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Jeff Lindsay

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JOSEPH AND THE AMAZING TECHNICOLOR DREAM MAP: PART 1 OF 2

Jeff Lindsay

Abstract: The Arabian Peninsula has provided a significant body of evidence related to the plausibility of Nephi's account of the ancient journey made by Lehi's family across Arabia. Relatively few critics have seriously considered the evidence, generally nitpicking at details and insisting that the evidences are insignificant. Recently more meaningful responses have been offered by well educated writers showing familiarity with the Arabian evidences and the Book of Mormon. They argue that Nephi's account is not historical and any apparent evidence in its favor can be attributed to weak LDS apologetics coupled with Joseph's use of modern sources such as a detailed map of Arabia that could provide the name Nahom, for example. Further, the entire body of Arabian evidence for the Book of Mormon is said to be irrelevant because Nephi's subtle and pervasive incorporation of Exodus themes in his account proves the Book of Mormon is fiction. On this point we are to trust modern Bible scholarship ("Higher Criticism") which allegedly shows that the book of Exodus wasn't written until long after Nephi's day and, in fact, tells a story that is mere pious fiction, fabricated during or after the Exile.

There were high-end European maps in Joseph's day that did show a place name related to Nahom. Efforts to locate these maps anywhere near Joseph Smith have thus far proved unsuccessful. But the greater failure is in the explanatory power of any theory that posits Joseph used such a map. Such theories do not account for the vast majority of impressive evidences for the plausibility of Nephi's account of the journey through Arabia (e.g., remarkable candidates for Bountiful and the River Laman, the plausibility of the eastward turn after Nahom). They do not explain why one obscure name among hundreds was plagiarized — a name that would have the good fortune of later being verified as a genuine ancient tribal name present in the right region in Lehi's day. More importantly, theories of fabrication

based on modern maps ignore the fact that Joseph and his peers never took advantage of the impressive Book of Mormon evidence that was waiting to be discovered on such maps. That discovery would not come until 1978, and it has led to many remarkable finds through modern field work since then. Through ever better maps, exploration, archaeological work, and other scholarly work, our knowledge of the Arabian Peninsula has grown dramatically from Joseph's day. Through all of this, not one detail in the account of Lehi's Trail has been invalidated, though questions remain and much further work needs to be done. Importantly, aspects that were long ridiculed have become evidences for the Book of Mormon. There is a trend here that demands respect, and no mere map from Joseph's day or even ours can account for this.

As for the Exodus-based attack, yes, many modern scholars deny that the Exodus ever happened and believe the story was fabricated as pious fiction well after 600 BC. But this conclusion does not represent a true consensus and is not free from bias and blindness. The Exodus-based attack on the Book of Mormon ultimately is a case where a weakness in biblical evidence from Egypt is used to challenge the strength of Book of Mormon evidence from Egypt's neighbor to the east, the Arabian Peninsula. We will see that there are good reasons for the absence of evidence from Egypt, and yet abundant evidence that the Exodus material interwoven in Nephi's account could have been found on the brass plates by 600 BC. The absence of archaeological evidence for Israel's exodus from Egypt and the chaos in the many schools of modern biblical scholarship do not trump hard archaeological, geographical, and other evidence from the Arabian Peninsula regarding Lehi's exodus.

We will see that some of the most significant strengths of the Book of Mormon have not been turned into weaknesses. Indeed, the evidence from Arabia continues to grow and demands consideration from those willing to maintain an open mind and exercise a particle of faith.

New Attempts to Bury Nahom

The Arabian Peninsula now provides a surprisingly rich body of evidence in support of the plausibility of Nephi's account of the journey that Lehi's family took on their way from Jerusalem to a coastal site they called Bountiful.¹ This body of evidence, reviewed briefly later in this paper, has often been ignored or treated superficially by our critics. However, recently a seemingly thorough contrarian view has been offered by an anonymous but well educated writer, "RT," on the

Faith Promoting Rumor blog at Patheos.com.² RT agrees with and builds on a critical assessment in a recent post from a professor of history, Philip Jenkins, in his blog *The Anxious Bench* also at Patheos.com.³ These authors raise significant arguments that merit a response. They suggest that Nephi's account has elements that raise suspicion and point to fabrication by Joseph Smith, with the assured assistance of a detailed map that could have guided him, for example, in placing Nahom in what LDS apologists see as exactly the right place. While there is no evidence that Joseph had such a map or access to one, the critics are certain that he must have seen and studied one to guide him in describing the journey through the Arabian Peninsula.

If RT and Jenkins are right, a map or two, some common knowledge, and a bit of luck coupled with the distortions of weak LDS apologetics might be all it takes to explain the alleged Book of Mormon evidence.

In fact, one could even argue that Nephi's account of his family's exodus from Jerusalem via what we now call Lehi's Trail is not a strength of the Book of Mormon after all, but one of its greatest weaknesses. RT argues that Nephi's subtle and frequent use of Exodus themes, with many implicit and explicit references to events in the book of Exodus, betrays the Book of Mormon as a modern construction, for modern biblical scholarship ("Higher Criticism") supposedly shows that the Exodus account was simply not known in 600 BC for Nephi to use. Does this give critics a powerful axe that trumps any Book of Mormon evidence?

In Section 1, we will summarize the numerous arguments that have been recently launched against Lehi's Trail, with brief responses. Then in Section 2 we'll review highlights of the Arabian evidence for Lehi's Trail before dealing later in more detail with the two issues I consider most weighty: the alleged use of a map of Arabia by Joseph Smith, covered in Section 3, and the impact of biblical scholarship regarding the Pentateuch on Nephi's writings, treated in Section 4.

In Section 3, while examining the possibility of maps having guided Joseph, I will argue that attempts to explain the evidence from Arabia with the aid of a map requires something of a dream map with far more information than Joseph possibly could have gleaned from any known source in his day.

In Section 4, while examining the felling power of the "Higher Criticism Axe" against the Arabian evidence, I will argue that modern scholarship leaves abundant room for Nephi to have known about the Exodus. We will see that biblical criticism based largely on examining the biblical text does not necessarily outweigh hard archaeological evidence.

Indeed, the alleged consensus of scholars does not present anything close to an iron-clad case against Nephi's brass plates and the record on the gold plates. In fact, what we can learn about the brass plates from the Book of Mormon, when properly viewed, may help us reform flawed assumptions in scholarly work on the Bible.

I. Summary of Recent Arguments Against Lehi's Trail

Before listing the barrage of criticisms that have recently been levied against the account of Lehi's Trail, it is important to first note what they do not achieve. Our erudite critics fail to:

- Explain why the case for Lehi's Trail has grown dramatically stronger, not weaker, in the nearly two centuries of further investigation in Arabia since the Book of Mormon came out. Many glaring weaknesses such as the lack of flowing water, the apparent lack of any place resembling Bountiful, the impossibility of trekking across the vast sand dunes of Arabia, etc., have now become less of a problem or even crown jewels of evidence for the plausibility of the Book of Mormon.
- Account for the multiple details of those crown jewels in the Arabian evidence with anything verging on a plausible explanation other than luck. For example, even if Joseph could have used a map to somehow guess the location of a fertile spot like Bountiful east of Nahom, finding one that would be (and still is today) *uninhabited* is a highly counterintuitive stroke of luck. As we will see, the unlikelihood of a place like Bountiful being uninhabited in a region where fertility is rare and greatly treasured is still being used as a reason why Nephi's record must be fictional ("it is simply impossible that Lehi could have found a pristine garden spot on the coast far from human civilization"⁴ according to RT, possibly unaware of important aspects of Warren Aston's non-fictional work at the secluded, still uninhabited, and verdant gem of Khor Kharfot, discussed below). What map or other data from the nineteenth century could have made Joseph so surprisingly lucky?
- Explain why, if Joseph used a map to provide "local color" or build in evidence for his book, he and his co-conspirators

never showed the least awareness of such evidence and never exploited it to advance their cause? When other apparent evidences became known, they were enthusiastically highlighted in LDS publications.⁵ If there were evidence on high-end maps from Europe known to Joseph and his peers, why not “discover” one and make a fuss over Nahom? Such a find would have to wait for an accidental discovery in the 1970s.

Now let’s wade through the bulk of the criticisms. We begin with Philip Jenkins, who makes these points:⁶

1. Finding a place name similar to Nephi’s “Nahom” in the vast Arabian Peninsula is pure coincidence.

Response: An assertion offered without support. Nahom is a remarkable find, far more than just a random place name, as discussed below. Further, given that ancient Hebrew-related languages were written with roots made from consonants without the vowels, Nahom would have been written as NHM, which is essentially the *same* name of the relevant place and tribe in modern Yemen. Today that name can be spelled as Nihm, Nahm, or Nehem, but these spellings can all be considered as NHM. This rare name is not found anywhere else in Arabia, as detailed below.

2. The inscriptions on ancient altars in Yemen providing archaeological evidence for the name Nahom in Lehi’s day actually refer to a tribe, not a geographical place.

Response: The general region called Nehem/Nahm, etc. is named for the Nihm tribe that has long been there. Tribes can, in fact, give their names to the lands they occupy.

3. The significance of the NHM inscriptions on altars in Yemen has been blown vastly out of proportion by enthusiastic LDS members. Since there are thousands of place names all over the Middle East, it was essentially a certainty that someone would eventually find overlap between a real name and one from the Book of Mormon, especially when you just consider that Semitic names

are typically just written with three consonants. “A name inscribed as NHM could be Nahom, Nuhem, Nahum, Nihim, Nehem, Nehim, Nihm, Nahm, Nihma, Nahma. ... The odds of some accidental correspondence are very high.”

Response: As documented in more detail below, there is only one region in Arabia with the NHM name, and it is in precisely the right place to correspond with the Book of Mormon. This, in combination with numerous other aspects of Lehi’s Trail that now have evidence for plausibility, provides a compelling case that something more than coincidence is at work in 1 Nephi. Adding Jenkins’ creative misspellings to the known ways that the NHM place and tribe have been transliterated does nothing for the case against Nahom. Since none of these other variations exist elsewhere in Arabia, as far as we know, his point is without merit. There’s one NHM-related area in Arabia, and it fits the Book of Mormon well. This could be coincidence, but Jenkins vastly overestimates the odds of “accidental correspondence.”

4. The name Nahom can be readily explained as just a minor variation on the name of the book Nahum in the Bible.

Response: The names are similar, but a prophet’s name in the Bible does not inform anybody as to the location of the ancient tribal region in Yemen that fits the Book of Mormon account so remarkably well.

5. In claiming that the NHM inscriptions from Yemen are significant, LDS apologists have failed to bear their burden of proof by considering the odds of finding the NHM name somewhere in Arabia. If this name occurs, say, every five miles or so in the Middle East, there’s no significance to finding one in the alleged “right place.”

Response: This is addressed below. Jenkins is simply unfamiliar with the detailed work that thoroughly answers his question.

6. “A form of NHM (*Nehhm*) shows up for instance in the travel narrative and maps of Carsten Niebuhr, of the 1761 Danish Arabia Expedition, marking a location in Yemen. An English translation of his writings appeared in 1792, and copies were available in US libraries in the early nineteenth century.” This map was available in some US libraries in Joseph’s day.

Response: This is addressed in detail below. Among the points to be made, had Joseph used this map, it would have offered precious little help (e.g., no hint of the Valley of Lemuel or Bountiful on the east) and would have guided him the wrong way after Nahom. What would motivate Joseph to ignore all the “help” available on the map and select only one small spot to pluck what would prove to be a very lucky place name?

7. There were other European maps of Arabia that had NHM-related names on them.

Response: Yes, and with many of the same limitations that Niebuhr’s map has. This will be treated in detail below.

8. “For the [LDS] apologist cause, [the map issue] is also utterly damning. The map evidence makes it virtually certain that Smith encountered and appropriated such a reference, and added the name as local color in the Book of Mormon.”

Response: Jenkins’ “virtual certainty” is based on speculation and an absence of evidence. While this is treated below, I’ll raise one important issue now: If Joseph secretly used a map with Nehem/Nahom on it, none of which can be shown to have been anywhere near him, in order to add “local color” and build in plausibility or evidence of authenticity to his tale, why did he and his peers never manage to “discover” such a map after the Book of Mormon came out in order to give it support? Why go to such trouble and not exploit it? Why did we have to wait until 1978 for a BYU professor to notice this potential evidence for the plausibility of Nahom in the Book of Mormon? The most plausible explanation is that Joseph did not know about the existence of Nehem/Nahom on some European maps.

9. Relevant maps were probably abundant: “Following the US involvement against North African states in the early nineteenth century, together with Napoleon’s wars in the Middle East, I would assume that publishers and mapmakers would produce works to respond to public demand and curiosity.”

Response: This is addressed below. The relevant maps may not have been abundant, and there is no evidence that one was ever near Joseph Smith.

10. Joseph was a diligent student who would have actively sought for information to help craft his book: “there is one thing we know for certain about the man, which is that he had a lifelong fascination with the ‘Oriental,’ with Hebrew, with Egypt, with hieroglyphics, with his ‘Reformed Egyptian.’ He would have sought out books and maps by any means possible.”

Response: Addressed below. Jenkins mistakes the intellectually mature Joseph of later years for the young unlettered man tasked with translating the Book of Mormon.

11. “Is there even the ghost of a case here that needs debating or answering? Obviously not. And this is the best the apologists can do?”

Response: Jenkins fails to understand how broad and deep the body of evidence from Arabia is. As we will discuss in our overview below, it is certainly a remarkable issue that weighs in favor of the plausibility of Nephi’s brief record.

From RT, Part 1:

RT’s related but more extensive critique comes in three parts, in which he makes many points, often at length and with reasonable documentation. I’ll exclude a few minor points that aren’t specifically related to Lehi’s Trail and 1 Nephi.

I should first point out that a number of RT’s criticisms are informed by modern “historical criticism” or “higher criticism” of the Bible, which tends to view the Pentateuch as fiction (to be discussed in Section 4).

Some extreme factions in these schools see little historical value in much of the Old Testament. RT seems to among these so-called “minimalists” (for minimizing the historical value of the biblical record) given the criteria he applies in labeling events as fictional and especially given that he does not seem to accept the reality of Jeremiah and Ezekiel as real prophets who existed before the Exile. In response to an argument from biblical scholar Richard Elliot Friedman citing passages from Jeremiah and Ezekiel to support for an early date for the presumed source used in much of Exodus, RT replied: “This is begging the question. We do not in fact have evidence that Jeremiah and Ezekiel existed before the exile.”⁷ This is surprising, since according to well-known Bible scholar Richard Elliot Friedman, proponents of the “Documentary Hypothesis” (discussed in Section 4) have not argued that Ezekiel and Jeremiah were written much later by someone else or that the Exodus-related material was patched into their books by late redactors,⁸ and James K. Hoffmeier notes that “the chronological data interspersed throughout the book of Ezekiel makes it one of the most securely dated books in the Hebrew canon.”⁹ I see RT’s view as a rather radical position not shared by a majority of scholars. But given that perspective, it will not be surprising that numerous aspects of the Book of Mormon would be found guilty of being fiction, especially those that lack granular detail consistent with his expectations or those that draw upon biblical themes.

My disagreement with his overall views of scripture does not address the merit of his points, which now need to be considered individually. I’ll provide brief responses to most of these points. Those not given responses here are treated below in Section 2.

1. Regarding the evidence related to Nahom, one can, “from a limited perspective,” say that “archaeological discovery and historical research would appear to bear out the accuracy of the Book of Mormon account.” The Book of Mormon appears to put Nahom in precisely the right spot. But these merits fade when we recognize that a map could have guided Joseph and when we notice the illogical and non-historical nature of the account.
2. The account contains many story elements showing “it originated as imaginative mythological literature modeled along biblical patterns,” while lacking the kind of details we would expect in a real report of a family traveling through Arabia. (See the related response to Objection #12 below.)

3. While the directions for travel are realistic, the details are not. There is very little precise geographical detail. Given the nebulous account, it is no surprise that “researchers of the Book of Mormon have been unable to agree on the precise path followed by Lehi in Arabia or even to identify a single site visited by the group apart from Nahom.”

Response: This is a surprising statement in light of the impressive candidates that have been identified for the sites of the Valley of Lemuel and the River Laman, Shazer, and especially Bountiful. Progress in understanding a likely route has been steady since the first serious efforts to explore this topic and continues with periodic field work and other research. The general path is clear, following the Frankincense Trail for much of the journey, with some debate over the eastward turn after Nahom, though this appears to be resolved in the latest works (e.g., Warren Aston’s 2015 *Lehi and Sariah in Arabia*).

