



Type: Magazine Article

---

## The City Zarahemla and Vicinity

Author(s): Joel E. Ricks

Source: *Juvenile Instructor*, Vol. 41, No. 22 (15 November 1906), pp. 673–677

Published by: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

---

**Abstract:** Identifies an area in Bogata, Columbia as the Land of Zarahemla. Presents photographs and a description of the geography, climate, and vegetation of the area, drawing parallels with passages of the Book of Mormon text.

---

# JUVENILE INSTRUCTOR

ORGAN OF THE DESERET SUNDAY SCHOOL UNION

VOL. XLI.

SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH, NOVEMBER 15, 1906.

No. 22

## THE CITY ZARAHEMLA AND VICINITY.



WITH this article we present a map of the region where the city Zarahemla is generally supposed to have been located. The purpose of the article is to point out the natural features of the region as they are today and to show how perfectly they meet the requirements of the Book of Mormon.

There is no detailed geographical de-

scription of the city Zarahemla and vicinity given in the Book of Mormon, and all that we know of it is gleaned from casual reference in describing certain events. Thus we have the hill Manti spoken of in connection with the execution of Nehor the anti-Christ. From the description of the war with the Amlicites we learn that that city was west of the Sidon river, that the hill Amnihu was east of the Sidon, that the valley of Gideon was east of the hill Amnihu and about one day's journey from the city Zarahemla, that the land Minon was about one day's journey south of Zarahemla, that the Hermounts wilderness, which was infested by wild animals, was northwest of the city Zarahemla and within a short distance of the city. During Alma's missionary tour he visited



LOOKING DOWN THE HILL MANTI.



PLAINS OF ZARAHEMLA, LOOKING WEST.

scription of the city Zarahemla and vicinity given in the Book of Mormon, and all that we know of it is gleaned from casual reference in describing certain events.

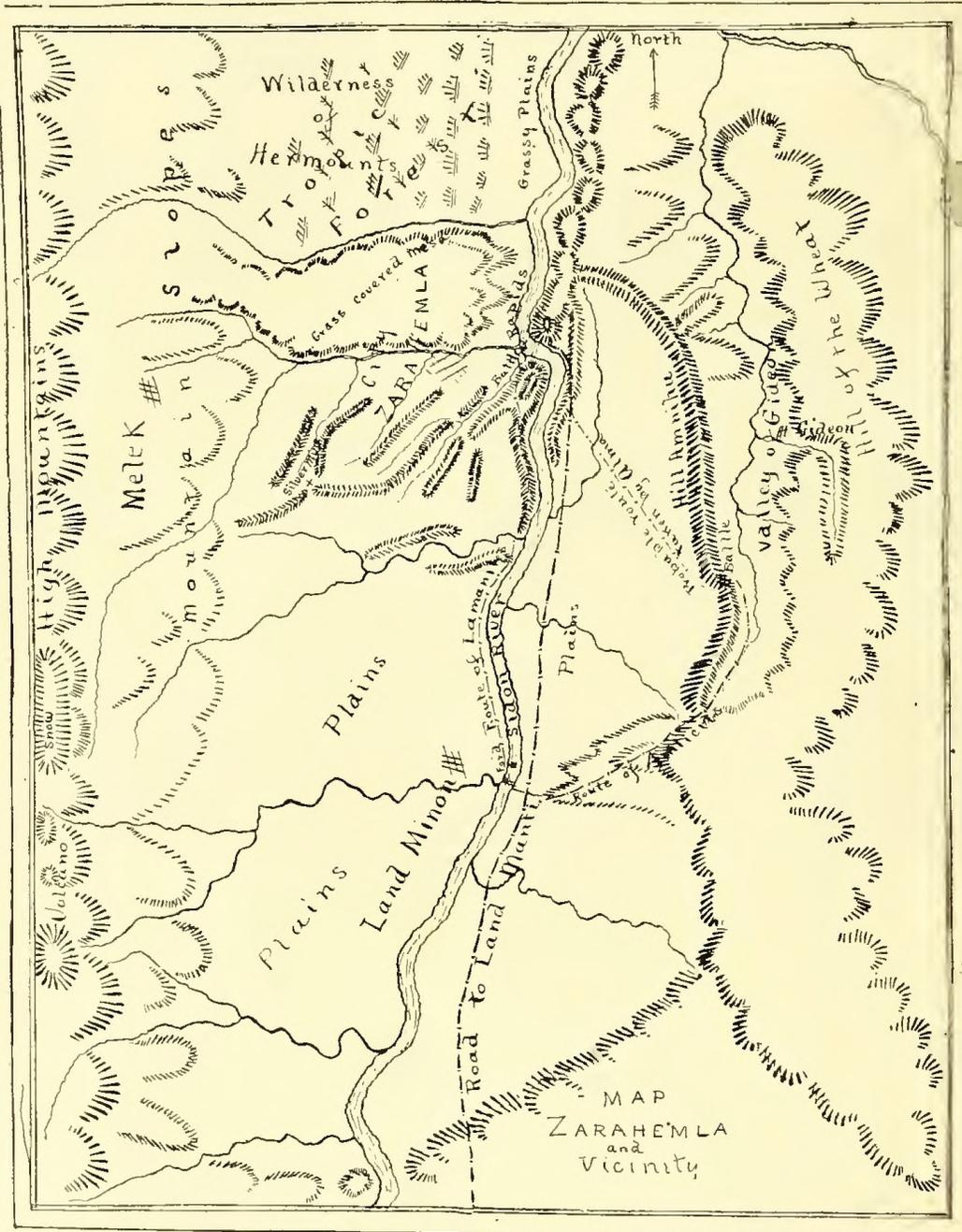
Thus we have the hill Manti spoken of in connection with the execution of Nehor the anti-Christ. From the description of the war with the Amlicites we learn that that city was west of the Sidon river, that

