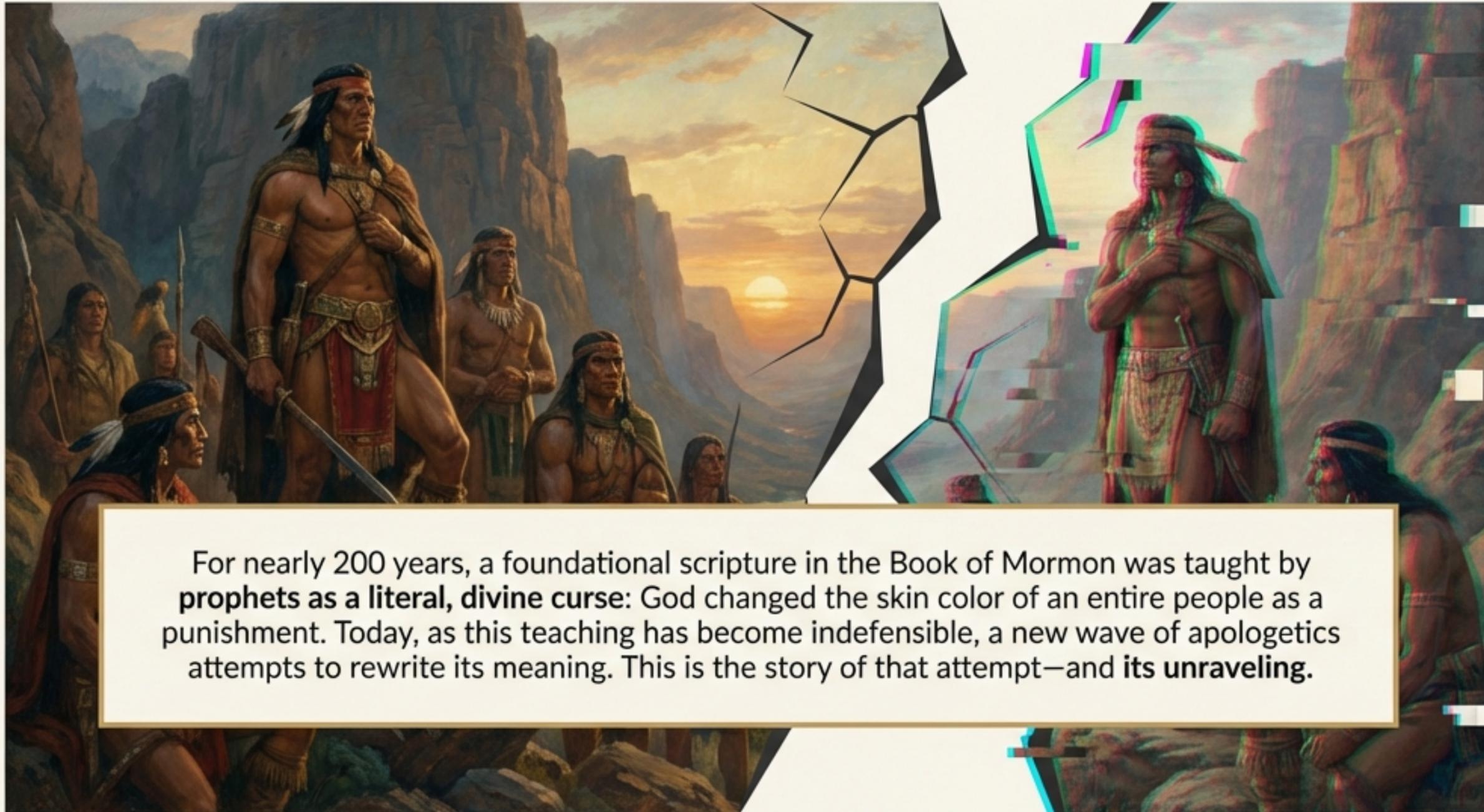


The Unraveling of an Apology: Deconstructing the “Skin of Blackness”.

