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Type: Web Article

Nephite History in Context 2: Special Issue

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Published at: *Studio et Quoque Fide*, December 2017

Abstract: This special issue of *Nephite History in Context* examines ancient sources relevant to Alma's statement that the Son of God would be born "at Jerusalem, the land of our forefathers" (Alma 7:11). First, a fragment from the Dead Sea Scrolls which uses the phrase "land of Jerusalem" in a story about Jeremiah, Lehi's contemporary, and in a setting very similar to that of 1 Nephi. Next, some of the Amarna Letters also use the phrase "land of Jerusalem," and even mention a town in the land of Jerusalem that has been equated with Bethlehem by several scholars. Finally, a small fiscal bulla from Bethlehem found in Jerusalem, dated to Lehi's day and attesting that Bethlehem was part of Jerusalem's hinterland at that time.

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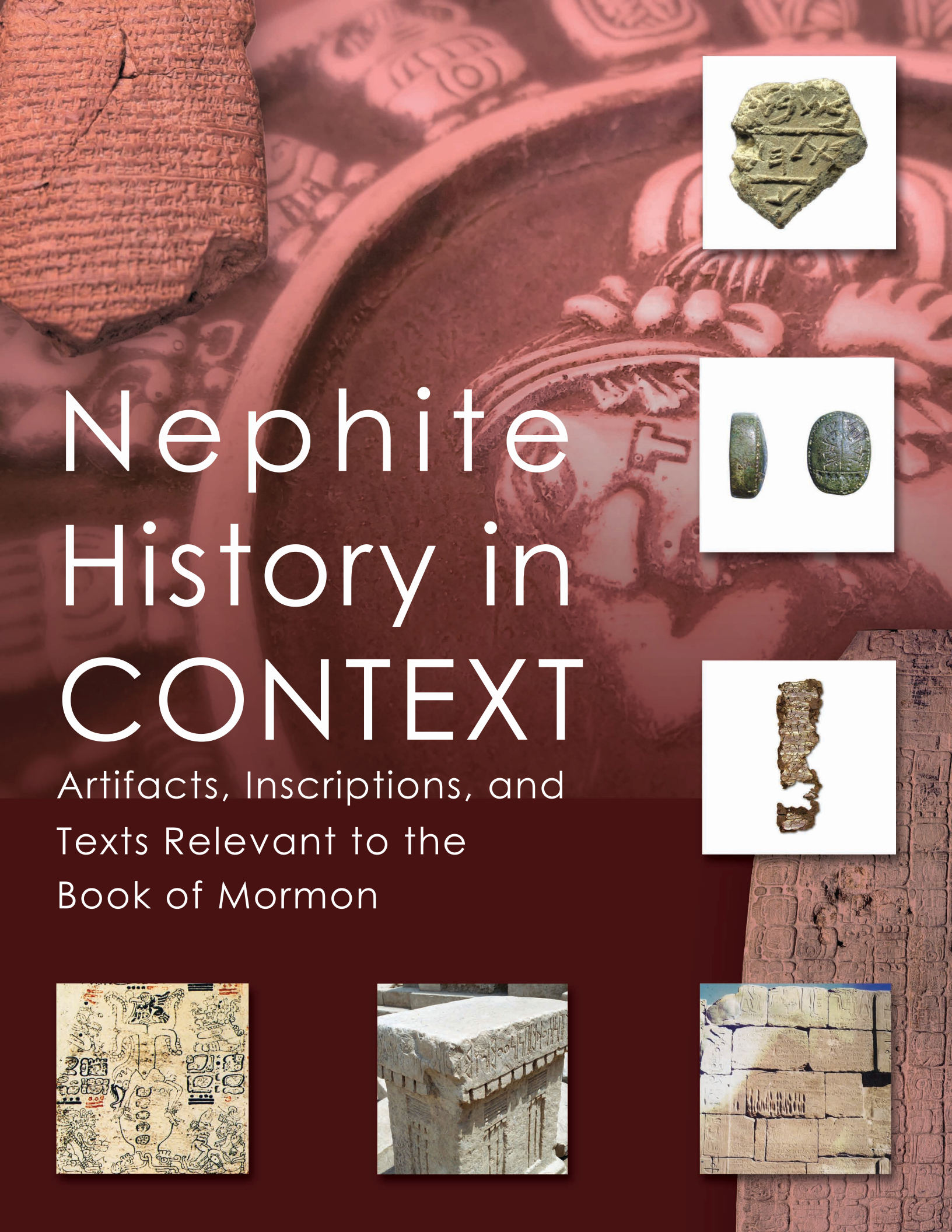

Nephite History in CONTEXT

Artifacts, Inscriptions, and Texts Relevant to the Book of Mormon

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Number 2 (December 2017)

A supplementary resource for

THE And It Came To Pass PROJECT

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Apocryphon of Jeremiah (4Q385a)

Neal Rappleye

Background

The Dead Sea Scrolls were found in 11 different caves near Qumran between 1947–1956. Cave 4 (pictured) held the majority of the scrolls, including 4Q385a and others containing the Apocryphon of Jeremiah. Map by Jasmin Gimenez. Photo credit: Effi Scweizer, Wikipedia.org.

Between 1947 and 1956, a few well preserved scrolls and tens of thousands of broken fragments were found scattered across eleven different caves along the northwest shores of the Dead Sea near Qumran. Now known as the Dead Sea Scrolls, they are arguably the most significant discovery ever made for the study of the Bible and the origins of Judaism and Christianity. Among the writings found are the earliest copies of nearly every Old Testament book, many of the known apocryphal and pseudepigraphic works, and several other texts discovered for the first time at Qumran. Altogether, more than 900 different compositions were found, most of which are written in Hebrew, though some are in Aramaic and Greek. Various dating methods indicate that they were written over time between the late third century BC and the mid-first century AD.[1]

One of the fragmentary, non-biblical texts found is a story about the prophet Jeremiah commonly called the "Apocryphon of Jeremiah," although it has sometimes been called "A Jeremiah Apocryphon," and "Pseudo-Jeremiah." According to Geza Vermes, the text is "written in well-imitated biblical Hebrew," and appears to date to around the first century BC.[2] The exact composition of the story is uncertain, and debate remains about which fragments belong to this text and which belong to a different story about Ezekiel, Jeremiah's contemporary.[3] In general, though, the story seems to focus around Jeremiah prophesying that a remnant of exiled Israel will return to their homeland only to be destroyed 490 years (ten jubilees) later for once again turning away from the Lord.[4]

Translation

The following excerpt is from 4Q385a frg. 18a–b col. i.[5] The translation is from Kipp Davis, *The Cave 4* Apocryphon of Jeremiah *and the Qumran Jeremianic Traditions: Prophetic Persona and the Construction of Community Identity* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2014), 132 (a transcription of the Hebrew can be seen on the same page),[6] with annotations added:

> Jeremiah the prophet from YHWH's presence.[7] [And the]captives who were led captive [went up] from the land of Jerusalem,[8] and they came [to Riblah,[9] to]the king of Babylon[,]when Nebuzaradan, the overseer of the bodyguard had slaughtered [the people of G]od.[10] And he took the furnishings from the house of God with the priests,[11] […][12] the sons of Israel, and brought them to Babylon. And Jeremiah the prophet walked [with them as far as]the river,[13] and he instructed them concerning what they ought to do in the land of[their]captivity.[14] [And they listened] to the voice of Jeremiah,[15] to the words that God had instructed to him [for them to do.[16] So]they kept the covenant of the God of their fathers in the land of [their captivity. They turned]from what they, their kings, priests, [and their princes]had done[ ] … […]profane[d the na]me of God, to [sin].[17]

Book of Mormon Relevance

This passage is generally believed to be part of either the introduction or the conclusion of the extant text.[18] In it, Jeremiah travels to a river with the captives "from the land of Jerusalem" (מארץ ירושלים) in the wake of the Babylonian invasion ca. 587–586 BC, counseling them along the way on how they should live while in captivity. The designation of the captives' homeland as the "land of Jerusalem," which may actually occur twice in this Jeremiah apocryphon (cf. 4Q389 frg. i),[19] is distinct from biblical references to Jerusalem and Judah. The phrase is not used anywhere in biblical texts, although fourteenth century BC tablets written in Akkadian use variations of an equivalent phrase (see pp. 6–12), indicating the great antiquity of this term for the region around Jerusalem.

