

A Skin of Blackness:

Disease and Inflammation in the Promised Land

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“Until 1978, the so-called Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was an officially racist organization.”¹

LATTER-DAY RACISM

Whether they’re killing Indian children, denying blacks the priesthood power of God, or disseminating hate speech through their most beloved texts, the racism of Mormons knows no bounds. As for today though, we are here to focus on one of the primary forms of the dissemination of that racism: The Book of Mormon, their quintessential text; which contains a passage that some individuals claim states that black skin is a curse from God placed on the wicked so that the good, white folk, would be able to spot the difference and thus not be enticed to mix their seed with those afflicted with the iniquity of melanin—making Joseph Smith, and Mormonism, racist at its core.

As the story goes, Lehi and his family, olive to light-brown-skinned mediterranean and Levantine Israelites, crossed the oceans together, taking their familial disputes and murmurings along with them. This meant that upon arrival in the promised land everything was not “kumbaya,” and once Lehi had passed away all bets were off. Eventually, the family was bifurcated. Readers of this book would soon discover that this division, among other factors, would lead to a sore and loathsome cursing, as it becomes contextually apparent that there is a union in their spiritual and physical countenances—as a skin of blackness falls upon them; a full skin-suit allegedly blacker than their already tanned complexions.

Back during my exMormon days is when I first wondered what this cursing may actually be if it be anything other than racism. This was somewhere between 2021–2023 when I had already become disillusioned with exMormon deconstructionism but before I had reconverted, and thus enjoyed formulating and employing theories to counteract the poor post-structuralist mid-wittery rampant in the post and progressive Mormon communities. These corresponding thoughts and scattered research became more solidified in the Fall of 2024 when I would realize that Laman and Lemuel likely suffered from the hangry gene,² and as such should perhaps be given some bit of genetic leeway. An observational study in 2022 collected reports of hunger and emotions five times daily from 64 participants for 21 days. Greater hunger was associated with greater anger and irritability and lower pleasure, even after accounting for participants’ general tendency toward such emotions.³ This is evident in the text as Nephi reports,

¹ Hitchens, Christopher., Mitt the Mormon: Why Romney Needs to Talk about His Faith., *Slate*, 26. Nov. 2007. <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2007/11/mitt-romney-needs-to-answer-questions-about-his-mormon-faith.html>

² Shelton, Janie F. “Hangry Like the Wolf.” *23andMe Blog*, 12 June 2018, <https://www.23andme.org/blog/articles/hangry-like-the-wolf/>

³ Swami, Viren, et al. “Hangry in the Field: An Experience Sampling Study on the Impact of Hunger on Anger, Irritability, and Affect.” *PLOS ONE*, vol. 17, no. 7, 2022, article e0269629 <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0269629>

“And after I did break my bow, behold, my brethren were angry with me because of the loss of my bow, for we did obtain no food...they did suffer much for the want of food. And it came to pass that Laman and Lemuel and the sons of Ishmael did begin to murmur exceedingly because of their sufferings and afflictions in the wilderness.”⁴

If this held any semblance of truth, I knew for a certainty that there were other biological underpinnings at play in the tellings of the iniquities and afflictions of the peoples of the Book of Mormon. It is believed, after all, that the entire tabernacle of a person is intelligence upon intelligence in their own spheres and order of creation from the top of the system to the bottom, and that God speaketh plainly to all his intelligent lights.⁵ So why then would the afflictions also not be led by the intelligences associated with the physiological systems that have been compromised?

