

The BoM Geography Draft & the 1825 Schoolboys' Map

All who undertake BoM cartography have to deal with certain real-world features, including: 1) The Nephite and Jaredite narratives took place in the Americas. 2) There are four seas of note, these being primarily the sea to the east and the sea to the west, and secondarily, the sea to the north and the sea to the south (to all of which eventually Israelites spread). 3) There are two landmasses separated by a “narrow neck of land” that could be traversed at some point by a Nephite in a day and a half. 4) The Nephite Cumorah and the Jaredite Ramah are one and the same and they are where the gold plates with the Nephite record were hidden, which Smith claimed to have found in upstate New York.

Geographic Segmentation

Geographic segmentation is possible when a lengthy text has been composed within a historical framework and has been broken down into subtexts covering sequential periods of time. It is a process where an earlier subtext leaves some portion of its territory devoid of geographical detail, with the result that a subsequent subtext is free to populate that territory with toponyms without fear of contradicting the preceding subtext. Four segments have been labeled stages one through four.

Table 4. Book of Mormon Toponyms

2 Nephi (north)	Omni (land northward)		
	land of Zarahemla	land northward	
2 Nephi (south)	Omni (land southward)		
place called Nephi	land of Nephi		
Mosiah (north)	Alma (land northward)		
Zarahemla land	Aaron	Lehi city	Riplah hill
	Ammonihah city	Manti	sea east
	Ammonihah land	Melek land	sea west
	Amnihu hill	Minon land	Sidom land
	Antiparah city	Moroni city	Sidon river
	Cumeni city	Moroni land	Sidon head
	Desolation city	Mulek	Sidon land
	Desolation land	Nephihah city	wilderness east
	Desolation of Nehors	Nephihah land	wilder... Hermounts
	Gideon city	Morianton city	wilderness south
	Gideon land	Morianton land	wilderness north
	Gideon valley	narrow pass north	wilderness west
	Judea city	narrow pass south	Zarahemla city

	land northward	Noah city	Zarahemla land
	land southward	Noah land	Zeezrom city
Mosiah (south)	Alma (land southward)		
Alma valley	Alma valley	Lemuel city	Siron land
Amulon land	Amulon land	Melek land	
Helam city	Ani-Anti village	Middoni land	
Helam, land	Antionum	Midian land	
Lehi-Nephi city	Antionum land	Mormon fountain	
Lehi-Nephi land	Antipas mount	Mormon forest	
Mormon forest	Bountiful city	Mormon land	
Mormon fountain	Bountiful wilderness	Nephi land	
Mormon waters	Helam city	Onidah hill	
Nephi city	Helam land	Sebus waters	
Nephi land	Ishmael land	Shemlon city	
Shemlon land	Jershon land	Shemlon land	
Shilom city	Jerusalem city	Shilom city	
Shilom land	Jerusalem land	Shilom land	
Mormon (land northward)			
Angola city	Cumorah land/hill	Jashon land	Shem land
Antum land	David land	Jordan city	Shim hill
Boaz city	Desolation land/city	Joshua city	Zarahemla

Stage 1. In the summer of 1828, disaster struck. A thief stole Smith's only copy of nearly all (if not all) of his BoM manuscript completed to date. It was clear that divine assistance could not be relied upon to replicate this work word for word. His counter was to announce that Providence, ever so prescient, had provided, engraved on Smith's gold plates, a second and independent account covering the same period of Nephite history. However, there was still a problem. The details in the stolen version might not be correctly remembered for the replacement text. The solution was clear. This new text would have to eschew detail, including geographical place names. The replacement text comprises 23% of the entire BoM narrative, and covers c. 470 years of Nephite history. Yet, it mentions only a place called Nephi (2 Nephi 5:8) and "the land of Nephi" (Omni 1:27), apart from the city and "the land of Zarahemla" (Omni 1:13), and "the land northward" (Omni 1:22), both mentioned at the end. As for the geographical framework, we are told only that this New World is one of the isles of the sea (2 Nephi 10:20) mentioned in Isaiah (60:9, 24:15).

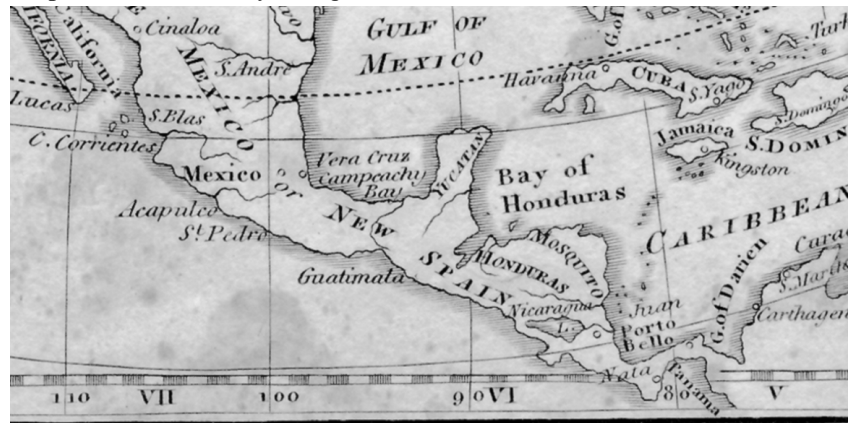
Stage 2. The Book of Mosiah was thus able to take advantage of the replacement text's lack of detail. Mosiah I led the Nephites north, across the Isthmus of Panama, to the Land of Zarahemla. There, the Mulekites incredibly adopted a Nephite identity. The four sons of Mosiah II travelled throughout the lands of Zarahemla (Mosiah 27:35). People

spread north, south, east and west, building large cities (Mosiah 27:6). And yet, all of the stories take place in the territory of the replacement text, i.e. south of the Isthmus of Panama, in the lands of the land of Nephi. Apart from mentioning “the land of Zarahemla,” the whole record of Mosiah totally eschews both stories and place names in the region that had become the adoptive Nephite homeland, and even introduces few new toponyms in the south. Only two of the four cardinal points of the compass are used to relate place names. There is a hill north of the land of Shilom (Mosiah 7:5) and Zeniff reigned in the land of Nephi, away south of the land of Shilom (Mosiah 9:14). Alma preached at the waters, fountain and forest of Mormon (Mosiah 18:5, 30). There is no geographical anchor point to situate place names. The Book of Mosiah has left the follow-on book (Alma) a blank slate to develop the geography of the lands of Zarahemla.

