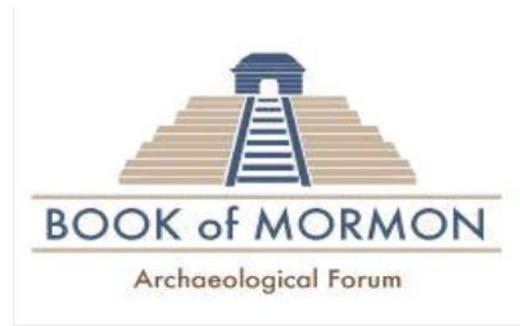




BOOK OF MORMON CENTRAL  
<http://bookofmormoncentral.org/>



Book of Mormon Archaeological Forum  
<http://bmaf.org/>

---

## Book of Mormon Objective Geographic Standard No. 2: Relationships of City Bountiful, Mulek, the East Sea, and Zarahemla

Author(s): Joe V. Anderson

Published: 2015

---

**Abstract:** This article is the second of a series of articles that will provide readers and students of the Book of Mormon with specific and scripturally supported geographic standards without reference to any real-world geography. The specific standard identified in this article will be referred to hereafter as Geographic Standard No. 2 and will focus on the relationships among City Bountiful, City Mulek, the east sea, and Zarahemla. Following a discussion of this objective standard, currently proposed models will be compared with this standard, and the areas where this standard has not been followed will be shown and discussed.



The Book of Mormon Archaeological Forum is collaborating with Book of Mormon Central to preserve and extend access to scholarly research on the Book of Mormon. Items are archived by the permission of BMAF.

<http://bmaf.org/>

## **Book of Mormon Objective Geographic Standard No. 2: Relationships of City Bountiful, Mulek, the East Sea, and Zarahemla**

Copyright © 2015 by Joe V. Andersen  
joeandersen38@gmail.com

This article is the second of a series of articles that will provide readers and students of the Book of Mormon with specific and scripturally supported geographic standards without reference to any real-world geography. The specific standard identified in this article will be referred to hereafter as Geographic Standard No. 2 and will focus on the relationships among City Bountiful, City Mulek, the east sea, and Zarahemla. Following a discussion of this objective standard, currently proposed models will be compared with this standard, and the areas where this standard has not been followed will be shown and discussed.

Joseph Smith stated that the Book of Mormon (1) “was the most correct of any book on earth”<sup>1</sup> and (2) “that it says what it means and means what it says.”<sup>2</sup> Surely it was not translated by revelation so that only “scholars” could understand it. It shouldn’t take intricate chiasmic structures—although they are fascinating and helpful—to understand it. It was translated into the English language by Joseph Smith so that unsophisticated readers could understand it. The Book of Mormon, including its geography, should be able to be understood by even the ordinary, reasonable reader.

In the face of so many divisive and vastly different models, maps, books, etc. that seem to be increasing exponentially regarding the geography of the Book of Mormon, what seems to be helpful—for those intent on locating the lands of the Book of Mormon—are some objective geographic standards that are specifically described in the Book of Mormon. All proposed models would then have to conform to these standards or be deemed invalid when applied to that particular standard. Several of these specific geographic standards are described in the Book of Mormon.

Any average reader of the Book of Mormon, knowing that Nephi correctly knew that the east side of the Red Sea ran in a “*south-southeast*” direction (1 Nephi 16:13), **should** reasonably believe that the writers of the Book of Mormon knew and correctly used cardinal directions. Even more importantly, the average reader would also reasonably believe that the Lord would not allow Joseph Smith to deceive people by using the direction of east and secretly mean north. In other words, the Book of Mormon contains no deception **even** in its use of cardinal directions throughout the text.

This Geographic Standard No. 1 must apply—give or take a couple of miles and directional variations of a few degrees— regardless of where a proponent geographically places city Bountiful, city Mulek, the east sea or Zarahemla.

In the discussion that follows, all Book of Mormon scriptures are italicized, and emphasis is shown via bolding.

One day's travel by a marching army will be deemed to be about ten air miles. (In that respect, see Joseph and Blake Allen's and Kirk Magleby's excellent explanations.)<sup>3</sup>

## **Relevant Objective Geographic Facts from the Book of Mormon**

Following are relevant geographic facts and scripturally provable conclusions associated with the relationships among City Bountiful, City Mulek, the east sea, and Zarahemla.

