estimates. Benzion Netanyahu, for example, estimated that from 600,000 to 650,000 Jews converted between the 1391 riots and 1480.<sup>14</sup> When Ferdinand and Isabella ordered the Jews to either convert or leave Spain, estimates of the Jewish population range from 40,000 to more than a million. Whatever the total, about half chose to convert, another 150,000 chose to go to Portugal,<sup>15</sup> and the remainder left for other countries, principally in the Middle East and Europe.<sup>16</sup> Yet it was precisely from the ranks of these *conversos* (converted Jews and their descendants)<sup>17</sup> that men of Jewish birth later ascended to the most exalted echelons of state and church. Many also became supporters of Christopher Columbus in his great quest of discovery.<sup>18</sup>

Though separated by a great ocean, the people of Lehi in America and the Jews who viewed themselves as “the captivity of Jerusalem in Sepharad” had received, or were about to receive, harsh treatment at the hands of these gentile nations. Gerber mentions one parallel that historians regard as a remarkable coincidence. She states, “On the evening of August 2, [1492,] two great dramas were simultaneously unfolding in Spain. In the port of Palos, three caravels under the command of

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12. Howard M. Sachar, *A History of the Jews in America* (New York: Knopf, 1993), 9.

13. Gitlitz, *Secrecy and Deceit*, 73–75.

14. B. Netanyahu, *The Marranos of Spain, from Late XIVth to the Early XVIth Century, according to Contemporary Hebrew Sources* (New York: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1966), 248.

15. Sachar, *History of the Jews*, 10.

16. Gitlitz, *Secrecy and Deceit*, 73–75.

17. Scholarship has used the term *converso* at times to refer to only those who had converted (as the term itself indicates) and at times as a useful term to describe the large numbers of descendants of those who had converted in previous generations. Some of these descendants still practiced a secretive form of Judaism, but others were fully Christianized, notwithstanding their Jewish descent. In this article, we will rely on the latter usage.

18. Sachar, *History of the Jews*, 9.

Christopher Columbus were undergoing final preparations for their historic journey of discovery. And throughout the country, the nation's Jews were spending their last night on Spanish soil after a sojourn that had lasted more than 1,500 years."<sup>19</sup>

King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella allowed Jews who refused to convert only four months to leave Spain, setting August 2, 1492, as the date by which they had to leave or be exterminated.<sup>20</sup> That date was only one day before Columbus would embark on his first voyage to the Americas. As Columbus journeyed to the Port of Palos to begin his journey, he passed caravans with thousands of Jews who were being driven from their Sephardic homeland. The expulsion of the Sephardic Jews will thus forever be linked on the calendar with the discovery of the Americas, the land of Lehi's descendants.

For Latter-day Saints, it is significant that Nephi himself also connected the destiny of his people with these voyages of Columbus, of which he prophesied, "And I looked and beheld a man among the Gentiles, who was separated from the seed of my brethren by the many waters; and I beheld the Spirit of God, that it came down and wrought upon the man; and he went forth upon the many waters, even unto the seed of my brethren, who were in the promised land" (1 Ne. 13:12).<sup>21</sup>

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19. Gerber, *Jews of Spain*, ix.

20. Many Jews believed that King Ferdinand would save them. Gerber, *Jews of Spain*, 129, quotes correspondence among them saying, "He is our brother and flesh, with Jewish blood in him."

21. Orson Pratt (in a footnote to the 1879 edition of 1 Nephi 13:12), George Q. Cannon, and Spencer W. Kimball are among the LDS Apostles who have directly connected this Book of Mormon prophecy with Christopher Columbus. See George Q. Cannon, in *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1855–86), 14:55, and Spencer W. Kimball, *Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, ed. Edward L. Kimball (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982), 427. See also De Lamar Jensen, "Columbus and the Hand of God," *Ensign* 22 (October 1992): 7–13; and Largey, *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*, 210–11. Columbus himself averred that he had been sent forth by the Spirit of God. See Jacob Wassermann, *Columbus: Don Quixote of the Seas*, trans. Eric Sutton (Boston: Little, Brown, 1930), 19–20; and Delno C. West and August Kling, *The Libro de Las Profecías of Christopher Columbus* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1991), 105. Interestingly, the prophecy does not specifically refer to Columbus as a Gentile, although the text could be interpreted that way. Rather it states that Columbus was a man *among* the Gentiles, and then refers in subsequent verses to "other Gentiles" and "multitudes of Gentiles" (1 Ne. 13:13–14).

