An "Ideal" Book of Mormon Geography

Author(s): Lynn C. Layton
Source: *Improvement Era*, Vol. 41, No. 7 (July 1938)
Published by: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
Page(s): 394–395, 439

Abstract: This article contains a map of the proposed geography of the Book of Mormon but does not super-impose this geography over a present-day map. The author makes an analysis of the geographical descriptions in the Book of Mormon text.

Archived by permission.
AN "IDEAL" BOOK OF MORMON GEOGRAPHY

By LYNN C. LAYTON

Without attempting to locate the scene of action on the present-day map the author here suggests a feasible location of names and places with respect to each other, as revealed by the text itself.

Many individual members of the Church, in private capacity, have expressed their views and their theories concerning Book of Mormon geography. Here is another view—representing merely the personal beliefs of one student of the subject and not necessarily representing the views of the Church or its members generally. But this presentation is unique in that it does not attempt to place the scene of action on the present-day map, but merely indicates the relative positions of one place with respect to another, as inferred from a study of the text itself.

In Alma 22:27 Mormon gives a description of the land ruled over by the king of the Lamanites in the year 90 B.C. He speaks of a "narrow strip of wilderness, which ran from the sea east even to the sea west, and round about on the borders . . . of the wilderness which was on the north, by the land of Zarahemla, through the borders of Manti, by the head of the river Sidon, running from the east towards the west—and thus were the Nephites and Lamanites divided." In this passage we learn three facts about the Sidon, that its headwaters are in a narrow strip of wilderness which runs from the sea on the east to the sea on the west, that the head of the Sidon is north of the Land of Nephi, and that the Land of Manti is near the wilderness in which the Sidon has its source.

Reading from Alma 16:7 we find that Zoram and his sons (Nephites coming from Zarahemla) crossed the Sidon "with their armies, and marched away beyond the borders of Manti into the south wilderness, which was on the east side of the river Sidon." About 74 B.C., the great Nephi general, Moroni, fought a campaign in this region. Here he ambushed the Lamanites as described in Alma 43:25-44. Paying special attention to verses 31, 32 we read, "Therefore, he divided his army and brought a part over into the valley, and concealed them on the east, and on the south of the hill Riplah; and the remainder he concealed in the west valley, on the west of the river Sidon, and so down into the borders of the land Manti." (Read verses 31-42.) From these passages we can be sure that near its head the Sidon flowed from south to north.

That the Sidon still flowed from south to north near Zarahemla is shown by Alma 2:15: "The Amlicites came upon the hill Amnihu, which was east of the river Sidon, which ran by the land of Zarahemla." And in Alma 8:3 we read that Alma went from Zarahemla to the "Land of Melek, on the west of the river Sidon."

Apparently the Sidon flowed into the sea on the north as Alma 3:3...
speaks of the bones of the slain Lamanites whose bodies were thrown into the river as being “in the depths of the sea.”

To begin our skeleton map it is necessary to consider the land of Nephi, which includes in its general term all of the lands held by the Lamanites in the first century B.C. Here the first Nephite city was built by Nephi the son of Lehi. Nephi 5:6-17. From this city Mosiah went forth to discover the land of Zarahemla. In the first century B.C. it was ruled by the Lamanites and was the land to which the sons of Mosiah went to preach the Gospel. The extent of this Lamanite kingdom is outlined by Mormon in Alma 22:27, and we have learned that it was separated from Zarahemla by a narrow strip of wilderness which ran east and west from sea to sea. “And the land of Nephi did run in a straight course from the east sea to the west.” Alma 50:8.

Now we are presented with a unique situation: The Sidon running from south to north ends in a sea. The Land of Nephi running east and west runs from sea to sea. The narrow strip of wilderness divides the Land of Nephi from Zarahemla, or the Nephite lands, and also runs from sea to sea, running east and west. If you will note this forms a T, with the Sidon as the stem and the Land of Nephi as the top bar. From this T and the east and west sea shores we can locate many of the ancient lands.

The Land of Zarahemla was near the Sidon. In the year 322 A.D. the last wars of the Nephites began “in the borders of Zarahemla by the waters of Sidon.” Mormon 1:10.

About 81 B.C. Zoram and his sons left Zarahemla and “crossed over the river Sidon, with their armies, and marched away beyond the borders of Manti into the south wilderness, which was on the east side of the river Sidon.” Alma 16:7. This passage together with Alma 2:15-37 (pay particular attention to verses 15 and 27) show that Zarahemla was on the west of the Sidon. They also fix Manti as on the east near the head of Sidon.

Zarahemla was the center of the Nephite lands in the days of Moroni. In the year 62 B.C. Moroni wrote an epistle from the city of Mulek to Pahoran, who was then chief judge of Zarahemla, accusing him of neglecting to send reinforcements to the frontiers “because ye are in the heart of our country... surrounded by security.” Alma 60:19.

