

In Defense of an Obsession

In the spring of 1969, I was introduced to the Book of Mormon when reading a book entitled, "*One Fold One Shepherd*," a review of the archeology of Mesoamerica written by Thomas Stuart Ferguson. Up until that time my interest in the Bible was largely a result of correlating archeological evidence with Bible stories learned as a child, hence my interest in the subject.

My wife and I joined the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints two months later bringing with us a great enthusiasm for the circumstantial evidence tending to support a cultural setting for the Book of Mormon. We were surprised to find little interest in this area from most members of the Church. In fact, when the subject was brought up at all, the general tendency of most members was that it was either an unimportant item, or worse, that it was somehow apostate to dwell on things so mysterious. Much has changed. Interest is now high with new material coming out constantly.

Over the years, our family has made numerous trips to archeological sites throughout Mexico, Belize, and Guatemala, investigating pet theories. One of my most satisfying experiences was in 1988 when three new books came out, each suggesting that the original hill Cumorah might be Cerro Vigia near Santiago Tuxtla in Veracruz, Mexico. Thirteen years prior we had come to the same conclusion while on location.

Admittedly, our children used to roll their eyes when the "archeology" subject came up, indicating to each other, "whatever you do, don't get him started." But in defense of this thirty-five-year obsession, our family has had many wonderful and memorable experiences while banging around in the backcountry of Mexico and Central America. Over time I've logged over 50 trips south, plus sent our children on eight student exchanges to Mexico. Another nine times we've had Mexican youth live with us. The obsession is apparently infective; our grown children make return trips to Mexico; in 2002 four of our grandchildren participated in private exchanges with the families of grown children who originally stayed in our home. "Archeology and the Book of Mormon" has become a family tradition.

Up until the early 1990's I was careful to not associate specific locations in the Book of Mormon with archeological settings when discussing it with others. However, it seems that folks have a growing "need to know" about current thinking, whether or not it can actually be "proven" to be correct. Sharing information such as this can be stimulating for everyone, encouraging study, and freshening up doctrinal subjects. It's been my experience that finding new correlatives for the cultural setting where Book of

Mormon stories may have unfolded, have rekindled a desire to reread the source. After all, anything that sheds light on that which we believe is frequently of interest.

Terry L Neal

Archeology and the Book of Mormon

The following material presupposes that the reader has a good working knowledge of the Book of Mormon and will likely identify correlations between each of the following condensed "bullets" of information. It is my opinion that the cultural setting for the Book of Mormon lies within the area generally defined as Mesoamerica. Mesoamerica is the place name archaeologists call the geographical areas of Mexico, Belize, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras. Mesoamerica also refers to a time frame. A time prior to the arrival of Europeans to this particular geographical region.

Why Mesoamerica?

The greater Nephite - Lamanite territory seems to have constituted an area not much larger than from middle Mexico south to El Salvador and Honduras. The bulk of the action probably takes place between modern day Guatemala City on the south and Veracruz and Oaxaca on the north; the halfway point falling in and around the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, an excellent candidate for the "narrow neck of land."

Mesoamerica is the only known site in North, South or Central America, during the time frame required, where a written language and significant cultural sophistication existed consistent with that required for the setting of the Book of Mormon. Further, the Isthmus area seems to be the originating place of both the Mayan calendar and of writing in the Americas.

Mesoamerica, its culture, archaeology, and geography, all correlate well with the internal structure of the Book of Mormon. It is here that the setting fits. There are numerous snippets of information that fit so well as to be almost irresistible in their collective significance.

Eleven years after the Book of Mormon was published, John Lloyd Stephens produced a book on his travels in Central America, Mexico and the Yucatan, revealing some of the incredible archeological sites of ancient America. Along with a British artist named Frederick Catherwood, Stephens traveled the area now referred to as Mesoamerica. He sometimes would hire entire Indian villages to clear the rain forest from impressive ruins sufficient for Catherwood to draw them.

While living in Nauvoo, Joseph Smith was presented a copy of Stephens newly published book. President Smith was then the editor of the Times and Seasons, a newspaper published by the church. Large excerpts of the book were re-printed for the saints to examine, including this statement: "This is a work that ought to be in the hands of every Latter-day Saint; corroborating, as it does the history of the Book of Mormon. There is no stronger circumstantial evidence of the authenticity of the latter book than that contained in Mr. Stephens' works. (Times and Seasons, Volume 4, Nov. 1842 - Nov 1843)

Interesting Stuff

There is no particular order to the paragraphs that follow and each one stands alone as to the significance it might have regarding the cultural setting of the Book of Mormon. Pages 13-16 include *my personal views* regarding which Mesoamerican culture cores show a significant relationship with civilizations of the Book of Mormon. Please note that the enclosed information is presented purely as "Interesting Stuff" and should not be construed as scientific proof of anything.