### **1. The east sea was located**

- a. east of the city/land of Nephi and east of the narrow strip of wilderness, "*which ran from the sea east even to the sea west*" (Alma 22:27).
- b. east of Zarahemla because Antionum, which was located by the east sea, was located east of Zarahemla: "*Now the Zoramites had gathered themselves together in a land which they called Antionum, which was **east of the land of Zarahemla**, which [Antionum] lay **nearly bordering upon the seashore**, which [Antionum] was south of the land of Jershon*" (Alma 31:3). (These scriptures preclude the possibility that the east sea could have been located north from the city/land of Zarahemla and/or north from the narrow strip of wilderness.

2. The word "sea" in the Book of Mormon never refers to a river or lake but always to a sea—a large body of water connected to an ocean.<sup>4</sup>

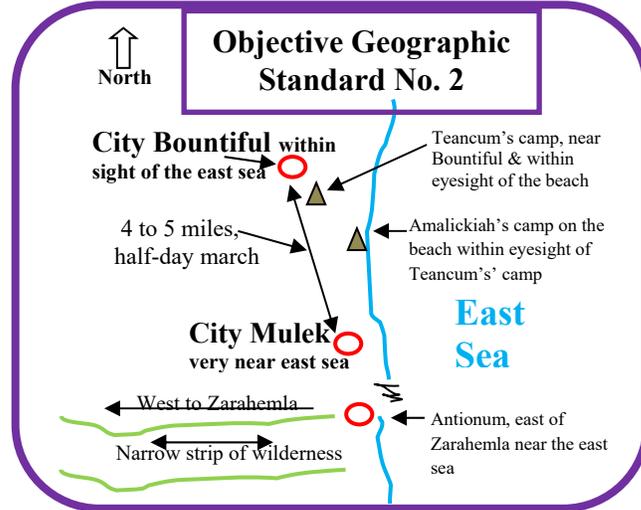
### **3. City of Mulek was located:**

- a. south of the east-sea city/land Bountiful and north from city of Moroni/Jershon/Antionum (Alma 52:23; 27:22; 31:3).
- b. "by" or near the east-sea seashore: "*And thus [Amalickiah] went on, taking possession of many cities, the city of Nephihah [should have been Moroni],<sup>5</sup> the city of Lehi, and the city of Morianton, and the city of Omner, and the city of Gid, and the city of Mulek, all of which were on the east borders by the seashore*" (Alma 51:26). City Bountiful is not mentioned here because this scripture is describing all the cities on the east coast that Amalickiah had captured, and he had not captured city Bountiful.
- c. very close to the east seashore (Alma 52: 22–23).
- d. less than half of one day's march south from city Bountiful (Alma 52:28), (about four or five miles) because the Lamanite army traveled from Mulek to city Bountiful and back in less than one day. (see endnote three)

### **4. City/land Bountiful was located:**

- a. within eyesight of the beach on the east sea (Alma 51:32), one to two miles inland.<sup>6</sup>
- b. north of city Mulek less than a half day's march—4 to 5 miles.
- c. In 67 BC, Teancum's camp was located near city Bountiful, and he and his men could see Amalickiah's camp on the beach of the east sea (Alma 51:32–37, 52:1–2).

Therefore, the Book of Mormon Objective Geographic Standard No. 2 should graphically look substantially like the following, regardless of where analysts position any of these locations on a geographic map:



Applying this standard to various proposed Book of Mormon maps or models yields the following results:

### The Heartland Model <sup>7</sup>

The Heartland Model places the east sea as the Atlantic Ocean due east from Montrose, Iowa—its Zarahemla, located almost nine hundred miles away. Currently, Heartland proponents make no attempt to locate Mulek or city Bountiful. The unreasonableness of the distance from the Atlantic Ocean to Montrose by itself makes this model flawed.

For example, in less than one year, 30 BC, Nephi performed a most amazing and extensive mission starting from the city of Zarahemla traveling to the east-sea city Bountiful where he commenced his mission traveling southerly *“even from one city to another until he had gone forth among all the people of Nephi who were in the land southward.”* Then he and his brother Lehi spent substantial time in the city of Zarahemla and converted and baptized 8000 Lamanites. Following this they crossed the narrow strip of mountainous wilderness and proselyted in the city of Nephi, including the many cities surrounding it. There they were jailed *“for many days”* and then thrown into a raging fire where angles preserved their lives. They then preached *“throughout all regions round about.”* They were so successful that the Lamanites became more righteous than the Nephites. This all occurred within the year 30 BC (see chapters 5 and 6).

