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Suggested Key to Book of Mormon Geography

Author(s): J. M. Sjodahl

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Abstract: The author surveys theories on Book of Mormon geography, and offers his own speculation. He concludes that Lehi landed in South America just south of the Isthmus and that he died in Peru. Nephi went on to Ecuador and then Colombia. Zarahemla was located on the Atlantic side of Central America.

SUGGESTED KEY TO BOOK OF MORMON GEOGRAPHY

BY J. M. SJODAHL

The main key to Book of Mormon geography is Alma 22:27-34. That passage was penned for the special purpose of furnishing important information on that subject, as far as knowledge concerning countries, rivers, cities, etc., can be conveyed without drawings or maps.

Difficult to Understand

There is, perhaps, no passage in the Book of Mormon more difficult to read understandingly. Judging from my own experience, I have no doubt that many have perused it again and again without being able to form a clear conception of the picture presented.

In this particular the description resembles somewhat the accounts by the Icelandic historians concerning the voyages of the Northmen to America in the tenth and eleventh centuries. They tell us, for instance, that Leif Erickson sailed from Brattahlid and on his southward course found a stony coast which he called Helluland; then, that after having sailed in the same direction for some time, he struck a wooded coast which he named Markland; then, that, after having traveled for more than two days for a stiff northeaster, he came to a river which he found issuing from a lake, and there he anchored and called the country Vinland; but what information does all this convey to the average reader? To be sure, our learned men, tell us that Helluland was either Labrador or the northern coast of Newfoundland, and that Vinland was in the latitude of Boston, probably; but after all is said, there is still room for surmise and discussion. It is very much the same with the geographical notes in the Book of Mormon.

Nor is it easy to see how it could be otherwise in the case of any very ancient record. No contemporary of Leif Erickson could have drawn a map intelligible to modern readers. Geographers at that time had ideas of the form of the earth, entirely different to ours. They divided the globe into three parts, Asia, Europe, and Africa. Of America they knew next to nothing. Asia, they thought, was "the middle" of the earth. They describe Africa as extending from southwest to west and northwest," and Europe from "west and northwest to northeast." They included Greenland in their Europe, and believed that the (American) coastland, which they had discovered, was part of Africa;* just as Columbus and the discoverers who followed in his wake, until the fateful voyage of Magellan in 1519; considered

*Joshua Foulmin Smith, *Discovery of America by the Northmen*, pp. 335-8.

the American coast as a part of Asia. Maps made at that time would, naturally, have reflected their erroneous ideas and been of little use to the common reader of our day.

A Maya Map

Maps made at the time of Alma would, possibly, have been still more unintelligible to us. To illustrate: Dr. Augustus le Plongeon* tells us that the old Maya empire is drawn, in the Troano manuscript, as a tree, the trunk of which, representing Central America, springs out of a calabash, meaning "the south," and has a single branch, representing Yucatan, while the Caribbean sea appears as an animal resembling a deer. Such was, if the learned doctor is not mistaken, a very ancient American map. If similar drawings had appeared in the Book of Mormon, they would have been of little help to us.

A Well Known Theory

The best known theory concerning the geography of the Book of Mormon is that represented by the late Elder George Reynolds in his *Story of the Book of Mormon*.

According to this theory, which, however, Mr. Reynolds characterizes as a supposition, merely, the Jaredites went in a northerly direction from the Valley of Nimrod as far as the Caspian Sea, which they crossed; then, turning eastward, they journeyed along the Central Asia plateau; thence to the Pacific seaboard, most probably on the coast of China. Elder Reynolds does not state this as a proved fact. All that is actually revealed is that their journey was a long one, beyond the limits of the then inhabited world, to the coast of a sea that "divides the lands." Here they remained for a period of four years, at a place which they called Moriancumer, possibly after their leader, the Brother of Jared. Finally they crossed the Ocean. The voyage lasted 344 days. "It is generally understood," Elder Reynolds points out, "that the place where they landed was south of the Gulf of California, north of the Isthmus of Panama." After a history of about sixteen hundred years, the Jaredites were all slain at the battle of Ramah, later called Cumorah, in the state of New York, except the king, Coriantumr, and the prophet-historian, Ether.

