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Author(s): S. Kent Brown

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Arabia and the Book of Mormon



S. Kent Brown

Whenever students who are interested in the ancient world and want to pursue a career in the study of antiquity ask me about a direction that they might take, I say, “Think Arabia.” There are literally thousands of inscriptions on temples and other buildings that are still preserved in southern Arabia and have never been read or studied. People who work archaeologically in other Near Eastern places would love just a couple of small inscriptions. In contrast, scholars of ancient Arabia enjoy access to hundreds and hundreds of unread lines.

The Trek of Lehi and Sariah

Led firmly by the Lord, Lehi and Sariah coaxed their extended family out of Jerusalem and into the desert of Arabia, beginning an exodus that would be celebrated in story and song for a thousand years. Until the translation of the Book of Mormon, their saga would not be known to the wider world for more than two and one half millennia. While spending months, perhaps a couple of years, at a base camp near the northeastern arm of the Red Sea, the family kept in contact with their estate at Jerusalem through the four sons: Laman, Lemuel, Sam and Nephi. Twice these sons traveled back the more than 250 miles to the city at the behest of the Lord. The first time they went back to obtain a scriptural record inscribed on plates of brass and the second time to persuade another family, that of a man named Ishmael, to join them at the camp in their quest for a promised land. But after the Lord directed the party to go into the desert, they packed up their tents and provisions and crossed the river Laman never to return again to Jerusalem. They effectively cut themselves off from their ancestral home.

A person might ask the question, “Why pay attention to this family trekking into the desert of Arabia?” There are three reasons. First, it is evident from the Book of Mormon text that the

descendants of this family referred back to the desert saga again and again. It was a chief point of reference in their long history that defined how they saw themselves and how they saw others. As an example, for centuries the descendants of the older brothers Laman and Lemuel held the belief that they were driven out of the land of Jerusalem because of the iniquities of their fathers, probably meaning Lehi and Nephi, and that they were wronged in the wilderness of Arabia by their brethren, which include Nephi and Sam, and were further wronged while crossing the sea.¹ A second reason has to do with the narrative of First Nephi. While it is spare in its detail, Nephi has written enough that we can actually track in a general way where the family traveled and where important events occurred. There is a third reason. It concerns clues within the text that shed light on this journey of journeys. We notice that it was not a journey that mirrors circumstances in upstate New York where Joseph Smith was living when he began to translate the Book of Mormon. It was a desert journey that ran across one of the harshest climes on the surface of the earth.

This said, there are a few specific geographical connections that we can make in the book of First Nephi to real terrain. One of those, of course, is Jerusalem. Another is the Red Sea. The third one would be the Indian Ocean, what the people called Irreantum and Joseph Smith elsewhere calls the “great Southern Ocean” on the south.² Further, we can say with confidence where Bountiful lies because there is only one stretch of land along the whole south coast of Arabia that fits Nephi’s description of the botany of the area. He speaks of wild honey, a lot of fruit, and timbers.³ There are plains and hills that run along the coast of southern Oman for about 100 miles, between two and twenty miles deep, which during the summer monsoon rains become like a Garden of Eden. Even in the dry season, which is the time I visited, plants are still blooming and fruit is ripening which would provide a constant source of food.⁴ Besides, in the Indian Ocean there are a lot of fish.

At the moment, I am the overall coordinator or director of a series of projects titled *The End of Lehi’s Trail*. Our botanists have gone into the field in southern Oman and our geologists have worked there. (We are waiting on a permit to begin archaeological work.) Besides important fieldwork, one of our intents in sending botanists and geologists into the field is to learn more about the world into which Lehi and Sariah emerged when they came out of the desert. They had been in the desert for eight years, and it is almost as though we can hear them singing as they finally reach the sea.⁵ It is exactly how Bertram Thomas described his trip by camelback from Muscat to this area in the south. As he came up over the top of the last rise, he could see a carpet of lush green vegetation stretching before him to the blue sea.⁶ In my view, there are evidences, many circumstantial, which have begun to give us a picture of what it was like for Lehi, Sariah and the other members of their party to travel in this part of the world.

