

How to Reach African-Americans

Summary

Marvin Perkins explores the cultural, historical, and doctrinal issues that have hindered African-Americans from joining or remaining in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Through scripture, prophetic statements, and personal experience, Perkins offers a framework for inclusivity and outreach rooted in the doctrine that God is no respecter of persons.

Introduction

Scott Gordon:

As a convert to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Marvin came to the Church after searching every religion he could find for over five years for what he called "the real Church." Born and raised in Niagara Falls, New York, just 90 miles west of Palmyra, he had never heard of the Church or Mormons.

When one of his business associates wanted to see him perform, that desire set off the missionary experience that would lead to his baptism into the Church three months later.

Marvin, an MJM Records recording artist, has been singing professionally for over 18 years. He started as a studio vocalist, background and weather artist.

While doing a small showcase in Los Angeles in 1996, he launched his debut album, *I'm So Glad*. After many concerts, firesides, and conferences sharing the gospel, he slowed down long enough to put together a second musical project in 1997 entitled *Hymns to Him*, which was recently released.

As Director of African-American Relations on the Southern California Public Affairs Council, Marvin works closely with other religious leaders to bring service and support to those in need.

He was just recently called to serve as co-chair for Genesis Public Affairs, his responsibilities very similar to the calling of Director of African-American Relations on the national level. The Genesis Group is the branch of the Church designed to meet the unique needs of African-Americans.

He has also served as Gospel Doctrine and Seminary instructor and is well versed in the scriptures.

And we're very, very pleased to have Marvin Perkins come and speak to us.

Opening Remarks

Marvin Perkins:

Good morning! I am grateful to be here today, especially to speak on this topic.

This topic is one that actually almost kept me from joining the Church and I wanted to make sure that no one else left the Church or would not join the Church or struggled in the Church as a result of not having the information I was seeking.

So I thought, "Let me study this thing."

So I've been studying this subject for seventeen years now. I am not by any means an expert on it. I just know what I know and that the Lord has guided me and directed me.

I've found that if we keep this talk to the scriptures you get less people trying to refute what you say.

The biggest reason that I study this is to help others into the gospel. There are many who won't take the time to learn this information, and that's alright for them, but I want to help those who do want to have some of this information.

And the Church has given us plenty of guidance.

So again, I'm no scholar, I'm no scriptionist. I'm just a man who loves the Lord and will do anything He wants me to do. Sometimes that gets me in trouble, but I'm willing to take it.

A Central Question

So how do we reach African-Americans?

Counsel from President Gordon B. Hinckley (General Conference, April 2006)

In the 176th General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on April 1, 2006, President Gordon B. Hinckley did not speak or conduct in the Saturday morning or afternoon sessions.

However, in the General Priesthood session held that same evening, he spoke emphatically, urging the priesthood holders to do everything in their power to wipe out racism in the LDS Church.

President Hinckley said:

"When a man grows old he develops a softer touch, a kindlier manner. I have thought of this much of late. I have wondered why there is so much hatred in the world. We are involved in terrible wars with lives lost and many crippling wounds. Coming closer to home, there is so much of jealousy, pride, arrogance, and carping criticism; fathers who rise in anger over small, inconsequential things and make wives weep and children fear.

Racial strife still lifts its ugly head. I am advised that even right here among us there is some of this. I cannot understand how it can be. It seemed to me that we all rejoiced in the 1978 revelation given to President Kimball. I was there in the temple at the time that that happened. There was no doubt in my mind or in the minds of my associates that what was revealed was the mind and the will of the Lord.

Now I am told that racial slurs and denigrating remarks are sometimes heard among us. I remind you that no man who makes disparaging remarks concerning those of another race can consider himself a true disciple of Christ. Nor can he consider himself to be in harmony with the teachings of the Church of Christ. How can any man holding the Melchizedek Priesthood arrogantly assume that he is eligible for the priesthood whereas another who lives a righteous life but whose skin is of a different color is ineligible?

Throughout my service as a member of the First Presidency, I have recognized and spoken a number of times on the diversity we see in our society. It is all about us, and we must make an effort to accommodate that diversity. Let us all recognize that each of us is a son or daughter of our Father in Heaven, who loves all of His children.

Brethren, there is no basis for racial hatred among the priesthood of this Church. If any within the sound of my voice is inclined to indulge in this, then let him go before the Lord and ask for forgiveness and be no more involved in such. . . . Why do any of us have to be so mean and unkind to others? Why can't all of us reach out in friendship to everyone about us? Why is there so much bitterness and animosity? It is not a part of the gospel of Jesus Christ."

Why This Presentation

Reason 1: A Significant Spiritual Opportunity

Two independent studies list African-Americans as the number-one culture in the United States when it comes to seeking religion. One of the studies, done in October 2005 by the Higher Education Research Institute, associated with the UCLA Graduate School of Research Studies, revealed that African-Americans led in seven of twelve spirituality categories.

According to the 2005 Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches, the annual Church membership figures compiled by the National Council of Churches show that the LDS Church is the fastest-growing and fourth largest in the United States. This study also states that the country's main-line Protestant churches—Methodist, Lutherans, Presbyterians, and others—are being overtaken by Mormons, Pentecostals, and Black churches.

SO WE SHOULD HAVE A GREAT MARRIAGE: AFRICAN-AMERICANS AND THE LDS CHURCH!

Reason 2: A Concerning Retention and Conversion Gap

- African-Americans are leaving the LDS Church at an alarming rate
- African-Americans are the least willing to take the missionary discussions
- African-Americans are the least likely to join the Church after missionary discussions

So first, we see that we have a tremendous missionary opportunity. And second, it would do us well to understand why so many African-Americans may feel that the Mormon Church is not the place for them. I say "Mormon" purposely, believing that those who leave or won't come have not yet gained a pure knowledge that this is the one true church of Jesus Christ.

There is a roadblock, which if removed would result in a flood of Heavenly Father's children coming to and remaining in the gospel of Jesus Christ, in its fullness. I have witnessed this as I have shared that which I will share with you in this article.

The Mission of the Lord

"For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man." (Moses 1:39; emphasis added.)

The Three Missions of the Church

- **Perfect the Saints**—Continual education of the Saints in the Word of God in order to know the things of God, making us better missionaries and more effective at sharing His doctrine.
- **Proclaim the Gospel**—Missionary work and sharing the gospel with others so that they may have the blessings that we enjoy.
- **Redeem the Dead**—Effectiveness in the first two makes way for all of those who did not receive the Lord's intended blessings while on this earth to receive them vicariously through temple work performed by members.

Study the Language and Culture of the People We're Trying to Reach

As far as I can tell, the LDS Church has the largest and most organized missionary program in the world. These dedicated young men and women go wherever they are called to go and serve. They enter the Missionary Training Center (MTC), where they learn the language of the people they are going to serve.

They are taught classes on cultures to better understand how they might reach those they'd like to teach.

I spoke to a friend who served in Indiana. She told me that there was no need to learn a language or culture, but she remembers very well the heavy emphasis in the MTC on communication skills and how to approach people respectfully, without offending them or scaring them off.

She mentioned that she really wished that she had been given some training on the "Black" issue (which include the Priesthood and skin color and curse issues) because she taught many African-American families without any preparation in dealing with these issues; as a result, she was not successful in helping any of these families into the Church.

I once spoke to a missionary in Los Angeles who said she avoids African-Americans because she knows the issue will come up, and she doesn't know what to say.

Understanding the Language and the Culture of African Americans

So, if we truly want to reach African-Americans, both inside and outside of the Church, we must first understand that which I call the language and culture of this people. There are hidden cues, unspoken understandings, and points of significance in every culture, group, religion, etc.

Have you ever met someone, for instance, while doing business? You begin a conversation, which is pleasant. Then you discover that he or she is also LDS, and "pleasant" turns to excitement. You feel like you now know so much more about this person and have a great deal in common with him or her. This is what I'm referring to when I make reference to understanding the language and culture.

Many times I will see an African-American at a Church function. I'll approach him or her, and introduce myself. I'll ask how long that person has been in the Church and how he or she found it. Then I'll ask how he or she is growing and doing with everything.

Nine times out of ten, the person will hesitate a bit, and then tell me that he or she is having trouble with the Black issue, the answers from ward members, or with family members of other faiths who have brought up unflattering material regarding the Church and Blacks.

