

## CHAPTER IV

# Who Are the "Gentiles" of the Book of Mormon

The word "Gentile," used in the collective sense, occurs five times in the Book of Mormon, including the three times it appears on the title page. The plural form, "Gentiles," is found upwards of 141 times. We have inherited "Gentile" from the Latin *gentilis*, "belonging to the same tribe or family"; from *gens* "tribe," "family." Inasmuch as the Nephites were descendants of the ancient Hebrews, it may be of interest to consider briefly the significance of the term "Gentile"—its Hebrew equivalent is *goi* ("nation," "people")—in the Old Testament. When the Lord made His great compact with Abraham, He promised the Father of the Faithful that through his seed the Gospel and the Priesthood should be carried through the world to bless all nations. (See Abr. 2:8-11.) Thus Israel was destined to become a nation and a people set apart—a people "chosen" to bless the *goyim* or "Gentiles."

For thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God: The Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth. (Deut. 7:6)

...

But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend. (Isa. 41:8)

...

O ye seed of Israel His servant, ye children of Jacob, His chosen ones. (I Chron. 16:13)

So we see that the Hebrews were supposed to be a unique and separate people, a righteous people, holding

themselves aloof from degrading Gentile ideas and customs. They proselyted among the Gentiles and, in the days of their righteousness, doubtless brought many into the fold who, by conversion, benefited religiously and became themselves Israelites. Sometimes the word *goi* was used to mean people who did not believe in the God of Israel, and was even used in a derogatory sense.

Are there any among the vanities of the Gentiles [goyim] that can cause rain? (Jer. 14:22)

In general, we may say that the Old Testament, aside from references to the Hebrews themselves, very often used *goyim* to designate those who were not of the Hebrew people and religion—they were Gentiles or Outsiders.

Now, let us see how the Book of Mormon uses the term "Gentile" or "Gentiles." It should be remembered that all of the Nephites who originally came to this continent were, as far as we know, of the house of Israel. Consequently they had no need during the thousand years of their history to refer to any group of their own people as Gentiles. Indeed, there is not a single reference in the Book of Mormon where even the Lamanites or any other dissident peoples are alluded to by that term. Of interest is the fact that most of the references to the Gentiles in the Nephite record obviously allude to Gentiles (non-Israelites) of the latter days, to relatively modern times. Some few references such as in 1 Nephi 13:3-4, seemingly allude to Gentiles of about the second century A.D.

Of interest is the way "Gentile" is used on the title page of the Book of Mormon. The first reference is this:

Written to the Lamanites, who are a remnant of the house of Israel;  
and also to Jew and Gentile—

Here, Moroni clearly distinguishes between two branches of Israel—the Lamanites and Jews—and the "Gentile," obviously the non-Israelite. To those not of our faith

it may be pointed out that Moroni would surely know that the "Jew" was also of Israel. (See 1 Nephi 15:19-20.) The second reference to "Gentile" in the first paragraph reads as follows:

Sealed by the hand of Moroni, and hid up unto the Lord, to come forth  
in due time by way of the Gentile—

This reference to "Gentile" is of unusual interest and needs some explanation. The Latter-day Saints have always claimed to be of Israel (see D. & C. 103:16-17; 133: 32-34), and they are the ones who have brought forth the Book of Mormon. Joseph Smith the prophet was assuredly of Israel, and he translated the Nephite record and originally sent it forth. So why does Moroni in the title page say it is "to come forth in due time by way of the Gentile?" How is "Gentile" to be construed here? As a matter of fact, even the Savior used the word as Moroni did when speaking to the Nephites after His resurrection:

Therefore, when these works and the works which shall be wrought  
among you hereafter shall come forth from the Gentiles, unto your seed  
which shall dwindle in unbelief because of iniquity; for thus it behooveth the  
Father that it should come forth from the Gentiles  
. . .(3 Nephi 21:5-6)

The answer to our question is probably this. Moroni, and of course the Savior, knew that when the Book of Mormon came forth in the latter days, it would come by way of the great Gentile nation spoken of hundreds of years before by Nephi the prophet:

The Lord God will raise up a mighty nation [United States] among the  
Gentiles, yea, even upon the face of this land; and by them shall our seed  
be scattered. And after our seed is scattered the Lord God will proceed to  
do a marvelous work among the Gentiles, which shall be of great worth unto  
our seed. (1 Nephi 22:7-8)

The Latter-day Saints who bring forth the Book of Mormon, thus assisting the Lord to do his marvelous work "among the Gentiles," are "Gentiles" in the political sense. We are citizens of this great Gentile republic, the United States. So Moroni, the Savior, and some other writers speak of us as "Gentiles" in the political sense, and this fact must be kept in mind by readers of the Nephite record. (See, e.g., 1 Nephi 13:39; 15:13; Morm. 5:15; 3 Nephi 16:4, 6; 21:5.)

The third reference to "Gentile" on the title page occurs in the second paragraph and simply refers to "Jew and Gentile," thus making a distinction between one branch of Israel and peoples who are not Israelites.

An examination of all the references to the Gentiles in the Book of Mormon shows that generally speaking they fall into the two classifications already set forth in our discussion of the title page. That is to say, the Gentiles are either the Latter-day Saints of modern times, Israelites, who are Gentiles in the political sense, or are non-Israelites.

The writers of the Nephite record, it should be noticed in conclusion, seem to have much compassion for the Gentiles. They are as broadminded in this respect, as was Paul in his New Testament letters. Notice these quotations:

Wherefore saith the Lamb of God: I will be merciful unto the Gentiles.  
(1 Nephi 13:33)

...

For behold, I say unto you that as many of the Gentiles as will repent are the covenant people of the Lord; and as many of the Jews as will not repent shall be cast off. (2 Nephi 30:2)

Even when the latter-day Gentiles are denounced for their terrible sins, the Lord adds this promise to them:

Come unto me, and be baptized in my name, that

ye may receive a remission of your sins, and be filled with the Holy Ghost, that ye may be numbered with my people who are of the House of Israel. (3 Nephi 30:2)

On still another occasion the Lord lashes out at the Gentiles, and that is because he is exasperated at their attitude toward the Bible and their lack of regard for the Jews, his ancient people. (2 Nephi 29:3-6)