In the year 51 B.C. Coriantumr, a renegade Nephite, led a great Lamanite army “down to the land of Zarahemla.” Helaman 1:17-18. After capturing Zarahemla he “did march forth with a large army, even towards the city of Bountiful; for it was his determination to go forth and cut his way through with the sword, that he might obtain the north parts of the land.” Helaman 1:23. “But behold, this march of Coriantumr through the center of the land gave Moronihah great advantage over them.” Helaman 1:25.

These verses establish the fact that Zarahemla was in the center of the Nephite lands, also that the city Bountiful was north of Zarahemla.

The Land Bountiful was near the “small neck of land which divided the land southward from the land northward” and was inhabited by the Nephites “even from the east unto the west sea.” Alma 22:29-33. Note here that verse 32 tells us that the “land of Nephi and the land of Zarahemla were nearly surrounded by water.” This use of the term “land of Zarahemla” apparently includes not only the specific land surrounding the city of Zarahemla, but all Nephite lands of this period.

The city of Bountiful was separated from the city of Mulek by

(Concluded on page 439)
AN “IDEAL” BOOK OF MORMON GEOGRAPHY

(Concluded from page 395)

plains, but was near it, as on one occasion Moroni sought to induce the Lamanites to “meet them upon
the plains between the two cities.” Alma 52:20.

Mulek was one of a number of cities which were on “the east
borders by the seashore.” Alma 51:26. It was from here that Tean-
cum fled northward on one occasion to reach the city of Bountiful.
Alma 52:23-27.

Thus we establish the land Bounti-
ful to the north of Zarahemla and
the City Bountiful in the eastern end
of the Land Bountiful.

The City of Moroni is also im-
portant to us as it was built “by the
east sea: and it was on the south by
the line of the possessions of the
Lamanites.” Alma 50:13. This
would place it on the east end of the
T. This location is important as
Moroni was one of the cities which
sank beneath the sea at the time of
the crucifixion. III Nephi 8:9.

It would be impossible to place
more of the lands in an article of
this length, but with the use of the
accompanying chart and the text of
the Book of Mormon many more
may be located with surprising ac-
curacy. Perhaps if all the require-
ments of the text are considered, the
Book of Mormon student may locate
the Land of Zarahemla on the pres-
ent-day map.

THE LORD’S WAY OUT OF BONDAGE

(Continued from page 401)

pose of the journey was withheld.
President Snow answered the call
to go, and then wondered and wor-
died until further light was given.

He finally went to bed and rested
fairly well during the night, appear-
ing to feel very much better the
following morning. It was Wednes-
day, May 17, the day on which the
special conference opened in the
Tabernacle in St. George. It was
during one of these meetings that
President Snow received the re-
newed revelation on tithing. I was
sitting at a table on the stand, re-
porting the proceedings, when all at
once father paused in his discourse.
Complete stillness filled the room.
I shall never forget the thrill as long
as I live. When he commenced to
speak again his voice strengthened
and the inspiration of God seemed
to come over him, as well as over the
entire assembly. His eyes seemed
to brighten and his countenance to
shine. He was filled with unusual
power. Then he revealed to the
Latter-day Saints the vision that was
before him.

God manifested to him there and
then not only the purpose of the call
to visit the Saints in the South, but
also Lorenzo Snow’s special mission,
the great work for which God had
prepared and preserved him, and he
unveiled the vision to the people.
He told them that he could see, as he
had never realized before, how the
law of tithing had been neglected by
the people, also that the Saints,
themselves, were heavily in debt, as
well as the Church, and now through
strict obedience to this law—the
paying of a full and honest tithing
—not only would the Church be
relieved of its great indebtedness,
but through the blessings of the
Lord this would also be the means
of freeing the Latter-day Saints from
their individual obligations, and
they would become a prosperous
people.

Directly on tithing, President
Snow said:

The word of the Lord is: The time has
now come for every Latter-day Saint, who
calculates to be prepared for the future and
to hold his feet strong upon a proper foun-
dation, to do the will of the Lord and to
pay his tithing in full. That is the word
of the Lord to you, and it will be the word
of the Lord to every settlement throughout
the land of Zion.

President Snow then referred to
the terrible drought which had con-
tinued so severely for three years in
the South. The Virgin River and
all its tributaries were virtually dry.
One old resident stated:

This has been the driest winter in thirty-
five years; and the winter before, the driest
in thirty-four years. The Pine Valley
Mountains, usually covered with snow, are
comparatively barren. Conditions are
very discouraging to the families of this locality.
The lucern and grain are drying up now
and the recent frost played havoc with the
grapes. Prospects are very discouraging
indeed.—Salt Lake Herald, May 21, 1899.

Four days later this statement was
made:

This is the coldest May, and the driest
May, the Dixie people have known.—Salt
Lake Herald, May 25, 1899.

President Snow said, after his re-
turn:

All through “Dixie” we found everything
(Concluded on page 440)