Understanding Provides Needed Insight

Though I'd never met these Saints that I'd approached, because African-Americans have our unique "language and culture," I understand that they may be having difficulty reconciling this issue; without this insight, ward members, leaders, and friends may never realize this ongoing internal struggle.

Without this understanding, the percentages of those affected by these issues that will come into or remain in the Church are very slim. This would also be the case if we sent missionaries to South America without teaching them anything about the language or culture of our brothers and sisters there.

So allow me to share what I, in my experience, have come to call the language and culture of most African-Americans. I feel somewhat qualified for that, since I've been African-American all my earthly life.

My Father asked me if I would accept the assignment to come to earth in beautiful brown skin, and I jumped with excitement at the opportunities.

What Is the Language and Culture of African-Americans?

The "language" that circulates among most African-Americans is that Mormons are racist, have a long history of racism, and think that Blacks are cursed. This is always uncomfortable for some to hear, but this is the reality.

If you truly want to reach this group, you must understand that there is a great chance that this is being thought, even if it is not spoken.

The culture of African-Americans is that we all will have to deal with the “Black” issue at some point, either before discussions, during discussions, or after baptism—sometimes many years after baptism.

Two brothers who came to me looking for information after not finding it locally come to mind. One had been a member five years, and the other for twenty-five years. The guidance given to us by the Lord through the scriptures has proven successful in removing these obstacles that keep good men and women who are concerned about these issues out of the Church.

Realizing What’s Out There

Christ was the only perfect being to live on earth as man. What that means is that all the rest of us will have some faults for our entire journey here on earth. Part of our test is to be able to look past the faults of men in order to see the things of God.

As an exuberant new member of the Church, I was in a conversation with someone, trying to share the Gospel. As we spoke, he pointed out what he said was a fault of Joseph Smith.

In my inexperience, I defended Brother Joseph with denial— “impossible . . . couldn’t be.” My new-member mind was saying that the Church was true, so what this man was saying couldn’t be. I’d later find out that his claim was true.

Now it didn’t bother me as much to find out that Joseph was human and had faults as it did that my credibility with this man was shot because I was willing to defend something in total ignorance. I had not studied the issue he’d presented, yet I was willing to speak out on it.

Once my credibility was gone, I felt I had little chance at helping him want to know more about the Church.

This may also be the case when friends and family find out that African-Americans (and other cultures as well) are investigating or have become new members of the LDS Church. Often we will be presented with anti-Mormon literature.

In an attempt to persuade me not to join, I was presented with many of the writings of latter-day leaders who had made derogatory comments regarding Blacks. I have no desire or need to rehash any of those statements. My point here is to simply point out that this information is given to investigators and members alike.

One can go into LDS bookstores today and find these books still for sale. You can find these writings easily on the Internet. So when we are handed this material, it’s obviously troubling and we seek to find answers.

Many times the answers are sought outside the Church, which is unfortunate, because that method will almost never turn out well.

The obvious place to turn would be to the person fellowshipping the individual or the ward members or leaders if they’ve begun going to Church. In this case, it is important that we don’t put up our automatic walls of defense, like I did in my early days, or we will lose our credibility.

If we study the Old and New Testaments, we find that all dispensations were populated by humans as well. By studying this subject through the scriptures, we can have “oil in our lamps,” thus being prepared in that time of need.

The Scriptures That I Show Investigators and Struggling Members to Demonstrate LDS Doctrine

The Old Testament

The Children of Israel were in bondage for more than 400 years. When the Lord used Moses and Aaron to free them, He also wanted to get them back to serving Him.

It took quite some time to go from one extreme to another. It was so difficult that they were given a simple law, the Law of Moses, to help them to gradually be able to abide the whole law.

They wandered for 40 years trying to get it right, and still needed more time before they would be more ready for what Christ would bring many years later.

This example shows us that the natural man does not change overnight.

The New Testament

In Matthew 28:19, the resurrected Savior commands His disciples to take the gospel to all the world, which included the Gentiles:

"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."

But even though they had a direct command from the Savior—who had just risen from the dead in great majesty and power—they would not do as He had commanded because of their feelings toward the Gentiles, which did not reflect the Lord’s view in 1 Samuel 16:7.

In fact, they had established a law to keep themselves separate from their brothers.

For the Jews to go from that extreme to one of sharing the love of the gospel with the Gentiles, and thus becoming one with them, would not happen overnight, but would take much time and effort in changing their hearts. It would also take another revelation from God.

This revelation is written in Acts 10. Peter receives the vision of the blanket knit at the four corners and receives the commandment again to take the gospel to all nations.

Verse 28 reads:

"And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean."

Verse 47 continues:

"Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?"

And now being commanded a second time, they began taking the gospel to the Gentiles. So here, as in the Old Testament, we see that changing the hearts of the natural man did not happen overnight.

Similarities in Our Day: The Doctrine and Covenants

When the Church was restored in 1830, the atrocity of slavery was in place in the United States. Until the passing of the Civil Rights act of 1964, discrimination was actually the law of the land.

If we go to the scriptures, we'll find accounts in the D&C similar to what we've just discussed in the Old and New Testaments.

On December 16, 1833, while in Kirtland, Ohio, the Prophet Joseph received a revelation letting the Saints know that since it was His will for every man to act in doctrine, principle, and agency, that slavery was not right. He recorded this as verses 78 and 79 of Section 101:

"That every man may act in doctrine and principle pertaining to futurity, according to the moral agency which I have given unto him, that every man may be accountable for his own sins in the day of judgment.

"Therefore, it is not right that any man should be in bondage one to another."

Few Latter-day Saints know that when the Saints entered the Salt Lake Valley in 1847, some 14 years after this commandment was given, there were three slaves in the first pioneer company—demonstrating that they continued in the practice despite the revelation.

Slavery would actually be legalized in the Utah territory in 1852 and would only end with the passing of the 13th Amendment in 1865, which outlawed slavery in the United States.

Timeline

- 1833, Joseph Smith receives revelation on slavery (D&C 101:78-79)
- 1847, Hark Lay, Green Flake, and Oscar Crosby, all slaves, arrive as part of the first pioneer company to enter Utah
- 1852, Slavery made legal in Utah, despite the commandment in D&C 101
- 1860, Utah Census reports 59 Blacks; 29 of them are slaves
- 1865, 13th Amendment ends slavery in the United States

So 33 years after the direct commandment was given by God, the Saints still did not willingly obey, but were compelled by federal law.

These examples have helped me to see that we are much more like those of earlier dispensations than we may think; humans, growing line upon line, and needing time, experience, and the patience of the Lord to do so, sometimes to be told again.

What Keeps Many African-Americans Out

I went to a parenting seminar some months ago in California, and the presenter happened to be LDS. As we discussed this issue, he told me, "Marvin, I don't get it. The African-Americans are some of the most spiritual people I know. I'd think they'd be really receptive to the gospel."

I asked him to imagine being in an environment where a good number of the membership think, but may not say (and then again some may actually say or teach), that you are or were cursed, were less valiant in the pre-existence, were the only race on earth not ready or worthy of the priesthood, or that the only unacceptable interracial marriage is between Black and white.

"Now can you imagine wanting to remain in that environment?" I asked.

"No, I wouldn't," he replied.

When I was investigating the Church, the teachings I just spoke of left me with a feeling that "my God doesn't feel like that about any of His children. Can they really believe those things and attribute that inequality to God? So we must be worshipping a different God."

I can just imagine that there are others who feel the same way I did.

How We Can Use the Scriptures to Show That the Doctrines of the Church Truly Teach That All Are Alike Unto God

I've broken this part of the presentation into four categories that most African-Americans have concerns about:

- EQUALITY
- SKIN COLOR
- CURSES
- PRIESTHOOD

Equality

Since Christ fulfilled His mission here on earth, wherein He fulfilled all righteousness, taking upon Himself all the sins of the world, His guidance to us through the scriptures has been that of total inclusion.

One has to search high and low, and be really creative with the interpretation of scripture, to support any point of separation, exclusion, or division, other than that of good and evil.

We can teach that this is a sampling of LDS doctrine on equality:

2 Nephi 21:3-4:

"And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord; and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears. But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked."

Mosiah 27:3:

"And there was a strict command throughout all the churches that there should be no persecutions among them, that there should be an equality among all men."

D&C 1:9-10:

"Yea, verily, to seal them up unto the day when the wrath of God shall be poured out upon the wicked without measure—Unto the day when the Lord shall come to recompense unto every man according to his work, and measure to every man according to the measure which he has measured to his fellow man."