- When Joseph Smith received the plates, he got down on his knees and said, "O God, what will the world say," and the voice of God came to him, "Fear not. I will cause the earth to testify of the truth of these things." Conference Report, Oct 1946 pg. 125
- In 1957 the Melchizedek Priesthood manual of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints quoted Dr. Hugh Nibley as follows: "It is our conviction that proof of the Book of Mormon does lie in Central America..."
- Archaeology, as a science, did not exist until the late 1800's. The deciphering of Egyptian hieroglyphics was not known until 1850. In 1910 Mesoamerican high cultures were first acknowledged as predating 400 AD.
- It is now well established that every major indigenous group of Mesoamerican's believed in a first man and woman, the flood, that their ancestors came from across the ocean, and that there had been a confusion of tongues at a great tower. Further, that the Son of God had been born of a virgin, came to earth, died, was resurrected, taught baptism, and was with others in a pre-existence at a council in heaven.

- Ixtlilxochitl was a royal noble, born in the mid 1500's the decedent of the last king of Texcoco of the Aztec alliance. He learned Spanish and endeavored to record the ancient traditions of his ancestors. His writings were translated into English in 1975 with an update in 1985 and describe items of incredible interest to Mesoamerica enthusiasts. One particular story is remarkable in that it describes a 4th century scholar, prophet, seer, general, and author, who had lived in a place called Bountiful. He led his people in repeated wars with the ruling tribe from the south and was driven out of his homeland. After many years this prophet - general negotiated a treaty wherein his people relocated to a place where another ancient people had once lived and been destroyed. The ancient ones claimed their fathers had come from the Tower of Babel and were destroyed because of their wickedness. The prophet-general wrote a history and possessed the accumulated library of his people. His name was Matzin, a likely transliteration of Mormon.
- Ixtlilxochitl became Mexico's earliest historian, working with ancient records, which were eventually destroyed by the Spaniards, he wrote: "It was 166 years since they had adjusted their years and times with the equinox, and 270 since the ancient ones had been destroyed, when the sun and the moon eclipsed, and the earth trembled, and the rocks broke, and many other things and signs took place.... This happened in the year of ce Calli... Adjusting the year count with ours comes to the same time as Christ suffered."
- The first Spanish padres to arrive in Mesoamerica were of the opinion that Jesus Christ had visited here after his sojourn in Israel. This became a dangerous political and religious view some years later as the Spanish and Portuguese enslaved one Indian culture after another. During the slavery epoch it was fashionable to take the view that Indians were somehow subhuman and as such they could not have been worthy of a visit by Christ. However, in the early 1980's while meeting with an order of Jesuits in Veracruz, the prefect told me openly that Jesus Christ was indeed the "Fair God" of the Americas. Although in conflict with the Catholic Church's official doctrine many Mexican political and religious leaders hold a similar view.
- Discovered in the proposed Land of Nephi, an ancient document written by Mayan nobles known as the "Title of the Lords of Totonicapan" contains these words: "The wise men...and leaders of three great peoples...extending their sight over...the world...came from where the sun rises. Together these tribes came from the other part

of the sea, from the East... These, then, were the three nations of Quiches, and they came from where the sun rises, descendants of Israel, of the same language and same customs as Israel. When they left.... the great Father (God) gave them a present called Giron-Gagal (sacred director or compass).... When they arrived at the edge of the sea Balam-Quitze touched it, (the sacred director) and at once a passage opened.... **for thus the great God wished it to be done, because they were the sons of Abraham and Jacob."**