Some historians have posited that Columbus himself was a *converso*, perhaps a descendant of Jews who had converted generations earlier and had moved to Italy to escape persecution. Salvador de Madariaga, a Spanish biographer, points out that though Columbus was born in Italy and moved to Portugal at age nineteen, eventually marrying into a Portuguese family, all his personal correspondence in journals and his letters to his family were written in Spanish (even before he moved to Spain).<sup>22</sup> Numerous supporting details have been put forward to demonstrate that Columbus engaged in speech and behaviors more typical of Jews than of Christians.<sup>23</sup>

It must be noted that other historians have rigorously disputed the likelihood of Columbus's Jewish descent. Indeed, identifying "Judaizing" tendencies—an important goal of the Spanish and later Portuguese Inquisitions—was a notoriously subjective endeavor in that time and continues to be so today.<sup>24</sup> Despite his apparent familiarity with Jewish

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22. Salvador de Madariaga, *Vida del muy magnífico Señor don Cristóbal Colón* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamerica, 1956), 71–85, 150–55, 171–94. His apparent preference was for a Spanish that had many similarities to Ladino, the form of Spanish of Sephardic Jews. See Estelle Irizarry, *Christopher Columbus: The DNA of His Writings* (San Juan, P.R.: Ediciones Puerto, 2009).

23. These include such things as his familiarity with Old Testament prophets (at a time and place where access to the scriptures by lay people was virtually closed to Catholics but expected of every Jewish male); his keeping company with Jews and former Jews, including navigators, astronomers, and his official translator; and his references to dates and phrases unique to Hebrew people (he referred to the Fall of Jerusalem, for example, using the phrase "the destruction of the Second House [the Temple]," the term that Jews used to refer to it). For his extensive preference for Old Testament prophecy, see his *Book of Prophecies*. West and Kling, *Libro de Las Profecías of Christopher Columbus*. For his preference for Jewish terms and language, see the preceding note.

24. See Gitlitz, *Secrecy and Deceit*, 73–90, for a discussion of the many difficulties, including a tendency to oversimplify the *converso* experience into only two possibilities, Judaizing or fully Christianized, when the reality was much more complex. Additionally, many of the items mentioned in the preceding footnote as supports for Columbus's Jewish ancestry—besides his use of language more characteristic of the Jews—can be explained in other ways. For example, his love of Old Testament prophecies could also be connected to Christian millenarianism, particularly since one of Columbus's stated goals for his expedition was the retaking of Jerusalem in order to prepare for the Second Coming of Christ. Although these types of mixed religious sentiments were often typical of the *converso* population, the existence of strong Christian sentiment in Columbus's writings prevent a conclusive determination of his ancestry.

scripture, Columbus was a committed Christian. There is no evidence that he practiced Jewish customs or attempted to woo Jewish converts back to Judaism. Indeed, he was convinced that his voyages would bring many converts to Christianity in the lands he discovered and would facilitate the Christian conquest of Jerusalem. Still, his Christianity had some elements apparently foreign to Catholicism of the day. Although Columbus's possible identity as a Jewish *converso* is certainly relevant to this article as a point of interest, it is not centrally important to our main arguments.