Regardless, my inspiration to finally write about and formalize my ideas on the topic came from a recent Mormon™ Stories™ Podcast™ episode,TM wherein British numpty Amanda Barnett revealed that she has taken it upon herself to sue the Leicester Marriott franchise for promoting racism by providing a Book of Mormon in every room alongside the bible, requesting that they remove the book from their hotels.⁶ She goes on to portray corporate Marriott itself as racist for having built its first hotel in Arlington, Virginia. This, an issue for her and deep ponderers alike, because it was in a Jim Crow state during the traditional “1957 human terrain” of the Jim Crow era. Apparently she couldn’t think of any other human terrain that could lead the path for a premier hotel chains opportunity to open up shop on the Jefferson Davis Highway in Arlington during the capitalistic travel boom of post World War II—none at all. The decision, if not purely motivated by explicit racism, may as well have been implicitly screaming it the entire time. Either way, it would seem that the date of construction and the address alone settle the question without further consideration or examination.

THE PARTIALITY OF AFFLICTION

These types of cursings are no stranger to associated texts, nor the workings of God it would seem. For long before Nephi’s family left Jerusalem another’s skin was afflicted in the wilderness. Miriam, having thrown shade at Moses’ Ethiopian wife, was thus afflicted, cursed by God with a leprous skin that was white as snow (Numbers 12:1-10). She was thrust out of the camp for seven days while the people waited and Moses prayed for her. So privileged, this curse of whiteness. Seven days of isolation AND the curse was lifted AND her family hung around!? Talk about getting off easy. Why would God not punish her longer? Does the punishment fit the crime? A tad bit of gossip for a temporary stint with leprosy and albinism? I wonder... I mean, at least this has some semblance of Jewish interpretation behind it. The

⁴ The Book of Mormon, 1 Ne 16:18–20., Hereafter BOM.

⁵ Shenefelt, C.M., *Harmonic Theism: Creatio ex Concordia and the Divine Arrangement of Worlds*, 2025.

⁶ “Suing Marriott Hotel for Racist Book of Mormon in the U.K.” — Amanda Barnett | Ep. 2207.” *YouTube*, uploaded by Mormon Stories Podcast, 7 Oct. 2026., <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cuf0ZFE9E6k>

Talmud associates leprosy—*metzora*, with *tzra'at*—which is a biblical classification of affliction which involves, among other things, afflictions of the skin; and “speaking malicious speech” with *lashon hara*, or having an *evil tongue*.⁷ Yet, perpetually murmuring against their father and brother, seeking to destroy them, explicitly disobeying and rebelling against God, and hardening their hearts for a generational curse of blackness? Hmmm. Is this equitable in 2026?

As far as the Yin Fu Ching is concerned,

“Heaven appears most partial; but in reality its dealings are most just. Heaven, in its relations with created beings, deals with them all differently, which seems partial in the extreme. But these differences are equalized, or harmonized, by virtue of their very differentiation, or, harmony is evolved from these very inequalities, and thus their treatment on the part of Heaven is, in reality, most just.

It is on account of this apparent partiality that things attain perfection, for although they are treated unequally, such treatment is really right and just. Justice, or equity, consists in [equitable] distribution.”⁸

Which is much like Joseph Smith doctri-fying,

“All kingdoms have a law given; And there are many kingdoms; for there is no space in which there is no kingdom; and there is no kingdom in which there is no space, either a greater or lesser kingdom.”⁹

As well as later that year, in September 1833, stating in a letter to Silas Smith,

“I have no doubt but you will agree with me that men will be held accountable for the things they have, and not for the things they have not, or, that all the light and intelligence communicated to them from their Beneficent Creator, whether it is much or little, by the same they in justice will be judged.”¹⁰

This partiality of justice may seem to follow no matter which direction the melanin is tweaked. For Gehazi brings the parallels closer to the account left to us by Nephi. After Gehazi deceives everyone by collecting payment for Elisha’s healing of the Syrian soldier Naaman, he is told that the affliction

⁷ “Arakhin 16b:3.” *The William Davidson Talmud*, Koren–Steinsaltz ed., *Sefaria*, www.sefaria.org/Arakhin.16b.3.

⁸ Balfour, Frederic Henry, translator. *Taoist Texts: Ethical, Political, and Speculative*. Trübner & Co. / Kelly & Walsh, 1884

⁹ *Doctrine and Covenants*, 88.36–37. Hereafter D&C.

