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## Introduction

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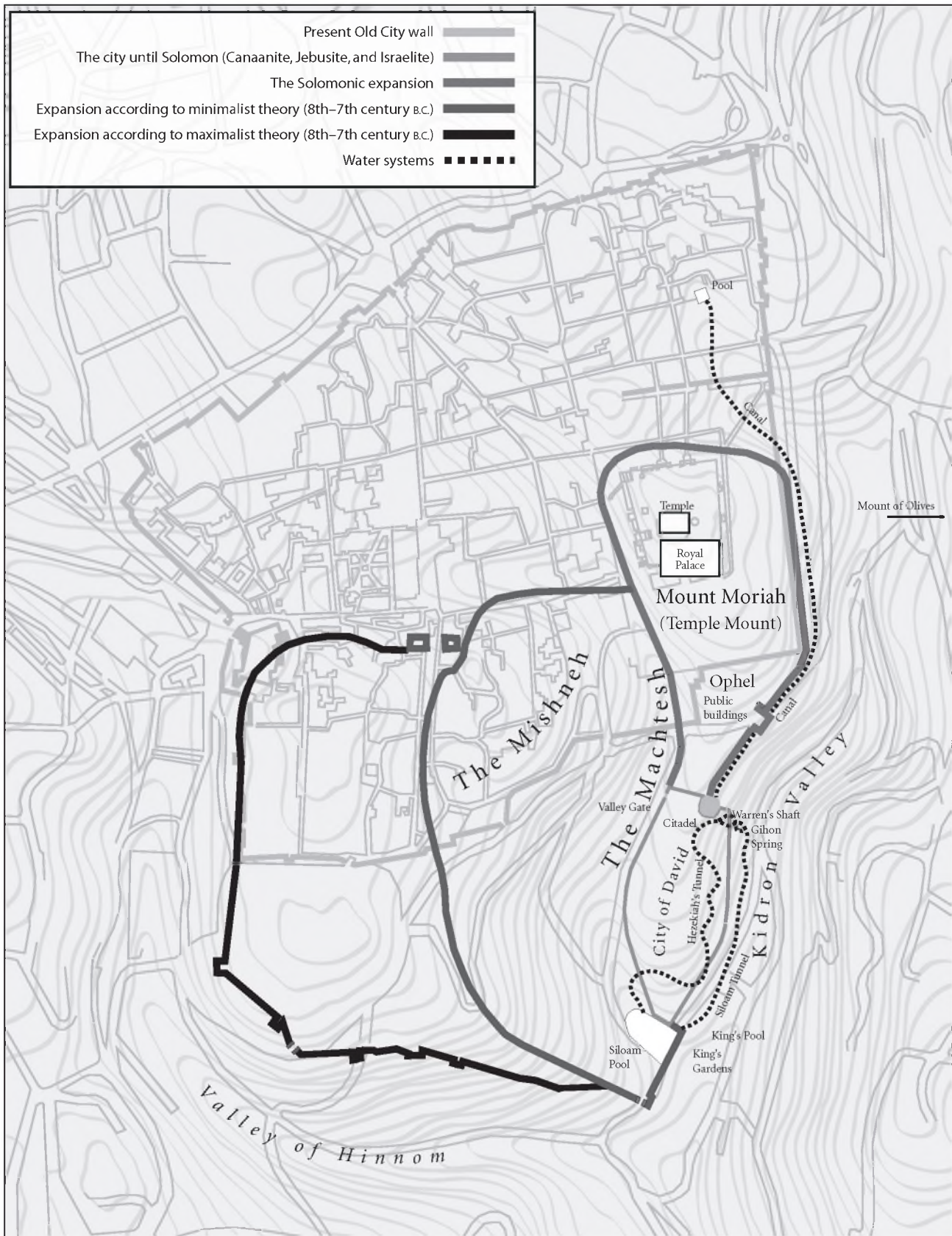
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## INTRODUCTION

Imagine the world of Jerusalem around 600 B.C. This was the world of Lehi, Sariah, Laban, and Zoram. It was also the world of Josiah, Jeremiah, Nahum, and Urijah. What was that world like? How did people live in that day and age? How can an understanding of that world help as we read the prophecies of Ezekiel or the records of Nephi?

This book tries to answer such questions and to glimpse parts of that world. Much of that era was lost forever, of course, when the warnings of many prophets came to pass as Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians shortly after Lehi left Jerusalem. The Temple of Solomon and the walls of the city were torn down. Buildings were burned. Treasuries were looted. People were killed or deported. Many records were destroyed, and certain religious beliefs were changed or extinguished. Most of what we know about these events comes from accounts written by a few of the survivors and influenced by their biases. Archaeological and textual evidence allows us to snatch only a glimpse of this and a peek at that. Carefully linked together, however, these snapshots blend into a helpful and interesting vista.

Chapters in histories discuss these years, and articles focus on one particular person or point. Rarely, however, has an entire book been devoted to this quarter century. Perhaps because this episode has an unhappy ending, historians and general readers feel its pain and turn away. Readers of the Book of Mormon, however, will see light at the end of this dark historical tunnel and a silver lining around these dark clouds of destruction.



Maps by Andrew D. Livingston. © FARMS

The walls and features of Jerusalem.