4. The simple unidirectional travel across Arabia (south-southeast, then eastward) gives a route one could create by looking at a map of Arabia.

Response: This is an outrageous statement based on hindsight. Yes, if you know where Bountiful is, where Nahom is, and where the Frankincense Trail is, you could connect lines on the map. But this explains nothing. RT does not explain how one could use these maps *a priori* to create Lehi’s Trail. Take any map of Arabia, hand it to a few dozen college students not familiar with the Trail of Lehi, and ask them to draw a route from Jerusalem to the ocean. Result? Probably a beeline to the Mediterranean Sea. Maybe straight to the Red Sea for a few. Then ask them to draw a path one could take from Jerusalem through the Arabian Peninsula to the ocean. Result? Even if you try forcing the “correct answer” by asking them to draw two lines, one south-southeast and another nearly due east, what percentage of people would ever end up at Khor Kharfot, the leading Bountiful candidate? Or, if

you point to where a candidate for Bountiful is and ask them how to get there from Jerusalem, how many would come up with a route as plausible as that in 1 Nephi? Even good modern maps lack the information to reach Nahom and from there to gain access to a strong candidate for Bountiful to the east. Using modern maps, would they ever reach the Valley of Laman, Nahom or Bountiful?

5. Since 1 Nephi 2:5 has Nephi coming near the “borders” of the Red Sea and then traveling south-southeast, they presumably traveled along the coast and not along the Frankincense Trail that is separated from the coast by the Hijaz mountains. But travel along the coast would be impossibly difficult, both due to the rugged terrain and the lack of wells for water.

Response: Virtually every researcher writing about Lehi's trail puts them on the Frankincense Trail early in the journey, not along the coast itself. The details of the route from the Valley of Lemuel to the main incense trail are not given, but the bulk of their southward travel would naturally follow the broad Frankincense Trail.

6. Lehi's exodus is completely illogical. If God wanted to get them to an ocean to sail to the New World, why not go straight to the Mediterranean Sea? Why take so long on such a difficult journey through Arabia? “Everything about the migration to the Promised Land seems to reflect real-world naiveté and ignorance.” “The decision to … lead this branch of Israel to the New World via the deserts of Arabia only makes sense at a literary level, created as a period of wilderness wandering and testing before the journey to the Promised Land. …”

Response: If I were to walk into a class of, say, ten-year-old Primary children in a typical LDS ward, I would expect to get a reasonable answer to the question of why God had Lehi travel and struggle for years before getting to the promised land, when he could have just sent them there quickly. It's essentially the same question as to why He sends us here to mortality instead of just putting us in Heaven in the first place. There are vital things to gain from the journey.

I am deeply puzzled by RT's stance here. Since he claims to be LDS, I assume he must have known this kind of answer at some point, but it seems to have been erased through much learning. This reveals one of the great problems in the branches of modern biblical criticism that seek to minimize the historical value of scriptural records. When a tale has strong literary functions (such as parallels to the Exodus) and high theological or symbolic meaning, it is immediately assumed to be fiction (if it's a biblical text, that is—a less biased approach is generally taken with other ancient documents, in my opinion), even though real life stories can frequently be cast into such forms. Hundreds of years from now, future minimalists may have their turn to dismiss the story of the Mormon exodus from Nauvoo to Salt Lake as mere “naiveté and ignorance” that “only makes sense at a literary level.”

7. The Book of Mormon account clearly “was not intended to represent factual history” because Nephi’s account employs language, motifs, and themes from the biblical narrative of the Exodus. This includes the “pillar of fire” Lehi saw (1 Nephi 1:6), themes of mercy and deliverance for God’s chosen people, the three-day journey into the wilderness (1 Nephi 2:6 and Exodus 3:18; 8:27; 15:22), Lehi’s invoking the names of his sons in poetic statements (1 Nephi 2:8-10) as did Moses (Exodus 18:3–4), the journey to the promised land, the significance of genealogy, the parallels between the brass Liahona and Moses’s brass serpent as symbols of Christ requiring faith, and the murmuring from hungry people in the group (1 Nephi 16:19 and Exodus 16:2–3, 8). Thirty-nine such elements are listed.

Response: This is related to my response above for Point #6, but will be treated in more detail below.

8. RT rebuts Terrence Szink’s assessment of the intricate Exodus themes in the Book of Mormon that, while pervasive, are subtle enough that they were only recognized in our day.¹⁰ Rather than being an evidence of ancient Hebraic origins beyond Joseph Smith’s abilities, RT is confident that Joseph

could have fabricated this since he was steeped in Bible lore, and since other authors have done similar things.

Response: The Exodus themes in the Book of Mormon have been a fruitful area for exploration by LDS scholars and are far more interesting and pervasive than anyone seemed to realize until recently. One can argue that Joseph made these connections through osmosis or good Bible scholarship, or one can recognize yet another layer of impressive accomplishment in a carefully crafted ancient record. This is left to the reader. Some of the other interesting contributions to consider are papers by Bruce Boehm¹¹ and S. Kent Brown.¹²

9. The Exodus themes in the Book of Mormon cannot be part of a real text from Nephi's day: "The **broad consensus of contemporary biblical scholarship** is that while parts of the Pentateuch may have been written during the late monarchy and been in existence when Nephi supposedly lived, the narrative did not become culturally authoritative for Jews in any significant sense until the Persian and Hellenistic periods."

Response: Treated in Section 3. RT's consensus is illusory.

10. The Book of Mormon fails to properly interact with the Pentateuch, showing little interest, for example, in defining the Laws and statutes the people should observe.

Response: This is a perplexing objection, for the law of Moses was already defined and on the brass plates. Why must it be redefined? I wish to know where RT obtains his criteria for how a scriptural record should interact with the laws of the Pentateuch, particularly when it has been carefully edited to benefit later generations who would no longer be under those laws. Mormon, knowing that we would have access to the records of the Old Testament, would add no value by reciting the details of those rules that do not apply to us. However, the Book of Mormon makes it clear that the Nephites observed the "the judgments, and the statutes, and the commandments of the Lord, according to the law of Moses" before the coming of Christ (2 Nephi

5:10; cf. 2 Nephi 25:24–26; Jacob 4:5, 7:7; Jarom 5, 11; Mosiah 2:3, 3:15; Mosiah 12:27–29, 13:27–28, 16:13–15; Alma 25:15–16; Alma 34:13–14; Helaman 13:1, 15:5; 3 Nephi 1:24, 9:17, 15:2–4, 8; 4 Nephi 12; Ether 12:11). In fact, nearly every book within the Book of Mormon makes references to the Law of Moses. The offering of sacrifice and burnt offerings is explicitly mentioned several times (1 Nephi 2:7, 5:9, 7:22; Mosiah 2:3) and the ritual practice of sacrifice among the Nephites is implicit in teachings about the future sacrifice of the Messiah (Alma 34:10–15). “Sacrifices and burnt offerings” are formally ended by the proclamation of the triumphant Messiah in 3 Nephi 9:9. The commandments in the Pentateuch that do still apply to us are given in detail in Mosiah 13 and aspects of this moral code are discussed in detail several times (Jacob 2, Mosiah 2:13, Alma 16:18, Alma 30:10, 39:3–12).

Given Mormon’s era and objectives, it would be truly surprising if he had incorporated the details RT demands into our record. Joseph, supposedly steeped in Bible lore, could easily have added “local color” with extensive details of the law of Moses, but instead we have a text that very appropriately reflects what the Book of Mormon claims to be. An evaluation of an ancient text needs to begin with understanding what the text claims to be, not what modern scholars demand of it, especially when the demands are motivated by a desire to minimize and undermine its historicity.

11. “Perhaps most damagingly, the allusions and references to the book of Exodus in the Book of Mormon show that the form of the narrative it presumes corresponds to that found in the Bible, combining both non-priestly (non-P) and priestly (P) material. **As is well known, one of the more significant conclusions of two centuries of biblical scholarship is that the story of the Exodus is actually a product of multiple literary sources/strands that were developed and combined over time**, including a non-P source (sometimes divided into separate Yahwist and Elohist sources or early non-P and late non-P strands) and a P source that covered

similar material but had distinctive theological emphases and content as well. Although many scholars believe that some of the non-P material may date to the pre-exilic or monarchic period, **the P source is at the earliest exilic and more likely from the post-exilic/Persian period.**” This rules out the Book of Mormon as a historical text.

Response: We deal with this below in Section 4, where we will see that significant biblical scholars disagree with the dating of P and others find noteworthy evidence for an Exodus from Egypt and for the significance of the Exodus tradition among pre-exilic Jews. The broad, stable consensus RT would have us accept belies the confusion in the unsettled world of modern biblical scholarship, where the textual evidence from LDS scriptures may actually provide valuable data to help resolve some current debates.

12. “The absence of mention of pack animals highlights the fanciful character of the narrative.” While Nibley said that the use of camels was so obvious, that there was no need to explicitly state what was used for the journey, RT is incredulous that Nephi would not mention camels even once. “For the Book of Mormon account of Lehi’s journey is a[n] autobiographical-historiographical narrative ... containing substantial itinerary material, including details such as place names, travel directions, and chronographic formula[e], as well as accounts about hunting for food and notable incidents and interactions within the group, in other words, the precise type of context where we would expect to find some mention of the status of the group’s livestock or pack animals.”

Response: After reading RT’s earlier objection that “almost everything in between [the beginning and the end of the journey] is nebulous and blurry,” I am grateful that RT now recognizes that there are significant details in Nephi’s brief account, in spite of comprising a mere handful of verses spanning eight years. I, too, would like more details and more local color, but Nephi’s purpose is not to document the details of daily life and give us a granular history. More

extensive details (the “more history part”) are in his *other* set of plates with Lehi’s record (2 Nephi 4:4), which I hope to read someday. Nephi’s goal on the small plates is to “write the things of my soul” (2 Nephi 4:5) and to bring us to the Messiah. Doing this requires some details of their journey, especially those that support his theological objectives in showing the workings of the Lord, etc. But it is unreasonable to demand information on camels, tent design, personal hygiene practices, interactions with locals, romance on the trail, etc. — the very sort of details that we would expect not in Nephi’s terse agenda-driven account, but in a fraudulent work designed to interest readers and sell well.

13. Related to the above objection, the use of camels is said to be unlikely. “[F]rom the evidence of archaeology and biblical text, it would seem that camels were not used as a regular beast of burden in the central hill country of Judah and Israel, but were confined to areas in the south and southwest/southeast of Palestine close to desert trade routes.”

Response: There is no problem in assuming, based on the text, that Lehi had experience with camels and may have owned some. While some have proposed that Lehi was a caravanner, Jeffrey Chadwick notes that Nephi’s familiarity with metal working suggests the family had a connection with the mining and metal working industry and may have frequented an important source of ore to the south, the ancient copper mines near the Gulf of Eilat where Lehi would initially approach the Red Sea on his journey.¹³ These mines in the Timna Valley are along the major route south to the Red Sea.¹⁴ To bring back ore, such travel would have naturally used camels. These mines were still active in Lehi’s day.¹⁵

There is significant evidence that domestic camels were used in Arabia by 600 BC. Martin Heide’s recent study on the domestication of camels is a valuable resource on this topic.¹⁶ It provides crucial information to counter some claims by biblical minimalists who see the numerous references to the camel in the Old Testament as anachronisms pointing to late origins of the text. While they may not have been

widely used in Israel before 1000 BC, “domesticated Bactrian camels may have been available in Mesopotamia by the end of the third / beginning of the second millennium.”¹⁷ (This is contra RT, who in Footnote 36 states that “Camels were not domesticated until the end of the second millennium and so are anachronistic in the stories about the patriarchs,” evidence that those accounts were created at a late date when camels were widely used.) By Lehi’s day, domesticated camels were in widespread use on trade routes in Arabia, and it is entirely plausible that someone embarking on a trip south of Israel would have used camels.¹⁸

Objections to Lehi’s Sacrifice

14. RT objects to Lehi’s building of an altar and offering sacrifices as not only contrary to Jewish centralization of worship at Jerusalem, but as fundamentally ahistorical because ancient Jews wouldn’t just build an altar at some random place for sacrifice. Sacrifice “was integrally connected to … the worship of local deities… in particular spaces set apart for this purpose. … [O]ne did not simply build an altar out in the country when you wanted to make a sacrifice to deity. Altars were in fact inextricably linked to particular cult sites and sanctuaries, where deities were understood to be close at hand. … Because sacrifice was fundamentally about feeding the deity, … one fed the deity where he/she was widely viewed to be present and cultically available.” Related examples in the Old Testament of individuals constructing altars for personal use (Genesis 13:18; 22:9; 35:7; Exodus 17:15; 32:5; 23:14; Joshua 8:30; Judges 6:24 etc.) are dismissed as equally ahistorical, being “literary presentations of times in the distant past rather than historical narrative and as a rule function as etiologies for the establishment of actual cult sites/sanctuaries.”

Response: In dismissing the historicity of numerous episodes relating to altar building, I suggest that RT draws upon his “biblical minimalism,” which we will discuss in the final section of this paper, viewing much of the Old Testament as a literary concoction not grounded in actual

events. However, since at least some of the locations where the patriarchs or others built altars were not specified (e.g., Noah's altar in Genesis 8:20) or were well outside Judea (e.g., the altar Moses built in Exodus 17:15), we need not believe that all these references to altar building were just to provide justification for existing designated worship sites for Jews in Israel many centuries later. If there is no substance to those accounts, if they were just post-exilic creations to justify later practices, why are there any scenes of divinely approved altar building and sacrifice outside of Jerusalem?

Regarding the requirement for central worship in Jerusalem, yes, this was part of the reforms of Josiah and the Deuteronomists, which Lehi and others clinging to the more ancient traditions may have resisted.¹⁹ In fact, one of the most interesting new bodies of Book of Mormon evidence comes from work exploring the tensions during the late First Temple period between a newly reformed religion and the old ways of worship, akin to Lehi's style. This includes the work of Margaret Barker and others.²⁰ But in any case, the late requirement for centralized worship in Jerusalem may not have applied to those far from its environs, as David Seely demonstrates.²¹

Altars, per *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, "consisted of any type of structure (they were usually open structures) where the sacrifices could be made by anyone. Such sites are numerous from the ancient periods and they seem to have been centers of activity for priests and nonpriests."²² Further, "the earliest legislation as well as the earliest practice presupposes the use of altars in a worship attended by no special priesthood." The guidelines for altars in Exodus 20:24–26 are given in the second person singular, as if to everyone, not just priests: "An altar of earth you shall make for me and sacrifice on it burnt offerings and your peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen; **in all the place** where I cause my name to be remembered I will come to you and bless you. And if you make an altar of stone, you shall not build it of hewn stones. ..." *The International*

Standard Bible Encyclopedia explains the implication since this regulation “applies in ‘all the place’ (i.e., throughout the territory of Israel) rather than in ‘every place’ (i.e., the special sites of theophanic appearances, or other sanctuaries).”²³ Thus, contrary to RT’s claim, altar building and sacrifice were not limited to places of special significance such as sites of theophanies, and could be part of family or lay worship. In addition to examples of family or lay worship from Genesis, young David spoke of an annual sacrifice for his family in Bethlehem (1 Samuel 20:6, 29) presumably using an altar.²⁴ *The Jewish Encyclopedia* also explains that while there were strict restrictions for the Levite offerings, “both before and after the time of Moses the ‘olah [burnt offering] was offered by laymen without distinction of persons and without restriction as to mode or measure,” citing Genesis 8: 20, 22:2ff (cf. 15:17); 1 Samuel 6: 14; Amos 22; Isaiah 1: 11; Hosea 6: 6; Job 1: 5 and 42: 8.²⁵

RT’s summary of sacrifice in ancient Israel and the feeding of local deities only at special sites, strikes me as a condescending view of secular scholars who project their modern attitudes back onto the Hebrews of Lehi’s day to suggest that the prophets of the Bible were superstitious primitives rather than intelligent men seeking to humbly worship the God of the universe. Yes, the sacred temple is an appropriate place to seek the presence of God (far more than some “local deity”), as Isaiah does in his worshipful encounter with the Lord at the temple altar in Isaiah 6. But anciently, worship and sacrifice were not strictly limited to Jerusalem or other official sites. Even after Josiah’s reforms, there was great variety in worship in ancient Israel.²⁶ For example, Dana Edelman’s work, mentioned by RT, shows that even after centralization, sacrifice and worship of Yahweh continued in many regions outside of Jerusalem. Her examples include worship complexes built inside of forts, such as the fort at Arad with a presumably Yahwistic worship complex including an altar of unhewn stones and a sanctuary with a holy of holies.²⁷

Edelman also mentions the ancient Jews in Elephantine,

Egypt, who had built themselves a temple or “altar house” not at some mystic site, but inside a fort.²⁸ I would argue that altars in forts are presumably there for convenience and security, and that forts themselves tend to be located at places selected for military advantage rather than mystic places providing access to local deities. The Elephantine Papyri show that faithful Jews far from Jerusalem could build altars, conduct sacrifices, and even build a temple, where worship continued even after the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed.²⁹

All this places the Book of Mormon on solid ground, while if it had been fabricated based on Joseph’s alleged intimate knowledge of the Bible, it would seem that a temple could not be built and that a Levite priest would be needed if sacrifices were to be offered, as many critics of the Book of Mormon continue to claim.