- The first Bishop of the Yucatan, Diego de Landa wrote a history of the Maya in the middle 1500's wherein he said: "Some of the old people of Yucatan say that they have heard from their ancestors, that this land was occupied by a race of people who came from the East and whom God had delivered by opening twelve paths through the sea. If this were true, it necessarily follows that all the inhabitants of the Indies, (the new World), are descendants of the Jews."
- In 1531 a document from Bishop Landa's royal interpreter was forwarded to Spain in response to specific questions, an excerpt of which says, "They had letters. Each letter was a syllable, and with them they were understood. And they had a year consisting of 365 days. They had knowledge of a Creator of all things... and of the fall of Lucifer, and of the creation of man, and of the immortality of the soul, and of Heaven and Hell, and of the Flood. Those who anciently came to people this land of Yucatan... did not worship idols... "
- The ruins of Kaminaljuyu have been largely built over by modern Guatemala City. Kaminaljuyu is the foremost city center with a written language dating between 600 BCE to 400 CE. This location is identified in several recent books as the City of Nephi. This position is established with a high degree of confidence.
- The ancient Mixtec Codex Nuttall of Oaxaca, Mexico, was translated by Jill Furst and includes this comment regarding Quetzalcoatl: "In the fixed calendar of 260 days, the date Four Earthquake would be the 6th of April. The date Seven Flower would be three days later, or the 9th of April.... Birth and rebirth are symbolic of Seven Flower. What is shown in the codex is that on April 6, AD 30 a deity shown first as dead and descending into the underworld leaves the underworld and comes back to life or is resurrected (reborn) three days later."
- According to Dr Joseph L Allen, a particular glyph, pervasive in its use, has intrigued Mayanists for some time. Recently it was discovered

that it stands for the phrase, **"And it came to pass."** The phrase "and it came to pass" occurs in the English translation of the Book of Mormon 1,381 times. In the Book of Mormon, the pattern is consistent with the grammatical and literary purpose in the Maya glyphs.

- In a 1988 book entitled "The Messiah in Ancient America", Drs. Warren and Ferguson build upon conclusions set forth in Ferguson's earlier book entitled, "One Fold and One Shepherd" which address the transfer of high culture from the Old World to the New. Lists of cultural and religious traits common to both Mesoamerica and the Near East are set forth. The following are their initial findings: 129 Belief and Ritual Elements in common, 28 Social Elements in common, 4 Political Elements in common, 23 Economic and Subsistence Elements in common, and 130 Technological Elements in common. They conclude "the items enumerated are unique to times and place and therefore leave little doubt as to the transfer of Mesopotamian high culture to Mesoamerica by boat."
- Raul Noriega, the Mexican scholar who discovered the method for interpreting the Mesoamerica calendar and astronomical glyphs did so by studying the mathematics and astronomy of Mesopotamia.
- At the Maya ruins of Uxmal in Yucatan, Mexico, the ancient Jewish symbol known as the Star of David was found and dated to many centuries before Columbus. It is noted that the triangles interlaced as was common in the Israelite representations.
- From a Reader's Digest publication entitled Mysteries of the Ancient Americas, comes this quote: "In the high civilizations of ancient America the state organized its citizenry for the building of massive pyramids, temples, and palaces. The sheer tonnage of earth removed, of rock transported and carved, of bricks dried in the sun never fails to astound the observer. In Mexico alone there may be as much as 100,000 pyramids still waiting to be uncovered. The number of ceremonial centers shrouded by forest in other parts of Mesoamerica must surely be large. Volume is as astonishing as number. Mexico's Cholula pyramid is the largest in the world."
- In ancient Mesopotamia, and in Egypt, the serpent motif signified the Creator God, or God of Life. In Mesoamerica the exact same application existed for Quetzalcoatl who was also thought of as the Creator God. On both sides of the world the apparent process by which they arrived at their conclusion was the same. It seems that the

undulating body of a snake is similar to that of a riverbed, (a riverbed is never straight). A mirror image of the curving riverbed, or body of a snake, is seen in the Milky Way, which is symbolic of the residence of God. It is from the sky that water comes, which in turn is the source from which the rivers fill. Water is the source of all life. Thus, the serpent signified the Creator God. In Numbers 21.5-10 Moses uses the serpent as a symbol of the Messiah. John 1.3 states clearly that Christ was the "creator God". The serpent was therefore the symbol of the Messiah in both places.

