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**Book of Mormon Lands Map, January 2016**

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# Book of Mormon Lands Map January 2016

Kirk Magleby

This is my best Book of Mormon Lands Map to date. It incorporates most of what I have learned since this journey began in August, 2011. I recently returned from 11 days in Guatemala where I collaborated with bright people such as Mark Wright, Diane Wirth, Dave Gray, Rick Callister, Van Dunham, Neal Rappleye, Stephen Smoot, and Rolando Amado. Rick shared a very good map from Shelby Saberon who is a trained Mesoamericanist. Mark uses Shelby's map in his BYU Book of Mormon classes. Van let me see an excellent map prepared by Elder Clate Mask who has lived and travelled extensively in this part of the world since the 1960's. Rolando shared insights from his many years of field research as an agronomist and student of anthropology. Rolando may be the native Guatemalan with the best grasp of the Book of Mormon in its New World setting. He worked for several years with Ric Hauck and Joe Andersen helping excavate sites in the Salama Valley.

Nothing I learned on my most recent trip contradicted, and many things corroborated the January, 2016 model presented here. Most importantly, I believe this model exhibits a high degree of fit to the text as many of the 200+ articles on this blog attest.



Kirk Magleby's Book of Mormon Map as of January, 2016

As with all images on this blog, click to enlarge. Colored pins represent lands. White pins represent cities with no corresponding land mentioned in the text. Blue represents the Mezcalapa - Grijalva as it flowed in Book of Mormon times (See the article "[Wandering River](#)"). Red represents the Usumacinta which I take to be the Sidon. All other drainage basins are in yellow. Larger type identifies the more prominent lands described in the text - Nephi, Zarahemla, Bountiful, Desolation, and Cumorah.

Here is another version of the map with named cities in the land southward and their proposed correlates.



Proposed Land Southward City Correlates as of January, 2016

And here are many of the natural features mentioned in the text.



Proposed Book of Mormon Natural Features as of January, 2016

Notice how the four seas and river Sidon on the map above form a classic quincunx, a very Mesoamerican way of perceiving space. This is a painted ceramic quincunx from Kaminaljuyu on display in the Museo Miraflores in Guatemala City. Kaminaljuyu is an A-List candidate for the city of Nephi.



Quincunx on Ceramic, Museo Miraflores, Guatemala City  
Photo by Kirk Magleby, December 27, 2015

Other Guatemalan examples of bodies of water in the four cardinal directions and at the center are in the article [Quichean Directionality](#).

You may wish to download a 9 MB [hi-res JPEG image](#) that combines all 3 of the maps above into a single file.

For serious students of the Nephite text, I recommend downloading the January 30, 2016 edition of the [Book of Mormon Model](#). This is a 14 MB kmz file that opens in Google Earth. Virtually all of the Google Earth imagery you see on this blog is generated by the model.

I can take but a small amount of credit for these maps. They incorporate what I find are the most persuasive parts of maps from a number of other scholars. The refrain from Isaac Newton comes to mind: "If I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.":

- John L. Sorenson, 1985, 2013 supported by Larry Poulsen & Brant Gardner
- F. Richard (Ric) Hauck, 1988 supported by Joe V. Andersen
- Joseph L. and Blake J. Allen, 1989, 2008 supported by Ted Stoddard
- Aric Turner, 2004
- V. Garth Norman, 2006
- Clate W. Mask, Jr., unpublished
- Shelby H. Saberon, unpublished supported by Mark Wright

I do take credit for the methodology behind these maps which I believe is sophisticated and empirically rigorous. Many of the articles on this blog lay out the process I have followed.

There are many discordant Book of Mormon maps because people differ widely in their approach to the problem. Among these classes of data, for instance, which should be primary, secondary, and tertiary in a hierarchy of evidence?

- Statements attributed to Joseph Smith and his contemporaries through 1840.
- Statements attributed to Joseph Smith and his contemporaries from 1841 - 1844 after they had seen Stephens and Catherwood's blockbuster *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatan*.
- Scholarly research including linguistics, ethnohistory, and archaeology.
- Geo physical data from satellite imagery and remote sensing systems.
- The text.

My methodology assumes the text is primary because it is closest to the divine.