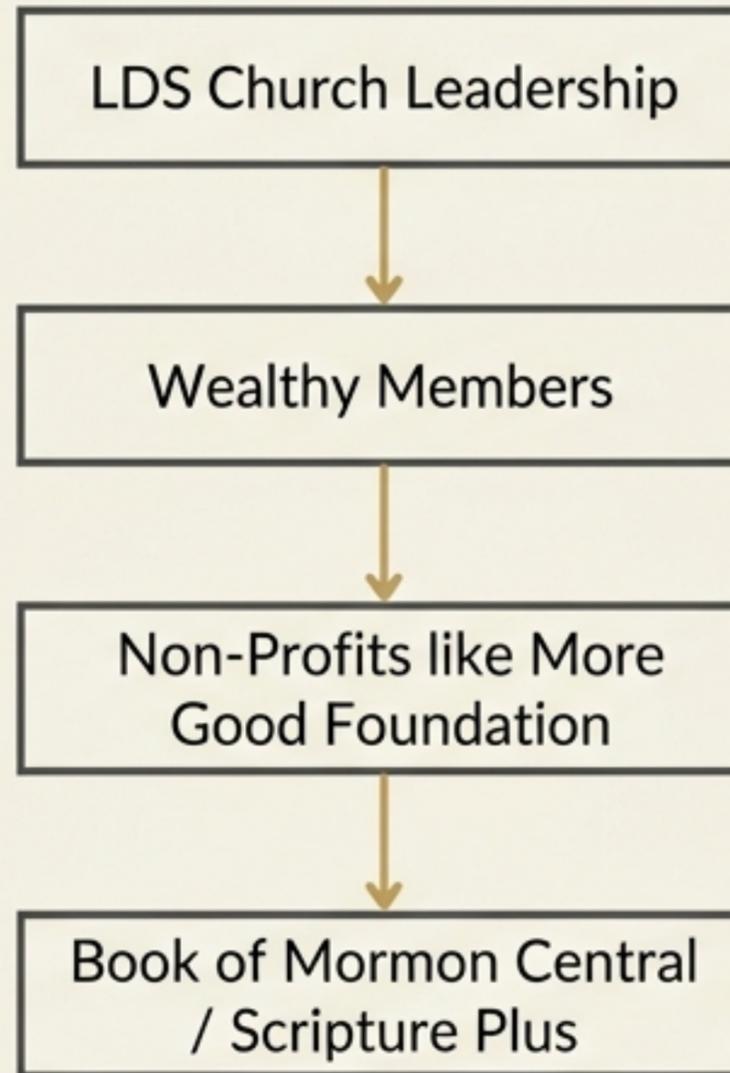


For nearly 200 years, a foundational scripture in the Book of Mormon was taught by prophets as a **literal, divine curse**: God changed the skin color of an entire people as a punishment. Today, as this teaching has become indefensible, a new wave of apologetics attempts to rewrite its meaning. This is the story of that attempt—and **its unraveling**.

The Modern "Solution": Creating Plausible Deniability

Enter the modern apologist. Figures like Jasmine Rappleye of the church-funded Book of Mormon Central are tasked with offering alternative theories.

The goal is not to establish a single, coherent truth, but to **"pollute the waters"** and provide **believers with just enough doubt** to dismiss the plain, racist meaning of the text.



“What she wants to do is Advance any possible theories... so that for a believing member they'll just say 'oh it doesn't mean it's not God wasn't racist.'”

- John Dehlin

The Myth of a “Crystal Clear” Correction

THE CLAIM

“Joseph Smith clarified this passage...to read “a pure and delightsome people” to make crystal clear that this is talking about spiritual purity not skin color.”

- Jasmine Rappleye

THE REALITY

This change was made in only *one* verse. The original, literal language was left untouched in numerous other places, including the verse where the curse originates.