- In the archaeological site of Chiapa de Corzo, (probable location for the "city of Sidom"), a cylinder seal was unearthed during an excavation of the main plaza. (Cylinder seals were common in ancient Mesopotamia.) The markings on the seal were copied and sent to Dr. William Albright, the famed Near Eastern archaeologist. Dr. Albright responded that they were "imitation Egyptian hieroglyphics of the sixth century BC."
- The New World Archaeological Foundation was founded in 1951 largely due to the efforts of Thomas Stewart Ferguson. It was to become a part of the archaeological program of BYU. Elder Howard W Hunter was Chairman of the Board from 1961 until the mid eighties. For a time this Foundation became the unquestioned leader in Mesoamerica archaeology and was widely respected in academic circles. The NWAFA was superseded by the Foundation for Archeology and Mormon Studies, (FARMS).
- The Mexican archaeologist/artist, Miguel Covarrubius discussing the archeological site of Kaminaljuyu, (the likely location of the City of Nephi), states in his book Indian Art of Mexico and Central America, that between 500 and 600 BC: "suddenly a highly civilized people arrived and settled on the site and feverishly undertook a vast program of building."
- The Mayan ruins of Lamanai are located near the coast in Belize, which correlates well with the Nephites' "East Wilderness". This inland harbor was constructed at the same time the Nephites were waging war with the Lamanites in the East Wilderness by the seashore. Lamoni was a king amongst the Lamanites, as recorded in Alma 20 during the exact period that scholars claim the city of Lamanai was constructed.

- Sometime after the birth of Christ, Lachoneus was the chief judge of the Nephites. Pressure from the Gadianton Robbers caused Lachoneus to call the Nephites together to a single location and set in supplies for a seven-year siege. Today the area thought to be one and the same carries the name Lacandone, the archeological site is referred to as Lacanha, and both appear to be name derivatives.
- Coatzacoalcos, Veracruz is the traditional departing place of the Fair God in Mesoamerican lore after he had "preached" his gospel in the Americas. Coatzacoalcos was probably located in the northwest quadrant of the land Bountiful.
- The ancient Maya term "caput sihil" means baptism, and literally means, "to be born again".
- A unique and striking cultural parallel between ancient Israel and Mayan culture is the construction of underground cisterns of a specific bottle shape. A highly technical thing - a bottle shaped cistern for the storage of water, about 8 feet in diameter, plastered, cut into living rock, with a small aperture, and with channels on the surface above to direct rainwater into the cistern.
- Calendars of significant precision, based upon identical astronomical observations and calculations are found in both Bible lands and Mexico. The true solar year was worked out in both areas to the 7th decimal point, 365.2421987 days.
- In both Mexico and Bible lands the precise timing of the cycles around Venus and Mercury had been calculated. This was not accomplished again until Kepler's work in the 17th century AD.
- Chiapas, Mexico correlates well with the "land of Zarahemla" and the Grijalva River as the "river Sidon". The city of "Zarahemla" is probably the archeological site of Santa Rosa that is now submerged under a man made lake caused by the damming of the Grijalva.
- Bountiful, as used in the Book of Mormon, seems to serve various purposes and stand for more than one location. The "land Southward" is referred to as "Bountiful", a specific part of the "land Southward" is called "Bountiful", (Bountiful State), and there is a "City of Bountiful". Rather like the country of Mexico, the District of Mexico (state), and

the City of Mexico, or the country of Guatemala, the Department of Guatemala (state), and the City of Guatemala.

- Chiapa de Corzo works well as the Nephite city of "Sidom", the lake of Atitlan as the "waters of Mormon", and Quetzaltenango as the "valley of Alma". The "city or land of Manti" is likely the archeological site of La Libertad, the "city of Ammonihah", may be El Mirador of Chiapas, Mexico. The "city or land of Nephihah" may be one of the famous sites in the Peten of Guatemala, ie: El Mirador, Tikal, Uaxactun, or even Rio Azul. The "city of Aaron is likely located near the site of Palenque.
- The central depression area of Chiapas, Mexico, seems logically the "land of Zarahemla," it is almost the same size as the ancient "land of Israel". It is separated on the south from the "land of Nephi" by a narrow mountain range running from the Caribbean on the east to the Pacific on the west. This mountain range serves as the "narrow strip of wilderness" and is ample reason why it stayed that way.
- The Maya's daily functional calendar consisted of 360 days plus 5 supplementary "unlucky" days. The Egyptians had the exact same system also regarding the extra five days as unlucky.
- The Israelites and the Mexican ancients utilized the exact same constellations to represent the primary four directions.
- Crucifying was a method of capital punishment in ancient Mexico, as it was in ancient Palestine. Leg breaking as part of the crucifixion procedure was practiced in both lands.
- The land of Bountiful probably stretched across the Yucatan peninsula through Tabasco and part of Veracruz and ended where the Coatzacoalcos River runs into the Bay of Campeche, the "place where the sea divides the land". On the opposite side of the river begins the "land of Desolation", so called because of the destruction of the Jaredites, the latter of which are almost assuredly the Olmecs.
- Several ancient paintings of Quetzalcoatl, (the Messiah of ancient America), represent him on a cross with his side pierced with a spear, and blood and water flowing from the wound.