Here in the Apocryphon of Jeremiah, Kipp Davis believes the phrase "land of Jerusalem" fits the overall "portrayal of 'the land' throughout the text," which "is restricted only to the holy city."[20] While the text likely dates to the first century BC, this more restricted portrayal of the region as "the land of Jerusalem," according to Robert Eisenman and Michael Wise, "greatly enhances the sense of historicity of the whole, since Judah … by this time consisted of little more than Jerusalem and its immediate environs."[21]

The setting of 1 Nephi is very similar to that of the Apocryphon of Jeremiah. Not only are the events in 1 Nephi contemporary to Jeremiah's ministry (1 Nephi 7:14), but the story is about Jerusalem natives who departed from the land in the wake of a Babylonian invasion about a decade earlier (ca. 598–597 BC), in which the temple was ransacked and captives were taken (see 1 Nephi 1–2; cf. 2 Kings 24:9–17; 2 Chronicles 36:9–10; Jeremiah 37:1), and Judah was likely reduced to essentially a city-state centered in Jerusalem, the once "great city" (cf. 1 Nephi 1:4; 2:13; 10:3; 11:13).[22] Then, like the captives in the Jeremiah apocryphon, Nephi and his family travel through the wilderness until reaching a river where they were

given further instructions and commandments through a prophet (Lehi), and received covenant promises from the Lord (see 1 Nephi 2–7). However, Nephi learned through prophetic means that in several hundred years his people would ultimately be destroyed for turning away from the Lord (1 Nephi 12:13–19).

Significantly, the phrase "land of Jerusalem" also shows up several times in 1 and 2 Nephi (see table). Furthermore, travel in and out of the city is always between "(the land of) Jerusalem" and the "wilderness," with no mention of other settled territory in between (see 1 Nephi 2:2–4, 11; 3:2–4, 9–10, 17–18, 23–27; 4:1–4, 24–30, 38; 5:6; 7:1–7), indicating a similarly restricted portrayal of "the land" as little more than a city-state centered on the holy city itself. Given the similarities between the settings in both texts, we can reasonably say this "greatly enhances the sense of historicity" of Nephi's narrative as well.[23]

Uses of "Land of Jerusalem" in 1 and 2 Nephi*	
1 Nephi, headnote	"The Lord warns Lehi to depart out of the *land of Jerusalem* … Nephi taketh his brethren and returns to the *land of Jerusalem*"
1 Nephi 2:11	"he had led them out of the *land of Jerusalem*"
1 Nephi 3:9–10	"go up to the *land of Jerusalem* … we had gone up to the *land of Jerusalem*"
1 Nephi 5:6	"journeyed in the wilderness up to the *land of Jerusalem*"
1 Nephi 7:2, 7	"again return into the *land of Jerusalem* … desirous to return unto the *land of Jerusalem*"
1 Nephi 16:35	"brought them out of the *land of Jerusalem*"
1 Nephi 17:14, 20, 22	"did bring you out of the *land of Jerusalem* … hath led us out of the *land of Jerusalem* … were in the *land of Jerusalem*"
1 Nephi 18:24	"brought from the *land of Jerusalem*"
2 Nephi 1:1, 3, 9, 30	"bringing them out of the *land of Jerusalem* … flee out of the *land of Jerusalem* … shall bring out of the *land of Jerusalem* … brought out of the *land of Jerusalem*"
2 Nephi 25:11	"return again and possess the *land of Jerusalem*"
*The phrase continued to be used by later writers in reference to their ancestral homeland. See Jacob 2:25, 31–32; Omni 1:6; Mosiah 1:11; 2:4; 7:20; 10:12; Alma 3:11; 9:22; 10:3; 22:9; 36:29; Helaman 5:6; 7:7; 8:21; 16:19; 3 Nephi 5:20; 16:1; 20:29; Mormon 3:18–19; Ether 13:7. Alma 24:1 uses in the phrase in reference to a new land called Jerusalem by later Lamanites.	

Notes

[1] For background on the Dead Sea Scrolls, see James VanderKam and Peter Flint, *The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Their Significance for Understanding the Bible, Judaism, Jesus, and Christianity* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 2002). See also Eugene Ulrich, "Dead Seas Scrolls," in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000), 326–329; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "The Dead Sea Scrolls," in *HarperCollims Bible Dictionary*, rev. and updated, ed. Mark Allan Powell (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2011), 183–188.

[2] Geza Vermes, trans., *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, rev. ed. (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2004), 602.

[3] See VanderKam and Flint, *Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 231.

[4] See Michael Wise, Martin Abegg Jr., and Edward Cook, trans., *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2005), 439–446. Out of all the translations I've consulted, this one's arrangement of the fragments produces the most readable narrative.

[5] In the early publications of this fragment, which predated the "official" publication in the *Discoveries in the Judaean Desert* series, it was referred to as "fragment 1" of "Pseudo-Jeremiah" from scroll 4Q385 (or 4Q385b). See Robert Eisenman and Michael Wise, trans., *The Dead Sea Scrolls Uncovered: The First Complete Translation and Interpretation of 50 Key Documents withheld for over 35 Years* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1992), 57–58; Florentino García Martínez, trans. *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated: The Qumran Texts in English*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY and Grand Rapids, MI: Brill and Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1996), 285. Later it was classified as 4Q385b frg. 16 col. i, as seen in Florentino García Martínez and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar, trans., *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Study Edition*, 2 vols. (New York, NY: Brill, 1999), 2:772–773. It's now referred to as 4Q385a frg. 18 col. i or 4Q385a frg. 18a–b col. i, as seen in Vermes, *Complete Dead Sea Scrolls*, 602; Wise, et al., *New Translation*, 446; Donald W. Parry and Emanuel Tov, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Reader*, 6 vols., 2nd ed. (Boston, MA: Brill, 2013), 2:802–803; and Davis, *Cave 4 Apocryphon of Jeremiah*, 132.

[6] All brackets and ellipses are in the original. I have omitted representation of the blank first line, and the lacuna at the beginning of the text.

[7] The sense here may be that Jeremiah was *leaving* the Lord's presence, as indicated in several translations. Vermes, *Complete Dead Sea Scrolls*, 602: "Jeremiah the Prophet [departed] from before the Lord (YHWH)"; Wise, et al., *New Translation*, "[… And] Jeremiah the prophet, [went out] from before the LORD"; Devorah Dimant, trans., in Parry and Tov, *Reader*, 2:803: "[and] Jeremiah the Prophet [went out] from before the Lord"; Martínez and Tigchelaar, *Study Edition*, 2:773: "[… and] Jeremiah the Prophet [went] from before YHWH." More consistent with Davis is Eisenman and Wise, *Uncovered*, 58: "Jeremiah the Prophet before the Lord" and Martínez, *Qumran Texts*, 285: "Jeremiah the prophet before YHWH."

[8] Several translators restore the lacuna at the beginning of this line as indicating that Jeremiah came and joined the captives. Vermes, *Complete Dead Sea Scrolls*, 602: "… [to accompany the] captives who were taken captive from the land of Jerusalem"; Wise, et al., *New Translation*, 446: "[and went with the] captives who were taken captive from the land of Jerusalem"; Dimant, in Parry and Tov, *Reader*, 2:803: "[and he went with the] captives who were led captive from the land of Jerusalem." More consistent with Davis are Martínez and Tigchelaar, *Study Edition*, 2:773: "[… the] exiles who were brought into exile from the land of Jerusalem"; Eisenman and Wise, *Uncovered*, 58: "[… wh]o were taken captive from the land of Jerusalem"; Martínez, *Qumran Texts*, 285: "[…w]ho were made prisoners of Jerusalem."

[9] Vermes, *Complete Dead Sea Scrolls*, 602 restores "[to … Nebuchnezzar]" (who was the king of Babylon at the time) here instead of "[to Riblah, to,]" while Eisenman and Wise, *Uncovered*, 58; Martínez, *Qumran Texts*, 285; Martínez and Tigchelaar, *Study Edition*, 2:773 just leave this space blank. Wise, et al., *New Translation*, 446 and Dimant, in Parry and Tov, *Reader*, 2:803 are both consistent with Davis.