UNCHANGED

2 Nephi 5:21 - “...as they were **white**...the Lord God did cause a **skin of blackness** to come upon them.”

UNCHANGED

1 Nephi 13:15 - “And I beheld that they were **white**, and exceedingly fair and beautiful...”

“If he wanted to make it Crystal Clear he would have changed it everywhere, especially where the curse happens.”

- Podcast Participant

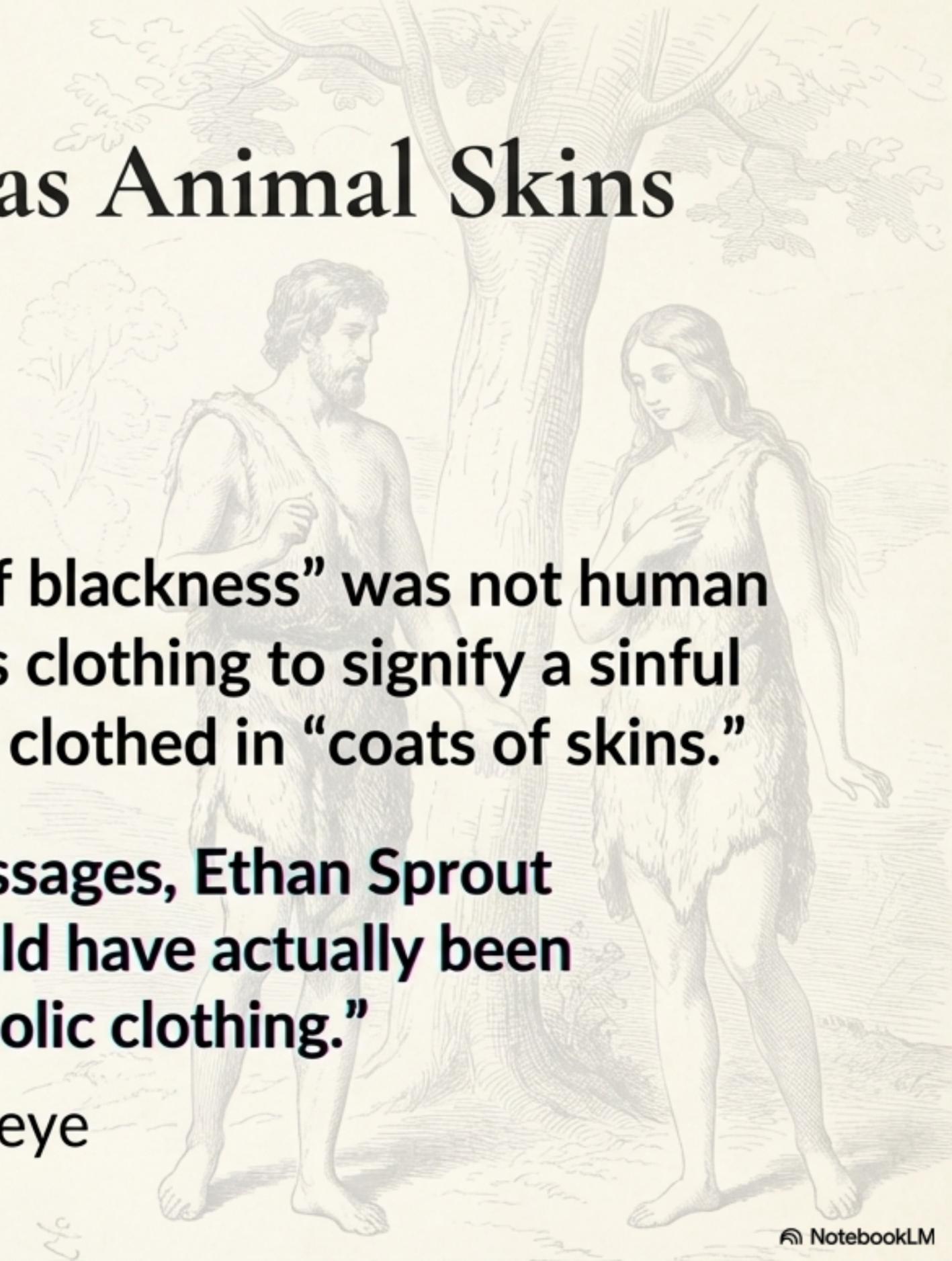
Claim #1: The Curse Was Animal Skins



The first theory suggests that the “skin of blackness” was not human skin, but rather dark animal skins worn as clothing to signify a sinful state, similar to how Adam and Eve were clothed in “coats of skins.”