Identifying the Features, Cities & Lands in the Book of Mormon

Stage 3. The Book of Alma takes full advantage of this *tabula rasa* with a geographical insert, Alma 22:27-34. That it is an insert is indicated in verse 35: “And now I, having said this, return again to the account of Ammon...” It was obviously intended to provide enough detail with sufficient specificity to give the reader a clear understanding of the geographical framework for the *Book of Mormon*.

Map 3. 1825 Schoolboys’ Map of Central America



Our task is not to make BoM geography fit modern maps, but rather the cartographical knowledge of the 1820s. To make a BoM draft map

for their work, the 1820s map that the Smiths and Cowdery must have had available is the *School Atlas to Adams' Geography* (v. below).

Stage 4. Mormon's record of Nephite history in his own lifetime (*infra*).

The Framework

We learned in 2 Nephi 10:20 that the land of Nephi is located on an isle of the sea. In Alma's insert, we learn that there are two such isles (continents), virtually surrounded by water (22:32), the land northward and the land southward (22:31-32), with a sea on the east and another on the west (22:27, 32-33). These landmasses are connected only by a "narrow neck of land," so narrow that a Nephite could go from the sea on the east to the sea on the west in a day and a half. (22:32; 63:5; cf. Ether 10:20). There is only one location in the Americas that comes even close to his description: the Isthmus of Panama. The distance from Panama City to Colón is 45 miles. The distance from David, Panama, to Chiriquí Grande is 70 miles. At five miles an hour, the crossing at Panama City would take ten hours. At a more believable pace, say 2.5 miles an hour, the crossing could be 28 hours at the David crossing, or very close to a day and a half (allowing for some sleep). The crossing at Panama City could be done in one day. Actually, a later passage refers to a fortified line taking only one day (Helaman 4:7-8). This crossing point on the narrow neck of land firmly situates the entire BoM geography. After five and one half centuries in the New World, the BoM peoples covered both continents: "...they did multiply and spread... from the land southward to the land northward... they began to cover the face of the whole earth, from the sea south to the sea north, from the sea west to the sea east. (Helaman 3:8)

Moreover, the entire Nephite territory, the land of Zarahemla, is no more than three hundred miles across, from sea to sea, and usually much less. The text is always aware of the presence of these bounding seas.

Cities, lands & Regions

In the *Book of Mormon*, city names are rarely found alone, such as Judea (Alma 57:11). More usually, they are preceded by "the city of" or "the land of." The latter refers to the city plus its hinterland. A few place names can refer additionally to a region. Thus we can have Zarahemla, the city of Zarahemla, the land of Zarahemla (city plus its hinterland), and the land of Zarahemla (the city plus all the cities and their lands in

the Zarahemla empire). One time only, we find “the lands of Zarahemla” (Mosiah 27:35; i.e. the lands of the empire). Similarly, we have the city of Nephi, the land of Nephi (city plus its hinterland) and the land of Nephi (the region under the sway of the city of Nephi; Alma 50:11). Bountiful is often found alone, referring to a wilderness area: “called Bountiful, it being the wilderness which is filled with all manner of wild animals of every kind.” (Alma 22:31) The Jaredite narrative also refers to it: “...they did go into the land southward, to hunt food for the people of the land, for the land was covered with animals of the forest. And Lib also himself became a great hunter. And they built a great city by the narrow neck of land, by the place where the sea divides the land. ...they did preserve the land southward for a wilderness, to get game.” (Ether 10:19-21) In it we find the city of Bountiful (Alma 53:4), and the land of Bountiful (Alma 52:18), the latter being the hinterland of the city, which is not coterminous with the wilderness Bountiful.