¹⁰ Letter to Silas Smith, 26 September 1833, p. 2, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, accessed October 13, 2026, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/letter-to-silas-smith-26-september-1833/1>

which was taken from Naaman would cling to him and to his seed for ever. He leaves Elisha's presence, "a leper as white as snow" (2 Kings 5.1–27). Here we find an ancient parallel wherein a physical marking and generational cursing are brought on by deception, rebellion, and departure from the presence of the prophets and the word of God.

These examples bring the dramatization of the color of the affliction into question because, although circumstances and moral significance differ, the bible describes both whitening¹¹ and darkening¹² of skin in association with various types of afflictions.

Which brings us back around to the moment I ended up attempting to distill my years of scattered musings on the topic into a single line of questioning. That being something along the lines of: "Can an affliction that is described as a curse also have an identifiable biological cause, and can that be hereditary?" The religious or spiritual significance involved in the narrative need not and does not exclude the possibility of infection, inflammation, or an environmental trigger. The history of skin disease in both Jerusalem and the Americas thus provides a basis for considering what conditions might account for the marked curse presented and described by Nephi in 2 Nephi 5, as well as by others throughout the text.

MALADIES FOR THE MALADAPTIVE AND THEIR PROGENY

When examining this it is important to consider evidence extant from both the ancient and the modern world. For ancient Jerusalem, a 2009 investigation of the first-century AD Tomb of the Shroud detected *Mycobacterium leprae* DNA in an adult male's remains.¹³ While dated to six centuries after Lehi's stated departure, this does establish the presence of Hansen's disease, otherwise known as leprosy, in ancient Jerusalem. This evidence, and of course, the biblical account of Christ healing the leper (Matthew 8.2–3)—Data and Dogma working in unison.

Shifting to the ancient Americas, in 2025, researchers reconstructed two ancient genomes of *Mycobacterium lepromatosis*, a bacterium that causes Hansen's disease. The genomes were "obtained from 4,000-year-old human remains of two adult males from the archaeological sites of El Cerrito and La

¹¹ The Holy Bible, Numbers 12.10, 2 Kings 5.27, Exodus 4. 6–7

¹² The Holy Bible., Job 30.30, Lamentations 4.7–8, Lamentations 5.10, [Joel 2.6, Nahum 2.10]; the Septuagint translates this as, 'every face is like the scorching of a cooking pot.' www.blueletterbible.org/verse/lxx/joe/2/6/]

¹³ 29 Apr 2010: Matheson CD, Vernon KK, Lahti A, Fratpietro R, Spigelman M, et al. (2010) Correction: Molecular Exploration of the First-Century Tomb of the Shroud in Akeldama, Jerusalem. PLOS ONE 5(4): 10.1371/annotation/32ada7b9-3772-4c08-9135-b5c0933f0b5e. <https://doi.org/10.1371/annotation/32ada7b9-3772-4c08-9135-b5c0933f0b5e>

Herradura in Northern Chile.”¹⁴ These findings provide us with a pathogen in the Americas that predates Lehi’s arrival to the new world by a substantial margin. Exposure to an already established American pathogen becomes a historically grounded possibility when considered as an infectious explanation for the affliction described in 2 Nephi 5; allowing for the possibility that environmental exposure and differing ways of working with, and living off of the land—interacting with biological lifeforms containing harmful bacteria and viral diseases—leads to affliction. In a separate study published later that same year, *M. lepromatosis* was identified in three additional pre-contact individuals. One was from British Columbia, Canada, and two from Argentina.¹⁵