According to the same theory, Lehi and his little flock journeyed across the peninsula of Arabia to its eastern coast. The land by the sea they called "Bountiful" because it was rich in fruit and wild honey. The sea was named by them "Irreantum," which is said to mean "many waters." Here they built a ship, in compliance with divine instructions. When it was finished, and the provisions were taken on board, they embarked and crossed the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean, and after an eventful voyage they landed at a point near where the city of Valparaiso now is situated, in Chile. From

**Queen Moo*, p. XLII.

here they gradually spread northward; and after a history extending over almost a thousand years, the Nephites were exterminated at the hill Cumorah, in the State of New York.

According to the same theory, the attendants who had charge of the young prince of Judah, Mulek, the son of Zedekiah, were brought across the great waters and landed in the southern portion of North America. Here they remained for some years, and then they went southward to the place where they were discovered by Mosiah and his followers, about 200 years before our era.

To those who hold this theory, the entire North America is, in the Book of Mormon, called "Mulek", because the Lord brought Mulek into that land. South America is, for a similar reason, called "Lehi," because this great colonist landed there. Zarahemla, where Mosiah found the Mulekites, is located in the northern part of South America, as one grand division of the Land of Lehi, the Land of Nephi being the other.

This Theory Modified

According to Elder Joel Ricks, who has published a "Helps to the Study of the Book of Mormon," the Jaredites, coming from Babel about 2,200 years before our era, landed on the west coast of Central America and established themselves in Honduras, where they built their capital. From there they spread out over all Central America, Mexico, and the greater portion of what is now the United States.

According to Elder Ricks, the colony of Lehi landed on the western coast of South America, in northern Chile, and built up the civilizations in the high valleys of the Andes. About 200 years B. C., Nephites moved from the districts about Quito into the valleys opening to the Caribbean, where they came upon the Mulekites, with whom they amalgamated and founded the kingdom of Zarahemla. Five hundred years later they pushed northward and gradually filled Central America, Mexico, and the greater portion of what is now the United States.

The Mulekite colony landed on the northern coast of South America, near the mouth of the Magdalena river. They occupied the entire valley and the plains westward toward the Isthmus, and here they were joined by the Nephites under Mosiah. According to Elder Ricks, who has carefully studied the subject and brought out many valuable facts relating to it, there was a time when the entire region, from Lake Titicaca in South America to the Great Lakes in North America, was occupied by one common people. The Jaredites and the Nephites, naturally, occupied the same lands at different times, and the Nephites took possession of and inhabited many of the cities which the Jaredites had abandoned.

Elder Ricks has the advantage of having personally explored some of the ruins from the ancient civilization of our continents and studied the topography of the localities about which he writes.

The Central American Theory

A theory, of more recent date, holds that the geographical scene of the history of the Book of Mormon is confined to a comparatively small area of Central America, viz., Guatemala, British Honduras, part of Yucatan, and Salvador. In this area, it is thought, the Jaredites, the Mulekites and the followers of Lehi, all established their first colonies, and from there, in due course of time, they spread out north and south, and peopled the American continents. But in the Book of Mormon, it is further thought, only the history of the original area has been preserved.

According to this theory, which has been forcefully advocated by Colonel Willard Young, after years of study of the Book of Mormon and standard works on American archaeology, the Jaredites, in their barges, came through the Dardanelles into the Mediterranean, passed through the Straits of Gibraltar, crossed the Atlantic, and, finally, landed on the east coast of Central America, in the Bay of Honduras.

All of the lands and cities mentioned in the Book of Ether are, Colonel Young holds, located in Honduras and Guatemala—mostly in Guatemala. The land of Moron is in the upper valley of the Copan River, in Honduras and Guatemala. The land of Corihor is in the valley of the Motagua River around the city of Quirigua. The land of Akish is the land around the city of Jalapa. The land of Desolation is the lower valley of the Motagua River. The hill Shim is between Jalapa and Chiquimula. The place where the sea divides the land is the western end of the Gulf of Honduras between British Honduras and the east end of Guatemala. The land south is Honduras south of the Gulf of Honduras. The land north is Guatemala and British Honduras. The narrow neck of land is the small peninsula running northwest at the extreme eastern end of Guatemala. The hill Ramah is the hill between the cities of Chiquimula and Jocatan.