To further demonstrate the blunder of Lehi building an altar, RT quotes Julius Wellhausen: “the altars, as a rule, are not built by the patriarchs according to their own private judgment wheresoever they please; **on the contrary, a theophany calls attention to, or at least afterwards confirms, the holiness of the place ...**” [emphasis added].³⁰ It is hard to see how one might think this doesn’t apply to Lehi. During the prolonged time here, Lehi experienced miracles such as escaping with his life and family in the first place, then receiving the brass plates, being filled with the spirit such that he could prophecy about his descendants (1 Nephi 5:17), having Ishmael’s family join him, and receiving the miraculous director called the Liahona (1 Nephi 16:10). Perhaps most dramatically, he had his famous vision of the Tree of Life (1 Nephi 8), which begins with an encounter with a heavenly being in a white robe. Lehi has had multiple divine encounters, spiritual experiences, and miraculous blessings, “and all these things” happened in the Valley of Lemuel (1 Nephi 9:1), before they crossed the River Laman to continue their journey (1 Nephi 16:12). This was a sacred place, a divinely appointed place. Lehi’s “local deity” was clearly accessible

here and had spoken with him. Perfect spot for an altar.

15. RT objects to sacrifices on Lehi's Trail since it would have meant bringing animals for sacrifice on the trip, which would require water and fodder.

Response: The multiple sacrifices described are all near the beginning of the journey, in their first major camp, where this would be less of a problem. Later when water is more precious and food less abundant, we don't have mention of sacrifice. But sacrifices could have been offered through vegetable offerings, birds, etc.

16. RT objects to the use of the Book of Mormon's phrase "sacrifice and burnt offerings" and wonders why sacrifice is always singular, when the Bible has "burnt offerings and sacrifices" (e.g., Exodus 10:25; 18:12; 20:24; 24:5). The exact Book of Mormon expression "is not attested anywhere in the Bible" and to RT it seems that it "functions as if it were a merism or compound expression for the offering of sacrifices, thus further reinforcing the impression that the author had no firsthand knowledge of Israelite sacrificial practice."

Response: I'm not sure why sacrifice is typically singular, but RT may be relieved to find 3 Nephi 9:19 has the double plural "sacrifices and burnt offerings." But yes, the Book of Mormon may well be using "sacrifice and burnt offerings" as a merism referring to the entire complex of sacrificial rites, just as the related phrase in the Bible may also function as a merism. For example, regarding "burnt offerings and sacrifices" in Exodus 10:25, Baruch Levine and Gary Anderson explain that this verse refers to the burnt offering (*olah-zebah*) and to the peace offering (*olah-shelamim*). They state that the frequent reference to these two sacrifices together should be understood as a merism representing the entire sacrificial system.³¹

17. RT claims that the Book of Mormon botches the distinction between burnt offerings and sacrifices.

Response: We've already noted that "sacrifice and burnt offerings" may well be a merism, referring to the body of sacrificial practices, and need not require that at least one instance of sacrifice and two of burnt offerings were made each time that phrase is used, contra RT. But Nephi's record is subtly consistent with ancient Jewish practices, as Kent Brown observes.³² When they reach the Red Sea, Lehi builds an altar and "makes an offering unto the Lord, and gave thanks unto the Lord our God" (1 Nephi 2:7) — no mention of burnt offerings. The two times he makes "sacrifice and burnt offerings" (1 Nephi 5:9 and 7:22), he has great cause for gratitude but also cause for concern about sin. "In each case, one can readily detect sin in the prior behavior of family members whether it took the form of complaining, family jousts, or the taking of human life. Here, Lehi sought to free his extended family from the taint of unworthiness so that he and they would be able to carry out the purposes of the Lord."³³

Lehi offers sacrifices after they have escaped from Jerusalem, after his sons escape Laban and return with the brass plates, and after his sons return with Ishmael's family, with Nephi having been delivered from death at the hands of Laman and Lemuel. These were moments showing the Lord's great favor and it was entirely appropriate for Lehi to praise God and offer sacrifice. In *Priesthood and Cult in Ancient Israel*, Gary Andersen writes: "The identification of cultic praise as a joyous act is not made lightly. There is a homologous relationship between the cultic role of this joyous praise and the cultic role of the *selamim* offering in the lamentation sequence. When lamenters have received an assurance of divine assistance or have experienced divine deliverance they must offer either praise or a *selamim* sacrifice."³⁴ So while "sacrifice and burnt offerings" may be a merism, literally offering both would be appropriate in both cases where that phrase refers to Lehi's actions.

18. “Lehi’s acts of sacrifice are unique in the context of the Book of Mormon. They are the only reports of a character engaging in actual sacrifice in the whole of the Book of Mormon narrative,” while we would expect sacrifices in other settings also such as when they reached the New World.

Response: I agree that we would expect Lehi and others to have offered sacrifice in the New World. However, the failure to record those specifics in Mormon’s abridged record does not mean those events did not happen nor that they were not recorded. However, Lehi’s acts of sacrifice are not unique in the Book of Mormon. Mosiah 2:3 records that the Nephites offered “sacrifice and burnt offerings according to the law of Moses” when they gathered at the temple to hear King Benjamin’s speech.³⁵ Sacrifices obviously continued among the Nephites until the coming of Christ (see item #10 above).

Further Objections

19. Lehi’s naming of a river and valley after Laman and Lemuel reflects non-Israelite concepts and naming conventions. RT argues that Israelites did not tend to name places in the way Lehi did, and would not have used people’s names. Rather, these actions can be assumed to be non-historical literary devices because they are patterned after similar actions by Moses during the Exodus, namely, the “similar poetic declarations made by Moses about his two sons (Exodus 18:3–4), and the naming of local topography was also a prominent feature of Israel’s journey from Egypt to the Promised Land (e.g. Exodus 15:23; 17:7, 15).” Further, “biblical scholars have shown that the naming episodes recounted in the Exodus narrative and elsewhere in the Bible, upon which the Book of Mormon naming events are most likely modeled, as a rule had a literary function and origin and were not intended to represent factual history.” Finally, “as far as we know, ancient Israelites did not name local topography with the names of private individuals.”

Response: Lehi’s actions may well have been deliberately modeled on some aspects of the Exodus. His choice to do so

and Nephi's choice to highlight such acts do not evaporate the reality of his journey. Some influential and vocal scholars deny the historicity of much of the Bible and naturally will argue that naming events or anything else with a "literary function" or etiological function cannot also represent factual history — if it comes from the Bible. We will briefly discuss the merits of their methodology in Section 3 of this paper.

The act of renaming a place was not uncommon among the ancient Hebrews. "New settlers would often change the name of their new home. Presumably this was because the former name was offensive to them or because they wished to commemorate in the new name a feature pertinent to their own experience."³⁶ Of course, Lehi was more than just a nomad. He was a prophet of God leading and teaching his people, and the naming of some places may have played a role in his theological objectives.

As for naming places after the names of private individuals, examples might include the land of Israel itself, the tribal regions for the various tribes of Israel such as Zebulon, Dan, and Judea (obviously named after Israel's sons), or the city of Leshem which members of the tribe of Dan renamed Dan "after the name of Dan their father" (Joshua 19:47). Somewhat less humble was Nobah renaming a village Nobah, "after his own name" (Numbers 32:42).

Incidentally, the naming of the first two eldest sons as Laman and Lemuel is an interesting example of "pendant names," names that go together, like Eldad and Medad or Hillek and Billek.³⁷

20. "[T]he Red Sea is implied to be a 'fountain' ... [T]his description is at odds with the conventional understanding of "fountain" in ancient Israel and the Near East more broadly." RT argues that the waters of the deep were viewed as a destructive force, representing chaos, so it would be "completely beyond the pale" for Lehi to encourage Laman to be like the River Laman flowing into the fountain of the Red Sea.

Response: The term "fountain of the Red Sea" may actu-

ally refer to subterranean fountains presumed to feed the Red Sea, and need not mean that the Red Sea is a fountain. This is discussed in Section 2; also see Point #27 below.

As for the waters of the deep being considered the enemy of God, making “the fountain of all righteousness” an inappropriate term in the context of 1 Nephi, the concept of the deep representing an enemy to God may stem from an influential 1955 paper by H.G. May³⁸ which has received a noteworthy reappraisal from Rebecca S. Watson.³⁹ May’s thesis was that “many waters” in the Old Testament referred to insurgent waters of chaos that represented God’s enemies and had to be controlled or tamed, but that paper may suffer from serious flaws and does not adequately reflect Jewish thought before the Exile. Instead, the “many waters” or the deep and fountains in ancient Jewish thought can represent waters of life and fertility. The “fountain of Jacob” in Deuteronomy 33:28, for example, is linked to agricultural abundance and may also relate to “the blessing of fresh flowing water.”⁴⁰

Watson demonstrates that the sea of water resting on the backs of (resting) bulls in the temple was not associated with chaos and battle, but with fertility and life. The bull itself was a popular symbol of fecundity in the ancient Near East and “appears in connection with the life-giving water of rivers and the underworld.”⁴¹ The associated plant symbolism around the molten sea may be connected to the theme of “life and regeneration” and “ideas of continued blessing and prosperity,” and the palm tree engravings (1 Kings 7:27–39) may also symbolize the tree of life, “a motif which is closely linked to that of life-giving water”⁴² — quite an appropriate combination of symbols in light of Lehi’s dream of the tree of life and the version of it experienced by Nephi, who saw that the iron rod “led to the fountain of living waters, or to the tree of life; which waters are a representation of the love of God” (1 Nephi 11:25).

In light of other examples, “the Temple may be characterized as ‘a sphere of life’: the recurrence of the same features in the Jerusalem Temple and in the garden of Eden, and especially

in the imagery surrounding the bronze sea and lavers, therefore indicates that the presence of the living God, whose blessings flow out to nourish the earth, may be represented here.”⁴³ In spite of possibly making too much of combat themes, May does recognize that the sea of bronze “stood for the cosmic sea, the *tehom*, as the subterranean ocean from which all fertility was derived.”⁴⁴ This was a positive symbol. Watson explains that “this harmonious Temple symbolism, in which the fresh water features as a source of life and blessing and as an indication of the presence of the deity, must be rigorously distinguished from any idea of conflict with the salt-water ocean.”⁴⁵ Further, while “it might appear that the waters here depicted are merely subterranean, the apprehension of an identity between the celestial and terrestrial temples, and the obvious congruence of the heavenly and earthly oceans, militates against such a clear-cut division.”⁴⁶

In light of Watson’s work, Lehi was on solid (albeit moist) ground when he stood by the River Laman and yearned for his eldest son to be like it, “continually running into the fountain of all righteousness!” (1 Nephi 2:5).

21. “Other place names mentioned in the broader literary context are also implausible.” RT objects to LDS explanations for Shazer and Irreantum.

Response: RT may be right, but there may be meaningful possibilities that he is overlooking, as discussed later in Section 3.

22. “The few chronological notices seem unrealistic and dramatically disproportionate.” While LDS writers widely agree that 1 Nephi 2:5–6 describes a three day journey from the beginning of the Red Sea to the Valley of Lemuel, RT interprets the text to say that it took three days from Jerusalem to reach the Red Sea, and then declares that distance to be impossibly large for such a short journey. RT complains about vagueness elsewhere and cannot fathom how the journey would end up taking eight years in total.

Response: The text indicates that they came down to the borders of the Red Sea, and then after three days of travel, reached the Valley of Lemuel. This natural reading makes it possible to reach the dramatic candidate for the Valley of Lemuel and the River of Laman that will be discussed below. RT's strained reading does render the trip impossible. In evaluating texts, one should beware of selecting possible readings that immediately render the text nonsensical, although nonsense is all some critics wish to see.

As for the eight years in total, this is a puzzle for all of us. There are many details we don't have yet, but the absence of some details is not a reason to reject a text. Clearly a long time was spent in at least one location, maybe more. Aston proposes that it was in the Valley of Lemuel and that vicinity, which may have been a training camp for their future journey through more difficult terrain.⁴⁷

23. "The narrative shows no knowledge of any actual people, tribal groups, or oasis communities in Arabia."

Response: This is a fair complaint. I also wish it gave more detail. But again, the absence of desired detail is not a reason to reject the text. The record appears to be written as a family record with a theological purpose, where outsiders don't get much attention. Clearly they interacted with locals to know what *others* called the place Nahom. To obtain water at wells along the way, there also would be regular interaction with others. But those interactions do not appear to rise to the level of being the things of Nephi's soul, which is what he writes for the benefit of his posterity, and us in a remote day. The book is not meant to be a travelogue or daily journal but a document to bring us to Christ. Many people are not named or discussed, including Nephi's own wife and children. I wish his small plates were several times the size they were, and that the Lord had given us about ten times as much information as we have. But what we have is a good start, if we can get past the illegitimate reasons people give to overlook the book.

24. "The general practice of not making fire on the trail

implies secrecy and as a practical matter would have posed severe challenges for a group relying on hunted food.”

Response: Here I feel RT works too hard to insist on narrow interpretations of Nephi’s statements in 1 Nephi 17 regarding their eating of raw meat (2, 12) since “the Lord had not hitherto suffered that we should make much fire” (12). These statements are made after the eastward turn on the most difficult part of their journey. The first statement about raw meat is preceded by the declaration that they did “travel and wade through much affliction in the wilderness” (1 Nephi 17:1). The statement about “hitherto” not using much fire is made after they arrive at Bountiful and need to make fire to process the ore Nephi found there. Does “hitherto” refer to the entire journey or primarily the most difficult portion after Nahom? I find it plausible that their little use of fire need not be due to divine commandment (a word stronger than “suffered” might have been used in that case), at least not all the time. One excellent reason for not making much fire is not having much wood. Patterns of travel, such as travel at night to avoid the heat of the day, may also have constrained the suitability of fire. Many foods do not require cooking or, like bread, can be cooked occasionally and used days later.⁴⁸ There may also have been times when the risks of bandit raids required avoiding fire.

Whatever the reasons, fire was not avoided completely, just not used much, at least for one major portion of their journey. As for raw meat, a reasonable view is that it would have been sun-dried meat, like the jerky that is popular in many parts of the world.⁴⁹ RT dismisses the explanation of what the text likely means in terms of practical, real life matters as “an attempt to secularize the narrative and make it intelligible in modern historicist terms.” Since the “ahistorical” text is infused with Exodus themes, RT cannot accept the women eating a civilized meal of camel jerky. Rather, it must be a supernatural scene of women savagely chewing bloody carcasses and finding it appetizing. This inflexibility in interpretation of a text, insisting on meanings that render it unlikely or

impossible instead of providing practical solutions for unclear or missing elements, is frequently encountered in the methodology of “higher criticism” of the Bible.

25. “Liahona is superfluous in the context of the narrative.” RT sees it as an unnecessary miracle to provide a parallel to the brass serpent of the Exodus account. Since Lehi was already a prophet and a “visionary man,” he was capable of getting revelation on directions without the tool. Further, the Liahona “has no relation to documented divinatory techniques or technology practiced in ancient Israel.”

Response: First, I would hope that most Book of Mormon students and Bible students would readily recognize the purposes the Lord can achieve through the use of physical objects as symbols and teaching tools and later as tangible reminders of miracles, deliverance, and covenants. Like the relics in the First Temple, the Liahona was a precious reminder to the Nephites of the Lord’s power and a symbol used for teaching important lessons (*Alma 37:38–45*). Yes, of course it was not necessary. But it was indisputably valuable. Complaints about the Lord’s didactic methods — a sufficiently trained scholar can think of many — should be taken to Him directly.

Second, I am surprised that RT objects to the originality of the Liahona. Apparently it is a problem if it “has no relation to documented divinatory techniques or technology practiced in ancient Israel.” Likewise, I suspect that if it did have a clear relationship to practices in ancient Israel, RT would find that to be evidence of clumsy imitation, fraud, and ahistoricity.