External Evidences for an Arabian Trek

In 1952, Hugh Nibley published a study on Lehi. One of his astute observations was that the first camp of Lehi and Sariah must have lain somewhere north of the Straits of Tiran, the place where Arabia and the Sinai Peninsula come close together just as one enters the Gulf of Aqaba or the Gulf of Eilat which divides Arabia and the Sinai. Brother Nibley also concluded that the stretch of land in southeast Arabia, now known as southern Oman, was the place of their Bountiful because it is the only place where one finds the kind of vegetation that Nephi describes.⁷ In 1976, Lynn and Hope Hilton traveled through parts of the Arabian Peninsula and, in a wide valley in northwestern Saudi Arabia, concluded that the best candidate for the first camp was at an oasis called Al-Badc where one finds wells. In addition, an early settlement was in that spot because there is evidence of irrigation works.⁸ This oasis lays 75 or 80 miles south of modern Aqaba. In this connection, Nephi notes that his family reached the Red Sea and then traveled another three days before camping.⁹ That first sighting of the Red Sea must have been near Aqaba. The party then traveled three days south, depending on the speed of their animals.¹⁰ They needed pack animals to carry the tents that, even if taken apart, are still very heavy. Hence, they traveled about 15 to 25 miles a day. The site that the Hiltons suggested is within reach.

More recently, George Potter, who lives and works in Saudi Arabia, has come upon a canyon in the same general area that is also a candidate for the family's first camp. While looking for a place called the Waters of Moses, he and a friend stopped and visited with an official at the town of Al-Badc who sent them to the town of Maqna closer to the coast. When they arrived, they met the police chief who sent them with permits up the coast to a Saudi coast guard station. After driving along a narrow military road next to the sea, they came upon a canyon whose sheer walls rise some 2000 feet in the air. To their amazement, they found a stream of water running in the canyon. Since that initial visit, he and associates have gone back at different times of the year. They have determined that the stream runs at all times of the year. It is a "continually running" stream, just as Nephi describes the stream next to the family's camp in his narrative.¹¹ Brother Potter and his friends have looked through the canyons (or *wadis*) in that part of Saudi Arabia and have found no other sources of running water. Even though the water level in the canyon is slowly dropping because the water is being pumped, the stream alone makes this canyon a superb candidate for the location of Lehi's camp. As we might expect, vegetation grows there too, an important feature for browsing pack animals.¹² In this light, we have come a long way in identifying the approximate place where Lehi and Sariah pitched their tents. We are certainly in the neighborhood.

After the family left that first camp, they moved generally “south-southeast” until they came to “the place which was called Nahom.”¹³ We notice that the expression is passive, meaning that someone else had named the place. At all the other stops named in Nephi’s narrative, it was family members who named the places. But when they reach Nahom, it was a place that already enjoyed a preexisting name.

Several years ago, a couple from Australia, a Brother and Sister Aston, took a clue from a one-page article by Ross Christensen, who used to be on the BYU Anthropology and Archaeology faculty, and zeroed in on Yemen as the location for Nahom. Brother Christensen had noticed that Carsten Niebuhr, an eighteenth-century German traveler, had noted a place called “Nehhm” in Yemen. The Astons did a bit of research. They found that this name, or its equivalent which is spelled Nihm, also appeared in Arabic sources that go back to the early Islamic period, the ninth century A.D. It is known as both a place name and as a tribal name. This area lies almost due west of the place where Bountiful must have lain in Oman. The Aston’s work pushed the existence of this name back to the ninth century A.D.¹⁴ There was a problem. Lehi and Sariah traveled through this area a millennium and a half earlier, about 600 B.C. We needed a written source that would establish this name closer to the time of Lehi and Sariah. Now we have the evidence.