People also differ widely in the way they interpret the text. For example, references to seas in the text have been interpreted by diligent students to mean:

- The sea south and sea north [Helaman 3:8](#) are metaphorical, not actual bodies of water. Therefore, there are 2 seas mentioned in the text: the sea east and the sea west.
- The sea south and sea north are metaphorical, but there are 3 seas mentioned in the text: the sea east, the sea west, and the west sea, south [Alma 53:8](#).
- The sea south and sea north are actual bodies of water; sea west and west sea, south refer to the same natural feature. Therefore, there are 4 seas mentioned in the text. The January, 2016 map is based on this interpretation.
- The sea south, sea north, sea east, and sea west are actual bodies of water, and west sea, south refers to a discrete feature. Therefore, there are 5 seas mentioned in the text.
- Sea east [Alma 22:27](#) and east sea [Alma 50:8](#) are two different bodies of water. Ditto Sea west [Alma 22:27](#) and west sea [Alma 53:22](#). Sea south and sea north are physical rather than metaphorical. Therefore, there are 6 seas mentioned in the text.

Add to this the question of whether "sea" refers to a salt water ocean, a fresh water lake, or some combination of the two, and the potential for divergent maps is obvious.

Interpretations follow assumptions about the text. These are my assumptions:

1. The events described in the text occurred in the Holocene epoch. This means shorelines have been relative stable since Jaredite times.
2. The language of the text is Early Modern English with its epicenter about 1560, pre-dating even the King James Version KJV. See the articles "[Early Modern English](#)" and "[English in the Book of Mormon](#)." This important textual insight continues to gain support with a flurry of recent scholarship from Stanford Carmack in *Interpreter*. See "[Why the Oxford English Dictionary \(And Not Webster's 1828\)](#)" from 2015. See also "[The More Part of the Book of Mormon is Early Modern English](#)" from 2016. Add to that "[Joseph Smith Read the Words](#)," "[The Case of the {-th} Plural in the Earliest Text](#)," and "[The Case of Plural Was in the Earliest Text](#)" all in 2016. Skousen corroborated by Carmack is becoming impossible to ignore. This means yea clauses explicate the subject of the previous clause, which helps an exegete correctly match pronouns with their antecedent

nouns in compound sentences such as the important geographical passages [Alma 22:28](#) and [Alma 50:11](#).

3. The Book of Mormon authors meant for us to take their text at face value. This is the intent of [2 Nephi 25:4](#), [7](#), [Alma 13:23](#), and [Moroni 7:15](#). Words and phrases should be interpreted the way they would have been generally understood on the streets of London when Shakespeare was a youth, Up and down describe relative elevation. North, south, east and west refer to cardinal directionality. Joseph's translation was under divine tight control a la Skousen and Carmack. See the article "[Translations](#)."
4. We should interpret the text consistently. This means we apply the same interpretive standards in the Old World and the New. All geonyms are physical rather than selectively metaphorical. There are no double definitions. Singular instances apply. All features are equally important. We account for all contextualized referents rather than engage in selective suppression of inconvenient polities or natural features. We extrapolate parallel meaning based on prior usage and cognate passages. This is Royal Skousen's notion of "systematic phraseology." Hence, a Nephite was a member of the polity, an average citizen or soldier. East or west of Sidon was riverside. Wilderness was territory beyond political or military control. Nephite metrics such as a day's journey were standard units of measure. People crossed waters in vessels.
5. Parallelism is an important formatting construct that can help shed light on difficult passages.
6. The text is precise rather than ambiguous. There should be no atextual assumptions, no forced readings, no false attributions, and no conclusions based on lacunae. There is an excellent [interview with Warren Aston](#) in the Book of Mormon Central Archive. At about minute 37 in that interview, I ask Warren whether in his experience the text of the Book of Mormon is precise or ambiguous. He responds, "the impression I have now is that it's a very precise, detailed account." That has been my experience as well.
7. The text is historical. We can and should correlate space and time. Alma 22 describes the geo-political situation ca., 90 BC. The parallel text in Alma 50 describes the very different geo-political situation ca. 72 BC.
8. Neither Nephites nor Lamanites exercised exclusive sovereignty over their territory the way a modern state does. They had strings of affiliated settlements with intervening wilderness and many unaffiliated polities. Large extents of territory were simply not directly referenced in the text. Mormon pioneers in the

western US offer an instructive analogue. Brigham settled the Saints in a vast territory from San Bernardino, CA to Salmon, ID, Pueblo, CO and Deming, NM, but he lacked the manpower to defend and develop such an extensive realm, so gentile incursion quickly marginalized the believers throughout most of their range.