To understand this world, historians strive to identify significant changes that occurred at that time. Many cultural features remained relatively constant in the ancient world from one century to the next, but during certain decades, dramatic developments occurred. Lehi's Jerusalem was one such time of turbulence and transformation. Locally, the kingdom of Judah rose to new heights under the reforms of King Josiah, only to crash to new lows a few years later with his death at Megiddo in 609. Internationally, the world was in wild flux as the Assyrian empire collapsed and the Babylonian kingdom came to power. Lehi can be understood in this setting, as he cried out against imprudent changes and improvident actions.

These developments around 600 B.C. were extremely interesting and influential. Events of this axial period shaped the contours of civilizations for centuries to come. This world was also the incubator in which the seeds of Nephite civilization germinated. Lehi and his family left from this world, carrying with them certain amounts of religious, linguistic, social, political, and cultural baggage. Knowing as much as possible about that world yields important glimpses into the backgrounds of the Book of Mormon.

In this book we have invited a variety of scholars with training in many disciplines to discuss what is known about Jerusalem around 600 B.C. Their topics range from ordinary domestic life to extraordinary religious institutions. We hope that readers will find these glimpses into Lehi's world fresh and lively. All these studies are published here for the first time, with the exception of chapters 13 and 15.

Following a "culturegram," a register of people in Lehi's world, and a photo essay that introduce a hypothetical traveler into the world of Jerusalem in that day, three studies focus on the daily life of people at this time. Jeffrey Chadwick helps







readers to understand the configuration of a typical preexilic Israelite house, which helps us to imagine what the house of Lehi and Sariah would have been like. Consistent with the fact that Lehi had gold and silver and other precious things, his was probably an upper- or solid middle-class home.

Essential to the survival of people in the ancient world were the diverse and valuable contributions of women, as the chapter by Ariel Bybee informatively discusses. Women were key members in the fabric of Lehi's society. Men in Lehi's world were predominantly involved in farming. Thus, the study by Terry Ball and Wilford Hess helps explain the agricultural concerns of men in Judah, which provides a context in which to better understand scriptural images that draw on horticultural symbols, such as the olive tree in 1 Nephi 10.

Language, literacy, and record keeping were important parts of Lehi's life. Dana Pike employs archaeological and paleographic tools to comprehensively survey the written artifacts from preexilic times. William Adams uses linguistic tools to examine four features of the Hebrew language that changed over time. Both of these authors relate their findings to the Book of Mormon.

Internationally, Lehi's Jerusalem had connections with Egypt. John Thompson shows that these relationships were at a high point during Lehi's day. John Gee skillfully sketches what Egyptian society was like at that time. Aaron Shade recounts the history of the kingdom of Judah during the century before Lehi. These chapters are especially interesting to readers of the Book of Mormon because Lehi knew Egyptian and was influenced by the scribal traditions of that world.

Main institutions in the world of Jerusalem 600 B.C. were the temple, the monarchy, wisdom teachers, legal administrators, and prophetic spokesmen. John Welch analyzes the trial

of Jeremiah and what Lehi would have learned from Jeremiah's narrow escape. David and Jo Ann Seely compare the prophetic missions of Lehi and Jeremiah. David Seely discusses the importance of covenant and the Temple of Solomon, which is the temple that Lehi and his contemporaries knew, and Welch explains the calling of Lehi as a prophet in terms of contemporaneous expectations. Kevin Christensen distills the many relevant insights of British scholar Margaret Barker, and her 2003 BYU Forum address on the reforms of Josiah offers new perspectives on the changes and losses that occurred in Israel during Lehi's lifetime.

The "seething pot" of Babylonia finally boiled over and spilled into Judah. John Gee gives fascinating information about the political powers that destroyed Jerusalem in 587/586 B.C. The divine justification for that catastrophe is discussed by Bruce Satterfield, and domestic and theological reasons allowing it are explained by David Seely and Fred Woods.

Knowing of the impending fate that hung over the city of Jerusalem, Lehi led his family out into the Arabian desert. The pattern of fleeing into the wilderness to escape wickedness was a pattern in Lehi's world, made attractive by the Rechabites, as is discussed by Welch and Jeffrey Thompson. Kent Brown concludes by providing details about Arabian connections with Jerusalem in Lehi's day, helping modern readers to travel a few days' journey alongside the footprints of Lehi.

With Lehi's vision that Jerusalem would be destroyed came the assurance that the mercies of the Lord would be over those who would repent and turn their hearts again to the ways of righteousness. Sensing the precariousness of wickedness, as well as trusting in the Lord's continuous generosity, are strong Book of Mormon themes pertinent at the beginning of the twenty-first century.



Of course, some details in these reconstructions remain uncertain and, as a result, readers should not expect to find complete agreement among these authors. For example, assessments of Josiah's reforms vary, and the state of the law at this time is debatable. In addition, dates of certain events cannot always be stated with precision. Indeed, the date 600 B.C. only approximates the year of Lehi's departure. Even the Nephite record keepers were not sure exactly when Lehi left: in Mosiah 6:4 the best that could be said of the key date that links the small plates to King Mosiah was that his reign commenced "in the whole *about* four hundred and seventy-six years from the time that Lehi left Jerusalem." Also, Hebrew words have been transliterated using the SBL popular style with variations to suit author preference.

We highly recommend further reading about this historic era. The reading list at the end of this book highlights our favorites. Other useful books are mentioned throughout this volume in footnotes.

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As we journey, we hope you will keep your eyes peeled and that you will enjoy the trip.