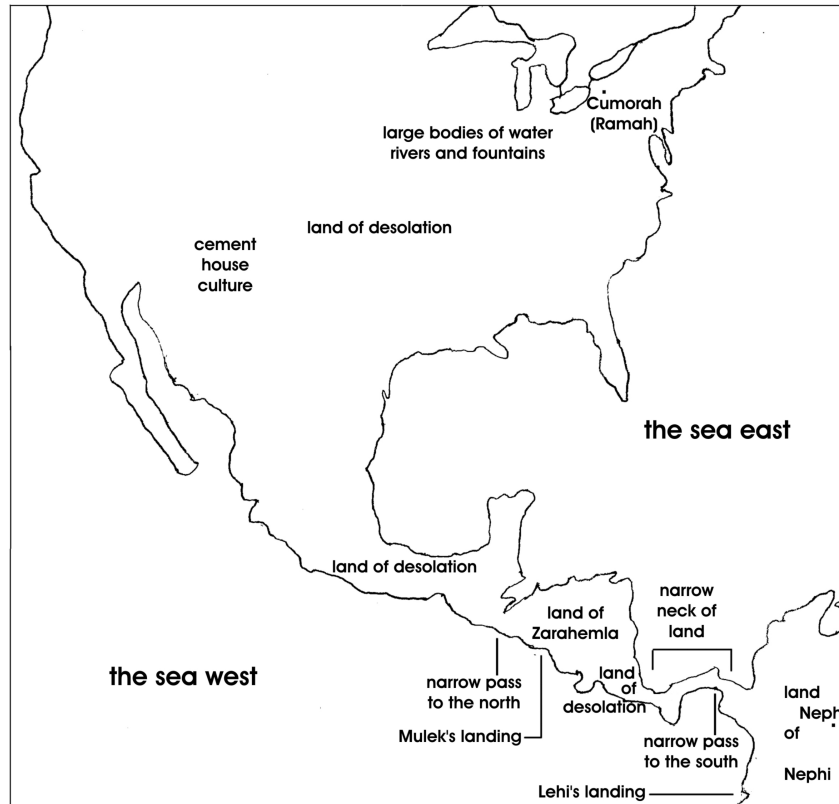
Wilderness & Desolation

In addition to Bountiful, the BOM has extensive other wilderness. A narrow strip of wilderness has essentially an H form, with the crossbar separating the Lamanites from the land of Zarahemla, and with the legs and arms of the H being narrow strips of wilderness up and down the coastal areas, on both sides of the narrow neck of land, bordering the sea east and the sea west (Alma 22:27). The wilderness areas were occupied by Lamanites living off of hunting and raiding, even on both sides of the land of Zarahemla, such that the Nephites were nearly surrounded (Alma 22:29). Note that at the time of Alma’s insert, Bountiful had been occupied by the Nephites (Alma 22:33). So then this crossbar may have passed along the south side of Bountiful, presumably being distinct from it by not being so rich in game (Alma 16:7, 22:27, 31:3, 43:23, 58:13).

There are some regional designations. “Zoram...crossed over the river Sidon...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) Contrast this with “Antionum, which was east of the land of Zarahemla, which lay nearly bordering upon the seashore, which was south of the land of Jershon, which also bordered upon the wilderness south.” (Alma 31:3) Swinging all the way north of Zarahemla and west, we find the wilderness Hermounts (Alma 2:37). The coastline on the east side of the land of Zarahemla is referred to as the east wilderness. There is no corresponding designation on the west side, although captain

Helaman has to contend with wilderness used as a Lamanite refuge in his campaign to liberate Manti and other cities there.

Map 4. The Americas and the Principal Nephite Territory



Note that the outer contour of this map is based on the schoolboys' map.

Ether (2:5) describes a wilderness as being “that quarter where never had man been.” Most usually, the least civilized of the Lamanites make a living by hunting and raiding in the wilderness. Ultimately, it is a land that has not been subjected to human exploitation, under the plow or otherwise. Travel through wilderness occasionally occurs in the BoM, and could represent a considerable challenge. Ammon and his group wander about in the wilderness for forty days before happening upon Shilom (Mosiah 7:4). For the distance from lands that the Lamanites had taken (Shemlon, Shilom and Amulon), just to arrive at the land of

Zarahemla (not the city proper), Alma spent a day getting to the valley of Alma, plus twelve days in the wilderness (Mosiah 24:20, 25).

The term “desolation” is just about the opposite of “wilderness.” The land Desolation had been extensively occupied by the Jaredites, and had become devoid of their inhabitants, desolate. All of the territory north of the line Bountiful-Desolation was encumbered by the Jaredite ruins found by Mulek upon his arrival. That the first landing of Mulek was in the land north, and that the first landing of Lehi was in the land south, is made clear in Helaman 6:10. Thus the entire land northward came to be called the land of Desolation. The line Bountiful and line Desolation is the point on the isthmus where a Nephite could cross sea to sea in only a day and a half. Bountiful is the northern tip of modern-day Columbia up to this narrow point on the Isthmus of Panama. Although this extensive region went all the way up to the land of large bodies of water, rivers and fountains (the Great Lakes region), over time the land of Zarahemla filled up with cities and was anything but desolate. As a result, a speaker from the vantage point of his home in the Nephite city of Gideon may well refer to the land of desolation as beginning at the northern boundary of the land of Zarahemla.

Similarly we have various directional terms. The southern boundary of “the land northward” was originally the northern side of Bountiful, but over time it could also begin at the northern boundary of the land of Zarahemla. The territory indicated by “the land which was northward” (Alma 50:11; 50:29 & 63:4) is distinct from that indicated by “the land northward.” It is the land northward upon leaving the land of Zarahemla: “departed out of the land of Zarahemla into the land which was northward” (Alma 63). “The land southward” may or may not include Bountiful. Even though the narrow neck of land lies on an east-west axis, the city of Nephi lies southeast of the city of Zarahemla, and the continent (South America) lies largely on a north-south axis. But the phrase “on the south” simply refers to the southern side of any place, such as “on the south of the city of Ammonihah (Alma 8:18); “on the south of the land Bountiful” (Alma 27:22); “on the south of the hill Riplah” (Alma 43:31); “it [the city of Moroni] was on the south by the line of the possessions of the Lamanites” (Alma 50:13); and, the Nephites “had hemmed the Lamanites in on the south” (Alma 22:33).

Water

There is no river mentioned in the Land of Nephi, and but one in the Land of Zarahemla, the river Sidon. Its headwaters are in the southwest

of that region, near the city of Manti, which is near the west sea. On the east of the city there is a wilderness and the headwaters. All crossings are from east to west, or vice versa, indicating a northerly flow. Since this river passes on the east side of the capital city, it must be emptying into or near what today is called the Gulf of Honduras.

The explorers sent out by king Limhi in search of Zarahemla got lost and after many days came to a “land among many waters.” (Mosiah 8:8) This phrase is used to indicate a large body of water, most notably the Indian Ocean (1 Nephi 17:5; cf. 13:10). There they also found “bones of men, and of beasts, and [it] was also covered with ruins of buildings of every kind.” This land, “which had been peopled with a people who were as numerous as the hosts of Israel,” most probably corresponds to the great Jaredite city near the narrow neck of land (Ether 10:20). If we were to search for some modern-day referent, it would be the region of the Lake of Nicaragua and Lake of Managua, the former being large enough to be featured on the 1825 schoolboys’ map.

No lakes, rivers or springs are indicated for nearly any of the BOM cities. There are however references to the Great Lakes region, said to be at “an exceedingly great distance” (Helaman 3:4), not just “many days.” This region has large bodies of water, rivers and fountains (Alma 50:29; Helaman 3:4; & Mormon 6:4, in connection with Cumorah).