The treatment of Sephardic Jews who were forced to flee Spain at this time is heart-rending. Most of them lost all of their property. Virtually no Christian country would accept them, with the notable exception of Portugal, which will be discussed below. Many fled to Turkey and to other areas in the Ottoman Empire under Muslim control. Others moved to Africa. Henry Kamen estimates that some 25,000 of those expelled died en route.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, "at least half of all the Jews could not find the strength to leave Spain and accepted conversion."<sup>26</sup>

Nominal conversion, however, was not enough. The persecution of those who did "convert" and remain in Spain became even more intense. The Inquisition was instituted in Spain in 1478 after Ferdinand and Isabella petitioned the Pope for authority to initiate it there. Once instituted, it became both a political and a religious instrument. Although its power derived from the Papacy, the Spanish Inquisition was a means at the disposal of the monarchy to consolidate power. *Converso* Jews, especially those with substantial property, were pursued on any allegation or suspicion that their conversion was not genuine. Torture and execution were common.<sup>27</sup>

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25. Henry Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition* (New York: Mentor, 1966), 32.

26. Gerber, *Jews of Spain*, 141. See also Gitlitz, *Secrecy and Deceit*, 27.

27. Regarding the experience of the *conversos* in Inquisition Spain, see John H. Edwards, "Male and Female Religious Experience among Spanish New Christians, 1450–1500," in *The Expulsion of the Jews: 1492 and After*, ed. Raymond B. Waddington and Arthur H. Williamson (New York: Garland Publishing, 1994), 41–52. See also Netanyahu, *Marranos of Spain*, 1–4; Bartolomé Bennassar, "La Inquisición frente a los conversos según las investigaciones recientes," in *Inquisición y Conversos: III Curso de Cultura Hispano-Judia Y Seferdi* (Toledo, Spain: Asociación de Amigos del Museo Sefardí, 1993), 21–34; and Erica Puentes Quesada and Ignacio Pulido Serrano, "El banco de datos sobre judeoconversos," in *Inquisición y Conversos: III Curso de Cultura Hispano-Judia y Seferdi*, 103–18.

The approximately 120,000 who fled to join Portugal's Jewish communities in order to avoid conversion in 1492 were soon faced with another brutal ultimatum. John II of Portugal, who had offered asylum, within five years reversed himself and declared that all Jews must convert. Several thousand returned to Spain and converted so that they could recover lost property. Those who refused were to be killed and their children taken from them and sent alone to a deserted island. These Spanish exiles in Portugal became some of the most ardent "crypto-Jews"—those "converts" who not only attempted to continue practicing their Jewish religion in secret but even sought to convince assimilationist Jews to revert back to Judaism. The institution of the Inquisition in Portugal in 1536 was thus even more forceful and violent than was its Spanish predecessor, witnessing its first *auto-da-fé* (burning at the stake to encourage confession) by 1540.<sup>28</sup>

As the Spanish and Portuguese colonizers left for the Americas, they took with them substantial Jewish ancestry, produced by forced or pressured conversions over more than fifteen hundred years.<sup>29</sup> Additionally, in order to escape the Inquisition, many more recently "converted" crypto-Jews fled to the Americas, though the Spanish and Portuguese Inquisitions followed them there. Despite the vigorous activity of the Inquisition, groups of secret Jews continued to arrive in Latin America from Iberia and other parts of Europe and persisted in secretly practicing their Judaism.<sup>30</sup> The largest number of crypto-Jews went to Mexico (which then included the present-day Southwestern United States) and to Brazil.<sup>31</sup> Boleslao Lewin estimates that there were 30,000 crypto-Jews

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28. Gerber, *Jews of Spain*, 141. See also Gitlitz, *Secrecy and Deceit*, 48–53.

29. Seymour B. Liebman, *The Jews in New Spain: Faith, Flame, and the Inquisition* (Coral Gables, Fla.: University of Miami Press, 1970), 42, calculated that by 1545 at least 25 percent of the Spanish immigrants to Mexico were recently converted Jews. Gitlitz, *Secrecy and Deceit*, 54, provides a helpful summary of various scholarly estimates, and states that the number of Judaizing *conversos* (those Jews who sought to return to Jewish religious practices) was "hefty." Even among those who were not recent converts, many had Jewish ancestry from "conversions" in previous generations.