“Based on this one and other passages, Ethan Sprout suggested that the dark skins could have actually been animal skins worn as symbolic clothing.”

- Jasmine Rappleye



Rebuttal: The Text Distinguishes Skin from Skins

“...they were naked, save it were a skin which was girded about their loins...” and “...and the skins of the Lamanites were dark dark, according to the mark which was set upon their fathers, which was a curse upon them...” (Alma 3:5-6)

*Clearly biology,
linked to the curse.*

*Clearly
clothing.*



Context is King

The same passage uses “skin” for clothing and “skins” for the curse. The text makes a clear distinction.



You Don't Inherit Clothes

Alma 3:9 states, “whosoever did mingle his **seed**...did bring the same curse upon his **seed**.”



The Missing Qualifier

“When you just say skin and you're talking about people...you're talking about the stuff that covers their body... If you were talking about... animal skins you would add that additional qualifier... ‘coats of skins’ or ‘garments of skins’.” - Nemo the Mormon

Claim #2: The Mark Was Dark Paint



The **second theory** proposes that the ‘**skin of blackness**’ was actually **dark paint or soot** applied for ceremonial purposes or warfare, drawing parallels to Classic Maya traditions.

“[Researchers] propose that the Lamanites mark themselves by painting their skins dark. This body painting may have been done as part of pre-war rituals...”

- Jasmine Rappleye



Rebuttal: The Amlicites Marked Themselves Because They Weren't Cursed

Evidence Exhibit:

“The Amlicites were distinguished from the Nephites, for they had marked themselves with red in their foreheads after the manner of the Lamanites.”
(Alma 3:4)



- **A Different Mark:** The Amlicites, who were Nephites, had to manually apply a mark of red paint to distinguish themselves. This was necessary precisely because they did not have the God-given “skin of blackness” of the Lamanites.
- **A Reversible Curse?:** In 3 Nephi 2:15, when Lamanites are converted, “their curse was taken from them, and their skin became white like unto the Nephites.” The curse is removed by God, not washed off in a river.