D&C 38:24-25:

"And let every man esteem his brother as himself, and practise virtue and holiness before me. And again I say unto you, let every man esteem his brother as himself."

2 Nephi 26:28:

"Behold, hath the Lord commanded any that they should not partake of his goodness? Behold I say unto you, Nay; but all men are privileged the one like unto the other, and none are forbidden."

D&C 38:27:

"Behold, this I have given unto you as a parable, and it is even as I am. I say unto you, be one; and if ye are not one ye are not mine."

D&C 51:9:

"And let every man deal honestly, and be alike among this people, and receive alike, that ye may be one, even as I have commanded you."

D&C 76:111:

"For they shall be judged according to their works, and every man shall receive according to his own works, his own dominion, in the mansions which are prepared."

D&C 78:5-6:

"That you may be equal in the bonds of heavenly things, yea, and earthly things also, for the obtaining of heavenly things. For if ye are not equal in earthly things ye cannot be equal in obtaining heavenly things."

“No Respector of Persons”

The Lord teaches That He Is “no respector of persons” in the Old Testament, the New Testament, the Book of Mormon, and the Doctrine and Covenants:

Deuteronomy 16:19:

"Thou shalt not wrest judgment; thou shalt not respect persons, neither take a gift: for a gift doth blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous."

2 Chronicles 19:7:

"Wherefore now let the fear of the Lord be upon you; take heed and do it: for there is no iniquity with the Lord our God, nor respect of persons, nor taking of gifts."

Proverbs 24:23:

"These things also belong to the wise. It is not good to have respect of persons in judgment."

Proverbs 28:21:

"To have respect of persons is not good: for for a piece of bread that man will transgress."

Ephesians 6:9:

"And, ye masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening: knowing that your Master also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him."

Romans 2:11:

"For there is no respect of persons with God."

Colossians 3:25:

"But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons."

1 Peter 1:17:

"And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear."

D&C 1:34-35:

"And again, verily I say unto you, O inhabitants of the earth: I the Lord am willing to make these things known unto all flesh; For I am no respecter of persons, and will that all men shall know that the day speedily cometh; the hour is not yet, but is nigh at hand, when peace shall be taken from the earth, and the devil shall have power over his own dominion."

D&C 38:16:

"And for your salvation I give unto you a commandment, for I have heard your prayers, and the poor have complained before me, and the rich have I made, and all flesh is mine, and I am no respecter of persons."

D&C 38:26:

"For what man among you having twelve sons, and is no respecter of them, and they serve him obediently, and he saith unto the one: Be thou clothed in robes and sit thou here; and to the other: Be thou clothed in rags and sit thou there—and looketh upon his sons and saith I am just?"

Acts 10:34:

"Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons."

Take special notice that the last scripture occurred when Peter again received the command to take the gospel to all nations.

What parallels are found between Peter's time, the 1830s, and 1978? You may not be able to articulate the similarities at this point. However, you may be better able to do so by the end of this presentation.

Skin Color—What New Understanding Can We Gain About Skin Color?

If one were to study the Old and New Testament, Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price, he or she would understand that the words “black” and “white” were not used in reference to skin color in any of these sacred works.

Let’s explore every single mention of those words to see what we discover.

“Black”

The word “black” is found in the scriptures 44 times. Each time it is used in reference to man, the footnote, chapter heading, or circumstance within the context of the verse denotes being gloomy, in anguish, in spiritual darkness, or something similar.

Follow the footnotes for each citing of the word “black” in all of its forms.

Scriptural Support

The word "black" is used 26 times in the Old Testament and New Testament combined:

- 9 times referring to the elements
- 4 times referring to hair
- 3 times referring to a horse
- 1 time referring to part of a building
- 8 times referring to man:
 - Job 30:30
 - Song of Solomon 1:5
 - Song of Solomon 1:6
 - Jeremiah 8:21
 - Jeremiah 14:2
 - Lamentations 4:8
 - Joel 2:6
 - Nahum 2:10

Let's examine those eight scriptures.

Old Testament Examples

Job 30:30:

"My skin is black upon me, and my bones are burned with heat."

Was Job Black? If yes, it doesn't sound like it's a bad thing: And the Lord said . . . “there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man” (Job 2:3).

Was Job anguished? Read Job 30:1-29.

Song of Solomon 1:5:

"I am black, but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon."

Song of Solomon 1:6:

"Look not upon me, because I am black, because the sun hath looked upon me: my mother's children were angry with me; they made me the keeper of the vineyards; but mine own vineyard have I not kept."

Jeremiah 8:21:

"For the hurt of the daughter of my people am I hurt; I am ^ablack; astonishment hath taken hold on me."

Footnote "a" to this verse says "black" is a Hebrew idiom meaning "gloomy."

Jeremiah 14:2:

"Judah mourneth, and the gates thereof languish; they are ^ablack unto the ground; and the cry of Jerusalem is gone up."

Footnote "a" to this verse says "black" in this context means "dejected."

Lamentations 4:8:

"Their visage is blacker than a coal; they are not known in the streets: their skin cleaveth to their bones; it is withered, it is become like a stick."

According to Webster's Dictionary, "visage" is the face, usually with reference to shape, features, expression, and so on; it also means countenance.

According to the American Heritage Dictionary, "visage" can mean the face or facial expression of a person, or countenance. It can also mean appearance or aspect, as in "the bleak visage of winter."

Joel 2:6:

"Before their face the people shall be much pained: all faces shall gather blackness."

Footnote "a" to this verse says "black" is a Hebrew idiom meaning "gloom."

Nahum 2:10:

"She is empty, and void, and waste: and the heart melteth, and the knees smite together, and much pain is in all loins, and the faces of them all gather ^ablackness."

Footnote "a" to this verse says "black" is a Hebrew idiom meaning "gloom."

Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price

The word "black" is found 18 times in the Book of Mormon, Doctrine & Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price:

- 11 times referring to the elements
- 1 time referring to hair
- 1 time referring to actions
- 1 time referring to paint
- 4 times referring to man

- Moses 7:8
- Moses 7:22
- 2 Nephi 5:21
- 2 Nephi 26:33

Let's look at those four scriptures.

Continuing Revelation Offers New Understanding

Elder Bruce R. McConkie said, after the 1978 revelation,

“. . . We have now had added a flood of intelligence and light on this particular subject, and it erases all darkness, views and thoughts of the past. . . .”

With that flood of light, the Brethren updated the scriptures, publishing the new edition in 1981 to give us a new understanding.

Key Scriptural Passages

Moses 7:8:

"For behold, the Lord shall curse the land with much heat, and the barrenness thereof shall go forth forever; and there was a blackness came upon all the children of Canaan, that they were despised among all people."

Moses 7:22:

"And Enoch also beheld the residue of the people which were the sons of Adam; and they were a mixture of all the seed of Adam save it was the seed of Cain, for the seed of Cain were black, and had not place among them."

2 Nephi 5:21:

"And he had caused the cursing to come upon them, yea, even a sore cursing, because of their iniquity. For behold, they had hardened their hearts against him, that they had become like unto a flint; wherefore, as they were white, and exceedingly fair and delightsome, that they might not be enticing unto my people the Lord God did cause a ^dskin of blackness to come upon them."

Follow new footnote "d" (referencing skin of blackness) to 2 Nephi 30:6 to get an idea of what is meant by "skin."

2 Nephi 30:6:

"And then shall they rejoice; for they shall know that it is a blessing unto them from the hand of God; and their ^bscales of darkness shall begin to fall from their eyes; and many generations shall not pass away among them, save they shall be a pure and a delightsome people."

Follow new footnote "b" (referencing scales of darkness) to the bottom of the page.

b scales—TG Darkness, Spiritual, TG Spiritual Blindness

AGAIN NOTE: Not only are the footnotes new, but the explanations in the footnotes are new and shed a much different light on what was previously thought.

Also take note of the phrase in the last line of 2 Nephi 30:6, "save they shall be a pure and delightful people." Prior to the 1981 edition, the passage used to read "save they shall be a white and delightful people."

Research shows that the Prophet Joseph made the change, indicating that the word pure better fit the meaning. However, due to heavy persecution, the change was not made until after the 1978 revelation.

More Scriptural Support

3 Nephi 2:15-16:

"And their curse was taken from them, and their skin became ^bwhite like unto the Nephites; And their young men and their daughters became exceedingly fair, and they were numbered among the Nephites, and were called Nephites. And thus ended the thirteenth year."