30. Although practicing Jews also played an important role in the early Americas, as mentioned in the following footnote, their history is outside the purview of this article since they typically did not intermarry with the Native American population, a concept that will be discussed below.

31. Brazil was also home to a large population of openly practicing unconverted Sephardic Jews who had fled to Holland prior to conversion and came to

in the Spanish-American colonies, while there were 10,000 in Brazil.<sup>32</sup> Gitlitz stresses, however, “Presumably the number of assimilationist new-Christians [*conversos*] was much higher.”<sup>33</sup>

Over the next two or three hundred years, the Inquisition and a gradual conversion process virtually eliminated the crypto-Jews as a category. By the time the Latin American nations received their independence in the early 1800s, the Inquisition had been abolished and the great *mestizo* race (known as *cholos* in Peru) was formed in the Americas from the mixing of the Native Americans with the Spanish and Portuguese colonizers (with their substantial Jewish ancestry).<sup>34</sup> Like the Sephardic Jews, the Native Americans in Latin America would also be persuaded or forced, over subsequent centuries, to convert to Catholicism.

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the New World when northeastern Brazil was conquered by the Dutch. Brazil thus became the site of the first synagogue built in the New World. These practicing Jews were later expelled from Brazil in 1654 and took up their residence in New York City (known at the time as New Amsterdam). Joshua Seixas, the Hebrew teacher hired by Joseph Smith, proceeded from this Sephardic, Dutch, Brazilian, Jewish community. For histories of the complex presence of Jews and those of Jewish descent in the Brazil, see Frederick J. Zwierlein, *Religion in New Netherland, 1623–1664* (1910; rpt., New York: Da Capo Press, 1971), and Tânia Neumann Kaufman, *Lost Footsteps, History Recovered: The Jewish Presence in Pernambuco, Brazil* (Recife: Ensol, 2004). Additionally, Argentina was and continues to be an important center for practicing Sephardic Jews (along with other locations).

32. Boleslao Lewin, *Los criptojudíos, un fenómeno religioso y social* (Buenos Aires: Milá, 1987), 185. This paragraph simplifies the very complex subject of crypto-Judaism in the New World, which saw significant differences depending on the area. Judaizing tendencies in Brazil were particularly strong, since its inhabitants came from Portugal rather than Spain.

33. Gitlitz, *Secrecy and Deceit*, 75.

34. Other ethnic groups existed besides the *mestizos* (descendants of Europeans who intermarried with the Native American population). Groups such as the *gachupin* (European born in the Iberian peninsula, but living in America), the *criollo* (Iberian, but born in America), and others existed, with the *mestizos* typically found near the bottom of the social scale, but higher than *mulatos* (white and black), *bugres* (Indian, white, black), and black slaves. The complexity of Latin America involves contributions by each of these groups that are not mentioned in this article. For example, it was the *gachupins* who were the primary liberators of Central and South America. For an excellent treatment of this history, see John A. Crow, *The Epic of Latin America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).

## Intertwined Destiny of the Children of Lehi, the Gentiles, and the Jews<sup>35</sup>

Lehi and other American prophets, including his son Nephi and his grandson Enos, foresaw with great sadness that their own people would eventually succumb to unbelief, fall into wickedness, and be scattered and destroyed by their brethren, the Lamanites (1 Ne. 12:19; 15:4–5; 2 Ne. 1:22; Enos 1:13–16). Nevertheless, through great faith they received prophetic promises from the Lord. He promised, for example, that the land of the Book of Mormon would be a land of inheritance for the seed of Lehi forever (2 Ne 1:5; 2 Ne. 10:19) and that no other people would come to this land except those brought by the hand of the Lord (2 Ne. 1:6). In 2 Nephi 10:19, Jacob quotes the Lord’s promise that the land of the Americas would be given “unto thy seed, *and them who shall be numbered among thy seed*, forever, for the land of their inheritance” (emphasis added).