I became interested in an exhibit of ancient Yemen artifacts that was in Paris about four years ago. I saw a notice of it in a magazine. The exhibit is still showing in Europe under the title of *The Queen of Sheba*. I bought the catalogue. I was interested in some incense altars that were donated to a temple in south Arabia. These altars are inscribed with the name of the donor, the father’s name, and the grandfather’s name, as well as the tribal name. At first, I was less interested in the names than in the shapes of the altars because these altars seem to preserve distinctive architectural forms that distinguish early Arabian sacred buildings. In my reading of the Book of Mormon, I had become curious why Lehi called the “great and spacious building” of his dream “strange.”¹⁵ I had concluded in my own mind that he did so because this building was different architecturally from what he had seen in his own surroundings. In south Arabia all architecture consists of straight lines—there are no circles; there are no arches. All of the doorways and all of the windows are topped with straight lintel stones. My assumption was and is that the architecture was strange to Lehi’s eye.

While I was examining the inscription of one of the altars that is pictured in the catalogue of this exhibit, I read the name of the donor: “Bicathar, son of Saw_d, son of Nawc_n, tribe of Nihm.” Moreover, the excavator who translated the inscription dates this altar to the seventh-sixth centuries B.C. I thought, Bingo! The name Nihm, or Nahom, appears on an altar that is contemporary with Lehi and Sariah. We can now appeal to an ancient independent written source. In the world of archaeology,

nothing is as decisive as writing. A person can dig up artifacts. If an artifact preserves a name on it or an inscription, it is much more valuable than just an artifact by itself. As a matter of fact, there are two other altars from the same temple that preserve this same name. As many know, in Semitic languages one writes with consonants rather than vowels. Hence, the name is NHM. These letters make up the name on the altars and also the name Nahom. However, the middle letter “H” on the altars is different because in old South Arabian it is a soft “H,” whereas the “H” in Hebrew, which Nephi preserves for us, is probably the letter *h.et*, a stronger “H” sound. But we ask, what did Nephi and Lehi and Sariah and the rest of their party hear when they heard the name of the place? They heard the name in a way that they associated with a Hebrew term familiar to them, that is, Nahom. The Hebrew term, of course, means comfort—something different from the sense of stonecutting in old South Arabian.¹⁶ But the name is there. It is a tribal name and the name of a place. This place lies less than a hundred kilometers east of the modern capital of Yemen, Sana’a. The tribe has been in this area for thousands of years. It still has the same name. Thus, we know that we are in the neighborhood, and we know additionally that the name was contemporary to Lehi and Sariah.¹⁷

There is another piece that belongs to this picture. In the region of Nahom in South Arabia, all roads turn east. Nephi essentially shows his knowledge of this aspect when he opens chapter 17: “And from that time we did travel nearly eastward.”¹⁸ This one point, it seems, means that the party of Lehi and Sariah were following the incense route whose main road and shortcuts turn eastward in this area toward the incense collecting center of Shabwah.

Loaded caravans were going the opposite direction from the party of Lehi and Sariah. The major staging city stood 150 miles to the east of where the Nihm tribal area lies. Called Shabwah, it was the place where all the incense was gathered from that part of Arabia. The incense was unloaded from the pack animals. It was weighed, counted, and taxed. Caravaneers had to pay an obligatory contribution to the local temples. Then the incense and other goods were loaded on other camels and off they went, traveling west. The main trail followed wells, bending south from Shabwah before it actually ends up due west of where it starts. But one can take shortcuts across the Ramlat Sabcatayn desert. The problem with shortcuts is that a person had to travel more than 100 miles between wells. But some hardy travelers evidently went this way.¹⁹ The main conclusion is that the shortcuts and the main trail are all headed west from Shabwah. For someone traveling the opposite way, as were the party of Lehi and Sariah, all these roads ran eastward.