Follow new footnote "b" (referencing white) to the following passages:

2 Nephi 5:21, 2 Nephi 30:6, Jacob 3:8 (scriptures we covered in exploring "white")

Mormon 9:6:

"O then ye unbelieving, turn ye unto the Lord; cry mightily unto the Father in the name of Jesus, that perhaps ye may be found spotless, pure, fair, and white, having been cleansed by the blood of the Lamb, at that great and last day."

Jacob 3:8:

"O my brethren, I fear that unless ye shall repent of your sins that their skins will be whiter than yours, when ye shall be brought with them before the throne of God."

1 Samuel 16:7:

"But the Lord said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart."

2 Nephi 26:33:

"For none of these iniquities come of the Lord; for he doeth that which is good among the children of men; and he doeth nothing save it be plain unto the children of men; and he inviteth them all to come unto him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; and he remembereth the heathen; and all are alike unto God, both Jew and Gentile."

Is This the Only Scripture Referring to Skin Color?

Is this the only scripture in all of the standard works that uses the word "black" to describe skin color? If you read the preceding verses in light of your new understanding, I believe its meaning here will be clear.

2 Nephi 26:17–32

"For thus saith the Lord God: They shall write the things which shall be done among them, and they shall be written and sealed up in a book, and those who have dwindled in unbelief shall not have them, for they seek to destroy the things of God.

"Wherefore, as those who have been destroyed have been destroyed speedily; and the multitude of their terrible ones shall be as chaff that passeth away—yea, thus saith the Lord God: It shall be at an instant, suddenly—

"And it shall come to pass, that those who have dwindled in unbelief shall be smitten by the hand of the Gentiles.

"And the Gentiles are lifted up in the pride of their eyes, and have stumbled, because of the greatness of their stumbling block, that they have built up many churches; nevertheless, they put down the power and miracles of God, and preach up unto themselves their own wisdom and their own learning, that they may get gain and grind upon the face of the poor.

"And there are many churches built up which cause envyings, and strifes, and malice.

"And there are also secret combinations, even as in times of old, according to the combinations of the devil, for he is the founder of all these things; yea, the founder of murder, and works of darkness; yea, and he leadeth them by the neck with a flaxen cord, until he bindeth them with his strong cords forever.

"For behold, my beloved brethren, I say unto you that the Lord God worketh not in darkness.

"He doeth not anything save it be for the benefit of the world; for he loveth the world, even that he layeth down his own life that he may draw all men unto him. Wherefore, he commandeth none that they shall not partake of his salvation.

"Behold, doth he cry unto any, saying: Depart from me? Behold, I say unto you, Nay; but he saith: Come unto me all ye ends of the earth, buy milk and honey, without money and without price.

"Behold, hath he commanded any that they should depart out of the synagogues, or out of the houses of worship? Behold, I say unto you, Nay.

"Hath he commanded any that they should not partake of his salvation? Behold I say unto you, Nay; but he hath given it free for all men; and he hath commanded his people that they should persuade all men to repentance.

"Behold, hath the Lord commanded any that they should not partake of his goodness? Behold I say unto you, Nay; but all men are privileged the one like unto the other, and none are forbidden.

"He commandeth that there shall be no priestcrafts; for, behold, priestcrafts are that men preach and set themselves up for a light unto the world, that they may get gain and praise of the world; but they seek not the welfare of Zion.

"Behold, the Lord hath forbidden this thing; wherefore, the Lord God hath given a commandment that all men should have charity, which charity is love. And except they should have charity they were nothing. Wherefore, if they should have charity they would not suffer the laborer in Zion to perish.

"But the laborer in Zion shall labor for Zion; for if they labor for money they shall perish.

"And again, the Lord God hath commanded that men should not murder; that they should not lie; that they should not steal; that they should not take the name of the Lord their God in vain; that they should not envy; that they should not have malice; that they should not contend one with another; that they should not commit whoredoms; and that they should do none of these things; for whoso doeth them shall perish."

Interpreting “Black and White” in Context

Note all the wickedness that’s being spoken of. Then take note of the invitation being offered.

Here the Lord is extending this wonderful invitation to the unrighteous as well as the righteous. That is the black and white being spoken of, which is consistent with the use of the words in all of the scripture we’ve covered thus far.

Supporting Parallel

Also note the use of the same thought in Alma 11:44:

"Now, this restoration shall come to all, both old and young, both bond and free, both male and female, both the wicked and the righteous; and even there shall not so much as a hair of their heads be lost; but every thing shall be restored to its perfect frame, as it is now, or in the body, and shall be brought and be arraigned before the bar of Christ the Son, and God the Father, and the Holy Spirit, which is one Eternal God, to be judged according to their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil."

“White”

Now let's examine the word “white.”

Scriptural Overview

The word “white” is found in 104 verses of scripture:

- 40 times in the Old Testament
- 28 times in the New Testament
- 24 times in the Book of Mormon
- 12 times in the Doctrine & Covenants

Of those occurrences of the word "white":

- 35 times refer to purity or righteousness

- 19 times refer to materials or objects
- 9 times refer to "the field," which is white and ready to harvest
- 7 times refer to an animal
- 4 times refer to hair
- 3 times refer to fruit or a tree
- 1 time refers to teeth
- 26 times refer to man

Occurrences Referring to Man

Of those 26 scriptures that refer to man, 18 refer to leprosy. Let's explore the remaining 8 scriptures:

- 1 Nephi 11:13
- 1 Nephi 13:15
- 2 Nephi 5:21
- 2 Nephi 26:33
- 3 Nephi 2:15
- 3 Nephi 19:25
- 3 Nephi 19:30
- Mormon 9:6

What do you notice about each of the passages referring to man? All are in the Book of Mormon.

Remaining Book of Mormon Uses of "White"

What are the other 16 occurrences of the word "white" in the Book of Mormon (of the 24 total) referring to?

- 11 refer to purity or righteousness
- 1 refers to materials or objects
- 1 refers to hair
- 3 refer to fruit or a tree

So far, "white" has not been used to describe skin color or a group of people in the Old Testament, New Testament, Doctrine & Covenants, Pearl of Great Price, or in 16 of 24 verses in the Book of Mormon.

We Follow Living Prophets

So does the word's meaning differ only in eight verses of the Book of Mormon (as listed above)?

Before we look at the remaining eight, let's look at this very important statement made by Elder Bruce R. McConkie just weeks after the 1978 revelation:

"Forget everything that I have said, or what President Brigham Young or President George Q. Cannon or whoever has said in days past that is contrary to the present revelation.

We spoke with a limited understanding and without the light and knowledge that now has come into the world. We get our truth and light line upon line and precept upon precept (2 Ne. 28:30; Isa. 28:9-10; D&C 98:11-12; 128:21).

We have now had added a new flood of intelligence and light on this particular subject, and it erases all the darkness and all the views and all the thoughts of the past. They don't matter anymore.

It doesn't make a particle of difference what anybody ever said about the Negro matter before the first day of June of this year (1978).

It is a new day and a new arrangement, and the Lord has now given the revelation that sheds light into the world on this subject."

—Sermons and Writings of Bruce R. McConkie
Part II—The Mission of the Holy Ghost
Chapter 9—Revelation on the Priesthood 1989
(Also spoken at a CES conference at BYU in August 1978)

One of the key points of Elder McConkie's statement is that "we have now had added a flood of intelligence and light on this particular subject, and it erases all the darkness and all of the views and all of the thoughts of the past."

In essence, there were thoughts and views that we've had that were not correct, and the revelation (what has been revealed) has helped us to see as we should have seen, as the Lord intended.

As I mentioned before, with the flood of intelligence and light received in 1978, great efforts went into updating the scriptures to reflect what was revealed, and a new edition of the scriptures was released in 1981.

To effectively maximize the scriptures as they relate to the revelation, follow all of the new footnotes that have been added. I'll also point out a few word changes as we move along.

Examining the Remaining Book of Mormon Passages

Now back to the remaining eight mentions of the word "white" in the Book of Mormon:

2 Nephi 5:21

"And he had caused the cursing to come upon them, yea, even a sore cursing, because of their iniquity. For behold, they had hardened their hearts against him, that they had become like unto a flint; wherefore, as they were white, and exceedingly fair and delightsome, that they might not be enticing unto my people the Lord God did cause a ^dskin of blackness to come upon them."