Modern clinical cases provide a closer view of the disease’s physical presentation, as well as its occurrences within family groups. A 2016 report involved two siblings from Guerrero, Mexico who both developed and were diagnosed with Hansen’s disease some years after immigrating to Minnesota. The brother exhibited, “madarosis, nonpitting edema of the ears, bilateral loss of eyelashes, and ill-defined, somewhat dusky, hyperpigmented patches scattered diffusely and symmetrically on his extremities with sparing of the trunk and neck.” His sister subsequently presented with hyperpigmented red and violet plaques. Testing identified *M. lepromatosis* in both individuals.¹⁶ Interestingly, a 1982 study, “Familial Clustering of Leprosy Patients in an Israeli Village” examined a community of immigrants from Kurdistan. It reported a 3.2% prevalence of leprosy in the community, which in this case was concentrated among relatively few groups of siblings.¹⁷

The 2016 report on the Mexican siblings states that the brother mentioned frequent handling and consumption of armadillos while living in Mexico, although, the article does not establish a connection. However, a 2011 study found that an unusual form of *M. leprae* appeared in 28 out of 33 armadillo samples, and 25 out of 39 patients living where exposure to infected armadillos was probable.¹⁸ Additionally, a 1989 study found *Leishmania (Viannia) naiffi* in nine-banded armadillos from Amazonian Brazil.¹⁹ Subsequent research found clinically documented human skin infections known as cutaneous

¹⁴ Ramirez DA, Sitter TL, Översti S, Herrera-Soto MJ, Pastor N, Fontana-Silva OE, Kirkpatrick CL, Castelleti-Dellepiane J, Nores R, Bos KI. 4,000-year-old *Mycobacterium lepromatosis* genomes from Chile reveal long establishment of Hansen’s disease in the Americas. *Nat Ecol Evol.* 2025 Sep;9(9):1685-1693. doi: 10.1038/s41559-025-02771-y. Epub 2025 Jun 30. PMID: 40588538; PMCID: PMC12420385.

¹⁵ Maria Lopopolo et al. ,Pre-European contact leprosy in the Americas and its current persistence.*Science*389,eadu7144(2025).DOI:10.1126/science.adu7144

¹⁶ Sotiriou MC, Stryjewska BM, Hill C. Two Cases of Leprosy in Siblings Caused by *Mycobacterium lepromatosis* and Review of the Literature. *Am J Trop Med Hyg.* 2016 Sep 7;95(3):522-7. doi: 10.4269/ajtmh.16-0076. Epub 2016 Jul 11. PMID: 27402522; PMCID: PMC5014252.

¹⁷ Barreyro, D.A., et al. “Familial Clustering of Leprosy Patients in an Israeli Village.” *Leprosy Review*, vol. 53, no. 4, 1982, pp. 277–83. <https://doi.org/10.5935/0305-7518.19820035>.

¹⁸ Truman RW, Singh P, Sharma R, Busso P, Rougemont J, Paniz-Mondolfi A, Kapopoulou A, Brisse S, Scollard DM, Gillis TP, Cole ST. Probable zoonotic leprosy in the southern United States. *N Engl J Med.* 2011 Apr 28;364(17):1626-33. doi: 10.1056/NEJMoa1010536. PMID: 21524213; PMCID: PMC3138484.

¹⁹ Lainson R, Shaw JJ. *Leishmania (Viannia) naiffi* sp. n., a parasite of the armadillo, *Dasypus novemcinctus* (L.) in Amazonian Brazil. *Ann Parasitol Hum Comp.* 1989;64(1):3-9. doi: 10.1051/parasite/19896413. PMID: 2930120.

leishmaniasis associated with this parasite.²⁰ It should also be noted that the armadillo findings concern *M. leprae*, which differs from *M. lepromatosis* identified in the ancient remains and the Mexican siblings, while the *Leishmania* example involves a parasite transmitted to humans through infected sand flies.

Furthermore, Leishmaniasis is well documented in Israel. A 2024 nationwide study identified 4,168 molecularly diagnosed leishmaniasis cases in Israel during 2017–2022. These were predominantly *Leishmania major* and *L. tropica*, a distinct species within the same genus of the *L. naiffi* parasite described in the previous study.