Third, I can agree with RT that the use of a divine physical object on which writing can appear and which can provide direction does have a certain relationship to a seerstone, or more to the point, the ancient Urim and Thummim, which I suggest provides a relevant example of an ancient divinatory tool perhaps with some relation to the Liahona. In *The Urim and Thummim: A Means of Revelation in Ancient Israel*, Cornelius van Dam explains why the Urim

and Thummim was not a lot oracle but an object, possibly a gem, that provided information via light.⁵⁰ In one example he cites the probable use of the Urim and Thummim in 2 Samuel 5:23–24 to give detailed information to David about when and where to attack the Philistine army, with instructions about a location to move toward.⁵¹ Vam Dam later concludes that the Urim and Thummim was an important tool that Yahweh used to guide his people in time of war and to instruct them on other important matters.⁵² The appearance and working of the Liahona and the Urim and Thummim are distinct, but they both could provide detailed revelation, including instructions on where to go.

Though I agree with van Dam that the Urim and Thummim was not merely a crude lot oracle, lot oracles may also offer some slight parallels to the Liahona. *Encyclopedia Biblica*'s article on the Urim and Thummim mentions an old Arab practice using two arrowshafts, each with words written on them, that were placed in a container. One was selected randomly to convey guidance from God.⁵³ The Liahona had two spindles that could point the way in a brass shell and had the ability for writing to appear. Nevertheless, much about the Liahona is unique, which should not be a problem. Yet it does have parallels to ancient divinatory practices, which also should not be a problem.

Finally, RT is silent on what may be the most interesting aspect of the Liahona: the beautifully apt Hebrew etymology that has been offered for this coined term that reflects an accurate knowledge of Hebrew from Lehi's day and literally means "direction of the Lord."⁵⁴

26. RT complains of the "relative nonsignificance of water to the narrative." He helpfully reminds us that water is essential for survival, and complains that it is not more frequently mentioned. "Only once during the whole journey through Arabia is a water source associated with the establishment of a campsite (1 Ne 2:6)! And only once do we hear about the group complaining for thirst while traveling ... (1 Ne 16:35)."

Response: Much is left out in the abbreviated account on the small plates, including some obvious issues involved in daily life. By traveling along the Frankincense Trail, access to regular watering spots would be possible. Stopping at such places to obtain water would be natural, expected, and not worth special mention, given Nephi's purpose in the brief account. While regular sources of water are along the trail, obtaining additional food for a family with children, without the luxury of the gold and silver left behind in Jerusalem, could well have been the real challenge at many stages.

Interestingly, the thirst of Lehi's group is mentioned slightly more often elsewhere in the Book of Mormon (Alma 18:36-37, Alma 37:41-42), where we also learn that there was a period in which the group was "slothful" and forgot to exercise faith and diligence, causing the Liahona to fail and their progress to stop, such that they "did not travel in a direct course and were afflicted with hunger and thirst" (Alma 37: 41-42). This account and many other details were apparently on the large plates, a record we currently do not have.

27. Claims to plausible candidates for the "River Laman" are wishful thinking. "It is well known that there are no actual rivers flowing from Arabia into the Red Sea due to the harsh desert climate, a state of affairs that has changed only marginally since the time of Lehi. Although Book of Mormon researchers have identified some seasonal wadis along the east side of the Gulf of Aqaba as possible candidates for the river Laman, it is only with considerable semantic stretching and a dose of wishful thinking that we can possibly consider calling these small waterbeds rivers."

Response: This was one of my most surprising moments reading RT. RT should be aware of the candidate for the River Laman found by Potter and Wellington at Wadi Tayyib al-Ism, demonstrated to flow year round.⁵⁵ It is not just a seasonal wadi and in many ways appears to be an impressive candidate, after years of critics denying that such a perennial river/stream could even exist. In addition to impressive documentation from the field work of Potter

and Wellington, there are now additional photos of the river/stream, the valley, and the setting from Adib Al Harbi, apparently the result of his tourism and exploring.⁵⁶

But I must admit that today the “river” is what I would call a stream or a brook, though Potter points to evidence that the flow may have been significantly stronger in the past, at least partly because the local government is pumping away some of its source water.⁵⁷ Is it inappropriate to call such a stream a river, or to use the same word for both? In the KJV, the Hebrew word *nachal* (נַחַל, Strong’s H5158) is translated “river” fifty-six times, “brook” forty-six times, “valley” twenty-three times, “stream” eleven times, and “flood” five times. Its definitions show that it can be a river or a stream.⁵⁸ Another Hebrew word, *nahar* (נָהָר, Strong’s H5102) is usually translated as “river” in the KJV (98 times), but twice appears as “streams” and can mean river or stream.⁵⁹ RT’s objection regarding stream vs. river seems poorly grounded.

Further, just as small hills tend to be called mountains in regions that are rather flat, so small bodies of water can be called lakes and rivers in arid settings when they might barely qualify as ponds and streams in climates with more rainfall. Moving into Arabia, I suspect Lehi’s family was relieved to spend time by a “river” of any size. That it was a small, shallow flow is consistent with the apparent ease with which they crossed it as they packed up their tents and headed into the wilderness (1 Nephi 16:12).

The site at Wadi Tayyib al-Ism as a candidate for the River Laman and Valley of Lemuel is not without weaknesses (further exploration is definitely needed) and has been criticized by one BYU scholar, Jeffrey Chadwick, whom RT cites and whose most important objection, in my opinion, is that the stream/river lacks a mouth flowing into the Red Sea as Nephi’s account seems to require.⁶⁰ Instead it sinks into the gravel floor of the valley almost half a mile from the Red Sea. This concern may be easily resolved, as discussed in Section 2. Here I will simply note that if Nephi understood that the River Laman, as it sank into the ground, was

flowing into the subterranean waters that feed the Red Sea (possibly what he meant by “*the fountain* of the Red Sea” in 1 Nephi 2:9), then the place where that stream disappeared to enter the larger subterranean water would appropriately be called a mouth, and the geography at Wadi Tayyib al-Ism would seem to relate well to the text without the need to assume differences in elevation of the canyon in Lehi’s day or significant differences in the behavior of the stream.

28. RT objects to the Book of Mormon’s “lack of differentiation in Arabian geography,” failing to note the details of the various terrains they would encounter.

Response: I have this problem, too, in my own journal, even when I am providing lots more detail and local color than Nephi. I’m willing to give Nephi a break for not feeling compelled to use a major portion of his small gold plates to tell us about details that did not advance his purposes.

29. “If the party went east as alleged in the Book of Mormon, they would have been forced to cross the Ramlat Al-Sab ‘atayn desert” and this would be virtually impossible.

Response: RT is right about the difficulty of crossing the Ramlat Al-Sab ‘atayn desert. He is wrong about the geography. Incredibly, following Nephi’s directions by going nearly due east from Nahom will let you avoid the dread sands of the Ramlat Al-Sab ‘atayn desert just to the south and the vast Empty Quarter just to the north, as Aston shows in *Lehi and Sariah in Arabia*.⁶¹ This path will allow you to have a shot at survival (Liahona or equivalent highly recommended!) by traveling along highlands that will bring you through the plateau just north of the Wadi Hadramaut and then directly into the lengthy Wadi Sayq, to emerge at Khor Kharfot, the leading candidate for Bountiful.

30. “Even more strangely, in the two cases where the presence of a mountain is recorded they are each appended with a definite article with no additional information about their location (“the mountain”), suggesting that

they are somehow known or particular mountains.”

Response: There is a prominent mountain at Bountiful’s leading candidate that could logically be called “the mountain”—a point definitely in favor of Khor Khafrot and the Book of Mormon. The first instance of “the mountain” (1 Nephi 16:30) informs us that Nephi went up to “the top of the mountain, according to the directions which were given upon the ball.” Rather than it being a case of Nephi assuming that we would know which mountain, it could be an artifact of translation if the trailing clause was initially a relative clause modifying “mountain,” as in “the top of the mountain for which directions were given upon the ball.”

31. Nephi’s record implies that his group was alone at Bountiful, which “highlights its inauthentic and imaginary character, since we know from archaeology that the Dhofar was inhabited and its natural geography exploited from very early times, including the time of Lehi.” Indeed, “virtually all of the proposed Bountiful sites would have seen significant human activity, and it is simply impossible that Lehi could have found a pristine garden spot on the coast far from human civilization.”

Response: Here is an issue from RT that we should take seriously. It is natural that a plush, green site on a coast will attract human population, and would seem very unlikely that such an unpopulated place could exist, even once we recognize that there *are* green places east of Nahom (contrary to the prevailing wisdom just a few years ago when the very idea of a place like Bountiful was mocked by anti-Mormons). I believe RT is correct on most of these points: Bountiful should be uninhabited, but much of Dhofar was inhabited, and it is **very unlikely, virtually impossible** that there could have been a pristine garden spot without a significant population — unless, I would add, that spot were hidden by its terrain from ocean travelers, as is the valley of Wadi Sayq whose oblique angle to the coast hides much of its greenery when viewed from the sea,⁶² and unless that site were enclosed by rugged mountains making it difficult

or impossible to access from inland *except* for someone coming from a distant inland path through the long Wadi Sayq, such as traveling nearly due eastward from Nahom without the benefit of an established trail. This is actually the very situation we have for Bountiful at Khor Kharfot, where “a unique and impressive set of circumstances has kept [it] isolated and unpopulated”⁶³ — a pristine miracle staring us in the face, a place that appears to have been largely uninhabited over the millennia, in spite of very small ruins from some past occupation and some cave paintings.⁶⁴ It is, in fact, uninhabited today. The evidence points to this as precisely the kind of sheltered, hidden, pristine garden spot the Book of Mormon requires. The fact that other spots along the coast of Oman were obviously settled and still are populated does not erase the reality of our unpopulated, pristine, majestic site that may very well have been the place a weary group of ancient Hebrews gladly called Bountiful. Far from highlighting the imaginary character of the Book of Mormon, this site brilliantly underscores the case for the reality of 1 Nephi as an authentic ancient record, no matter how many issues one can manage to quibble with.

32. RT objects to various details regarding the ship Nephi built.

Response: Most of his concerns are adequately addressed in Aston’s most recent work, *Lehi and Sariah in Arabia*, but it is true we have few details in the account. Aston’s proposal of a raft-like structure with a sail and other features seems plausible. As for wood, Aston explains that that imported lumber was not needed and reports that Khor Kharfot offers acacia, sycamore fig, and tamarind trees that could be suitable for shipbuilding, and have been used for shipbuilding in the past.⁶⁵ Aston’s point is supported by finds of ancient Egyptian working boats (as opposed to purely ceremonial boats) made of acacia and sycamore fig⁶⁶ and by reports on the excellent properties of tamarind wood, making it suitable not only for furniture and tools, but also for canoes and the “side planks of boats.”⁶⁷ Other species might have been available in Lehi’s day such as particularly useful coconut palms, though they are not currently there.⁶⁸

One further important point: sailing from the coast of Oman to reach Mesoamerica is possible if done during a time of the ENSO effect (El Niño — Southern Oscillation⁶⁹), which changes winds and currents in a way that could be exploited for travel from Arabia to the New World.⁷⁰

33. RT claims that the Book of Mormon shows no awareness of the complex geography the group would encounter, such as the lack of direct access from the large Wadi Hadramaut to the Dhofar region, requiring the group to cross mountains before a wadi leading to Bountiful.

Response: Access from the interior to many parts of Dhofar is a challenge, as RT notes, and is another important point to consider. Indeed, direct access to Khor Kharfot is rather difficult, being isolated and largely enclosed by mountains (a primary reason it remains uninhabited), *unless* one begins far inland as the Lehites did.⁷¹ Precise navigation via the Liahona would probably be required to enter the correct wadi, but for a group coming eastward from Nahom (not on any alleged trade route), there would be no major barriers to reaching Bountiful. Going nearly due east, the group would stay north of Wadi Hadramaut and be able to directly enter Wadi Sayq with no lava fields to cross or mountains to scale, making it possible for a group with children and camels to reach Khor Kharfot from Nahom. (See also the Yemen rainfall map in Section 2 below.) RT's objections are more based on a misunderstanding of the required route than a lack of plausible routes.

34. RT complains of Nephi's repeated use of the word "wilderness" to describe where they were traveling, again showing the Book of Mormon's lack of awareness of geography.

Response: "Wilderness" is an appropriate term, though lacking in the geographic details RT would like to see. As the group came to the southern end of the Dead Sea. They would encounter "the wide rift valley of *Arabah*, a name that actually means *wilderness*, just as Nephi had recorded."⁷² Strong's H6160, *'arabah*, is translated in the KJV as "wilder-

ness” five times, as “desert” 9 times, and as “plain” 42 times, in addition to being used twice as a place name, Arabah.⁷³ This word is closely related to ‘arab (בָּרֶאֵב, Strong’s H6152), which in the KJV is always translated as Arabia.⁷⁴ To me, ‘arabah would seem like a meaningful word to use not only because it literally is the name of a region they were going through several times early in their journey, but also because it relates to the general area they were traveling through. Lehi’s Trail was a trek through ‘arabah/Arabah and ‘arab/Arabia, and nearly always through real wilderness/desert.

Nephi may also have used other words such as Strong’s H4057, *midbar*, which can mean wilderness, desert, uninhabited land, large tracts of land around cities, and pasture suitable for flocks. In the KJV it is translated as “wilderness” two hundred fifty-five times and “desert” thirteen times.⁷⁵ It appears that *midbar* and ‘arabah can refer to a variety of terrains and still be translated as “wilderness.” Nephi’s frequent reference to the “wilderness” also helps highlight parallels between their journey and the Exodus, which is more in line with Nephi’s aims than providing lessons in geology and geography. Still other words could be used at times that again are suitable for the desert.⁷⁶ Nephi’s use of “wilderness” is also appropriate considering Isaiah’s use of that concept, where it is frequently linked to Exodus themes and deserts, but tied to future deliverance and blessings in a gardenlike state where the faithful will rejoice. The trek through the wilderness to Bountiful and the promised land resonates with Nephi’s favorite writer, Isaiah (cf. Isaiah 32:15–16; 35:1, 6; 40:3; 41:18–19; 42:11; 43:19–20; 51:3; 63:13). That Nephi applied the scriptures to his own journey and painted it in related language, emphasizing related themes, is no reason to treat it as fictional, but in fact points to the skillful, thoughtful application of scripture that a devout ancient Hebrew might make when on a divinely guided journey through the wilderness and across a sea to the promised land. In fact, he explicitly states that “I did liken all scriptures unto us, that it might be for our profit and learning” (1 Nephi 19:23). That he accomplished this so successfully and so deeply (e.g., consider the intricate

parallels to David and Goliath discussed by Ben McGuire⁷⁷ and the papers cited above at Point #8) is hardly a reason to reject his work as Joseph's crude borrowing of Bible lore.

Further, RT misses many important though sometimes subtle clues about geographical awareness, such as Nephi's consistent and geographically accurate use of "up" and "down" referring to their travels to and from Jerusalem.⁷⁸ Finally, noting such features as the Valley of Lemuel, the River Laman, the presence of fertile regions after the Valley of Lemuel, the difficulties of the eastward trek, and especially Bountiful, with its prominent mount, flint, iron ore, access from the inland, and great fertility certainly should count toward some hint of geographical awareness. Nephi's foreword to 1 Nephi states that his account includes "the course of their travels" and he provides exactly that. Clear, basic directions and sometimes other details are given for every location mentioned. It was only when modern researchers took the text seriously that we learned just how plausible Nephi's account is. While much more work is needed, dismissing it as fiction and grasping for reasons to ignore the evidence is not the scientific thing to do at this stage.

Highlights of RT's Part 2:

Several of the complaints in Part 2 will be addressed in the review of evidences in Section 2 below. I'll just mention a few issues here:

35. The South Arabian NHM name with its softer H would not be recognized as NHM in Hebrew with its harder H. "[T]he tribal name Nihm is spelled with a voiceless laryngeal middle H rather than a pharyngeal H and stems from the root NHM, which in ancient South Arabian refers to 'pecked masonry' or 'stone dressing.' This spelling means that **Nihm would have sounded utterly different to a native Hebrew speaker from Hebrew NHM** and it is unlikely that the first would have evoked the other. The weakening and coalescence of the gutturals did not occur in Hebrew until much later."

Response: Yes, there are several H sounds in ancient Semitic languages. In Hebrew, the letter *hē* (ה) is a voiceless

glottal fricative written as [h],⁷⁹ a sound that can be heard at Wikipedia.⁸⁰ It is related to the South Arabian ՚ that is the H of the NHM inscriptions from altars near Marib, Yemen, showing the significance of the NHM tribe near Lehi's day. On the other hand, *heth* (ה) “originally represented a voiceless fricative, either pharyngeal /ħ/, or velar /x/.”⁸¹ These two H sounds can also be heard at Wikipedia.⁸² To my ear, these sounds all have an “H-ness” to them. I don’t think it would be impossible for Nephi to have also heard a relationship.