There is not an ancient source that knows of this eastward turn. Not one. I have looked. Strabo, who was born a few years before Jesus was born, wrote a geographical work and he mentions a series of cities in this part of Arabia. Strabo even writes about their relative direction to one another, west to

east. But he doesn't talk about connecting roads, and he doesn't tell us that the main incense road from the tribal area of Nihm or Nahom runs east. To be sure, a spur of this trail goes south from that area across the mountains and down into Aden. But that is not a main part of the trail. The main part of the trail comes from the east into the Nihm tribal area and turns north. It is only known by someone who has traveled it. Nephi was traveling it, though in the opposite direction. I have found one map drawn in 1460 A.D. by a geographer from Germany that shows knowledge of a trail that comes south into Arabia and then turns east. This early German geographer based his map on the written work of a man named Ptolemy who was born about A.D. 100. Ptolemy became a famous geographer and there are a number of medieval maps that are based on his written work. It is debated whether or not he himself drew maps. The map that shows this trail is owned by the New York Public Library. But it was not available to Joseph Smith. It was still in Europe at that time. The New York Public Library acquired this map only in 1892.²⁰ How does one explain this trail on that map? It is because European geographers communicated with Arab geographers who knew the turn of the trail. There is no European source and there is no Classical source that knows of this turn in the trail.

This observation raises another question. What written sources or maps about Arabia might have been available to Joseph Smith? Two Europeans had drawn maps of Arabia that showed a place named Nehem or Nehhm before the publication of the Book of Mormon in 1830. One was Carsten Niebuhr who went into Arabia in the 1760s, published two volumes about his experiences soon after he returned, and those two volumes were translated into English in 1792. Might these volumes and their map showing "Nehhm" have been available to Joseph Smith? The second map was drawn in 1751 by Jean Baptiste d'Anville, a French cartographer who also published a book on ancient geography that was subsequently translated into English in 1814. Might d'Anville's map showing "Nehem" have been available to Joseph Smith? Might such maps and books have been a part of the collection at the Dartmouth Library, knowing that Joseph Smith's family resided close to Dartmouth between 1811 and 1813 when young Joseph was between five and seven years old?

With the able help of a woman who is a former employee of Dartmouth College and also the Institute teacher for the LDS students at Dartmouth, I now possess the relevant acquisition information about works on ancient Arabia in the Dartmouth Library. D'Anville's book on ancient geography came to Dartmouth in 1823, years after Joseph Smith's family moved to New York. Carsten Niebuhr's books were acquired only in 1937, one hundred seven years after the Book of Mormon had been translated into English. D'Anville's map which shows "Nehem" was acquired by the Dartmouth library only in 1936.²¹ There is no evidence that these works, either the books or the maps, were available in neighboring libraries.²² In fact, John Pratt's lending library in Manchester, New York, near where Joseph Smith spent his teenage years, owned none of these works. The complete listing of the

collection in Pratt's library has been published and nothing in his library connects remotely with anything about ancient Arabia.²³

Internal Evidences for a Desert Journey

There are features within the text that fit, in my view, with an ancient desert setting in Arabia. We start with an obvious element, Lehi's dream. I believe that Lehi's dream in 1 Nephi 8-10 was prophetic, not only for the House of Israel, not only for the coming of the Messiah, but also for his family during the next few years that they would be traveling. The dream starts when Lehi is met by a guide wearing a white robe who in essence says, "Follow me." Lehi then says that he "traveled for the space of many hours in darkness."²⁴ After walking in darkness for a long while, Lehi "began to pray" and then found himself in "a large and spacious field." The most prominent plant in this field was a lovely tree watered by a stream.²⁵ Clearly, Lehi had walked into a field out of the desert.

In southern Arabia there were ancient water works. Construction on the famous Marib dam had begun a few decades before Lehi and Sariah passed through that area. In 685 B.C. workers began to build this dam to catch the runoff. The dam at Marib caught behind its walls the equivalent runoff of the Colorado River in a moderately dry year. To be sure, the runoff in Yemen is not like the Colorado River, which continues to run. We are talking about the runoff from high in the mountains that funneled together water from many wadis until it collected into one valley where the people of Marib had built a dam. Ancient engineers and workers repeated these irrigation works all over this part of south Arabia. At Marib, officials created a pair of sluices, one on each side of the dam, which allowed them to let the water run out through water channels as the water of the lake dropped and thus bring water to mile after mile of green land. Evidence shows that water from the dam reached fields twenty-five kilometers away.²⁶ By creating this water system, the people of Marib were not only servicing their own needs but were providing food and fodder for the camel caravans that were traveling from other parts of Arabia with incense and other goods. The result was that there was greenery in this part of Arabia standing right next to the sands of the desert. That is exactly what we see in Lehi's dream. In effect his dream offered him a view of what he would see farther south, an irrigated land next to the desert plain.