Another bacterial condition historically documented in Mexico, Central America, and northern South America is pinta. Caused by *Treponema carateum*, a bacterium closely related to the *Treponema pallidum* subspecies responsible for venereal syphilis, yaws, and bejel, pinta is known to produce brown, slate-blue, grey, or blackened lesions, with some symptoms leading to depigmentation as the disease progresses.

“Pinta, also known as mal del pinto or carate, is the most benign of the endemic treponematoses since it affects only the skin.”²¹

Consequently, pinta provides us with a distinct example of an acquired infection capable of producing both darkening and lightening of the skin.

To fill in the land-gap, there is also modern Native American comparison known as *actinic prurigo*. In a 2020 clinical report the condition was described in a child whose father was of Navajo and Hispanic ancestry.²² This involves an inflammatory hypersensitivity response that is associated with sunlight exposure. It can produce intensely itchy papules, nodules, plaques, as well as scarring.²³ The difference here being that the environmental trigger shifts to sunlight exposure with a mechanism of inflammation rather than bacterial infection or parasite. Perhaps, even, it may be that geographic relocation brings about alterations in ultraviolet exposure, elevation, and seasonal conditions, potentially provoking or intensifying inflammatory skin disease in genetically susceptible individuals. Among 594 children, actinic

²⁰ van Thiel PP, Gool Tv, Kager PA, Bart A. First cases of cutaneous leishmaniasis caused by *Leishmania* (Viannia) *naiffi* infection in Surinam. *Am J Trop Med Hyg*. 2010 Apr;82(4):588-90. doi: 10.4269/ajtmh.2010.09-0360. PMID: 20348504; PMCID: PMC2844559.

²¹ Stamm LV. Pinta: Latin America's Forgotten Disease? *Am J Trop Med Hyg*. 2015 Nov;93(5):901-3. doi: 10.4269/ajtmh.15-0329. Epub 2015 Aug 24. PMID: 26304920; PMCID: PMC4703279. (*Typically transmitted through non-sexual skin-to-skin contact*).

²² Eickstaedt, J.B., Starke, S., Krakora, D., Hinshaw, M. and Arkin, L.M. (2020), Clearance of pediatric actinic prurigo with dupilumab. *Pediatr Dermatol*, 37: 1176-1178. <https://doi.org/10.1111/pde.14311>

²³ Cuevas-Gonzalez JC, Lievanos-Estrada Z, Vega-Memije ME, Hojyo-Tomoka MT, Dominguez-Soto L. Correlation of serum IgE levels and clinical manifestations in patients with actinic prurigo. *An Bras Dermatol*. 2016 Jan-Feb;91(1):23-6. doi: 10.1590/abd1806-4841.20163941. PMID: 26982774; PMCID: PMC4782642.

prurigo was recorded in 55.7% of those living above 3,500 meters, compared with 39.7% at 2,500–3,500 meters.²⁴

These examples establish several possible relationships among exposure, inflammation, familial susceptibility, and alterations in skin condition and pigmentation, and are documented from South America to Central America to North America—so pick your land model of the Book of Mormon, it'll fit! Lucky you. Lucky all of us.

As far as the Book of Mormon narrative is concerned, it appears the primary reasons for these maladaptations are due to decisions to travel one way over the other, physically and spiritually—to expose themselves to different parts of the land—to work with the land, (meaning to work with the tabernacle of God, and thus the laws of God²⁵), by differing means of operation (Table 1); leading to vastly different outcomes, for them and their posterity, and would seem to follow biblical tradition.²⁶