Think about the impossibility of this event happening if Montrose, Iowa, was Zarahemla. From Montrose, Nephi and Lehi would have to have traveled directly to City Bountiful somewhere on the Atlantic Ocean more than 800 miles— crossing the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers and the Appalachian Mountains— to begin their Mission. Then they would have meandered back— many more than 800 miles and again crossing the Appalachia Mountains and the Ohio and Mississippi rivers— to Montrose visiting and preaching to every Nephite city and all Nephites then living in the land southward. This would mean that they also traveled to the west sea locations where Nephites were also living like the cities of Antiparah and Juda, etc. That alone would have been impossible. But then they would also have to have traveled another 570 miles or more to the city of Nephi—again crossing the Mississippi and Ohio rivers and then crossing

the narrow strip of wilderness to get to the city of Nephi, located somewhere in Tennessee. Then they would have spent many days in jail before visiting and preaching in all the regions round about the city of Nephi. And “when the sixty and second year of the reign of the judges (30 BC) had ended, all these things had happened...” This extraordinary mission would have covered more than 3000 miles in less than one year! Impossible. Therefore, It did not happen in the United States.

### The Sorenson Model <sup>8</sup>

The Sorenson model places the east sea as the Gulf of Mexico; the city of Mulek at La Venta; and the city Bountiful twenty-five miles west of La Venta near the Coatzacoalcos River and eight miles inland (See map 12 on page 241 of his book). Placing his proposed locations on a Google map clearly demonstrates why Sorenson’s proposed locations of the east sea, city of Mulek, and city Bountiful in the area of the Gulf of Mexico are erroneous.

As readers study the map that follows, they should ask the following questions: “Where did Amalickiah camp on the beach of the east sea? How could the north sea be the east sea that was east of Zarahemla?” Readers should remember that Sorenson places Zarahemla at Santa Rosa on the Grijalva River. Coatzacoalcos and Sorenson’s east sea are located about two hundred miles north and west of Santa Rosa instead of due east to the Caribbean Sea. How can such directions possibly conform to the requirements of the Book of Mormon? How could the Lamanite army have marched twenty-five miles to city Bountiful and then flee another twenty-five miles back to Mulek in one day? Why does Sorenson not mention Antionum in the index and why, without explanation, does he place Antionum north and west of Santa Rosa/Zarahemla instead of east as required by Alma 31:3?



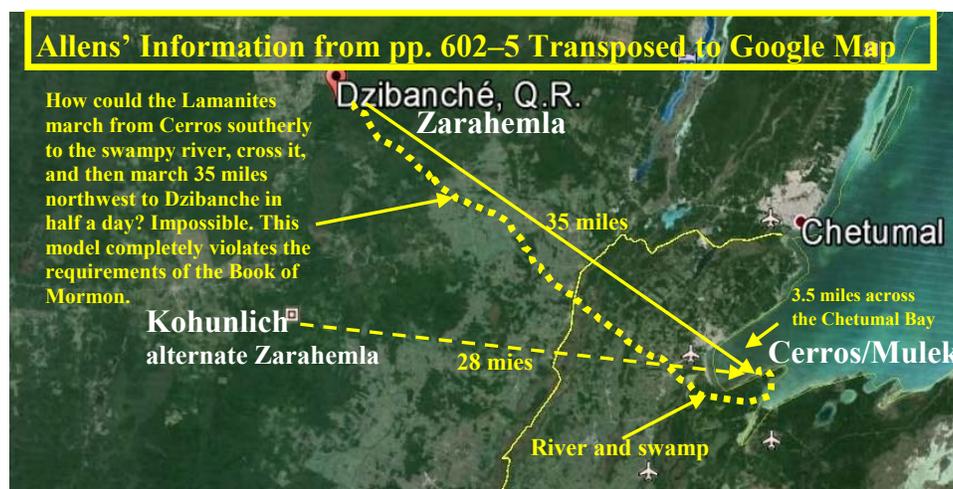
How could Teancum have marched “*down by the seashore northward*”? “Mormon states that “*The armies of the Lamanites did march forth against Teancum, supposing by their numbers to overpower Teancum. . . . And as Teancum saw the armies of the Lamanites coming out against him he began to retreat down by the seashore northward*” (Alma 53:23; emphasis added). Going northward from anywhere on the lower Gulf of Mexico places a traveler in the Gulf of Mexico. This is such an impossible scenario and model. It violates what the Geographic Standard No. 2 requires.