[10] This differs from all other translations I've consulted, which typically leave this lacuna blank and opt for a less extreme term in the place of "slaughtered." Vermes, *Complete Dead Sea Scrolls*, 602 and Dimant, in Parry and Tov, *Reader*, 2:803 have "smote"; Wise, et al., *New Translation*, 446 and Martínez and Tigchelaar, *Study Edition*, 2:773 each have "struck." Eisenman and Wise, *Uncovered*, 58 and Martínez, *Qumran Texts*, 285 each stop after "guard" or "escort."

[11] Most translations use "vessels" rather than "furnishings," suggesting that this refers to the sacred relics of the temple. See Vermes, *Complete Dead Sea Scrolls*, 602; Martínez and Tigchelaar, *Study Edition*, 2:773; Dimant, in Parry and Tov, *Reader*, 2:803; Eisenman and Wise, *Uncovered*, 58; Martínez, *Qumran Texts*, 285. Wise, et al., *New Translation*, 446 has "utensils."

[12] Dimant, in Parry and Tov, *Reader*, 2:803 and Wise, et al., *New Translation*, 446 restore "the nobles" here. Consistent with Davis, Vermes, *Complete Dead Sea Scrolls*, 602; Martínez and Tigchelaar, *Study Edition*, 2:773; Eisenman and Wise, *Uncovered*, 58; Martínez, *Qumran Texts*, 285 all leave this lacuna blank.

[13] Martínez and Tigchelaar, *Study Edition*, 2:773 and Eisenman and Wise, *Uncovered*, 58 leave the lacuna before "the river" blank, while Martínez, *Qumran Texts*, 285 is even missing "the river." Vermes, *Complete Dead Sea Scrolls*, 602; Wise, et al., *New Translation*, 446; and Dimant, in Parry and Tov, *Reader*, 2:803 are all consistent with Davis.

[14] Vermes, *Complete Dead Sea Scrolls*, 602; Martínez and Tigchelaar, *Study Edition*, 2:773; Dimant, in Parry and Tov, *Reader*, 2:803; Eisenman and Wise, *Uncovered*, 58; Wise, et al., *New Translation*, 446 all indicate that Jeremiah "commanded" rather than merely "instructed" the captives. This is true in both instances of "instructed" in this passage. Martínez, *Qumran Texts*, 285 curiously has "laughed and told" here, and has "decreed" in the second instance of "instructed."

[15] There is some variation in how the lacuna in this section is dealt with and translated. Vermes agrees with Davis that this indicates something the captives *did*, while Wise, et al. and Dimant both make it another of Jeremiah's commands. Martínez and Tigchelaar; Eisenman and Wise; and Martínez all leave it blank. Vermes, *Complete Dead Sea Scrolls*, 602: "[And they obeyed] the voice of Jeremiah"; Wise, et al., *New Translation*, 446: "[that they should listen] to the voice of Jeremiah"; Dimant, in Parry and Tov, *Reader*, 2:803: "[(that) they should listen] to the voice of Jeremiah"; Martínez and Tigchelaar, *Study Edition*, 2:773: "[…] by the voice of Jeremiah"; Eisenman and Wise, *Uncovered*, 58: " … to the voice of Jeremiah"; Martínez, *Qumran Texts*, 285: "[…] by the voice of Jeremiah."

[16] Wise, et al., *New Translation*, 446 and Dimant, in Parry and Tov, *Reader*, 2:803 simply have "commanded him [to do]," making Jeremiah, and not the people, the subject of the instructions or commands from God. Martínez and Tigchelaar, *Study Edition*, 2:773; Eisenman and Wise, *Uncovered*, 58; Vermes, *Complete Dead Sea Scrolls*, 602; Martínez, *Qumran Texts*, 285 all leave the lacuna blank, which also effectively makes Jeremiah the subject of the command.

[17] Owing to the fragmentary nature of these final lines, there are several differences in other translations that impact, at least somewhat, the meaning of the passage. Vermes, *Complete Dead Sea Scrolls*, 602: "And they were to keep the covenant of the God of their fathers in the land [of their captivity … and they were not to d]o as they had done and their kings and priests [and … and they] profaned [the na]me of God"; Wise, et al., *New Translation*, 446: "that they should keep the covenant that the God of their fathers in the land [of Babylon, that they should not do] as they had done, they themselves, their kings, their priests, [and their princes … for they had] profaned [the nam]e of God"; Dimant, in Parry and Tov, *Reader*, 2:803: "and they should keep the covenant of the God of their fathers in the land [of Babylon and they shall not do] as they had done, they themselves and their kings and their priests [and their princes] [(namely, that) they]defiled[the na]me of God to[desecrate]"; Martínez and Tigchelaar, *Study Edition*, 2:773: "they will keep the covenant of the God of their fathers in the land of [their exile …] as they and their kings, their priests did […] … […] God […]"; Martínez, *Qumran Texts*, 285: "they will keep the covenant of the God of their fathers in the country of [exile …] what they and their kings and their priests did […] God […]."

[18] Vermes, *Complete Dead Sea Scrolls*, 602 positions it at the beginning; Wise, et al., *New Translation*, 446 position it toward the end.

[19] See Davis, *Cave 4 Apocryphon of Jeremiah*, 142–143: "in the land of J[erusalem]" ([בארץ י]רושלים). Wise, et al., *New Translation*, 441 and Dimant, in Parry and Tov, *Reader*, 2:814–815 restore it as "in the land of J[udah]" or "in the land of J[udaea]" ([בארץ י]הודה), but as Davis points out, "Judah" is never used in the extent text to refer to the land. Thus, he reasons that in light of 4Q385a frg. 18a–b col. i and the overall portrayal of the Jewish homeland in the text, "land of Jerusalem" makes better sense here.

[20] Davis, *Cave 4 Apocryphon of Jeremiah*, 143.

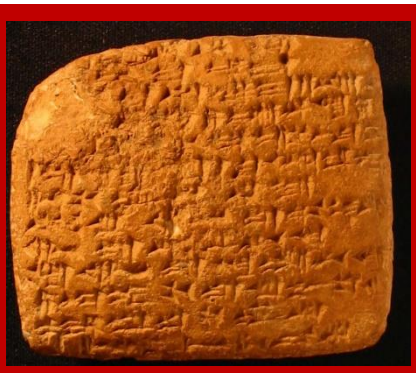
[21] Eisenman and Wise, *Uncovered*, 58.

[22] See Neal Rappleye, "Jerusalem Chronicle (ABC 5/BM 21946)," *Nephite History in Context* 1 (November 2017): 1–5. Interestingly, this source refers to Jerusalem as "the city of Judah," perhaps indicating that Judah had been reduced to little more than the city itself. See also Daniel C. Peterson, Matthew Roper, and William J. Hamblin, "On Alma 7:10 and the Birthplace of Jesus Christ," (FARMS Transcripts, 1995), online at https://publications.mi.byu.edu/transcript/on-alma-7-10-and-the-birthplace-of-jesus-christ/ (accessed December 2, 2017); Daniel C. Peterson, "Is the Book of Mormon True? Notes on the Debate," in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1997), 156–157.

[23] See Gordon C. Thomasson, "Revisiting the Land of Jerusalem," in *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon: The FARMS Updates of the 1990s*, ed. John W. Welch and Melvin J. Thorne (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), 139–141; cf. John A. Tvedtnes, "Cities and Lands in the Book of Mormon," in *Pressing Forward*, 166; Peterson et al., "On Alma 7:10"; Peterson, "Notes," 157–158; Daniel C. Peterson, "Not Joseph's, and Not Modern," in *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and John W. Welch (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002), 211.

Letters of ʿAbdu-Ḫeba of Jerusalem (EA 285–290)

Neal Rappleye



In the fourteenth century BC, the Syria-Palestine region was divided up into city-states (map) ruled by petty vassal kings under Egyptian rule. One of these kings was ʿAbdu-Ḫeba, who ruled at Jerusalem. He wrote six surviving letters to the pharaoh, including EA 290 (pictured), which mentions "a town in the land of Jerusalem, Bit-Laḥmi by name." Map by Jasmin Gimenez. Photo from www.amarna.cchs.csic.es.