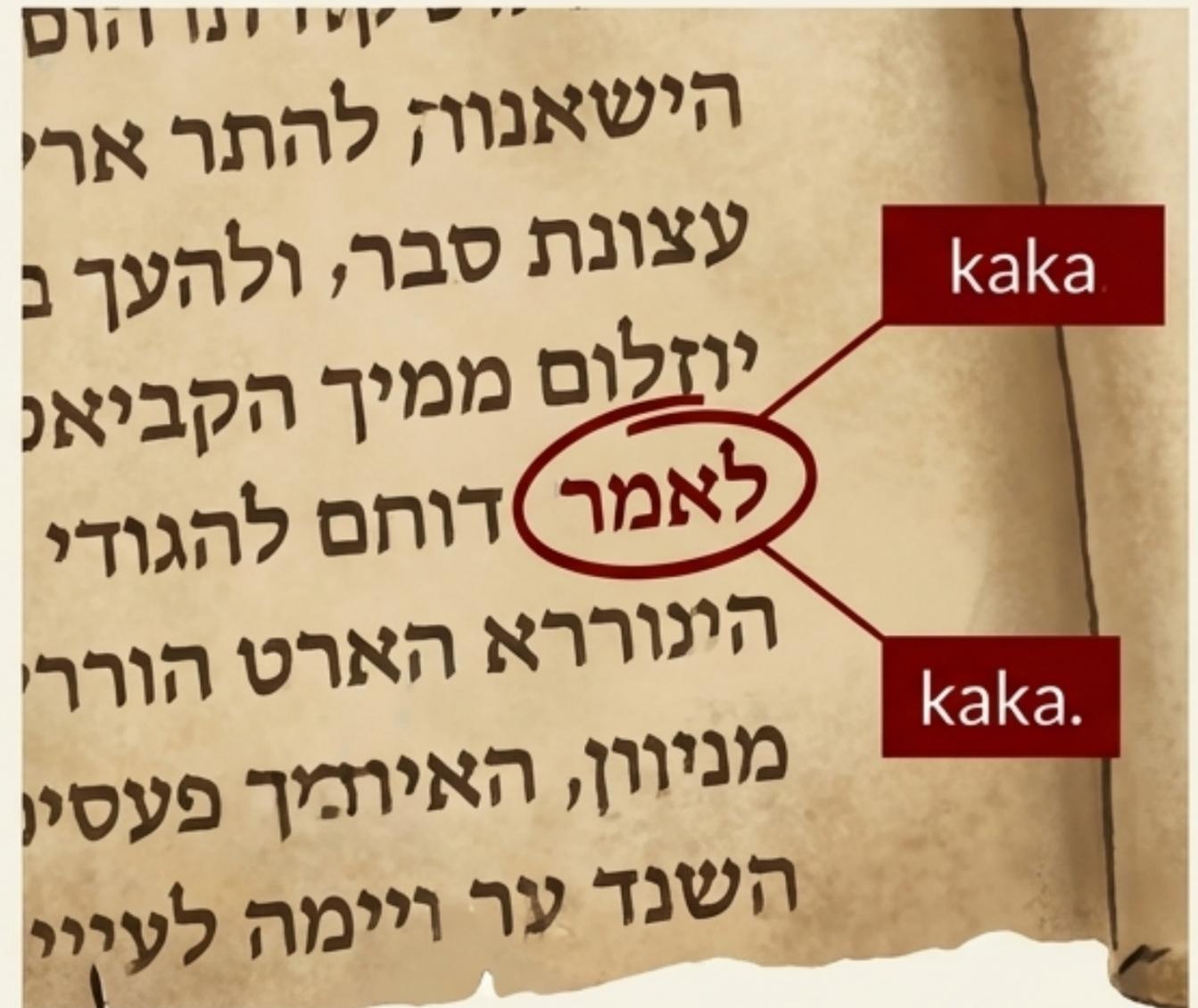
Claim #3: The Mark Was a Tattoo



A brand new theory suggests the “mark” was a tattoo. This argument attempts to redefine the word “mark” by linking it to the Hebrew word “kaka” (tattoo) found in Leviticus, a book of the Old Testament.

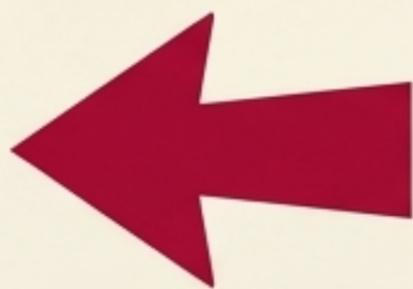
“The word translated here as “mark” is the Hebrew “kaka” which means incision, imprint, tattoo.... This kind of a mark would literally be a cursed thing upon the Lamanites.”

- Jasmine Rappleye



Rebuttal: A Case of Deceptive Quoting

“...their curse was taken from them, and their skin became white...” ...and their young men and their daughters became **exceeding fair...** (3 Nephi 2:15-16)



Rappleye fails to mention that the verse first says the curse was taken from the parents, and their skin became white. Her theory only addresses the children being born without tattoos.