It also appears that in his dream Lehi was doing what all people do when they travel through the desert in that part of the world: he went at night. A person travels at night in order to escape the terrible heat of the day. In this connection, all the major civilizations in South Arabia worshiped the moon as their chief god. Why? Because the moon provides light at night when one is

traveling.²⁷ Perhaps importantly, we recall that Nephi quotes the Lord as saying, “I will also be your light in the wilderness.”²⁸ It was a matter of nighttime travel.

In his dream, when Lehi was walking with his guide at night, as one does in the desert, he was behaving differently from how people travel in Joseph Smith’s upstate New York. People there do not typically travel at night. In this respect, Lehi’s dream is foreign to Joseph Smith’s world. There are other differences. When Lehi arrives in the field and finds the tree next to a stream, it is almost as though he expects to see somebody. He turns around and looks for Sariah and their younger sons who are with her. One can almost hear him saying, “Oh, there she is, next to the stream.” As we have hinted, a running stream in the desert in south Arabia is likely coming out of a dam. Lehi beckons to Sariah to come to the tree and she and the two younger sons come and partake of the fruit. Again, almost as though he is expecting it, he turns and looks for the older sons. Again, we can almost hear him say, “Ah, there are Laman and Lemuel by the stream.” He then beckons to them. Oddly, they refused food in the desert, a measure of their intransigence.

I suggest that Lehi’s dream has chronicled a family trek through the desert at night. I read the account as follows. Lehi goes with the guide. Even though Sariah is behind him with the baggage animals and the younger sons, perhaps eighty or ninety yards, she can still see him. Even if the night is moonless, there is enough light from the stars which reflects off the floor of the desert that she can still see his visage ahead of her so that she knows exactly where she is going. As is customary, she is traveling with the most important parts of their possessions, the two younger sons and the baggage animals. Behind her, because the family has the luxury of a couple of older children, the two older sons follow as a rear guard. A person naturally asks, “Why is the father always going out ahead?” I have asked myself that question. I respond this way. I have stood on the bank of a canal in Egypt and watched a family walking along the canal bank opposite me. I have seen the father out in front a few yards and then comes the mother with two or three small children who are holding tightly onto her. As westerners we ask, “Why doesn’t the husband slow down and help his wife with the kids?” In their culture, that’s the wrong question to ask. A man always walks ahead looking for danger, for food, and for water. Even though there is plenty of food and water at a family’s home and home is only a half a mile away in the next village, custom requires that a family travel as I have just described. In this light, the trip through the desert in Lehi’s dream is a family trip. One further demonstration of this point is the order of the march of the Israelite tribes chronicled for us in the book of Numbers. The most important, the most precious part of the caravan is in the middle. That is where the moveable parts of the sanctuary with its rugs and furniture and veil were kept for protection.²⁹ That scenario seems to be what we see in Lehi’s dream, a trip of a family through the desert. And this desert description does not match Joseph Smith’s world of upstate New York.