- The Messiah is known in the Bible by thirty-five title names that have their equivalent, or close to their equivalent, in Mesoamerica. The cross is a primary symbol of both the new and Old World Messiah's.
- Only in Egypt and Maya lands is the art style showing head in profile view with eye and upper torso of human body in full frontal position found. This is a conventionalized, unrealistic, and strikingly unusual art form.
- The Papaloapan water basin could have been the "Waters of Ripliancum", the hill Vigia is likely "Cumorah", and the modern city of Acayucan is thought to be the "city of Desolation".
- Genetics research has divided the cottons of the world into three categories: 1 - wild and domestic old world 2 - wild new world 3 - domestic new world. Combining Asiatic domestic cotton with Peruvian wild cotton originally produced the latter. Conclusion: Cottonseeds are not tough and cannot float around the world, the Asiatic variety was brought to the Americas anciently by boat.
- Sahagun, an early Catholic padre who came to New Spain within ten years of Cortez, wrote extensively about the traditions of the Mexicans. He learned to read and write in Aztec. He records: "Concerning the origin of these peoples, the report the old men give is that they came by sea from the north, (down the gulf coast), and it is true that they came in wooden boats.... seven ships in which the first settlers of this land came.... They came from the direction of Florida, (indicating an Atlantic crossing), and came coasting along the coast, disembarking in the Port of Panuco which means "place where those arrived who crossed the water." These people came in search of a terrestrial paradise. (Mulekites)
- In 1834 a padre translated the "Totonicapan document" from Maya into Spanish. The first pages have since been lost but the padre's record of what they contained is as follows: "This said manuscript consists of 31 quarto pages; but translation of the first pages is omitted because they are on the creation of the world, of Adam, the Earthly Paradise in which Eve was deceived not by a serpent but by Lucifer himself, as an Angel of Light. It deals with the posterity of Adam, following in every respect the same order as in Genesis and the sacred books as far as the captivity of Babylonia." This information is

remarkable because it pegs a transfer of high culture from the Middle East to Mesoamerica at the time of the first Diaspora.

- Ixtlilxochitl, the Mexican historian of the late 1500's, writes concerning the earliest colonizers of Mexico: "And the Tultec history tells how man, multiplying after the great flood made a very tall and strong tower.... When things were at their best, their languages were changed and, not understanding each other, they went to different parts of the world.... the Tultecs.... who understood their language among themselves, came to these parts (Mexico) having first crossed large lands and seas.... they were of those of the division of Babylon.... they say that they traveled for 104 years through different parts of the world until they arrived...."
- The "Central Depression", of Chiapas, Mexico is thought to be the "land of Zarahemla". The Grijalva River flows through the heart of this area and is identified with the "river Sidon". It has recently been established that this area was extremely active, beginning about 600 BCE. It is estimated that there were "thousands" of settlements here up until about 300 CE, after which many or most of them were abandoned. This data correlates perfectly with the withdrawal of the Nephites to a position north of Tehuantepec that I assume to be the "narrow neck of land".
- The city of Santiago Tuxtla is nestled at the base of Cerro Vigia, look out mountain, or for our purposes, the "hill Cumorah". This quaint Mexican town gets its water supply from a group of springs that literally spew out from the ground. Having spent the day with family playing in one of these natural "fountains" in a remote location, but near Vigia, I can assure you that Mormon's description of "a land of...fountains" is indeed accurate.
- The geological record of much of the Mesoamerica area reveals volcanic activity of significant levels consistently carbon dated to a time frame that allows for a 34 CE dating. Mass destruction was recorded in the Book of Mormon at about the time of the Savior's crucifixion. Current discoveries lead one to believe that at least three different volcanoes may have erupted at approximately this time in different quadrants of the Mesoamerica map.
- Cerro Vigia, (our hill Cumorah candidate), is smack dab in the middle of hundreds of ancient ruins dating to the times of the Olmecas, (Jaredites). In 1967 Berger, Graham, and Heizer, made the following

statement about this exact area: "He who fancies himself as a rough and ready archaeologist need only secure a permit, equip himself with a knowledge of Spanish, some high boots, insect repellent, water purifier, dysentery remedies, a four wheel drive vehicle, plenty of money, considerable patience, and some reserve nerve for unpleasant confrontations, and go into the field and locate a new batch of ten-ton sculptures."