In fact, Hebrew has two NHM roots, one with the relatively hard *heth* and one with the softer *hē*. Since English has only one H to transliterate these letters, it is unclear which root Nephi used, though most writers assume it is the first. The first root is *nacham* (Strong’s H5162, נָחַם) which is typically translated as “comfort” but can also mean “to be sorry” or to “suffer grief.”⁸³ Gesenius indicates that it is “like the Arabic” cognate *nahima*.⁸⁴ This root for Nahom would make an apparent word play with the verse immediately following Nahom, where the daughters of Ishmael “mourn exceedingly” (1 Nephi 16:35) and are obviously in need of comfort. In proposing a word play here, Stephen D. Ricks (and others) have discussed the issue of differing H sounds and noted that while the local Nehem may have had an etymology different than the Arabic *nahama*, “to sigh or moan,” nevertheless, a mourning-related Hebrew *Nahom* with its hard H still could have been understood by Nephi to be related. This is not an essential point, but still noteworthy. Ricks concludes that “Nahom is thus a striking fit as a Book of Mormon proper name based on archaeological, geographical, historical, and, to a lesser extent, on linguistic or etymological considerations.”⁸⁵

The second root to consider is *naham*, (Strong’s H5098, נָהַם), with the soft H, which can be translated as “roar” or “mourn,” and can be applied to the “voices of people groaning.”⁸⁶ There is overlapping meaning between these two words, both of which may be onomatopoeic in origin.⁸⁷ To assume that hearing one NHM root could not evoke the other, when it has related meaning and a related sound, seems unreasonable.

RT objects to this root, for a Hebrew word meaning “groan” would “hardly be intelligible” as a place name. He might have a point if Nephi were coining a Hebrew name based on NHM with a soft H, but Nephi is merely reporting the local name, which may have been from an early Arabic language. If Nahom were heard with a soft H, understanding it to be related to “groan” is entirely appropriate. If Nephi heard it with a more guttural H and made a connection to Hebrew NHM with a hard H, the associated meanings related to “mourning” and “comfort” would be appropriate. The two roots are related and a word play with either might be possible.

Regarding the second root, Aston in a peer-reviewed paper observes that its Hebrew meanings of “roar,” “complain” and “be hungry” relate to the Arabic meanings “to growl, groan, roar, suffer from hunger, to complain” and states that “this association with hunger may be connected to the fasting that was often part of mourning for the dead in ancient Yemen and still in many cultures today.”⁸⁸ This enhances the potential scope of the word play in 1 Nephi 16.

The word play issue has most recently been addressed by Neal Rappleye and Stephen Smoot, who also discuss an example a bilingual wordplay in the book of Genesis on the name Ham involving two different H phonemes.⁸⁹ This strengthens the case that Hebrew speakers would have recognized a relationship and been able to make a word play with words differing in the H sound. There’s no problem here.

36. RT complains that *nacham*, a Hebrew word for “comfort” is inappropriate in the alleged wordplay, since the daughters are still grieving and have not yet come to terms with Ishmael’s death. While no response should be necessary, I will briefly mention this in Section 2.

37. RT complains that the meaning of Nehem is linked to stonework, not mourning, making it a poor fit for a word play. **Response:** One of Warren Aston’s important contributions related to Nahom, apart from identifying the NHM

inscription on the second and third such altars near Marib, is found in his peer-reviewed paper on the etymology of the Nihm tribal name.⁹⁰ In discussing the tribal lands, centered about 40 kilometers northeast of Sana'a, he explores possible meanings of the name and its origins." The root NHM (with the soft H) "appears in every known occurrence of the name in epigraphic South Arabian text, whether Sabaean, Hadramitic or Minean in origin. Here, it usually refers to 'dressed masonry' or the 'dressing of stone by chipping.'"⁹¹ Aston proposes that ancient stoneworkers gave the tribe its NHM name, and that their stonework and masonry skills were probably employed in creating the numerous stone burial sites in the region, including their own tribal lands but possibly also the large necropolis outside of their current lands.⁹²

38. RT also complains that there is no indication that a word play is intended since the name is simply introduced in a matter-of-fact manner.

Response: Hebraic wordplays are rarely preceded with any special flags or markers. Puns, allusions, and other tools are simply dropped into the text for the reader to discover. This is in contrast with conventional US practice where amateur punsters seem bound to insert the formulaic lie "no pun intended" after every pun to make sure we know that it was intended. But the numerous word plays in the Book of Mormon show evidence of being neither from an amateur nor an American.⁹³

39. RT finds that the weeping of the women at Nahom is not relevant to the proposed meaning of the name Nahom. He finds the allegedly ancient text to be inadequate, lacking details from ancient funerary practices. "[The description of only women mourning in v. 35 seems to stem from the more simple narrative intention to portray females as emotional in nature and especially sensitive to the physical challenges of wilderness travel (cf. 1 Nephi 17:1–2). The gender stereotype of women as tender and weak ... is also found in the contemporary

pseudo-biblical prose work *The Late War*, by Gilbert Hunt.”

Response: RT’s approach nicely illustrates some of the flawed methodology of minimalists in the field of “Higher Criticism” who prefer to look for parallels in late sources to establish late dates for scriptural texts rather than give the ancient texts a fair treatment., while also zealously minimizing evidences for plausibility. The women are doing the mourning, mourning exceedingly, in fact, but instead of being able to admit that is appropriate in context, he instead paints it as evidence of modern plagiarism informed by modern stereotypes, noting that the mourning of women in Gilbert Hunt’s *The Late War*⁹⁴ is similar to that of the Book of Mormon. Of course, *The Late War* has recently been touted (without success) by some Book of Mormon critics as a key source of Book of Mormon plagiarism.⁹⁵

RT’s footnote is to Hunt at p. 72 of an 1819 edition, where in chapter 19, vs. 62, we encounter the phrase “as weak women,” but ironically it is the *men* of Zebulon’s army who are described as weak. On that page, we also have widows weeping for slain husbands and children (19:58), but that follows old men weeping for their children in the previous verse. This seems more like equal opportunity weakness and crying to me, though there is that outdated idea that male soldiers are supposed to be stronger than women. The possibility of more significant gender stereotypes permeating the *Late War* can be tested by searching the text for terms such as “women,” “woman,” “cried,” “lament,” “plead,” “beg,” “weep,” “howl” or “mourn,” where it seems that men cry about as often as women.⁹⁶ The problem may be my lack of sensitivity, but perhaps RT’s point reflects not so much a careful reading of *The Late War* as it does his own stereotypical view of Book of Mormon origins.

40. The burial of Ishmael outside of Jewish territory “reflects ignorance about ancient Israelite attitudes toward death and burial” since being buried away from one’s homeland would be a “calamity of the highest order,” but there is “no indication that the Book of Mormon author or

members of Lehi's party had any knowledge of such cultural norms." RT complains of missing details such as "how native members of the Nihm tribe responded to foreigners seeking a burial place on their land."

Response: In almost any historical record, there are missing details that later readers might wish to have, but "mourning exceedingly" seems to reflect that there was some sense of a calamity here. The gaps, though, can be managed with a "generous reading" of the text. Nephi, for example, may have assumed that attentive readers would notice that yes, they were in a foreign land for this death and burial not requiring further explanation. The details of the burial, the rites performed, any negotiations for a burial place, etc., are left out presumably because they do not fulfill Nephi's theological agenda, though I share RT's desire for more. Interestingly, one of Aston's suggestions on this issue is that a Jewish colony in the area may have assisted in providing a proper Hebrew burial. Jewish burials in Yemen are attested no later than 300 BC, and since we know of later Jewish presence in the Nihm area, it is possible that Jews could have been there earlier and could have been able to assist in proper burials.⁹⁷

41. RT claims that Nephi's description of Nahom as a "place" would be unintelligible "since the Hebrew common noun *mqwm* 'place' is always used to refer to a particular or closely defined locale, such as a house, town, or sanctuary, never a tribal region."

Response: RT is projecting his views back into the text. While today we know of Nihm as a tribe with tribal lands, Nephi does not say that Nahom was a broad geographical region, town, tribe, or any of the above, although the context requires it at least be a "place" where someone could be buried. He met people there, probably in some kind of dwelling, where they learned the name. The "place" could have included a "closely defined locale" like a town or an ancient burial site. But I am not convinced by RT's limitations on the scope of *mqwm* or *maqowm* (Strong's H4725).⁹⁸ The first use of that word is in the Creation

account of all the waters being gathered into one “place” (*Genesis* 1:9). That would seem like a fairly broad place, not “closely defined.” *Isaiah* 33:21 speaks of “a place of broad rivers and streams,” indisputably a broad area. *Ecclesiastes* 1:7 speaks of the sea as a “the place from whence the rivers come.” So a broad region for “the place” Nahom does not seem beyond the pale, though Nephi may have encountered something much more closely defined.

42. RT claims that Aston has embellished the facts by stating that Nahom is associated with a large burial region.

Response: Aston has not embellished the facts of the burial regions in the area at all. In all of his writings that I have encountered, he has been careful to explain that Arabia’s largest necropolis, rich in graves made of stone, does not lie within current Nihm tribal boundaries. But for RT to say that they are “nowhere close” is not particularly objective, for they are certainly close enough to have been within the scope of Nihm tribal activities, though not necessarily Nihm tribal lands. The significance of the burial regions, including those within current Nihm lands, will be discussed in Section 2.

I find RT’s accusation of embellishment by Aston to be inappropriate. Aston has been meticulous and careful in his statements and research. Unlike nearly all the rest of us interested in Arabia, he has spent years traveling there, inspecting sites, studying intricate details, mastering new skills, building relationships with officials and scholars in the area, funding exploration out of his own pocket, and carefully bringing to light some of the most significant and carefully documented finds relevant to the Book of Mormon. Along the way he has given presentations to academic conferences, published a peer-reviewed paper on some aspects of his work, and written two of the most valuable books available for students of the Book of Mormon. It is not all just for the sake of apologetics. He has uncovered a unique biological treasure at Bountiful and has gained the respect and support of many scholars in pushing for work to preserve the now-threatened region

whose water resources are being diverted. He has joined with others, including non-LDS experts, in establishing the Khor Kharfot Foundation (khor-kharfot-foundation.com)⁹⁹ in order to encourage further study and protection of the region. His work is worthy of respect, whether one accepts the Book of Mormon or not, and responsible scholars will recognize his contributions and careful work rather than making unwarranted accusations of “embellishment.”

II. The Strength of Book of Mormon Evidence from Arabia

Of Weaknesses and Strengths in the Book of Mormon

The Book of Mormon has numerous apparent weaknesses and idiosyncrasies that critics can ridicule. The surprising thing, though, is how often these weaknesses eventually become strengths. Some merely become neutralized with reasonable arguments and tentative scenarios, but many glaring defects have, over time, transformed completely into noteworthy evidences of authenticity. Examples include Joseph’s long-ridiculed blunder in Alma 7:10 about Christ being born in the land of Jerusalem, when everyone knows it was the town of Bethlehem. This attack could be neutralized with logic, but now ancient documents such as the Amarna Letters and the Dead Sea Scrolls reveal that the “land of Jerusalem” — a phrase not found in the Bible — was an authentic term among ancient people describing the region around Jerusalem, including nearby Bethlehem.¹⁰⁰

Similar episodes of weakness becoming strength include the general idea of ancient Semites writing scripture on metal;¹⁰¹ the mass of the gold plates (along with other physical aspects of the highly physical plates);¹⁰² cement in the Americas;¹⁰³ the basic evidence of grand civilizations in the ancient Americas which was felt as a matter requiring faith by early Latter-day Saints, until they felt great vindication with the publication of John Lloyd Stephens’ *Incidents of Travel in Central America* in 1841;¹⁰⁴ the blunder of the man Alma being given a common female name;¹⁰⁵ the fatal “mists of darkness” in 3 Nephi 9 being recognized as volcanic ash complete with hard evidence of corresponding volcanic activity in the right time and place (Mesoamerica);¹⁰⁶ the concept of Jews even thinking of building a temple outside of Jerusalem;¹⁰⁷ and so forth.

Naturally, some issues remain as weaknesses requiring patience, further work and frequent review of casual assumptions, although many major weaknesses are being eroded to some degree with significant

surprises and new evidences in works such as John Sorenson's *Mormon's Codex*¹⁰⁸ and Brant Gardner's *Traditions of the Fathers*,¹⁰⁹ along with the ongoing work at places like the Interpreter Foundation and Book of Mormon Central.¹¹⁰ There is still room for debate and, mercifully, nobody need feel compelled to believe the Book of Mormon in the absence of any faith. Faith is still required and probably always will be, but for those interested in exploring the rocky path of faith, there are occasional dazzling lights along the way to help us see our way around or over the obstacles we face.

Some of the brightest lights giving intellectual support to the Book of Mormon come from the Old World, particularly the Arabian Peninsula, where dramatic finds have added new levels of credibility to the account in 1 Nephi. Glaring weaknesses such as the impossibility of finding a "continually running" river (1 Nephi 2:9) in Arabia and a place like Bountiful in a land rich in oil and sand but nothing like the verdant treasure of Nephi's account, have suddenly become strengths.¹¹¹

Almost as interesting as the evidence itself is the response of critics and skeptics in their efforts to minimize the significance of what is emerging there. The critics who once mocked the account of Lehi's trail and its ridiculous details today insist that those very details, now that they appear to be strengths in light of modern investigation, are easily accounted for based on information that must have been at Joseph's fingertips.

Many contend that everything Joseph needed to craft the Book of Mormon was in his environment. This has become a mantra for critics. Nahom? A similar name is on several European maps from before Joseph's day. Bountiful? Just a twist on Arabia Felix, the happy green corner of southwestern Arabia that some ancient writers discussed. The Valley of Lemuel and the River Laman? Any decent map of Arabia shows mountains near the Red Sea, so obviously there would be valleys, and mountain valleys would suggest water to Joseph — or maybe Joseph mistook the Gulf of Aqaba for a river. Piece of cake. As one prolific critic, an anonymous university professor, explained on my *Mormanity* blog:

No vast library would have been needed [to create the Book of Mormon]. The amount of material Joseph would have had to see and hear is not at all extraordinary. ... Joseph would merely have had to listen to a bunch of sermons, pay attention to the discussions going on all around him, and, yes, see a map or two. Nothing far-fetched at all.¹¹²

I don't buy this "argument from impossibility" because I don't see anything in the book that couldn't have been written in the 1820s by Smith or someone like him.

Chiasmus? Anyone familiar with the Bible is familiar with chiasmus (regardless of whether they know the term for it). EModE [Early Modern English]? Most likely an artifact of Stanford Carmack's poor "Texas sharpshooter" methodology. Nahom? Nehem was right there on widely available maps of Arabia. Etc. **It's all there.**¹¹³ [emphasis mine]

Some outstanding efforts at fleshing out the "it's all there" theory for the Arabian evidences include those of Jenkins and RT.¹¹⁴ Their work is a notable improvement over the silent treatment or casual dismissal often seen in other quarters, so the authors are to be thanked for at least engaging the evidence to some degree. But have they actually considered and accounted for the *strengths* of the evidence, rather than just focusing on apparent gaps and the endless potential of dumb luck?

Joseph's Well Hidden Expertise and a Foolishly Missed Opportunity?

If Joseph knew much about the Arabian Peninsula, he failed to show off this knowledge in the only comment we have from him about Lehi's journey: "*Lehi went down by the Red Sea to the great Southern Ocean, and crossed over to this land,*" meaning America.¹¹⁵ Down by the Red Sea, then to the ocean. That's rather vague — the kind of overview one might pick up from the Book of Mormon, but it doesn't reveal a rich source from which the Book of Mormon picked up its information. It doesn't seem that Joseph was very interested in or knowledgeable about the details of the Arabian Peninsula. As far as I know, nothing in his comments, behavior, and belongings, or in the observations of others around him, reveal any fascination with the Arabian Peninsula and its cartography or geography.