Follow the new footnote "d" for "skin": d 2 Ne. 30:6, 3 Ne. 2:15 (14-16).

2 Nephi 30:6:

"And then shall they rejoice; for they shall know that it is a blessing unto them from the hand of

God; and their ^bscales of darkness shall begin to fall from their eyes; and many generations shall not pass away among them, save they shall be a pure and a delightsome people."

Follow new footnote "b" for "scales": b TG Darkness, Spiritual. TG Spiritual Blindness.

Not only are the footnotes new, but the explanations in the footnotes are new and shed a much different light on what was previously thought.

Also take note of the phrase in the last line of 2 Nephi 30:6: "save they shall be a pure and delightsome people."

Prior to the 1981 edition, the passage used to read "save they shall be a white and delightsome people."

Research shows that the Prophet Joseph made the change indicating that the word pure better fit the meaning. However, due to heavy persecution, the change was not made until after the 1978 revelation.

1 Nephi 11:13

"And it came to pass that I looked and beheld the great city of Jerusalem, and also other cities. And I beheld the city of Nazareth; and in the city of Nazareth I beheld a virgin, and she was exceedingly fair and white."

It should be clear that this passage is describing Mary's degree of purity, not her race.

1 Nephi 13:15

"And I beheld the Spirit of the Lord, that it was upon the Gentiles, and they did prosper and obtain the land for their inheritance; and I beheld that they were white, and exceedingly fair and ^cbeautiful, like unto my people before they were slain."

Follow new footnote "c" for beautiful: c 2 Ne. 5:21, 4 Ne. 1:10; Morm. 9:6

4 Nephi 1:10:

"And now, behold, it came to pass that the people of Nephi did wax strong, and did multiply exceedingly fast, and became an exceedingly ^afair and delightsome people."

Notice the new footnote "a" for "fair" makes reference to 1 Ne. 13:15; 2 Ne. 5:21, Morm. 9:6.

Mormon 9:6

"O then ye unbelieving, turn ye unto the Lord; cry mightily unto the Father in the name of Jesus, that perhaps ye may be found spotless, pure, fair, and white, having been cleansed by the blood of the Lamb, at that great and last day."

In this passage the word spotless is being defined, and then we are given detail on how to achieve this spotlessness.

Also note that all of these scriptures are being tied together through the new footnoting. There appears to be purpose in this.

2 Nephi 26:33 Revisited

2 Nephi 26:33:

"For none of these iniquities come of the Lord; for he doeth that which is good among the children of men; and he doeth nothing save it be plain unto the children of men; and he inviteth them all to come unto him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; and he remembereth the heathen; and all are alike unto God, both Jew and Gentile."

From what we've learned so far from the meaning of the word "white" as it is used in the scriptures, can this be one of the only places it is referring to skin color?

As before, start reading from verse 17, and note how the wicked and their wicked deeds are spoken of. Then read about the love of the Lord and how that love and invitation are extended to all, both the wicked and the righteous.

Again, you'll certainly conclude that the "black" and "white" being spoken of refer to wickedness and righteousness, not to races of people.

Additional Scriptural Connections

2 Nephi 2:15:

"And their curse was taken from them, and their skin became ^bwhite like unto the Nephites."

Follow new footnote "b" for "white": 2 Ne. 5:21; 30:6; Jacob 3:8

Again we find the changes inspired by the 1978 revelation bringing us right back to 2 Nephi 5:21 and 2 Nephi 30:6.

Now let's take a look at one that hasn't yet been mentioned.

The Meaning of "Whiter"

But first, let's take a side note and look at two of the three times the word "whiter" is used in the scriptures:

Psalms 51:7:

"Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow."

Lamentations 4:7:

"Her Nazarites were purer than snow, they were whiter than milk, they were more ruddy in body than rubies, their polishing was of sapphire."

Have you ever seen a person whiter than snow or milk? It is clear to me that once again, white or whiter is referring to purity.

The third occurrence of the word whiter is found in the last scripture being referenced in the footnote of 3 Nephi 2:15.

Jacob 3:8:

"O my brethren, I fear that unless ye shall repent of your sins that their skins will be ^awhiter than yours, when ye shall be brought with them before the throne of God."

Follow new footnote "a" for "whiter": a 3 Ne. 2:15.

How Does God Judge?

Question: What will God judge us on when we are brought before His throne? Will He judge us on our physical appearance? He answers that question himself in 1 Samuel, Isaiah, and 2 Nephi:

Samuel 16:7:

"But the Lord said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart."

Isaiah 11:3:

"And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears."

Nephi 21:3:

"And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord; and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears."

Transfiguration and Whiteness

Nephi 19:25:

"And it came to pass that Jesus blessed them as they did pray unto him; and his countenance did smile upon them, and the light of his countenance did shine upon them, and behold they were as ^dwhite as the countenance and also the garments of Jesus; and behold the whiteness thereof did exceed all the whiteness, yea, even there could be nothing upon earth so white as the whiteness thereof."

Follow new footnote "d" for "white": d TG Transfiguration

3 Nephi 19:30:

"And when Jesus had spoken these words he came again unto his disciples; and behold they did pray steadfastly, without ceasing, unto him; and he did smile upon them again; and behold they were ^awhite, even as Jesus."

Follow new footnote "a" for "white": a Matt. 17:2.

"And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light."

Conclusions on the Word “White”

The conclusion for the Book of Mormon:

- 19 times the word “white” is referring to purity or righteousness
- 1 time the word “white” is referring to materials or objects
- 1 time the word “white” is referring to hair
- 3 times the word “white” is referring to fruit or a tree

The conclusion for all scripture:

- 43 times the word “white” is referring to purity or righteousness
- 19 times the word “white” is referring to materials or objects
- 9 times the word “white” is referring to “the field,” which is white and ready...
- 7 times the word “white” is referring to an animal
- 4 times the word “white” is referring to hair
- 3 times the word “white” is referring to fruit or a tree
- 1 time the word “white” is referring to teeth
- 18 times the word “white” is referring to leprosy

A study of the Old Testament and the New Testament will help us to understand that the word “white” is not used to describe a race of people.

The changes in the Book of Mormon that resulted from the 1978 revelation are consistent with the Bible, and helps us to understand what was previously misunderstood.

Conclusion

The words “black” and “white” do not refer to race or literal skin color in the scriptures.

Curses

In 1954, President David O. McKay said:

“There is not now, and there never has been a doctrine in this Church that the Negroes are under a divine curse. There is no doctrine in the Church of any kind pertaining to the Negro.”

(Sterling M. McMurrin affidavit dated March 6, 1979. See *David O. McKay and the Rise of Modern Mormonism* by Greg Prince and William Robert Wright.)

Definition of Doctrine

doc•trine noun

a particular principle, position, or policy taught or advocated, as of a religion or government: Catholic doctrines; the Monroe Doctrine.

something that is taught; teachings collectively: religious doctrine.

a body or system of teachings relating to a particular subject: the doctrine of the Catholic Church.

As you search your mind for perceived doctrine regarding Blacks, include the Old Testament and New Testament in your consideration of President McKay's statement.

Understanding “Curse”

The understanding of the definition of “curse” that I have now is much different from the one I used to have. This is all due to the Book of Mormon.

Now I have these scriptures that give us some of the plain and precious truths that were not clear to my understanding before. For me, this heightens the importance of continuing revelation.

Definitions of “Cursed”

Let's start out by covering the 15 different definitions for the word “cursed” as listed in Webster's Dictionary:

- the expression of a wish that misfortune, evil, doom, etc., befall a person, group, etc.
- a formula or charm intended to cause such misfortune to another.
- the act of reciting such a formula.
- a profane oath; curse word.
- an evil that has been invoked upon one.
- the cause of evil, misfortune, or trouble.
- something accursed.
- Slang. the menstrual period; menstruation.
- an ecclesiastical censure or anathema.
- to wish or invoke evil, calamity, injury, or destruction upon.
- to swear at.
- to blaspheme.
- to afflict with great evil.
- to excommunicate.
- to utter curses; swear profanely.

How do we know which definition to apply? Are we sure that the most widely accepted meaning— which has and continues to be passed down through the generations—is correct?

A careful study of the scriptures might shed new light on definition numbers 9 and 14 above, because the Book of Mormon teaches me that a curse is a separation from God, His Church, His ways, His knowledge and blessings, and/or His spirit, caused by the way that we live.