Concerning the actual journey of the party of Lehi and Sariah, there are indicators in the text about distance and time. Because such aspects are not directly mentioned, we have to tease them out of the text. First, we know that this group of people was in the desert for eight years. In an article published in the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, I have suggested that they spent most of that time on the last, 700-mile leg of their trek across south Arabia.³⁰ One of the pieces that a person must take into account has to do with marriages. We recall that, when the family of Lehi and Sariah were in their first camp, Ishmael's family joined them. Soon thereafter, the five daughters of Ishmael married a man named Zoram and the four sons of Lehi and Sariah. Not long afterward, the Lord commanded Lehi to "take his journey into the wilderness."³¹ So party members went off into the desert. I very much suspect that within the first couple of months, one or two of the brides became pregnant. I also suspect that these pregnancies formed one of the challenges of this journey. If so, we expect Nephi to mention the births of babies, and he does not disappoint us. Traveling south, the group finally reached Nahom. Ishmael, I believe, had been in ill health for some time. That may be one of the reasons why the party stopped from time to time. This allowed him to recover his strength so that he could continue. When the travelers finally reach Nahom, Ishmael died. The mourning was intense. Nephi writes that Ishmael's daughters "did mourn exceedingly."³² The mourners, of course, would have included his own wife. It is after the death and burial of Ishmael and after the period of mourning that Nephi mentions the first children.³³ This notation gives us a gauge that they traveled some 1100 or 1150 miles from the first camp to this place in south Arabia within a year or less. In my view, the distance and time of this first long leg of the trek ties to the births of the children.

An ancient account gives us a measuring rod that supports this set of observations about distance and time. The geographer Strabo wrote of a Roman military expedition that came from Egypt into Arabia and marched south over approximately the same terrain that the party of Lehi and Sariah did. The Roman Army made the trip in six months, with the help of a guide. The soldiers suffered terribly in Arabia from bad water and bad food. As a result, they contracted life-threatening diseases, the very kind of thing that Alma mentions that the party of Lehi and Sariah suffered.³⁴ When the Romans retraced their steps in fast march, it took them two months to travel the distance through western Arabia that they had initially traversed in six. This military expedition gives us a gauge of about how long it took to move people through this area. Hence, it is reasonable to think that the family took about a year to walk from their first camp in the northwest corner of Arabia and reach the place in southern Yemen where they then turned east.

I conclude by focusing on Sariah. In my view, other than the initial revelation to Lehi to begin preaching and the next revelation to leave Jerusalem,³⁵ the most spiritual event that occurred within the family involved Sariah. After she and her family had reached the first camp, we can almost hear

Sariah saying, “Okay, what are we doing here? Why have we left our home?” To Lehi she might have said, “You have sent our sons 250 miles back to Jerusalem. Who knows what is going to happen to them between here and there? It’s a terrible desert. It’s a terrible risk. There are wild animals, wild people. Why are we here?” When Lehi tries to calm her down, she even challenges his spiritual motivation for doing as he has done. He responds, “I know I am a visionary man...but...I know that the Lord will deliver my sons.”³⁶ I suspect that, after a reasonable time had passed since her sons had gone back to Jerusalem the first time, Sariah went out and stood in a place where she had a long view so that she could see her sons coming for four or five miles. A person can imagine her relief when she finally saw them. After her sons arrived back in camp, everybody was happy, and relieved. Nephi then quotes his mother—it is one of the few places where Nephi quotes a woman in his record—who says, “Now I know of a surety that the Lord hath commanded my husband [and] ...that the Lord hath protected my sons.”³⁷ It seems clear to me that she had received a spiritual witness that the Lord had protected her sons and that God was leading her husband. Once she was on board, so to speak, once she knew that the Lord was directing everything, she would ensure the success of the journey. For it is the woman who has to make a salad out of thistles and to make a stew out of little meat. It is her challenge to try to keep the family alive. Moreover, she is in charge of the furnishings and the tent and how people live. Further, as custom dictates, Sariah takes charge of her daughters-in-law who will help her to help the others survive in a terrible wilderness. Sariah’s receipt of the spiritual witness formed the grand key for the survival of her party in the desert.³⁸

Conclusion

What do we conclude? Do these observations prove the Book of Mormon to be true? No. Do they prove the Book of Mormon to be false? No. Nothing decisively proves it except a spiritual witness. Even so, a number of pieces from ancient Arabia fit Nephi’s narrative. We actually find ourselves with a clearer picture of what happened to this family and what their experience was. For myself, the way that one learns whether the Book of Mormon is true is by reading it and then by going into one’s closet and praying. I know that it is the word of God. I know that it is a divine instrument of conversion. And I know that this story happened to real people in a place called Arabia.³⁹

Notes

¹ See Mosiah 10:12.