In addition, these Book of Mormon prophets received promises that the Lamanites, as well as the remnants of the Nephites mixed among them, would be gathered again and restored to a knowledge of God’s covenants with their ancestors (D&C 10:46–52). More specifically, the Lord promised Lehi and other prophets that their fallen seed in the latter days would, first, be driven and scattered by the Gentiles who would come to the promised land (1 Ne. 13:14); second, receive the Bible from the Gentiles (1 Ne. 13:38, 39, 41); third, receive the record of their fathers (the Book of Mormon); and, fourth, hearken to the words of the book (2 Ne. 30:5). Further, they would be restored to the knowledge of the covenants of their fathers and to the knowledge that their fathers had of Christ (Morm. 8:36; W of M 1:8; 2 Ne. 30:5). The prophecies of the Book of Mormon also indicate that the Lamanites would return unto Christ (Hel. 15:16), would be grafted into the true tree and receive the strength of the true vine, and would come into the fold of God (1 Ne. 15:15). Finally, it was promised that they would blossom as the rose (D&C 49:24) and would become

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35. Just as it is not necessary to assume 100 percent Lehite ancestry to refer to the Native Americans as the seed of Lehi, neither is it necessary for the Spanish and Portuguese colonizers (who were of mostly Gentile descent) to have 100 percent Jewish ancestry in order to call them Jewish. In reality, they were both Gentile and Jewish by blood. As has been discussed, many were also both Jewish and Gentile (Christian) by religious practice, as well. Additionally, many of these colonizers would also eventually become mixed with the seed of Lehi (1 Ne. 14:2), as will be shown.

a blessed people (Jacob 3:6). The fulfillment of these prophecies was to begin in earnest with the coming forth of the Book of Mormon to stand as a joint witness with the Bible (3 Ne. 29:1–9).

As a result of this great restoration, the Lord also covenanted with Book of Mormon prophets that remnants of Lehi's descendants would receive the Bible and the Book of Mormon along with others who would possess this land such as "the Jews who were scattered upon all the face of the earth" (1 Ne. 13:39). Nephi taught that these latter-day blessings were not just for the scattered remnants of the Nephites and Lamanites but were also for all of the house of Israel, because "the house of Israel, sooner or later, will be scattered upon all the face of the earth, and also among all nations" (1 Ne. 22:3). Following his prophecy that those who had become Lamanites would have the scales of darkness fall from their eyes and would become a pure and delightsome people, he immediately adds in the following verse that "the Jews which are scattered also shall begin to believe in Christ; and they shall begin to gather in upon the face of the land; and as many as shall believe in Christ shall also become a delightsome people" (2 Ne. 30:6–7).<sup>36</sup>

### The Coming Together of Two Nations

"And *when* the two nations shall run together the testimony of the two nations shall run together also" (2 Ne. 29:8, emphasis added).

At essentially the same time that the Bible and the Book of Mormon were coming together through the restoration of the gospel, a great coming together of two nations or peoples was also taking place throughout Latin America. The Spanish and Portuguese *conquistadores*, coming forth from Gentile nations, had earlier helped fulfill the prophecies that the descendants of Lehi would be scattered and driven by the Gentiles in the last days (1 Ne. 13:14). As has been shown above, however, many of the same Gentiles who colonized the Americas were also to a considerable extent descendants of the tribe of Judah, retaining a significant amount of Jewish *converso* blood.<sup>37</sup> As many of these immigrants from

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36. Though the Mulekites joined the seed of Lehi shortly after the arrival of both groups in the promised land, the Mulekites brought no record with them. Hence they cannot be considered as the Jews (mentioned in 2 Nephi 29:8) who would join the seed of Lehi, each bringing their respective records.