Scriptural Understanding of “Curse”

Some of the sons of Lehi would not obey the commandments, thus they lost the gifts of the Spirit and separated themselves from God and the church. Thus were they cursed.

When they repented, they regained the Spirit and the presence of the Lord, and became once again pure, clean, white (apply new understanding), and delightsome, and thus the “curse” or the “separation” from God was removed.

Scriptural Examples of “Curse” as Separation from God

Let’s take a look at just a few scriptures that will help to illustrate this.

Doctrine and Covenants

D&C 29:41:

"Wherefore, I, the Lord God, caused that he should be cast out from the Garden of Eden, from my presence, because of his transgression, wherein he became spiritually dead, which is the first death, even that same death which is the last death, which is spiritual, which shall be pronounced upon the wicked when I shall say: Depart, ye cursed."

Moses and Cain

Moses 5:36, 38-39:

"And now thou shalt be cursed from the earth which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother’s blood from thy hand.

And Cain said unto the Lord: Satan tempted me because of my brother’s flocks. And I was wroth also; for his offering thou didst accept and not mine; my punishment is greater than I can bear.

Behold thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the Lord, and from thy face shall I be hid."

Alma and the Amlicites

Alma 3:18-19:

"Now the Amlicites knew not that they were fulfilling the words of God when they began to mark themselves in their foreheads; nevertheless they had come out in open rebellion against God; therefore it was expedient that the curse should fall upon them.

Now I would that ye should see that they brought upon themselves the curse; and even so doth every man that is cursed bring upon himself his own condemnation."

They rebelled against God, and lost His presence. Verse 19 shows that every man bringeth, through his choice not to be obedient, a separation from God, or a curse.

The Anti-Nephi-Lehies

Alma 23:16-18:

"And now it came to pass that the king and those who were converted were desirous that they might have a name, that thereby they might be distinguished from their brethren; therefore the king consulted with Aaron and many of their priests, concerning the name that they should take upon them, that they might be distinguished.

“And it came to pass that they called their names Anti-Nephi-Lehies; and they were called by this name and were no more called Lamanites.

“And they began to be a very industrious people; yea, and they were friendly with the Nephites; therefore, they did open a correspondence with them, and the curse of God did no more follow them.”

Note that these Lamanites repented and converted to the Church, thus removing the curse or separation from God.

Follow new footnote “c” to 2 Nephi 30:6, then follow footnote “b” for the word "scales."

Obedience vs. Rebellion

1 Nephi 2:19-24:

"And it came to pass that the Lord spake unto me, saying: Blessed art thou, Nephi, because of thy faith, for thou hast sought me diligently, with lowliness of heart.

“And inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments, ye shall prosper, and shall be led to a land of promise; yea, even a land which I have prepared for you; yea, a land which is choice above all other lands.

“And inasmuch as thy brethren shall rebel against thee, they shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord.

“And inasmuch as thou shalt keep my commandments, thou shalt be made a ruler and a teacher over thy brethren.

“For behold, in that day that they shall ^arebel against me, I will curse them even with a sore curse, and they shall have no power over thy seed except they shall rebel against me also.”

Follow footnote "a" in verse 23, which refers to Job 24:13: "They are of those that rebel against the blight; they know not the ways thereof, nor abide in the paths thereof."

2 Nephi 1:17-18:

"My heart hath been weighed down with sorrow from time to time, for I have feared, lest for the hardness of your hearts the Lord your God should come out in the fulness 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, and are led according to the will and captivity of the devil."

Responsibility and Accountability

2 Nephi 4:5-6:

"But behold, my sons and my daughters, I cannot go down to my grave save I should leave a blessing upon you; for behold, I know that if ye are brought up in the way ye should go ye will not depart from it.

"Wherefore, if ye are cursed, behold, I leave my blessing upon you, that the cursing may be taken from you and be answered upon the heads of your parents."

Follow footnote "c" for "heads" to find out why—6c D&C 68:25 (25-29):

"And again, inasmuch as parents have children in Zion, or in any of her stakes which are organized, that teach them not to understand the doctrine of repentance, faith in Christ the Son of the living God, and of baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of the hands, when eight years old, the sin be upon the heads of the parents."

The parents did not teach the ways of the Lord. Thus they cannot be on His paths, in His ways.

2 Nephi 4:34:

"O Lord, I have trusted in thee, and I will trust in thee forever. I will not put my trust in the arm of flesh; for I know that cursed is he that putteth his trust in the arm of flesh. Yea, cursed is he that putteth his trust in man or maketh flesh his arm."

Separation from God Defined

2 Nephi 5:20-23:

"Wherefore, the word of the Lord was fulfilled which he spake unto me, saying that: Inasmuch as they will not hearken unto thy words they shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord. And behold, they were cut off from his presence.

"And he had caused the cursing to come upon them, yea, even a sore cursing, because of their iniquity. For behold, they had hardened their hearts against him, that they had become like unto a flint; wherefore, as they were white, and exceedingly fair and delightsome, that they might not be enticing unto my people the Lord God did cause a skin of blackness to come upon them.

"And thus saith the Lord God: I will cause that they shall be loathsome unto thy people, save they shall repent of their iniquities. And cursed shall be the seed of him that ^amixeth with their seed; for they shall be cursed even with the same cursing. And the Lord spake it, and it was done."

Follow footnote "a" in verse 23: TG Marriage, Interfaith.

Note that the footnote points out that the issue is "interfaith" marriage. The mixing of faith gives way for the traditions of the parent that does not believe to create patterns of separation between the child and the Lord, thus cursing the child.

Mark and Separation

Alma 3:8-10:

"And this was done that their seed might be distinguished from the seed of their brethren, that thereby the Lord God might preserve his people, that they might not mix and believe in incorrect traditions which would prove their destruction.

"And it came to pass that whosoever did mingle his seed with that of the Lamanites did bring the same curse upon his seed.

“Therefore, whosoever suffered himself to be led away by the Lamanites was called under that head, and there was a mark set upon him.”

Alma 3:14:

"Thus the word of God is fulfilled, for these are the words which he said to Nephi: Behold, the Lamanites have I cursed, and I will set a mark on them that they and their seed may be separated from thee and thy seed, from this time henceforth and forever, except they repent of their wickedness and turn to me that I may have mercy upon them."

3 Nephi 2:14-16:

"And it came to pass that those Lamanites who had united with the Nephites were numbered among the Nephites;

And their curse was taken from them, and their skin became white like unto the Nephites;

And their young men and their daughters became exceedingly fair, and they were numbered among the Nephites, and were called Nephites. And thus ended the thirteenth year."

Accountability Before God

The Articles of Faith of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, second article:

"We believe that men will be punished for their own sins, and not for Adam's transgression."

(See History of the Church, Vol. 4, pp. 535—541.)

Final Clarification on “Curse”

Notice the consistent use of the word “curse” to describe sinful living or traditions that separate one from the Lord and His people, His spirit, and His path.

This helps us to understand which definition for "curse" from Webster's Dictionary we should apply.

Priesthood

Many in and outside the Church are not aware that all men were holding the priesthood when the gospel was restored in its fullness. So actually, the 1978 revelation gave the priesthood *back* to Blacks.

African-Americans Who Were Ordained to the Priesthood in the 1800s and 1900s

Elijah Abel, ordained by Joseph Smith in 1836

Walker Lewis, ordained in 1844

William McCary, also known as "Black Pete," ordained in 1846

Enoch Able, ordained in 1900

Elijah Abel, grandson of the first Elijah Abel, ordained in 1934

Statements by Church Leaders on the Priesthood Ban

So if Blacks are holding the priesthood and it wasn't an issue, when did it become an issue? Let's look again at those statements from our church leaders.

President David O. McKay

"There is not now, and there never has been a doctrine in this Church that the Negroes are under a divine curse.

There is no doctrine in the Church of any kind pertaining to the Negro.

'We believe' that we have a scriptural precedent for withholding the priesthood from the Negro. It is a practice, not a doctrine and the practice someday will be changed. And that's all there is to it."

President George Albert Smith is also quoted as having said the same thing.

Elder Dallin H. Oaks

"It is not the pattern of the Lord to give reasons. We can put reasons to the commandments—when we do, we are on our own.

Some people put reasons to the ban, and they turned out to be spectacularly wrong. There is a lesson in that. I am referring to reasons given by General Authorities and elaborated on by others. The whole set of reasons seemed to be unnecessary risk-taking.