Background

The Amarna Letters make up the bulk of the 382 cuneiform tablets found at Amarna, Egypt in 1887. The letters date to the mid-fourteenth century BC (ca. 1365–1335 BC), with most of them coming from the reign of Akhenaten (ca. 1352–1336 BC), though some date to the reigns of Amenhotep III (ca. 1390–1352 BC) and perhaps Smenkhkara (ca. 1338–1336 BC) and Tutankhamun (ca. 1336–1327 BC). The collection includes international correspondence between Egypt and other nations, such as Assyria and Babylonia, but most of the letters are to and from vassal kings in the Syria-Palestine region, which was under Egyptian rule at the time.[1]

These vassal rulers were often petitioning the pharaoh to take sides in petty squabbles between their city-states. Among them was ʿAbdu-Ḫeba, ruler of Jerusalem (*Urusalim*). ʿAbdu-Ḫeba wrote six surviving letters (EA 285–290), and three others mention him or Jerusalem (EA 280, 335, 366). As is typical of several of the other vassal kings, throughout his letters ʿAbdu-Ḫeba professes his loyalty to the pharaoh, complains that other city-states are waging war against him, and pleads for the pharaoh's assistance. Yet letters from successive rulers of another city-state (EA 280, 335) suggest that in some cases, ʿAbdu-Ḫeba may have been the aggressor.

Translation

The following are excerpts from three of ʿAbdu-Ḫeba's letters, EA 287, 289, and 290. The translations are from W. F. Albright, trans.,[2] "The Amarna Letters," in *The Ancient Near East: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures*, ed. James B. Pritchard (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 437–440,[3] with annotations added:

EA 287

Behold this land of Jerusalem: (It was) not my father (and) not my mother (who) gave it to me, (but) the arm of the mighty king (which) gave (it) to me. ... [If] they send into the land [of Jerusalem][4] ⌜troops⌝, let them come with [an (Egyptian) officer for][5] (regular) service[6] ... [and] let my king requisition for them much grain,[7] much oil, (and) much clothing, until Pawre, the royal commissioner, comes up to the land of Jerusalem. Addaya has left,[8] together with the garrison (and) the (Egyptian) officer which my king had given (me). ... So send me a garrison this [year], and send me a commissioner likewise, O my king. ... Behold, the king has set his name in the land of Jerusalem for ever; so he cannot abandon the lands of Jerusalem![9]

EA 289

Behold Milkilu and Tagu![10] The deed which they have done is this, that they(!) have taken it, the town of Rubutu.[11] And now as for Jerusalem—Behold this land belongs to the king, or why like the town of Gaza is it loyal to the king?[12] ... Milkilu has written to Tagu and the sons of ⟨Lab'ayu⟩,[13] (saying) "Ye are (members of) my house.[14] Yield all of their demands to the men of Keilah,[15] and let us break our alliance ⟨with⟩ Jerusalem!"[16] The garrison which thou didst send through Haya, son of Miyare, Addaya has taken (and) had put into his residence in Gaza. ... So now, as my king lives, ... let the king send fifty men as a garrison to guard the land!

EA 290

Behold the deed which Milkilu and Shuwardata[17] did to the land of the king, my lord! They rushed the troops of Gezer,[18] troops of Gath, and troops of Keilah; they took the land of Rubutu; the land of the king went over to the ʿApiru people.[19] But now even a town of the land of Jerusalem, Bit-*Lahmi* by name,[20] a town belonging to the king, has gone over to the side of the people of Keilah. Let my king hearken to ʿAbdu-Heba, thy servant, and let him send archers to recover the royal land for the king!

Book of Mormon Relevance

These letters, written in a pre-Israelite era, may constitute the earliest extrabiblical reference to Jerusalem in the historical record.[21] Combined with other letters written by or mentioning ʿAbdu-Ḫeba (EA 280, 285–290, 335, 366), a picture emerges depicting Jerusalem as a powerful city-state which dominated the southern highlands.[22] Yet this picture does not square with the archaeology of Jerusalem,

which manifests little to no remains dated to the fourteenth century BC. As one archaeologist put it, "No trace has ever been found of any city that could have been the *Urusalim* of the Amarna letters."[23]

Scholars have dealt with this discrepancy in various ways, some arguing that the negative evidence of archaeology should not trump the clear, contemporary written sources, while others argue that the letters must be reinterpreted in light of the meager findings of archaeology.[24] Regardless of how this problem is reconciled, it serves to illustrate an important point: written historical sources are not always supported by or consistent with the archaeological record. We should keep this in mind when studying the Book of Mormon in light of archaeology, and seek to both (1) reconsider archaeology in light of the text and (2) reinterpret the text in light of archaeology, just as scholars have done with the letters of ʿAbdu-Ḫeba and others in the Amarna archive.[25]

ʿAbdu-Ḫeba's frequent use of terms translated as "land(s) of Jerusalem" (see table below) is interesting, considering the recurrent use of "land of Jerusalem" throughout the Book of Mormon and the equivalent Hebrew phrase which shows up in a first century BC fragment from the Dead Sea Scrolls (pp. 1–5). Based on these sources, the Book of Mormon appears to be part of a long-standing tradition that connects Jerusalem with the region surrounding the city proper.[26]

Akkadian Terms Translated as "land(s) of Jerusalem" in the Amarna Letters*		
Letter	**Akkadian**	**Literal Translation**
EA 287, line 25	KUR URU *Ú-ru-sa-lim*	"the land of the city of Jerusalem"
EA 287, line 46	KUR URU *Ú-ru-sa-lim*^{KI}	"the land of the city of Jerusalem (a place)"
EA 287, line 61	KUR *Ú-ru-sa-lim*^{KI}	"the land of Jerusalem (a place)"
EA 287, line 63	KUR.ḪI.A URU *Ú-ru-sa-lim*^{KI}	"the lands of the city of Jerusalem (a place)"
EA 290, line 15	URU KUR *Ú-ru-sa-lim*^{KI}	"a city of the land of Jerusalem (a place)"
*Transliterations from Anson Rainey, *El-Amarna Correspondence* (2015), 1110, 1112, 1124. X^{KI} is a postpositive determinative for a place-name. See W. S. Lasor, "Jerusalem," in *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (1979), 2:999, 1004–1005.		

Even more interesting, in light of Book of Mormon statements about the Messiah's birth (Alma 7:10), is the reference to Bit-Laḥmi as "a town of the land of Jerusalem." The actual name in the text is Bit-Ninutra or Bit-Ninib, but Ninutra/Ninib is widely recognized as a logogram "masking" the name of the true deity intended by the reference, presumably the Mesopotamian god *Laḫmu*,[27] though others have suggested the Amorite god *Ḥoron*, the goddess *ʿAnath*, or the Canaanite sun-god *Shemesh*.[28] Nonetheless, many biblical scholars accept the identification as Bit-Laḥmi, which is "an almost certain reference to the town of Bethlehem."[29]

If this association with Bethlehem is accepted, then this means that the small town that would later become famous as the birth place of Jesus (Matthew 2:1; Luke 2:4–7) was part of the "land of Jerusalem" at this time,[30] and a recently discovered fiscal bulla confirms there was a similar relationship in place in Lehi's day (see pp. 14–17). In that light, Alma's declaration that the Son of God would be born "at *Jerusalem* which is *the land* of our forefathers" (Alma 7:10, emphasis added) should be understood as

including Bethlehem.[31] Alma's phrasing is even similar to ʿAbdu-Ḫeba's in EA 289: "And now as for *Jerusalem*—Behold *this land* belongs to the king" (emphasis added).