The Lamanites and the Land of Nephi

Perhaps two decades after Lehi’s landfall in the land southward, Nephi’s elder sibling and rival had become irrevocably opposed to his brother’s rule, and his Christian message. The Lord warned Nephi to flee. He gathered his followers with their planting seed and flocks, and fled into the wilderness, clearly eastward away from the seashore, and perhaps somewhat northward, into what is now north-central Columbia. This location works for the various subsequent displacements of missionaries and armies. Nephi et al. established the city Nephi and land of Nephi. The Lamanites continued to grow in numbers, and to move into the region of the land of Nephi. About 450 ALJ the Lord commanded Mosiah to take the Nephites and move to the Mulekite city Zarahemla, north of the narrow neck of land. The Mulekites enthusiastically accept the Nephite language and the gospel of Christ. Their king, Benjamin, designates Mosiah to be their new ruler. (Omni 1:18, 19; Mosiah 6:2)

A man called Zeniff leads a group of Nephites back to the land of Nephi (Mosiah 7:9). The Lamanite king Laman allows them to occupy the cities of Shilom and Lehi-Nephi in exchange for paying tribute

(Mosiah 7:21). Noah, son of Zeniff, builds a tower in Shilom, that also overlooks Shemlon. Amulon, viceroy of Helam, is appointed a teacher over the people in the land of Shemlon, the land of Shilom, and the land of Amulon (Mosiah 23:39-24:1). The tower of Shilom overlooks that city and Shemlon (Mosiah 11:12). When the Lamanites seek to destroy the people of Limhi, they go “up to the land of Nephi” (Mosiah 20:7). When Ammon arrived at Shilom, viceroy Limhi is described as being “the king of the people who were in the land of Nephi, and in the land of Shilom” (Mosiah 7:7). Although viceroy Limhi, son of Noah, reigns in Shilom, two references state that he returns to the city of Nephi (Mosiah 21:1, 12). These six lands are closely grouped.

Mosiah becomes concerned about those who had left. A man called Ammon (identified as being a descendant of Zarahemla) succeeds in prevailing upon him to be allowed to take a company of sixteen to learn their fate. When he gets to Shilom, he is seized and brought to king (viceroy) Limhi. With the aid of Gideon, and led by Ammon, king Limhi escapes with his people back to Zarahemla (Mosiah 22:5-11). But another hero has yet to get out: Alma, a convert of the prophet Abinadi. When Amulon persecutes Alma and his converts, they begin to meet secretly at a place called Mormon (forest called Mormon), where he baptizes in the waters of Mormon (Mosiah 18:16). This is geographically important, because it is located “in the borders of the land having been infested, by times or at seasons, by wild beasts.” (Mosiah 18:4) This probably describes a location on the east side of Bountiful, and is therefore an anchor point, that helps locate these five lands. Moreover, interaction between king Limhi and the king of the Lamanites indicates at least some degree of propinquity to the city of Nephi (20:12-21:1).

The next Nephite foray into the lands southward is undertaken by another Ammon (a son of Mosiah), and his siblings (Aaron, Omner and Himni). They split up and each heads for a different place with the object of proselytizing. Ammon goes to the land of Ishmael. Those who are converted unto the Lord are people of the Lamanites in the land of Ishmael; in the land of Middoni; in the city of Nephi; in the land of Shilom; in the land of Shemlon, in the city of Lemuel, and in the city of Shimnilom. (Alma 23:8-12) There is not enough information to enable us to know specifically where these are located in the land southward. But we can observe that when Ammon and Lamoni are on route to Middoni, they encounter the latter’s father apparently coming from the city of Nephi, placing it in some sort of linear relationship with the land of Ishmael and Middoni. Nephi, Shilom and Shemlon overlap the six cities

above. All of these are probably within some proximity to each other.

The converts take the name of Anti-Nephi-Lehies and become the target of Lamanite military forces. Ammon and the others meet in the land of Midian, and hold a council in the land of Ishmael. In view of the Lamanite danger to these converts, Zarahemla decides to give them the land of Jershon. This tells us that Zarahemla still sought to exercise control over at least one land south of Bountiful. Their enemies collect in a neighboring land, Antionum (v. *supra*). Another city has some geographical information. Aaron went to the land of Jerusalem, “away joining the borders of Mormon.” (Alma 21:1) And even more clear are the cities of Mulek, Gid and Bountiful (v. *infra*).

The Nephites and the Land of Zarahemla

The group from Jerusalem led by Mulek had made landfall in the land north (Helaman 6:10) and built the great city Zarahemla. “[They] were brought by the hand of the Lord across the great waters, into the land where Mosiah discovered them; and they had dwelt there from that time forth.” (Omni 1:16) The place of Mulek’s landfall must have been within some reasonable proximity to the land of Nephi. Later, General Moroni fortified: “the line between the Nephites and the Lamanites, between the land of Zarahemla and the land of Nephi...the Nephites possessing all the land northward, yea, even all the land which was northward of the land Bountiful.” (Alma 50:11)

The city of Zarahemla, the residence of Alma, is on the west side of the Sidon. Alma travels west to Melek, and then three days north to Ammonihah (Alma 8:3-6; later renamed the Desolation of the Nehors, Alma 16:11). Alma, Amulek and their converts leave Ammonihah and go to the land of Sidom (Alma 15:1). In the context of Lamanite forays against the Nephites, the land of Noah is associated with Ammonihah (Alma 16:3; 49:14-15). The land, valley and city of Gideon are across the river Sidon from Zarahemla, i.e. on the east side (Alma 2:26, 6:7). Minon is between Zarahemla and the land of Nephi (Alma 2:24-26). In Alma’s war against the Amlicites, the hill Amnihu is on the east of the Sidon, and associated with Gideon, east of Zarahemla (Alma 2:15-20).

Zarahemla was located inland. In Helaman (1:27) we read: “the Lamanites ... had come into the center of the land, and had taken the capital city which was the city of Zarahemla.” (cf. Alma 22:28 & 31:3). Furthermore, from Zarahemla one must cross the wilderness to get to the land of Nephi. (Alma 17:8, 22:27, 27:14) The wilderness wraps north and south around to the west of Zarahemla and in the west of the land of

Nephi (Alma 22:28). The wilderness also lies east of Zarahemla, having wrapped around and up both the east and west coasts. (Alma 50:9) In 3 Nephi (3:23) we read that a land (unnamed) lay between Zarahemla and the land of Bountiful.