If the details in 1 Nephi were part of a scheme to create apparent Book of Mormon evidence, he certainly missed every opportunity to exploit that evidence. Neither he nor his peers seem to have recognized there was evidence supporting Book of Mormon plausibility there. It would be several generations later before Hugh Nibley dug into the evidences related to Lehi in the desert, and he would fail to find our specific candidates for the River Laman, Nahom, and Bountiful. In 1978, a few decades after Nibley's initial work, Dr. Ross T. Christensen, a

professor of archaeology at BYU, was the first person to notice a Nahom-like name on a map of Arabia and announce a possible connection to Nahom in Nephi's account.¹¹⁶ If Joseph and purported co-conspirators went to the trouble of learning details about the Arabian Peninsula to enhance the Book of Mormon, why completely fail to capitalize on that work? Why leave the evidence for plausibility to future generations over a century later? What possible advantage did he obtain by plucking obscure Nahom off the map? It's like a murder mystery where the alleged killer lacked any motivation for the crime, lacked means to commit the crime, probably never got near the murder weapon, and for the rest of his life apparently never even knew of the crime. As we shall see, the claim that Joseph drew upon his environment to write the Book of Mormon raises bigger questions than it answers.

Some Highlights of the Arabian Evidence

Contrary to all previous reports, a perennial stream was found by George Potter and Richard Wellington that flows through a magnificent canyon into “the fountain of the Red Sea,” in a place that nicely fits



A view of Khor Kharfot, the mouth of Wadi Sayq, a leading candidate for Bountiful, with Arabia's largest freshwater lagoon and abundant fruit, nearly due east of Nahom. Image courtesy of Warren Aston.

details in Nephi's account. The valley is Wadi Tayyib al-Ism, roughly midway along the east side of the Gulf of Aqaba.

In contrast to Joseph's vague summary of Lehi's journey mentioned above, the Book of Mormon text provides a number of specific details: three days through the wilderness past the borders "nearer" the Red Sea to the Valley of Lemuel, which has a continuously flowing river, and



A view of Khor Kharfot at Wadi Sayq, facing eastward. Image courtesy of Warren Aston. Photo taken after the monsoon season when the area is especially green.



Satellite view of Wadi Sayq at Khor Kharfot, showing the large freshwater lagoon at the leading candidate for Bountiful, nearly due east from Nahom. Note: this Google Earth image was taken in the dryer winter months and thus lacks the vibrant green that follows the monsoon season.

even apparently had seeds, grain and fruits that the family could gather (1 Nephi 8:1). These details and other aspects of Nephi's account of the valley and river have found remarkable confirmation with a specific and plausible candidate for the Valley of Lemuel and River Laman, Wadi Tayyib al-Ism, identified by George Potter and Richard Wellington in their *Lehi in the Wilderness*.¹¹⁷ (It is not the only candidate that has been proposed,¹¹⁸ but I feel it stands as the best.) You can view several parts of the valley and some of its stream within Google Maps at 28.563416 degrees north and 34.808121 degrees east¹¹⁹ (access it via this shortcut: <http://tinyurl.com/valleylemuel>).

The valley is a dramatic rift in the earth that is far different than the surrounding terrain. Potter and Wellington found that the valley could have been readily accessed coming south from Aqaba by simply continuing straight when the main trail turns east at Haql, which is about twenty-five miles south of the northern end of the Gulf of Aqaba. By departing from the caravan route, Nephi would encounter the shoreline mountains after about fifteen more miles. The only way to continue was to turn into a wadi on the left that led into the mountains, the only valley leading into the mountains that they encountered after Haql. This then opened into another wadi leading south, and later at about seventy miles from their start, the wadi turned west toward the tallest shoreline mountains. So far, all was arid and barren. Three miles later, they were inside a great granite canyon with a small stream, a perennial river that flows into the Red Sea, an entirely plausible candidate for the long-ridiculed Valley of Lemuel and River Laman, within a plausible three-day journey (with camels) from the northern end of the Red Sea.¹²⁰

While plausible, the region has not been systematically explored, and it is possible that other valleys could one day prove to be superior candidates, but for the moment we can safely say that at least one reasonable candidate has been found. It is also possible to question assumptions made for this site, such as whether Lehi used camels.

Nephi later says that they next traveled four days to a place called Shazer that featured good hunting, travel generally being south-southeast, a highly specific direction that well fits the ancient incense trails running roughly parallel to the Red Sea. Continuing in that direction (1 Nephi 16:13, 14), after extensive travel and afflictions, Ishmael dies and is buried at a place *others* called Nahom (1 Nephi 16:33–34).

Nahom appears to correspond with the ancient and modern tribal lands of the Nihm tribe (which can be pronounced *Nehem* or *Nehhum*) located northeast of Sana'a at about 15.6 degree north latitude.¹²¹

The name Nahum/Nahom in Hebrew has a root meaning related to mourning and appears to be part of a Hebraic word play in 1 Nephi 16: 34–35. The NHM Hebrew root *nacham* (Strong's H5162¹²²) has a basic meaning related to sorrow, grieving, lamenting, and consoling. Non-LDS scholar David Damrosch explains:

It [*naham*] appears twenty-five times in the narrative books of the Bible, and in every case it is associated with death. In family settings, it is applied in instances involving the death of an immediate family member (parent, sibling, or child); in national settings, it has to do with the survival or impending extermination of an entire people. At heart, *naham* means “to mourn,” to come to terms with a death; these usages are usually translated (e.g., in the RSV) by the verb “to comfort,” as when Jacob’s children try to comfort their father after the reported death of Joseph.¹²³

Alan Goff observes that immediately after we read of Ishmael’s burial at Nahom, his daughters mourn exceedingly (1 Nephi 16:35).¹²⁴ RT claims that this connection in Hebrew fails because the daughters have not yet “come to terms” with Ishmael’s death and have not found comfort. I am frustrated by this dense, literal reading of the text, not rare among those who look for reasons to reject the historicity of scripture in general (we’ll discuss biblical “minimalists” later). Can we not readily recognize that “comfort” need not be attained in this setting to be an appropriate term? Is it not clear without being explicitly written that the faithful members of Lehi’s family would be trying to provide comfort in this scene, just as Jacob’s children try (but fail) to comfort their father after reporting Joseph’s death? *Nacham* is appropriate in both settings. Its use is subtle evidence of Hebraic influence behind the text, particularly in light of the further observations Goff offers about the pattern of murmuring in the wilderness in the Old Testament, also applicable here.¹²⁵

Wonderfully, we now have archaeological finds — three stone altars from a temple at Marib, to the east of current Nihm boundaries — confirming that a NHM-related tribal name was in the area somewhat before Nephi’s day. These altars were donated to the temple by a wealthy member of Nihm tribe, with his tribe name carved as NHM on the altars.¹²⁶

We also know that the region was associated with burial places. Aston shows a 1976 map from Nigel Groom (sorry, too late for Joseph) of the Nahom/Nehem area near Wadi Jawf in Yemen which has a marker in the Nehem area for “burial region.”¹²⁷ Aston learned from a French

archaeological team that this burial site is ancient, with circular rock tombs that may date to 3,000 BC.¹²⁸ About 25 miles east of those tombs at Ruwaik, outside the present Nihm tribal boundaries but possibly within its ancient boundaries, is an extensive ancient burial place, apparently the largest in Arabia, with some tombs dating well before Lehi's day,¹²⁹ adding plausibility to Ishmael's burial (not death) at a place already known as Nahom.

If Nihm stonework was at Marib, it could have been at the necropolis. In fact, as Aston proposed in a paper in the *Journal of Arabian Studies*, the masonry or stonework-related meaning of NHM in South Arabian may well reflect the Nihm tribe's ancient occupation as craftsmen who made the stone graves in the region, including those on their tribal lands, and other stone items.¹³⁰ If so, the relationships between both mourning and stonework associated with NHM roots in the Near East would be nicely joined in the Nihm tribe's origins (and be remarkably applicable to Nephi's account).



Aston's proposed route from Nahom to Wadi Sayq and Khor Kharfot.¹³²

Though Marib is outside the current boundaries of Nihm tribal lands, the Nihm tribe obviously had some kind of presence there anciently to have been associated with three altars at the Marib temple. In recent years the tribe has continued making news in Marib, though not always fortunate.¹³¹ There is no reason to assume that the Nihm tribe could not have been associated with Arabia's largest necropolis outside its current borders, roughly as far from current Nihm lands as Marib.

After Nahom, they make an eastward turn and reach Bountiful, a verdant place nearly due east of Nahom (1 Nephi 17:1–5). See the photos above and also explore the leading candidate on Google Maps, coordinates: 16.7322336 degrees north, 53.3325437 degrees east, accessible via <http://tinyurl.com/wadisayq>.¹³³ This is less than 1 degree north of the heart of Nihm territory and the candidate for the place Nahom, making it nearly due east of Nahom, as Nephi said. As Aston notes, the entire course that a traveler would take to access Kharfot from Nahom, a trek of about 970 km in length, “lies in a substantially easterly direction, with no significant detours required by the terrain.”¹³⁴

None of these details has been contradicted by subsequent exploration and discovery in the Arabian Peninsula, and many have surprising validation for their plausibility. The south-southeast direction makes perfect sense for travel generally along the broad Frankincense Trail. The Valley of Lemuel and the River Laman have an outstanding candidate complete with wild grain and fruit, including berries and three kinds of dates.¹³⁵ There is evidence related to the place Shazer (discussed below). Extensive evidence related to Nahom and especially Bountiful has been provided in Warren and Michaela Aston’s *In the Footsteps of Lehi*¹³⁶ and more recently Warren Aston’s *Lehi and Sariah in Arabia*,¹³⁷ perhaps my favorite books related to the Book of Mormon. This includes evidence for Nahom’s ancient association with burial places.

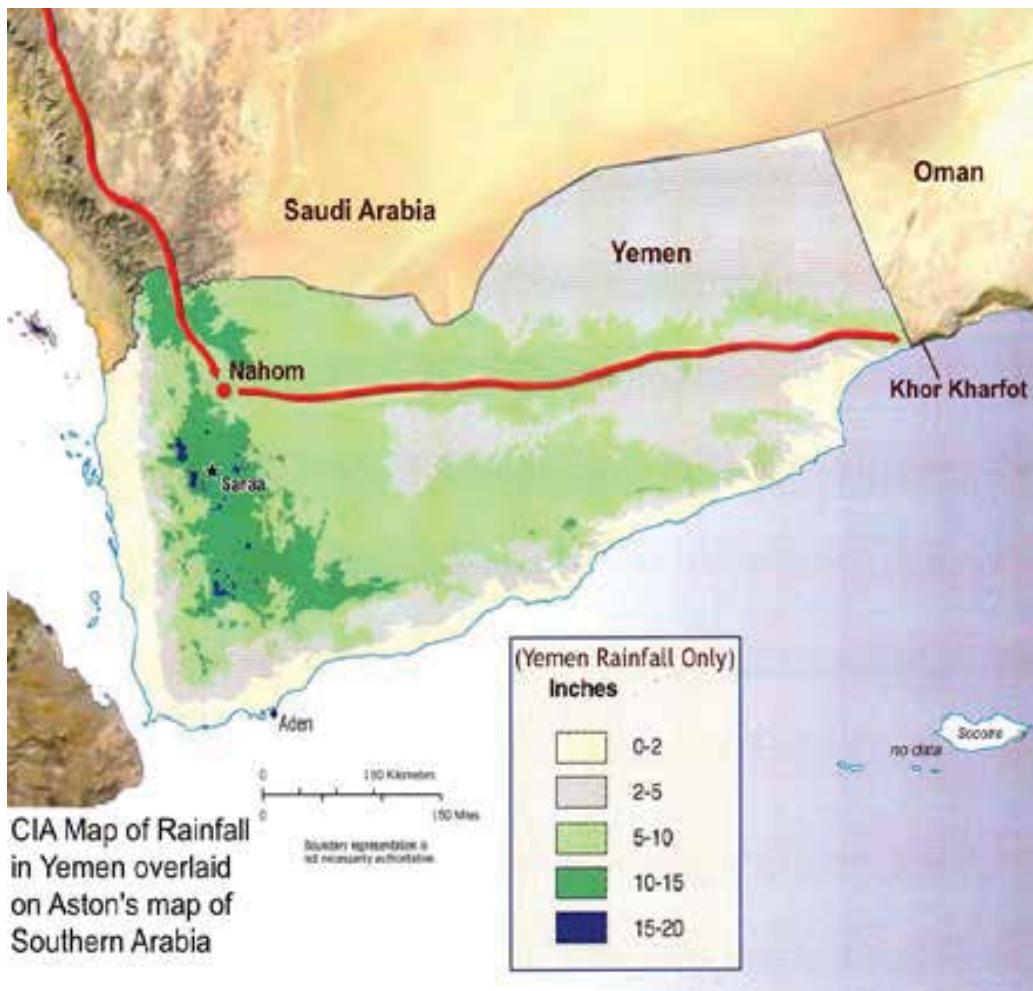
Perhaps most importantly, now we know that the Nahom region offers the ability to turn east and not only survive, but to reach a remarkable and previously unrecognized place that Aston has proposed as the leading candidate for Bountiful.¹³⁸

While Nephi shows the ability to discern direction with accuracy, reflected in the south-southeast direction that he gives for major portions of their journey, the “nearly eastward” direction that they take for the remainder of the trip after Nahom has been said by some to necessarily require a large detour from “nearly eastward” in order to avoid the desert by following trade routes.¹³⁹ Aston shows that those proposed routes would not be feasible for reaching a fertile spot toward the east and would hardly qualify as traveling eastward.¹⁴⁰ In fact, Aston insists that Nephi’s directions are plausible and accurate. By traveling directly eastward from Nahom, Nephi’s group would avoid the dreaded Empty Quarter to the north and the difficult Ramlat Saba’tayn desert to the south.¹⁴¹ Even a slight departure from eastward, such as east-northeast or east-southeast, would have led to trouble. But “traveling almost true east from Nahom placed them on a narrow band of stony plateaus and

valleys leading between the two deserts to the coast.”¹⁴² Aston explains that this eastward route is not only the most direct and efficient path to reach Bountiful, but one that makes Bountiful accessible without significant physical barriers such as lava fields, sand dunes, mountains, or steep ravines.¹⁴³ Consistent with Nephi’s account (1 Nephi 17:1–2), this would be the most difficult part of the journey due to the scarcity of water, but pools of water on the stony surface of this region following rain storms could have helped.¹⁴⁴

Adding to the plausibility of Aston’s, or rather Nephi’s, “nearly eastward” route from Nahom, is the map of rainfall distribution reported for Yemen,¹⁴⁵ which I believe has not been previously considered in discussions of Lehi’s Trail. In the image below, I have superimposed a CIA map of annual rainfall in Yemen over Aston’s map of southern Arabia. A path from Nahom through the upper green branch of higher rainfall corresponds well with Aston’s proposed path, avoiding the extremely low-rainfall desert regions. That green branch leads them directly toward Dhofar and Wadi Sayq, a long wadi in Oman west of Salalah that extends westward from Khor Kharfot slightly over the border into Yemen. Aston’s proposed route, in my opinion, is the most direct and reasonable route to the secluded, hard-to-reach Khor Kharfot.

A remarkable correlation between Nephi’s Bountiful and Khor Kharfot is not just that it is a rare fertile location on the coast nearly due east of Nahom, but that it was and largely still is an uninhabited fertile spot. Fertile spots with fresh water (such as the freshwater lagoon fed with freshwater springs at Khor Kharfot, documented in the video *Lehi in Arabia*¹⁴⁷) tend to attract settlement, especially in Arabia, but Nephi’s Bountiful clearly lacked population because Nephi had to rely on his brothers for labor to build the ship and had to make his own tools from iron ore that he had to find himself. He was not in a major port town, but an uninhabited but highly livable spot the family apparently had to themselves. What are the odds of such a place being found anywhere in Arabia, much less exactly where the Book of Mormon said it should be? It’s one thing to guess that an area on the coast might be unusually fertile and suitable for people to live. It’s another thing to guess that nobody lives there. No map would have helped Joseph do that.



Map of average rainfall in Yemen¹⁴⁶ superimposed on Aston's topographical map of southern Arabia. The upper green branch (5–10 inches/year) extending from Nahom east toward Oman corresponds well with the route proposed by Aston that provides inland access to Wadi Sayq and Khor Kharfot, Bountiful.

Observations on the River Laman, Where “There Never Was a River,” and the Problematic “Fountain”

Solid evidence supporting Book of Mormon plausibility can be found across the entire span of Lehi's Old World journey. The evidence comes from field work, archaeological finds, and other scientific studies. For example, Potter and Wellington's field work found that by following a reasonable interpretation of Nephi's directions, it would be possible to wander into a magnificent and highly plausible candidate for the Valley of Lemuel with a continually (year-round) flowing river (brooklet) of water, in a setting that corresponds wonderfully with Nephi's record and Lehi's sermon to his sons based on the terrain. It is a three days' journey

from the initial approach to the Red Sea along the ancient trails that would have taken Lehi's family south, based on travel with camels.