### The Model of Joseph and Blake Allen <sup>9</sup>

Joseph and Blake Allen also place Zarahemla at Santa Rosa; however, as opposed to Sorenson’s model, at least the Allens understand that the east sea was located east of Zarahemla near the Gulf of Honduras instead of at the Gulf of Mexico.

However, the Allens place city Bountiful at Dzibanche, Mexico, thirty-five miles east of Cerros— their proposed city of Mulek. Cerros is located 175 miles north of their proposed Moroni located in the Gulf of Honduras. The following is a Google map with the Allens’ information transposed from their book at pages 602–5.<sup>10</sup> Their second choice for city Bountiful is at Kohunlich located about fifteen miles south of Dzibanche, which is located twenty-eight miles due west from Cerros and 160 miles north of city of Moroni.

Unfortunately, this model creates an impossible scenario for the Lamanites. As will be seen on the following map and as explained below, the Lamanite army would have to have left Mulek in the morning, chased Teancum “*down by the seashore northward,*” circled around, and returned southward following the Chetumal Bay on its south end until coming to a swampy river delta, crossed the river, and then continued following Teancum mostly eastward thirty-five miles to Dzibanche. All of this would have to have occurred by about noon or so because they had to have had time to flee back to Mulek before dark!



Mulek was located on the coast of the east sea “*on the east borders by the seashore*” (Alma 51:26). The Book of Mormon requires the distance between city Bountiful and city Mulek to be very close because there was a plain between the two cities. Alma 52:20 states that the Nephites attempted to get the Lamanite leader Jacob to “*come out with his armies to meet them upon the plains between the two cities. But . . . Jacob, who was a Zoramite, would not come out with his army to meet them upon the plains.*” This account indicates a very short distance between Bountiful and Mulek, perhaps three or four miles. According to this model, it was the Chetumal Bay or the swampy river delta that was located between Cerros and Dzibanche.

The Book of Mormon requires that the city Bountiful be located northerly from Mulek, not more than a half day’s march (approximately five miles) and near the same seashore.

Mormon describes the military campaign of about 64 BC as follows:

[Moroni] *caused that Teancum should take a small number of men and march down near the seashore; and Moroni and his army, by night, marched in the wilderness on the west of the city Mulek; and thus, on the morrow, when the guards of the Lamanites had discovered Teancum, they ran and told it unto Jacob, their leader.* [If Cerros were Mulek, then Moroni’s army would have been stationed on the west side of Cerros right on the seashore, and Teancum would have been waiting on the northeast side of Cerros near the seashore. Retreating northward from there would have meant that Teancum would have ended up in the Chetumal Bay.]

*And it came to pass that the armies of the Lamanites did march forth against Teancum, supposing by their numbers to overpower Teancum. . . . And as Teancum saw the armies of the Lamanites coming out against him he began to retreat **down by the seashore northward.** . . .* [This wording implies that they never left the seashore and always traveled northward. This scripture does not support the idea that they “circled back” somewhere. Had they “circled back” after leaving Cerros and after traveling northward on the seashore, they would have traveled a much greater distance. They would also have to have marched southward to go around the bay and then have crossed a good-sized river and a very swampy delta, which would have substantially reduced the distance they could have marched in half a day. The Book of Mormon never says they went southward or eastward or that they circled back.]<sup>11</sup>

*And it came to pass that the Lamanites did pursue Teancum until they came **near the city Bountiful**, and then they were met by Lehi and a small army, which had been left to protect the city Bountiful.* [It sounds like they followed Teancum northward along the seashore and never crossed a river or a swampy delta.]