It is also interesting to note that ʿAbdu-Ḫeba specifically requested "fifty men as a garrison to guard the land." Several other letters mention fifty-man garrisons (EA 132, 139, 238, 295; cf. EA 366, "50 chariots"), and it appears to be a common or standard unit for a garrison in that period.[32] Letters from both the Neo-Assyrian (ca. 911–612 BC) and Neo-Babylonian (ca. 626–539 BC) empires also indicate that fifty men was the standard military unit in the first millennium BC as well.[33] In 1 Nephi, Laban, a military official in Jerusalem dreaded by Nephi and his brothers, "can command fifty" (1 Nephi 3:31; 4:1). Based on these sources, it seems likely that the "fifty" at Laban's command was a standard-sized garrison stationed in the city.[34]

Notes

[1] For background on the Amarna Letters, see R. F. Youngblood, "Amarna Tablets," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, fully revised, 4 vols., ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979), 1:105–108; Richard S. Hess, "Amarna Letters," in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000), 50–51; Clyde E. Fant and Mitchell G. Reddish, *Lost Treasures of the Bible: Understanding the Bible through Archaeological Artifacts in World Museums* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2008), 37–42; Lawrence Boadt, with Richard Clifford and Daniel Harrington, *Reading the Old Testament: An Introduction*, rev. and updated (New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2012), 131–133; Lester L. Grabbe, *Ancient Israel: What Do We Know and How Do We Know It?*, rev. ed. (New York, NY: Bloomsbury/T&T Clark), 44–47 § 2.1.2.2. For analysis of the political situation in Late Bronze Age Canaan in light of both the Amarna Letters and other archaeological findings, see Nadav Na'aman, "Canaanite Jerusalem and its Central Hill Country Neighbours in the Second Millenium BCE," *Ugarit-Forschungen* 24 (1992): 275–291; Israel Finkelstein, "The Sociopolitical Organization of the Central Hill Country in the Second Millennium BCE," in *Biblical Archaeology Today, 1990, Pre-Congress Symposium, Supplement* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1993), 110–131; Shlomo Bunimovitz, "On the Edge of Empires—Late Bronze Age (1500–1200 BCE)," in *The Archaeology of Society in the Holy Land*, ed. Thomas E. Levy (New York, NY: Facts on File, 1995), 320–329; Israel Finkelstein, "The Territorial-Political System of Canaan in the Late Bronze Age," *Ugarit-Forschungen* 28 (1996): 1–32; Nadav Na'aman, "The Network of Canaanite Late Bronze Kingdoms and the City of Ashdod," *Ugarit-Forschungen* 29 (1997): 599–626; Stephen H. Savage and Steven E. Falconer, "Spatial and Statistical Inference of Late Bronze Age Polities in the Southern Levant," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 330 (2003): 31–45; Nava Panitz-Cohen, "The Southern Levant (Cisjordan) During the Late Bronze Age," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of the Levant c. 8000–332 BCE*, ed. Margreet L. Steiner and Ann E. Killbrew (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014), 541–560. For Egyptian history during the Amarna period, see Jacobus Van Dijk, "The Amarna Period and the Later New Kingdom (*c.* 1352–1069 BC)," in *The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt*, ed. Ian Shaw (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000), 265–283; James K. Hoffmeier, *Akhenaten and the Origins of Monotheism* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015), 62–90. Dates for the pharaohs are based on the chronology in Shaw, ed., *Oxford History of Ancient Egypt*, 485.

[2] Albright is listed as the "translator" on p. 429, but at the bottom of that same page it states: "The translations offered below represent the combined work of W. F. Albright and George Mendenhall, with corrections by W. L. Moran, S. J."

[3] All ellipses are mine. All italics, parentheses, and brackets are from Albright. These are explained on Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near East*, xxviii: "Within the translations certain conventions have been followed in the signs and notations. Italics have been used to designate doubtful translations of a known text and for transliterations of the original text. Square brackets are employed for restorations in the text made by the translator; round brackets (parentheses) have been put

around interpolations made for a better understanding of the translation; obvious scribal omissions have been placed between triangular brackets."

[4] Anson F. Rainey, trans., *The El-Amarna Correspondence: A New Edition of the Cuneiform Letters from the Site of El-Amarna based on Collations of all Extent Tablets*, 2 vols., ed. William Schniedewind and Zipora Cochavi-Rainey (Boston, MA: Brill, 2015), 1113 restores this as "[Gaza?]" rather than Jerusalem. William L. Moran, ed. and trans., *The Amarna Letters* (Baltimore, ML: John Hopkins University Press, 1992), 328 is consistent with Albright. See Rainey, *El-Amarna Correspondence*, 1593 for discussion.

[5] Moran, *Amarna Letters*, 328 has "[*a garrison for*]" in this lacuna. Rainey, *El-Amarna Correspondence*, 1113 has "[*x* number of]."

[6] Rainey, *El-Amarna Correspondence*, 1113 provides a considerably different translation of this line: "Look, they sent from the [city] state of [Gaza(?)] support(!) troops with [*x* number of]slaves." Moran, *Amarna Letters*, 328 is more consistent with Albright: "A[*nd so i*]*f* he is going to send [*troop*]*s* into [*Jerusalem*], let them come with [*a garrison for*] (regular) *service*."

[7] Rather than "requisition" (i.e., procure by force), both Rainey and Moran have "inquire." Rainey, *El-Amarna Correspondence*, 1113: "[So] may the king inquire concerning the[m]"; Moran, *Amarna Letters*, 328: "May the king inquire about the[m]."

[8] Addaya was the resident Egyptian administrator or governor in Palestine, stationed in Gaza. See Albright, "Amarna Letters," 439 n.21.

[9] Moran, *Amarna Letters*, 328 has, "As the king has placed his name in Jerusalem forever, he cannot abandon it—the land of Jerusalem." This is the only place where Moran translates the full phrase "land of Jerusalem," which he has as a singular instead of the plural "lands of Jerusalem." Rainey, *El-Amarna Correspondence*, 1113, has "Look, the king has established his name in the land of Jerusalem forever and he simply cannot abandon it, viz. the city state of Jerusalem." According to W. S. Lasor, in the underlying Akkadian, the first mention of Jerusalem uses *mat* (or KUR, per Rainey, p. 1112), "land" (*mat urusalim*^{ki}; Rainey: KUR *Úrusalim*^{KI}), while the second definitely uses the plural *matât* (or KUR.ḪI.A, per Rainey, p. 1112), "lands" (*matât* ^{al}*urusalim*^{ki}; Rainey: KUR.ḪI.A URU *Úrusalim*^{KI}). See W. S. Lasor, "Jerusalem," in *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 2:999, 1005. Moran typically omits "land of" (*mat*/KUR) in his translations, while Rainey tends to use "land of" (*mat*/KUR) and "city state" (*mat* ^{al}*X*/KUR URU) to distinguish between the presence and absence of the "city" determinative (^{al}*X*/URU) in the underlying Akkadian. Regardless, in this passage, the sense of all three translations is that ʿAbdu-Ḫeba is referring to a broader region or territory by using first *mat*/KUR and then *matât*/KUR.ḪI.A.

[10] Milku was the ruler at Gezer, and Tagu was his father-in-law. See William Moran, "Tell El-Amarna," in *The Context of Scripture*, ed. William Hallo and K. Lawson Younger, 4 vols. (Boston, MA: Brill, 2003, 2016), 3:237 n.13, 238 n.6. Hereafter cited as *COS*.

[11] According to Moran, *COS* 3:238 n.7, Rubutu was likely a town between Jerusalem and Gezer. Albright, "Amarna Letters," 437 n.19 places it "somewhere in the region southwest of Megiddo and Taanach."

[12] The meaning of this passage is uncertain. As Albright renders it, ʿAbdu-Ḫeba is arguing that Jerusalem belongs to the king because it's loyal, like Gaza. Yet Moran, *Amarna Letters*, 332 (cf. Moran, *COS* 3:238) has "And now for Jerusalem, if this land belongs to the king, why is it ⟨*not*⟩ *of concern* to the king like Ḫazzatu?" (Ḫazzatu = Gaza [see Moran, *COS* 3:238 n.8]), making it about why Jerusalem is not getting the same preferential treatment as Gaza. Victor H. Matthews and Don C. Benjamin, *Old Testament Parallels: Laws and Stories from the Ancient Near East*, 3rd ed. (New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2006), 150 offer a similar translation: "Now, with Jerusalem threatened, why does the pharaoh not show the same concern expressed for Gaza?" Rainey, *El-Amarna Correspondence*, 1121 offers yet another interpretation: "[And] now as for the city of Jerusalem, if this land belongs to the king, why, as the city of Gaza belongs to the king, is it just sitting (isolated)?" This translation seems to be suggesting that ʿAbdu-Ḫeba is wondering why Jerusalem is left undefended, when Gaza—by the simple command of pharaoh—could come to his aide.

[13] Rainey, *El-Amarna Correspondence*, 1121, has "sons (of Arṣaya/Lab'ayu)."

[14] This is another passage that is uncertain. Moran, *Amarna Letters*, 333 (cf. Moran, *COS* 3:238) has "Be *both of you a protection*," and Rainey, *El-Amarna Correspondence*, 1121, has "Be ye men!" Matthews and Benjamin, *Old Testament Parallels*, 150 has "Let both of you obey me." Moran, *Amarna Letters*, 333 n.3, notes several other proposed readings, including Rainey's "be men," "as for you, go on," and Albright's "you are of my house." Cf. the discussion in Rainey, *El-Amarna Correspondence*, 1596.