The River Laman was long an easy target for critics, an obvious weakness. In the 1858 *Millennial Star*, an anti-Mormon critique called "The Doctrines of Mormonism" from the Religious Tract Society is rebutted.¹⁴⁸ One of the arguments against the Book of Mormon is this:

Then, in the wilderness, three days' journey [after going by the Red Sea], we are told of a river, where there **never was a river**. Then this river is said first to empty itself into the Red Sea, and then into the fountain of the Red Sea! Evidently the ignorant man who wrote all this nonsense, or spoke it, knew nothing of the geography of the wilderness, and knew little about seas, and rivers, and fountains.

The LDS writer noted that the critic has not proven there is no river, and if there is none there, the river Nephi described may have been a small brook that has long since dried up. As for the argument about fountains, the defense is offered that calling any sea a fountain is hardly objectionable, and that the sea provides the source of "waters under the earth" that bubble up as springs, making the sea ultimately the "universal fountain" of the earth's water resources.

The argument may have been reasonable for its day, but the Book of Mormon's claim remained a trouble spot, for, based on modern knowledge, one could reasonably assume there was no river there and perhaps "there never was a river." Even 20th-century surveys of the region would continue to declare that it was free of rivers.¹⁴⁹ Given that, should the world not be somewhat intrigued by the finding of Potter and Wellington that there was in fact a remarkably plausible candidate for such a river and such a valley within a three days' journey south of Aqaba, the northernmost tip of the Red Sea that is likely to have been near Nephi's initial approach to the Red Sea? The declaration that "there never was a river" there stands vacated. Many more modern repetitions of that same complaint stand refuted. Exploration of the Arabian Peninsula has made the Book of Mormon more credible, more plausible, not less so. A weakness has become a strength.

Critics still nitpick at the evidence, of course. It is argued by some that the three-day counter could have begun anywhere along the Red Sea, for Nephi doesn't say precisely where he was when he came "near" and then "nearer" the Red Sea. But since major trails south would bring him to Aqaba as the primary way of approaching the Red Sea, and then away from the Red Sea after that, it is a rather reasonable assumption that

Nephi's contact with the Red Sea began at Aqaba. Further confirmation that the River Laman is along the short Gulf of Aqaba and not anywhere along the Red Sea may be found in Nephi's language.

But *fountain*? Critics in the 1850s guffawed at describing the flow of the river as going into the “fountain of the Red Sea” and some continue to object to Nephi’s term. One can argue that *fountain* can have a broader meaning than a spring or subterranean flow of some kind, but the other uses of “fountain” in the Book of Mormon point to similar concepts: a physical or figurative source of a flow such as a spring. The Hebrew word typically translated as “fountain” (Strong’s H4599, *mayan*) has the meaning of a spring, and is also sometimes translated as spring or well, giving it a subterranean flavor. Interestingly, that more specific meaning may actually fit the physical reality Nephi experienced.

Potter and Wellington, in *Lehi in the Wilderness*, observe that “the river flows under a gravel bed for the last three-eights of a mile as it approaches the Gulf of Aqaba.”¹⁵⁰ They observe that the river may have previously had much greater water flow, and that the canyon floor is believed to have risen since Lehi’s day, so perhaps it flowed directly into the Red Sea when Nephi saw it. On the other hand, I wish to suggest that even though the river flow may have been greater and the elevation of the canyon somewhat lower, what if the river still disappeared beneath the rocks as it approached the Red Sea in Nephi’s day? By disappearing into the rocks adjacent the Red Sea, the water is obviously not disappearing completely, but is flowing into the Red Sea through subterranean channels, joining the underground springs that feed the Red Sea. In other words, the River Laman is now, and possibly was in Nephi’s day, literally flowing into the *fountains* that feed the Red Sea.

If the river disappeared near the coast in Nephi’s day as it does now, arguably flowing into the “fountain of the Red Sea,” then perhaps this would also explain Nephi’s repeated use of the verb “empty” rather than “flow.” The river “emptied into the Red Sea” (1 Nephi 2:8), and again Lehi “saw that the waters of the river emptied into the fountain of the Red Sea” (1 Nephi 2:9). Waters disappearing, descending into the earth, could well be described this way. Perhaps Potter’s candidate for the River Laman fits the details of Nephi’s description even better than he realized, although it is difficult to know if the behavior of the river around 600 BC would be similar to its behavior today.

Another objection to the leading candidate for the River Laman is that it lacks a mouth flowing into the Red Sea, apparently contrary to 1 Nephi 2:7, which states that the river “emptied into the Red Sea; and the

valley was in the borders near the mouth thereof.” Chadwick emphasizes this repeatedly in his critique, claiming that without a mouth, we can rule this candidate out and be certain that Potter has been looking in the wrong place.¹⁵¹ One definition of “mouth” is:

something that resembles a mouth especially in affording entrance or exit: as

- a*: the place where a stream enters a larger body of water,
- b*: the surface opening of an underground cavity. ...¹⁵²

Another dictionary gives one definition for mouth as “the outfall at the lower end of a river or stream, where flowing water is discharged, as into a larger body of water.”¹⁵³ If Nephi understood that the River Laman, as it sank into the ground, was flowing into the subterranean waters that feed the Red Sea, or the fountain of the Red Sea, then the place where that stream disappeared and entered a larger body of water (the subterranean fountain) would appropriately be called a mouth. The Book of Mormon does not say that the mouth directly contacted the Red Sea. It had a mouth and flowed into a fountain, the fountain of (meaning “belonging to” or “associated with,” I would argue) the Red Sea, and thus “emptied into the Red Sea,” via the fountain. This understanding resolves the primary argument Chadwick offers against this candidate, for the river does indeed have a mouth where it flows into a larger body of water. And, as noted above, it resolves the objection to calling the Red Sea a fountain, which is not necessarily what Nephi is saying. It is also consistent with the ancient concept of interconnected subterranean waters that feed rivers and oceans.¹⁵⁴

Don’t Overlook Shazer

Nahom and Bountiful are relatively well known in LDS circles, and the candidate for the River Laman has also received significant publicity. Here I’ll go into a little detail about one of the lesser known treasures of plausibility along the way, Shazer, to illustrate how minor points in the text play significant roles in connecting the text to real terrain.

Shazer is introduced as Nephi’s group leaves the Valley of Lemuel (1 Nephi 16:11–14):

11 And it came to pass that we did gather together whatsoever things we should carry into the wilderness, and all the remainder of our provisions which the Lord had given unto us; and we did take seed of every kind that we might carry into the wilderness.

12 And it came to pass that we did take our tents and depart into the wilderness, across the river Laman.
 13 And it came to pass that we traveled for the space of four days, nearly a south-southeast direction, and we did pitch our tents again; and we did call the name of the place Shazer.
 14 And it came to pass that we did take our bows and our arrows, and go forth into the wilderness to slay food for our families; and after we had slain food for our families we did return again to our families in the wilderness, to the place of Shazer. And we did go forth again in the wilderness, following the same direction, keeping in the most fertile parts of the wilderness, which were in the borders near the Red Sea.

Nephi's use of *borders*, as had been pointed out by Kent Brown, may refer to mountains in the area.¹⁵⁵ This word was also used to describe Nephi's initial approach to the Red Sea, where there were borders "near" and borders "nearer" the Red Sea. George Potter said that he learned from local Arabs that the name of the mountains in northwest Arabia, the Hijaz, means "borders." He also notes that the Hebrew word for borders, *gebul*, is cognate with Arabic *jabal* (*jebel, djebel*) meaning mountain.¹⁵⁶ So references to the borders near the Red Sea could logically refer to mountains. The entry in *Strong's Concordance* for *gebul* also notes that one meaning can be a concrete object marking a limit.¹⁵⁷

Starting with the proposed location of the Valley of Lemuel, the place Shazer needs to be within a four-day journey (presumably with camels) along a south-southeast direction.

Regarding the place name Shazer, Nigel Groom's *Dictionary of Arabic Topography and Placenames* provides an entry for a similar word, *shajir*: "A valley or area abounding with trees and shrubs."¹⁵⁸ Other dictionaries also connect *shajir* and *shajra* to an abundance of trees.¹⁵⁹ Hugh Nibley felt there may be a significant connection:

The first important stop after Lehi's party had left their base camp was at a place they called *Shazer*. The name is intriguing. The combination *shajer* is quite common in Palestinian place names; it is a collective meaning "trees," and many Arabs (especially in Egypt) pronounce it *shazher*. It appears in *Thoghret-as-Sajur* (the Pass of Trees), which is the ancient *Shaghur*, written *Segor* in the sixth century. It may be confused with *Shaghur* "seepage," which is held to be identical with *Shihor*, the "black water" of Josh. 19:36. This last takes in western Palestine the form *Sozura*, suggesting the

name of a famous water hole in South Arabia, called *Shisur* by Thomas and *Shisar* by Philby. ... So we have *Shihor*, *Shaghur*, *Sajur*, *Saghir*, *Segor* (even *Zoar*), *Shajar*, *Sozura*, *Shisur*, and *Shisar*, all connected somehow or other and denoting either seepage — a weak but reliable water supply — or a clump of trees. Whichever one prefers, Lehi's people could hardly have picked a better name for their first suitable stopping place than *Shazer*.¹⁶⁰

RT criticizes Nibley's approach, noting that *Shazer* is not a Hebrew word, and if Nephi for some reason wanted to adopt a word related to Arabic's *shajir*, given the nature of Hebrew consonants in that era it is more likely that it would have been pronounced something like "sager" with "s" and "g" instead of the sibilants "sh" and "z."¹⁶¹ RT's criticism draws upon Thomas Finley in *The New Mormon Challenge*, who rejects the plausibility of an Arabic or Hebrew origin to the name and instead speculates that Joseph Smith concocted it from *Jazer* in the Bible, particularly Isaiah 16:8 which mentions *Jazer* and wilderness.¹⁶² In response to Finley's essay, Roper and Tvedtnes acknowledge that Finley may be right about the problem with Nibley's proposal, and they offer an even stronger argument by also noting that words with two consecutive sibilants are rare in Semitic languages.¹⁶³ They also explain that Finley's proposal for *Jazer* would seem to suggest that Joseph spent inordinate amounts of time searching the Bible for relevant place names to modify in order to come up with a word that would be used only once with little apparent significance. This objection applies to some of RT's speculations as well for the origins of *Nahom* and other names, an objection we'll come back to later.

As for *Shazer*, there are several other interesting possibilities that have been raised by LDS scholars regarding origins and meaning of the name *Shazer*, as listed in the extensive *Book of Mormon Onomasticon*,¹⁶⁴ but objections can be raised for all of them. A candidate favored by the *Onomasticon* is a Hebrew word meaning "twisted," perhaps due to twisted acacia trees in the area or, as Aston speculates, the twisted terrain,¹⁶⁵ but why it would be chosen by Lehi's group is unclear and RT appropriately questions its plausibility.

An intriguing possibility noted in the *Onomasticon* is an ancient watering hole in South Arabia written as *Shisur* or *Shisar*, possibly from a word meaning "clef" or "sinkhole."¹⁶⁶ In recent English publications, this site is often written as *Shisr* or *Shisur* (*Shisur Wubar*).¹⁶⁷ It is part of the "Land of Frankincense" on the UNESCO List of World Heritage Sites.¹⁶⁸

This significant ancient watering hole and settlement is in the Dhofar region about ninety-five miles northwest of Salalah, near candidates for Bountiful. It is discussed in some detail, along with Khor Rori, one of the Bountiful candidates, in a UNESCO report that points to the ancient significance of the place, though not necessarily the name.¹⁶⁹ It is nowhere near Nephi's Shazer, of course, but that name for a watering hole from a region of incense production could have been known to travelers on the Frankincense Trail, and its suitability as a name for a watering hole could have contributed to whatever reasons Lehi may have had for applying a related name to the watering hole they encountered. Perhaps both *shajer* and *Shisr* influenced the choice.

At the moment, we don't have a compelling explanation for the meaning of Shazer or the reasons why it was selected as a name. Perhaps variations in local dialects might account for the difficulties regarding Nibley's proposal of relationship to the Arabic word *shajer*, said to be pronounced *shazher* by some Arabs, especially in Egypt.¹⁷⁰ Could "Shazer" be Nephi's transliteration of a local pronunciation of a term related to Arabic's *shajir*, making it not a Hebrew word after all? Is Shazer a transliteration of a name that we now would write as *Shisr*? Other speculations can also be considered,¹⁷¹ but for now, no easy answer presents itself. This uncertainty, however, is not uncommon in dealing with ancient texts where there are many puzzles about names and their origin.

A more important question is whether the existence of a place like Shazer is plausible, given that the Book of Mormon indicates that it was a place where Lehi's group could stop and go hunting — obviously a place with water and wildlife where one could stay for a while on a long journey.

It turns out that there is a reasonable fit for Shazer, a large, extensive oasis region with what is said to be the best hunting in all of Arabia, and it is in the right location to have been a four-days' journey south of the proposed location for the Valley of Lemuel, near a branch of the ancient Frankincense Trail and in the region of Arabia near the Red Sea called the Hijaz. This oasis is in the wadi Agharr and was proposed by Potter and Wellington in *Lehi in the Wilderness* as a result of field work to investigate that portion of Lehi's trail. They explain that they initially thought it would be easy to find Shazer, knowing that Nephi's group traveled seventy-five miles (almost certainly with camels) from the Gulf of Aqaba to the proposed site of the Valley of Lemuel in three days.¹⁷² They concluded that the four-day journey from the Valley of Lemuel

to Shazer required simply finding an oasis within 100 miles south-southeast of the Valley of Lemuel. The following passage from Potter and Wellington describes how they located a candidate for Shazer. After initial candidates they explored proved to be too inhospitable to fit Nephi's description, they continued searching along the Gaza branch of the Frankincense Trail, which passes within about ten miles of the leading candidate for the Valley of Lemuel. The critical clue came when Richard Wellington read an account from a German explorer, Alois Musil, who spoke of an oasis of date palms extending over twenty-five kilometers in the region of Agharr. In nearby Midian they had also been told by the Police General that the best hunting in the entire area was in the mountains of Agharr. Evidence from old Arab geographers also pointed to Agharr as the first rest-stop after Midian, making it a plausible candidate for Shazer, the halting place of Nephi's group four days after leaving the Valley of Lemuel (*1 Nephi 16:13*). Potter and Wellington describe their visit:

Now we had evidence from independent sources that the first rest stop after Midian [modern al Bada'a] on the ancient Gaza branch of the Frankincense Trail was in a fertile valley with trees, wadi Agharr, and the surrounding mountains presented the best hunting opportunities along the trail. The next step was to visit Al-Agharr....

From al Bada'a we headed the sixty miles south-southeast to wadi Agharr and our potential location for Shazer. ... As we reached wadi Agharr ... [t]here was a gap in the mountains where the trail led. Through the gap we could see some palm trees in the wadi. Entering the wadi we were amazed to find an oasis that ran as far as the eye could see both to our left and to our right.

Wadi Agharr was exactly as Musil had described — fields of vegetables and plantations of palms stretching for miles. It is a narrow valley, perhaps one hundred yards across, bounded on each side by high walls stretching up a few hundred feet. "Shazer" was certainly an apt description for this location — a valley with trees, set amid the barren landscape of Midian. Here, after three years of fruitless searching, systematically visiting all the wells in a seventy-five mile radius of wadi Tayyab al Ism, we had finally found Shazer.

[The authors then discuss the presence of “Midianite” archaeological sites in the region, dating to the late second to mid-first millennium BC, suggesting that the valley was fertile anciently.]

On a later expedition we returned to Shazer and drove up into the mountains in the area we thought the men of Lehi’s party would have gone to hunt. We spoke with Bedouins who lived in the upper end of wadi Agharr who told us that Ibex lived in the mountains and they still hunted them there. We were reminded of the words of the Greek Agatharkides of Cnidos who called this area anciently the territory of Bythemani. According to Agatharkides, “The country is full of wild camels, as well as of flocks of deer, gazelles, sheep, mules, and oxen ... and by it dwell the Batmizomaneis who hunt land animals.”¹⁷³ It may have been these very animals that Lehi and his sons went out to hunt.

Here at wadi Agharr is a site that perfectly matches Nephi’s Shazer. It probably has the best hunting along the entire Frankincense Trail. It is the first place travelers would have been allowed to stop and pitch tents south of Midian, and as the Book of Mormon states, it is a four days’ journey from the Valley of Lemuel (1 Ne. 16:13).¹⁷⁴

Their candidate for Shazer is a plausible four days’ journey away from their stunning candidate for the Valley of Lemuel and River Laman. If this is Shazer, it would seem that Nephi’s group quickly returned to the Frankincense Trail, perhaps backtracking out of the Valley of Lemuel for several miles to reach the main trail again before continuing their “nearly south-southeast direction” toward Shazer, about sixty miles south-southeast from Al Bada’ā or ancient Midian.