The Lamanite-Nephite wars in Alma begin when Lamanites attack converts called the Anti-Nephi-Lehies. The Lamanites, seeking revenge against the Nephites (Alma 25:1), march up the west coast of the land of Zarahemla and destroy the city of Ammonihah (Alma 25:1-2). Finding the Nephites to be too strong for them to continue, they return to the land of Nephi. When the Anti-Nephi-Lehies (later renamed the people of Ammon) get established in Jershon, the Nephites put military units all about the city to protect them. (Alma 28:1) Zerahemnah collected Lamanites, Amalekites and Zoramites in Antionum, and created an army poised at Jershon. The Nephite chief captain Moroni commands the army in the borders of Jershon. Rather than confront Moroni, Zerahemnah takes his forces through the wilderness, around into Nephite territory at Manti to seize the land. Moroni divides his force, with part just south of the hill Riplah, east of the headwaters of the Sidon, and the other part on the west of the Sidon in the borders of the land of Manti. He and his captain Lehi surround the Lamanites on the banks of the Sidon. After some additional fighting, Zerahemnah enters into a peace agreement and is allowed to slip into the wilderness with his remaining forces.

A period of far more serious warfare develops due to the rise of Nephite dissenters under the leadership of Amalickiah. He, after fleeing to the land of Nephi, and considerable maneuvering, incredibly becomes king of the Lamanites, and seeks “to reign over all the land, yea...the Nephites as well as the Lamanites.” (Alma 48:2) The Lamanites proceed again up the west coast of the land of Zarahemla, but when they find Ammonihah rebuilt and very strong, they decide to attack Noah. Lehi commands its defense and defeats the Lamanites who return to the land of Nephi.

Enraged by this news, Amalickiah personally commands a new effort (19 YOJ), beginning by mobilizing a massive army. Since he decides not to attack the city of Judea (the command center in the west, fortified by Antipus), we assume that it was he who conquered the other cities in that quarter of the nephite territory, including Zeezrom, Cumeni, Antiparah and even Manti, the prize of the west. (Alma 56:14) Clearly he then leaves these conquests to be defended by his captains, as Helaman, in his report to Moroni, makes no mention of him. In 28 YOJ Helaman marches into battle with his 2000 stripling soldiers (Alma

53:22). After taking the cities lost, and last of all Manti, he says in his report to Moroni “we have obtained those cities and those lands, which were our own.” (Alma 58:33) Geographically, the most we know is that all of these cities are in the course of Amalickiah’s campaign to take Manti. None of them figures in Moroni’s campaign in the east.

While Helaman is engaged with the liberation of Nephite cities in the west, Moroni becomes aware that the Lamanites are amassing a huge force to invade the land of Zarahemla, and readies his own land for war. In YOJ 20 he begins erecting earthen berms surmounted by picket palisades around all the cities of the land (Alma 50:1-2). He then drives all the Lamanites in the east wilderness “into their own lands, which were south of the land of Zarahemla.” (Alma 50:7) In their place, he orders that Nephites should settle the east wilderness. At this point, “the land of Nephi did run in a straight course from the east sea to the west.” (Alma 50:8) He fortifies “the line between the Nephites and the Lamanites, between the land of Zarahemla and the land of Nephi, from the west sea, running by the head of the river Sidon—the Nephites possessing all the land northward, yea, even all the land which was northward of the land Bountiful” (Alma 50:11)

Also in 20 YOJ (about 67 BCE), the Nephites begin establishing cities in the north (Alma 50:15), including the city of Lehi (Alma 50:15), and the city of Morianton, which “joined upon the borders of Lehi; both of which were on the borders by the seashore.” (Alma 50:25) In the same year, the Nephites established the land, city and fortifications of Moroni, “by the east sea; and it was on the south by the line of the possessions of the Lamanites.” (Alma 50:13) The “line of the possessions of the Lamanites” corresponds to the northern border of Bountiful. The city of Moroni is therefore in the southeast corner of the land of Zarahemla, to be a counter to Mulek, “which was one of the strongest holds of the Lamanites.” (Alma 53:6) In the same year that the city of Moroni was established, the Nephites also establish Nephihah, “joining the borders of Aaron and Moroni.” (Alma 50:14)

While captain Moroni is preoccupied with putting down some dissenters in his own land, particularly the king-men, the Lamanites begin their invasion of the east. In 25 YOJ, they take the city of Moroni, the people of Moroni flee to the city of Nephihah, and “the people of the city of Lehi gathered themselves together...to receive the Lamanites to battle.” (Alma 51:24). Amalickiah proceeds to take possession of a string of cities beginning with the Lamanite stronghold Mulek, and including the city of Gid, the city of Omner, the city of Nephihah, the city of Lehi and the city of Morianton, “all of which were on the east

borders by the seashore.” (Alma 51:26) So the Nephite cities on this shore are Moroni, Nephihah, Aaron, Lehi and Morianton.

At the end of this year, Amalickiah commands a large force to take the land of Bountiful, but is prevented by Teancum, who slays him (Alma 51:34). He is replaced by his brother Ammoron.

To further preempt the Lamanite attack, in YOJ 27 Moroni orders Teancum to take the Lamanite fortified city Mulek. He decides that his force is insufficient, and so backs off to the city of Bountiful to wait for Moroni to arrive with his army. In the 28th year, Moroni takes possession of Mulek (Alma 52:26). The Lamanites pursue Teancum to the city of Bountiful, which was being defended by captain Lehi. Moroni puts Lehi in charge of the city of Mulek. Teancum is commanded by Moroni to fortify the city of Bountiful (Alma 53:3). The Lamanites were keeping their Nephite prisoners in the city of Gid. Moroni takes possession of this city, and forces his own captives to fortify it (Alma 55:25), and then to be taken and guarded in the city of Bountiful. The fact that these three cities are near one another, and not far from the northern border of the Lamanite possessions, is seen in the missionary itinerary of the sons of Helaman, who begin their entry into the land of Nephi by going first to the city of Bountiful, then on to the city of Gid, and then to the city of Mulek (Helaman 5:14-15).