*And . . . when the chief captains of the Lamanites had beheld Lehi . . . coming against them, they fled in much confusion, lest **perhaps they should not obtain the city Mulek before Lehi should overtake them.*** [They clearly could have made it back to Mulek within the same day. Therefore, the farthest distance that city Bountiful could have been located from Mulek was not more than half a day’s march—not a day’s march as suggested by the Allens or a distance of twenty-five miles as suggested by Sorenson.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, Mulek and Bountiful would not have been more than five miles or so apart. This distance is also more consistent with what the Allens suggest when they note that a day’s journey

was more like eight miles instead of thirty or forty miles.]<sup>13</sup> (Alma 52:22–23, 27–28; emphasis added)

Therefore, Kohunlich also could not have been the city Bountiful because it is located about thirty miles as the crow flies and due west (instead of north) from Cerros. The Lamanites could not have traveled northward from Cerros along the seashore to get to Kohunlich as required by the Book of Mormon. Travelers would have to have “circled back,” traveled southward, and then crossed a large river and a swampy delta before marching to Kohunlich or Dzibanche.

This model in no way represents what the Geographic Standard No. 2 requires.

### **Garth Norman’s Map**<sup>14</sup>

The map proposed by Garth Norman is inaccurate for the same reasons as Sorenson’s because Norman places city Bountiful and city Mulek in the approximate same locations. It is interesting that he is so detailed with respect to most other proposed locations; however, with these two, he only shows them on the map but does not explain their location or attach them to actual geographical sites as he does so many others. Further, the Gulf of Mexico cannot be the east sea. In the Geographic Standard No. 1, it is shown that the east sea was located east of Zarahemla. Norman places Zarahemla near Palenque, which is located almost due east of the Gulf of Mexico. If Palenque were the city Zarahemla, then the east sea must, according to the Book of Mormon, be the Caribbean Sea somewhere near Belize. This model is in violation of the requirements of the Book of Mormon

Apparently, in an attempt to justify his location of Morianton, Lehi, and Moroni near an east sea, he also states that another east sea was located east of Belize. Where does the Book of Mormon justify having two separate east seas? How could Moroni have chased the "Lamanites" out of the Gulf of Mexico area where he locates Mulek and city Bountiful and chased them "all" due east across the Grijalva river, through the Lacandon wilderness, across the Usumacinta river, across the Pasion river, across the Sarstoon river and through the Maya lowland over 375 air miles to the narrow strip of wilderness located between the Gulf of Honduras and the Pacific? All in the year 72 BC? This model cannot be accurate.

### **Kirk Magleby’s Model**<sup>15</sup>

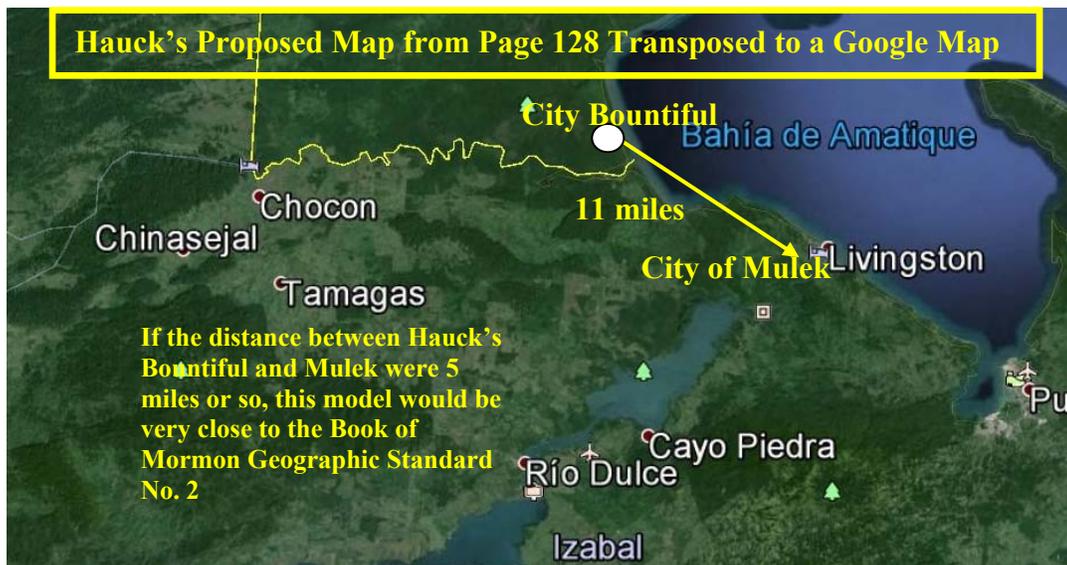
Kirk Magleby places Zarahemla at Emiliano Zapata, twenty-five miles north of Palenque. He places city Bountiful and Mulek similar to the locations proposed by Joseph and Blake Allen near the Belize coast. Therefore, Magleby’s map is inaccurate for the same reasons.