9. Both Nephites and Lamanites were capable of travelling, projecting power, and maintaining supply lines across space hundreds of kilometers distant from their respective capitals.
10. The text explicitly applies multiple meanings to these terms: a) Bountiful - a discrete land and the entire land southward, b) Desolation - a discrete land and the entire land northward, c) Nephi - lesser Nephi was a discrete land while greater Nephi was the entire land southward south of the narrow strip of wilderness, d) Zarahemla - lesser Zarahemla was a discrete land while greater Zarahemla was the entire land southward between Bountiful on the north and the narrow strip of wilderness on the south.
11. Lehi-Nephi was a politically correct term used only during the Zeniff - Noah - Limhi era.
12. Cities and eponymous lands can generally be distinguished in the text.
13. Borders and centers of lands can generally be distinguished in the text.
14. The text of choice is the [Yale 2009](#) because it comes closest to the words that fell from the lips of the Prophet at the moment of translation. This means Ammon and his brethren went to the land of Middoni rather than Midian [Alma 24:5](#). Nephiah in [Alma 51:26](#) should read Moroni. The city of Mulek was in the land of the Nephites [Alma 53:6](#).

I have compiled a list of [problematic passages](#) whose disparate interpretations cause much of the confusion and disharmony among students of Book of Mormon geography. Applying the textual assumptions enumerated above sheds considerable light on these vexatious passages. In all cases, the interpretation followed in the January, 2016 map is the second of the two options presented in the list.

Applying my interpretations based on my assumptions, I have come up with eleven tests I believe any viable Book of Mormon New World correlation should pass.

1. The text describes 37 places where you go up in elevation from point a to point b, and 41 places where you go down in elevation from point a to point b. See the

article "[Test #1 Ups and Downs](#)." I believe a viable model will get all 78 of these relationships right. The January, 2016 model scores 100% on this test, using Google Earth to make the results explicit and reproducible.

2. The text describes 3 different ways Nephite lands were divided into two roughly equal halves. See the article "[Test #2 One Half of Nephite Lands](#)." I believe a viable model will show similar surface areas between the paired halves in all 3 cases. The January, 2016 model does show nearly equal surface areas between the halves in all 3 cases, using Google Earth to make the results explicit and reproducible.
3. The text describes the boundary between Nephites and Lamanites and the boundary between the lands Zarahemla and Bountiful as cultural borders. See the article "[Test #3 Cultural Boundaries](#)." I believe a viable model will show evidence that these littorals described in the text are known to science and did exist anciently. The boundaries in the January, 2016 model satisfy this criterion.
4. The text describes at least 3 ecological borders that should show up on satellite imagery. See the article "[Test #4 Ecological Boundaries](#)." The 3 borders in the January, 2016 model do show up clearly on satellite photos. Google Earth makes the results explicit and reproducible.
5. The text uses the terms north, northward, northern, and northernmost. 39 discrete from and to locations should plot a northerly vector. The text uses the terms south, southward, and south-southeast. 36 discrete from and to locations should plot a southerly vector. The text uses the terms east and eastward. 30 discrete from and to locations should plot an easterly vector. The text uses the term west. 28 discrete from and to locations should plot a westerly vector. See the article "[Test #5 North South East and West](#)." I believe a viable model will show all 133 vectors within their appropriate compass quadrant. The January, 2016 model scores 100% on this test, using Google Earth to make the results explicit and reproducible.
6. The text uses some variant of the term "day" 22 times to describe distance measure. See the article "[Test #6 Relative Distances](#)." I believe a viable model will derive a reasonable value for the standard unit of Nephite distance measure "one day's journey" and then apply that value consistently in all 22 cases. The January, 2016 model first derives 15 air (straight-line) kilometers as a reasonable value for the Nephite metric (see the article "[Land Southward Travel Times](#)"), then applies that measurement consistently in all 22 instances where the text describes distance in this way.
7. In addition to continental-scale lands such as Bountiful and greater Zarahemla, the Book of Mormon describes 31 lesser lands such as Melek and Ammonihah [Alma](#)