Again captain Moroni has to put down a rebellion in Zarahemla. Pachus, king of the king men had driven the freemen out of the city, and removed chief governor Pahoran from his judgment seat. He had taken refuge in Gideon, across the Sidon river eastwards, but in the valley of Gideon, i.e. not on the sea. Moroni takes a small force to the city of Gideon, and he and Pahoran defeat Pachus, putting him and his recalcitrant followers to death. Then Moroni resolves to end the war with the Lamanites. For some reason, he takes Pahoran with him, and they pass up Lehi to march on Nephihah, which they take by stratagem. Moroni doubles back and takes Lehi, (Alma 62:30) and the other cities taken by the Lamanites, and sets up camp in the land of Moroni. Along the way, they drive the Lamanites from the liberated cities to the land of Moroni, where they “were encircled about in the borders by the wilderness on the south, and in the borders by the wilderness on the east.” (Alma 62:34) Commanding his entire force, Moroni “did drive them out of the land; and they did flee, even that they did not return at that time against the Nephites (Alma 62:38).

Vignette ***A Tale of Two Cities***

The first step in relating this drama is to introduce the principals, the city of Lehi and the city of Morianton. Before the invasion of the Lamanites, in approximately 63 BCE, Morianton, the founder of the new city of Morianton, attacks his neighbor, the city of Lehi, and undertakes to seize territory by force of arms. The people of the city of Lehi take fright and flee to the camp of Moroni, who renders judgment in their favor. Now Morianton takes fright, and convinces the citizens of his city “that they should flee to the land which was northward, which was covered with large bodies of water,” (Alma 50:29) i.e. the Great Lakes region. Moroni becomes concerned, calculating that if Morianton should control the land northward (northward of the land of Zarahemla), it would be to the detriment of the Nephites. He resolves to stop them and sends an army. Teancum at the head of this army heads Morianton at a narrow pass, where a battle ensues and the rebel is killed. The residents of the city of Morianton are escorted back to their homes (Alma 50:36).

Alma describes this narrow passage as leading “by the sea into the land northward, yea, by the sea, on the west and on the east.” (Alma 50:34) Being flanked by seas on both sides, it is clearly an isthmus. Both the city of Morianton and the city of Lehi are in the land of Zarahemla, and a bit to the north at that. So this would-be migratory city (men, women and children) would have to travel to the northern border of the land of Zarahemla, to approach this narrow pass from the south to cross the isthmus heading north, on route to a land covered with large bodies of water. But from modern Honduras to Mexico, inclusively, i.e. on any putative northern border of the land of Zarahemla, there is no such isthmus, nor any narrow area in an appropriate location to serve as an isthmus for this tale. *Or is there?*

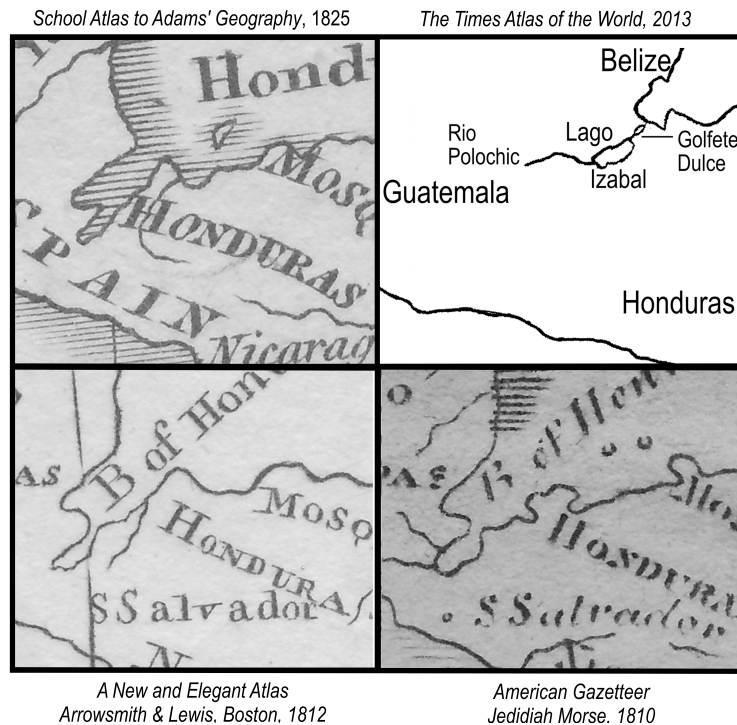
Betrayed by a Faulty 19th Century Map

The solution is provided by the 1825 schoolboys’ map that the author of Alma would have used.

The Bay of Honduras separates Honduras and Belize on today’s maps, while it ends to the west with a shoreline on Guatemala. It is connected by a very short river to Golfete Dulce, which is connected by a navigable river to Lake Izabal (dimensions, c. 31 miles by 16). This body of water is an oval oriented east-west. The schoolboy’s map mistakes Golfete Dulce and Lago Izabal for a continuation of the bay, and extends the latter even further, slicing across Guatemala east to

west, leaving a narrow land bridge to connect the southern slice to the northern one. In his *Geography*, Daniel Adams states, “This country [Guatemala] is divided by the bay of Honduras, into two peninsulas.”¹ Jedidiah and Sidney Morse concur in their contemporary geography “for the use of schools”: “The bay of Honduras divides this country into two peninsulas.”² This does violence to geophysical reality, but at least on this 1825 map, there is ostensibly a second isthmus, north of Panama. Crossing it requires a second narrow pass, with a sea on either side. The land of Zarahemla is therefore situated between two isthmuses, each with its own narrow pass.

Map 5. The “Isthmus of Guatemala,” a Creation of Early Cartography



¹ Daniel Adams, *Geography, or a Description of the World*, 13th ed. (Boston: Lincoln and Edwards, 1831), 187.