37. The crypto-Jews who helped colonize the Americas were apparently not a significant part of the soldiers or conquistadores who brutalized the Native Americans (although Jewish blood from centuries of older conversions was likely represented in that group). See Gitlitz, *Secrecy and Deceit*, 54. Jewish *conversos*

Spain and Portugal (with a mixture of European and Sephardic Jewish blood) subsequently intermarried with the Native Americans, they created a *mestizo* race that also mixed blood of Judah with Lehite seed of Joseph. This *mestizo* race would eventually permeate Latin American society.

This amalgamation of two nations or peoples culminated politically and culturally when the Latin American nations formed by their intersection gained independence from their “mother Gentiles” (1 Ne. 13:17), fulfilling another prophetic pronouncement found in the Book of Mormon: “And I beheld that their mother Gentiles were gathered together upon the waters, and upon the land also, to battle against them. And I beheld . . . that the Gentiles [including, as has been shown, a mixture of Judah and Joseph] that had gone out of captivity were delivered by the power of God out of the hands of all other nations” (1 Ne. 13:17–19).

Starting just after the birth of Joseph Smith in 1805, virtually all of the Spanish and Portuguese colonies of the New World began to proclaim their independence, starting with Argentina in 1816. In 1821, Mexico and Venezuela declared their independence. Brazil and Ecuador followed in 1822.<sup>38</sup> The Central American nations gained their full independence in 1823. Peru, Bolivia, and Uruguay followed in 1824 and 1825. In 1826, just months before Joseph received the plates and only a few years before the publication of the Book of Mormon, the last remnants of Spanish troops in the Americas were defeated in Peru. Throughout the Americas, these Iberians with their extensive Jewish ancestry had by then “run together” with the children of Lehi, and as they gained

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seldom entered the soldiering trades. Their experience and their high rates of literacy tended to land them in the New World as traders, small-scale merchants, artisans, and administrators. They came in substantial numbers as colonizers, especially in Mexico and Brazil; to a somewhat lesser degree to Peru and Chile; and in smaller numbers to the other colonies. Thus, even though it is possible for a people to be both Gentile (proceeding from a Gentile nation with Gentile blood) and Jewish (with some Jewish blood and sometimes remnants of Jewish beliefs and practices), the conquest of the Americas could correctly be identified as Gentile, while the colonization of the Americas can accurately be said to contain a significant Jewish element.

38. The process of independence in Central and South America was supported by the Monroe Doctrine, articulated by the United States in 1820, the year of the First Vision. It declares that any unwanted military or political involvement in the Western Hemisphere by outside powers was potentially a hostile aggression against the United States.

independence from Spain and Portugal, they became united into a “nation”<sup>39</sup> in preparation for the also prophesied running together of their two great records.

But can the Book of Mormon references to the seed of Lehi be read as applying to the nations of Latin America? Throughout the history of the LDS Church, identifying the modern location of the descendants of Lehi has been challenging, and cases of varying strength can be made for a number of locations, including Central America, as, for example, in John Sorenson’s *Mormon’s Codex*.<sup>40</sup> Joseph Smith saw the Native American civilizations in the United States as at least partial descendants of Book of Mormon peoples (see D&C 54:8). Meanwhile, Church publications of the time accepted reports of amazing discoveries in North, Central, and South America as confirmations of the general Book of Mormon storyline.<sup>41</sup>

Although almost all Latter-day Saint scholars currently reject the idea that the Book of Mormon storyline could have geographically covered all of North and South America, it is impossible to know absolutely whether any of the proposed locations is completely accurate, even if strong adherents to various positions might argue differently. The widespread scattering of the tribes of Israel (including both the Jewish *diaspora* and the so-called Lost Ten Tribes), however, can potentially serve as a parallel for the fate of the descendants of Lehi. Through the eventual dissemination of the blood of Lehi throughout much of the Americas by means of scattering and intermarriage over the course of many centuries, virtually all the peoples of the Americas have been affected by the descendants of Lehi to a lesser or greater degree. In this sense, all or almost all

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39. For a general history of the movements toward independence in Central and South America, see R. L. Woodward Jr., “The Aftermath of Independence, 1821–1870,” in *Central America since Independence*, ed. Leslie Bethell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 1–15; and Lewis Hanke, ed., *History of Latin American Civilization: Sources and Interpretations* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1967), 1–59. We do not mean to imply that the *mestizos* were the primary instigators of this independence, which was primarily achieved through the efforts of the *gachupins* (nor does the Book of Mormon prophecy suggest their influence but rather appears to portray them as more passive participants in this history).