Melek, which was by the wilderness side west of Zarahemla. The Nephites were an agricultural people, and it would be but natural to expect that they would locate their communities in districts favorable for agricultural pursuits. Thus where Minon was located above Zarahemla, and where Melek was situated on the wilderness side, must have been agricultural districts.

A careful reference to the map will enable one to better understand the description that we shall give of the district of country under consideration.

If we were to stand at the point where the Guali unites with the Sidon we should seem to be surrounded by hills on every hand; just across the Sidon is a high hill, an offshoot of the hill Amnihu, which forms

the eastern boundary of the valley several miles farther east. Just above the mouth of the Guali not a quarter of a mile distant, and on the west of the Sidon, is another high hill very similar to the one on the east of the river. These hills rise nearly 1,000 feet above the river, and are separated only by the deep channel of the Sidon. Each of these throw out a single



SCALE 12 MILES TO 1 INCH.

ridge which parallels the river for several miles southward, where they sink down to the level of the plain. The hill on the west dominates all of the other hills on the west side of the river, and for this reason I have called it the hill Manti.



THE CROSSING OF THE SIDON, LOOKING SOUTH-EAST.

From this hill we are able to overlook the surrounding country and can take in at a glance all of its prominent features. Let us ascend the hill then, and look around.

To the north we trace the course of the Sidon for several miles and see it dash itself angrily against the great boulders in its path. To the west of the river, not two miles from the hill Manti, is a flat topped hill or mesa sloping back westward to the foot of the mountains. North of the mesa is the forest region to which we have given the name, *Wilderness of Hermounts*, because it answers so perfectly the description of the wilderness into which the Lamanites were driven after the battle at the crossing of the Sidon. All along the western horizon are the great mountains. West of the hill Manti, the slopes rise gradually for several miles back. As these slopes bear evidence of having supported a numerous population in the distant past, I have located the land Melek there. South of the mesa as we look west from the Si-

don we see several hills rising in succession in terraces very similar to the bench terraces about Logan and Provo and in other parts of Utah. These terraces expand into broad pastures, widening and lengthening as you go westward; they extend to the grassy slopes of Melek twenty miles or more from the Sidon. South of the terraced plains and extending back from the hill Manti to the great mountains are a large number of isolated sandstone ridges, which extend southward several miles. All through this hilly region are open, level spaces, glens and valleys. South of the hilly region are the broad plains of Minon, and away beyond in the dim distance is the ridge of hills which crosses the valley and which divides the land Minon from the land Manti. All along the eastern horizon stretching away in a south-south-easterly direction is the hill Amnihu proper. The hill rises nearly 2,000 feet above the valley, and were it not that it is dwarfed by the giant mountains which surround the valley it would be a pretty respectable



THE HILL EAST OF THE SIDON.

mountain. This hill, where it divides the valley of Gideon from the Sidon, is a narrow ridge and is so steep that where the Bogota trail crosses it, the road zigzags back and forth for a considerable distance

to reach the summit, and is so steep that it is difficult to ride a mule up it.

The Alto del Trigo, or hill of the wheat, which forms the eastern boundary of the valley of Gideon, is not visible from the hill Manti. The valley of Gideon is in a southeast direction from the hill Manti, and in a direct course is about fifteen miles distant; by the trail it is called twenty miles. Between the hill Amnihu and the Sidon is a comparatively level region, six or seven miles wide and fifteen or more miles long, which is really a part of the Minon valley. To the northwest of the hill Manti is a broken mountainous country. With the exception of the Wilderness of Hermounts the hills and plains are free from timber except along the creeks and rivers, which are usually fringed with trees.