[8:6-7](#). These lesser lands were regional polities, often described in the text as city states [Mosiah 7:21](#), [Mosiah 23:25](#). The city state form of administrative organization is well-known from many areas of the world throughout history. Furthermore, city state land areas tend to fall within typical size ranges based on common-sense limits such as the distance a man on horseback traveled in one day or the territory a local militia could reasonably defend. See the article "[Test #7 Land Areas](#)." I believe a viable model will show mean Book of Mormon land areas that fall within the size ranges typical of city states known to history. The average area of lesser lands in the January, 2016 model is very consistent with mean city state land areas recognized by historical geographers in many parts of the world. The total number of named lands in the Book of Mormon (33 greater and lesser lands) compares favorably with the number of Maya city states currently known to science (16 in the northern Maya lowlands, 31 in the southern Maya lowlands). See a brief discussion in the article "[Hansen and Coe](#)."

8. Two of the most widely-supported correlations in the Mesoamerican theory are Nephi in the Guatemalan Highlands and Ramah - Cumorah in southern Veracruz. All 8 of the Mesoamerican maps referenced in this article propose Nephi within a 100 kilometer radius of Guatemala City and Ramah - Cumorah in the Tuxtlas or the nearby Papaloapan delta. If these Nephi and Ramah - Cumorah correlations are in the right geographic ballpark, we can draw some strong inferences about the location of Zarahemla from the account of King Limhi's expedition. Limhi's 43 explorers traveled from Nephi to Ramah - Cumorah, then returned to Nephi bearing artifacts. They reported that they had found Zarahemla, and King Limhi, custodian of the Zeniff colony records, believed them. See the article "[Test #8 Limhi Expedition](#)." for a list of Zarahemla criteria implied by the Limhi explorer's travels. I believe the location of Zarahemla on a viable Book of Mormon map will satisfy these criteria. The Zarahemla correlation in the January, 2016 model (Nueva Esperanza - Calatraba) does comfortably satisfy all of the criteria, using Google Earth to make the results explicit and reproducible.
9. The text has a surprising amount of detail, both explicit and inferred, about river Sidon. The article "[Test #9 River Sidon](#)" lists 44 criteria for Sidon. I believe a viable candidate for Sidon will satisfy these criteria. The January, 2016 candidate for Sidon, the Usumacinta, satisfies all 44 criteria with flying colors, using Google Earth to make the results explicit and reproducible.
10. The text describes 7 places where armies and others crossed over Sidon. See the article "[Test #10 Crossing Sidon](#)." Because of swamps, canyons, swift currents, etc.

people generally cross large rivers at certain favorable points and avoid dangerous crossing locations. I believe a viable Book of Mormon correlation will show Sidon transit points at locations amenable to river crossing. The river crossing points in the January, 2016 model are all attested either by a modern bridge at that location, or rope bollards discovered by archaeologists that were used anciently to ferry canoes across the river. Google Earth helps make the results explicit and reproducible.

11. The text describes 10 large-scale characteristics of the Book of Mormon land mass that should be observable via satellite imagery. The article "[Test #11 The Big Picture](#)" itemizes them. I believe a viable Book of Mormon map will convincingly show all 10 characteristics. The January, 2016 model does clearly demonstrate all 10 features, using Google Earth to make the results explicit and reproducible.

Any map that can run the gauntlet of these 11 tests deserves serious consideration, but there are many more textual criteria to analyze. The January, 2016 model also satisfies 100% of the following criteria with Google Earth helping make the results explicit and reproducible.

- A. Ammonihah 29 criteria outlined in the article "[Ammonihah](#)."
- B. Gideon 23 criteria outlined in the article "[Gideon](#)."
- C. Helam 10 criteria outlined in the article "[Helam](#)."
- D. Hermounts 11 criteria outlined in the article "[Hermounts](#)."
- E. Manti 25 criteria outlined in the article "[Manti](#)."
- F. Melek 14 criteria outlined in the article "[Melek](#)."
- G. Minon 7 criteria outlined in the article "[Minon](#)."
- H. Narrow (Small) Neck of Land 15 criteria outlined in the article "[The Narrow \(Small\) Neck of Land](#)."
- I. Narrow Pass 16 criteria outlined in the article "[The Narrow Pass and Narrow Passage](#)."
- J. Narrow Strip of Wilderness 32 criteria outlined in the article "[The Narrow Strip of Wilderness](#)."
- K. Sidom 13 criteria outlined in the article "[Sidom](#)."
- L. Sidon must flow northward. See the article "[River Sidon South to North](#)."
- M. Sidon 28 criteria outlined in the article "[The Usumacinta/Sidon Correlation](#)."