Lehi and his colony, according to Colonel Young, left the Gulf of Persia and crossed the Indian and the Pacific Oceans and landed on the shore of Salvador in Central America. The land of Nephi is the upper valley of the Humuya River in Honduras. The land of Zarahemla is on the west side of the Ulua River in Honduras. The land southward is Honduras, San Salvador and Nicaragua. The land northward is Guatemala, British Honduras, Yucatan and Chiapas.

The narrow pass leading from the land southward into the land northward is the narrow strip of land between the Omoa Mountains and the Gulf of Honduras. The hill Cumorah (Ramah) is between the cities of Jocatan and Chiquimula in Guatemala. The River Sidon is the Ulua River. The land Bountiful is on both sides of the Ulua River near the Gulf of Honduras.

Mulek and his colony, Colonel Young believes, came out of the Mediterranean Sea, crossed the Atlantic Ocean, and landed on the northern shore of Honduras near the mouth of the Ulua River.

The city of Zarahemla is at or near the present city of San Pedro Sula.

Still another Theory

Elder Stuart Bagley, who also has studied the subject thoroughly, agrees in some particulars with Colonel Young. In others he takes a different view.

The City of Nephi he finds at Uxmal, and Zarahemla about 300 miles south of this place. The Usumacinta river is Sidon, Bountiful is Chiapas, "The narrow neck" is Tehuantepec, and Desolation is north of this isthmus and includes Mexico north and west of high divide.

Difficult, but not Impossible

In view of the many differing opinions concerning this subject, an endeavor to find the correct one might be thought fruitless. But it should not be, since the divine promise, "Seek, and ye shall find", never fails. But in the search for truth, it often happens that preconceived ideas must be given up. We may have to sell all we have in order to obtain one pearl of great price.

Material for a Theory

In trying to form a consistent theory on Book of Mormon geography, we have as material, in the first place, the statements in the Book itself. These are the foundation and the substance. Nothing that contradicts any of them can be admitted.

Then we have certain statements concerning the subject, which can be traced back to some of the first leaders of the Church, who were the associates of the Prophet Joseph himself, and these cannot be set aside lightly, even if they are regarded as mere individual opinions; for even an opinion on a Book of Mormon question, expressed by one who, undoubtedly, had it from the Prophet himself, must be of more weight than, for instance, my opinion, if it differs from theirs. This is, I suppose, a self-evident proposition.

I refer now especially to the positive statements by Frederick G. Williams, and Orson Pratt concerning the landing of Lehi south of the Isthmus of Darien, and the just as positive assertion in the *Times and Seasons*, which was edited by the Prophet Joseph, to the effect that the city of Zarahemla stood in Central America, where also the boundary line between Bountiful and Desolation was drawn. (*Times and Seasons*, Oct. 1, 1842). Such statements, it seems to me, cannot consistently be set aside for the sake of a theory.

In the third place, we have now a great amount of archaeological and ethnological material concerning the American Indians, who are the descendants of the Jaredites, the Nephites, the Lamanites and the Mulekites. Much of this material is as yet only theoretical, but some must be accepted as solid facts, and our theories concerning the geography of the Book of Mormon must have room for such facts. For

truth is truth, wherever found, and, while it is true that the Book of Mormon furnishes the solution of many problems that puzzle archaeologists, it is equally true, that archaeology helps us to understand some obscure passages in the Book of Mormon.

The Important Question

If this is admitted, the question arises: Is it possible to form a theory in which all this material can be united? I believe it is.

Let me explain, however, that I may not have been able to form this theory. Others may find flaws in my reasoning, which I, myself, do not happen to see. The key here offered is, therefore, by way of suggestion rather than assertion. But even a suggestion may have its value.

The Key Word

The passage, which may be called key word to the whole subject is as follows:

"And it came to pass that the king sent a proclamation throughout all the land, amongst all his people who were in all his land, who were in all the regions round about, which was bordering even to the sea, on the east and on the west, and which was divided from the land of Zarahemla by a narrow strip of wilderness, which ran from the sea east even to the sea west, and round about on the borders of the seashore, and the borders of the wilderness which was on the north by the land of Zarahemla, through the borders of Manti, by the head of the river Sidon, running from the east towards the west—and thus were the Lamanites and the Nephites divided.