[15] Matthews and Benjamin, *Old Testament Parallels*, 150 have "re-enforce our soldiers at Keilah." More consistent with Albright, Moran, *Amarna Letters*, 333 (cf. Moran, *COS* 3:238) has "Grant all their demands to the men of Qiltu [Keilah]"

and Rainey, *El-Amarna Correspondence*, 1121 has "Grant their every request to the men of Qilti (Keilah)." Qiltu/Keilah was approximately 12 miles southwest of Jerusalem. See Michael D. Coogan, ed., *A Reader of Ancient Near Eastern Texts: Sources for the Study of the Old Testament* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), 118 n.11.

[16] Moran, *Amarna Letters*, 333 (cf. Moran, *COS* 3:238) has "let us isolate Jerusalem," and Matthews and Benjamin, *Old Testament Parallels*, 150 similarly has "we will isolate Jerusalem." Rainey, *El-Amarna Correspondence*, 1121 has "let us desert Jerusalem." Moran, *Amarna Letters*, 333 n.4, indicates that it's literally "let us separate" or "let us desert." In any case, the sense is that they are plotting against Jerusalem.

[17] Shuwardata was another of the vassal kings in Palestine, though his territory is uncertain. Most scholars believe he was the over Gath (see Grabbe, *Ancient Israel*, 52 § 2.2.1.3) but Albright, "Amarna Letters," 437 n.16 says he is the ruler of Hebron, and Coogan, *A Reader*, 118 n.11 says he is the ruler of Keilah.

[18] Rather than "rushed," Moran, *Amarna Letters*, 334 has "ordered" and Wayne T. Pitard, "Before Israel: Syria-Palestine in the Bronze Age," in *The Oxford History of the Biblical World*, ed. Michael D. Coogan (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1998), 65 has "led," while Rainey, *El-Amarna Correspondence*, 1125 has "assembled(!)." Moran, *Amarna Letters*, 334 n.2 mentions other proposals, such as "they hired" and "they were taken in" and Rainey's "they assembled."

[19] There is considerable debate among scholars over the meaning of *ʿapīru* (sometimes *hapīru* or even *habīru*) and just who these people were and whether the name is etymologically related to the term *Hebrew* (*ʿibrî*). If so, the mention of *ʿapīru* in these and other texts may hold some clues as to the origins of the Israelites (i.e., the Hebrews). See Carol A. Redmount, "Bitter Lives: Israel in and out of Egypt," in *Oxford History of the Biblical World*, 97–98; Robert B. Coote, "Hapiru, Apiru," in *Eerdmans Dictionary*, 549–550; Grabbe, *Ancient Israel*, 52–53 § 2.2.1.3.

[20] For the town or city "belonging to Jerusalem," Moran, *Amarna Letters*, 334 has "Bit-^{d}NIN.URTA." Pitard, "Before Israel," 65 similarly has "Bit-Ninurta." Rainey, *El-Amarna Correspondence*, 1125 has "Bit-NIN.IB" (cf. EA 69: "Beth-[NIN.IB(?)]," p. 439). See also "Bet-Ninib" in Hugh Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert/The World of the Jaredites/There Were Jaredites*, The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, Volume 5 (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 6; Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, Volume 6 (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 101.

[21] Lasor, "Jerusalem," 999, 1004 and Grabbe, *Ancient Israel*, 44 § 2.1.2.1 both mention possible earlier references (ca. eighteenth–nineteenth century BC) in Egyptian Execration texts (as *rwsʒmm*), though Grabbe notes that "the reading 'Jerusalem' has been questioned" by Na'aman, "Canaanite Jerusalem," 278–279.

[22] See Nadav Na'aman, "Jerusalem in the Amarna Period," in *Jérusalem Antique et Médiévale: Mélanges en l'honneur d'Ernest-Marie Laperrousaz*, ed. Simon C. Mimouni and Gérard Nahon (Walpole, MA: Peeters, 2011), 31–48.

[23] Margreet Steiner, "Jerusalem in the Tenth and Seventh Centuries BCE: From Administrative Town to Commercial City," in *Studies in the Archaeology of the Iron Age in Israel and Jordan*, ed. Amihai Mazer (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 283.

[24] For a representative sample of the discussion, see Margreet Steiner, "It's Not There: Archaeology Proves a Negative," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 24, no. 4 (July/August 1998): 26–28; Jane M. Cahill, "It Is There: The Archaeological Evidence Proves It," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 24, no. 4 (July/August 1998): 34–38; Nadav Na'aman, "It Is There: Ancient Texts Prove It," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 24, no. 4 (July/August 1998): 42–44; Jane M. Cahill, "Jerusalem at the Time of the United Monarchy: The Archaeological Evidence," in *Jerusalem in the Bible and Archaeology: The First Temple Period*, ed. Andrew G. Vaughn and Ann E. Killebrew (Boston, MA: Brill, 2003), 27–33, 73–80; Israel Finkelstein, "The Rise of Jerusalem and Judah: The Missing Link," in *Jerusalem in the Bible and Archaeology*, 86–87; Ann E. Killbrew, "Biblical Jerusalem: An Archaeological Assessment," in *Jerusalem in the Bible and Archaeology*, 338–339; Margreet Steiner, "The Evidence from Kenyon's Excavations in Jerusalem: A Response," in *Jerusalem in the Bible and Archaeology*, 347–351; Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *Keys to Jerusalem: Collected Essays* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012), 5–6. I tend to favor the view that the clear depiction of a powerful Jerusalem in the letters (from both ʿAbdu-Ḫeba and his enemies) should be given considerable weight in this instance, though I would agree that the meager archaeological finds should temper interpretations somewhat.

[25] On this point, see Neal Rappleye, "'Put Away Childish Things': Learning to Read the Book of Mormon with Mature Historical Understanding," address given at the 2017 FairMormon Conference, August 3, 2017, online at https://www.fairmormon.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Rappleye_2017FM_Presentation.pdf (accessed December 2, 2017). Nadav Na'aman has frequently used the Amarna Letters to make this very same point, though he applies it to the Bible, not the Book of Mormon. In addition to Na'aman, "It Is There," 42–44, see Nadav Na'aman, "The Contribution of the

Amarna Letters to the Debate on Jerusalem's Political Position in the Tenth Century BCE," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 304 (1996): 17–27; Nadav Na'aman, "Cow Town or Royal Capital?," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 23, no. 4 (July/August 1997): 43–47, 67; Nadav Na'aman, "The Trowel vs. the Text: How the Amarna Letters Challenge Archaeology," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 35, no. 1 (January/February 2009): 52–56, 70–71; Nadav Na'aman, "Does Archaeology Really Deserve the Status of a 'High Court' in Biblical Historical Research?," in *Between Evidence and Ideology: Essays on the History of Ancient Israel*, ed. Bob Becking and Lester L. Grabbe (Boston, MA: Brill, 2011), 165–183. Israel Finkelstein, "Archaeology as a High Court in Ancient Israelite History: A Reply to Nadav Na'aman," *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 10, no. 19 (2010) responds to Na'aman, but nonetheless concedes, "Na'aman rightly spotlights the discrepancy between the testimony of the Amarna letters, which describe sites such as Jerusalem, Shechem, Gezer and Lachish as strong polities, and the meager 14th century BCE finds unearthed in the excavations at these sites" (p. 2).

[26] Na'aman, "Canaanite Jerusalem," 281–283 argues that the region under Jerusalem's direct domain spanning thousands of years was more or less the same as that of the "land of Jerusalem" in the Amarna Letters. So these later references to the "land of Jerusalem" in the Book of Mormon and Dead Sea Scrolls likely refer to approximately the same territorial region surrounding Jerusalem.

[27] See n.20 for translations using Bit-Ninutra or Bit-Ninib. Edward F. Campbell Jr., *Ruth: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary*, Anchor Bible 7 (New York, NY: Double Day, 1975), 54 indicates that "Bît-NIN.IB=Bît-Ninurta=Bît-Laḫmi." On the god Laḫmu, see G. C. Hieder, "Lahmu," in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, 2nd ed., ed. Karel Van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. Van der Horst (Boston, MA and Grand Rapids, MI: Brill and Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999), 502.