- Heber J Grant, a former president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, shared the following in a 1929 conference: ".... when I was a young, unmarried man, another young man who had received a doctor's degree ridiculed me for believing in the Book of Mormon. He said he could point out two lies in that book. One was that the people had built their homes out of cement and that they were very skillful in the use of cement. He said there had never been found a house built of cement by the ancient inhabitants...." The use of cement in Mesoamerica is prevalent during the time frame required of the Book of Mormon. No archaeologist today would dare make such a statement.
- On a Sunday afternoon picnic in 1980, with a wonderful Mexican family from Veracruz, my then 11-year-old son Michael wandered off between some small pyramids into a freshly plowed sugar cane field and began to pick up what archaeologists call "potsherds", or pieces of very old pottery. Evidently the burro-powered plow had turned up a lot of the stuff because Michael didn't quit until he had half filled a large black plastic trash bag. Everywhere in great abundance were the "shards" of ancient civilization.
- The Phoenicians, who were allies of Judah when the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem, were perhaps the world's greatest sailors. History confirms that they had circumnavigated Africa 600 years before Christ, and archaeological evidence supports at least one visit to the Brazilian coastline. It is more than likely that it was a Phoenician boat(s) that ferried Mulek and his followers out past Spain, across the Atlantic, and into the Gulf of Mexico.
- Mulek likely disembarked at the mouth of one of the two largest river systems flowing into the Gulf, either the Usumacinta or the Grijalva, one of which is surely the Book of Mormon's river "Sidon". Interestingly enough, the capital city of the Phoenicians was also named Sidon.

- The discovery of a 15-ton carved stone amongst the 80 odd monuments at Izapa has fascinated members of the LDS church since its initial interpretation in 1951 by Dr. Wells Jakeman. The elaborate renderings bear an uncanny resemblance to the vision of Lehi as recorded in the Book of Mormon. This immense carving dates to between 300 BCE to 50 BCE and appears to present all of the characters and themes in a stylized version of the Tree-of-Life story.
- Bernardino de Sahagun, a Catholic priest in 16th century Mexico recorded a comprehensive study on the beliefs and customs of the high culture of that area. He records that the Mexicans believed in a grand council in the heavens before the organization of the earth. He records, "... They said there were twelve divisions in the heavens. There existed, there dwelt, the true God and his consort. Only one was their God, Quetzalcoatl." When babies were conceived, their souls came from heaven and entered their mother's wombs. They believed in a resurrection.
- An English sailor named David Ingram walked from Tampico, Mexico on the shores of Veracruz, (a place not far from our "Cumorah"), all the way to the St John's river which forms the border between Maine and Canada. This took place during the 16th century through alien country inhabited with largely hostile Indian tribes. In all, Ingram took 11 months to make almost the same journey required of the Book of Mormon's Moroni as the latter carried the plates to upper state New York. Comparing dates within the Book of Mormon we know that Moroni had at least 36 years to cover the same distance.
- An early Spanish priest in Mexico, compared the plan of Mexican temples with that of the temple of Solomon and came to the conclusion that they were laid out in similar fashion. The temples were terraced, representing the layered universe, and were oriented such that the first rays of the sun on solstice day would shine through the temple doors. The courtyards, walls and altars were based on the same basic configurations. In 2 Nephi 5.16 is recorded: "And I, Nephi, did build a temple.... the construction was like unto the temple of Solomon...."
- Renowned archaeologists have interpreted Stela 3 at the ruins of La Venta as a portrayal of a meeting between a local head of state and an immigrant leader. The latter having facial characteristics "at home in the Holy Land". La Venta is our candidate site for the "city of Mulek" which was likely the first place settled by the Mulekites. La Venta is

located on the bay of Campeche just east of dead center of our "neck of land" and has been inhabited since Olmeca, (Jaradite) times.