"Now, the more idle part of the Lamanites lived in the wilderness, and dwelt in tents; and they were spread through the wilderness on the west, in the land of Nephi; yea, and also on the west of the land of Zarahemla, in the borders by the seashore, and on the west in the land of Nephi, in the place of their father's first inheritance, and thus bordering along by the seashore.

"And also there were many Lamanites on the east by the seashore, whither the Nephites had driven them. And thus the Nephites were nearly surrounded by the Lamanites; nevertheless the Nephites had taken possession of all the northern parts of the land bordering on the wilderness, at the head of the river Sidon, from the east to the west, round about on the wilderness side; on the north, even until they came to the land which they called Bountiful.

"And it bordered upon the land which they called Desolation, it being so far northward that it came into the land which had been peopled and been destroyed, of whose bones we have spoken, which was discovered by the people of Zarahemla, it being the place of their first landing.

"And they came from there up into the south wilderness. Thus the land on the northward was called Desolation, and the land on the southward was called Bountiful, it being the wilderness which is filled with all manner of wild animals of every kind, a part of which had come from the land northward for food.

"And now, it was only the distance of a day and a half's journey for a Nephite, on the line Bountiful and the land Desolation, from the east to the west sea; and thus the land of Nephi and the land of Zarahemla were nearly surrounded by water, there being a small neck of land between the land northward and the land southward.

"And it came to pass, that the Nephites had inhabited the land Bountiful, even from the east unto the west sea, and thus the Nephites in their wisdom,

with their guards and their armies, had hemmed in the Lamanites on the south, that thereby they should have no more possession on the north, that they might not overrun the land northward.

"Therefore the Lamanites could have no more possessions only in the land of Nephi, and the wilderness round about. Now this was wisdom in the Nephites—as the Lamanites were an enemy to them, they would not suffer their afflictions on every hand, and also that they might have a country whither they might flee, according to their desires."

This is, as has already been admitted, very difficult to read understandingly and yet it is less puzzling than the place in Genesis where the inspired writer evidently gives the location of the garden of Eden, by mentioning the four rivers, Pison, Gihon, Hiddekel, and Euphrates.

The following are some of the outstanding features of Alma 22:27-34.

The Land of Nephi

There are two lands of Nephi. Both are mentioned in verse 28. One is "the place of their father's first inheritance." This is also called Lehi-Nephi (Mosiah 7:1), or, as we should say, Nephi in the land of Lehi. The other is Nephi in the land of Bountiful, which the Nephites had colonized (v. 33) even "from the east"—the eastern boundary—"unto the West Sea," and which, on that account was called the land of Nephi, on the same principle that parts of America have been called "New England," "New Spain," "Nova Scotia," etc. The Nephites were anxious to retain in remembrance the name of their great ancestor (2 Nephi 5:8), and to them, therefore, wherever Nephites settled was "the Land of Nephi."

Concerning the Land of Nephi, in Lehi, we read (v. 27):

(1) It was bordering "even to the sea, on the east and on the west." It must have had a coast line on both the Atlantic and the Pacific side, possibly on the Gulf of Darien on the east and the Gulf of Panama on the west.

(2) It was divided from the land of Zarahemla by a "narrow strip of wilderness," (v. 27). This "wilderness," as we learn from verse 31, was Bountiful. This is not conjecture. The text says clearly: "It [Bountiful] being the wilderness which is filled with all manner of wild animals." The land of Nephi, then, in Lehi, was separated from Zarahemla, not by the entire country Bountiful but, by a "narrow strip" of it. Now we read on:

(3) (This narrow strip) "ran from the sea east even to the sea west and round about on the borders of the sea shore, and the borders of the wilderness which was on the north by the land of Zarahemla, through the borders of Manti, by the head of the river Sidon, running from the east towards the west."

