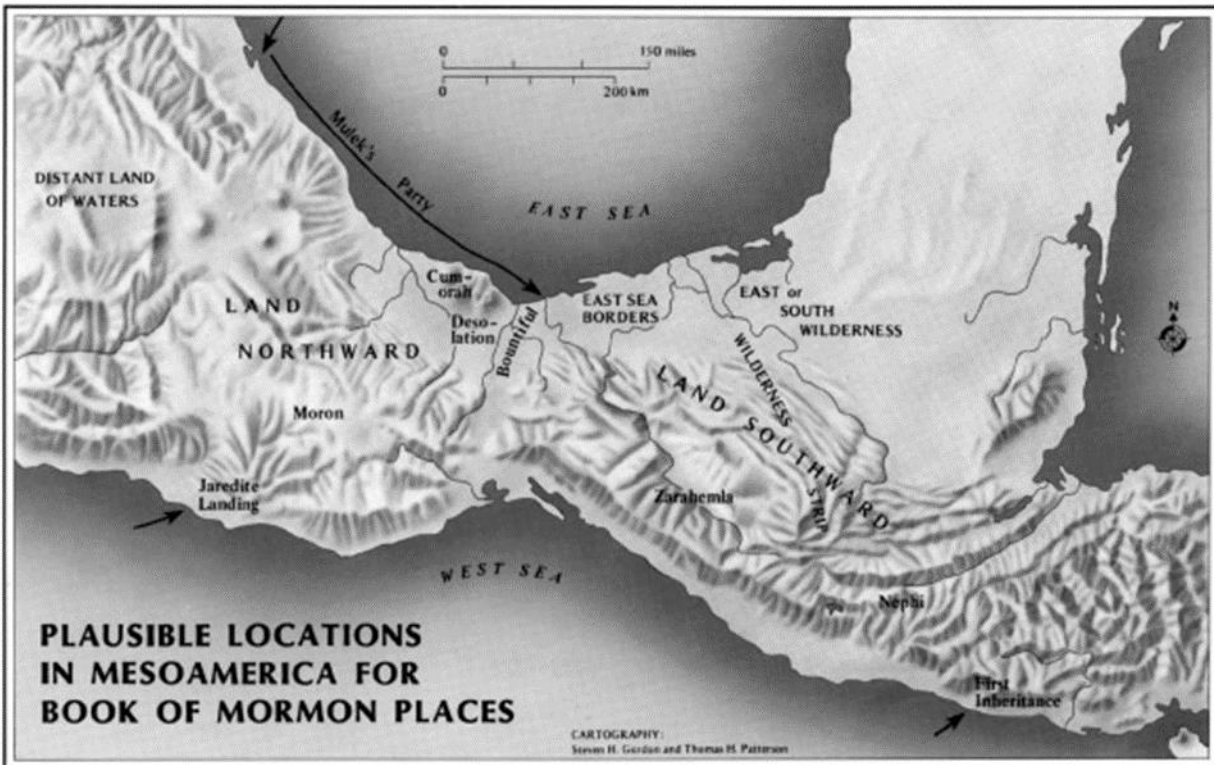


Directional Issues

In 1978 John L. Sorenson published "An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon" which was considered a major breakthrough in the search for Book of Mormon lands and many noted scholars of the day viewed this book as the legitimate location of Book of Mormon locations. Shortly after the Sorenson publication, David Palmer published "In Search of Cumorah" in 1981 which gave the Sorenson publication and additional boost in authenticity. Numerous books and technical articles were published during ensuing years which by in large measure added to the momentum of Sorenson view of the Book of Mormon lands. The map below was published in 1978 by Sorenson and to this day there is wide acceptance of many aspects of this map, specially the land northward.