In addition to the large oasis at Wadi Agharr (also known as Wadi Sharmah), another large oasis at al-Muwaylih has been proposed as a candidate for Shazer.¹⁷⁵

Potter and Wellington offer much more as they retrace Nephi’s journey. For example, after Shazer, Nephi writes that they traveled through the “most fertile parts” (1 Nephi 16:14) and then subsequently through “more fertile parts” that can be understood to be less fertile than the “most fertile” parts. These fertile regions were encountered before they turned due east, which began the most difficult part of their journey. Along the ancient incense trail, continuing just after Shazer until

Medina, one encounters a region of the Hijaz called Qura Arabiyah or “the Arab Villages” which are described by Arabs as the “fertile parts” of the land. It is the part of the trail with the highest concentration of farms and rest stops for caravans, and fits the Book of Mormon description. After Medina, there are fewer farms, but still enough fertile places to be called “the more fertile parts.”¹⁷⁶ Knowledge of these many fertile regions in the midst of the barren Arabian Peninsula was largely hidden from the west until recently. These are rare and unusual places in the Arabian Peninsula. Could Joseph have learned of them on his own?

Evidence that Gets No Respect

For many students of the Book of Mormon, the evidence for Nahom has been particularly interesting because it has been buttressed with recent archaeological finds. Three altars from Lehi’s day have been unearthed in Marib bearing identical inscriptions mentioning the ancient Nihm tribe whose name has the NHM consonants of the Semitic name Nahom. The NHM names in the region of Nahom are linked to the tribe which has been in the area for at least 2,800 years. Marib is seventy miles east of Sana'a and outside the current region of the Nihm tribe but could have been included within its tribal boundaries anciently or could have been the nearest sacred site for a major donation from a wealthy Nihm tribesman.

The Nahom region is located exactly where one can turn eastward to reach excellent candidates for Bountiful. The evidence from geography and an Arabian NHM-name putting Nahom in precisely the right area to correspond with the Book of Mormon demands respect.

Naturally, there are many issues where further work is needed to resolve questions or debate. For example, while LDS researchers generally agree that Khor Kharfot is a highly plausible candidate for Bountiful, Potter and Wellington advocate a different site, Khor Rori,¹⁷⁷ still in the same general area. There is debate about which route was used shortly before reaching Nahom, and debate about whether the route after Nahom went directly eastward or southeast for a while before getting back on the eastward tack. But these are minor issues compared to the big picture.

For many Latter-day Saints, the Arabian Peninsula evidence has been some of the most remarkable evidence supporting Book of Mormon authenticity. At least with respect to the Arabian journey given in 1 Nephi, the case for Joseph fabricating the text seems strongly challenged, but the evidence gets no respect. It raises the question of just

what would it take for evidence anywhere to rise to the level of counting as actual evidence in favor of plausibility. For some critics, the Arabian evidence, as we shall see, counts for nothing.

The Critics Respond, Round One

After presentation of the basic evidence from the Arabian Peninsula, the old arguments like “there never was such a river” and “Bountiful cannot possibly exist” required a facelift. The initial response of critics was to nitpick by noting lack of consensus on details of the trail or suggesting that Nihm or Nehem only share three letters of five in Nahom. Some efforts sought to minimize the whole body of evidence into a single point and then dismiss it. Thus, one critic, Chris Johnson, gave a video presentation at an ex-Mormon conference in which he compressed the Arabian evidence into the finding of Nahom seemingly “at the right place” in Arabia.¹⁷⁸ Recognizing that Nahom in Hebrew was just NHM, he raised the question as to how significant it is to find a name with those three consonants, or rather, how significant it was for Joseph Smith to guess the existence of a place name using NHM. He then provided a list of many other names from around the world he had found through computer-aided searching showing that NHM-names were so common that the NHM finding in Arabia was without significance. In fact, he even claimed that NHM-based names were “some of the most common” of any three-letter grouping of consonants.

Apart from the terrible logic of reducing the Arabian evidence to just three letters, and thinking that finding those letters in, say, Europe, Africa, or North America was somehow relevant to the significance of finding Nahom in the right place in the Arabian Peninsula, what made this attack particularly amusing was what I discovered when I pried into his prize list of NHM names.¹⁷⁹ If NHM names are common all over the world, as Johnson argued, then we should expect to find them without great difficulty. The scattered examples he offers, however, reflect strenuous searching among minutiae with a powerful lens. For example, Nhema, Zimbabwe appears to be no more than a modern street, Nhema Close, only about 150 meters long, in the eastern suburbs of Harare. If this level of granularity is needed to come up with a handful of NHM names, it’s hard to seriously maintain that they are abundant and common. Several of the names don’t appear to exist or have any substance to them. Among ones that do seem to exist, Nhime, Angola appears to be merely an obscure beach, possibly with a village nearby. Nahum in Israel, was a kibbutz founded in the twentieth century. Tiny Nahma, Michigan with

a population under five hundred was founded in 1881. Noham, Iran has a population of one hundred eighty-six. The majority of his examples are not only insignificant in our day, but were generally nonexistent in Joseph Smith's day or at least not able to have served as inspiration for Nahom, though Johnson is not arguing plagiarism but rather that finding an NHM name somewhere is not significant because there are so many of them.

The real issue, however, is whether NHM names are common in the Arabian Peninsula. They are not. NHM names are rare in Arabia, past or present, and finding one in a plausible location in Yemen counts for far more than Johnson is willing to admit.¹⁸⁰

The generally weak and casual response by critics has been ramped up considerably now, as we see in the arguments of Jenkins and RT, particularly with the theory that Lehi's Trail can be explained with a map or two, which is the topic of our next section in Part 2 of this article.

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Endnotes

- 1 Exemplary sources include the following books: Warren P. Aston and Michaela K. Aston, *In the Footsteps of Lehi* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Comp., 1994); Warren P. Aston, *Lehi and Sariah in Arabia: The Old World Setting of the Book of Mormon* (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris Publishing, 2015); and George Potter and Richard Wellington, *Lehi in the Wilderness: 81 New, Documented Evidences that the Book of Mormon is a True History* (Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, Inc., 2003). For videos, see *Lehi in Arabia*, DVD, directed by Chad Aston (Brisbane, Australia: Aston Productions, 2015) and *Journey of Faith*, DVD, directed by Peter Johnson (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute of Religious Scholarship, 2006), <http://journeyoffaithfilms.com/>. Many other relevant publications will be cited hereafter.
- 2 The three-part series for “Faith Promoting Rumor” was authored by the anonymous writer “RT”: RT, “Nahom and Lehi’s Journey through Arabia: A Historical Perspective, Part 1” (hereafter Part 1), “Faith Promoting Rumor,” Patheos.com, Sept. 14, 2015, <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/faithpromotngrumor/2015/09/nahom-and-lehis-journey-through-arabia-a-historical-perspective/>; also RT, “Nahom and Lehi’s Journey through Arabia: A Historical Perspective, Part 2” (hereafter Part 2), “Faith Promoting Rumor,” Patheos.com, Oct. 6, 2015, <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/faithpromotngrumor/2015/10/nahom-and-lehis-journey-through-arabia-a-historical-perspective-part-2/>; and also RT, “Nahom and Lehi’s Journey through Arabia: A Historical Perspective, Part 3” (hereafter Part 3), “Faith Promoting Rumor,” Patheos.com, Oct. 24, 2015; <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/faithpromotngrumor/2015/10/nahom-and-lehis-journey-through-arabia-a-historical-perspective-part-3/>. As for RT’s identity, the author information at “Faith Promoting Rumor” states that he is a lifelong member of the Church and a graduate of Harvard Divinity School. See “Guest Blogger: RT” at Patheos.com, Sept. 26, 2011; <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/faithpromotngrumor/2011/09/guest-blogger-rt/>.
- 3 Philip Jenkins, “The Nahom Follies,” “The Anxious Bench,” Patheos.com, June 14, 2015; <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/anxiousbench/2015/06/the-nahom-follies/>.
- 4 RT, “Part 1.”

- 5 Matthew Roper, “Joseph Smith, Central American Ruins, and the Book of Mormon,” in *Approaching Antiquity: Joseph Smith and the Ancient World*, ed. Lincoln H. Blumell, Matthew J. Grey, and Andrew H. Hedges (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2015), 141–162.
- 6 Jenkins, “The Nahom Follies.”
- 7 RT, comment posted Oct. 20, 2015 on “The Nahom Follies, Part 2: Could Nephi Have Known the Exodus Story? Does the Documentary Hypothesis Trump the Arabian Evidence?,” Oct. 19, 2015, <http://mormanity.blogspot.com/2015/10/the-nahom-follies-part-2-could-nephi.html>.
- 8 Richard Elliott Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible*, 2nd edition (New York: HarperCollins, 1997).
- 9 James K. Hoffmeier, *Ancient Israel in Sinai: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Wilderness Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), Kindle edition, chapter 1, footnote 42.
- 10 Terrence L. Szink, “Nephi and the Exodus,” in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, ed. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1991), 39–42; <http://publications.mi.byu.edu/fullscreen/?pub=1111&index=6>.
- 11 Bruce J. Boehm, “Wanderers in the Promised Land: A Study of the Exodus Motif in the Book of Mormon and Holy Bible,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 3/1 (1994): 187–203; <http://publications.mi.byu.edu/fullscreen/?pub=1385&index=12>.
- 12 S. Kent Brown, “The Exodus Pattern in the Book of Mormon,” in *From Jerusalem to Zarahemla: Literary and Historical Studies of the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1998), 75–98; <https://rsc.byu.edu/archived/jerusalem-zarahemla-literary-and-historical-studies-book-mormon/exodus-pattern-book-mormon>.
- 13 Jeffrey R. Chadwick, “Lehi’s House at Jerusalem and the Land of His Inheritance” in *Glimpses of Lehi’s Jerusalem*, ed. John W. Welch, David Rolph Seely, and Jo Ann H. Seely (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2004), 113–17; <http://publications.mi.byu.edu/fullscreen/?pub=1081&index=3>. Chadwick also observes that if Lehi and his sons had already made this trip several times for mining purposes, the boys would be able to find their way back and

forth without the need for a Liahona or other special assistance, consistent with the text.

- 14 Aston, *Lehi and Sariah in Arabia*, Kindle edition, Part 2, section “Departing Jerusalem.”
- 15 “Valley of Timna,” Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timna_Valley, accessed Feb. 24, 2015.
- 16 Martin Heide, “The Domestication of the Camel: Biological, Archaeological and Inscriptional Evidence from Mesopotamia, Egypt, Israel and Arabia, and Literary Evidence from the Hebrew Bible,” *Ugarit Forschungen* 42 (2010), Münster: Ugarit-Verlag 2011, 331–384; https://www.academia.edu/2065314/_The_Domestication_of_the_Camel_Biological_Archaeological_and_Inscriptional_Evidence_from_Mesopotamia_Egypt_Israel_and_Arabia_and_Literary_Evidence_from_the_Hebrew_Bible_in_Ugarit_Forschungen_42_2010_M%C3%BCnster_Ugarit-Verlag_2011_331_384 (or via this shortcut: <http://tinyurl.com/camelhistory>).
- 17 Ibid., 363.
- 18 Heide also sets a noteworthy example in taking ancient texts seriously as sources to be considered, not dismissed, when he says: “If we suppose that all references to camels in Genesis are the outcome of a later elaboration of the text [as some scholars do] we will not gain any new insight into the question of the camel’s domestication from Genesis.” See Ibid., 363.
- 19 See Margaret Barker, “Joseph Smith and Preexilic Israelite Religion,” in *The Worlds of Joseph Smith*, ed. John W. Welch (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2005), 69–82; <https://ojs.lib.byu.edu/spc/index.php/BYUStudies/article/viewFile/7066/6715%22%5Dhere>. Also see Kevin Christensen, “The Temple, the Monarchy, and Wisdom: Lehi’s World and the Scholarship of Margaret Barker,” in *Glimpses of Lehi’s Jerusalem*, 449–522; <http://publications.mi.byu.edu/fullscreen/?pub=1081&index=15>.
- 20 Margaret Barker, *Temple Mysticism: An Introduction* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2011). Also see Kevin Christensen, “Book Review: Temple Mysticism: An Introduction, by Margaret Barker,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture*, 5 (2013): 191–199; <http://www.mormoninterpreter.com/book-review-temple-mysticism-an-introduction-by-margaret-barker>.

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 - 23 H.M. Wiener, W.S. Caldecott, C.E. Armerding, “Altars,” *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. 1, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1979, first published 1915), 101–104, quotation at 101; <https://books.google.com/books?id=wo8csizDv0gC&pg=PA101>.
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 - 25 Morris Jastrow, Jr., J. Frederic McCurdy, Kaufmann Kohler, Louis Ginzberg, “Burnt Offering,” *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, ed. Isidore Singer and Cyrus Adler, 12 vols. (New York and London: Funk and Wagnalls, 1907); <http://jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/3847-burnt-offering>.
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 - 27 Diana Edelman, “Cultic Sites and Complexes Beyond the Jerusalem Temple,” 94.
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- 39 Rebecca Sally Watson, *Chaos Uncreated: A Reassessment of the Theme of “Chaos” in The Hebrew Bible* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2005); <https://books.google.com/books?id=TbrqBYB2Q7YC>. See 50–53 as a foundation before H.G. May’s work is directly addressed at 57–59.
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- net/4652752-Evaluations-of-cultural-properties.html, accessed Feb. 11, 2016.
- 170 Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 90.
- 171 For example, if *shajir* were connected to *segor* (per Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 90) or *sager* (per RT, “Part 1”) while being pronounced *shazher* in some dialects (per Nibley), perhaps there could be a further connection to the Hebrew word transliterated as *segôr* or *cēgōwr* (Strong’s H5458, שָׁגֵר, see Strong’s H5458, *Blue Letter Bible*, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/Lexicon/Lexicon.cfm?strongs=H5458&t=KJV>), which is related to Egyptian *sg3r*, both with the meaning of “enclosure” (see James K. Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt: The Evidences for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1996), 179; https://books.google.com/books?id=CT_IHTEcL6gC&pg=PA179). In that case, Nephi’s knowledge of Egyptian language or scribal techniques coupled with his transliteration of a local word related to *shajir* may have caused his selection or coinage of “Shazer” to suggest an enclosure (*segor*) formed by trees (*shajer*). This is simply amateur speculation, however, and the issues with the two sibilants may deserve vigorous objections. The problem of the name Shazer remains unsettled.
- 172 Potter and Wellington, *Lehi in the Wilderness*, 73.
- 173 Alois Musil, *Northern Hijaz — A Topographical Itinerary*, published under the patronage of the Czech Academy of Arts and Sciences and of Charles R. Crane, 1926, 303, as cited by Potter and Wellington, *Lehi in the Wilderness*, 76–78.
- 174 Potter and Wellington, *Lehi in the Wilderness*, 74, 76–78.
- 175 Aston, *Lehi and Sariah in Arabia*, 2015, Kindle edition, Part 2, “Into the Wilderness,” in the section “Shazer.”
- 176 See Potter and Wellington, *Lehi in the Wilderness*, 82–92, which includes excellent photos and a satellite map.
- 177 Potter and Wellington, *Lehi in the Wilderness*, 121–162.
- 178 Chris Johnson, “How the Book of Mormon Destroyed Mormonism,” 2013 presentation in Salt Lake City, YouTube; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GAGasQ7j_ZI, see especially 6:50 to 7:50. The video contains highly derogatory treatment of Church leaders. For a response to the bulk of Johnson’s

- presentation claiming to have found a key source for the Book of Mormon fabrication, see Benjamin L. McGuire, "The Late War Against the Book of Mormon," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 7 (2013): 323–355; <http://www.mormoninterpreter.com/the-late-war-against-the-book-of-mormon/>.
- 179 Jeff Lindsay, "Noham, That's Not History (Nor Geography, Cartography, or Logic): More on the Recent Attacks on NHM," *Mormanity*, December 21, 2013; <http://mormanity.blogspot.com/2013/12/noham-thats-not-history-nor-geography.html>. Also see Jeff Lindsay, "The Significance of Nahom: Just Three Letters?," *Mormanity*, December 12, 2013; <http://mormanity.blogspot.com/2013/12/the-significance-of-nahom-just-three.html>.
- 180 Warren Aston, personal communication, 2015, and Aston and Aston, *In the Footsteps of Lehi*, 12. I've also searched without success for NHM-related names on several of the more detailed maps of Arabia and on the list of Arabic place names at "List of Arabic Place Names," Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Arabic_place_names.