- Ceramic storage jars of almost identical style and design are discovered anciently at sites in Israel and Mesoamerica. Further, many ceramics are decorated with collections of wavy lines produced by the same method, painted in red.
- The ancient site of Santa Rosa, (Zarahemla), now under water from the damming of the Grijalva, (river Sidon), was excavated for a time previous to the new man-made lake that now covers these ruins. An interesting fact was discovered in excavating the foundation layer of the largest structure dating to the first century BCE. The foundation footing was constructed of two different types of gravel quarried from two different locations with a line dividing the structure exactly in half. The archaeologist on site also noted two zones of different cultural inhabitants laid out in the city along the same east - west line. It appears that two distinct social groups occupied the site related by either political or religious arrangements. At this same time the Book of Mormon records: "And now all the people of Nephi were assembled together, and also all the people of Zarahemla, and they were gathered together in two bodies." Mosiah 23.3
- Breastplates worn by high priests in both Israel and Mexico were divided into 12 segments.
- From the Maya work "Annals of the Cakchiquels" we see additional reference to the earliest settlement of the Guatemala highland, ("Land of Nephi"). The Cakchiquel Maya retain a certain amount of individuality even today as their 350,000 people still speak the Maya tongue. The "Annals" were written by Arana and Diaz, members of the royal Maya Xahila family, in the middle 1500's and includes the words: "From the other side of the sea we came.... from the west we came.... from across the sea..." Lehi's party came from the west, from across the sea, and were likely the ancestors to which they are referring.
- Alma 22 provides considerable data on the political boundaries that existed in the first century BCE. Alma 46 through 62 covers the war years, which include a massive homesteading program in the East Wilderness by the Nephites. This area is very likely that of the Guatemala Peten and Belize. Archeology confirms a huge build-up of cities and settlements in this area at this exact time.

- The Pyramid of the Sun at Teotihuacan, Mexico required nearly a million tons of adobe for its 243-foot height, making it larger in volume than Egypt's Great Pyramid at Giza.
- The largest pyramid in the world is Cholula located in Puebla, Mexico. Tradition claims the "Fair God" once destroyed it because the people did not accept the gospel. Archaeology indicates that Cholula was destroyed from volcanic activity in the first century, a date that works well with the crucifixion of Christ.

The Olmecs as the Jaredites

Scholars agree that the Olmecs are the "mother culture" of Mexico. During the late 1980's four excellent books were published by LDS authors all identifying the Olmecs as the Jaredites of the Book of Mormon. Although several previous writers had made similar assertions each of these publications, following closely on one another, presented new evidence that corroborated this thesis. The Olmecs were centered on the Gulf Coast of Mexico. Olmec settlements and cultural impact were felt throughout the entire Mesoamerica area.

The identification of the Book of Mormon Jaredites with the Mesoamerica Olmecs is set forth with a high degree of confidence.

The Zapotecs as the Mulekites

The Oaxaca Valley in south central Mexico is located "northward" of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, (the proposed narrow neck of land), and is the traditional homeland of the Zapotecs. This advanced culture reflects considerable influence from both the Olmecs and Mayas yet maintains a clearly separate identity during the times called for in the Book of Mormon. Zapotec settlements are actually on both sides of the Isthmus, which fits neatly with what one would expect from the Mulekites. The archeological record demonstrates that the Zapotecs came under the control of a particular subset of Mayas, who arrived in relatively small number from "Guatemala or Chiapas Mexico." These are likely the Nephites as they assumed leadership of the Land of Zarahemla. The places and times are appropriate to the chronology of the Book of Mormon story.

The Zapotecs fit well as the Mulekites, which were in fact, the Nephites for most of the time frame set forth in the Book of Mormon.

The Maya as the Lamanites

The Maya is well known as the traditional high culture of the Americas. Heavily researched and excavated, the Maya represents the majority of the information now available on Mesoamerican anthropology. Although a powerful influence throughout the entire area, oddly enough the Maya did not settle north of the Isthmus at any time discernable from the archeological record. Recent information indicates constant warfare permeated their history, but they seem to stop their expansionary programs directly at the "narrow neck". Assuming the "narrow neck" as the Isthmus, it seems clear that the Maya/Lamanites expanded to fill the "land southward", eventually subjugating similar cultures into identifiable nonexistence.

The Maya fit neatly into the time frame required of the Book of Mormon, with an abundance of cultural and geographical correlatives. The thesis that the Lamanites were in fact the Mayas is a very strong one.

The Izapa Culture as the Original Nephites

The original Izapa culture core runs south along the pacific side of Mexico from the Isthmus of Tehuantepec into the northern part of the coastal plain of Guatemala. This area is contained within the greater Mayan territories in the "land southward" or in other words, within that area of Mesoamerica beginning on the south side of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. The Izapa culture is quite different from that of the traditional Maya although heavily influenced by the latter and eventually absorbed sometime after 350 CE. Tapachula, Mexico, only five miles from the Guatemala border on today's map, seems to be the original core nucleus for the Izapa.

