

A Tale of Two Meanings: The “Skin of Blackness” in Mormonism

The Book of Mormon describes a “skin of blackness” as a divine curse placed upon a group of people called the Lamanites. This infographic explores the dramatic shift in how this concept is understood, pitting the direct teachings of the church’s founder against contemporary explanations that reframe its meaning.

The Historical Record (1830–1844)

Intermarriage Was Encouraged to Make Descendants ‘White’

An 1831 revelation states men should take Native American wives so their “posterity may become white and delightsome.”



Joseph Smith Identified a Skeleton as a ‘White Lamanite’

In 1834, Smith described a skeleton named Zelf, stating “the curse was taken from him.”



Missionaries Were Sent to Specific Native American Tribes

From 1830, Joseph Smith identified tribes like the Seneca and Delaware as the Lamanites needing conversion.



The Modern Apologetic Claim



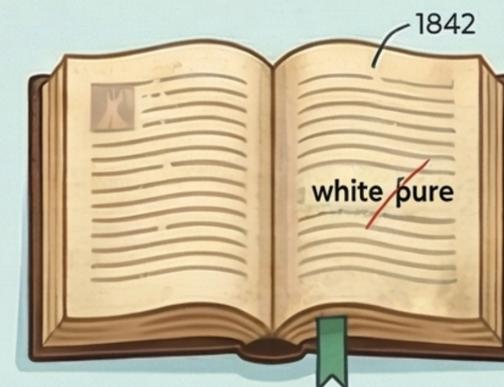
The “Curse” Was Symbolic

Apologists argue “skin of blackness” refers to spiritual death or being “cut off from the Lord.”



It Was an Artificial Mark

Other theories propose the “skin” was actually tattoos, war paint, or animal furs.



A Textual Change Clarified Intent

An 1842 edit changing ‘white and delightsome’ to ‘pure and delightsome’ is cited as proof of non-literal intent.