[28] See Zecharia Kallai and Hayim Tadmor, "Bīt Ninurta = Beth Horon—On the History of the Kingdom of Jerusalem in the Amarna Period," *Eretz-Israel: Archaeological, Historical, and Geographical Studies* 9 (1969): 138–147 (written in Hebrew; see English summary on p. 138 of the English section); Nadav Na'aman, "On Gods and Scribal Traditions in the Amarna Letters," *Ugarit-Forschungen* 22 (1990): 252–254 (proposing ʿAnath); Na'aman, "Canaanite Jerusalem," 277 mentions Beth-shemesh along with Bethlehem and Beth-Horon as proposals for Bit-Ninutra/Bit-Ninib, but does not go into detail, and mentions that he finds none of these proposals persuasive.

[29] Albright, "Amarna Letters," 440 n.15. See also Michael W. Several, "Reconsidering the Egyptian Empire in Palestine During the Amarna Period," *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 104, no. 2 (1972): 123; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke (I–IX): Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, Anchor Bible 28 (Garden City, NY: Double Day, 1981), 406; Patrick Heenan, "Bethlehem (West Bank)," in *International Dictionary of Historic Places*, 5 vols., ed. Noelle Watson (New York, NY: Routledge, 1996), 4:133; William M. Schiedewind, "The Geopolitical History of Philistine Gath," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 309 (1998): 73; R. Dennis Cole, "Bethlehem," in *Eerdmans Dictionary*, 172–173; Walter A. Elwell and Philip W. Comfort, ed., "Bethlehem," in *Tyndale Bible Dictionary* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001), 165; Markus Bockmuehl, *This Jesus: Martyr, Lord, Messiah* (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2004), 25; Eugen J. Pentiuc, *Jesus the Messiah in the Hebrew Bible* (New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2006), 137 n.67; Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *The Holy Land: An Oxford Archaeological Guide*, 5th ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008), 229–230; Denis Baly, "Bethlehem," in *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, rev. and updated, ed. Mark Allen Powell (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2011), 92; Murphy-O'Connor, *Keys to Jerusalem*, 5; Lorenzo Kamel, "Israel and a Palestinian State: Redrawing Lines?," in *The Levant in Turmoil: Syria, Palestine, and the Transformation of Middle Eastern Politics*, ed. Martin Beck, Dietrich Jung, and Peter Seeberg (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 160 n.6.

[30] Proposals that Ninutra/Ninib is actually Ḥoron, ʿAnath, or Shemesh (see n.28) naturally lead to different conclusions about what biblical city or town is associated with Bit-Ninutra or Bit-Ninib, namely Beth-Horon, Beth-shemesh, or Beth-ʿAnath. In addition to these, most recently Amir Feldstein, "The Kingdom of Jerusalem in the 'El-Amarna' Period," *New Jerusalem Studies* 22 (2017): 41–51 (written in Hebrew, English summary on pp. 7*–8*) has proposed Kirjath Jearim. Rainey, *El-Amarna Correspondence*, 27 appears to favor Beth-Horon, but admits that the question "remains a point of intense controversy." Due to this controversy, Coogan, *A Reader*, 118 n.15 simply says the location is "unknown." Campbell, *Ruth*, 54 notes the dispute but reasons that Bethlehem is "probably attested" by the name, and while they argued for Beth-Horon, Kallai and Tadmor admitted that Bethlehem was the "most widely accepted identification" (Kallai and Tadmor, "Bīt Ninurta = Beth Horon," English summary, p. 138). The identification as *Bethlehem* continues to be widely accepted by biblical scholars today (see n.29). Nonetheless, Beth-shemesh (19 miles), Beth-Horon (12 miles), and Kirjath Jearim (7 miles) are all farther from Jerusalem than Bethlehem (5 miles), so even if one of these alternative proposals is correct, Bethlehem would still be part of the "land of Jerusalem" (Beth-ʿAnath cannot be confidently identified on a map). Certainly, the reconstruction of the

"land of Jerusalem" in the Amarna letters by all major scholars encompasses Bethlehem within its borders. See Na'aman, "Canaanite Jerusalem," 283–286; Finkelstein, "Sociopolitical Organization," 122–123; Bunimovitz, "Edge of Empires," 328, fig. 6; Savage and Falconer, "Spatial and Statistical Inference," 38, fig. 4; Panitz-Cohen, "The Southern Levant," 546, fig. 36.2.

[31] See Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 6–7; Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 101–102; Daniel C. Peterson, Matthew Roper, and William J. Hamblin, "On Alma 7:10 and the Birthplace of Jesus Christ," (FARMS Transcripts, 1995), online at https://publications.mi.byu.edu/transcript/on-alma-7-10-and-the-birthplace-of-jesus-christ/ (accessed December 2, 2017); Daniel C. Peterson, "Is the Book of Mormon True? Notes on the Debate," in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1997), 154–158; John A. Tvedtnes, "Cities and Lands in the Book of Mormon," in *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon: The FARMS Updates of the 1990s*, ed. John W. Welch and Melvin J. Thorne (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), 164–167; Daniel C. Peterson, "Not Joseph's, and Not Modern," in *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and John W. Welch (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002), 211.

[32] Na'aman, "Contribution of the Amarna Letters," 25 n.2; Moran, *Amarna Letters*, 338 n.6.

[33] See Joseph Offord, "Archaeological Notes on Jewish Antiquities," *Palestinian Exploration Fund Quarterly* 48, no. 3 (1916): 148; A. Leo Oppenheim, *Letters from Mesopotamia: Official, Business, and Private Letters on Clay Tablets from Two Millennia* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 177.

[34] See Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 97–98; Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 126–127.

Bethlehem Bulla

Neal Rappleye

Background

Some of the most important and valuable inscriptions from ancient Israel and the surrounding region are the short inscriptions written on tiny seals, typically used for enclosing documents to ensure it is authentic and has not been tampered with. Such seals are usually made out of a semi-precious stone (though other materials were also used) and typically have the owners name inscribed on it, thus binding important documents with his or her "signature." Nearly 3000 seals and clay seal impressions (called *bulla*; pl. *bullae*) have been found in Israel and the surrounding region, dating from the tenth–sixth centuries BC, although the largest portion of them come from the eighth–seventh centuries BC.[1]

Important documents like this fourth–fifth century BC papyri from Elephantine, Egypt would be sealed using clay *bulla*, like the "Bethlehem Bulla" pictured below. Top Image: Brooklyn Museum. Bottom Image: Clara Amit, Israel Antiquities Authority.

Out of those thousands of seals and bullae is a small handful of seal impressions known as "fiscal bullae," which sealed tax shipments paid in kind (i.e., silver, wine, or grain).[2] There are approximately fifty examples of such bullae, all of which date to between the eighth–seventh centuries BC. Some follow the typical pattern of having the name of their owners inscribed on them, but most (about thirty-five) feature the name of the city from which the taxes were paid "to the king." The majority of these are unprovenanced, but three were found between 2011–2013 within controlled archaeological digs in Jerusalem, including the so-called "Bethlehem Bulla."[3]

According Eli Shukron, one of the excavators, the Bethlehem bulla was likely attached to "a shipment [that] was dispatched from Bethlehem to the king in Jerusalem."[4] Exactly which king remains uncertain. The initial archaeological context suggested "a date within the eighth–seventh centuries BCE," but the limited paleographic evidence seems to favor a seventh century date,[5] or

possibly even the late "seventh to the early sixth centuries."[6] According Shukron, dates in the reign of either Hezekiah (ca. 726/715–697/686 BC), Manasseh (ca. 697/686–642 BC), or Josiah (ca. 640–609 BC) are all possible.[7]

Translation

The following translation is based on Martin Heide, "Some Notes on the Epigraphical Features of the Phoenician and Hebrew Fiscal Bullae," in *Recording New Epigraphic Evidence: Essays in Honor of Robert Deutsch on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday*, ed. Meir Lubetski and Edith Lubetski (Jerusalem: Leshon Limudim, 2015), 72 (transcription of the Hebrew can be seen on this same page),[8] with annotations added:

In the seventh (year).[9]
[B]ethlehem.[10]
[For the kin]g.[11]

Book of Mormon Relevance

In the late eighth through the seventh century BC, the kingdom of Judah was divided into separate administrative districts for tax collection and other organizational purposes.[12] Jerusalem, according to Yohanan Aharoni, did "double duty" as both the royal capital and the administrative center of one of these districts.[13] Nadav Na'aman explained, "Jerusalem was located in the centre of a sort of district, which encompassed the capital and its periphery, including the agricultural areas of the city's residents, as well as satellite settlements directly connected to Jerusalem proper."[14]

The discovery of the Bethlehem bulla right in Jerusalem is evidence that Bethlehem was one of these "satellite settlements" linked directly to the capital city. This suggests continuity between the territorial relationships in the Jerusalem region from seventh century BC all the way back into the Amarna period (fourteenth century BC),[15] when Bethlehem was identified as "a town in the land of Jerusalem" (see pp. 6–13).