Interestingly, it is exactly at Tapachula that many scholars now believe that writing and both the religious and astronomical calendar systems were developed. Further, the original measurement methodology of this area was the cubit, which is the basis of the measurement system of ancient Israel. It is here that the famous Stela 5 is found which is frequently referred to as the "Tree-of-Life Stone". In a 1987 report to the Maya convention, it was reported that, "For almost a thousand years from 600 BCE, it, (Izapa), seems to have been the largest and most important center on the Pacific Coast, undoubtedly serving both civil and religious functions."

Izapa influence itself sporadically radiated east and northwest, but its greatest influence is observed southward. The Tapachula area is likely the sight of the original landing party of Lehitites from whence writing and the calendar were carried throughout the entire Mesoamerica arena. Archeologists today actually track the calendar's expansion from Izapa on a trail that mirrors the Nephites movements. It should be noted that the Nephites and the Mulekites merged with the latter representing probably well

over 90% of the population count so ultimately the Nephites were the Mulekites.

Where are those Nephi records?

Just previous to the final destruction of the Nephites, Mormon was commanded of the Lord to secure all of the records that had "been handed down by our fathers" and make certain of their safety lest the Lamanites find and destroy them. He then prepared a place...

"...and hid up in the hill Cumorah all the records which had been entrusted to me by the hand of the Lord, SAVE IT WERE these few plates which I gave unto my son Moroni."

It is important to note that only those few plates, which Mormon had condensed into his "portable" record, were actually given to his son Moroni. These "few" plates are the ones that were to eventually be buried in upper state New York to come forth in the dispensation of the fullness of times and be translated and known as The Book of Mormon.

By contrasting Mormon 6.5 verses Moroni 10.1 we see that Moroni had not yet secured the plates in their final resting place some thirty-six years after he had received them. In the meantime, he records that, "...I even remain alone to write the sad tale of the destruction of my people. ...the Nephites who had escaped into the country southward were hunted by the Lamanites, until they were all destroyed." Mormon 8.2,3

It seems reasonable from a careful reading of the text that a large cache of Nephi records is still secure in the original hiding place. Further, the Book of Mormon is quite clear that the final destruction place of both the Jaredites and the Nephites was very near the narrow neck of land in the area they called Desolation, on the hill called Cumorah. The text further implies that Moroni's only escape route was to the North.

A Lineage History

Anciently, the ability to read, and having the resources to write placed one in an elite social status. Generally speaking, it was the rulers and religious leaders who placed the largest emphasis on these skills. Taxing records, the recording of assets, warfare documentaries, and lineage histories were the stuff of which rulers' writings were made. Astronomical records, calendars, scripture, and priesthood lineage histories comprised most of the work of religious orders.

Critical to both rulers and religious leaders was their historical "right to rule" as established in "sacred histories" which were in the possession of those in power. Throughout world history the patterns of kingship and priesthood authority repeats itself. The process by which authority is maintained and passed on is strikingly similar regardless of time or location.

In every ancient culture the heads of state, both religious and political, gather their subjects periodically and display sacred relics, (frequently records), and review the official histories that establish their right to rule. (Consider King Benjamin's address.) These ceremonies were usually highly structured and held on some form of recurring basis, and they would generally include an opportunity for those under authority to acknowledge support for those in authority. (Consider the LDS Church's ward, stake, and general conferences in this light.) It appears that some of the material retained within the Nephite records was preserved for this purpose. Recognizing this element within the Book of Mormon adds immense creditability to its authentic antiquity.

The Book of Mormon is occasionally referred to as a history book. This does not do it justice and is not really accurate; general history is recorded only insofar as it relates to a religious principal being taught or an event important to the direct genealogy of Nephi. For example, the plates clearly establish the "right to rule", both politically and religiously, as passed down through the lineage of Nephi rather than any other. Jaredite records are contained in the book of Ether and are also clear on this point as set forth in Ether 1:6-32. In this case, kings, and would be kings, were all of the lineage of Jared. When viewed in this context many of the episodes recorded within The Book of Mormon are "seen" more clearly.

Brigham Young once said, " Do you read the scriptures as though you were writing them... Do you read them as though you stood in the place of the men who wrote them? If you do not feel thus, it is your privilege to do so."

The Book of Mormon is a limited record of religious and military events as it relates to an elite ruling group, their extended family, and culture core. It is not a sweeping history of the Americas. The record came to an end because the lineage did, not because it was the end of civilization in the area.

It is my testimony that the Book of Mormon is absolutely true, I have not the slightest doubt about it. Terry L Neal