40. John Sorenson, *Mormon’s Codex* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2013).

41. For an example of discoveries from Central America in Joseph Smith’s day that were seen as validating the Book of Mormon, see *The Evening and Morning Star* 1 (February 1833): 71.

descendants of Native American peoples can be considered the children of Lehi, even if their bloodlines were impacted only in minor ways (or even if they are the recipients of that heritage only through some level of cultural contact over the centuries).

This view seems to have been the understanding of Joseph Fielding Smith. In reference to several prophecies in the Book of Mormon (3 Ne. 20:16; 21:12; and Morm. 5:24) and in Doctrine and Covenants 87:5 that in latter days the “remnants” of the seed of Lehi would rise up and vex the Gentiles, he wrote, “It has been the fault of people in the United States to think that this prophetic saying has reference to the Indians in the United States, but we must remember that there are millions of the ‘remnant’ in Mexico [and] Central and South America. . . . The independence of Mexico and other nations to the south has been accomplished by the uprising of the ‘remnant’ upon the land.”<sup>42</sup>

In addition, other scriptural evidence points to Latin America and parts of today’s United States as important locations in the fulfillment of these Book of Mormon prophecies. First, the prophecy in 1 Nephi 13:12 points to a man, most likely identified as Columbus, who went forth “unto the seed of [Nephi’s] brethren.” Interestingly, the lands that Columbus actually visited during his four voyages were confined to what is now Latin America (specifically, the Caribbean, Central America, and the northeastern tip of South America).

Second, an angel told Nephi that if the Gentiles would “harden not their hearts against the Lamb of God, they shall be *numbered among the seed of thy father*; . . . and they shall be a blessed people upon the promised land forever” (1 Ne. 14:2, emphasis added). The countries in which those of European/Gentile descent have most fully come to be numbered among the seed of Lehi is in Latin America, as a result of the “mestizo” (racial mixing) process. The opposite situation is found in most of the United States and Canada, where the European colonizers did not mix in significant numbers with the original Native Americans.

Third, the preceding prophecy also intimates that the promise of being numbered among the seed of Lehi and becoming a blessed part of the house of Israel is contingent upon the people’s choice to not harden their

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42. Joseph F. Smith, *Church History and Modern Revelation* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1953), 1:363. Also quoted in *Doctrine and Covenants Student Manual*, 2d ed. (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2001), 195.

hearts against the Lamb of God. This is reinforced by such scriptures as 2 Nephi 9:53, which proclaims that Lehi's remnant would also, in future generations, "become a righteous branch unto the house of Israel."

In Latin America—where the Spanish and Portuguese (with their substantial in-mixing of Jewish blood) colonized, converted to Catholicism, and joined with the descendants of Lehi—the Church is now experiencing some of its greatest missionary successes.

Among the Iberian colonizers who had Sephardic ancestry, this process of conversion to Christianity *first*, followed *afterward* by receipt of the Book of Mormon with its clearer teachings regarding Christ's gospel, seems to be foretold by Nephi in 2 Nephi 25:16: "And after [the Jews] have been scattered, . . . even down from generation to generation until they shall be persuaded to believe in Christ, the Son of God . . . and when that day shall come that they shall believe in Christ, . . . then, at that time, the day will come that it must needs be expedient that they should believe these things [that is, Nephi's record<sup>43</sup>]." Although it must be remembered that reasons for Church growth are complex and multifaceted, missionary work among the nations of Latin America, where this conversion process has occurred, is bringing about a great gathering<sup>44</sup>—and a very strong "branch" of the house of Israel.<sup>45</sup>