² See Joseph Fielding Smith, Compiler, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: The Deseret News Press, 1938), 267.

³ 1 Nephi 17:5, 18:1.

⁴ Consult Terry B. Ball *et al.*, "Planning Research on Oman," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 7/1 (1998): 12-21.

⁵ 1 Nephi 17:6.

⁶ Bertram Thomas, *Arabia Felix* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932), 48-49.

⁷ Hugh W. Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert, The World of the Jaredites, There were Jaredites* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 85, 108-113.

⁸ Lynn M. and Hope Hilton, *In Search of Lehi's Trail* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 63-68; also "In Search of Lehi's Trail, Part 2: The Journey," *Ensign* 6/10 (October 1976): 43-45. On ancient irrigation works at Al-Badac, and thus running water, consult Michael Lloyd Ingraham, Theodore D. Johnson, Baseem Rihani and Ibrahim Shatla, "Saudi Arabian Comprehensive Survey Program: C, Preliminary Report on a Reconnaissance Survey of the Northwestern Province (With a Note on a Brief Survey of the Northern Province)," *ATLAL. The Journal of Saudi Arabian Archaeology* 5 (1401 A.H. – 1981 A.D.): 75.

⁹ 1 Nephi 2:5-6.

¹⁰ Concerning the need to travel at least three days from Jerusalem before offering sacrifice, and thus Nephi's need to make the note about the three days in his narrative, see David R. Seely, "Lehi's Altar and Sacrifice in the Wilderness," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 10/1 (2001): 62-69.

¹¹ 1 Nephi 2:9.

¹² George D. Potter, "A New Candidate in Arabia for the Valley of Lemuel," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 8/1 (1999): 54-63.

¹³ 1 Nephi 16:13, 34.

¹⁴ See Ross T. Christensen, "The Place Called Nahom," *Ensign* 8/8 (August 1978): 73; Warren P. and Michaela K. Aston, *In the Footsteps of Lehi* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 3-25.

¹⁵ 1 Nephi 8:33.

¹⁶ Nibley points out that the "Hebrew *Nahum*" means "comfort" (*Lehi in the Desert*, 79). See also Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, Editors, *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Three Volumes (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1997), 2:734-739. For NHM in ancient Arabian dialects, see G. Lankester Harding, *An Index and Concordance of Pre-Islamic Arabian Names and Inscriptions* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 81, 602; and Joan Copeland Biella, *Dictionary of Old South Arabic: Sabaean Dialect*, Harvard Semitic Studies No. 25 (Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1982), 296.

¹⁷ Consult S. Kent Brown, "'The Place that was Called Nahom': New Light from Ancient Yemen," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 8/1 (1999): 66-68; and Warren P. Aston, "The Nahom/Nihm Altars," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 10/2 (2001): 56-61. For the root NHM in ancient Arabian dialects, see Harding, *An Index and Concordance of Pre-Islamic Arabian Names and Inscriptions*, 81, 602; and Biella, *Dictionary of Old South Arabic: Sabaean Dialect*, 296.

¹⁸ 1 Nephi 17:1.

¹⁹ Of the ancient Classical authors who have written about Arabia or about the incense trade there, none say anything about the directions that the incense trail followed in the region of the Ramlat Sabcatayn desert. Pliny, who mentions "Sabota, a walled town containing sixty temples," which is to be identified with Shabwah, does not say that there was a major road that connected his Sabota with important towns in the west (*Natural History*, 6.32 [155, 159]). Strabo does not mention the trail per se (*Geography* 16.4.22-24) although he reports that Sabata (Shabwah) lies "farthest toward the east" among the four important interior cities of south Arabia (*Geography*, 16.4.2), implying a connecting road. But his work was not available in English translation during Joseph Smith's lifetime. No western authors who wrote before Joseph Smith's time mention the eastward turn of the trail from the area of Wadi Jawf to Shabwah.