The [Book of Mormon Onomasticon](#) is a marvelous resource for possible Old World etymologies of Book of Mormon names. Paul Y. Hoskisson, Robert F. Smith, Stephen D. Ricks and John Gee have invested thousands of hours creating this unique contribution to Book of Mormon scholarship. Two names, Ripliancum and Riplah, deserve special mention because Moroni himself explicitly defined the term Ripliancum in [Ether15:8](#). Both Ripliancum and Riplah carry the meaning of large or abundant. See the article "[Hill Riplah](#)." I believe a viable Book of Mormon map will locate both Ripliancum and Hill Riplah in places appropriate to their names. The January, 2016 model correlates Ripliancum with the Papaloapan river delta in southern Veracruz, the largest wetlands in our land northward. The January, 2016 model correlates Hill Riplah with Cerro Pampache in Alta Verapaz, the largest detached hill in Guatemala.

If a proposed Book of Mormon correlation is correct, it will shed light on otherwise enigmatic passages in the text. Here is one example. [Mormon 4:4](#) must refer to some kind of military advantage unique to the Nephite city of Desolation. Other possible interpretations of that verse are explicitly contradicted by Mormon elsewhere in his eponymous book. The article "[French Connection](#)" point #6 describes the significant military advantage gained by building defensive walls with hard granite rather than soft limestone. The January, 2016 model locates the city of Desolation in the vicinity of Tonalá, Chiapas. Tonalá is the only area in Mesoamerica where we find large-scale use of hard architectural granite in the AD 300 - 400 time frame. The article "[The Narrow Pass and Narrow Passage](#)" further discusses this interesting point.

Here is a second example: [Mosiah 23:4](#) says Helam was a land of pure water. Mesoamerica was well-watered in Book of Mormon times as it is today. It has thousands of springs and streams, with many lakes and cenotes. Pure water was so abundant it was of little use as a distinguishing feature. This passage makes sense, though, in a place where impure and pure water were geographically proximate. The article "[Helam](#)" in point #4 shows our candidate for the land of Helam near Lake Lachua in Alta Verapaz. "Lachua" is derived from the Q'eqchi' Mayan words *la chu ha* meaning "fetid water." Lake Lachua has heavy concentrations of calcite and emits a foul sulfuric odor. The same article also shows our candidate for the land of Helam near the salt dome that gives the Maya site Salinas de los Nueve Cerros its unique name. A salt water stream flows from the salt dome into the Chixoy River which from that point on is called the Salinas until it joins with the Pasión to form the Usumacinta. "Salinas" refers to salt. So, in our correlation,

Helam was called a land of pure water because it was not far from sulfuric and salty waters.

If a proposed Book of Mormon correlation is accurate, multiple people following different lines of reasoning will reach the same conclusion. Here are two examples:

- "[Norman's Clincher](#)"
- "[Sea Divides the Land](#)"

If a proposed Book of Mormon correlation is accurate, future corroborative discoveries will surface. Examples can be found in these articles all published after the January, 2016 map:

- "[Partake of the Fruit](#)"
- "[Anthropomorphic Trees](#)"
- "[Kaminaljuyu](#)"
- "[Origins of K'inich Yax K'uk' Mo'](#)"
- "[Takeshi Inomata](#)"
- "[Men from the East Wearing Red](#)"
- "[Obsidian Trade Patterns](#)"

If a proposed Book of Mormon correlation is accurate, improved technology will tend to make it even more obvious. See for example: "[Ubiquitous Narrow Strip](#)"

If a proposed Book of Mormon correlation is accurate, it will help debunk common misconceptions about the text. See for example: "[Big River](#)"

Finally, if a proposed Book of Mormon correlation is correct, it will help us understand why we have gone nearly 200 years without a generally accepted map. See the article "[Red Herrings](#)" for my take on this fascinating question.