“She’s trying to say... this scripture says that their children became fair and that means because they discontinued the practice [of tattooing]... but like the scripture also said the parents became fair who would have had the tattoos... that’s **really deceitful.**” - Herardo

Claim #4: It Was All Symbolic



When physical explanations are exhausted, the final theory claims the language is purely symbolic. “Black” and “white” do not refer to skin color but to a spiritual state of “death and destruction” or righteousness, drawing parallels to ancient Near Eastern literature.

“It’s pretty clear that these examples aren’t referring to literal skin color or race... skin black as pitch appears to be a motif for death and destruction.”

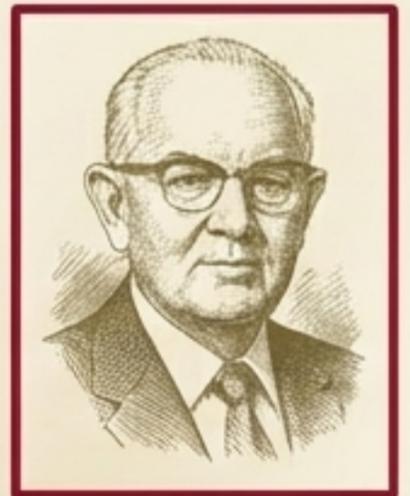
- Jasmine Rappleye

Rebuttal: The Curse Had a Very Physical Purpose

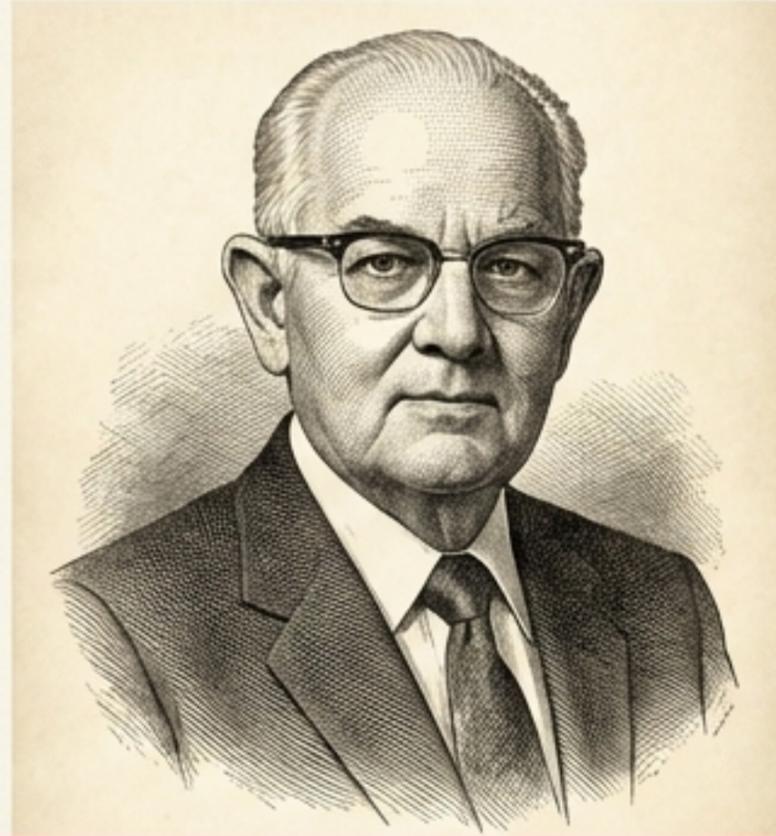
“...as they were white, and exceedingly fair and delightsome, that they might not be enticing unto my people, therefore the Lord God did cause a skin of blackness to come upon them.”

Physical Attractiveness – The text explicitly states the curse was to **prevent interracial marriage** by making the Lamanites **physically unattractive** to the Nephites. This is a **biological**, not **symbolic**, function.

Prophets Believed It Was Literal - LDS Prophet Spencer W. Kimball taught in 1960 that he was witnessing Native American children in the church's placement program literally “**becoming white and delightsome**,” demonstrating the leadership's long-held literal belief.