²⁰ Only the map of Arabia Felix that accompanies the Codex Ebnerianus of Ptolemy's *Geography* shows a trail that turns east in south Arabia. Ptolemy does not describe the trail in the written part of his work where he lists towns and their locations. This codex came into possession of the New York Public Library in 1892 from a London book dealer named Bernard Quaritch and was not published until

1932. See *Claudius Ptolemy, The Geography*, translated and edited by Edward Luther Stevenson (New York: Dover Publications, 1932), 137-140 and the map of Arabia Felix; *The History of Cartography: Cartography in the Traditional Islamic and South Asian Societies*, edited by John Brian Harley and David Woodward (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 3-4, 10, 94-95, 97-100, 168-169. The acquisition information came from Dr. John M. Lundquist, head of the Oriental Division of the New York Public Library (March 28, 2001).

²¹ The dates for the Dartmouth library collection come from P.A. Crossett in a communique dated March 22, 2001.

²² In addition to the survey of the Dartmouth library and as a back-up effort, I made a personal survey of the holdings in the special collections section of the John Hay Library at Brown University when I was there in April 2001. The results were similar to those for Dartmouth.

²³ For a listing of the books available in John Pratt's library near Joseph Smith's New York home, consult Robert Paul, "Joseph Smith and the Manchester (New York) Library," *BYU Studies* 22/3 (Summer 1983): 333-356.

²⁴ 1 Nephi 8:8.

²⁵ 1 Nephi 8:8-10, 13.

²⁶ Jürgen Schmidt notes that the seasonal stream coming into the Marib dam brought in high years 1700 cu. m/sec. (= a low spring discharge through Cataract Canyon on the Colorado River) but averaged about 1000 cu. m/sec. during the spring and fall monsoons. He also calculates that the Marib dam irrigated 9600 hectares, almost 24,000 acres (see *Yemen: 3000 Years of Art and Civilisation in Arabia Felix*, edited by Werner Daum [Innsbruck: Pinguin-Verlag, 1987], 55, 57-59, 60). Wendell Phillips observes that the water captured behind the Marib dam "was distributed to create mile upon mile of green fields" at the edge of the desert (*Unknown Oman* [New York: David McKay Co., Inc., 1966], 189-190). Robert W. Stookey states that early inhabitants of southern Arabia "built some of the most imposing hydrological works of the ancient world, sustaining dense, prosperous populations in regions which now support merely a few nomadic herdsmen" (*Yemen-The Politics of the Yemen Arab Republic* [Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1978], 9).

²⁷ Brian Doe observes that religious devotion in south Arabia was "Öastral in conceptÖessentially a planetary system in which the moon as a masculine deity prevailed." This "indicates that there was an early reverence for the night sky." The "religious calendar was also lunarÖ The national god of

each of the kingdoms or states was the Moon-god known by various names. The Sun-goddess was the moon's consort" (*Southern Arabia* [London: Thames and Hudson, 1971], 25). For an observation about how a desert-dwelling family moves with its baggage animals and also the reasons for traveling at night, see Charles Doughty, *Travels in Arabia Deserta*, with an introduction by T. E. Lawrence, Two Volumes in One (New York: Random House, 1936), 1:86 and 257, as well as the geographer Strabo (ca. 64 B.C.-19 A.D.) who writes that "in earlier times the camel-merchants traveled only by night" (*Geography* 17.1.45).

²⁸ 1 Nephi 17:13.

²⁹ Numbers 1:47-53; 2:34; 10:14-28, 33.

³⁰ S. K. Brown, "A Case for Lehi's Bondage in Arabia," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 6/2 (1997): 205-217.

³¹ 1 Nephi 16:9.

³² 1 Nephi 16:35.

³³ 1 Nephi 17:1-2.

³⁴ Alma 9:22.

³⁵ 1 Nephi 1:18, 2:2.

³⁶ 1 Nephi 5:4-5.

³⁷ 1 Nephi 5:8.

³⁸ For Sariah's important role in the success of the party in the desert, consult Camille Fronk, "Desert Epiphany: Sariah and the Women in 1 Nephi," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9/2 (2000): 4-15.

³⁹ I offer my thanks to Pat Ward for her assistance in preparing this paper.