That is to say, as I read it, the "wilderness" or the narrow strip began on the border of Lehi-Nephi (from the sea east even to the

sea west) and then ran round about the sea shore (on the narrow strip), and then continued clear up to the borders of the wilderness which was north by the land of Zarahemla, through Manti by the head of the river Sidon. "And thus," the text says, "were the Lamanites and Nephites divided," referring to the Nephites who had come to Zarahemla and the others who had colonized the southern part of Bountiful (v. 33). They were literally separated, by the narrow isthmus that connects South America with Central America, from the bulk of the Lamanites in South America.

This is perfectly intelligible if we understand that the land Bountiful was Central America, between the Isthmus of Darien and Tehuantepec, as the article in the *Times and Seasons* seems to imply.

Bountiful

We have already seen that this country was called "the wilderness" (Alma 2:31; comp. Alma 2:36, 37). Its eastern extremity was the "narrow strip of wilderness," which adjoined the land of Leho-Nephi. On the opposite extremity—

(1) It "bordered upon the land which they called Desolation," the land on the northward, and was, therefore, in reference to the land Desolation, the land on the southward. (v. 31.)

(2) The boundary line between the two countries, Desolation and Bountiful, was drawn from some point east to the West sea and is said to have been "only the distance of a day and a half's journey for a Nephite."

Just how long this distance in modern measurement was we have no means of knowing. The Peruvians, and also the Mexicans, had trained couriers. Those of Peru, it is claimed, were able to convey messages from Cuzco to Lima, a distance of nearly four hundred miles, in three days, or two hundred miles in a day and a half. But that result was obtained by relay runners. Each *chasqui*, or courier, ran a league and a half and then passed the message on to one who was waiting. It is not impossible that the Nephites had some such institution, and that a day's journey was the regular distance covered by such messengers. Be this as it may, the probability is that the isthmus Tehuantepec is indicated as the point where the boundary line between Desolation and Bountiful was drawn.

That isthmus, from the bay of Campeche to Tehuantepec, is only about 125 miles in width. The distance could easily be covered by couriers in the time mentioned. If, on the other hand, the Nephites measured distances in "hours," as some modern peoples do, and if about three and a half miles made an "hour," then 36 hours would represent 126 miles.

(3) The land Bountiful, or, as it is also called, "The Land of Nephi and the Land of Zarahemla," lying side by side, Nephi on the Pacific and Zarahemla on the Atlantic (Alma 50:7, 8), was "nearly surrounded by water;" Tehuantepec being at one extremity and "a small neck of land between the land northward and the land south-

ward" on the other (v. 32). The context seems to require this interpretation, since the intention of the author is to show that the two countries, Zarahemla and Nephi, exclusive of Desolation in the north and Lehi-Nephi in the south, formed, very nearly, an island.

Curiously enough, the Indians, at the time of the advent of Columbus, still called the isthmus of Darien the "narrow place." As he was proceeding southward along the Mosquito coast, he heard of the Pacific ocean, and was told by the Indians that if he continued his course, he would soon come to a "narrow place" between the two seas. They were not ignorant of the geography of their country.

(4) The geographical configuration of the American continent explains what follows in the Book of Alma. The Nephites, we are told, had hemmed in the Lamanites on the south, to prevent them from overrunning the land northward, or to cut off the natural retreat of the Nephites, if defeated, into the land Desolation. (vv. 33, 34.)

The Narrow Pass

A ridge of hills, rising to a height of 730 feet, bends in a semi-circle around the bay of Tehuantepec, in places approaching the coast to within 15 or 20 miles. On the northern side of these hills there are plains containing rich alluvial soil, well watered. On the southern side there is a narrow belt of lowlands traversed by a few small rivers. The ridge is broken by the Chivela pass, which leads from the north to the south, or vice versa. If my conclusions are correct, the "narrow pass" where the people of Morianton were intercepted in their northward trek (Alma 50:34) must be looked for in this region. Here also Teancum, by order of Moroni, constructed fortifications against the Lamanites (Alma 52:9). Here, again, Moroniah, when the Lamanites had taken possession of Zarahemla, raised a line of fortifications the length of which was "a day's journey for a Nephite." Here, about 350 A. D., the boundary line between Nephites and Lamanites was drawn by mutual agreement (Mormon 2:28, 29), and here the Nephites began preparations for the final struggle (Mormon 3:5). It was here that Hagoth built his ships (Alma 63:5) possibly at the mouth of the Tehuantepec river, about 55, B. C.