Let's not make the mistake that's been made in the past here and in other areas—trying to put reasons to revelations. The reasons turn out to be man-made to a great extent."

Elder Bruce R. McConkie

And Elder Bruce R. McConkie's statement again—one of my favorites:

"Forget everything that I have said, or what President Brigham Young or President George Q. Cannon or whoever has said in days past that is contrary to the present revelation.

We spoke with a limited understanding and without the light and knowledge that now has come into the world."

One of his key point is "we have now had added a flood of intelligence and light on this particular subject, and it erases all the darkness and all of the views and all of the thoughts of the past."

New Light and Understanding After 1978

So if we are to do away with all that was taught on this issue prior to 1978, what understanding would the Lord, through the Brethren, want us to have?

What new direction came with this flood of intelligence and light that Elder McConkie wrote had been added unto them?

Note again that this flood of new light came in 1978 and we received a new edition of the scriptures in 1981.

Then further note that almost every passage dealing with white, black, curse, and so on received new footnotes. So we find new direction in the scriptures—more specifically, in the series of footnotes and at least one word change that I'm aware of.

We've seen some of these in the sections we've covered so far on skin color and curses.

Questions I Had to Ask Myself

What does the Lord want me to understand about these passages since He inspired the Brethren to call attention to them with new footnotes?

Though the footnoting confirms, do I need it to understand what the scripture means?

Were the Brethren changing or clarifying the meaning of the scriptures by the 1981 additions?

We know that they would not attempt to change the meaning of scripture, but were merely clarifying their meaning for our understanding.

Modern Revelation

Now let's take a look at the new understanding gained on priesthood from modern revelation.

One of the great things about the Doctrine & Covenants is that it is not translated scripture from another language as are the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the Book of Mormon. Instead, it is direct revelation given in our language, in our day, for our day, with one of its main purposes to give the Prophet's direction on how to set up and administer the Lord's restored gospel.

According to D&C 18:3-5:

"And if you know that they are true, behold, I give unto you a commandment, that you rely upon the things which are written;

"For in them are all things written concerning the foundation of my church, my gospel, and my rock.

"Wherefore, if you shall build up my church, upon the foundation of my gospel and my rock, the gates of hell shall not prevail against you."

Nature of Revelation in the Doctrine & Covenants

Let's first look at the explanatory introduction to the Doctrine & Covenants. It helps us to see that these sacred revelations were received in answer to prayer in times of need, and came out of real life situations involving real people.

The Prophet and his associates sought for divine guidance, and these revelations certify that they received it.

The Lord does not excuse what He has said:

"Search these commandments, for they are true and faithful, and the prophecies and promises which are in them shall all be fulfilled.

What I the Lord have spoken, I have spoken, and I excuse not myself." (D&C 1:37-38.)

The Lord does not vary from what He had said:

"For God doth not walk in crooked paths, neither doth he turn to the right hand nor to the left, neither doth he vary from that which he hath said, therefore his paths are straight, and his course is one eternal round.

"Remember, remember that it is not the work of God that is frustrated, but the work of men." (D&C 3:2-3.)

Obedience vs. Social Pressure

Society's pressures are not an acceptable reason for disobeying the Lord's command:

"Behold, you have been entrusted with these things, but how strict were your commandments; and remember also the promises which were made to you, if you did not transgress them.

"And behold, how oft you have transgressed the commandments and the laws of God, and have gone on in the persuasions of men.

"For, behold, you should not have feared man more than God. Although men set at naught the counsels of God, and despise his words—

"Yet you should have been faithful; and he would have extended his arm and supported you against all the fiery darts of the adversary; and he would have been with you in every time of trouble." (D&C 3:5-8.)

Scriptures in the Doctrine & Covenants on Priesthood

Section 4

A revelation given through Joseph Smith the Prophet to his father, Joseph Smith, Sen., at Harmony, Pennsylvania, February 1829 (see HC 1:28).

D&C 4:3:

"Therefore, if ye have desires to serve God ye are ^acalled to the work."

Follow new footnote “a” to the bottom of the page. There are four scriptures listed.

Let’s take a look at one of the footnoted scriptures, D&C 36:5:

"That as many as shall come before my servants Sidney Rigdon and Joseph Smith, Jun., embracing this calling and commandment, shall be ordained and sent forth to preach the everlasting gospel among the nations."

The remaining footnotes in D&C 4:3 footnote “a” are D&C 11:4, 36:5, and 63:57, which we’ll cover shortly.

D&C 4:5:

"And faith, hope, charity and love, with an eye single to the glory of God, ^gqualify him for the work."

Follow new footnote “g” to the bottom of the page to find the following: TG Priesthood, Qualifying for.

Verse 5, then, gives us the criteria for qualifying for the priesthood, which would be faith, hope, charity, and love with an eye single to the glory of God.

Section 6

A revelation given to Joseph Smith the Prophet and Oliver Cowdery at Harmony, Pennsylvania, April 1829 (see HC 1:32–35). The Prophet inquired of the Lord through the Urim and Thummim and received this response:

D&C 6:4:

"Yea, whosoever will thrust in his sickle and reap, the same is ^acalled of God."

Follow footnote "a" to the three scriptures listed: D&C 11:4, 12:4, and 14:4.

Section 11

A revelation given through Joseph Smith the Prophet to his brother Hyrum Smith at Harmony, Pennsylvania, May 1829 (see HC 1: 39–46). This revelation was received through the Urim and Thummim in answer to Joseph’s supplication and inquiry. History of the Church suggests that this revelation was received after the restoration of the Aaronic Priesthood.

D&C 11:4:

"Yea, whosoever will thrust in his sickle and reap, the same is ^bcalled of God."

Follow footnote "b" to five scriptures about being called: D&C 4:3, 6:4, 12:4, 14:4, and Rev. 14:15.

Scriptures in the Doctrine & Covenants on Priesthood

Section 12

A revelation given through Joseph Smith the Prophet to Joseph Knight, Sen., at Harmony, Pennsylvania, May 1829 (see HC 1:47–48). At Joseph Knight's request, the Prophet inquired of the Lord and received the revelation.

D&C 12:4: "Yea, whosoever will thrust in his sickle and reap, the same is ^bcalled of God."

- Follow footnote "b" to D&C 6:4, 11:4, 14:4, and Rev. 14:15.

Section 14

A revelation given through Joseph Smith the Prophet to David Whitmer at Fayette, New York, June 1829 (see HC 1:48–50). This revelation and the revelations in the two following sections (15 and 16) were given in answer to an inquiry through the Urim and Thummim.

D&C 14:4: "Yea, whosoever will thrust in his sickle and reap, the same is called of God."

Section 36

A revelation given through Joseph Smith the Prophet to Edward Partridge near Fayette, New York, December 1830 (see HC 1:131). See heading to Section 35. The Prophet said that Edward Partridge "was a pattern of piety, and one of the Lord's great men."

D&C 36:4-5: "And now this calling and commandment give I unto you concerning all men—That as many as shall come before my servants Sidney Rigdon and Joseph Smith, Jun., embracing this calling and commandment, shall be ^aordained and sent forth to preach the everlasting gospel among the nations."

- Follow the new footnote "a" for "ordained," which leads to D&C 4:3 (which we've already covered), D&C 63:57 (which we will cover shortly), and TG Priesthood, Ordination. But did we need the new footnote to understand this commandment from God?

D&C 36:7: "And this commandment shall be given unto the elders of my church, that every man which will embrace it with singleness of heart may be ordained and sent forth, even as I have spoken."

Section 63

A revelation given through Joseph Smith the Prophet at Kirtland, Ohio, late in August 1831 (see HC 1:206–211). The Prophet, Sidney Rigdon, and Oliver Cowdery had arrived in Kirtland on August 27 following their visit to Missouri. Prefacing his record of this revelation, the Prophet wrote: "In these infant days of the Church, there was a great anxiety to obtain the word of the Lord upon every subject that in any way concerned our salvation; and as the land of Zion was now the most important temporal object in view, I inquired of the Lord for further information upon the gathering of the Saints, and the purchase of the land, and other matters."

D&C 63:57: "And again, verily I say unto you, ^athose who desire in their hearts, in meekness, to warn sinners to repentance, let them be ordained unto this power."

Follow the new footnote "a" for "those":

D&C 4:3: "Therefore, if ye have desires to serve God ye are called to the work."