This recognition should not minimize in any way the prominence of the United States or the land of Jerusalem in the latter-day restoration. The major physical gathering of the Jewish people, of course, involves their restoration to the land of Jerusalem (3 Ne. 20:29). And the primary location from which the gospel has been restored to go forth to the world has been the United States of America. The place where the Lord raised up a great seer (Joseph Smith) and the central location of the Restoration (and the location of the New Jerusalem) is the United States. Still, this historical overview demonstrates that prophecies regarding Israel can often be fulfilled in many different times and places, having

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43. Nephi uses the phrase "these things" in verses 3, 21, and 22 of 2 Nephi 25 to refer to his writings.

44. See *Deseret News 2013 Church Almanac: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 2013), 4, 183, 189–90, 203–9.

45. The membership of the Church in Latin America is now roughly equal to the Church membership in the U.S. and Canada.

application wherever “Israel” is found, provided that the people are willing to “liken all scriptures” unto themselves (1 Ne. 19:23).<sup>46</sup>

Perhaps this merging of Judah and Joseph can also be considered a partial fulfillment of Zenos’s grand allegory of the olive tree. In that allegory, he prophesied of the last days, saying, “And the branches of the natural tree [the Jews?] will I graft into the natural branches of the tree [the descendants of Lehi?]; and thus will I bring them together again, that they shall bring forth the natural fruit, *and they shall be one*” (Jacob 5:68, emphasis added). Nephi used Zenos’s imagery to make a similar prophecy, declaring that the remnant of “our seed . . . shall be grafted in, being a natural branch of the olive tree, into the true olive tree” (1 Ne. 15:14–16; see also 1 Ne. 10:14).

We are not proposing that this joining of the Sephardic Jews with Gentile nations of Spain and Portugal—and then with the children of Lehi—is either the only possible explanation of these prophecies or that this work of reunification has been completely fulfilled.<sup>47</sup> It does serve, however, as an example of how God works with all his people throughout history, scattering and gathering, dividing and joining together at the correct times in order to bring to pass his eternal purposes.

The prayers of ancient prophets and the resulting covenants of the Lord, that their children would be restored to the true knowledge of their fathers and of their Redeemer, are being answered and realized

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46. For a further discussion of “multiple-fulfillment prophecy,” see Victor Ludlow, *Isaiah: Prophet, Seer, and Poet* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1982), 2–3. These types of prophecies are not recognized by just Latter-day Saint readers but were used by the New Testament authors as well, such as in the famous Immanuel prophecy (Isa. 7:14), which most likely had an initial fulfillment in Isaiah’s day, but which was also seen by New Testament authors as a direct prophecy of the birth of Jesus Christ (Matt. 1:23). See Jeffrey R. Holland’s discussion of this particular “multiple-fulfillment prophecy” in *Christ and the New Covenant* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 78–80.

47. As has been mentioned in previous footnotes, the history of Latin America is much more complex than just the conquest period. It also includes the fleeing of the Sephardic Jews and the coming of Ashkenazi Jews to the United States, Argentina, and elsewhere over the course of American and Latin American history. Although many at this point have departed for Israel or other countries, a substantial non-*converso* Sephardic population—in addition to the Sephardic *converso* blood that had earlier been mixed with the children of Lehi—continues to exist in Latin American countries. Howard Sachar’s *History of the Jews in America* provides a helpful overview.

today through the combined instrumentality of the Bible and the Book of Mormon. The Lord of the vineyard is laboring among his people and with his servants (Jacob 5:71). He has not forgotten his promises. He has called the descendants of Joseph and of Judah to be instruments in his laboring hands in helping to recover his ancient covenant people through the instrumentality of the records of Joseph and Judah, joined together as one.<sup>48</sup>

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48. See, for example, Jacob 5:19–28, 39, 54, 55, 68, and 70–72.