CASTLE ROCK, WILDERNESS OF HERMOUNTS.

There are indications that some time in the past the channel of the Sidon north of the mesa was in some manner blocked up, causing the waters of the river to back up making a lake of all of the valley region south of the mesa. It was apparently at a time when the earth was agitated by those internal forces which have wrought such great changes in the earth's surface in past ages. This is proven by the fact that the terraces are composed of volcanic ashes or scoria, which has been washed down by the Gauli river from the mountains on the west. Between thirty and forty miles southwest of the hill Manti is the volcanic cone of Tolima. The Gauli has its source in the glaciers that cover the

slopes of this mountain. During a period of eruption the ashes were thrown out and gathered by the Gauli and its tributaries and deposited in the terraces as indicated. The lesser and lower terraces were formed as the river assumed its old channel.

There are several creeks which rise in the hilly region south of the mesa, and which empty into the Guali. These have cut deep, narrow channels through the terraces. The banks of the creeks are perpendicular, and vary in height from twenty-five to one hundred feet. I mention these details for the reason that I believe the Nephites utilized these natural barriers in preparing the defenses of their city.

We believe the city Zarahemla occupied the greater part of the mesa, and the plains south of it, and probably the glens and valleys of the adjoining hilly country. In using the word *city* we do not use it in the sense that it is used by us, i. e., of a compact city, but to distinguish the lesser land Zarahemla from the country Zarahemla. In a former article I expressed the opinion that the Nephites lived in communities, and that each home was surrounded by a tract of land which was cultivated by the family. We arrived at this conclusion after studying the terraced cities in the east wilderness. At some central point in the community was the temple and the market where the people met to worship and to exchange their wares. This condition evidently prevailed at Zarahemla during the reign of the second Mosiah, for he tilled the ground for his support; and when the people assembled at the temple, they brought their tents and camped in the open space about the sacred building. As late as 30 B. C. Nephi had a garden about his house in Zarahemla, which was by the highway which led to the chief market. The term highway is rarely applied to a city street, but both garden and highway would be appropriate terms in a community.

Frequent reference is made in the Book of Mormon to the fortifications about Nephite cities. While some of the cities may have been enclosed by earth walls, on the top of which were palisades of timber, we are of the opinion that in most instances forts were erected at convenient points as places of resort in case of attack. In the case of Zarahemla, the site indicated is very favorable for defense against the primitive methods of warfare then in vogue. The southern limits are protected by the deep channels of the creeks referred to. In two places the writer saw evidences that a palisade had been erected along the edge of the steep terrace. On the north the mesa is protected by the deep channels of a turbulent river and the almost impassable forest.

We are of the opinion that the Sidon was formerly fordable at the point where the rapids begin; but a rope suspension bridge of the Peruvian type could be swung across the river between the two hills. An iron bridge now spans the river there.

A careful perusal of the map will reveal the fact, that the region answers every requirement of the Book of Mormon. The locations of the lands and cities harmonize

perfectly with the geographical features of the country. Formerly Minon was supposed to have been two days' journey south of Zarahemla. We now know that it was only one day's journey between the two points. The movements of the armies during the Amlicite war can be pretty accurately traced, and those movements are along routes that now, as then, are the most natural and accessible. In Nephite times, the road between Zarahemla and the east wilderness passed through the valley of Gideon. The road between these points passes through that valley today. The road to the land Manti ran along the east bank of the Sidon, the road from Honda to the upper Magdalena follows that route now.

We know but very little of the Land Zarahemla. It is only within four years that any of our people have visited it. The observations that have been made are only superficial. Yet a good deal of information has been obtained. A more careful study of the country will add further information, until we shall know certainly many of the details of Nephite history, especially that part of it relating to the geography of their country.

*Joel Ricks.*

## COLOGNE.



WE left Elberfeld early in the afternoon. Before our train reached the curve we could see Dusseldorf, the first city on the Rhine. How pretty it looks, with its shipping and bowers of green, dense foliage, almost hiding the houses from sight.

Everyone stands to see the Falls of the Rhine at Schaffhausen. As Americans, we may justly feel proud of our Niagara, with its sweep of mighty waters; but this

scene is picturesque, romantic, beautiful. There is about it a delicate, bewitching, thrilling beauty, without volume or great majesty, that touches the chord of inspiration. Fascinating is the surging torrent. Reaching the ledge of rock, it moves madly backward, ere it makes its final leap over, followed by other waters that ceaselessly plunge on and on; surging here and dashing there. Clouds of spray rise high over the billows, where, penetrated by gorgeous rays of light, it reflects a thou-