The Hypocrisy of Undermining Prophets



There is a deep **institutional hypocrisy** at play. While members are taught to “**stay in their lane**” and **never contradict** the teachings of prophets, the church provides **financial backing for apologists** to do exactly that.

““These apologists need to be censored by the church more than funded by them because they’re undermining the words of past prophets... If any of us try to say we know better than the prophets, we’re shut down immediately... Why did these guys get to do it, and why do they get paid by the church to do it?””

- Nemo the Mormon

Having It Both Ways: When “Black and White” Suddenly Becomes Literal

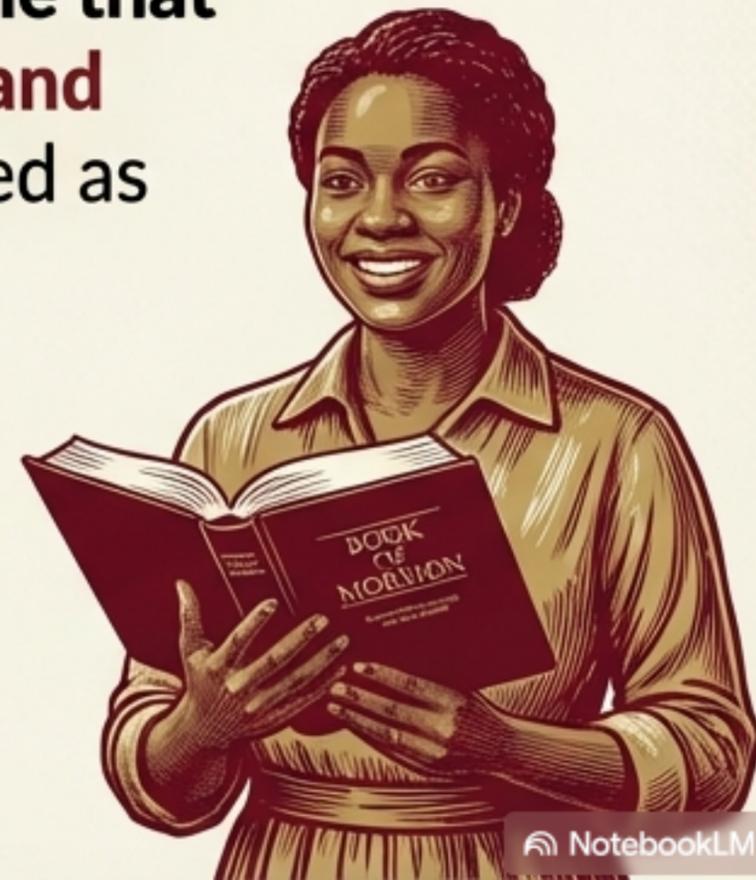
The Apologetic Argument

For verses on the curse (e.g., 2 Nephi 5), “**black**” and “**white**” are **symbolic**, not literal skin color.



The Church’s Marketing

For a verse on inclusivity (2 Nephi 26:33), the church’s official video presents Cali’s conversion story, which hinges on the phrase “**he denieth none that come unto him, black and white**” being interpreted as literally about race.



The Contradiction

The church cannot have it both ways. If “black and white” is symbolic in chapter 5, it cannot **suddenly** become literal in chapter 26 just **because it is more convenient**.

A Failure of Coherence



The four theories—animal skins, paint, tattoos, and symbolism—are not only contradicted by the text, but they also contradict each other. An honest search for truth seeks a single, coherent explanation. Presenting multiple, conflicting options is a strategy of obfuscation.

“You don’t have strong legs to stand on. None of these arguments are strong at all...
you’re just throwing mud at the wall and seeing what sticks.”

- Julia

The Plain Meaning of the Text

“Some LDS readers have interpreted descriptions of the Lamanites being dark as cultural or symbolic rather than biological, but this appears to contradict the plain meaning of the text.”

Grant Hardy

Latter-day Saint Scholar & Textual Critic

The Oxford Annotated Book of Mormon (footnote on 2 Nephi 5:21)