Lehi grew up in Jerusalem (1 Nephi 1:4) during Josiah's reign, and probably even began raising his family while Josiah was still king.[16] This fiscal bulla thus indicates that Bethlehem was directly "linked to the nearby city of Jerusalem,"[17] within or close to Lehi's lifetime. To the extent that knowledge of their Jerusalem homeland was passed on at all to future generations (see 2 Nephi 25:6), the memory of this connection may have impacted traditions of the Messiah's birth among the Nephites. Whereas early Christian tradition states that Jesus was born in Bethlehem (Matthew 2:1; Luke 2:4–7), Nephite tradition stated that he was born "at *Jerusalem* which is *the land* of our forefathers" (Alma 7:10, emphasis added), which they probably understood to include Bethlehem as a "satellite settlement."[18]

Notes

[1] For background on seals and bullae, see David C. Maltsberger, "Seal, Signet," in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000), 1175–1176; J. Andrew Dearman, "Seal," in *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, rev. and updated, ed. Mark Allen Powell (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2011), 928–929; William G. Dever, *What Did the Biblical Writers Know and When Did They Know It? What Archaeology Can Tell Us About the Reality of Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001), 204–209, 235–237; Lester L. Grabbe, *Ancient Israel: What Do We Know and How Do We Know It?*, rev. ed. (New York, NY: Bloomsbury/T&T Clark, 2017), 223–228 § 5.1.2.6. The estimate of nearly 3000 comes from William G. Dever, *Beyond the Text: An Archaeological Portrait of Ancient Israel and Judah* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2017), 596.

[2] See Nahman Avigad, "Two Hebrew 'Fiscal' Bullae," *Israel Exploration Journal* 40, no. 4 (1990): 262–266; Eli Shukron, in "Bulla Bearing the Name Bethlehem," The Ir David Foundation, May 2012, online at http://www.cityofdavid.org.il/en/archeology/finds/bulla-bearing-name-bethlehem (accessed December 6, 2017).

[3] The first was the Gibeon bulla; see Gabriel Barkay, "A Fiscal Bulla from the Slopes of the Temple Mount—Evidence for the Taxation System of the Judean Kingdom," חידושים בחקר ירושלם 17 (2011): 151–178 (written in Hebrew, see English summary at the end of the paper). The Bethlehem Bulla was the second; see Ronny Reich, "A Fiscal Bulla from the City of David," *Israel Exploration Journal* 62, no. 2 (2012): 200–205. The third is the Eltekon bulla; see Gabriel Barkay and Robert Deutsch, "Another Fiscal Bulla from the City of David," *New Studies on Jerusalem* 22 (2017): 115–121 (written in Hebrew, see English summary on pp. 11*–12*). These articles also provide information on the number of fiscal bullae and their general dating.

[4] Shukron, in "Bulla Bearing the Name Bethlehem."

[5] Reich, "Fiscal Bulla," 204.

[6] Hiede, "Some Notes," 72.

[7] Shukron, in "Bulla Bearing the Name Bethlehem."

[8] Hiede did not include brackets to correctly represent the parts of the translation that are a restoration, so I've added them for clarity. I've also changed Hiede's brackets on "year" to parentheses (consistent with Reich, "Fiscal Bulla," 201) so as not to confuse this added word from the translator (usually placed in parentheses) with restorations to the underlying Hebrew, shown in the brackets I've added.

[9] Hershal Shanks, "Strata: 'Bethlehem' from IAA Dig Found by Archaeologist IAA Arrested," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 38, no. 5 (September/October 2012): 12 adds a little more for clarity: "In the seventh (year of the king's reign)."

[10] Reich, "Fiscal Bulla," 201 renders this literally as Beit Leḥem, which is the Hebrew transliteration for Bethlehem (p. 203: "Beit Leḥem is identified with the city of Bethlehem"). Shanks, "'Bethlehem' from IAA Dig," 12 adds "(taxes from the City of) [B]ethlehem," clarifying that Bethlehem is the place the taxes are from.

[11] Shanks, "'Bethlehem' from IAA Dig," 12 has "to (or 'for') the king." The common term *lmlk* (למלך) widely attested on seals, bullae, and store jar handles for this period, literally means "belonging to the king."

[12] See Nadav Na'aman, "The Kingdom of Judah Under Josiah," *Tel Aviv: Journal of the Institute of Archaeology of Tel Aviv University* 18, no. 1 (1991): 13–16; Nadav Na'aman, "Canaanite Jerusalem and its Central Hill Country Neighbours in the Second Millenium BCE," *Ugarit-Forschungen* 24 (1992): 282; Nadav Na'aman, "Josiah and the Kingdom of Judah," in *Good Kings and Bad Kings: The Kingdom of Judah in the Seventh Century BCE*, ed. Lester L. Grabbe (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2005), 191–201.

[13] Yohanan Aharoni, *The Archaeology of the Land of Israel*, trans. Anson F. Rainey (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1982), 259.

[14] Na'aman, "The Kingdom of Judah Under Josiah," 14; Na'aman, "Josiah and the Kingdom of Judah," 198–199.

[15] Na'aman, "Canaanite Jerusalem," 281–283.

[16] John L. Sorenson, "The Composition of Lehi's Family," in *By Study and Also By Faith: Essays in Honor of Hugh W. Nibley*, 2 vols., ed. John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 2:179 places Lehi's birth around 639 BC, near the beginning of Josiah's reign, and his marriage to Sariah around 621 BC, at the height of Josiah's reign. Sorenson's age estimates for Lehi's sons (pp. 175–176, 177–179) require that Laman, Lemuel, Sam, and Nephi all be born by 614 BC, several years still before Josiah's reign ended ca. 609 BC. Note, however, John L. Sorenson, *Nephite Culture and Society: Selected Papers* (Salt Lake City, UT: New Sage Books, 1997), 23 states that he was persuaded Lehi departed from Jerusalem ten years later than originally supposed. Since his estimate for Lehi's age was based on assumptions about Lehi's sons ages upon departure, this obviously changed things, presumably shifting Lehi's birth to ca. 630 BC, and similarly shifting his marriage and the birth of his children by about ten years. Other proposals for Lehi's birth date include: H. Donl

Peterson, "Father Lehi," in *First Nephi, The Doctrinal Foundation*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr., The Book of Mormon Symposium Series, Volume 2 (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1988), 56: 650–640 BC; Robert F. Smith, "Book of Mormon Event Structure: The Ancient Near East," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 5, no. 2 (1996): 111: ca. 652 BC; David Rolph Seely and Robert D. Hunt, "Dramatis Personae: The World of Lehi (ca. 700–562 BC)," in *Glimpses of Lehi's Jerusalem*, ed. John W. Welch, David Rolph Seely, and Jo Ann H. Seely, (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2004), 46: "the last years of the reign of Manasseh [ca. 647–642 BC?]"; Jeffrey R. Chadwick, "Lehi's House at Jerusalem and the Land of his Inheritance," in *Glimpses of Lehi's Jerusalem*, 128: 645 BC. My own views are most closely aligned with those of Sorenson (1990), and I reject the later departure date that he adopted in Sorenson (1997). On this, see Neal Rappleye, "Jerusalem Chronicle (ABC 5/BM21946)," *Nephite History in Context* 1 (November 2017): 1–5, esp. n.20. In any case, whichever date one prefers, much of Lehi's life in Jerusalem would have been during Josiah's reign, and most would have him raising his family at least partly during Josiah's reign as well.

[17] "Ancient Bethlehem Seal Unearthed in Jerusalem," Phys.org, May 23, 2012, online at https://phys.org/news/2012-05-ancient-bethlehem-unearthed-jerusalem.html (accessed December 6, 2017).

[18] See Robert F. Smith, "The Land of Jerusalem: The Place of Jesus' Birth," in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 170–172.