In addition to the foregoing, the reasonable reader should ask the following questions: (1) What strategic benefit would Captain Moroni have gained by locating the northeastern-most military outpost, city Bountiful, one hundred and seventy-five air-miles north of city Moroni— which the Allens and Magleby properly place in the Gulf of Honduras near Livingston? and (2) Why would he place this military outpost north of the millions of Maya then inhabiting the Peten and Belize?

This model violates the Geographic Standard No. 2.

## Richard Hauck's Map <sup>16</sup>

The map proposed by Richard Hauck seems fairly close to the standard; however, he does not identify the city Bountiful but only a large area near the mouth of the Sarstoon River. He places city of Mulek about where Livingston is located just to the north of the mouth of the Rio Dulce. This is a distance of eleven air miles. It is properly located near the east seashore, and the Lamanites could have marched along the seashore northward and reached city Bountiful, but not within a half a day. The distance is a little too far to conform with to Geographic Standard No. 2, however, it is close and the reader should remember that city of Moroni must have been located close to this area and was sunk in the east sea which probably altered the coastline.



### Notes

1. "Introduction," *The Book of Mormon: An Account Written by the Hand of Mormon upon Plates Taken from the Plates of Nephi* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981).

2. Larry E. Dahl and Donald Q. Cannon, eds., *Encyclopedia of Joseph Smith's Teachings* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1997), under "Scriptures."

3. According to Joseph and Blake Allen, "In the Nephite measuring system," a day's travel is equal to about eight miles. (Joseph Lovell Allen and Blake Joseph Allen, *Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon*, 2nd ed. rev. [American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2011], 412)

According to Kirk Magleby, "We can say with confidence that 10 air (straight line) kilometers [6.2 miles] per day are on the low end of what we would reasonably expect from Book of Mormon journeys. Fifteen air kilometers [9.3 miles] per day are probably typical of Book of Mormon travels led by well-informed guides, and 20 air kilometers [12.4 miles] per day (or more) are not unreasonable." (Kirk Magleby, "Land Southward Travel Times," Book of Mormon Resources Blog, <http://bookofmormonresources.blogspot.com/2011/10/land-southward-travel-times.html>, [accessed October 19, 2015])

4. Noah Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: S. Converse, 1828), s.v. "sea."

5. Royal Skousen says that in Alma 51:26, Nephiah should have been Moroni. Skousen, Royal, *The Book of Mormon: the earliest text*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009 at page 463.

6. Alma 51:32: *And it came to pass that they did harass them, insomuch that they did slay them even until it was dark. And it came to pass that Teancum and his men did pitch their tents in the borders of the land Bountiful; and Amalickiah did pitch his tents in the borders on the beach by the seashore.*

This location was between Mulek and city Bountiful and “near” the city/land Bountiful because when the Lamanites saw that Amalickiah had been killed the last night of the year and that the Nephites were ready for battle the next morning, they “retreated with all their army into the city of Mulek” (see Alma 51:32–37 and 52: 1–2).

7. See Jonathan Neville, *The Lost City of Zarahemla: From Iowa to Guatemala and Back Again,*” (Rochester, NY and Cottonwood Heights, UT: Legends library publishing, 2015), pp. 332

8. John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985).

9. Allen and Allen, *Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon*, 636–37.

10. Allen and Allen, *Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon*, 602–5.

11. See Allen and Allen, *Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon*, 603, for the Allens’ interpretation of this military operation.

12. See Allen and Allen, *Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon*, 604, and Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, 18.

13. See Allen and Allen, *Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon*, 411–12.

14. V. Garth Norman, *Book of Mormon—Mesoamerican Geography: History Study Map*, 3rd ed. (American Fork, UT: ARCON with Ancient American Foundation, 2008).

15. Kirk Magleby, “Gideon,” Book of Mormon Resources Blog, <http://bookofmormonresources.blogspot.com/2011/12/gideon.html> (accessed October 20, 2015).

16. Richard F. Hauck, *Deciphering the Geography of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988), see map on p. 203.