In 1988 Richard Houck published his book entitled "Deciphering Geography of the Book of Mormon". Houck's book took exception with Sorenson locations of the land of Nephi and Zarahemla but left the land northward intact. During the subsequent years larger cracks developed in the lands of Nephi and Zarahemla but there were no cracks in the land northward even though there were serious issues associated with the land northward. Even though the Nephites and Jaredites directional confusion had been seriously questioned there did not seem to be any reluctance to question the long-held belief that the land northward was west of the land southward. In addition, the Olmecs do not appear to be a good fit for the Jaredites and there are some serious questions associated with the proposed location of the hill Cumorah. And finally, the Isthmus of Tehuantepec was considered to be too wide. There are some other serious issues but suffice to say it is difficult to understand why there aren't any fissures showing up with regards to the land northward. Actually, there is a major fissure. The location of the proposed land northward has caused well meaning people to look elsewhere and the Heartlanders were born.

It has been said that identifying the location of the “land northward” is the most important feature in solving the locations of the Book of Mormon lands. This is certainly true and once the whereabouts of the land northward can be found, numerous Book of Mormon locations will likely fall into place.

The following is a list of reasons why it is a problem to place the land northward in a westerly direction from the Isthmus of Tehuantepec:

- The scriptures are plain that the “land northward” is actually north of the land southward.
*3 Nephi 6:2... and they did return to their own lands and their possessions, both on the **north** and on the **south**, both on the land **northward** and on the land **southward**.*

This scripture is one of over twenty where the directional terms of either north or south are in the same chapter along with the terms northward and southward. A number of them strongly imply that the land northward is north of the land southward.

It stands to reason that the land northward would be north of the land southward like North Carolina is north of South Carolina and the same with the Dakotas. This is one feature that the Heartlanders got right and the confusion over directions is probably the reason they started looking for another location.

- Probably the most troubling part of the map is the location of the East and West Seas. When inquiring minds look at the East Seas being north and the West Sea being south, they begin to wonder about validity of the Book of Mormon. I find it concerning that this map would be used by BYU religious studies.
- It’s a general feeling among current Book of Mormon scholars that the Olmecs were the Jaredites. They lived primarily in the tropical lowlands of south-central Mexico, in the present-day states of Veracruz and Tabasco and since this area would be a major part of the land northward it was assumed that the Olmec had to be the Jaredites. The following is list of reasons why this is a faulty assumption:
 1. The Olmecs arrived upon the scene approximately 1000 years after the Tower of Babel time frame. Some argue that they were preceded with by the pre-Olmec and possibly there could have been a tie between the pre-Olmec and the Olmec. However, there is very little known about the pre-Olmec. Some have speculated that they were Maya.
 2. The first settlement of Olmecs was located at San Lorenzo around 1400 BC. This site was abandoned around 900 BC at which time the site of La Venta was established. It does not appear that La Venta population levels ever exceeded 20,000. La Venta was the center of the Olmec civilization. It is true that they had a few other small sites and it is also true that they seemed to move towards the coastal regions of the Pacific as well as assimilate with the Maya. However, as group they never seemed to expand into the tens of millions that would be required according to the Book of Mormon text.
 3. Much more information on the Preclassic settlement of northwest Yucatan has been published in the 40 years since Sorenson (1978) and Palmer (1981) suggested that the land northward was located west of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. Andrews and Robles (2004) reported the findings of the Proyecto Costa Maya, a field reconnaissance of Pre-Hispanic occupation of northwest Yucatan during Preclassic times. Based on ceramic data from the intensive survey, they identified 116 sites in the area around Merida, Yucatan that were occupied during the Middle Preclassic period (~700-300 B.C.) There

were 91 sites occupied during Late Preclassic times (300 B.C.-A.D. 250). The site of Xtobo was a regional center during the middle Preclassic occupation of Northwest Yucatan. The site was of significant size during the Middle Preclassic with no significant later reoccupation (Anderson et al., 2012).