Zarahemla

Concerning this country, which occupies one of the most prominent positions in Book of Mormon history, the following information is given:

(1) It was situated "southward" in relation to the lands of the Jaredites (Ether 9:31).

(2) It was colonized by the Mulekites, who came from Jerusalem (Omni 15; Hel. 6:10; 8:21), and landed in the country called Desolation (Alma 22:30), or Mulek (Hel. 6:10), whence they proceeded "up into the south wilderness," known as Bountiful (Alma 22:31).

(3) It was divided from the land of Nephi in Lehi by a narrow strip of wilderness (Panama?), but, together with the land of Nephi in Bountiful it formed almost an island (Alma 22:32).

(4) It was also separated from the land of Nephi in Bountiful by a strip of wilderness running "west and north beyond the borders of the land" (Alma 2:36, 37; 22:27).

(5) It was discovered by Mosiah (Omni 12, 13), and his advent in Zarahemla marks an epoch in Book of Mormon history, for from that time the main scenes of the great drama are laid in, as I believe, Central and North America, instead of the southern continent.

(6) It was north of the colonies founded by the Lamanites in the land of Nephi in Bountiful, for Moroni drove them out of the eastern part of the land of Nephi into their own lands, south of Zarahemla, and this land of Nephi "did run in a straight course from the east sea to the west" (Alma 50:7, 8).

(7) He then fortified the line between Lamanites and Nephites, the former occupying the land of Nephi and the latter Zarahemla, building forts all the way from the West sea (Alma 50:11), possibly as far as the lakes Managua and Nicaragua, which, with the San Juan river might form a natural obstacle to the progress of invading hordes.

(8) In the year 17 A. D. the northern extremity of Zarahemla and Bountiful, near the boundary line of Desolation, was appointed, by Lachoneus, to be a gathering place for a determined defense against the Lamanites, who were constantly crowding the Nephites northward. For many years the opposing forces fought with varying success, until the year 26 A. D., when peace was established and the Nephites returned to their own lands (3 Nephi 6:1-3).

"The Country of the King" Surrounded by Water

Finally, it should be added, for what it is worth, that in the Troano manuscript there is a remarkable glyph, which Dr. Augustus le Plongeon* says, if read phonetically, means "The Country of the King, Surrounded by Water." The upper circle, he informs us, stands for *Ahau*, "king," and the lower, for a country in the water; while the feather, the symbol of royalty, indicates that that is the name of the country. And this "Country of the King, surrounded by Water" is, he tells us, the old Maya domain in Central America. But, from the Book of Mormon we know that Zarahemla was founded by followers of Mulek, the scion of the royal house of Judah. It was, therefore, preeminently "the country of the king." It was also, as we have seen, "nearly surrounded by water." It appears, then, that we have, in the Book of Mormon, a geographical name identical with one in the Troano manuscript, and the inference is natural that both stand for the same portion of Central America, or very nearly so.

From some passages in the Book of Mormon we gather that

*"Queen Moo, Introduction, p. XLV.

Nephi, in Lehi, was separated from Zarahemla by a considerable distance. Limhi's expedition was "lost in the wilderness" and missed the country entirely (Mosiah 21:25), which could hardly have happened on a short distance. The expedition of Mosiah, consisting of sixteen strong men, wandered forty days in the wilderness, after they had left the land of Zarahemla, and then they reached Shilon, in Lehi-Nephi (Mosiah 7:4; comp. Alma 17:9).

Just how long distance sixteen strong men would cover in forty days is a matter of conjecture. The following from a sermon by Brigham Young may be of interest in this connection:

"The longest journey on foot I ever took at one time was in the year 1834, when a company of the brethren went up to Missouri. * * * We performed a journey of 2,000 miles on foot. We started on the 5th of May and accomplished that journey inside of three months, carrying our guns on our shoulders, doing our own cooking, etc. * * * Much of the way we had to drag our baggage wagons through mud holes and bad sections of the road. Twenty to thirty men would take hold and draw a wagon up a hill, or through a mud hole, and it was seldom that I laid myself down to rest until 11 or 12 o'clock at night. * * * If we laid by a day or a half day, we generally calculated to make the travel average twenty* miles a day. We spent considerable time in waiting upon the sick; and some days and nights the brethren who were able, were standing over the sick and dying, and burying the dead; we buried eighteen of the company. Notwithstanding all this, inside of three months we walked about two thousand miles."—*Jour of Dis.*, vol. 4, pp. 92 and 102.