Aspect	Nephite Methodology	Lamanite Methodology
Food Production	Cultivation, planting and harvesting grain and fruit. (2 Ne 5.11; Enos 1.21)	Hunting wild animals, some eating raw meat. (2 Ne 5.24; Enos 1.20)
Animal Resources	Shepherding, raising and managing flocks and herds. (2 Ne 5.11; Enos 1.21)	Hunting in the wilderness (2 Ne 5.24; Enos 1.20)
Settlements, Industry	Constructing buildings, establishing settlements, building temples, fortifying cities. (2 Ne 5.15–16; Jarom 1.7)	Dwelling in tents and moving through the wilderness. (Enos 1.20)
Skills	Woodworking, metalworking, construction, machinery, agriculture, weapons manufacturing, armor. (2 Ne 5.15; Jarom 1.8, Alma 43.19–22)	Weaponry of bow, cimeter, ax, and hands; hunting. (Enos 1.20)
Record Keeping	Retains inherited written record. (2 Ne 5.12, 17)	Enos leaves account of hostility toward Nephite records. (Enos 1.14)
Labor Descriptions	Industrious; labors with hands (2 Ne 5.17; Mosiah 10.5)	Idle; hunters and fighters. (2 Ne 5.24, Mosiah 10.8)

²⁴ Ramos W, Gutierrez EL, De La Cruz-Vargas JA, Díaz J, Hurtado J, Ronceros G, de Vries E. Exposure to Atmospheric Ozone Disruption and Altitude Over 3500 m.a.s.l. are Associated with a Higher Prevalence of Photodermatoses in Pediatric Population of High-Altitude in Peru. *Clin Cosmet Investig Dermatol*. 2022;15:1779-1786
<https://doi.org/10.2147/CCID.S374884>

²⁵ Shenefelt, C.M., *Harmonic Theism: Creatio ex Concordia and the Divine Arrangement of Worlds*, 2025., pp. 55–69, 95, xix

²⁶ Uriona, T.J., “Life and Death, Blessing and Cursing: New Context for ‘Skin of Blackness’ in the Book of Mormon,” 2023., *BYU Studies*, 62.3, p.140.

Aspect	Nephite Methodology	Lamanite Methodology
Spiritual Connection	Obedience and productive labor lead to prosperity. (2 Ne 5.10–11)	Separation from the Lord, idleness, nomadic behavior. (2 Ne 5.20–24)

Table 1 summarizes early descriptions found in 2 Nephi, Enos, Jarom, and Alma. These contrasts reflect particular settings and the narrators' perspectives rather than permanent characteristics of either group. Later accounts describe substantial overlap in their economic practices and reversals in their relative righteousness (Hel 6.7–13, 34, 38).

As even does Mormon's commentary in Helaman remind us,

"...thus we see that except the Lord doth chasten his people with many afflictions, yea, except he doth visit them with death and with terror, and with famine and with all manner of pestilences, they will not remember him."²⁷

Which was a reality spoken of to Laman and Lemuel already,

"...for I have feared, lest for the hardness of your hearts the Lord your God should come out in the fullness of his wrath upon you, that ye be cut off and destroyed forever; or that a cursing should come upon you for the space of many generations; and ye are visited by sword, and by famine, and are hated."²⁸

Moreover, and specifically in Enos' descriptions, it specifically points toward the eating of raw meat, while Jarom reports the drinking of animal blood (Jarom 1.6)—which is an act the Israelites would have forbidden under the law of Moses.²⁹ Lehi and Nephi's party ate raw meat under divine approval (1 Ne 17.2, 12), so Jarom perhaps provides the clearer picture of which act would violate the law. Either way, unapproved and unguided behavior that breaks the Mosaic law would have made the Lamanites impure—not enticing, even loathsome—according to the traditions of the Nephites; this, for both the filthiness of the act itself and the filthiness of contamination and disease that could result, physically and spiritually.³⁰

Furthermore, amping up the racism that can be found throughout the text, this was a cursing which Abinadi also cast towards his executioners,

²⁷ BOM, Helaman 12.3

²⁸ BOM, 2 Ne 1.17–18

²⁹ Leviticus 17.10–14, Deuteronomy 12.23–25, Exodus 12.8–9.