² Jedidiah Morse and Sidney Edwards Morse, *A New System of Geography, Ancient and Modern, for the use of Schools* (Boston: Richardson and Lord, 1822), 153.

In the 1820's, map engraving was done on a copper plate. Maps were produced for inclusion in large tomes on geography, or as works of art to hang framed on a wall. Perhaps the most illustrious of these artists was Aaron Arrowsmith, hydrographer to the Prince of Wales in 1810, and later to the king of England. He teamed up with Samuel Lewis, a publisher in Philadelphia, for his luxurious *A New and Elegant Atlas*. Although the map of Jedidiah Morse also features the "isthmus of Guatemala," most likely the work of Arrowsmith is the source for both it and Daniel Adams' *School Atlas to Adams' Geography*.³ Unlike these more high-end productions, this latter work was published as cheaply as possible to fit the budget of the average schoolboy's parents. The entire work is printed on cheap paper, although the cover is a bit heavier than the mere ten sheets inside. The maps are published on one side of the sheets, leaving the verso blank. There is no text at all. Published many times from 1814 to at least 1830, this humble work would certainly be familiar to Joseph Smith Sr., as a member of the Palmyra school board, and to Oliver Cowdery as a school teacher. Moreover, Daniel Adams graduated from Dartmouth college, where Hyrum Smith later studied. He very possibly used this map.

This tale of two cities, Morianton and Lehi, has no relationship to the evangelizing missions in Alma, nor to the military campaigns. Alma 50:25 through 50:36 can be deleted with no real change to the rest of Alma. So why was this vignette inserted at all?

Adhering to real-world geography could only strengthen the *Book of Mormon*, or so they thought. Alma refers to numerous real-world geophysical features: the two continents, the isthmus connecting them, the four seas, the land with large bodies of water (the Great Lakes), the semiarid land where people built cement houses, and the land of many waters (Lago de Nicaragua). The authors had no reason to suspect that the "isthmus of Guatemala" was just an early cartographical error. Their Pre-Columbian Israelites had to spread eventually from the sea on the south to the sea on the north. To do so, many would have to cross this isthmus. The authors could have just ignored this feature. But it was another opportunity to include what they thought was a real-world geophysical feature, and even better, one located at an appropriate point to mark the northern border of the lands of Zarahemla. Since it had

³ Daniel Adams, with H. (Hazen) Morse, engraver, *School Atlas to Adams' Geography* (Boston: Lincoln and Edmonds, 1825). Jedidiah Morse, *The American Gazetteer, Exhibiting a Full Account of the Civil Divisions, Rivers, Harbors, Indian Tribes, &c. of the American Continent* (Boston: Thomas & Andrews, 1810), fold-out map: North America.

nothing to do with their sermons, nor with the evangelical missions to the Lamanites, nor with the wars with the Lamanites, getting this feature into Alma could best be done by means of a stand-alone vignette. The map gave rise to the story, and today the story leads back to the map.

The Land Northward and Land of Desolation

In Mormon we once again find geographical segmentation. In Mormon's two wars with the Lamanites, he traverses the lands of Zarahemla four times, once from his birthplace in the north to the line separating the Nephites and Lamanites, where he begins his military career, a second time retreating into the land northward, a third time driving the Lamanites back into their own territory, and then a fourth time retreating a final time. Yet there only three places named south of the narrow pass to the north which led into "the land that is northward": the city of Desolation near the southern border of Nephite territory, the land of Zarahemla, the waters of Sidon and the narrow pass to the south. All other toponyms are north of the narrow pass to the north, and are names not encountered elsewhere in Nephite history. The potential for contradiction to arise from name generation in Mormon is thereby obviated.

These two geographical designations evolved over time. The land northward is first found in Omni to identify the direction of the flight of the Nephites under the lead of Mosiah. It became a term for the whole region north of the line Bountiful-Desolation. It is used initially somewhat synonymously with the land of Desolation. Mulek made landfall in the land northward, which had been the territory of the Jaredites. They found it to be full of ruins, still uncorroded weapons, and even skeletons. It was a land desolate of its original inhabitants, "because of the greatness of the destruction of the people who had before inhabited the land." (Helaman 3:6). But the Mulekites began filling the territory between the Isthmus of Panama and the Isthmus of Guatemala with urban and rural settlements, a process that was furthered by the addition of the Nephites. From the perspective of Zarahemla, the land northward lay north of its lands. And although the original meaning of the land of Desolation persisted, effectively it had become the territory from this northern narrow pass to include the land of many waters, rivers and large bodies of water, the Great Lakes region.

At age eleven, Mormon's father took him "into the land southward, even to the land of Zarahemla" (Mormon 1:6). So he himself must have originated in "the land which was northward," i.e. in a part of the land of

Desolation north of the land of Zarahemla. It is somewhere in this region that Ammaron buried the sacred records, in the hill Shim of the land Antum (Mormon 1:3).

The Lamanites attack, entering the land by the waters of Sidon. At about 326 CE, the Nephites appoint Mormon to be the leader of their armies. They retreat to the north countries (Mormon 2:3), where they occupy the city of Angola, but are driven out. After being driven out of the land of David, the Nephites gather in the city of Joshua on the seashore. After initial success, the Nephites retreat to the land of Jashon near hill Shim. From there the Nephites were driven “northward to the land which was called Shem.” (Mormon 2:20) At this point, a Nephite-Lamanite treaty gives the Nephites the land from the narrow pass leading southward, and the Lamanites received all the land southward.

A new war begins. Mormon gathers his people to the land of Desolation, to a city by the narrow pass leading to the land southward. In 361 the Lamanites attack the city Desolation. Driven from there, the Nephites flee to the city Boaz. At this point Mormon takes the records from the hill Shim (Mormon 4:23). Next they retreat to the city Jordan. This chief Nephite captain then requests that the Lamanites allow him to gather his people to “the land of Cumorah, by a hill which was called Cumorah.” (Mormon 6:2) “and it was in a land of many waters, rivers and fountains” (Mormon 6:4). Although Mormon hid the Nephite records there “save it were these few plates which I gave unto my son Moroni” (Mormon 6:6), Cumorah was later identified as the place where the angel Moroni revealed the gold plates (D&C 128:20).

