



JUNE, 2014

John Sorenson, at our BMAF conference in 2013, handed to me after the conference was over a list he had quickly written on a piece of scrap paper and requested that we put it on our website. Here it is:

"A Whole Bunch of Reasons Why Book of Mormon Geography Could Not Have Included North America"

1. The "promised land" occupied by the Nephites was characterized for many centuries as an area of "civilization." As indicated by archaeology and related studies, no place in North America in the period of Book of Mormon history contained any cultures at the level of "civilization."
2. The population of Book of Mormon lands over much of the period of its history totaled from hundreds of thousands up to millions. The areas of North America touted as occupied by Nephites, Lamanites and Jaredites cannot be shown from objective evidence to have been anywhere near that level.
3. Many "cities" and even "great cities" are reported by the Nephite record between 1500 BC and AD 400. Not a single such city has been documented in North America in that period.
4. Intensive agriculture is indicated as the economic means of support, according to the record. Agriculture only on a limited scale was employed by inhabitants of North America before AD 400.
5. Multiple kinds of grains were cultivated by the Nephites as their subsistence mainstay. In the Book of Mormon period, as far as is known, only limited grain crops of corn/maize were cultivated in North America.
6. "Flocks" and "herds" were raised at times by the Nephites and Jaredites (at least). There is absolutely no evidence for any degree of animal husbandry in ancient North America.
7. Many major public buildings, many of them of a religious nature, are referred to in the scripture as characteristic of their settlements. In the Book of Mormon period there is no evidence of any such structures in North America.

8. Major wars were fought among Book of Mormon peoples for well over 1,000 years; they involved over hundreds of thousands of combatants. In North America in the relevant period there is no evidence of warfare on any significant scale.

9. Swords and “cimeters” (scimitars) are particularly referred to as weapons in the Book of Mormon period. Neither in archaeology or art are any such weapons identified in North American cultures.

10. Armor and shields also were in common use according to the record. Evidence for those features is also entirely lacking in North America before AD 400.

11. Large-scale fortifications (of particular types) are described as being used by Book of Mormon peoples, but those types, nor in fact any such large-scale defensive structures, are not known in North America in Book of Mormon times.

12. Roads and highways were described by the Nephite record as being built near the time of Christ. North American archaeology reveals nothing of the sort.

13. “Towers,” obviously tall, bulky structures of earth or stone, were features in some Book of Mormon cities. Such constructions were absent before AD 400 in North America.

14. People of Book of Mormon areas were frequently literate, in fact several scripts are reported. No North American cultures have been shown to have had any system of writing whatsoever.

15. At least the Nephites are said to have possessed “many” books covering many subjects. No ancient North American books at all are evidenced.

16. The Nephites followed several different calendar systems. In North America even a single calendar is only uncertainly known.

17. According to the Nephite record several kinds of metals were worked in the original settlement areas (land of Nephi and Jaredite areas). No true metallurgy is evidenced in North America during the Book of Mormon era.

18. A substantial number of priests, prophets, and other occupational specialists (including “thousands” of idle people in the land of Zarahemla—Alma 60: 22) are mentioned. No more than a mere handful of (“idle”) people occupying specialist roles are in evidence in any ancient culture in North America.

19. There is no mention nor even hint of cold, snow or ice in the Book of Mormon account of its peoples. In the Great Lakes or Prairie regions winter storms are and were so common that it is unthinkable that they would not be a prominent mentioned feature of the climate.

20. It is obvious from the description of the great catastrophe at the crucifixion of the Savior that

volcanism must be involved as a natural cause (of at least the “darkness”). In eastern North America that is out of the question; there are no volcanoes there.

21. The river Sidon is a major drainage feature that runs hundreds of miles from south to north from the highlands of the land of Nephi through the “narrow strip of wilderness” past Manti and Zarahemla to the sea. No river in North America even remotely qualifies.

22. The battle of Alma’s Nephite army on the riverbank (Alma 2) has them wade across the river Sidon to battle a combined Lamanite/Amlicite force. The idea of wading across the Mississippi is obviously absurd.

23. The Lehite party in their ship landed on the shore of the (west) sea in the “land of first inheritance” (Alma 22: 28). Any attempt to make that point anywhere but on the Pacific coast of North America requires fantastic twisting of the obvious meaning of the distances and other geographical language.

23. From the borders of the (immediate) land of Nephi to Zarahemla via the waters of Mormon, land of Helam and valley of Alma, took Alma’s party about 21 days. No plausible rate of travel can make that distance more than 250 miles. No suggested “Nephi” to “Zarahemla” distance in North America comes close to that.

24. The land of Zarahemla is said to be “nearly surrounded by water” (i.e., seas). No North American geography qualifies.

25. The land northward supported a population of millions (Ether 15: 2) in late Jaredite times. Not only is it manifestly absurd that any “land northward” around the Great Lakes, given the climatic conditions there, could have supported even one-hundredth as many people, but also the archaeology of that region shows only a tiny fraction of the history’s stated number ever to have dwelt there, let alone in Jaredite times when no one lived there but a few hunting tribes.

26. Book of Mormon references allow that the “narrow pass” or “narrow passage” between the lands northward and southward was within the narrow neck of land and constitute the sole feasible way for large parties to go northward/southward. No North American geographical arrangement comes close to such an arrangement.

27. The hill Ramah/Cumorah of the Book of Mormon lay north of the narrow pass/neck, yet the hill in New York state is not so situated.

28. King Limhi’s exploring party (sent from the land of Nephi to find Zarahemla) traversed the narrow neck/narrow pass without even realizing it, for they returned having been to the final Jaredite battleground (at hill Ramah) but supposed that they had only found the ruins of Zarahemla. Anywhere in North America this is impossible.

29. The kingdom dominated by the Lamanite king (Alma 22: 27) extended from east sea to the west

sea. No North American correlation comes close to fitting with those conditions.

30. The hill Cumorah in New York could not plausibly have been a refuge for the 23 survivors of the final battle who were found atop it on the day after the great battle. Had they so much as sneezed their presence would have been detected by the Lamanites.

31. Had New York's hill been the site of the final battle, the 230,000 Nephite dead (not to mention a large number of Lamanite dead—up to half a million total corpses) would have left behind over half a million weapons. Remains on any such scale would have become obvious long since to archaeologists.

32. The notion that Lehi's party sailed around Africa and northward through the South and North Atlantic not only has no historical analogs whatever, but given the winds and currents, it was probably impossible in ancient times and has never been duplicated in modern times.

33. From the land of Nephi Mosiah led his party "down [across a mountainous narrow strip of wilderness] into the land which is called the land of Zarahemla" (distant no more than c. 200 miles; see 23 above). In North America, it is impossible to find such a place.

34. West of Zarahemla was the land of Melek (Alma 8: 3-6), "west by the borders of the wilderness." (That wilderness was adjacent on one side to the land of Zarahemla {Alma 22: 28} and on the other to the west sea {Alma 22: 28}.) No North American area comes close to such an arrangement.

35. The Nephites had inhabited the land Bountiful, even from east [sea] unto the west sea, and thus had hemmed in the Lamanites on the south that they could occupy no lands farther north (Alma 22: 33). These statements are meaningless in North America.

36. The Nephites gathered all their people (nearly a quarter of a million of them) to the land of Cumorah (Mormon 6: 3-4) for their final battle. Anyone who has spent a winter in western New York, let alone four of them, must wonder how they survived in their tents and what so many people might have eaten (there is no mention of manna!)

37. Any attempt to put a land northward in, say, Ontario, must face the fact that there is no trace of anything approaching what the Book of Mormon represents as Jaredite society in that area.