D&C 36:5: "That as many as shall come before my servants Sidney Rigdon and Joseph Smith, Jun., embracing this calling and commandment, shall be ordained and sent forth to preach the everlasting gospel among the nations."

It appears that the Lord wanted us to know exactly who He was speaking of when He said "those." How grateful we are for continuing revelation.

D&C 84:33-35

"For whoso is faithful unto the obtaining these two priesthoods of which I have spoken, and the magnifying their calling, are sanctified by the Spirit unto the renewing of their bodies. . . . And also all they who receive this priesthood receive me, saith the Lord."

It appears that these two priesthoods are available to all who seek to obtain them, with one exception. This is the only place in the Doctrine & Covenants—the book that contains the Lord's commandments regarding how to establish and administer the principles and ordinances of the restored gospel—where it is revealed that some would not have rights to the priesthood.

D&C 121:16-21

"Cursed are all those that shall lift up the heel against mine anointed, saith the Lord, and cry they have sinned when they have not sinned before me, saith the Lord, but have done that which was meet in mine eyes, and which I commanded them.

"But those who cry transgression do it because they are the servants of sin, and are the children of disobedience themselves.

"And those who swear falsely against my servants, that they might bring them into bondage and death—

"Wo unto them; because they have offended my little ones they shall be severed from the ordinances of mine house.

"Their basket shall not be full, their houses and their barns shall perish, and they themselves shall be despised by those that flattered them.

"They shall not have right to the priesthood, nor their posterity after them from generation to generation."

Articles of Faith

Second Article of Faith: "We believe that men will be punished for their own sins and not for Adam's transgressions." This Article of Faith is consistent with all that the Lord has revealed in the passages we've just read.

Before we examine the next Section, let's take a look at the timeline for each time the Lord said that all men who embraced or had desires to do His work could be ordained to the priesthood:

February 1829—Section 4:3
February 1829—Section 4:5
April 1829—Section 6:4
May 1829—Section 11:4
May 1829—Section 12:4
June 1829—Section 14:4
December 1830—Section 36:4-5
December 1830—Section 36:7
August 1831—Section 63:57
September 22 and 23, 1832—Section 84:33-35

Look closely at the dates. Now notice that the revelation we now know as Section 1 was actually received after all of the other revelations with the exception of Section 84. Yet this revelation was chosen to be the Lord's preface to these doctrines, covenants, and commandments. If one only reads one section of this sacred work, this section gives a direct and clear understanding of the Lord's will concerning all men and the priesthood.

Section 1

A revelation given through Joseph Smith the Prophet during a special conference of elders of the Church held at Hiram, Ohio, November 1, 1831 (see HC 1: 221–224). Many revelations had been received from the Lord prior to this time, and the compilation of these for publication in book form was one of the principal subjects passed on at the conference. This section constitutes the Lord's Preface to the doctrines, covenants, and commandments given in this dispensation.

"HEARKEN, O ye people of my church, saith the voice of him who dwells on high, and whose eyes are upon all men; yea, verily I say: Harken ye people from afar; and ye that are upon the islands of the sea, listen together.

"For verily the voice of the Lord is unto all men, and there is none to escape; and there is no eye that shall not see, neither ear that shall not hear, neither heart that shall not be penetrated. . . .

"And the voice of warning shall be unto all people, by the mouths of my disciples, whom I have chosen in these last days. . . .

"Unto the day when the Lord shall come to recompense unto every man according to his work, and measure to every man according to the measure which he has measured to his fellow man.

"Wherefore the voice of the Lord is unto the ends of the earth, that all that will hear may hear: . . .

"Wherefore, I the Lord, knowing the calamity which should come upon the inhabitants of the earth, called upon my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., and spake unto him from heaven, and gave him commandments;

"And also gave commandments to others, that they should proclaim these things unto the world; and all this that it might be fulfilled, which was written by the prophets—

"The weak things of the world shall come forth and break down the mighty and strong ones, that man should not counsel his fellow man, neither trust in the arm of flesh—

"But that every man might ^aspeak in the name of God the Lord, even the Savior of the world;"

Follow the new footnote "a" on the word "speak" to the bottom of the page, where it says "20 a TG Authority."

What is the "authority" to speak or act in God's name?

TG stands for Topical Guide. Go to the Topical Guide, look up "Authority," and you'll find 44 scriptural references indicating that this passage is referring to priesthood.

This scripture and its supporting footnote lead me to believe that the priesthood was to go to all worthy men.

Continuing on, notice the use of the semicolon at the end of verse 20, indicating a continuation of the sentence's thought. The Lord gives purpose for all men being able to speak in His name, that:

"That faith also might increase in the earth;

"That mine everlasting covenant might be established;

"That the fulness of my gospel might be proclaimed by the weak and the simple unto the ends of the world, and before kings and rulers."

Despite the many inequalities of man, one demonstrated through the then-current practice of slavery, the Lord substantiates that this command is from Him. He also informs us that these commandments were given to His servants in their weakness and after the manner of their language. This is important to understand that the Lord did not choose perfect men to restore the gospel, and that it was given in their language, English. The D&C is unique in this, since the Bible and the Book of Mormon were translated from ancient foreign languages.

Notice that the words "black" and "white" are not used at all in reference to man in the Doctrine & Covenants. Instead, the words for wicked and righteous, spiritual darkness and purity are expressed in words that are common to our language and our day, that they might come to understand something they may not have understood at the time.

D&C 1:24-38: "Behold, I am God and have spoken it; these commandments are of me, and were given unto my servants in their weakness, after the manner of their language, that they might come to understanding. And when they were in error that it might be made known, and as they sought wisdom on those points that they might be taught from on high.

"And inasmuch as they erred it might be made known;

"And inasmuch as they sought wisdom they might be instructed; . . .

"And again, verily I say unto you, O inhabitants of the earth: I the Lord am willing to make these things known unto all flesh;

"For I am no respecter of persons, and will that all men shall know that the day speedily cometh; the hour is not yet, but is nigh at hand, when peace shall be taken from the earth, and the devil shall have power over his own dominion. . . .

"What I the Lord have spoken, I have spoken, and I excuse not myself."

Thoughts and ways of life ingrained for decades over the span of many generations don't disappear overnight, but dissipate over time when the desire to do so and effort to eradicate them are present. We each grow line upon line, precept upon precept, even in the 1800s as we do today. What made a man accept the gospel of Jesus Christ and still maintain slaves? The desire for him to extend all the blessings given to him from God may have required much prayer, growth, experience, and time.

What Is Revealed in the Revelation?

An excerpt from Declaration 2:

Dear Brethren:

As we have witnessed the expansion of the work of the Lord over the earth, we have been grateful that people of many nations have responded to the message of the restored gospel, and have joined the Church in ever-increasing numbers. This, in turn, has inspired us with a desire to extend to every worthy member of the Church all of the privileges and blessings, which the gospel affords.

This passage appears to indicate that this decision was in the hands of man, and that their desire played a significant role in this issue.

Conclusion—So in Order to Reach African-Americans We Must:

Understand the language among African-Americans regarding the Church and its members.

Know that the culture is one of a highly persecuted people who want to know that their previous perception of the Church is no longer the case.

We need to be honest and stop denying what everybody knows to be true. There is plenty of written documentation that we need to explain somehow. We just can't wish it away. It's like walking in with a milk mustache: "I didn't have any milk."

Learn and teach what the Lord has given us through the Brethren to understand these issues. You don't need the philosophies of men on this issue. You can go to the scriptures—study them out.

I recommend that you don't take my word for anything, but that you actually go to the scriptures and get on your knees for everything that you don't understand. He'll give it to us. He really will.

And as a result of learning this information, what happens?

Well, this is what we've seen when we've taught from the scriptures—this new direction that the Brethren have given us:

The discussions continue, resulting in baptism.

Brothers and sisters of color—of all colors—come back into the Church as a result of now feeling more comfortable.

Members are strengthened and more active participants in their stakes, in their wards.

Missionaries are armed, and members are armed. They go out with knowledge of how to deal with these issues, and now they can actually help someone.

And finally, you are able to keep your covenant to feed the Lord's sheep.

How do you think the Lord would feel if we as a Church ignored these people—especially when we have this pattern of studying the language and the culture of people before we go out to try to reach them, but yet putting no effort forth for this group of people?

I think that He would be very displeased with us. But I know that if we do this—if we study these things, the language and the culture of the people, and what the Brethren have given us—that we will see a flood of African-Americans come into the Church.

And I leave these things with you in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.