At that rate the expedition of Mosiah should have covered a distance of about 888 miles in forty days.

Sidon

(1) The river Sidon ran *by* the land of Zarahemla (Alma 2:15), an expression which seems to indicate that its course was near a border rather than in the center of the country. The valley of Gideon was on the east bank and the city of Zarahemla on the west. (Alma 6:7; 2:2, 27.) The land of Manti was south of Gideon. (Alma 16:6; 22:27.) Through the borders of Manti ran the narrow strip of wilderness or barren hills that separated Zarahemla from the land of Nephi along the entire length of the two countries, from east to west. The land of Minon was above the land of Zarahemla, "in the course of the land of Nephi" (Alma 2:24); that is to say, in the mountains to the south of Zarahemla.

(2) A tremendous battle was fought on the banks of Sidon, about 75 B. C. between Nephites under Moroni, and Lamanites under Zerahemnah (Alma 43:16-34).

(3) Three years later, Moroni cut off all the strongholds of the Lamanites in the western end of the wilderness by a line of fortifications between Zarahemla and the land of Nephi (in Bountiful), "from the west sea, running by the head of the river Sidon." (Alma 50:11.)

*The text has 40 miles, but that must be a typographical error. Two thousand miles in 90 days is an average of 22 miles and a fraction a day.

(4) Here, in the year 322, A. D., the final struggle between Nephites and Lamanites began (Mormon 1:10).

From all this it appears to me that we must identify Zarahemla with the ancient Maya "empire" of which Mr. Bancroft* says:

"Throughout several centuries preceding the Christian era, and perhaps one or two centuries following, there flourished in Central America the great Maya empire of the Chanés, Culhuas, or Serpents, known to its foes as Xibalba, with its center in Chiapas at or near Palenque, and with several allied capitals in the surrounding region."

If this conclusion is correct, the land of Zarahemla occupied the Atlantic slope of Central America, from the Gulf of Mexico to the Mosquito coast on the Caribbean Gulf. The city of Zarahemla was about where the ruins of Palenque are found, and the immediate region around the city was also known as Zarahemla. The river Sidon may then be identified with the Usumacinta river.

The immense distances are no obstacle to the acceptance of this view, for it is known that the so-called Maya "empire" at one time "extended over the greater part of Central America.**

The domain of the Incas, Nadaillac estimates at 3,000 miles by 400,† with a population of eight million souls. And of the mound builders of North America he says, to prove that they had a widely extended commerce: "Beneath the same mounds we find the copper of Lake Superior, the mica of the Alleghanies, the obsidian of Mexico, and the pearls and shells of the Gulf."‡ The entire distance between Tehuantepec and South America is about 1500 miles. If travelers could make about 900 miles in forty days, they could certainly make an occasional trip across the narrow strip that separated their country from the land of Nephi, in Lehi.

Nephites, Lamanites, Jaredites

The suggestions here offered assume that Lehi landed in South America some distance south of the Isthmus and that he proceeded to the Titicaca basin, in Bolivia, and the valley of Cuzco, in Peru, where he died.

Shortly afterwards, Nephi and his faithful followers separated themselves from their brethren and, after having journeyed "in the wilderness for the space of many days," established themselves first in Ecuador, and then colonized the lofty table lands of Colombia, in what they called the Land of Nephi. (2 Nephi 6:2-9).

For some time they lived in peace here, but as the years passed, both they and the Lamanites multiplied and were scattered "upon much of the face of the land," (Jarom 5-8), and whenever the two factions came in contact with each other conflicts arose. At first the Nephites

**Native Races*, vol. 5, p 231.

**Nadaillac, *Pre-Historic America*, p. 263.

†Nadaillac, *Pre-Historical America*, p. 388.