4. While it is true that La Venta was abandoned about the same time as the final Jaredite war. However, La Venta was the only Olmec settlement that was abandoned. The Book of Mormon text is clear that there was total annihilation.
 5. A large number of Olmec figurines have a very distinctive appearance of Asian descent. This coincides with traditions that tell of a large group of Oriental refugees that left Asia about the same time as the emergence of the Olmec. Since Jared and his followers were from Mesopotamia it does seem to accommodate the belief that the Jaredites were of Oriental descent.
 6. There were periods in the Book of Mormon times where the Nephites moved north and resettled the lands that were vacated by the Jaredites. To this day La Venta was never resettled.
 7. *Ether 1:43 And there will I bless thee and thy seed, and raise up unto me of thy seed, and of the seed of thy brother, and they who shall go with thee, a great nation. And there shall be none greater...*The Maya civilization is considered to be one of the top five ancient civilizations of the world and there is one obscure world ranking the puts the Olmecs somewhere in the forties.
- There are a number of scriptures that talk about a massive fortification located at the south end of the land northward. This fortification went from the East Sea to the West Sea and its length was a day's journey of a Nephite. This would probably be no more than 20 km and would be very visible today. There is no such structure at the proposed location of the narrow neck or the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. In addition, the 130-mile length of the narrow neck does not come close to being a day's journey of a Nephite.
A couple of prominent models has realized that the Isthmus of Tehuantepec is not an acceptable location for the narrow neck, however they still ascribed to the area west of the Isthmus to be the land northward. They have an interesting version of the narrow neck that is near the south end of the Isthmus, however it has a number of serious deficiencies. These include (1) There is not East Sea (Alma 22:27... which was bordering even to the sea, on the east and on the west) (2) there is no evidence of a massive fortification and narrow passage way, (3) this location forces multiple lands of Bountiful and (4) the narrow neck does not have an east-west orientation.
 - During the last few hundred years of the Book of Mormon there was a large portion of the proposed land northward under the control of Teotihuacan rulers. This situation would make it impossible for the Book of Mormon people to function as described in the Book of Mormon.
 - The various proposed locations of the battles in the land northward seem contrived and very little to do with geographical characteristic of the land.
 - The proposed location of the hill Cumorah has a number of problems such as (1) it is south of Gulf of Mexico-it should be west, (2) it does not seem to fit the description of being near the "first landing", (3) it does not fit the requirement found in Mormon 6:4...*it was in a land of many waters, rivers, and fountains...*, (4) The agricultural lands are marginal in the areas near the hill-productive farm land was necessary to feed the millions that took years in preparing for the war.

The Pasion River Model's version of the land northward:

- The Pasion River Model considers the Maya to be Jaredites. These peoples resided primarily in the lands north of Tikal or the land northward.
- The Maya are considered to be one of top ancient civilizations in the world thereby qualifying to be the Greatest Nation, None Greater (Ether 1:43).
- The land northward is north of the land southward. (this seems so obvious that it is uncomfortable to even bring it up)
- The proposed narrow neck of land separates the land northward from the land southward and is about the length of a day's journey for a Nephite- 12km.
- There is a massive fortification positioned in the narrow neck is in an ideal location to represent the one mentioned in the Book of Mormon. This fortification represents the southern edge of the land northward. As one would expect this massive fortification along with the narrow passage way is visible today.
- There are water systems on both ends of the fortification and they are to east and to the west of the narrow neck. These waters systems are the remnants (wetlands) of the East and West Seas that are mentioned in the Book of Mormon. The configuration of the ancient seas establish a clear picture of how the land northward should be positioned.
- There is no need to force more than one "land of Bountiful". The land of Bountiful is in the northern portion of the land southward and is adjacent to the southern end of the land northward.
- The land of Desolation is on the southern edge of the land northward and right across the border is the land Bountiful. The proposed location of the land Bountiful is a place of plenty and the land of Desolation is a good fit for final Jaredite war.
- The "first landing" is located in the southeastern side of the land northward and correlates very well with the Jaredites arrival to the new world. This location is helpful in establishing the location of the eastern border of the land northward.
- The Pasion River Model's version of the northward has a near perfect fit with the new hypothetical model the is featured by the BYU Religion Department as well as numerous other hypothetical models.



- The illustration below demonstrates the need to fashion the lands of the Book of Mormon in an hour-glass configuration which means that the land northward is north of the land southward. This graphic represents the opinions of twenty-one researchers and should not be taken lightly. It does not appear that there is a single hypothetical map that has the hour-glass configuration laying on its side.



Summary:

It is difficult to understand why there is so much of a determination to hold on to idea that the land northward is west of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec when the justification for this theory has dissipated. On the other hand, why is it so difficult to accept a theory (Pasion River) that matches essentially all of the criteria from the Book of Mormon text?

References:

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