³⁰ Uriona, T.J. "The Curse of the Covenant: The Deuteronomic Curses in the Book of Mormon." *BYU Studies*, vol 63, no. 2, 2024, pp. 5–24., fn.28

“...ye shall be afflicted with all manner of diseases because of your iniquities. Yea, and ye shall be smitten on every hand, and shall be driven and scattered to and fro...”³¹

Something of notice would be that it is reported that their idleness and hunting *follow* the cursing, they do not cause the cursing (2 Ne 5.24). Although, this allows for the possibility that their initial affliction helped to shape their subsequent way of life, with time and continued exposure worsening the effects thereof.

Just as this distinction is drawn, it is also worth noting that an inherited or continuing affliction does not establish the wickedness of every individual experiencing it. This is very clear as the overall narrative of the text progresses, but is explicitly stated by Jacob,

“Behold, the Lamanites your brethren, whom ye hate because of their filthiness and the cursing which hath come upon their skins, are more righteous than you...Wherefore a commandment I give unto you, which is the word of God, that ye revile no more against them because of the darkness of their skin. Neither shall ye revile against them because of their filthiness, but ye shall remember your own filthiness, and remember that their filthiness came because of their fathers.”³²

A similar distinction can be drawn from the Zhuangzi. Shen Tujia, a one-footed ex-con whose foot had been amputated as a punishment, was pressed by a fellow student, Zichan, studying under the same teacher, Uncle Dim Nobody. Zichan demanded a certain level of deference from Shen Tujia, assuming that because of Shen Tujia’s amputated foot and sordid past the difference in the moral worth between the two men had been established. Shen Tujia responded beautifully,

“There are many who dress up their mistakes to make themselves think they should not lose a foot, but very few who do not dress up their mistakes, knowing they have no particular entitlement to retain that foot. Only a true virtuoso can understand what is unavoidable and find peace in it as his own fate. If you play around near Archer Yi’s target, lurking near the bull’s-eye, it is only normal to get hit. If you manage to escape being hit, that’s just fate, random good luck. Many two-footed people laugh at me for having one foot, which always used to infuriate me. But as soon as I arrived here at our master’s place, everything fell away, bringing me back to where I’d started from. It’s as if the master cleansed me with his goodness without my even realizing it. I have studied under him for nineteen years and never once in all that time have I been aware that I was

³¹ BOM, Mosiah 17.16–17

³² BOM, Jacob 3.5–9

one-footed. Here you and I have been wandering together on the inner side of the corporeal—is it not wrong of you to seek me on its outer side?”³³

It is thus apparent that both Shen Tujia and Jacob’s rebukes challenge those who mistake another persons physical conditions as sufficient knowledge of their righteousness and moral worth.



CONCLUSION

Disease and inflammation offer plausible explanations for the physical marks and afflictions described in 2 Nephi 5. Ancient evidence establishes the presence of Hansen’s disease in pre-contact civilizations in the Americas long before Lehi’s family is said to have potentially arrived somewhere on the larger land mass; modern clinical research documents infections and inflammatory conditions which produce various skin diseases and alterations in pigmentation. Together, these establish the medical plausibility that the affliction was acquired, though they do not establish or identify which condition, if any, is referenced in the narrative, or which is more plausible than the next, given the available narrative.

The intergenerational aspect of the affliction could involve differences in shared environmental exposures among the various groups, as well as transmission within families, or preexisting inherited susceptibility to such conditions, depending on the condition involved. These mechanisms may allow an affliction to persist among descendants whose individual conduct differed in kind from that of their ancestors.

Within the Book of Mormon’s conventional narrative framework, actual physical consequences are interpreted in relation to obedience, separation, judgement, and restoration. Therefore, an explanation involving ordinary biological processes could coexist with the spiritual meanings assigned to the associated afflictions. This also offers a view wherein the mark is understood as affecting particular families within particular circumstances, leaving the precise and complete diagnosis unresolved while providing grounds for analyzing the passages beyond an exclusively racial interpretation.

³³ Zhuangzi. *Zhuangzi: The Complete Writings*. Translated by Brook Ziporyn, Hackett Publishing Company Inc., 2020., c.5 p.47