‡*Ibid.*, p. 183.

defended themselves successfully, but the outcome was that many of them perished. (Omni 5.)

Some time between the years 279 and 130 B. C., Mosiah, with a considerable following, emigrated from the Land of Nephi, and, after a long journey through the wilderness—the isthmus of Panama—reached the land of Zarahemla (Omni 13-15).

Other Nephites followed a somewhat different route and founded settlements on the Pacific side of Central America. This part of the promised land was known as Bountiful (Alma 22:33), but when the Nephites settled there they called their settlements the Land of Nephi, as they had named their country in their father's first inheritance in South America. (Alma 22:28).

A number of Lamanites also went into Central America. They were "the more idle part" of them. These led a nomadic life, probably pitching their tents in the mountain valleys (Alma 22:28, 29). As soon as the Lamanites in Central America were strong enough, numerically, the old struggle began again, and the Nephites were gradually driven northward.

Many Lamanites and Nephites must have remained in South America and Central America while the struggle raged in the northern continent. Concerning their history, no record is preserved in the Book of Mormon. After the massacre around Cumorah many of the conquerors and survivors, without doubt, gradually worked their way southward towards the lands of their fathers. Nothing is said in the Book of Mormon of their exploits, except that they continued to war among themselves (Mormon 8:6-10) until the whole face of the land was one continual round of murder and bloodshed, causing a state of savagery, ignorance, and error. The Book of Mormon record closes in the year 421 A. D., or thereabouts. The history of the vast multitudes not directly included in the Book of Mormon record, though contemporary with the compilers of that volume, as well as the history of the millions who lived on the American continents after the close of the Book of Mormon record until the Spanish conquest, must be read in the mounds and cliff dwellings, the ruined pueblos, temples, and forts, and other remains of past civilizations that are found all over the American continents, and in the traditions that have been preserved.

All Indians Are Not the Descendants of Lehi

Students of the Book of Mormon should be cautioned against the error of supposing that all the American Indians are the descendants of Lehi, Mulek, and their companions, and that their languages and dialects, their social organizations, religious conceptions and practices, traditions, etc., are all traceable to those Hebrew sources.

Because the Jaredite record is very brief we are apt to forget that it embraces many centuries—how many, we have no means of ascertaining—and that it gives an epitome principally of the history of

Moron, where the Jaredites first established themselves. It stands to reason that the Jaredites gradually settled in favorable localities all over the American continents, and that both Nephites and Lamanites came in contact with them, and that an amalgamation took place everywhere as in the case of the Nephites and Mulekites in Zarahemla. If so, the Jaredite culture must have become a factor in the development of the institutions and languages of the country. But the Jaredites came from some center of population in Asia. Their language and culture were different from that of Lehi and Mulek. Their speech was probably closely related to the Aryan. And the impress they made upon the culture of the later arrivals has never been entirely effaced.

It has been asserted,* for instance, that the Mexican language, commonly called Nahuatl, is, in vocabulary and verb conjugation, purely Aryan, which had its origin in the highlands of east Iran, the country of the Elamites. But while it has Aryan characteristics, it has also evidences of Semitic relationship in its pronominal system, and many of its words are traceable to Semitic roots. This dual relationship would probably be found in other Indian tongues.** The Jaredite influence is, possibly more in evidence, in some respects, than the Semitic, but the mixture gives evidence of Jaredite and Nephite origin.

Nor is it improbable that America received immigrants from Asia and other parts of the globe, who may have introduced new creeds and institutions, although not mentioned in the Book of Mormon. The Indian traditions concerning culture-heroes, such as Votan, Quetzalcoatl, Manco Capac, Bochica, Wixepcocha, and others, who came mysteriously to the people in their degraded condition and taught them to till the ground, to spin and weave, to build houses, and to worship, and then passed out of view as mysteriously as they had come, may point to such immigrations, as well as to those which we know from the Book of Mormon.

*T. S. Denison, *The Primitive Aryans of America*, pp. 18, 19; Chicago, 1908.

**The Aryans are considered the ancestors of the Hindoo, Persian, Greek, Latin, Celtic, Teutonic, Slavonic and some other races.