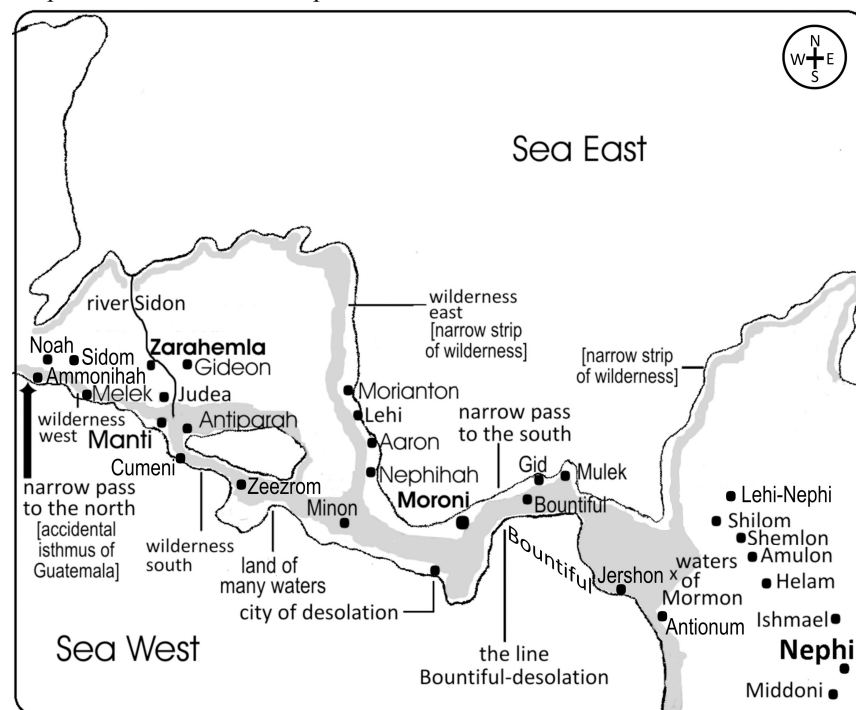
Apart from the four listed above, no toponym in Mormon is found anywhere else in the Nephite narrative. “The land which was northward” has unique cities founded by the Nephites that spread into the northern lands. Helaman has few toponyms. Those that occur are already found in Alma. The principal toponyms found in 3 Nephi are the cities that a wrathful Jesus destroyed just prior to his visit to the new world. The cities of Zarahemla, Moroni, Moronihah and Jerusalem occur in Alma. The remainder do not occur elsewhere in the BoM narratives: Gilgal, Onihah, Mocum, Gadiandi, Gadiomnah, Jacob, Gimgimno, Jacobugath, Laman, Josh, Gad and Kishkumen. There is no information to determine the location of these cities but since we are told that the greater destruction occurred in the north, we may be intended to understand that they too are north of the lands of Zarahemla.

The final Lamanite onslaught begins in 375 CE, and the remainder of the Nephites are gathered at Cumorah by 384 CE. The retreat from the city of Desolation to Cumorah lasted c. nine years.

The Map

The most distinctive feature of the map of the *Book of Mormon* is the extension of the Bay of Honduras, almost to the sea west. The modern Gulf of Honduras is merged with Lake Izabal to form an extension of the gulf that cuts nearly two thirds of the way across modern Guatemala from the sea on the east to the sea on the west, leaving a narrow isthmus between the lands of Zarahemla and the “land which was northward.” On maps 4 and 6, the narrow pass at the Isthmus of Panama has been labeled “narrow pass to the south,” and the narrow pass at this BoM northern isthmus has been labeled “narrow pass to the north.”

Map 6. The Lands of the Nephites and Lamanites



Map 4 has been developed using the schoolboys' map that clearly served as the basis for the BoM authors. It was scanned and printed. The coastal outline was then meticulously traced and also scanned to produce an empty map, which has been filled in somewhat sparsely. The coastal outline for map 6 was taken from that of map 4. The toponyms discussed above were then put into it to the extent that space allowed. Some could

be located with considerable accuracy. Others, such as the cities that figure in Helaman's campaign around Manti, were entered into the region to which they belong, but without any pretense that they could be located precisely.

Observations

§ The Book of Mormon has a complex history and a correspondingly complex geography; numerous toponyms are required by the numerous displacements of missionaries and armies. The internal consistency is remarkable. There is no way that this could result from extemporaneous narration off the top of one's head.

§ BoM geography proceeds in segmented stages. The replacement text almost totally lacks toponyms to avoid any chance of contradiction with the stolen 116 pages. This also leaves the land southward totally free for the generation of toponyms in Mosiah. This book concentrates its toponyms in the land southward, leaving the land northward (north of the narrow pass to the south) free for Alma to develop an elaborate geography, which however is totally south of the narrow pass to the north, leaving the northerly region for the toponyms of Mormon's flight to Cumorah. Mormon almost totally avoids toponyms in the lands of Zarahemla, obviating the possibility of contradictions with prior books.

§ This geography was clearly based on the schoolboys' map of 1825. It was the popular text in the 1820's, and undoubtedly known to Smith Sr. and Oliver Cowdery. Its compiler, Daniel Adams, was a graduate of Dartmouth College, where Hyrum Smith studied.

§ Following this map, the Gulf of Honduras was extended westward thereby producing an isthmus on the western coast of present-day Guatemala. As a result of this, the BoM narrative has the lands of Zarahemla tucked between two narrow passages, one leading southward, and the other leading to "the land which is northward." Incorporated into the *Book of Mormon*, the inaccuracy in this map produced a significant geographical error in the Nephite narrative.

§ It is virtually certain that the schoolboys' map was used to produce a draft map for the BoM project. This draft was not needed for the replacement text, and probably was only mission-critical for Alma and

Helaman. A draft map made it a simple matter to achieve a high degree of internal consistency.